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**The Pitchman in Print:  
Oral Performance Art in Text and Context**

by

**Joseph Ugoretz**

**A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English in partial  
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,  
The City University of New York**

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## Abstract

The Pitchman in Print: Oral Performance Art in Text and Context

by

Joseph Ugoretz

Advisor: Professor Catherine McKenna

Oral performance art, patterned performative speech for an audience, is perhaps the oldest and most ubiquitous human art form. Specific instances of this art include the performances of griots and guslars, troubadors and shamans, as well as rappers and riddlers, preachers and politicians. While this art form is by definition oral, it is also the case that, frequently, literary art has represented oral performance art. There is written art which depicts oral art, which describes it, appropriates it, criticizes and co-opts it.

In this dissertation, I define oral performance art as constituting a separate and unique artistic genre, one which has generic qualities. Oral performance art always, in all its specific instances and contexts, includes three main characteristics—(1) a contested control of the performance and its reception, (2) a display of verbal virtuosity, and (3) a familiarity of form which links it to an established tradition.

I also define *written* representations of oral performance art as constituting a separate and unique *literary* genre, with its own generic qualities. This dissertation is founded on the conclusions of seven years of fieldwork with pitchmen and their audiences at contemporary American county fairs and carnivals. After detailing these conclusions, and examining the work of other theorists and critics of oral performance art, I present an analysis of the work of five literary artists—Geoffrey Chaucer's

*Parliament of Fowls*, Charles Dickens' *Bleak House*, Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*, and Simon Ortiz' poetry and short fiction.

Each of these literary artists, I argue, translates oral performance art, and therefore each of them is uniquely able to share and co-opt some of the effects of the distinctive features of oral performance art. In addition, in these translations, there is an inherent emphasis on the differences between oral performance art and literary art. This emphasis allows these authors to uniquely engage audiences in their literary portrayals of other hierarchical differences which are associated with the oral and the literary, such as the difference between high and low culture, the elite and the popular, the modern and the primitive, truth and fiction.

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This is for Beth and Julie

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This dissertation draws much of its inspiration and information from my fieldwork. The performers and audiences I encountered at the fairs where I conducted fieldwork have remained anonymous or pseudonymous in this dissertation, but their contributions to my work have been vital and are certainly worthy of recognition and acknowledgement. I will particularly mention the staff of Reithoffer Shows—for over 100 years, the true "Aristocrats of Show Business."

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My daughter Julie, who always reminds me of what is important in life, has also reminded me of what is important in oral performance art. "Who's telling this story, anyway?" I once asked her when she interrupted a bedtime story for the fifth time during an especially squirmy and chattery evening. "You and me, Dad," was her immediate and accurate answer.

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## **Introduction**

There is something magic about a fair... The smell of trampled grass, the flaring lights... (Patrick O'Brian, *The Yellow Admiral*, 36)

The county fair carnival, in time and space, occupies a place in the imaginations and reactions of audiences. The fair broadcasts itself, sending out forerunners. Before the time it arrives, there are advance men with posters and arrows, newspaper ads, and prepared promises. On the way to the place it occupies and creates, audiences begin to experience sights—the rides, the lights, a tethered balloon, and the streams of traffic—and sounds—music, shouting, crying children, screams of riders, and the amplified talk of the pitchmen—as well as smells—animals and their excrement, dust, roasting meat, sugar, and hot fat.

The entrance to the fair is guarded; there are gates and ticket takers, and these limits establish a zone, a space of changed rules, and different expectations. All the sensations which are broadcast into the surroundings are, inside the zone of the fair itself, intense, invasive, and uplifting. There is risk and possibility, fun and danger, the confirmation of what is mundane and allowed, as well as the challenge and violation of these same established norms and perceptions. There is also, at the fair, a performer whose natural environment this is. There is a performer who, by the nature of his art, most particularly represents and belongs to this environment.

Standing on a small raised platform, wearing a microphone on a harness around his chest, the pitchman begins his spiel. “Step right up,” or “Give it a try before you

buy" (or even, for other types of pitchmen, "dearly beloved" or "once upon a time")<sup>1</sup>. A crowd gathers, with one or two people, together, joining to start, and others, seeing them standing, joining them as well. In serried ranks, the crowd, the "tip," begins to form—some close, some on the fringes, to be, if the pitch is successful, drawn in. The pitchman engages them, together and individually, and the nervous laughs give way to more involvement as the audience gives their attention and enters the constructed physical space of the performance. The audience may buy; they may walk on, but for a moment they may be entertained, involved, engaged in the performance. More than this, the pitchman and his performance have formed them into something which they were not before.

From a strolling crowd, they have been transformed into an audience, with a communal identity and role, and yet each member of the audience remains an individual. Their individuality, moreover, has been sharpened, honed into a competitive struggling with shifting aggressions and alliances. The pitchman plays these aggressions and alliances. The text of his pitch, the skeleton of his performance, actually modifies and is modified by his audience. This particular type of performance, the art of the pitchman, is certainly commercially successful, but, more importantly, the pitch and its reception and enjoyment involve unique and identifiable artistic esthetics as well.

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<sup>1</sup> Performers at the fair use a variety of terms to identify themselves, including "lecturer," "agent," "spieler," and "talker." They never use the term "barker," which is only "used by writers and some First-of-May showmen who don't know better." (Wilmeth 18) I have chosen to use one of the most common, "pitchman" (and the attendant pronouns, "he," "his," and "him") for convenience throughout this dissertation. There are, of course, pitchwomen as well, and my use of this term is in no way meant to exclude them.

Since 1993, I have been conducting fieldwork with pitchmen, their performances, and their audiences at fairs and carnivals. Pitchmen practice an artistic genre, a form of cultural expression, which is also performed by griots and guslars, by troubadors and shamans, as well as by rappers and riddlers, preachers and politicians. In diverse instances, in near and remote places, in ancient and immediate times, people perform with words in front of an audience. I call this artistic genre oral performance art.

There are various continua within my definition of oral performance art, just as there are varied styles, types, and instances of oral performance art. The performances range from improvised to pre-established, from impromptu to recurring, from audiences of two or three to audiences of thousands, from the purely commercial to the purely artistic, from the denigrated and feared to the culturally highly honored. There are, however, unifying common features within and behind each and all of these continua.

As a genre, oral performance art may be briefly defined as patterned performative speech for an audience. The three facets of this central definition (patterned, performative, for an audience) are actually in reverse order of importance. Audience, first, is the essential element without which oral performance art cannot exist—a group of live human beings, physically present for the performance. Oral performance art, by my definition, takes place only with and for these present, live human beings.

By defining oral performance art as performative, I mean that the speech involved carries metacommunicative markers which place it into a separate contextual frame—that of performance. The frame of performance is keyed (to use Goffman's term) (cited in Bauman, *Verbal Art* 15) by features including special codes or formulaic phrases, alliteration, rhythm and rhyme, concrete references to local time and place, narrative

interludes, direct address to the audience, physical and gestural elements, and others which I will develop below. These keys set performance apart, marking it as a unique form of discourse. Audiences and performers know and expect that performance is not the same as, for example, conversation.

By defining oral performance art as patterned, finally, I mean that there is some continuity of the text of the performance, that the words of the performance are created, in performance, around a preconstructed framework. The performance, using themes and formulas, is reconstructible. Successive performances, even when using the “same” text or “verbatim” recitation, are not, however, identical. (Lord 72-75) The second two elements of my definition—audience and performance—render this impossible.

What makes oral performance art unique, what places it within a specific genre of human artistic endeavor, is contained in its very nature. The performance of these artists is oral, the tools of the performer are voice, words, and present physical body—and the audience is similarly present, and similarly volitional and active. For these reasons, the art of the pitchman, like the art of other performers of this genre, is definitionally separate and fundamentally individuated from other human arts.<sup>2</sup>

All oral performance artists may be grouped together, because of the uniqueness of this genre. It may seem odd to group together the pitchman and the preacher, the con-man and the comedian, but the similarities in the nature of their art can not be ignored.

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<sup>2</sup> There are similarities between oral performance art as I have defined it and the related genre of theater or drama. While some subgenres of what is generally considered theater (dramatic monologue, for example) may profitably be considered as subgenres of oral performance art as well, most traditional theatrical drama, with a “script” and “characters,” should be distinguished from oral performance art as I am discussing it here.

While there are, naturally, differences between the pitchman and the other practitioners of oral performance art, these differences are those of degree, not of kind.

In fact, it is the pitchman who is the quintessential oral performance artist, and the differences of degree between pitchmen and other oral performers actually serve to emphasize the similarities, because the similarities are inherent in the definitional situation and context of oral performance art in general. My observations of pitchmen have been confirmed by other scholars (with different emphases, and different agendas, of course) with performers and contexts as diverse as Christian preachers (Rosenberg, Davis), the "Man of Words" in the West Indies (Abrahams), Xhosa Imbongi (Opland), and Texan dog traders (Bauman), among many others (Boas, Jacobs, Okpewho, Finnegan, Dargan, Glassie, *et al.*).

The presence of an active live audience and the presence of an active live performer link all these forms of performance. There are, however, several features of the pitchman's art in particular which make it, in my view, not only an excellent example of oral performance art as a genre, but the ideal choice for the type of research and analysis I have conducted in this dissertation.

The context in which the pitchman's art takes place, as I mentioned above and explore further below, is that of the county fair carnival. Because this context includes so much oral performance art, and because of the periodic and temporary nature of the fair as a setting, the level of competition among pitchmen for audiences is exceedingly high. Skills at the fair must be well-honed, and those who can not meet the high standards of performance soon fail and do not return.

In addition, the blatantly commercial and questionably ethical position of performers at the fair, as well as the contradictory connection with the "traditional," and with "family values" emphasizes, rather than concealing, *all* sides of the ambivalent reception of oral performance art in general. For the pitchman's audience, there are negative receptions that are perhaps more obvious, although just as enjoyable, as those that are evoked by such oral performance artists as, for example, Martin Luther King. There are also positive receptions that are perhaps more obvious, although just as enjoyable, as those that are evoked by such oral performance artists as, for example, Public Enemy.

Finally, the oral performance art of the pitchman is contemporary, familiar, common and accessible, both for me as a scholar and for the audience of this dissertation. In conducting fieldwork at the fair, I am an insider, a typical, natural and unconstructed member of the audience (although there are the attendant differences in ever being present as a researcher). I also should not ignore the fact that, for me, the fair and the performances of the pitchmen are personally appealing and a subject of longstanding interest and appreciation.

Oral performance art in general, and the art of the pitchman in particular, is an excellent subject for field research and detailed analysis, and I have attempted to carry out some of this research and analysis in this dissertation. However, the informing principle of this dissertation, the true subject and application of my field research, is in the relationship of oral performance art *not just to itself, but to the other, more historically recent human art which deals with words, literary art.*

This dissertation is not just about the artistic genre of oral performance art, but about its literary representations. From its earliest instances, literature has represented oral performance art. There is written art which depicts oral art, which describes it, appropriates it, criticizes, and co-opts it. In *Beowulf* and *Beloved*, in *Mules and Men* and *Moby Dick*, and innumerable other cases, literary performance engages oral performance art. Doing things with written words on paper for artistic effect is a different process from doing things with voiced words for a live audience, but written art is informed by and connected to the oral performance contexts which it so often represents.

I see oral performance art, as I have said, as constituting a separate and unique artistic genre, one which has defined and individual generic qualities. In addition, however, and at the heart of this study, I see written representations of oral performance art as constituting a separate and unique *literary* genre, with its own defined and individual generic qualities. When authors make use of the language of oral performance art in their written art, they can (of course) never provide an exact (the word “literal” can hardly be applied) translation. What they are presenting, rather, is an intentional, creative, and complicated re-presentation. They are making the original language (oral performance art) useful in different ways to different audiences. This allows the original language to be used, the new (translated) language to be enriched, and the differences between the languages to be foregrounded and interrogated.

There are several forms which these literary translations can take. Sometimes a large segment or an entire work of fiction or poetry is presented (like Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*) as a retelling of an oral storytelling session, with different oral performers successively taking the stage. Some authors use a narrator, or other character

(like Jim Casy in Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath*) specifically depicted and presented as an oral artist. Sometimes a literary work (like Sherwood Anderson's "Death in the Woods") is constructed as if it were a verbatim transcription of the words of an oral performance. In other cases the literary work merely contains echoes of elements identified and identifiable as oral performance techniques (like the alliteration in *Piers Plowman* and other works of the alliterative revival, or the catalogues and formulaic epithets of Homer's *Iliad*).

In other instances, written representations of oral performance art have taken the form of "collections" of oral performances (frequently known as "folklore," since the term was coined in 1846). These collections represent instances of oral performance art as specific texts, to be collected and preserved—for the edification of children, the glorification of simple, voiceless people, or the salvation of vanishing cultures, among other purposes. They carry out their representations either with obvious and explicit editing and emendation, as in the Grimms' *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* and Yeats' *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry*; or with claims of near- or more-than-verbatim transcription, as in Tedlock's *Breath on the Mirror*.

A final category of written representation of oral performance art is the work of the many authors who have studied and theorized about oral performance (generally the performances of others—from far-away places and strange, exotic cultures). These theories have covered a range of broader subjects, including the nature of literature, distinctions between eras of human development (like "orality and literacy"), cultural or ethnic traits, and so on. Most notable in this category has been the work of Albert Lord in proposing a theory of oral composition (the "oral formulaic theory") in his *The Singer*

*of Tales*. Walter Ong's "psychodynamics of orality" as presented in his *Orality and Literacy* have also been extremely influential.

Authors may translate the *text* of an orally performed work, representing in literary form the plot and basic outline of an orally performed folktale, or a sermon or magician's patter. They may translate the *texture* of oral performance, representing in literary form distinctive oral features such as alliteration, rhyme, aggregative catalogues or copious overstatement. What's more interesting to me, however, and more frequently neglected, is the ways in which literary artists, in every translation of oral performance art's text and texture, also translate elements of the oral performance art *context*—its receptions and associations for audiences.

To go beyond identification or analysis of text and texture into identification and analysis of context requires a familiarity which can only be achieved by field observation, reflexive participant observation ethnography. To an extent which I do not believe has been reached before, I have set out to provide a foundation for my literary analysis of literary texts by gaining a fluency in the language of oral performance art, in a contemporary, live setting. In this attempt, my focus was, I believe, different from previous ethnographic studies of oral performance art and artists. My focus was *not* on the art and artists as much as it was on the crucial feature of audience. This has allowed me to observe some generic qualities of oral performance art, which have not previously been precisely defined in this way.

There are three primary qualities of oral performance art as it is practiced by the pitchmen I have observed, and, I would argue, these qualities are inherent in the nature of the genre of performance they practice. Oral performance art always, in all its specific

instances and contexts, includes these three main characteristics—(1) a contested control of the performance and its reception, (2) a display of verbal virtuosity, and (3) a familiarity of form which links it to an established tradition. In the succeeding chapters, I will define and explain these characteristics and their operations further. I believe that these characteristics are inherent in the nature of oral performance art as a genre, and that they are significant not just in the oral performance setting, but in literary representations of this setting as well.

These three qualities of oral performance art are also deployed by literary artists, although the context of oral performance art is not, and can never be, identical with the context of literary art. However, when literary artists undertake this deployment, when they make use of oral performance art's contested control, its verbal virtuosity and its familiarity of form, they are able to do more than just bring these features to bear as if they were directly translatable. The re-presentation of oral performance art, as a translation, also creates a type of masquerade, a facsimile of mimesis, or at least of verisimilitude. As in all masquerades, however, the mask emphasizes, at least implicitly, its own artificiality.

When literary artists use oral performance art in their written art, the differences between the art forms are emphasized and utilized. The literary representation of oral performance art, as a genre, by making use of the contrast between its literary form and its oral associations, is uniquely suited to accomplish certain specific literary goals and techniques. This dissertation will identify and explain some of these goals and techniques, and the ways in which the translation of oral performance art into literary contexts serves to accomplish them.

My first chapter will present and analyze some of the ways in which the critics and researchers who have come before me have studied and analyzed oral performance art. This introductory chapter, which I have labeled "Reflections, Transcriptions and Prescriptions," reviews the work of anthropologists and folklorists, as well as literary critics, rhetoricians, historians and linguists.

After this review of previous studies, my second chapter, "Quacks, Yokels and Light-Fingered Folk," will detail my own fieldwork with contemporary American oral performance art, my own literary/ethnographic representation of oral performance art, with its characteristic claims to accuracy and analytical superiority.

Chapter three, the final chapter, "The Pitchman in Print" will focus my analysis on the literary representations of oral performance art. By a detailed analysis of the translation of oral performance art in the work of five representative authors, I will illustrate an analytical approach, a method of reading texts of this sort, which has not been proposed or conducted before. My five representative authors and their works (Chaucer's *Parliament of Fowls*, Dickens' *Bleak House*, Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, and Simon Ortiz' "The Killing of a State Cop" and several of his poems) illustrate some of the range of types of literary art which include translations of oral performance art, and demonstrate the constellation of techniques and goals this kind of translation can accomplish.

My approach is not, as has often been the case, to see literary artists' representations of oral themes and techniques as some sort of unconscious residue, an indirect inheritance or influence from a long-lost oral past. Neither do I see the written collection of oral performance art as the result of a process of transparent transcription.

Similarly, I do not consider the work of theory and criticism of oral performance art as uninvolved "objective" analysis. All of these approaches have been applied to the different types of written representation of oral performance art, yet none of them sees these instances of oral performance art in text sufficiently clearly as being themselves performances, actively using oral performance art, with determined and determinable purposes and effects.

I have referred above to "translations" of oral performance art in literary art. All written representations, rather than being transparent recreations, are a type of translation. They are not the same as an oral performance and not the same as a "purely" literary performance—just as a translation is neither the work in its original language nor an original work in the second language. When authors undertake to translate oral performance art from its original contexts into text, they create a unique performance context which influences the artistic effects they achieve, their relationships with their audiences, their identity as performers, and their texts themselves.

Oral performance art, in its performance contexts and in its literary representations, is a rich and varied art form, sometimes valorized and sanctioned and sometimes marginalized and derogated, but always powerfully enacted. When literary artists translate oral performance art, they are not objectively and unconsciously reflecting an automatically transmitted heritage or tradition. These writers are actively deploying the contexts, tools, and techniques of oral performance art, which are altered and differently energized through their representation in texts.

## **Chapter 1—Reflections, Transcriptions and Prescriptions: Critical Representations of Oral Performance Art**

One should not forget that a different lexis is appropriate for each genus [of rhetoric]. For the written and agonistic [style] are not the same... Written style is most exact; the agonistic is very much a matter of delivery... On comparison, some written works seem thin when spoken, while some speeches of [successful] orators seem amateurish when examined in written form. (Aristotle, *On Rhetoric*, 255)

Beginning with Aristotle, if not earlier, writers have theorized, analyzed and prescribed the techniques and effects of oral performance art and connected or compared them to literary art. Generally, these works have fallen into one of several categories. Some have focused on a specific type or instance of oral performance art, using it to draw conclusions about the cultural context in which it occurs, or more general conclusions about related or descendant cultural contexts. (e.g. Haring, Bascom, Muhawi and Kanaana) Others have focused on a specific type (or piece) of writing, analyzing the "influence" or "traces" of oral performance art which lie behind or within the written work. (e.g. Magoun, Dorson, Watts) Still others, drawing on the other two categories of analysis, have theorized more generally about the distinctions, transitions, and interactions between the broad categories of "orality" and "literacy." (e.g. Zumthor, Ong, Goody) Finally, as in Aristotle and other classical analyses of rhetoric, there have been prescriptive representations—those which present books of rules and tips for oral performers. (e.g. Aristotle, Cicero, Lucas)

Generally, the types of analysis included in critical representation of oral performance art have divided into two strands which have, with few exceptions, remained separate. Writers have focused either on performances or on texts. While each of these

types of analysis has come to interesting conclusions and proposed influential approaches, an integrated approach has been lacking.

This dissertation, by presenting an integrated analysis of oral performance art in context, with its representations in text, fits into a history, a legacy of other such analyses. While my analysis, my critical representation, differs from those that have gone before in ways that I have discussed above and will discuss below, it nonetheless stands in relation to those earlier works. A summary and discussion of those earlier works will provide some evidence of my foundations and framework.

Studies of oral performance art which focus on specific cultural instances are generally carried out through ethnographic (or earlier, proto-ethnographic) methods. These scholars have observed oral performance art in the field, recorded (by means of whatever technology was available) performances, and interviewed performers (rarely audiences). Frequently, these studies have labeled their subject "folklore," and referred to their academic discipline by the same name.

These anthropological and folkloristic representations of oral performance art have moved through several different stages. The first of these models was based on an implicit image of a performer from a benighted, unsophisticated, illiterate, crude, primitive, and disappearing or neglected (yet often basically wise and esthetically valuable) culture, whose tales (after requisite tidying up and regularizing) could be represented to a grateful literary audience. In this way the readers could be edified and improved, entertained and delighted, while the tale could be preserved and salvaged from the unfortunate but inevitable extinction towards which it was headed. This prevalent

early strain in folkloristic (and to some extent literary) study and scholarship is mainly concerned with the collection of folktales. Collecting, whether from the field or from written sources, is conducted for varying purposes, which naturally are reflected in the texts of the collections.

Some of the earliest of these collections were founded on premises—which are still prevalent today—which Ruth Finnegan has called "romantic and evolutionist theories." (*Oral Poetry*, 30) These collections represent oral performance art as fitting the romantic ideal of the best poetry as spontaneous, unartificed, closer to nature, communally produced without individual authorship, more primitive and truer to basic human emotions. These tales are generally represented as the work of people far away in time or space. They are either survivals (sometimes called "relics," or "fossils") of an earlier, nostalgically longed-for era, or a sort of souvenir or travelogue of an exotic, bizarre, longed-for place.

W.B. Yeats' *Fairy and Folktales of the Irish Peasantry* (1888), is an excellent example of this type of collection.

These folktales [he writes in his introduction], are full of simplicity and musical occurrences, for they are the literature of a class for whom every incident in the old rut of birth, love, pain, and death has cropped up unchanged for centuries: who have steeped everything in the heart: to whom everything is a symbol. They have the spade over which man has leant from the beginning: The people of the cities have the machine, which is prose and a parvenu. (5)

Romantic and evolutionist representations reflect the values and cultures of the collectors and their literary audiences. These collectors often attempt to instill moral conduct in children, or incite patriotic nationalist pride. They can also fulfill longings for a missing spirituality, or attempt to rescue from oblivion the disappearing beauty of the lifeways of people being "corrupted" by the modern world. *The Grimms' Kinder- und*

*Hausmärchen* (1812) is an early European example of this type of collection. The Grimms' work has been influential not just on scholars, but on storytellers, moviemakers and authors as well. Although the Grimms certainly acknowledge, throughout their successive editions, redactions, and emendations of the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, that their role was more than that of objective reporters and retellers, they nonetheless felt that what they were doing was different from making up the stories themselves. They felt it important to cast their work as being directly from the folk (Dégh and Ward essays in *The Brothers Grimm and Folktale*) They and other collectors like them wanted to claim the value and associations connected to the folk, which they saw as distinctly separate from "corrupt" modern literary art.

A direct and dangerous descendant of this type of nationalistic reclaiming of heritage through folklore study and collection was the work of folklorists in Germany, as detailed in Dow and Lixfeld's collection *The Nazification of an Academic Discipline*.

In America, the tales of Native Americans were most commonly collected in studies of this type, exemplified by Franz Boas' *Chinook Texts* (1894), and Stith Thompson's *Tales of the North American Indians* (1929). In these cases the goal was not so much to see immediate nationalist reclaimings, but to make possible deep understanding and insight into other peoples—still seen as disappearing (or already lost) and with an emphasis on the differences between these people and "us" (generally, Modern Western Europeans—including Americans). These differences are usually seen as either earlier, unformed stages of "us" or conversely, something completely different and opposite—something "we" never were.

Many contemporary collections of folktales, for children, adult seekers of "New-Age" spiritual enlightenment, and other readers, fall into the romantic evolutionist category as well. The works of Joseph Campbell, which also have connections to the historical/geographical approach outlined below, are a notable example, and the well-stocked and thoroughly perused shelves of the "folklore and mythology" sections of major commercial bookstores testify to the current popularity of this type of written representation of oral performance art.

Another early type of anthropological representation of oral performance art is the work of writers whose approaches fall into the category which Ruth Finnegan calls the "historical-geographical school." (*Oral Poetry*, 41) This approach has also frequently been described, because of its Scandinavian origins, as the "Finnish school." This type of study is generally concerned with tracking and tracing variants of orally performed works (mostly tales). The idea is that by careful comparison of these variants, and the geographical and temporal locations in which they are found, an original (and originary) place and time for a base-tale or arche-tale can be postulated. Additionally, relationships between peoples (and classification and hierarchization of these peoples) can be demonstrated and "proved."

The writers of the historical-geographical school consider tales which are reduced to bare plot elements, characters and scenes, without any attention to (sometimes without even any reporting of) their oral performance contexts. The collections and collations of these elements can be monumental, as in Stith Thompson's prodigious *Motif Index of Folk Literature* (1955-1958) and Aarne and Thompson's *The Types of the Folktale* (1928) and analytically ingenious, as in Vladimir Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale* (1968).

The exclusive interest in systematic typology and classification of these studies grows out of a typically modern desire to see their work as scientific. Representing oral performance art in this way serves the purpose of nailing down uncertainties, of explaining and knowing through precise observation and objective, isolated identification. As Thompson defines the purpose of his *Motif Index*:

The principal use of the present index, I hope, will be for cataloging motifs in various collections of tales and traditions. If gradually all the tales, myths, ballads and traditions were cataloged according to the same system, great progress would be made in rendering possible complete comparative studies than can now be undertaken. (24)

The precision and the comparative approach of this type of representation have been very influential, and the attraction of its claims to certainty (growing out of the volume of research and detailed cross-checking it entails) is undeniable. Citing motif and type numbers, with comparable variants, from Thompson's *Index* and Aarne and Thompson's *Types* is still considered an essential step in folklorists' representations and analyses of tales.

In addition, writers such as Melville Jacobs (*The Content and Style of an Oral Literature*, 1959) and Linda Dégh (*Folktales and Society*, 1962) have studied oral performance art in its functional role within a given cultural or ethnic group. These studies have, through intensive ethnographic fieldwork and participant observation, conducted extensive collection of (mainly) tales and interviews of their tellers. They generally pay some attention to audience and specific performance contexts. Often, however, technological or cultural obstacles prevented *in situ* collection, requiring constructed repeat performances for the anthropologist and his pad or tape recorder. These studies, with a great deal of depth and ingenious analysis, generally see oral

performance art as a symptom or tool of culture, with less attention to its artistic and aesthetics and little attention to its functioning as an event.

Often, even with the fascinating conclusions these types of studies have been able to derive, their somewhat unidirectional focus has limited their usefulness and overemphasized single facets of the multifarious oral performance art context. For example, a lack of attention to audience interaction and co-construction of the oral performance art event can promote a conclusion that unduly emphasizes oral performance art's role in the instilling and continuance, rather than the questioning and problematizing, of cultural norms.

The emphasis of these studies has been questioned by the more recent anthropological and folkloristic works on oral performance art. These works have taken a performance-centered approach (variously defined and connected to ethnopoetics and ethnography of speaking), which represents oral performance art, through different techniques, as a contextualized, situated social interaction, in which meaning is negotiated among performers and audiences. The field of performance studies, so useful in cross-cultural studies of theater, ritual and new forms such as performance art, has grown out of this type of approach (Carlson). This type of approach, first called for in articles by Dan Ben-Amos ("Toward a Definition of Folklore in Context," 1971) and Roger Abrahams ("Toward an Enactment-Centered Theory of Folklore," 1977), was most explicitly and influentially proposed in Richard Bauman's *Verbal Art as Performance* (1977).

Bauman's focus on performance, with the keying and negotiated communal structure of a social event, permitted him to turn the attention of folklore scholarship

away from residues and fossils of texts, to living contemporary events and contexts. This approach was taken up by several writers, including Dennis Tedlock, Keith Basso and Charles Briggs, among others.

When these writers focus on the elements of performance as well as text, they vary in how they define these elements and in how they deploy these definitions. Some, most notably and successfully Dennis Tedlock, focus on creating textual codes to represent the audible, voiced elements of oral performance. Others pay more attention to gesture, physical space, location in ritual time, or reports of participants (or sometimes of the descendants of lost participants). Most recently, John Miles Foley (in *The Singer of Tales in Performance*, 1995) has attempted an interesting and largely successful synthesis of this type of representation with that prescribed by the oral-formulaic school.

Even with these variations, these types of written anthropological representations share several common features. First, with few exceptions, the writers of these representations still tend to turn to the oral performance art of others far away, if not in time, then in physical and cultural space from themselves. They still, frequently, like the folklore collectors working from romantic and evolutionist theories, show a simultaneous tendency to idealize and to want to preserve, to appreciate and, frequently, to apologize for the oral performance art they represent in their writings.

Also, even with their stated and actual commitment to including the context of the performance in their representations, their definitions of context tend to neglect all but the most cursory and stated attention to the audience of the performance. In attending at all to the audience in representing oral performance art, these studies are breaking new

ground, but there is still a distance to be traveled. The focus of these studies still remains pointed firmly in the direction of the performer.

My own fieldwork, however, has demonstrated that the focus of actual audiences and performers in performances of oral art is far more widely dispersed. The experience of oral performance art is multi-directional, with audience members' interactions occurring not just in a unipolar, linear pattern. Audiences interact with each other and themselves, and performers interact with individual and collective audiences. The model of an audience watching and listening to a performer performing to them, with occasional interruptions or appreciations from the audience to the performer, is an incomplete model.

The premises of these kinds of collection and analysis (which are, of course, representations—translations) are mainly connected to what is seen as the difference of oral performance art, whether that means preliterate or illiterate. These translators of oral performance art see the art they translate as the work and province of a kind of people who are very different from the practitioners of literary art. These premises connect directly to oral performance art's contextual reference to tradition.

Oral performance art in live contexts always refers to a tradition. It derives much of its effectiveness and appeal from the fact that it recalls past performances. It is metonymous or, to use Foley's term, "immanent." In order to function, elements of the oral performance must refer to an unstated larger matrix of past performances, and past audience's constructions and perceptions of those performances. This gives oral performance art the appearance, at least implicitly and often explicitly evoked, of "descending in an unbroken line through the ages." This type of evocation connects quite

easily to writers' nostalgic and primitivist ideas and agendas, to pictures of the unchanging and the admirable or the undeveloped and the exotic. I will explore these elements of the oral performance art context, and their literary representations, more fully in later chapters.

The performance-centered approach of recent anthropological and folkloristic writing about oral performance art has been extremely productive. Many of its basic premises inform my own field research. In creating this type of written representation of oral performance art, these studies move towards subtler and interestingly nuanced representations.

The prescriptive representation of oral performance art, on the other hand, has been largely relegated, since the transition to a predominately literate society, to the field of public speaking (or sometimes, in contemporary universities, "mass communications"). Even academic departments of rhetoric tend to focus on texts, and literary performance, rather than oral performance art. Within the field of public speaking and communication, the emphasis is on practical considerations (Lucas), with the study of techniques and methods dominating the more philosophical and esthetic issues.

The schools of rhetoric of classical times, and even the formal training in rhetoric of more recent academic history were developed and sophisticated in their study and prescription of oral performance art's features and methods. While training in rhetoric of this kind may not be present in the contemporary educational era, just as oral performance art continues, so do prescriptive representations of it. It is important to be

aware that the skills and techniques involved in oral performance art are taught, although this teaching frequently occurs in ways that are not codified and textualized. Performers instruct performers, and this often happens with a great deal of precision and developed pedagogical effort, even (or especially) when it takes place outside established academic settings.

Much more common currently than prescriptive representations, however, is the literary critical representation of oral performance art. Early literary critical theories of the influence or transcription of oral performance art in literary texts begin most explicitly with debates about the nature of the composer and the composition of Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. These long, complex, and masterful works of epic poetry prompted questions about whether or not a single author, especially a putatively illiterate author, could have produced them.

Milman Parry, beginning with his doctoral theses in 1928, made two major steps in advancing this debate, two steps which formed the basis of the entire academic discipline of the theory of oral composition. The first of these steps, as Foley asserts, grew out of Parry's reading of early ethnographic/anthropological representations of oral performance art, particularly Vasilii Radlov's work on the oral poetry of North Turkish Kara-Kirghiz tribes (1885). Parry was able to compare representations of a living oral tradition, of poems performed by live performers for present audiences, to Homer's poetry.

Following this comparison, through an analysis of Homer's use of epithets and enjambment, Parry concluded that many of the characteristics Radlov observed—the use

of improvisation and memorization, narrative inconsistencies, the role of the audience and so on—could be applied to Homer.

Not only did Parry see that a long and complicated epic poem could be composed and performed by an illiterate poet, so that Homer's orality was a possibility; Parry saw that this type of poem and this type of poet called into question the commonly held definitions of both composition and performance. Parry believed that it could be possible, with more comparative research—he selected the South Slavic region as his field site—to understand and represent the details of the process of the type of oral composition he was defining.

Parry died in 1935, having written only seven pages of the manuscript of his major comparative work. His student and co-worker, Albert Lord, continued the fieldwork in Yugoslavia and, in 1960, published the influential landmark work, *The Singer of Tales*.

This book represented several features of oral performance art, which became touchstones for the examination of many literary texts which could arguably be oral in origin. By analyzing collected oral poems, particularly by comparing different versions of the same poems, Lord constructed a model of oral composition which explained the seemingly impossible feats of memory and improvisation observed in oral poets, and provided a framework for analysis of texts.

Rather than memorizing verbatim or creating as a whole, Lord found, these oral poets were constructing their poems out of a repertoire of formulas and formulaic expressions. By the most specific definition, Parry's original formulation, the formula is "a group of words which is regularly employed under the same metric conditions to

express a given essential idea" (quoted in Lord, 30). These groups of words are also associated into longer groups, running to several lines. Performers, therefore, could use varying combinations of these elements, which were ready to hand (or to mouth) to fit the requirements of the themes—plot episodes or story elements—which made up stories and poems. A poem defined as the "same" poem could use different elements to fill the same episodic or metric slot.

According to Parry and Lord, this accounted for the inconsistencies in the narrative of Homer's work, as well as the repetition, stereotyped descriptions and epithets, and accumulation of detail. By affiliating Homer with the "folk" or "primitive" poets encountered in their fieldwork, they wanted to explain and give esthetic value to what had been seen as flaws in the art of Homer as well as the South Slavic guslars (and other oral poets).

*The Singer of Tales*, and the Oral-Formulaic theory to which it gave rise, created an explosion of new studies and representations (and studies of representations) of oral performance art. The application of oral-formulaic theory to medieval literature in particular has been very productive.

Francis Magoun's influential and controversial article, "The Oral-Formulaic Character of Anglo-Saxon Narrative Poetry," (1953) for example, purports to identify definitively, by the presence or absence of formulas, whether works of literature are of "oral origin" or not. He applies to the Anglo-Saxon context Lord and Parry's ideas of formulas from the South Slavic context without justifying the legitimacy of this certainly questionable application. In addition, problems such as Magoun's assertion that "oral poetry, it may be safely said, is composed entirely of formulas, large and small, while

lettered poetry is never formulaic," (450) have justly been questioned (by, for example, Larry Benson in his 1966 article "The Literary Character of Anglo-Saxon Formulaic Poetry"). Nonetheless, this article began a school of literary criticism, applying the Oral Formulaic theory to literary works, without Magoun's extreme categorization. This application allowed elements of many literary works to be identified as growing directly out of possible oral origins.

Similarly, even earlier than Magoun, Ruth Crosby argued that the works of Chaucer, more than being derived from or originating in oral performance art, are actual scripts, designed and created to be performed. She makes this argument in two articles, "Oral Delivery in the Middle Ages" (1936) and "Chaucer and the Custom of Oral Delivery," (1938) basing her conclusions on works of visual art, elements of typical oral performance art techniques in the written works, and on the verbal tags of Chaucer's narrators such as "as ye may heere" (*Canterbury Tales* l.858).<sup>3</sup> Crosby's argument ignores, and has been attacked for ignoring, the conventionality of such phrases, even in clearly literary works. (Pearsall 295) It also ignores the fact that Chaucer used, in many instances, phrases like, "thow, redere." (*Troilus and Criseyde* V.270) Crosby's work did, nonetheless, open for serious question the idea of Chaucer's work as being simultaneously literary and oral, an idea proposed by Ward Parks (Amodio 150) which I explore further, from my own perspective, below.

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<sup>3</sup> All quotes from Chaucer in this dissertation not otherwise identified are drawn from *The Riverside Chaucer*. L. Benson. ed.

All of the applications of oral-formulaic theory to literary art have had this positive effect—the idea that, as Mark Amodio writes, "orality and literacy exist along a continuum and are integral and interrelated parts of a subtle and complex cultural change rather than (largely) unrelated moments of cultural evolution" (*Oral Poetics in Middle English Poetry*, 5). In seeing the particular textural techniques of oral performance art as present in literary works, these scholars have opened the way for studies such as mine—allowing, although not yet reaching, my analysis of the literary *use* of oral performance art, rather than the literary descendant or reflection of oral performance art.

However, underlying the oral-formulaic theory itself, as well as its later applications, there is still an idea of a basic and insurmountable dichotomy. This dichotomy, which Ruth Finnegan has opprobriously labeled the "great divide" in oral theories, is between orality and literacy. With this dichotomy as a premise, oral performance art must be seen as the province of others who, if not ancient and extinct, are certainly primitive and disappearing. The advent of literacy, according to Lord, meant the end of oral performance art (except for some "counterfeits"). Even at the time of the publication of *The Singer of Tales*, Lord said, "Today in Yugoslavia the transition under this aspect is nearly complete. The oral process is now nearly dead" (138).

This great divide (the crossing of which meant death to oral performance art), is most explicitly and paradigmatically represented in another type of critical representation of oral performance art, begun and best exemplified by Walter Ong's *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (1982). Ong's focus and interest is "the differences between orality and literacy" (1); for Ong, these two terms are defined strictly and mutually exclusively. There is no orality in literacy and no literacy in orality.

For Ong, literacy is a transformative human technology; even the title of his chapter 4, "Writing restructures consciousness," (30) illustrates this. He examines both the before and after of this transformation. Ways of managing knowledge—even the basic nature of thought and consciousness—are different, according to Ong, in "primary oral cultures (cultures with no knowledge at all of writing)" from those in literate cultures. His study represents these cultures, and the thought and performance of their members, as necessarily strange, bizarre and extinct (or recoverable only in isolated areas among lost peoples), created by predecessors to modern, literate human beings.

An extraordinarily useful part of Ong's work is his definitions of some "psychodynamics of orality" (*Orality and Literacy* 31-77). Ong sees these psychodynamics—including aggregative lists, agonistic tone, and empathetic subjective references—as belonging to cultures which "fully literate persons can only with great difficulty imagine." (31) I have, found these features quite frequently, however, in my own fieldwork among contemporary, fully literate performers and audiences. Ong, himself fully literate, of course, not only imagines these cultures, he analyzes and represents them in great detail. He bases his analysis and representation (at least explicitly) on theoretical extrapolations of the nature of sound and the nature of text.

Ong's "psychodynamics of orality," however, need not be considered only as the odd habits of mind of lost and imagined primitives. I see these psychodynamics, rather, as esthetically desirable choices, chosen and deployed by practicing oral artists, literate or not. In representing oral performance art, and in analyzing its representations, these psychodynamics can provide a critical vocabulary for comparison. They can also serve

as analytical foundations for a vision of oral performance art as necessarily, descriptively and significantly different from written art, even when that written art represents oral art.

Much of this examination is crucial, but Ong's generalizing definitions and descriptions of "oral cultures" are often unnecessarily broad and dichotomous. In representing and characterizing oral performance art as the work of people who are more pure, less sophisticated, differently conscious and rational from moderns, and necessarily far away in time and space, Ong misses (indeed denies) many of the performance contexts and the contemporary ubiquity of oral performance art.

The work of Ong and many of his successors portrays, like romantic and evolutionist of representations, inaccurate and idealistic models of oral performance art. In addition, seeing the great divide as unbridgeable renders many performances and much of all performance invisible. The basic advance of Ong's work, however, is in distinguishing oral and written performance, and enumerating some of the distinguishing features.

The theories of oral origins and the studies of orality and literacy, generally, pursue one or both of two of the elements of oral performance art in context. Many of these studies, like the folkloristic studies discussed above, rely on translation and a use of oral performance art's reference to tradition. When writers see oral residues, influences or derivations in literary works, they are often emphasizing (implicitly) the connection of these works to a kind of timeless, prehistoric (or ahistoric) group of predecessors. They link the literary artists to these predecessors, making them, in effect, less literary. These critics may also seek, in this way, to explain or justify certain lapses, or confusing elements in the literary works they analyze. They are making conclusions

about the literary artists which put these artists in a similar category, one subject to primitivist ambivalent admiration and nostalgic longing, to the oral performance artists the literary artists represent.

More than this, though, these literary analyses use their identification of oral elements in literary works to appropriate some of oral performance art's popular appeal and emotional power. They attempt to make a connection between the experience of oral performance art's live audiences and the audiences of the literary works which are their subject matter. In this way, they can add to the appeal and understanding of their subject texts as well as drawing conclusions about their subject texts' authors' motivations, knowledge and skills.

In my work, I am combining, and looking beyond, the types of critical representation I have discussed in this chapter. Yet these earlier reflections, transcriptions and prescriptions inform and underlie my own analysis. In using oral performance art to draw conclusions about cultural contexts, in finding oral influence or remnants in literary works, in theorizing about the differences between the written and the oral, and in prescribing rules and techniques for oral performance art, these earlier studies have found and categorized useful information, and opened the field and the idea of studying oral performance art, both in literary texts and in performance contexts.

My representation of the oral performance art I have observed in the field is intended not to draw conclusions about the culture of the performers and audiences as much as it is to inform my own literary analysis of the works of literature which are my subjects. I am bringing together the work of both types of critical representers I have

discussed here. In doing so, I am presenting a new type of critical representation—a literary critical representation, informed by anthropological and folkloristic representation, and including an awareness of the elements of the oral performance art context which I am translating.

## **Chapter Two—Quacks, Yokels and Light-Fingered Folk: Oral Performance Art at the Fair**

There is a great quantity of eating and drinking, making love and jilting, laughing and the contrary, smoking, cheating, fighting, dancing, and fiddling: there are bullies pushing about, bucks ogling the women, knaves picking pockets, policemen on the look-out, quacks (*other* quacks, plague take them!) bawling in front of their booths, and yokels looking up at the tinselled dancers and poor old rouged tumblers, while the light-fingered folk are operating upon their pockets behind. (William Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, 5)

While Thackeray is here describing a fictional fair in Victorian England, his description, with few additions and subtractions (and with allowances for poetic license), could be applied quite easily to many similar events which have occurred through many ages and in many places. The periodic commercial fair or festival—the market day or carnival, the county fair or exposition of trade—wherever or whenever it is held, is likely to have actors filling the roles of most, if not all, of the characters Thackeray describes.

The fair as a whole is some kind of conglomeration, a knitting together of the interactions of all of these characters, to form a certain place, a certain time, and a certain definable human social event. There are a group of characters, however, the ones that Thackeray identifies with himself, which are as central to the fair as they are to Thackeray's description. It is the "quacks bawling in front of their booths," the pitchmen and con men, the hawkers and shady salesmen,<sup>4</sup> who, in my analysis, most fundamentally represent the character of the fair.

Fairs include quite a lot of oral performance art, from the livestock auctions to the stand-up comedy routines on the grandstand stage. There are three specific types of

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<sup>4</sup> See note 1. regarding the gender specificity (unintended) of some of these terms.

talkers working at the fair, though, that I chose for my focus. In diminishing numbers, some fairs still include sideshows, with live talkers on the bally<sup>5</sup>—or at least inside talkers. These performances are few, though, and I found that in most cases, the sideshow exhibits were ballyed by means of a tape-recorded grind. The operators of the games of skill and chance do some oral performance art as well, although these too (with the frequent exception of age and weight guessing and dump-the-chump joints) sometimes tend to eliminate the oral performance art in favor of large signs or tape-recorded grinds. I have included these types of performance in my fieldwork, but my main focus has been on the pitchmen who sell novelty items (food slicers, floor and surface wipers and tool enhancers, and so on).



**Figure 1—Sideshow talker**

These performances draw huge crowds, and successfully sell many dollars' worth of items. Even when the fair is not too crowded, these joints can do well, and they exist

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<sup>5</sup> The "bally." or "ballyhoo." is the platform and the performance given on that platform, as well as the act of presenting such a performance, to draw a crowd. The term is "used as part of pitchmen's slang in

at many fairs, even the ones that do not have sideshows, or talkers for the games at all. In addition, these performers work at all the different times, with all the different audiences, and in all the different types of fair—street fairs, county fair carnivals, as well as outdoor sports and other commercial expos. Their performance is also, for the purposes of this dissertation, readily familiar and accessible to my own audience and to me as a researcher.



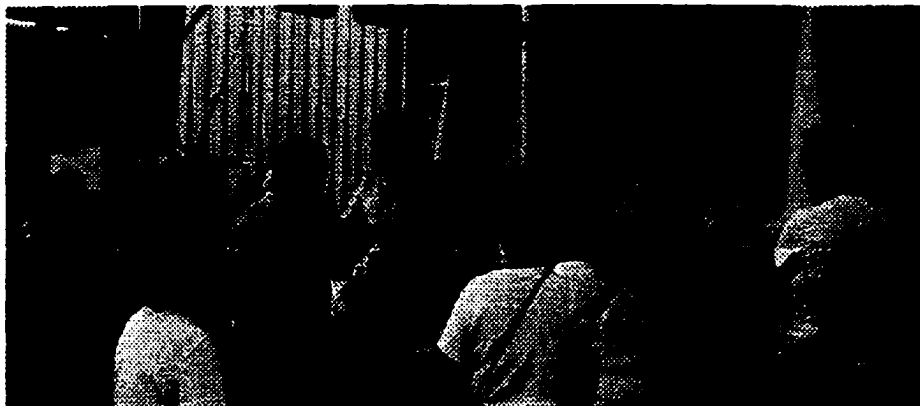
**Figure 2--Game operator**

To some extent, the art of the pitchman at the fair is, of course, unique to the context of the fair. However, to a larger extent the universal, definitional positioning of the performance and its own genre and particular characteristics are representative of the context of all oral performance art. The pitchman is in some ways more extreme and in

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virtually all forms of outdoor and environmental entertainments, especially the medicine show, carnival and circus." (Wilmeth 15)

other ways subtler than other types of oral performers, but may easily be seen as emblematic of the genre as a whole.



**Figure 3--Pitchman**

In conducting my fieldwork, I have been aware of the problems of ethnography and participant observation. I know that my position as an observer, a researcher, makes me *per se* different from the other members of the audience, and even from myself when I am not a member of the audience. My fieldnotes reflect some of the anxieties I felt from being in this complex position. In choosing a setting for my fieldwork I attempted to select a context in which I could be (and have been, at times when I was not engaged in fieldwork) an insider member of the audience. At the fairs where I carry out my fieldwork, I believe I am as little of an outsider as possible, while still being enough of an outsider to do the research.

In addition, I have carried out complementary field research in other contexts—Caribbean dub poetry, contemporary downtown poetry slams, guided museum tours, religious revival meetings, and political rallies—in which I have been variously more and less an insider. Also important has been my experience as a classroom teacher (a commonly experienced, but less commonly recognized, type of oral performance art). I

believe that these experiences have given me an insight which is simultaneously objective enough and aware enough of subjectivities to give my conclusions a degree of validity.

Finally, my experience with and interest in the literary works which represent oral performance art have given me a comparative framework within which live performance in context can be placed. Because the art of the pitchman is represented so often in literature, and because I have a familiarity with this literature and a concentration on its nature as representation of oral performance art, I have been able to connect the performances and the audiences I've observed to a constellation of literary versions.

One of my earlier findings (see my unpublished "'Are You Here for the Slam?'" Power and Place at the Nuyorican Poets' Cafe," 1992) has been that oral performance art events construct and create their own settings, their own place in whatever physical space they are situated. For my fieldwork I chose a setting which highlights, rather than masks, the impermanence and the liminality of the temporarily constructed oral performance place. The county fair carnival, the setting for this study, is a mobile, impermanent setting. Rather than one permanent, geographical space, it is a communally created and constructed place. The performers and audiences within this place are also shifting and multiform.

Since 1993, I have visited more than twenty different fairs and have been part of the audience for over two hundred performances.<sup>6</sup> My methodology for this study

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<sup>6</sup> I conducted fieldwork at street fairs and boat shows in New York City, hunting and fishing expos on Long Island and in Rockland County, and county fair carnivals in New York, New Jersey, Delaware, Pennsylvania, Indiana and Oregon. My most continuous and intensive fieldwork, however, took place each summer at the Dutchess County Fair in Rhinebeck, New York.

included reflexive participant observation as a fairgoer and audience member, as well as some unstructured interviewing. At each fair I visited, I tried to experience the fair as I would if I were not conducting formal research, happening on the pitchmen as I strolled, rather than consciously seeking them out. I tried to pay attention to my own responses, and to observe those of others by watching them watch the performances, after I had had my own responses.

I recorded (in writing) snatches of conversation I overheard, answers to my informal questions, and pieces of pitches that seemed significant or interesting. I also made audio tape recordings of selected pitches, and some audience discussion and response, and took documentary photographs of some representative settings, performers and audiences (some of these photographs make up the illustrations for this dissertation). However, I made no attempt to "collect" pitches systematically with mechanical recording devices or complete verbatim transcription.

This type of systematic collection and transcription can certainly be useful, and has been carried out (most notably by Amanda Dargan). However, I have not attempted it because my focus in this fieldwork has been on the experience and roles of the audiences of the performances, of *all* the participants in the genre, rather than just the performers. My early fieldwork experiences, and my research in the earlier studies discussed in the previous chapter, showed me that systematic collection of performances led to a narrow attention on the text and the performer. I believe, and have observed, that one of the things that is unique about oral performance art as a genre is the multi-directionality of its focus, and the polyphony of its voicing.

In looking at instances of oral performance art at the fairs I visited, I broke down my analysis into three interrelated categories: the performers, the performances and the audiences. After some general contextual observations about the fairs as settings, I will turn to each of these categories separately, and then explore some of the ways in which they are connected.

The fairs I observed, whether held in a street, a fairground, or a gymnasium, are set up to walk through. They are constructed as a pathway (or set of pathways), a passage to be traversed. There is no one place which may be identified as "the fair," because the experience of the fair requires movement through time and space.



**Figure 4--The fair pathway**

The booths are arranged along the sides of aisles, so that stopping to look closely, to touch, or to talk requires moving to one side, out of the flow of the crowd. This

arrangement of a passageway with walls of booths promotes a certain pace, which I observed in myself at the first fair I attended. This pace is an even stroll, slower than normal walking speed, yet constant. The booths on one side flow by and are observed, but to stop and engage with any one booth requires a conscious effort. There is an observation of each booth, but very little involvement or real connection.

Another element of the fair as a setting is one which is contained in the description by Thackeray which I quoted above. The diversity of the fair, the great number and variety of activities, purposes, and moods—along with the conflicts this type of diversity inevitably causes—are present as clearly at the fairs I observed as at Thackeray's fictional Vanity Fair. In describing this type of setting, literary artists often focus, as did Thackeray, on this diversity. They also, frequently, use the kind of accumulative, copious catalogue that is so typical of the performance itself.

It is the conflicts inherent in this diversity, however, which I think are most significant. Between the crowds and the people working the booths (as well as within the crowds themselves), even in the friendliest exchanges, there was an undertone of distrust, a question of whether the deal at the fair was really fair, or the merchandise worthwhile, which would only rarely be found in other commercial exchanges.

No one lives at a fair, and for the people who do live or run a business in the place where a fair occurs, the conflict and hostility (at least the inconvenience) may be even more powerful than for the crowd at the fair (see Kate Walter's "Who Needs Street Fairs?"). Fairs occur in a space that is made into a different place specifically and uniquely for the fair. The space is fenced and gated, with an admission charge and a ticket required for entrance. The fair is, physically and psychically, a separate zone.

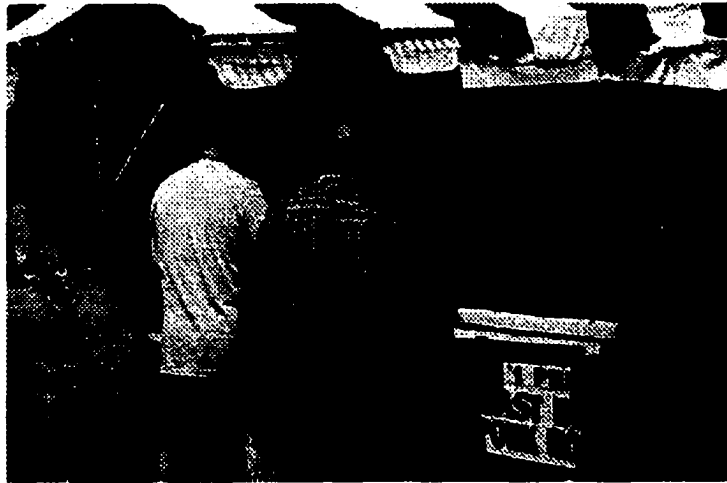
Everyone in the crowd who visits this place is a newcomer (a "yokel," according to Thackeray). As newcomers, no one in the crowd, even people who live right on the same street, is really at home.

This is especially apparent at the county fairgrounds. Here, space—the fairgrounds—is set aside for these fairs. This space is usually on the edge of towns, on the margins. While it is set aside for the fairs, marking them as valued visitors, it is still space set aside for visitors. Most of the spaces sit empty and unused during most of the off-season. Even when the livestock and crafts contests are considered, it must be remembered that these are exhibitions of the talents and achievements of people (and animals) who are local to the counties, but not to the specific localities of the fairs themselves. The traveling, independent carnival operators (such as Reithoffer's Amusements or Amusements of America) are not locals. However, on the fairgrounds, even the locals are not locals, but the "carnies," in a sense, are.

Connected to this outsider status, to the fact that no one lives at the fair, is the fact that communities, in a way, and to an extent, welcome the fair. Even when this welcome is contested, there is some perceived advantage, financial, nostalgic, or otherwise, in having the fair visit. The fair and the performance which belongs to it are familiar in form, although different at each instance; fairgoers know what to expect. At the same time, they expect to be surprised. The fairs return to communities, and the communities return to the fairs. "You know where the animals are," I heard one woman tell her child, "you've been here every year I have, and a couple I haven't."

In addition, the fair is a zone of excess, and more particularly, of display of excess. From the grand flashing lights and blaring music to the sights and smells of huge

amounts of tasty and aromatic food, the fair is where there is much of everything, and everything is too much for the senses. People stand and stare at this excess, watching huge roasts of beef and whole pigs turning on spits, giant Viking ships turning screaming teenagers upside down, and row after row of massive hogs, cows and cucumbers.<sup>7</sup> More than watching, though, people join and become part of this display, buying and wearing large, garish hats, and carrying giant purple Chihuahuas, four-foot-long fluorescent pink inflated plastic bones, or clusters of three orange-headed wonder mops—"buy two, get a third one absolutely free!" All of this excess, its display, and the participation and inclusion of its audience, are elements of the fair as setting in which the oral performance art of the pitchman, with his display of verbal virtuosity, is inextricably intertwined.



**Figure 5--A display of excess**

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<sup>7</sup> This display of excess is also quite apparent in sideshow banner art—and much of the art and illustration connected with the fair. (see Hammer and Bosker, *Freak Show*; Johnson, Secreto and Vardell, *Freaks, Geeks and Strange Girls*; as well as the covers and interior illustrations of all five volumes of James Taylor's *Shocked and Amazed*).

When literary artists represent the oral performance art of the pitchmen who belong to this setting, to the zone of the fair, much of the display, as well as the outside, simultaneously familiar and exotic role of the setting can be connected to their literary art. Even when the fair in particular is not the described setting of a literary work, a similar setting is prescribed and created by any oral performance art event. My research on the Nuyorican Poets Café and its poetry slams explored the ways in which a bar and café, with people sitting together in more or less comfort and equality, became transformed by the act of oral performance art into a place which was much more contested, temporary, and open to risk and possibility, like the fair. I believe that the same type of transformation happens in a living room, on a street corner, in a church or aboard a cruising yawl (as in *Heart of Darkness* and other literary and anthropological representations).

Many of these features of the fair as setting connect directly to features of the pitchman as performer. The job of a pitchman as a performer is an intense and challenging one. Many performances have to be presented over the course of a fair, and there is often no clear demarcation of the ending of one performance and the beginning of another. A pitchman has to catch the attention of his audience, hold it long enough for them to hear the pitch, and then close the deal. The appreciation for this type of performance may be expressed by laughter or even applause, but for the performer, the only really valuable appreciation is when the audience hands over some money.

The pitchmen I observed were a diverse group of performers. They had varying degrees of skill and success in obtaining their audience's attention and appreciation, and varying degrees of engagement with their tasks. It became clear, as the research went on,

that as in so many other artistic endeavors, there are far more pitchmen than there are talented pitchmen.

I spoke at some length with several of the pitchmen I observed. Time is money for these performers, and time spent talking to a researcher is time not spent performing. I did briefly introduce myself and ask a few questions of all the pitchmen, although more than this was often impossible. Interestingly, the ones I spoke to longest—the ones who were willing, even eager, to take the most time away from their work—were also the ones who seemed to me to be the most skilled and successful.

One woman, who was pitching chamois cloths at the Long Island Hunting and Fishing Expo, told me that she traveled and sold at fairs and expositions throughout the region and throughout the year. She was her own boss, buying the cloths wholesale, and had twelve people working for her, covering fairs that she was unable to attend.

She was very aware of her own work as performance, and defined the main skills required. "You can't be afraid to talk in front of people. You have to be aggressive and be able to close. There are lots of people who can make the pitch, but you have to know just when to push for the sale. You have to be able to close."

This ability to close, she said, was something that had to be sensed, a kind of intuitive performative skill. She was unable to train people in this skill, and when I asked her how she did train her employees, she told me that she really just gave them "certain information, the facts about the product" and let them develop the pitches themselves.

As we were talking, she kept the microphone she was wearing switched on, but no one stopped walking by, no one paused to listen. After the interview was over, without noticeably changing her volume or tone of voice, she looked up and said, "Makes

cleaning a breeze, you know." The difference between conversation (or interview) and performance was made completely clear: a man walking by with three children slowed and smiled. "C'mon over and take a look," she said. "Care for a demonstration?" The man came to a complete stop, glanced the other way, and walked over to stand in front of her booth. She began her pitch, and ended up with a crowd of eight or nine people, and closed it by selling four packages (at ten dollars each).

I observed another example, a negative example, of the principle of sensing the moment to close in a young man with blue sunglasses pitching chamois cloth mops at the Chelsea fair. He gathered large crowds, and had them laughing and responding positively to his pitch, but would perform for long periods (four to six minutes) without mentioning the price or asking for the sale. At one point I saw a woman with money in her hand give up and walk away. The pitchman had missed the moment, failed to close, and the balance of the performance tilted away from him.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, I observed and spoke briefly with a man pitching PermaSeal Shampoo at the Lower Columbus Avenue Festival. He told me he had only been to two previous fairs, and was about to quit because, he said, "There's no money here."

This pitchman was more aggressive than any of the others I observed—"Come over here, don't miss this one. You gotta see this. Best bargain at the fair. Special price today." His pitch drew larger crowds for the beginnings of his pitches. As he continued his pitch, however, and some people began to drift away (as I noticed happening with every pitch I observed, at every fair, to greater or lesser degrees), he challenged them with direct questions, "Hey, don't you want to see? All right, your loss." These questions

never actually brought people back, and while he was challenging the drifters, more people, who had seemed involved, turned and left. On several occasions, he lost an entire crowd in this way. He had pushed the moment too hard and too soon, and, again, the balance of the performance tilted away from him.

Part of the nature of oral performance art, its direct approach to a present audience that must be attracted and convinced to stay, requires an aggressive, almost hostile attraction. Audiences must be forced, and the force may be aggressive, but it can not be aggravating. The pitchman must control an audience that is not necessarily amenable to being controlled. This presents difficulties for the performer and defines the performer's character and how he is perceived.

All the pitchmen kept themselves, in some way, separate from their audiences. This separation was connected to the fact, which I discussed above, that no one lives at the fair, that the pitchmen are always and automatically outsiders to the community they visit, and only insiders to the zone of the outside, the fair. Bauman mentions "the persistent association between performers and marginality or deviance," and how performers are separate, "away from the center of...conventionality, on the margins of society." (*Verbal Art* 45)

The pitchmen's separation was frequently physically marked. Every pitchman I observed was marked in some way, generally by his position behind a counter or on a podium or stage. Frequently this marker of separation was embodied in a microphone, sometimes a large one with a colorful foam head, sometimes worn around the neck and positioned upright in the middle of the chest, and sometimes worn over the head and floating directly in front of the mouth. Other times I noticed that the pitchmen I observed

had some article of clothing or other personal accessory—cowboy boots, a bolo tie, an unusual hat or a heavy silver bracelet, for example—which was unusual and flamboyant when compared to the general appearance of the audience, and of the community in which the fair was taking place. This kind of physical marking was an embodied sign of a difference in status and regard which was noticeable and ambivalent.

The pitchman as a performer, as someone on display in a contest for control, sometimes needed to present himself as an inferior, asking for attention from a subordinate position, even setting himself as a figure of fun. Other times, even, for some performers, during the same performance, he set himself as a superior, with more knowledge and ability than his audience, even condescending to them.

John, a water-race pitchman at the Dutchess County and Bloomsburg fairs, told me that he enjoyed working the water-race game particularly (he had worked several others) because of the numbers of children who played. "I especially like the little kids. I wanna pick 'em up sometimes, help them shoot. Parents don't really like it when I touch them." I had noticed this myself, in observing his and other games. Parents prevented children from coming too close to performers, showing a distinct uneasiness about even direct verbal contact. There is a sense in which these performers, even those working the games most explicitly directed to small children (a game with floating plastic ducks, in which "every one's a winner," for example) are not really to be trusted with children.

These performers have a need to balance aggressiveness and pleasantness, sensing the moods and the moments of their audiences. The different phases of their task—the drawing in, the holding of attention, and the close—must receive a delicately balanced rationing of time and skill. This balancing, along with its connected interaction with the

audience, lies at the core of the successful practice of their performances, and it is a talent which may be separate from the actual content of the performances.



**Figure 6—Marked by the microphone**

These performers' need (and possibility) for control of their audience is a direct result of the live, oral nature of their art. This control is practiced with varying degrees, varying balances of aggression and flattery, by all oral performance artists. It has consequences and effects for the audiences and for the performances themselves.

The performance of pitchmen at fairs, like other oral performance art, is characterized by particular textual features, most noticeably including repetition, rhythmically structured catalogues, rhyme and alliteration. Pitchmen also use a kind of exaggerated language and emphatic overstatement. These features exemplify the pitchman's characteristic display of verbal virtuosity; they convey information but also delight and maintain a hold on the audience by the use of sound. All of these techniques and features, all of this virtuosity, are used by the pitchman to enable his more successful control of the audience. "You have to have an answer for everything," the man pitching the Painless Hair Remover told me. As I observed, he had exactly that. Even more

significantly, his "answers for everything" were generally neatly matched in sound with the audience's questions or objections, or the next point he wanted his pitch to reach.



**Figure 7—Cabbage head—an unusual hat**

The use of stock answers to audience questions, challenges and responses, of repeated formulas strung together differently and with the appropriate elements substituted into the appropriate slots, is an essential feature of all oral performance art. When an audience member interrupted a performance to ask, for example, whether the PVA mop would scrub up scuff marks from shoe heels, the pitchman's response to the challenge included three euphonious formulas, the "thirty-pound soaking-wet string-mop," "lefty-loosy, righty-tighty" and the "ketchup sandwich," which the audience had already heard several times before.

This way of using the performance to control the audience, to allow for any of their responses, continued throughout all the successful pitches. The repeated phrases:

"just like that," "make it damp, then you wipe," "thumb on top, that's where your power is," "one hand on the top, other hand goes on your handle, all you do is you turn it," and so on, are a familiar form to the audiences. They become expected and anticipated (sometimes even being mouthed or muttered along with the performer). They allow the audience to feel at home and drawn into the performance, as well as giving the pitchman a way to fill in gaps and make transitions in the rhythm of the performance.

When an audience member asks a question or expresses doubt—"What if it breaks?" or "Seven dollars *each*?"—the pitchman can respond immediately with a phrase that the audience has already heard and is already prompted to accept—"That's not a ninety-day, not a sixty-day, that's a *lifetime* guarantee," or "It's not a matter of *cheapness*, ma'am, it's a matter of true, priceless quality."

Another feature of the pitchmen's performances, which is also a recognized quintessential feature of oral poetry (Ong 1982: 39-41; Boas 1925: 329, 332), is the catalogue. The catalogue is a long list of items, linked together sometimes without connecting conjunctions, sometimes with repeated, not strictly necessary conjunctions. These catalogues work without logical coordinations, using a paratactic rather than a hypotactic structure. Oral catalogues derive their accumulated power and effect from their sound, the oral virtuosity they demonstrate, rather than from any logical, narrative or emotional sense. The PermaSeal salesman at the Bloomsburg Fair made extensive use of these catalogues, often drawing a smile or chuckle, and an extended stay, from an audience which was about to desert him.

"It cleans Dacron," he began in one such instance, "also nylon, herculon, linoleum. Wool, wood, cotton, canvas, muslin. Rattan and bamboo, and Scotchguard

and concrete...." The list went on even longer, although I could not write fast enough to record it all. When I asked him about this listing (he used others--types of stains, products you might try which wouldn't work, and so on), he said, "I just try to make it as long as possible. Sometimes I don't even know what I'll say next, but I try not to repeat myself."

The elements in these oral catalogues often rhyme or alliterate, or are similarly aurally connected, presenting and emphasizing the pitchman's skill and verbal virtuosity. In addition, further emphasizing the catalogue as a virtuosic performance rather than a mere list, pitchmen frequently insert incongruous, unexpected and humorous elements, which emphasize, by interrupting, the aural flow of the catalogue. The EZ Chopper pitchman opens his bowl and puts in "cabbage, carrots, parsnip, potato, tomato, rutabaga, lemon and lime, and obviously I could put more but no one's gonna eat it anyway." These humorous elements are frequently hostile and insulting (at least mildly) or refer to the body and its functions in ways that are not generally considered appropriate or polite in public. The PVA mop, for example "...picks up sand, salt, dog hair, cat hair, fish scales, toe nails..."

Often the humorous elements of the pitchman's performance represent thinly veiled attacks on children, wives, husbands, parents, and, particularly, in-laws. With the Sportsman's Dream (a knife set) "you get the utility knife—you can use for PVC and carpeting or radiator hose and still slice that nice tomato—or my wife.... She uses it for bagels." The implication, that the utility knife can slice a wife as well as a nice tomato, can not be left standing. The moment of hesitation, though, before the bagels are

mentioned, and the pitchman's smile and the audience's chuckles, emphasize both the veil (the bagels) and the attack (the slice).

These performances may skirt the boundaries, through humor and innuendo, of what is acceptable. The control the pitchman exercises is threatening to audiences, but some of this threat is simultaneously strengthened and diluted by redirecting it with humor. "Just checking if you're listening" is the way in which pitchmen often respond to audience's laughter at this type of humor, and this kind of response aptly emblemizes the way in which the pitchman's humor simultaneously diffuses and emphasizes the uneasiness provoked by this type of performance.

Pitchmen also use, sometimes separately from these catalogues and sometimes simultaneously with them, other displays of verbal virtuosity. Pitchmen use polysyllabic synonyms, rattling them off with mellifluous ease. They recite, with relish, drawn out chants and convoluted constructions that roll off the tongue. Their own pleasure in their artistic invention and enjoyment of it, of the creation of impressive sound, is one of the most definitive elements of their performance.

Another technique used by pitchmen, like other oral artists, is storytelling. Many pitches I observed included long narrative segments, formulaically structured, with sequential plots, characters, actions and resolutions. Stories beginning with "I had a customer last year..." or "The other day a guy told me..." ended with "and he came back and bought a whole case this time" or "and after all that, he's still using the same drill bit." What came between these beginnings and endings, the narrative of past experiences, worked as good stories often do, to keep audiences listening and involved, to connect them to experiences and events. Often, the stories were brief, and the

descriptions they included were presented in a kind of shorthand, with a small detail standing in for a lengthier passage. The descriptions and the stories, though, were extremely evocative, for reasons which are specific to oral performance art and its familiarity of form.

These stories, and much of the pitchman's performances, contain specific references to places, events, dates and people which serve as referential pegs for the audiences. This is part of oral performance art's familiarity of form. When a pitchman tells the audience, "Let me tell you what happened just across the river in New Paltz" or "Right there in New York City, in Mount Sinai, they're ordering fifteen cases a week," he makes the performance seem more real and accurate and trustworthy, and gives the audience a feeling that the performance is tailored specifically to them. There is meaning immanent in these descriptions—they call to mind the entire constellation of connections which the audience carries from previous stories and previous descriptions—and they can be adjusted by both the performer and the audience to each specific individual audience member. The audience knows that their life is part of the performance and the performance is part of their life—as real places they know and identify from experience are called to mind.

When a pitchman's performance is at its best, there is an engagement, a working together of the performer and the audience, and the structured orally composed formulas of the pitch only strengthen and confirm this engagement. This was eminently apparent in the performance of the chamois cloth pitch at the Long Island Hunting and Fishing Expo, where the woman told me, "When I'm really on, I know just what they're gonna ask, but I can't answer until they do ask it, so I'll just pause and wait for them to come in

with the question." Without "them to come in with the question" the performance can not work. The performance is co-constructed. While the pitchman is the performer, this role is, in the best pitches, actually shared with the audience, and both parties are active and essential.

This co-constructed performance contains distinctive textual elements, many of which can be translated into literary art and identified there. Repetition, rhythmically structured catalogues, rhyme, alliteration, exaggerated language and emphatic overstatement can all be literary tools, just as they are tools of oral performance art. When these techniques are translated, though, when they reflect and represent oral performance art, rather than being just literary tools, there will also be some translation of their verbal virtuosity, their familiarity of form, and their contested control of an audience. Literary translations of oral performance art, such as Chaucer's catalogues, Dickens' descriptions, and Twain's humor, among others, contain these elements of the pitchman's performance in a literary, but identifiable, translation.

Of course, the setting, the performers and the performance of oral performance art can not be directly translated. More important, the audience of oral performance art, because it is live and present at the moment and during the process of the creation of the performance, is very different from the audience of literary art.

The key feature of the audiences for pitchmen's performances is one that I have already peripherally discussed in the contexts of the setting, the performers and the performances. The audience for a pitch is mobile, shifting, and far from guaranteed. The strolling pace, the browsing mode of fairgoers means that they must be stopped, their pace must be interrupted, in order for them to become an audience.

I noticed on many occasions, every one that I observed, in fact, that the initial approach of a fairgoer to a pitch is tentative and punctuated by pauses. Sometimes people make the actual step (really a stop), and other times they pause only momentarily before continuing their stroll. Sometimes people stay for the whole pitch, sometimes they walk away before the close.



**Figure 8 --The audience consults**

One important aspect of this mobility is that the pitches' audiences almost always consult in some way before making the actual step into the role of audience. Two people will glance at one another, or a single person will look away, towards other people, as they approach the pitch. Joining an audience for this type of oral performance is a negotiated communal decision, which is undertaken in common with another person, not individually.

Several of the pitchmen with whom I spoke expressed an explicit awareness of this to me. "Sometimes one is enough," one woman told me. "It depends on the flow of

people, but you've got to get someone to break the ice. Once there's a few people listening, more will come."

This communality is involved not only in the beginning of the pitch, but throughout its performance. In watching audiences, even when the pitch seemed most successful and engaging, I frequently observed a glance, away from the performer and toward other audience members. A person would look away from the pitchman, and briefly check, seeming to gauge the response of the person standing nearest.

At first I noticed this in myself, and thought it was because I was there as a researcher, but as my observations continued I realized it was almost universal, occurring even when the person standing nearest appeared to be a stranger to the glancer. Being a part of an audience for a pitch, it would appear, involves being a part of a group, and being involved and concerned about measuring the behavior of the other members of that group.

This glance is, I believe, subtly related to the outsider status of fairgoers which I discussed above. To be at a fair and to be in the audience of a pitch is to be engaged in an activity which, however familiar it may be, is not quite comfortable. There is a discomfort about being a "yokel," which is related to an awareness of the possibility of being cheated or taken advantage of. The pitchman's audience carries an air of caution, of guardedness, and seeks solidarity with other audience members to provide confirmation that it really is safe (and even that it is really morally acceptable) to listen and engage with the pitch.

On one occasion, when a woman had just bought a Kitchen Magic at the Lower Columbus Avenue Festival, she turned to the stranger next to her and said, "You should

buy one, too. It's a good deal, isn't it?" This remark brought about another sale for the pitchman, and a satisfied smile from the first buyer. She had received the confirmation she needed to be comfortable with her purchase, and the stranger she addressed had received the confirmation she needed to make a purchase. Again and again at the fair, I saw and participated in interactions of this type, sometimes supporting the performer, sometimes banding together against him.

In pitches where there is real cause for distrust (not, presumably, the ones included in this study), such as sidewalk three-card Monte games, it is common practice to hire a "shill," a confederate who poses as an audience member and provides this confirmation. I do not believe that anything of this type occurred at the pitches I observed, but it was certainly clear that the confirmation was needed, and that in successful pitches it did come.

The undertone of distrust, of caution and awareness of dangers in the pitches' audiences was sometimes more than an undertone. As I have mentioned, questions and even direct challenges from the audience are not uncommon, and pitchmen must handle them. At times these challenges went beyond subtle distrust into outright hostility. One well-dressed woman yelled furiously at the Kitchen Magic pitchman with his pile of sliced and diced vegetables and cheese, "You should give all that *food* to the *homeless!*"

"Lady," he answered, "I haven't got the time. I'm tryin' to *work* for a living."

While this was perhaps not the most talented response to audience heckling, it did get a laugh from the rest of his audience, and it did cause the heckler to allow the pitchman to continue his pitch. It also exemplified the pitchman's most common style of response to outright hostility. He used a familiar (almost proverbial) phrase, returned her

hostility by belittling her, and answered her directly. He did not insult her directly, which could have led to an escalation of the exchange. He continued the contest for control, using the heckler and his contest with her to engage the rest of the audience further, and redirected the audience's attention to himself. Dargan and Zeitlin noted the same type of response to hecklers in their study of carnival talkers—talkers responded with comments like "I remember *my* first beer."

In one game in particular, "Soak the Bloke,"<sup>8</sup> this kind of hostility is thoroughly used to the "Bloke's" advantage. In this game, the "bloke" sits behind a protective netting, above a tank of water, and taunts and insults his audience (sometimes, as the evening grows later, quite obscenely) to provoke their anger. The angrier they get, the more they want to spend money to soak him in water by throwing a baseball at a target, which, when struck, releases a trap door under his seat. While this game is atypical in the amount of anger, of insult, which is not just tolerated but desired, it does typify the ways in which this kind of response is provoked and then used to the performer's advantage.

The audiences know they are being fooled, they know they are being provoked, but because it's "all in fun,"<sup>9</sup> they can be hostile and aggressive in a sanctioned forum. The expressions of people throwing baseballs at this "bloke's" target included some anger, but more a kind of embarrassed humor. Some of the roughest jibes (for example, a joke at the expense of a teenaged boy's overweight mother—"Whooooee, thar she

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<sup>8</sup> I also saw this game called "Dump the Chump." and Arthur Lewis (*Carnival*) reports seeing "Dump Bozo" beginning in 1938 (200). He also reports the injection of racial elements, beginning in 1899 with "The African Dip." bearing the sign, "Hit the Trigger. Dump the Nigger." (202) and the element of sex in the 1930's with "Dump Mable Out of Bed." (201)

blows!') provoked derisive laughter from the audience, as well as maniacal cackles from the "bloke," but no active hostility, beyond the sanctioned attempt to "soak" him, towards the "bloke" himself.

The pitchmen's audiences, although they share in the performance of the pitch, both among themselves and with the performer, are nevertheless engaged in a contest for their attention and appreciation. The control of the audience ultimately does belong to each audience member, but in joining together to become an audience, they share some of this control with one another, and more important, it is the pitchman's task to take it over for a while. They give up this control when they stay and listen, when they give their attention, their acceptance and ultimately their money, but it is never a complete surrender. There are resistances and rebellions, discomforts and distrusts, to varying degrees and with varying results.

Oral performance art, with its performers, audiences and performances, while it is often valorized and culturally sanctioned, as with African griots or Baptist preachers, for example, is also frequently marginalized and transgressive as with gangsta rappers and beat poets. When people come to the fair, they are already coming to a site where this same contradiction exists.

When oral performers and their audiences create their art at the fair, they are participating in a tradition, a tradition which has value to communities. This tradition includes elements of celebration and nostalgia, of community pride and esteem. In these elements there are also negative sides. The community is defined and identified against

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<sup>9</sup> At some fairs this game has its profits reserved for charitable purposes, further justifying the

an Other. Attitudes about the Other are reflected in the performers' attitudes about their audiences and the audiences' about the performers. The pitchmen who run children's games can not be trusted with children, and the audiences who pay pitchmen's wages can not be trusted with the products—"I only give them an *empty* container if they want to check the label. No sense taking chances," the Clenz-All pitchman, afraid of being robbed by an audience which was similarly afraid of being robbed by him, told me.

Leslie Prosterman (1992) recounts how people "lament" the "deterioration" of the "nice old" county fairs caused by the carnivals which ruin them. I would suggest, as her historical research concludes, that it is not the carnivals which "ruin" county fairs. The carnival is an integral part of the county fair. It is for *both* what is transgressive *and* what is valorized that people come to the fair. And it is *both* of these that people find in oral performance art.

Oral performance at the fair provokes smiles and frowns, distrust and acceptance, trust and fear, exploitation and enjoyment, because that is exactly the function of the fair as a whole. These performances both define and reflect their specific nature and that of the culture and context within which they occur. This context is also translated into the literary representations of oral performance art.

In addition, oral performance art contains referential pegs, a familiarity of form and accessibility which comes from the fact that audiences simultaneously know what to expect, and do not feel entirely confident that what they will expect will occur (or will be pleasant or even acceptable). The past which is referred to in oral performance art is one

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"fun" and defusing the hostility.

about which the audience holds ambivalent feelings—nostalgic longing as well as superiority and anxiety. Oral performance art at the fair is a part of every contemporary landscape, in post-capitalist, transnationalist America, and it is part of the nostalgia for and rejection of what is "old-timey" as well.

Because of the live human audience, there is also an interplay, growing out of the pitchman's contested control of the audience, which is always present in oral performance art. Richard Bauman refers to "the inherent sociability of performance." (*Verbal Art* 42) However, this sociability (like many other sociabilities) is a striving sociability, competitive *and* cooperative. There is a struggle for control—an unresolved, active striving for mastery—with the audience and the performer negotiating and together creating the performance. There is also, often, an outright and explicit reference to this interplay—"now I know you're going to say..." In this way the interplay is pointed out and pointed up, and the fact that the performer's authority is subject to question is emphasized even as those questions are partially and temporarily avoided or resolved.

The contest between the performer and the audience also includes an emotional and moral charge. There is the fear of approaching the performer, the fear of allowing children to come near. There is the off-color or slightly risqué humor and humorous, occasionally vicious, personal insult. There is a tendency, variously expressed, toward violating or at least teasing out the boundaries of morally acceptable behavior.

All these elements are present in the oral performance art I have observed in my fieldwork, although not all of them have been observed, or observed in the terms and with the emphasis I use, in other writers' representations and analyses. They are, though, from my reading of these other representations, and from my observation of their

ubiquity and constitutive role in the oral performance art of pitchmen, primary and constant features of all oral performance art. In my fieldwork, I have observed and defined these main features of oral performance art as a contested control, a display of verbal virtuosity, and a familiarity of form.

When writers translate oral performance art into their literary art, they also translate these elements of oral performance art which I have observed in context. However, because literary art is not oral performance art, because what literary artists do is different, and because this difference, the nature of this type of work as translation, is evident in the literary work itself, these translations need to be examined as such. That examination, the focus of this dissertation, takes place in my next chapter.

### **Chapter Three—The Pitchman in Print: Literary Representations of Oral Performance Art**

I am equally good and varicose on all subjects. I can take up the matter of Russian immigration, or the poetry of John W. Keats, or the tariff or Kabyle literature, or drainage, and make my audience weep, cry, sob and shed tears by turns. (O. Henry, *The Gentle Grafter*, 14)

Oral performance artists, like O. Henry's Andy Tucker, are "good and varicose on all subjects." However, literary artists, as well, can take up many subjects, and accomplish many effects. Sometimes, in subtle or explicit ways, one of the "subjects" they "take up" is oral performance art. My argument is that in these cases, when literary artists translate oral performance art, an analysis of the literary work must include an analysis of its nature as a translation.

In some cases, literary artists make very clear that their task and technique includes this sort of translation. In other cases, the presence of translated oral performance art in a literary work is less obvious. In any case, though, these translations have occurred many times, and are included in many literary works. In order to illustrate the range of types of literature which make use of the literary translation of oral performance art, and to demonstrate how the method of analysis I am proposing may be carried out, I have selected five representative literary works.

I have intentionally selected works of poetry as well as fiction, and works by authors who wrote in centuries ranging from the late fourteenth to the late twentieth. These works demonstrate the range of different possibilities in the genre which is made up by literary translation of oral performance art. Simultaneously, however, they demonstrate the similarities of all works within this genre. The main similarity, as will

become apparent in this chapter, is that all these works, by translating oral performance art, foreground the issue of their own nature as translation.

In translating the art of the pitchman into print, literary artists are able to take advantage of the appeal and power of oral performance art, but they are also able to use the contrast between the art forms, between literary and oral art, to point up and emphasize other contrasts.

I. "*Thourgh myn eres the noyse wente*": The Parliament of Fowls

Geoffrey Chaucer was clearly a literary artist, seeing and portraying himself as a writer. It is easy to locate instances in the texts of his poetry in which he refers to himself, or has his narrator refer to himself, sometimes directly, as writing for readers. In *Troilus and Criseyde*, for example, the narrator begins by asking:

Thesiphone, thow help me for t'endite  
 Thisse woful vers, that wepen as I write.  
 (I.6-7)

And at times he directly addresses a reading audience:

Thow, redere, maist thiself ful wel devyne  
 That swich a wo my wit kan nat diffyne;  
 On ydel for to write it sholde I swynke,  
 Whan that my wit is wery it to thynke.  
 (V.270-273)

The ending of the poem, as well, "Go, litel bok," (V.1786) clearly demonstrates Chaucer's view of his work as a written object

There are also, however, many other instances where he seems to address listeners and a present audience directly. The General Prologue to the *Canterbury Tales*, for example, ends, and the tales begin:

And he began with right a myrie cheere  
 His tale anon, and seyde as ye may heere.  
 (I.857-858)

Also, the narrator of *The Legend of Good Women* directly addresses a present audience, with a representation of the typical veiled hostile attack and direct emotional involvement in the tale of an oral performance artist:

But in this hous if any fals love be,  
 Ryght as hymself now doth ryght so dide he,  
 With feynynge, and with every subtil dede.  
 (1554-1556)

These instances have led to theories about the oral performance of Chaucer's written poetry, beginning with Ruth Crosby's "Oral Delivery in the Middle Ages" in 1936, often referring to suggestive (although stylized) illustrations of Chaucer performing before an audience (such as the illuminations from the *Corpus Christi* and *Lansdowne* manuscripts). Chaucer also uses folkloric material, and more subtle oral approaches and techniques. Many critics have traced the influence of folklore and folkloric material on Chaucer's poetry (especially useful are Bryan and Dempster's *Sources and Analogues of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales* and, from a different perspective, Carl Lindahl's *Earnest Games*).

Chaucer uses clear allusions to both the nature of his work as writing and the nature of his work as translation of oral performance art. Sometimes both these types of allusions occur in a single short passage, as in the prologue to the Miller's Tale, where those in the audience who do not want to *hear* what is *said* are advised to *turn the page*.

And therefore every gentil wight I preye,  
 For Goddes love, demeth nat that I seye  
 Of yvel entente, but for I moot reherce  
 Hir tales alle, be they bettre or werse,  
 Or elles falsen som of my matere.  
 And therefore, whoso list it nat yheere,  
 Turne over the leef and chese another tale;  
 For he shal fynde ynowe, grete and smale,  
 Of storial thyng that toucheth gentillesse,  
 And eek moralitee and hoolynesse.  
 (I.1371-1380)

These conflicting types of allusion seem to rule out any classification of Chaucer's poetry as strictly oral or strictly literary. As Parks puts it,

Common sense would dictate that an interaction (of one sort or another) between literary and oral receptional presuppositions is signalled by the mix of oral and written allusions in Chaucer's work. Articulating the dynamics of this interaction poses an exciting and largely unexplored problem in Chaucerian criticism. (Amodio 155)

The focus of my analysis is just this unexplored problem, an analysis of Chaucer's poetry as *representation* of oral performance art. Chaucer's work, I will argue, gains much of its force and appeal, as well as added complexity and analytical richness, directly from the fact that it often represents oral performance art and its contexts in *texts*.

Although examples can be found in many of Chaucer's poems, with the *Canterbury Tales* as a whole and several of the tales in particular as notable examples, *The Parliament of Fowls* provides a perfect illustration of the workings of this type of representation. *The Parliament of Fowls* is a poem about a parliament; it specifically and graphically portrays an oral performance event. The parliament of fowls in Chaucer's poem is a literary construct, an allegory that fits into a courtly and classical tradition. yet it is also a literary representation of a type of event which fits into the folk traditions of many cultures, in many historical periods. There are thousands of examples of this genre. Aside from the pitchmen and their audiences I have observed, other examples range from riddling sessions (Jamaican, Japanese or Anglo-Saxon), to barroom bull sessions, from Kwakiutl Potlatches to street corner or schoolyard snaps, from courtroom or congressional debates to television talk shows.

It is probably going too far to suggest (as Lindahl suggests in connection with the *Canterbury Tales*) that Chaucer is actually presenting a type of ethnography. Yet the event which the dreamer observes in *The Parliament of Fowls* is an event of the type which I have observed in the field, and in reporting this event, the dreamer is, in fact, carrying out something like the kind of reporting carried out by ethnographers since that discipline's inception. It is also interesting that just as ethnographers commonly focus on

exotic people ("Others" in time, space or race), so this dreamer is observing a race of "exotics"—birds.

The birds are Other than the dreamer, and the differences even among the birds, the types or classes of birds—the water-fowl, the worm-fowl, the seed-fowl, and so on, each with its characteristic status and attitudes—further echo the diversity and competitive striving of oral performance events in context. The dreamer's representation of the parliament, embedded in Chaucer's poem, translates with some degree of accuracy several of the features of oral performance art which I observed in the field. The management by inclusion of audience responses, the contested control of the audience, and the sharing of authorship of the performance which I saw at the fair are certainly a part of this parliament.

The birds of "lowere kynde," rather than respectfully listening to and accepting the arguments of their superiors, continually interrupt to carp, complain, heckle, jeer and contradict:

The goos, the cokkow, and the doke also  
So cryede, 'Kek kek! Kokkow! Quek quek!' hye,  
That thourgh myne eres the noyse wente tho.  
(498-500)

Their counter-performance diffuses the spotlight of the performance of the parliament. Each member of this community in oral competition may seize or lose power, and even if the ultimate result of these reversals is to reinforce established power, the result is also, paradoxically, to reinforce the susceptibility of this power to reversal. When challenges to the authority of a speaker are constant, even if they are met and put down, the very necessity for meeting and putting down the challenges encourages more challenges.

Even among the tercel eagles, arguments are subject to interruption. One tercel eagle presents an argument he intends to reject, proposing a trial by battle which he really does not want. The other eagles, however, take him up on his proposal, seizing control of the proceedings. The first eagle must try to redirect the discussion, with the self-effacing tone of a pitchman working a crowd ("ne taketh not agref I preye"):

'I can not se that argumentes avayle:  
 Thanne semeth it there moste be batayle.'  
 'Al redy!' quod these egles tercels tho.  
 'Nay, sires,' quod he, 'if that I durste it seye,  
 Ye don me wrong, my tale is not ido!  
 For, sires—ne taketh not agref I preye—  
 It may not gon as ye wolde in this weye;  
 Oure is the voys that han the charge in honde,  
 And to the juges dom ye moten stonde.'  
 (538-546)

All the birds are subject to and carry out this kind of interruption, agreeing and disagreeing with one another at will, mocking or confirming each other's ideas. They use the oral devices of the pitchman, including boasting, direct appeals, and familiar proverbial formulas to attempt to exercise the kind of control of the audience, sometimes subtle, sometimes forceful, that pitchmen exercise.

And for these water-foules tho began  
 The goos to speke, and in hire kakelynge  
 She seyde, 'Pes! Now tak kep every man,  
 And herkeneth which a resoun I shal forth brynge!  
 My wit is sharp; I love no taryinge;  
 I seye I rede hym, though he were my brother,  
 But she wol love hym, lat hym love another!'  
 'Lo, here a parfit resoun of a goos!  
 Quod the sperhawk; 'Nevere mot she thee!  
 Now parde, fol, yit were it bet for the  
 Han holde thy pes than shewed thy nycete.  
 It lyth nat in his wit, ne in his wille,  
 But soth is seyde, "a fol can not be stille."  
 (561-574)

No one authority is accepted, every statement has a counter-statement, in a polyphonous voicing of difference, which makes authorship within the parliament communal rather than individual. There is a raucous noise of multiple voices which can be stifled by authority only temporarily and incompletely at best. Nature and the eagles are still in charge at the end, but they will be, at the very least, challenged again next year

Just as at the fair, the oral performer must constantly attempt, and never completely accomplish, a management of audience responses, actions, reactions and interruptions. As I observed at the fair, when attention wanders, when agreement coalesces, when hostility threatens, when laughter interrupts or disinterest distracts, oral performers directly and aggressively confront and incorporate these responses into their performances. "I see you don't believe me—well, hold on just two more minutes." "Amazing, isn't it?" "I'm glad you asked that question." "Look at that guy nodding. He doesn't even know what I'm talking about." Or, in this poem, "Holde youre tonges there," to which "Assented were to this conclusioun/The briddes alle." Not just the voices of the audience, but the re-voicing of their responses by the performer—their "assent"—all become part of the performance.

It is also significant that the tone of some of the voices, the counter-voices of the goose, the cuckoo, and the duck, in particular, is derisive, mocking, and self-confidently disrespectful. These birds of "lowere kynd" consider themselves sufficiently on an equal footing with the eagles not just to interrupt and contradict them, but to make fun of them, to verbally play with their claims and opinions.

The noyse of foules for to ben delyvered  
 So loude rong, 'Have don, and lat us wende!'  
 That wel wende I the wode hadde al to shyvered.  
 'Com of!' they criede, 'allas, ye wol us shende!

Whan shal youre cursed pletynge have an ende?  
 How sholde a juge eyther parti leve  
 For ye or nay withouten any preve?  
 (491-497)

This type of verbal play, the parody of established hierarchical authority, promotes a type of "folk laughter," to use Bakhtin's phrase—a laughter which leads to subversion of that authority. When a churlish bird makes a gentil bird's serious argument look ridiculous, the power of the laughter he inspires is increased, rather than diminished, by authority's strident shouts for "pes" and he becomes, by his very appropriation of the right to make fun and to receive the focused attention of the audience, the superior. It is the play, here, however, not the ultimate "winner" of the debate, which gives the poem (or the performance) its success.

The line between audience and performer is a shifting one in the parliament, as it is at the fair, blurred by constant crossing and redrawing. This feature, in addition to disrupting and subverting hierarchies, reinforces community, without suppressing the differences contained within that community. When the birds sing the roundel together at the end (which is not a conclusion) of their parliament, they sing with a harmony that accepts and requires the different tones of different voices.

But fyrst were chosen foules for to synge,  
 As yer by yer was alwey hir usaunce  
 To synge a roundel at here departynge,  
 To don Nature honour and plesaunce.  
 (673-676)

The poem's inconclusiveness is one of its most frequently mentioned and analyzed features. This poem's contradictions always remain contradictory. The poem begins:

The lyf so short, the craft so long to lerne,  
 Th'assay so hard, so sharp the conquerynge,

The dredful joye alwey that slit so yerne:  
 Al this mene I by Love, that my felynge  
 Astonyeth with his wonderful werkyng  
 So sore, iwis, that whan I on hym thynke  
 Nat wot I wel wher that I flete or synke.  
 (1-7)

This set of oppositions, these contradictory statements, defining the poem's subject, but impossible to reconcile, and without any reconciliation offered, with the contradictions left standing, stand at the very opening of this poem.

Likewise, at the very opening of the garden of love in which the parliament of fowls takes place, there stands a gate inscribed with similarly contradictory messages.

For with that oon encresede ay my fere  
 And with that other gan myn herte bolde;  
 That oon me hette, that other dide me colde;  
 No wit hadde I, for errour, for to chese  
 To entre or flen, or me to save or lese.  
 (143-147)

Once again, although the dreamer does enter the gate, it is only because he is told that the messages do not apply to him. The contradictions, and the gate, are left standing, unresolved and unreconciled.

Finally, and again similarly, the struggle of the parliament, the conflict between the contradictory stands of the three tercel eagles in competition for the love of the formel eagle, is also left unresolved, and the poem ends with these contradictions open, with a promise not of reconciliation, but of further future competition for the birds next year and further reading for the dreamer.

And with the shoutyng, whan the song was do  
 That foules maden at here flyght away,  
 I wok, and othere bokes tok me to...  
 (693-695)

Chaucer's representation of a judgment between opposites which is deferred or avoided, a struggle which has no victor, gives the poem depth, interest, and force as a literary work of art, but it also echoes a commonly recognized essential feature of competitive oral performance art, particularly art of the type which is performed in events like the very parliament which is the subject of this poem. (Tedlock, *Spoken Word* 241-243)

This type of inconclusiveness has several consequences for oral art in general, and for Chaucer's representation of oral art in this poem. The lack of a definite conclusion, of a resolved issue, invites the audience into the struggle. A sense of inclusive community is reinforced, and the primary value for that community becomes the process of discussing and competing. Since the birds in the poem have not settled their competition, they must reassemble next year (and, presumably, in each of the following years), and the competition becomes a repeated, valued and enjoyed event.

'Beth of good herte, and serveth alle thre.  
A yer is nat so longe to endure,  
And ech of yow peyne him in his degre  
For to do wel, for, God wot, quyt is she  
Fro yow this yer; what after so befalle,  
This entremes is dressed for yow alle.'  
(660-665)

Embedded within this competition, and directly related to its inconclusiveness, is another typical feature of oral performance. When competition is not resolved, when even Nature, the judge in the poem, cannot ultimately judge a winner, there is a subversion and reversal of judgment itself, and of hierarchical authority in general.

'I wol nat serve Venus ne Cupide,  
Forsothe as yit, by no manere weye.'  
Quod Nature, 'heere is no more to seye.  
Thanne wolde I that these foules were aweye,  
Ech with his make, for tarynge lengere heere!'

(651-657)

Each member of a community in oral competition may seize or lose power, and even if the ultimate result of these reversals is to reinforce established power, the result is also, and more importantly, to reinforce the susceptibility of this power to reversal. (Bauman, *Verbal Art* 29) Each year, the birds of lowere kynde must return, and must be subject to the authority of nature, yet each year they have the authority to hold up the decisions, to make their voices heard and appreciated by the audience as a whole, to take on some of the authority and identity of performers themselves.

The folklorist Roger Abrahams, in his work on African and African American storytelling, defines a subgenre of "dilemma tales." These tales pose a problem, often moral or philosophical, which remains unresolved at the end of the tale. In these tales, according to Abrahams, "it cannot be stressed too strongly that it is the flow of the discussion that counts, not the finding of a solution." (*African Folktales* 109)

In a story from Togo, for example, which Abrahams retells as "Wondrous Powers," a father who can no longer support his three sons sends them out to bring him food and clothing. After traveling for a year, each son finds a magical item. In the first son's magic mirror the sons observe that their father is dead. The second son's magic sandals transport the sons instantaneously to the father's grave. The third son's calabash of magic medicine raises the father from the grave. "Now," the tale ends, "which of these three sons has performed the best?" (115)

In the discussion which follows tales of this sort, including a similar tale from the Kpelle of Liberia (as described in Gay and Cole's *The New Mathematics and an Old Culture*):

The discussion waxed furious, with the debate shifting back and forth between advocates of the trap maker and the weaver. They chose sides, apparently for the sheer joy of the debate... Each person tries to put his side in the best possible light. There is no argument over the facts of the case, but over the interpretation. Traditional values are stressed, and the decision is a kind of corporate process. (26)

Abrahams sees dilemma tales as characteristically Black African, and in the specific forms in which he finds these tales this is certainly the case. However, the more general feature of inconclusiveness, of a focus on process and prowess in argument and display, is far from exclusive to Africa or African America.

In fact, inconclusiveness, or situational (rather than abstract conclusive) centering, is a feature of oral art related to Ong's formulation of the "psychodynamics of orality." Ong even goes so far as to argue that the very notion of closure in narrative evolves from and is dependent on the technology of writing and its successor, print.

By isolating thought on a written surface, detached from any interlocutor, making utterance in this sense autonomous and indifferent to attack, writing presents utterance and thought as uninvolved with all else, somehow self-contained, complete...

The printed text is supposed to represent the words of an author in definitive or 'final' form. (132)

For Ong, the literary is the sole province of closure, and the "oral world" the sole province of inconclusiveness. When representations of oral performance art appear in literary works, he sees a lingering ghost, a remnant of the earlier world which is in the process of being replaced. I see the relationship between oral performance art and literary art as a more flexible translation, rather than the collision of mutually exclusive worlds. However, the kind of focus on the process of competition rather than its resolution, which Chaucer translates in this poem, can certainly be observed in many oral genres, in many cultures—for example, riddling, playing the dozens, poetry slams, and campfire ghost stories.

At the fair, as I have observed, this kind of inconclusiveness is quite obvious. Every pitch leads to another pitch, as audience members enter and leave at different points. The close is never a final close because, just as one pitch is ending with a sale, the next audience is midway through, or even at the very beginning, of another pitch, yet nowhere near a sale. At the end of the day the pitchman stops, but the fair picks up again the next day, or in the next town, or in the next season. I often observed people (not, presumably, researchers like myself) returning to the same pitchman at a different time in the day or evening, picking up at a different point in the performance. It is the performance, the process and the participation, not the final conclusion, which is vital in oral performance art.

Aside from the use of oral performance as subject matter and framing contextual structure, Chaucer also incorporates other oral elements. Most notable among these in *The Parliament of Fowls* is the use of catalogues. The catalogue, with its additive rather than subordinating structure, with its metric listing of epithetically-identified elements, is, as I have said, a quintessential feature of the pitchman's art, and of oral performance art more generally.

*The Parliament of Fowls* contains several of these catalogues, particularly the list of trees in lines 176-182:

The byldere ok, and ek the hardy asshe;  
 The piler elm, the cofre unto carayne;  
 The boxtre pipere, holm to whippes lashe;  
 The saylynge fyr; the cipresse, deth to playne;  
 The shetere ew; the asp for shaftes pleyne;  
 The olyve of pes, and eke the dronke vyne;  
 The victor palm, the laurer to devyne.

and the much longer list of birds in lines 337-364. These catalogues, like most oral catalogues, derive their accumulated power and effect from their sound, the verbal virtuosity they demonstrate, rather than from any logical, narrative or emotional sense. Of course, these catalogues in *The Parliament of Fowls* do have literary antecedents, even direct literary sources. The catalogues in the earlier literary sources may or may not be themselves considered literary translations of oral catalogues. The catalogues in this poem, however, must be seen within the context of its more general translation of oral performance art as subject and matter. Within this context, they certainly represent the kind of verbal virtuosity practiced by pitchmen and other oral performance artists—"You can make your tuna salad, your chicken salad. your taco salad. Your fruit salad, potato salad, cucumber salad and cole slaw. Shredded cheese, grated cheese and carrots."

What is particularly significant about the catalogues in *The Parliament of Fowls*, however, is that they are not presented as being *spoken* by the birds, the oral poets in the poem, but *written* by the dreamer, the constructed writer of the larger written work. Not only does the dreamer observe an oral performance event; he directly appropriates a characteristic tool of oral performance in describing the setting of that event. Yet it is in a written poem, and with written description, that he uses this tool.

This dreamer, in addition to being presented so clearly as a writer, is also presented, and describes himself, as a reader. In fact, it is from his reading of a book, "Tullyus of the Drem of Scipioun," that the dream itself arises. The contradictory legends on the gates, as well, which I mentioned above, are *written* legends, *read* by the dreamer.

Even more clearly, at the end of the poem, the dreamer defines himself as a reader, and his task and response to the oral performance event he has observed is to read further, rather than to undertake any further action.

And with the shoutyng, whan the song was do  
 That foules maden at here flyght away,  
 I wok, and othere bokes tok me to,  
 To reede upon, and yit I rede alwey.  
 I hope, ywis, to rede so som day  
 That I shal mete som thyng for to fare  
 The bet, and thus to rede I nyl nat spare.  
 (693-699)

Chaucer foregrounds the contrast between the oral and the written by using both the translation of oral performance art and the emphasis on the literary narrator. The contrasts between listening and reading, between speaking and writing, and the ways in which they remain unresolved in the poem, echo the other contrasts, the other inconclusiveness in the poem. When Chaucer employs these echoes, references, and directly imitated situations and contexts from oral art, a curious blending, a transitional art form, is created within his written art. Chaucer is able to situate his poem directly on the center-line of the oral-written continuum. Chaucer can take advantage of the stature and credentials accorded to a writing poet in a literate (or at least elite-literate) society, yet at the same time he can provide his audience with the emotional immediacy, comical enjoyment, and communalizing, subversive power of oral performance art. Chaucer's work provides the perfect example of a kind of liminal literature, the separate genre that is constructed by literary translation of oral performance art. This genre falls between "folk" or oral-traditional genres and the established, "modern" genres of the literary elite.

At the same time, by referring to his narrator's task as writing, by performing orally a written work which has oral performance as a subject, and which uses the tools

of oral art, while still referring to the dreamer's writing and reading as primary, Chaucer circularly points out (and once again, does not resolve) the contradictions between the two forms. Chaucer's audience, like the birds in the poem, can enjoy the process of the contradiction, and can be included in the struggle. Chaucer is able to do more than unconsciously reflect or objectively portray an instance of oral performance art in his literary art. He can specifically and successfully engage his audience in the issues of both oral and literary performance. He can connect to the effects of both, and use the techniques of both.

When Chaucer presents the parliament of fowls within the poem, then, the imagined oral performance event translates several typical and particularly effective characteristics of oral art: an inconclusiveness which provides an emphasis on process and performance, a reversal of established hierarchies, a communalization of authorship, and mocking verbal play. As the dreamer reports what he has seen and heard from the assembled birds, he reports all these features. He watches birds performing what is actually a common and particularly human genre.

The genre of competitive oral performance is so common in human societies, and Chaucer's narrator reports it with such accuracy and relish, that it is clearly one with which Chaucer and his audience were as familiar as we are today. This oral genre provides the central event (as well as the title) of *The Parliament of Fowls*, and it is also one which Chaucer presents, in different forms, in many of his other works. However, this genre is characteristically oral, and Chaucer's art is written poetry.

At this point, it is interesting to remember that Crosby and others (Lindahl, Brewer), have theorized that much of Chaucer's poetry in general, and *The Parliament of*

*Fowls* in particular, was written to be performed orally, before an assembled audience. Without entering into the controversy over the historical accuracy of this hypothesis, I would like to propose the model of a written poem in oral performance as a productive one for interpretation of the oral elements I have described so far.

If we examine *The Parliament of Fowls* as a work performed orally before a courtly audience, the oral elements it includes can be seen to serve a distinct and powerful function. In its portrayal of an oral performance, the poem could partially echo the situation of its own performance, yet at the same time the casting of the poem as a dream vision, and of the narrator as a dreaming human observing anthropomorphized birds, would point up the differences between the situation of the poem's performance and the performance within the poem.

Roger Abrahams, in *The Man-of-Words in the West Indies*, writes that on the island of Saint Vincent,

...in a *marriage* or *baptism fête*, a *send-off* and *thanksgiving*, a *wake* or the more spontaneous moonlit night *ring play* occasions, the following traits are observable: (1) an open-ended, protean quality in the interaction, both in terms of spontaneous beginning and fade-out ending and of who interacts with whom; (2) an accompanying emphasis on each person being an active part of the performance, adding his voice, motions and emotions to the total effect; (3) in many events, a focus on the most persuasive performer, with the others interacting on a call-and-response pattern in which there is no necessary thematic connection between the call and the response; (4) each person in the performance environment is regarded as a potential central performer; (5) the performer (and the performance) is judged with regard to staying power; (6) an open delight in repetition and improvisation out of (or against) the repeated elements; and (7) a constant interplay and overlap of voices, sometimes in noise, sometimes through focused dialogue (or its kinesic equivalent). (131)

It is certainly possible that just as *The Parliament of Fowls* translates these typical features of oral performance art, if the poem itself were performed orally, its audience would respond and participate in a similar way to the audience of African

dilemma tales, or to the audience of a Vincentian baptism fête or ring play, or to the audience of a carnival pitchman.

The issue of closure, of resolution, in the poem is one that has been frequently discussed (Grudin 53). My reading of the poem, however, centers on the representation of oral performance art in literary art. Through this reading, the poem's nature, as Chaucer himself makes so clear, may be seen as directly engaged in the tension between the oral and the literary. This reading provides a different approach to the issue of closure. Larry Benson believes that

Chaucer resolves the disputes of the birds into the harmony of their song, the earthly counterpart of the music of the spheres that Scipio heard in his dream. That happy song is an assurance that, though the narrator (and reader) may not solve all the problems the poem raises, a harmonious solution remains, elusive, yet possible. (*Riverside Chaucer* 384)

In my reading, however, the song represents not a resolution, but an invitation, an opening, and a celebration of the process of performance and competitive dispute. The harmonious solution is not "elusive, yet possible," it is absent, yet present, in that the struggle itself is the harmony and the conclusion.

Brewer slightly modifies Larry Benson's view,

Nothing has been resolved—ordinary logic is defeated or unimportant—but we are aware of a completed structure, of opposites balanced if not entirely reconciled. A complex whole of related thoughts, feelings, and experiences has been created, as in some small but elaborate medieval church, not quite symmetrical, but not meant to be, where arch meets springing arch, where a painted side-chapel leads off from the main chancel but is subsidiary and supporting to it, where there is a place for many things in an organised whole, and where are recognised the claims of both heaven and earth. (25)

This is closer to my reading, although Brewer's choice of analogy is perhaps not entirely appropriate. In reading this poem as a literary translation of oral performance art, the opposites do become "balanced if not entirely reconciled," the whole is "complex, and

not quite symmetrical," but not "organised." It is, rather, more like the disorganized place created within the context and the fair by the pitchman, his performance and the audience, where order is shifting and variable, and imposed temporarily and provisionally at best, rather than a cathedral which stands unmodified and immovable.

The lack of organization and the complexity of the arguments are emphasized; the susceptibility of any argument, any control, to being contested is made the ultimate subject and theme. In this poem, Chaucer uses the translation of oral performance art and the contrast between oral performance art and the literary art to illuminate and enliven his subject and theme.

His purpose here, specifically and successfully conveyed by his entry into the genre of translated oral performance art, is not to define the best sort of love, not to resolve the issue. Instead, by using this form of translation, Chaucer celebrates the issue, and makes his poem an entrant into a competition. The poem itself sustains the continuation of this competition.

The literary translation of oral performance art in this short poem adds to the poem's appeal, and helps make a specific point about the definition, the right and wrong, of an abstract concept—love. In this process, as I have said, there is also some comment and some subversion of the established relationship between high and low culture, and the nature of right and wrong in the authority of both of these sides. A similar comment and subversion, and a similar added appeal, appears in Charles Dickens' *Bleak House*.

## II. *The Pitchman and the Protégée*: Bleak House

Charles Dickens' *Bleak House*, the massive novel around the Chancery case of Jarndyce and Jarndyce, is constructed with two narrators, with the chapters almost exactly divided between them. There is one omniscient third-person narrator. The second, first-person, narrator is the novel's main character, Esther Summerson, a naïve but sensible and sensitive young orphan woman, taken in as a "protégée" (and ultimately wife) by the kindly but mysterious Mister Jarndyce.

In using these two narrators, Dickens is able to maintain the interest and melodramatic emotional connection provided by the audience's identification with and affection for Esther, and at the same time to provide the scope and range of descriptive detail and insight into other characters' thoughts and motivations provided by the omniscient narrator. Some critics (e.g. Gissing, Sitwell) have seen these alternating narrative voices as a flaw in the novel, finding a leakage of one voice into another or an implausibility in Esther's character. Other critics (e.g. Nabokov, Johnson) see this choice as one of the novel's main strengths, as do I. There is an important feature of the voice of the third-person narrator, however, which has not been previously recognized or analyzed. When read through the lens of my fieldwork and my analysis of oral performance art, this third-person narrator's voice is quite clearly the voice of the oral performance artist, of the pitchman.

For a convenient framework within which to describe the ways in which Dickens constructs this narrator as a pitchman, I will use the thirteen characteristics of *Bleak House*'s style listed by Vladimir Nabokov in his lecture on this novel (*Lectures on Literature* 63-124). I will list all thirteen here, and examine them one by one below, pointing out where they connect and, frequently, overlap.

1. vivid evocation, with or without the use of figures of speech
2. abrupt listing of descriptive details
3. figures of speech: similes and metaphors
4. repetition
5. oratorical question and answer
6. the Carlylean apostrophic manner
7. epithets
8. evocative names
9. alliteration and assonance
10. the *and-and-and* device
11. the humorous, quaint, allusive, whimsical note
12. play on words
13. oblique description of speech  
(114-123)

There are certainly other ways to categorize these characteristics, but Nabokov's are concise and comprehensive, and, although this fact is unrecognized in his lecture, the definitions he gives to most of these characteristics clearly apply to the characteristics of oral performance art which I have identified in my fieldwork and described above. Of his thirteen stylistic characteristics, at least ten can be identified with certainty as stylistically oral characteristics. In addition (and this fact is also unrecognized—or at least unmentioned—by Nabokov) the ten oral performance art characteristics are generally the province of the third-person narrator, while the three more literary characteristics generally appear in Esther Summerson's chapters.

I will take these characteristics of the novel one by one. The first characteristic, vivid evocation, is clearly not exclusively an oral performance technique. However, there is a specific type of descriptive evocation, as I have discussed in the context of my fieldwork above, which is used by pitchmen to provide the audience with referential pegs to connect to a specific time and place and to be drawn into the performance. This kind of description—the evocation of memory by painting a picture with a few familiar strokes—is a distinctive technique of oral performance art ("Let me tell you what

happened just across the river in New Paltz" or "right there in the doctor's office, on that hard table with the paper cover"). It is also the type of description Dickens' narrator uses in the beginning of almost every chapter he narrates.

*Bleak House* begins with a famous descriptive passage, evoking foggy London and the Court of Chancery. This passage works as literary description, but it also works in many ways as a translation of oral performance art. The fragmented sentences, repetitive rhythmic formulas and alliteration, as well as the copious, additive catalogues, all add up to the type of description which oral performance art constantly includes. The specific place names and references to types of people, places and times go even further to provide the referential pegs which concretize audience connections to the performance.

Fog everywhere. Fog up the river, where it flows among green aits and meadows; fog down the river, where it rolls defiled among the tiers of shipping and the waterside pollutions of a great (and dirty) city. Fog on the Essex Marshes, fog on the Kentish heights. Fog creeping into the cabooses of collier-brigs; fog lying out on the yards, and hovering in the rigging of great ships; fog drooping on the gunwales of barges and small boats. Fog in the eyes and throats of the ancient Greenwich pensioners, wheezing by the firesides of their wards; fog in the stem and bowl of the afternoon pipe of the wrathful skipper, down in his close cabin; fog cruelly pinching the toes and fingers of his shivering little 'prentice boy on deck. Chance people on the bridges peeping over the parapets into a nether sky of fog, with fog all round them, as if they were up in a balloon, and hanging in the misty clouds. (1)

In addition, this type of oral descriptive evocation includes a commanding, a leading by the hand into almost cinematic panning and zooming which imitates the unsubtle steering and bringing of an audience by the hand that pitchmen practice ("Just turn your eyes to the overhead mirror, here, you'll see exactly how it works"). The act of leading is foregrounded, and the active leader's authority is reified in a way that tends to short-circuit exceptions and exemptions—in a way that tends to make the accession to being led a definite choice, seemingly freely entered into.

Another example is Dickens' beginning to his second chapter:

It is but a glimpse of the world of fashion that we want on this same miry afternoon. It is not so unlike the Court of Chancery, but that we may pass from one scene to the other, as the crow flies. (8)

Dickens makes explicit the narrator's request, and the audience's choice, in taking "but a glimpse," and in "pass[ing] from one scene to the other as the crow flies." This passage functions as a literary translation of the pitchman's "Let me take you behind the scenes for a minute..." or "Think for just a minute about the back seat, just after you took the kids down to Chuck E. Cheese..." These descriptions ask outright for cooperation, directly requesting and leading to the audience's connection to the description. They emphasize the possibility of that request being rejected and simultaneously make such a rejection unlikely.

Nabokov's second category "abrupt listing of descriptive details" connects, as he acknowledges, to the seventh category "epithets," and the eighth, "evocative names." These three categories, especially when examined together, become translations of oral performance art techniques as well. These features work as part of the familiarity of form of oral performance art, making more meaning immanent in the "abruptness" of the descriptive details. In other words, these descriptive devices function as shorthand markers, bringing to mind for the audience a constellation of personal and traditional connections and recollections. Similarly, a pitch for a "Woodsman" electric jigsaw began, "I remember my daddy's garage. Sawdust. And that dusty, oily smell," and the men gathered in the audience smiled or nodded in recognition.

The oral performance, which must often be brief and must always be efficient, can still provide a richness of meaning and association. Dickens' pitchman narrator, like an oral performance artist, is able to bring characters and situations to mind with minimal

signaling, yet these characters and situations can be fully realized because they are experientially known.

Now do those two gentlemen not very neat about the cuffs and buttons who attended the last Coroner's Inquest at the Sol's Arms, reappear in the precincts with surprising swiftness (being in fact, breathlessly fetched by the active and intelligent beadle), and institute perquisitions through the court, and dive into the Sol's parlour, and write with ravenous little pens on tissue-paper. (457)

Elsewhere, the "giddy Voluminia" or the "watchful Mrs. Snagsby," like the "active and intelligent beadle," or those two gentlemen "not very neat about the cuffs and button," call to mind the characters (especially the minor characters) with brief but euphonious and telling tags serving purposes which are sonic, as well as mnemonic (and often humorous). The evocative names—Smallweed, Krook, Guppy, Guster, even Ada Clare and Dedlock—function similarly: mnemonically, sonically, and humorously. Pitchmen, as well, use tags of this type—"the little woman" or "greasy grimy mess," and of course "Wondermop," "Sweepa" or "Miracle Shine," as well as abrupt, shorthand listings, "Saturday, you don't want to be working—watch TV, put your feet up."

Figures of speech, particularly similes and metaphors, Nabokov's third element of Dickens' style, are not distinctively oral, at least not within the results of my fieldwork. This is not to say that oral performance artists do not use these figures (they are, of course, "figures of *speech*"), but in general they appear to be just as effective and common in literary works as in oral performance art. However, there are instances where these figures overlap with other more clearly oral features, such as alliteration, rhyme or even epithet, and in these cases, as in the cases where the similes or metaphors are traditional rather than original in nature, the connection with oral performance art must be recognized. In *Bleak House*, however, these figures seem to be equally distributed

between the literary and the oral, and equally used by the third person narrator and Esther Summerson.

Nabokov's fourth element, repetition, however, is a quintessential feature of the pitchman's oral performance art style. Nabokov even calls Dickens' use of repetition "a kind of incantation, a verbal formula repetitively recited with growing emphasis; an oratorical, forensic device." (118)

Pitchmen use catalogues, as I have reported, such as "It cleans Dacron, also nylon, herculon, linoleum. Wool, wood, cotton, canvas, muslin. Rattan and bamboo, and scotchguard and concrete..." ("PermaSeal") and repetitive passages like "Click it, fold it, paint a wall. Click it, fold it, trim a tree. Fold it, click it, change a bulb. Click it, fold it, wash a window. Fold it, click it, clear a gutter." (The "Little Giant" ladder)

Dickens uses catalogues such as

In the shade of Cook's Court, at most times a shady place, Mr. Snagsby has dealt in all sorts of blank forms of legal process; in skins and rolls of parchment; in paper—foolscap, brief, draft, brown, white, whitey-brown, and blotting; in stamps; in office-quills, pens, ink, India-rubber, pounce, pins, pencils, sealing-wax, and wafers; in red tape and green ferret; in pocket-books, almanacks, diaries and law lists' in string boxes, rulers, inkstands—glass and leaden, penknives, scissors, bodkins and other small office-cutlery; in short, in articles too numerous to mention; ever since he was out of his time and went into partnership with Peffer. (127)

or

Gentlemen of the green baize road who could discourse, from personal experience, of foreign galleys and home treadmills; spies of strong governments that eternally quake with weakness and miserable fear, broken traitors, cowards, bullies, gamesters, shufflers, swindlers and false witnesses; some not unmarked by the branding-iron, beneath their dirty braid; all with more cruelty in them than was in Nero, and more crime than is in Newgate. (363)

The example above of the novel's opening description of London in fog is similarly an oral catalogue in translation, as is the moving and apostrophic

Dead, your Majesty. Dead, my lords and gentlemen. Dead, Right Reverends and Wrong Reverends of every order. Dead, men and women, born with Heavenly compassion in your hearts. And dying thus around us every day. (649)

or

Behind dingy blind and curtain, in upper story and garret, skulking more or less under false names, false hair, false titles, false jewellery, and false histories, a colony of brigands lie in their first sleep. (363)

As I have described above, this specifically oral type of repetition functions as a display of verbal virtuosity—of copious, additive cataloging. Oral repetition can work without a logical building from term to term, but with a preponderance of terms creating its own rolling, continuing force. When Dickens' pitchman narrator uses this same type of repetition, he can summon some of the same force, and also connect to his audience's knowledge and experience with the pitchman's art.

Nabokov's fifth and sixth elements—oratorical question and answer, and the Carlylean apostrophic manner—are manifestly constructed as translations of oral performance art, and are used in *Bleak House* only by the pitchman narrator. These constructions allow at least an illusion of the quintessential feature of oral performance art, a feature which can not be included in literary art, the interaction of the performer and the audience. The contested control of the audience, the steering of questions and interest by posing the questions and answering them before they can be asked, are effective tools of every pitchman. Dickens translates these tools in passages such as these:

In search of what? Of any hand that is no more, of any hand that never was, of any touch that might have magically changed her life? Or does she listen to the Ghost's Walk and think what step does it most resemble? A man's? A woman's? The pattering of a little child's feet, ever coming on—on—on? Some melancholy influence is upon her; or why should so proud a lady close the doors and sit alone upon the hearth so desolate? (399).

On such an afternoon, the various solicitors in the cause, some two or three of whom have inherited it from their fathers, who made a fortune by it, ought to be—

as are they not? –ranged in a line, in a long matted well (but you might look in vain for Truth at the bottom of it), between the answers, rejoinders, injunctions, affidavits, issues, references to masters, masters' reports, mountains of costly nonsense, piled before them. (2)

Relatively even to this world of ours, which has its limits too (as your Highness shall find when you have made the tour of it, and are come to the brink of the void beyond), is a very little speck. (7)

Dickens' many parenthetical additions, qualifications, apostrophes and anticipations of challenges are directly translated from the techniques of oral performance art. Dickens uses "as are they not?" and "(but you might look in vain...)" and "(as your Highness shall find...)" and so on, just as an oral artist does, to anticipate, manage and include into the performance the interjections, reactions and challenges of a present, shifting and diverse live audience.

Nabokov also names alliteration and assonance as being characteristic of Dickens' style, and as being connected to the characteristic of repetition. These features, are, of course, also the techniques of oral performance art. Alliteration and assonance, like other figures of sound, originate in oral performance and take their effect from the echoes of performances in which readers have taken part. Dickens uses these figures, like a pitchman, for their humorous effects, their mnemonic value, and especially as a display of verbal virtuosity.

"Tumbling tenements," (220) "Cook's Court, Cursitor Street," (127) "smoke rising from the chimney, and a child, chased by a woman, running out into the rain," (9) are clear examples of this type of alliteration. Of course, alliteration and assonance are frequently used in literary texts, and I would argue that there is at least some echoing of oral performance art contexts in every literary use of alliteration and assonance. The literary translation of these two oral features, however, is a technique which, although it

is more common and easily identifiable in literary works in general, is less essential (and less frequently appearing) than some of the others which Dickens' pitchman narrator employs. The virtuosity displayed in appropriate oral use of alliteration and assonance is easily short-circuited by overuse, making the inherent humor and appreciable talent become ridiculous and ineffective. It would seem Dickens' narrator, like all skilled pitchmen, is aware of this.

What Nabokov calls the "and-and-and device," may seem, like the repetition, to be another translation of an oral performance technique. However, the examples Nabokov notes, and most of the instances of this device in the novel, are in the chapters narrated, not by the omniscient third-person narrator, but by Esther. In fact, in these instances, as Nabokov notes, it is Esther's emotional nature which is being emphasized. The "and-and-and device," as in

I put my two arms round his neck and kissed him; and he said was this the mistress of Bleak House; and I said yes; and it made no difference presently, and we all went out together, and I said nothing to my precious pet about it. (613)

is more a case of words running away with Esther than of Esther playing with words.

The effect is that of the thoughts and emotions taking control—quite unlike the control of ideas and receptions practiced by the pitchman. The pitchman's catalogue (like Dickens' pitchman narrator's catalogue) is a lengthy accumulation, eloquently constructed, with its number and variety of terms intentionally extended and enjoyed. Esther's catalogues (of and-and-and's) are an unimpeded flow—reined in, with difficulty, as soon as possible, with an attempt at finality—"and I said nothing to my precious pet about it."

The humorous, quaint, allusive, whimsical tone which Nabokov notices in Dickens' pitchman narrator is a translation of another feature of oral performance art.

The pitchman, in his performance, often makes use of humor, especially humor which is at least slightly hostile or insulting to some part of his audience—or to some other, absent, audience. The pitchman at the fair may make a joke about slicing his wife, as well as a "nice tomato;" he may explain that the thinnest setting for slicing vegetables should be for when the mother-in-law drops by; or he may ask the women in his audience to remind husbands who object to the price of stainless steel cookware "just how much money is tied up in those power toys—I mean tools—gathering dust in the garage."

In the same way, Dickens' pitchman narrator uses his humor to emphasize his position as skirting of moral norms, to set up and diffuse competition and hostility between himself and his audience and among the members of his audience, and to demonstrate his own confidence and his control of the audience.

Mr. Bucket and his fat forefinger are much in consultation together under existing circumstances. When Mr. Bucket has a matter of this pressing interest under his consideration, the fat forefinger seems to rise to the dignity of a familiar demon. (712)

Why, Mrs. Piper has a good deal to say, chiefly in parentheses and without punctuation, but not much to tell. Mrs. Piper lives in the court (which her husband is a cabinet-maker), and it has long been well beknown among the neighbours (counting from the day next but one before the half-baptising of Alexander James Piper aged eighteen months and four days old on account of not being expected to live such was the sufferings gentlemen of that child in his gums) as the Plaintiff—so Mrs. Piper insists on calling the deceased—was reported to have sold himself. Thinks it was the Plaintiff's air in which that report originatinin. (147)

In each of these cases, and in the other instances in which this feature appears in the novel, Dickens' pitchman narrator sets himself on a level above the characters he is describing. Because his comments on the characters are humorous, while condescending, the audience can share in the sense of superiority, while at the same time feeling the slight discomfort that comes from humor at the expense of others—humor which may be

turned against anyone. Of course, this superiority and condescension must be delicately balanced by pitchmen at the fair, and by this narrator, with instances in which the pitchman takes (with characteristic humorous exaggeration) the opposite stance, referring to his audience as "your Highness" (8) or "your Majesty" (649).

Nabokov also mentions the play on words as his twelfth characteristic. These plays on words are generally placed in the mouths of characters, rather than the pitchman narrator, but the narrator, by relating them, continues both his humorous tone, and the connected air of superiority and condescension. The narrator reports Mr. Jobling's humorous misstatement of the French,

'How am I to live? Ill fo manger, you know,' says Mr. Jobling, pronouncing that word as if he meant a necessary fixture in an English stable. 'Ill fo manger. That's the French saying, and mangering is as necessary to me as it is to a Frenchman. Or more so.' (277)

And he reports the breathless phrasing of the debilitated cousin,

The debilitated cousin says of her that she's beauty nough—tsetup Shopofwomen—but rather larming kind—remindingmanfact—inconvenient woman—who *will* getoutof bedand bawthstablishment—Shakespeare. (650)

These translations set the narrator (and with him, the audience) as superior in understanding to Mr. Jobling and the cousin, so that they become figures of fun. In addition, this sort of allegedly exact translation of the patterns and errors of his characters' speech demonstrates the pitchman's connectedness to their world. His knowledge places him above the characters' misunderstandings, and allows the audience to feel joined with him in this superiority, but his attention to and believable accuracy in reporting the characters' misunderstandings connects him with the world of the characters and allows the audience to feel joined with him in this connection.

There is also a complication in these instances, however. In presenting as accurate the humorous misstatements and addled diction of characters, Dickens, more than the narrator, is employing a typical tool of the written translator of oral performance art. By displaying, and by using to his own advantage, the difference between the speech patterns of these characters and the patterns of standard written English, Dickens is emphasizing and taking advantage of the nature of his work as translation. He is writing, from behind his pitchman narrator, to his reading audience. In this way, the reading audience can be reminded that they are reading, that they are more literate than the characters, and that the way the characters speak is a result of their Otherness. This kind of direct translation of speech emphasizes, for a reading audience, the stereotype of oral performance art as the realm of the untutored, the folk, the Other.

Nabokov's final characteristic of Dickens' style, the oblique description of speech, is one which is almost exclusively used by Esther as a narrator, and is a characteristic which is, like the and-and-and device, connected to her task of *writing* her narrative, barely reining in her emotion and narrative flow to make it fit a written work, rather than confidently controlling and displaying, leading her audience as a pitchman does and must. In addition, the type of oblique description of speech to which Nabokov refers is more frequently found in and effectively suited to written rather than oral narratives. Oral narratives, and their literary translations, do not use oblique quotation nearly as much as they do the kind of direct quotation, distinguished by aural features, which is practiced by Dickens' pitchman narrator in this novel.

In ten of Nabokov's thirteen characteristics of Dickens' style, therefore, and in all the characteristics of the style of one of the narrators, *Bleak House* works as a translation

of oral performance art. However, what makes the novel most successful is not just the translation, not just the fact that there is a pitchman narrator, but also the fact that there is also a literary narrator. In addition, the actual identity of this literary narrator within the context of the novel sets up an interplay of receptions and expectations uniquely connecting the novel to the oral performance art context, as well as the context of literary art. This interplay adds to, and is, in fact, constituent of, the novel's texture and themes.

Esther begins her narrative, "I have a great deal of difficulty in beginning to write my portion of these pages, for I know I am not clever." (14) She adds, a little later,

I don't know how it is, I seem to be always writing about myself. I mean all the time to write about other people, and I try to think about myself as little as possible, and I am sure, when I find myself coming into the story again, I am really vexed and say 'Dear, dear, you tiresome little creature, I wish you wouldn't!' but it is all of no use. I hope anyone who may read what I write, will understand that if these pages contain a great deal about me, I can only suppose it must be because I have really something to do with them, and can't be kept out. (112)

These statements directly oppose Esther to the pitchman narrator, who is far less in the story as a character, yet far more active as a participant in steering and managing, and far less likely to ever dream of keeping himself out. Esther is hopeful and self-effacing, at times to an extreme degree. The pitchman narrator is generally manipulative and ostentatious.

For Dickens' audience, the pitchman narrator evokes the same responses—mingled pleasure and distrust, fear and comfort—which are evoked in a live audience by a live pitchman in a real oral performance event. Dickens' pitchman narrator is also marked, and evokes responses from his audience, because of the arenas into which he has access, the settings and characters he describes. As a pitchman, he has the credentials to enter and to report the courts of Chancery as well as the world of the shooting gallery and

the slum. He can enter, at least in the guise of a con-man, the fashionable world of Chesney Wold and Bleak House. His access to and familiarity with these diverse worlds, his status as one who dwells in between, makes him simultaneously fascinating and frightening. The audience, because this narrator connects with the familiar role of the pitchman, allows him to guide them through worlds with which they may have either distanced melodramatic or familiar everyday knowledge.

This novel also connects (at least in Esther's sections) with the conventional *literary* genre of the autobiographical novel of progress—the first chapter of Esther's narrative is titled "A Progress." Dickens can reach an audience which connects to both types of popular performance, the literary as well as the oral. Readers who are attracted and pleased by the popular literary genre as well as readers who are attracted and pleased by the oral performance art of the pitchman can all be drawn into this novel. This certainly accounts for some of the popularity of this novel in its original appearance—the fact that it is accessible and acceptable to audiences at many points on the folk-elite continuum.

Another effect of using the pitchman narrator, of contrasting this narrator with the literate, innocent narrator is the way in which it allows Dickens to narrate scenes of emotionally devastating effect, while retaining emotional immediacy. The chapters of the pitchman's narration are all in the present tense, and place the audience directly in the scene, imitating the present immediacy of the oral performance art context. This allows the threatening intensity to have its full effect, and uses it to forge links between the audience and the performer, as well as among the members of the audience. The narration of the death of Jo is one such instance, well worth repeating in this context, in

which an incredibly painful moment is related as if it were happening, as if the pitchman narrator were present at the event and presenting it to a live, present audience.

Dead, your Majesty. Dead, my lords and gentlemen. Dead, Right Reverends and Wrong Reverends of every order. Dead, men and women, born with Heavenly compassion in your hearts. And dying thus around us every day. (649)

In this passage, and others like it, Dickens' pitchman narrator, like the pitchmen I observed in the field, forges the audience into an "us" with the performer, as well as separating them from the performer by labeling them "your Majesty," and "my lords and gentlemen." This passage also divides and sets up competitions among the audience members, to determine who among them has "Heavenly compassion." The narrator emphasizes the divisions and differences between himself and his audience, between different members of the audience, and even between the members of the audience and others for whom they feel ambivalently—the "Right Reverends" and "Wrong Reverends." This is quite similar to the ways in which I observed pitchmen at the fair setting up competitions in their audiences, between husbands and wives, parents and children, mothers-in-law and sons-in-law, and so on.

Another type of competition set up in *Bleak House* is the comparison of bad and good oral performance artists. Like the hip hop convention of imitating and ridiculing the "sucker MC's," Dickens sets Conversation Kedge, the "child" Skimpole, and most cuttingly the Reverend Mr. Chadband as competing oral performance artists, and ridicules their techniques, goals and lack of skills, thereby enhancing the status and admiration in his audience's opinion of his own pitchman narrator.

While it is certainly not essential to my argument, it's worth noting that Dickens frequently performed his literary work in staged readings—oral performances which were

well attended, popular and financially rewarding. (Ackroyd 833, 989; Kent) As an author and as a performer, Dickens was quite familiar with the techniques and demands of the pitchman's oral performance art.

*Bleak House* is generally seen as a work of satire, of critical commentary on the Victorian courts and legal system, on the world of fashion and on the treatment of children and the poor. As I discussed in my analysis of the *Parliament of Fowls*, oral performance art and its translations are uniquely suited to the work of satire, provoking the kind of folk laughter which is so destructive to hierarchies and established order. This kind of humor transforms ideas and positions that have the potential to offend the powers that be and makes them ridiculous. Folk laughter, by letting humor and offense interact and play off one another, gaining strength from the interaction, does not totally defuse either the humor or the offense. According to Bakhtin,

laughter does not deny seriousness but purifies and completes it. laughter purifies from dogmatism, from the intolerant and the petrified; it liberates from fanaticism and pedantry, from fear and intimidation, from didacticism, naïveté and illusion, from the single meaning, the single level, from sentimentality. Laughter does not permit seriousness to atrophy and to be torn away from the one being, forever incomplete. It restores this ambivalent wholeness. (*Rabelais* 122-123)

In addition, the multiple (or, to be more precise, dual) narrators of this novel are another type of translation of the polyphony which oral performance art necessarily includes. Just as audience members at the fair interrupt one another and the pitchman, and vice versa, so the pitchman narrator's chapters interrupt Esther's narrative, and vice versa. Of course, the more random, diverse polyphony of oral performance art in context is not directly translatable in literary art. However, by presenting this partial translation, this echoing of oral performance art's inherent polyphony, Dickens strengthens and emphasizes his pitchman narrator's character as an oral performance artist.

In *Bleak House*, Dickens has created a novel which works for half the chapters as a simulacrum—a re-presentation—of oral performance art. At the same time, by including the other chapters, and giving them equal space and weight, he has created a confrontation between oral performance art and literary art. He highlights both sides of the confrontation. He emphasizes the oral performer's narrative control (with its inherent untrustworthiness), his verbal virtuosity and the familiarity of his form; he also emphasizes the sincerity, depth of true feeling, and worthiness of affection of the writing narrator.

More than either of these, though, he emphasizes the confrontation and the contradiction. His audience for the novel can not be active participants in its creation in the way an actual oral performance art audience always is, but his audience can experience at least a simulated degree, a remembered association, of this type of participation.

In *Bleak House* Dickens has, as he states in his preface, "purposely dwelt upon the romantic side of familiar things." (xiv) It is this contrast, this intermingling of the romantic and the familiar, which is the novel's real success, and which is so uniquely emphasized by the intermingling of the oral and the written narrators. The intersections—of the Chancery case and the real lives of the young people, of greed and poverty, of fashion and the underworld, of the country and the city, and of oral performance art and literary art—are the meshing forces which give the novel its interest and its appeal.

These intersections are serious, and intricately interrelated. They become even more serious, and operate on an even deeper and grander scale, in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*.

### III. *A Tale of a Tale of a Journey: Heart of Darkness*

Joseph Conrad's novella *Heart of Darkness* chronicles a journey up Africa's Congo River, with the journey's extraordinary goal. *Heart of Darkness*, however, is also narrated as an extended translation of an oral performance event. It is, therefore, more than a tale of a journey—it is a tale of a tale of a journey. This novella is deeply concerned with, and thoroughly implicated in, the relationship between oral performance art and literary art. It is from this relationship that Conrad derives much of his story's philosophical and aesthetic force. In presenting this translation, Conrad makes effective use of many of the features and associations of oral performance art and the oral performance artist that I have found in my fieldwork. Even more important, though, as we have seen in *Parliament of Fowls* and *Bleak House*, it is the intersection, the interplay of oral performance art and literary art which is the real subject and method of the story.

After the framing narrator's introduction, the story is a direct translation of the oral performance of the main character, Marlow. Before examining some of the ways in which Marlow's tale is cast as oral performance art, it will be useful to discuss the descriptions of setting, audience and performer with which the performance is framed.

The story is told on board the cruising yawl *Nellie*. The yawl is at rest, in a calm, waiting for the tide to turn to carry it down the river. It is difficult to imagine a setting more perfectly constructed for oral performance art. As I have described above, oral performance art makes a place out of the liminal space in which it occurs, and the *Nellie*, not even on a journey, but waiting to begin a journey, could not be a more liminal space. The time, too, just at the setting of the sun, when "a change came over the waters and the serenity became less brilliant but more profound." (55) is exactly between the day and the

night, leaving a serenity, an emptiness to be filled by the constructed, negotiated place of the performance.

This construction and negotiation take place among the members of the audience, among whom "there was, as I have already said somewhere, the bond of the sea. Besides holding our hearts together through long periods of separation, it had the effect of making us tolerant of each other's yarns—and even convictions." (53-54) This audience is made up of individuals who share a bond, but whose bond is one of tolerance—not the closest, nor the most affectionate of bonds. Convictions are tolerated, but this tolerance is only possible, certainly not guaranteed.

The setting of the scene and the audience is that of oral performance art exactly—and when the oral performance begins, it is thoroughly embedded in that scene and audience, *in medias res*, as it so often is in oral performance art's real-life contexts. "'And this also,' said Marlow suddenly, 'has been one of the dark places of the earth.'" (56) this beginning functions as did the chamois mop pitchman's sudden switch from her interview with me, into "makes cleaning a breeze. you know." This abrupt launching of the pitch draws the audience into the performance by implying a beginning which has not actually occurred. The audience must "catch up," believing they have already missed a piece of the performance.

Marlow, who in this way begins the performance that will make up this novella, is a character of ambivalence, marked physically by uncertain trustworthiness and obscure origin, as oral performers so often are. He is a "wanderer" and "sat cross-legged right aft, leaning against the mizzen-mast. He had sunken cheeks, a yellow complexion, a straight back, an ascetic aspect, and, with his arms dropped, the palms of hands outwards,

resembled an idol." (54) Marlow is with the others on the yawl, but is not exactly like them—there is some question about his humanity, or at least his resemblance to others, even other seamen: "the worst that could be said of him was that he did not represent his class." (56)

Marlow is physically marked and separated, as the pitchmen at the fair are marked and separated by their microphones and cowboy boots, but more than this, he is psychically and attitudinally marked, as are the pitchmen. Marlow is removed just as the pitchmen remove themselves and are seen as removed by their audiences. Richard Bauman notes

the persistently documented tendency for performers to be both admired and feared—admired for their artistic skill and power and for the enhancement of experience they provide, feared because of the potential they represent for subverting and transforming the status quo. (*Verbal Art* 45)

Like the pitchmen, and other oral performance artists, Marlow's trustworthiness becomes questionable to his audience, and that audience's fascination, evoked by his knowledge and credentials of a different world than theirs, simultaneously grows.

Much has been made critically (e.g. Miller, London, Kiskis) of the frame narrator's description of Marlow's storytelling:

The yarns of seamen have a direct simplicity, the whole meaning of which lies within the shell of a cracked nut. But Marlow was not typical (if his propensity to spin yarns be excepted), and to him the meaning of an episode was not inside like a kernel but outside, enveloping the tale which brought it out only as a glow brings out a haze, in the likeness of one of these misty halos that sometimes are made visible by the spectral illumination of moonshine. (57)

Generally this statement is taken as being seriously and literally meant, and as being an accurate report of the nature of meaning in both Marlow's and the tales of seamen more generally (Miller 33). In my reading, however, this statement represents a misinterpretation, and a significant one, on the part of the frame narrator. This

misinterpretation is the result of the tension between oral and literary performance which is so central to this novella. In judging the yarns of seamen as simple, with a clear nugget of meaning, and in judging meaning for Marlow as being atypical, the frame narrator is committing an error typical of literary representations of oral performance art.

This error is part of the romantic, nostalgic impulse when representing oral performance art. Oral performance art is not only and always simple in meaning and effect. In fact, although the stereotype of oral performance art as being "full of simplicity" (Yeats 5) is widespread and attractive, oral performance art is by its very nature associative, with rich and complicated meaning and effect immanent in it. Because of this, Marlow's yarn, like other yarns, is actually ideally suited to the kind of meaning which "envelops the tale which brought it out only as a glow brings out a haze—the misty halo that is only seen in the spectral illumination of moonshine."

Conrad presents a realistic view and portrayal of oral performance art, one which actually coincides with the nature and effects of oral performance art in context. He is opposing his portrayal to the stereotypical misinterpretation which is represented by the comment of his frame narrator. This misinterpretation, common in early nationalist romantic collecting of folklore, and leading up to much of the contemporary late twentieth-century "New Age" study of and interest in "traditional" oral performance art, was just as common for Conrad's audience, and for Marlow's. The association between oral performance art and the simple or the primitive (whether seamen or African natives) is mistaken, but driven by deep issues—issues which Conrad is directly engaging in this novella. The misinterpretation of the nature of oral performance art, and the coincident misinterpretation of Marlow's yarn, is part of the confrontation that Conrad is so

concerned with in this novella—the fact that what may be seen as primitive, primeval or simple may be the opposite.

A seaman—who in the frame narrator's view, as well as that of others, should be telling a simple and "nutty" tale—tells and uses oral performance art to tell the kind of tale that presumably only a "civilized" moral and aesthetic sense can create and appreciate. Conrad's theme, that of the darkness and evil which lies not just in the primitive and savage, but in the modern and civilized as well, extends to the conflict between oral and literary art, and is supported and energized by it. The frame narrator's error, the romantic stereotyping of the oral by the literary, represents some of the conflict between the related larger categories of the "primitive" and the "civilized." The categories of oral and literary are commingled and reversed in the novella, and this adds to the commingling and reversal of the larger categories as well.

Marlow's tale, in its framing, setting and context, is like all oral tales. The story is presented as a translation of Marlow's storytelling performance, complete down to the details of such a performance. These details include the assembling and drawing of the audience, in particular the audience members' consulting with each other before joining to become an audience, just as I have observed in the field. The frame narrator takes notice not just of his own response to Marlow's opening interjection ("and this also..."), but also of the responses of the rest of the audience. It is the interaction among the audience members which Conrad is translating here:

His remark did not seem at all surprising. It was just like Marlow. It was accepted in silence. No one took the trouble to grunt even... (57)

The frame narrator makes note of the entire audience's response (acceptance without even so much as a grunt—a non-responsive response, but thereby noticeable and noteworthy).

When Marlow continues, it is with the command of the audience and the preemptory responses to anticipated questions which the oral performer practices:

'I was thinking of very old times, when the Romans first came here, nineteen hundred years ago—the other day... light came out of this river since—you say Knights? Yes; but it is like a running blaze on a plain, like a flash of lightning in the clouds. We live in the flicker—may it last as long as the old earth keeps rolling! Imagine the feelings of the commander of a fine—what d'ye call 'em? —trireme' (57)

The rhetorical questions and preemptory responses ("you say Knights? Yes;"), the self-interruptions, corrections and controlled uncertainty ("nineteen hundred years ago—the other day" and "what d'ye call 'em"), as well as the direct commands ("Imagine the feelings") are direct translations of oral performance art techniques, and carry the same associations experienced by audiences of oral performance art in context.

When Marlow pauses, his audience is already hooked, and has agreed to be led through the tale—with some reluctance but with an ultimate accession. "We looked on, waiting patiently—there was nothing else to do till the end of the flood;" (60) Frequently, the audiences of pitchmen at the fair displayed a similar attitude, agreeing to pause only because "there was nothing else to do." This hesitation to commit (or to admit to committing) to joining the audience is further evidence of the uncertainty and untrustworthiness attached to this sort of performance. Although Marlow continues in a "hesitating voice," the audience on board the *Nellie* will follow that voice—as if by "fate:"

'I suppose you fellows remember I did once turn fresh-water sailor for a bit,' [...] we knew we were fated, before the ebb began to run, to hear about one of Marlow's inconclusive experiences.

'I don't want to bother you much with what happened to me personally,' he began, showing in this remark the weakness of many tellers of tales who seem so often unaware of what their audience would best like to hear; (60)

Of course, Marlow will be "bothering" his audience quite a bit with what has happened to him personally. His remark to the contrary is an example of the kind of false disclaimer so often used by the oral performer. This is the kind of disclaimer that is accepted formulaically by oral performance art audiences—not really believed.

Such disclaimers are not, of course, incompatible with taking responsibility for a display of competence, but are, rather, concessions to standards of etiquette and decorum, where self-assertiveness is disvalued. In such situations, a disclaimer of performance serves both as a moral gesture, to counterbalance the power of performance to focus heightened attention on the performer, and a key to performance itself. (Bauman, *Verbal Art* 22)

The frame narrator's interpretation of Marlow's remark as a "weakness of many tellers of tales who seem so often unaware of what their audience would best like to hear," is the same type of error as the narrator made in classifying the meaning of the yarns of seamen—a romantic underestimation of the skill and complexity with which oral performance art is actually achieved.

In addition to setting up the scene and the audience of oral performance art in the frame, Marlow's performance continues to translate some of the structural and textual elements of oral performance art we have seen before. Primary among these is his use of the direct address and preemptory command of his audience and their responses to the performer and his performance as well as to his audience. The managing of these responses, the integration of them into the creation of the performance, is a feature which is at the core of all oral performance art. It is significant that this feature is the one which Conrad chooses to translate so accurately. This managing and integrating of the audience's response is, as we have seen, present in the very beginning passages of Marlow's performance, and it continues throughout the novella, especially at places of maximum emotional and moral energy.

Marlow not only responds to, but also requires, his audience's participation in his performance—throwing out incendiary and direct tantalizers, guaranteed to provoke a response. The placement of these tantalizers is, of course, as for an oral performer in context, intentional. When there is a possibility of doubt or of the audience drifting away, or when there is a possibility that the audience may be offended or hostile, Marlow directly addresses, and even incites, this type of response, in order to deal with it and incorporate it into the performance itself, thereby adding the hostility or condescension or untrustworthiness to the text of his performance.

'But I felt it all the same; I felt often its mysterious stillness watching me at my monkey tricks, just as it watches you fellows performing on your respective tight-ropes for—what is it? half-a-crown a tumble—'

'Try to be civil, Marlow,' growled a voice, and I knew there was at least one listener awake besides myself.

'I beg your pardon. I forgot the heartache which makes up the rest of the price. And indeed what does the price matter, if the trick be well done? You do your tricks very well. And I didn't do badly either, since I managed not to sink that steamboat on my first trip....' (57)

The mysterious stillness, the discomfort of navigating the steamboat through the jungle—the feeling of being watched—are conveyed to the audience, as is the resistance to this stillness. In addition, the audience (at least one listener besides the frame narrator) is emphasized as being a group, listening together and hearing each other's voices and responses. At a moment of doubting Marlow's reported response, the audience on the *Nellie* has its doubts incited—attacked—and resolved, while their own uneasiness about the possibility of unexpected attack is added to their experience.

This kind of direct attack and integration takes place at other instances in the narrative as well, and even when the audience's response is not reported in the translation as explicitly as in the example I've just cited, it is clear that their response—which is created by Marlow's attacks—is part of the mood Conrad, through Marlow, demands in

the novella. This mood, as the reader becomes linked with the audience on the *Nellie*, is available to be shared by the reader as well as by that frame audience. Both the frame audience and the reading audience can feel the bi-directional antipathy in these moments:

You can't understand. How could you? —With solid pavement under your feet, surrounded by kind neighbours ready to cheer you or to fall on you, stepping delicately between the butcher and policeman—how can you imagine what particular region of the first ages a man's untrammelled feet may take him into by the way of solitude—utter solitude without a policeman—by the way of silence—utter silence, where no warning voice of a kind neighbour can be heard whispering of public opinion (137)

And

Very well; I hear I admit, but I have a voice, too, and for good or evil mine is the speech that cannot be silenced. Of course, a fool, what with sheer fright and fine sentiments, is always safe. Who's that grunting? You wonder I didn't go ashore for a howl and a dance? Well, no—I didn't. Fine sentiments, you say? Fine sentiments, be hanged! I had no time. I had to mess about with white-lead and strips of woollen blanket helping to put bandages on those leaky steam-pipes—I tell you. (113-114)

Or

'He was just a word for me. I did not see the man in the name any more than you do. Do you see him? Do you see the story? Do you see anything? It seems to me I am trying to tell you a dream...'

He was silent for a while.

'...No, it is impossible; it is impossible to convey the life-sensation of any given epoch of one's existence—that which makes its truth, its meaning—its subtle and penetrating essence. It is impossible. We live, as we dream—alone...'

He paused again as if reflecting, then added—

'Of course in this you fellows see more than I could then. You see me whom you know...'

It had become so pitch dark that we listeners could hardly see one another. (97)

The audience's perceptions of Marlow and his perceptions of the audience, as well as the audience members' perceptions of one another ("we listeners could hardly see one another"), become knitted together, to establish, to an extreme degree, the kind of discomfort and even disgust which oral performance art is capable of evoking. The sense

of hostility or ridicule, the constant shifting competition and struggle for superiority which oral performance art requires, is translated here so that the frame audience and the reading audience as well, may be managed. The responses that could cause the tale to fail are the very responses that allow the tale to succeed.

In addition to this control and managing of inopportune or hostile responses, Marlow's performance translates some of the other structural and textural features of oral performance art as well. Marlow makes use of many of the same types of verbal virtuosity as the pitchmen I observed in the field. Many of his descriptions, for example, work in the same way as the evocative description and referential pegs of specific place names which oral performance artists employ:

We called at some more places with farcical names, where the merry dance of death and trade goes on in a still and earthy atmosphere as of an overheated catacomb; all along the formless coast bordered by dangerous surf, as if Nature herself had tried to ward off intruders; in and out of rivers, streams of death in life, whose banks were rotting into mud, whose waters, thickened into slime, invaded the contorted mangroves, that seemed to writhe at us in the extremity of an impotent despair. (73)

Within and in addition to these descriptions, Marlow uses repetition and catalogues, as well as the quick abbreviated additive form, which are such common features of oral performance art.

"Camp, cook, sleep, strike camp, march. (83)

What was there after all? Joy, fear, sorrow, devotion, valour, rage—who can tell?—but truth—truth stripped of its cloak of time. [...] Acquisitions, clothes, pretty rags—rags that would fly off at the first good shake. (113)

There are also, within these examples and at many, many other places in the narrative, the apostrophic and direct interjections, emendations and self-corrections which oral artists use. Phrases such as "you know," "well," "yes," "who could tell?" "by Jove," "you understand," even "pass the bottle" simultaneously break the flow and

continue the flow of oral performances, and add to the verisimilitude of this translated oral performance, as well as simulating the same effects.

Finally, at several places within Marlow's performance, often within his descriptive passages, he uses alliteration and other sonic devices, both to please and to allow his audience access, and to display, as oral performance artists do, his own virtuosity and eloquence:

Going up that river was like travelling back to the earliest beginnings of the world, when vegetation rioted on the earth and the big trees were kings. An empty stream, a great silence, and impenetrable forest. The air was warm, thick, heavy, sluggish. There was no joy in the brilliance of sunshine. The long stretches of the waterway ran on, deserted, into the gloom of overshadowed distances. On silvery sandbanks hippos and alligators sunned themselves side by side. (108)

This passage, among others, exemplifies simultaneously several of the techniques of verbal virtuosity which pitchmen use—alliteration, asyndeton, and accumulation—and it is especially noteworthy for its strikingly euphonious final sentence about the hippos and alligators.

By presenting this novella as a translation of an oral performance, by having the story told through the character of Marlow, complete in the oral performance art setting of the *Nellie*, Conrad is able to achieve several effects. He is able to take advantage of the accessibility and popularity of this genre, a weird story told as dark falls on a boat floating on calm water—and who can resist the appeal of a seaman's yarn? The popularity and strength of the appeal of stories of this type is extremely powerful.

Michael Kiskis makes this point quite strongly, calling Marlow (and Huckleberry Finn)

part of a chorus of fictional storytellers who seduce their audiences by sharing powerful tales. These storytellers are rarely subtle: they are direct, unabashed seducers. They are descendants of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's mariner. (146)

Conrad also translates the inherent enjoyment in bantering with a narrator, testing and resisting his powers of persuasion and eloquence, in the portrayal of the frame narrator and the frame audience. In addition to enjoyment, however, this bantering, testing and resisting carry a degree of discomfort and distrust. By taking advantage, in his translation, of both aspects of oral performance art, what is enjoyable and what is uncomfortable, Conrad can let the reading audience of the novella feel some of the moral ambivalence and unsettled creepiness he wants to associate with the jungle and Kurtz's deeds. The frame narrator, in setting the scene and describing the performance, does a good job of emphasizing both their appeal and the discomfort they engender. As he allies himself with the other listeners in the audience, the frame narrator allies himself by extension with the reading audience as well. The translation, since it is so complete and accurate, can carry a good deal of the force and effect of the original.

The frame narrator also, with his description of Marlow and his performance, especially his direct, controlling attacks and attempts to short-circuit the distrust, disbelief and difference of his audience, emphasizes the otherness of the oral performance artist. In this way, Conrad can let the frame audience (and the reading audience) perceive themselves as superior to the oral performer—more advanced and empowered to comment and judge—but also subject to the threat of attack. This is especially important and effective as Conrad raises and problematizes the issues of just exactly where the heart of darkness lies, of what is primitive and what is modern, what is cruel and what is humane, what is animal and what is human. By similarly raising and problematizing the issues of what makes oral performance art different from literary art, Conrad gives all these issues an added complexity and associative familiarity.

This complexity is enlivened and further illuminated, as well, by the character of Kurtz and his comparison with Marlow. Kurtz, unseen in the story until nearly the end, is nonetheless a distinct and haunting presence from the very beginning. As this type of presence, whose words and person (and whose oral performance) are only reported, Kurtz is the antithesis of Marlow, the present, active performer of the story. Yet it is Kurtz's *speech*, his voice and words, which are constantly referred to as his distinguishing and distinctive characteristics:

The point was in his being a gifted creature, and that of all his gifts the one that stood out pre-eminently, that carried with it a sense of real presence, was his ability to talk, his words—the gift of expression, the bewildering, the illuminating, the most exalted and the most contemptible, the pulsating stream of light, or the deceitful flow from the heart of an impenetrable darkness. (133-134)

Even Kurtz's "real presence" is based on his ability to talk. This ability is described, accurately, from my experience of oral performance art, in ambivalent terms, as "the most exalted and most contemptible, the pulsating stream of light, or the deceitful flow from the heart of an impenetrable darkness." He is an ambivalent character in many ways, for all those who report his speech. The Russian "harlequin,"<sup>10</sup> after describing Kurtz's erratic and dangerous behavior, nonetheless defends him, significantly offering Kurtz's *speech* as justification:

"Why! He's mad," I said. He [the Russian] protested indignantly. Mr. Kurtz couldn't be mad. If I had heard him talk, only two days ago, I wouldn't dare hint at such a thing. (151)

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<sup>10</sup> It is interesting that this character, although not an oral performance artist himself, is described as a member of the cast of the sort of fair traditionally associated with oral performance art.

For Marlow, in fact, the journey to find Kurtz becomes a journey to be a member of his audience, to experience his oral performance art, to hear him:

I made the strange discovery that I had never imagined him as doing, you know, but as discoursing. I didn't say to myself, "Now I will never see him," or "Now I will never shake him by the hand," but, "Now I will never hear him." The man presented himself as a voice." (133)

Yet, although Kurtz is cast in so many ways as an oral performance artist, and although Conrad is able, by casting him in this way, to take advantage of the moral ambivalence assigned by the audience to the oral performer (as he does with respect to Marlow), Kurtz's performance and its techniques and effects differ significantly from the features of oral performance art which I have observed in my fieldwork and which I have described as being practiced by Marlow.

Kurtz's performance is *not* the kind of shared participatory creation of oral performance art in context. "You don't talk with that man—you listen to him," (145) says the Russian. What has happened to Kurtz in the jungle is that he has stepped too far along the continua of trust/distrust and manipulation/cooperation which are always a part of oral performance art. Kurtz has removed himself from the context which oral performance art demands for its creation, the context of other, participating human beings, and actual life experience. "There was nothing either above or below him, and I knew it. He had kicked himself loose of the earth." (169)

Kurtz's audience, the natives in the jungle, as well as the others who can only listen to him, do not understand his words and his performance and do not participate in them, and so he commands and controls them through brute force. "He came to them with thunder and lightning, you know—and they had never seen anything like it." (150) Thunder and lightning are not the tools of oral performance art—and they *are* the tools

which Kurtz has used, so instead of heads nodding in agreement, or cocked in attentive engagement, he winds up with heads on poles.

At this point it is also interesting to look at Marlow's stated and explicit hatred of lies. This may be the kind of false disclaimer which oral performers so often issue—intended to be seen as false and emphasizing the voluntary nature of the trust granted (provisionally and partially) by the audience to the performer. Many oral performance artists issue similar claims about their hatred of lies, often in comparison to other oral performance artists. (see Bauman's "Any Man Who Keeps More'n One Hound'll Lie to You," Bauman and Abrahams 79) Of course, the very act of creating oral performance art always involves some degree or type of lying. Lying is inherent in the creative structure of all art, and in oral performance art it is emphasized, foregrounded, played with and enjoyed despite, and because of, its immorality.<sup>11</sup> Marlow is an oral performance artist, and at the end of the story, in his statement to Kurtz's intended, he proves himself to be, whatever his disclaimers, at least in terms of literal truth, a liar.

For Kurtz, on the other hand, it is in *writing* that he gives the lie to his written lies. Kurtz has his "pamphlet," in which, Marlow reports,

he soared and took me with him. The peroration was magnificent, though difficult to remember, you know. It gave me the notion of an exotic Immensity ruled by an august Benevolence. It made me tingle with enthusiasm. This was the unbounded power of eloquence—of words—of burning noble words. (139)

This eloquence, however, is in the form of "seventeen pages of close *writing*" (emphasis mine), and it is in writing, as well, that the lie is given to the seventeen pages

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<sup>11</sup> I will explore this issue in more depth in the context of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, below.

of written lies, the famous “Exterminate all the Brutes!” (139) Conversely, what may be seen as the truest statement Kurtz makes, and what Marlow denies in his lie to Kurtz’s intended, is an oral statement. It comes after Kurtz’s “final burst of sincerity,” compared to which, Marlow says, “no eloquence could have been so withering to one’s belief in mankind.” (169) Moreover, it comes in a tone for which the sounds of the words are uniquely suited, a sonic device just as successful and magnetic as a pitchman’s intentional whisper to draw an audience in tighter,

He cried in a whisper at some vision—he cried out twice, a cry that was no more than a breath—

“The horror! The horror!” (175)

In *Heart of Darkness*, Conrad is able to use his translation of oral performance art on several levels. Marlow as the oral performance artist can give the novella the moral ambivalence as well as the accessibility and appeal of oral performance art in context. More than this, though, Conrad is able to allow his audience to experience, entertain and question some of their own assumptions and associations concerning oral performance art, as well as, and in relation to, their assumptions and associations about good and evil, the civilized and the primitive, and “light” and “darkness.”

The literary translation of oral performance art in this novella fits exactly with Conrad’s goals. As he problematizes and reverses hierarchies and binaries, he can use his translation, and the fact of its being a translation, to bring the reversals and the problems into stark relief. Oral performance art and literary art can assume opposite roles to those which his audience expects. These roles, both the actual and the anticipated, can add to the novella’s appeal and effect. This tale of a tale of a journey works admirably to translate and to question the identities and the expectations of the writer and the

storyteller—the literary artist and the oral performance artist—as well as the reading audience and the oral performance art audience.

*Heart of Darkness* provides a good example of the way in which oral performance art can be translated with an emphasis on the dark and uncomfortable effects of oral performance art in context. In *The Parliament of Fowls* and in *Bleak House*, there was much more of an emphasis on the humor and enjoyment inherent in this sort of translation. However, just as in those two works, in *Heart of Darkness* vital emotional and philosophical issues are given added force and appeal for a reading audience because of the connection of these literary works with oral performance art. Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, again with a humorous and satirical tone, presents another example of how this type of translation can be used.

#### IV. "If I'd a Knowed What a Trouble it Was to Make a Book": Huckleberry Finn

Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is a work of satire, famous and controversial for its treatment of issues of race and morality in the post-bellum South. These issues are presented in the novel through the contrasts between high and low culture, particularly in terms of the nature of truth and the ethics of lying and deception. *Huckleberry Finn* works to expose and to critique the blindnesses and hypocrisy of high culture, while still recognizing and illustrating the failings of low culture. In exploring these contrasts, in his focus on lies and sincerity, Mark Twain makes extensive use of the contrast between literary and oral performance. He manages this through the opposing poles of the novel's characters (particularly Jim, Tom, and the duke and the king), through the depiction of an oral performance event in context (the camp-meeting), and most especially through the voice of his narrator, Huckleberry Finn.

Huck's narrative voice often echoes, as I will describe below, elements of the voice of the pitchman. In some ways, his language, which Toni Morrison has called "sardonic, photographic, persuasively aural" (xxxiii) is, clearly, a translation of the language of oral performance art. In addition, as a narrator, Huck writes with an accent and syntax which represent a specific and believable oral dialect. Yet Huck is not illiterate, as he is sometimes labeled by critics (Kiskis 148; Brooks 4). In fact, Huck explicitly and significantly refers to the construction of his narrative as an act of *writing*. Even in the beginning of the novel, Twain has Huck show an awareness of himself as a writing narrator, and of his audience as a reading audience:

You don't know about me, without you have read a book by the name of "The Adventures of Tom Sawyer," but that ain't no matter. That book was made by Mr. Mark Twain, and he told the truth, mainly. There was things he stretched, but mainly he told the truth. That is nothing. I never seen anybody but lied, one time or another, without it was Aunt Polly, or the widow, or maybe Mary. Aunt

Polly—Tom's Aunt Polly, she is, and Mary, and the Widow Douglas, is all told about in that book—which is mostly a true book; with some stretchers, as I said before. (17)

Huck's work is a book, and as such it fits in with other books that have come before. It is, in fact, a sequel—which requires, or at least recommends, the reading of the first book. Huck's audience consists of readers, and they need to have read other books, as his book stands in connection with them. Also, in his commentary on Mark Twain's book, Huck here introduces right at the outset this novel's concern with truth and its flexible nature ("stretchers"). Huck as narrator opposes himself to Mark Twain as narrator, but connects both in the matter of truthfulness. In fact, through an emphasis on the fictional nature of the characters who do not lie ("Aunt Polly... and Mary, and the Widow Douglas, is all told about in that book"), "stretching" the truth becomes a universal truth.

At the end of the book, as well, Huck emphasizes that his narrative is a work of writing, and that because of this, it is an unpleasant and difficult task:

Tom's most well, now, and got his bullet around his neck on a watch-guard for a watch, and is always seeing what time it is, and so there ain't nothing more to write about, and I am rotten glad of it, because if I'd a knowed what a trouble it was to make a book I wouldn't a tackled it and aint't agoing to no more. (366)

The difficulty of Huck's task, the "trouble" it is to make a book, comes, at a deeper level, from the difficulty, in fact the impossibility, of complete accuracy in translation of oral performance art. While Huck's narrative voice *represents* an oral voice, it does not, in fact, even remotely resemble the writing of an illiterate, or semi-literate, individual. It is not the writing of someone who talks like Huck. Huck's dialect, or rather the written translation of his dialect, is quite clearly a work of some skill and

talent. Yet this writing, this translation of dialect, is (of course) well within the talents of the narrative's actual author, Mark Twain.<sup>12</sup> As Twain's "Explanatory" reminds readers,

The shadings [of the dialects in the book] have not been done in a hap-hazard fashion, or by guess-work; but pains-takingly, and with the trustworthy guidance and support of personal familiarity with these several forms of speech. (7)

The dialect in *Huckleberry Finn*, particularly that of Huck Finn himself, emphasizes, rather than hiding, its nature as a translation, a studied and artificial representation.

Twain's choice of Huck as a narrator has often been praised because of the availability of a "fresh," "untainted" perspective such as that from which a young boy, an outsider to established social structures and strictures, can write. (Fishkin 13; Trilling 91-92) Yet what is even more interesting is that Twain has chosen to present Huck's narration in a translated oral dialect while still labeling and emphasizing its written nature. Twain thus presents a narrative in masquerade to an extreme extent—at least a triple masquerade. Huck's narrative is that of a writer, masked as an oral performer, masked as a writer, masked as an oral performer. Like all masks, these serve to emphasize the fictional nature of the masquerade, calling attention to both the falseness of the mask, and the susceptibility of the real to being masked.

In addition to the dialect, there are other features of Huck's narrative voice which perform as translations of the oral performance art of the pitchman. Huck's style of oral performance art is not exactly that of the pitchman, partially because his subgenre of oral performance art is the related one of the folk storyteller or tale spinner. However,

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<sup>12</sup> Even "Mark Twain" is a constructed fictional representation of the book's "real" author, Samuel Clemens. The issues of identity and its construction which are implied by an author's use of a pseudonym may be stretched even farther, but such an analysis is not within my goals or my grasp in this dissertation.

because the subgenera are so closely related and because, as I have explained, the elements of the pitch are so representative of oral performance art in general, Huck's narrative displays many of the same elements of the pitchman's art I observed in the field.

For example, Huck's voice includes the accumulative, verbally virtuosic catalogues of oral performance art.

We got an old tin lantern, and a butcher knife without any handle, and a brand-new Barlow knife worth two bits in any store, and a lot of tallow candles, and a tin candlestick, and a gourd, and a tin cup, and a ratty old bed-quilt off the bed, and a reticule with needles and pins and beeswax and buttons and thread and all such truck in it, and a hatchet and some nails, and a fish-line as thick as my little finger, with some monstrous hooks on it, and a roll of buckskin, and a leather dog-collar, and a horse-shoe, and some vials of medicine that didn't have no label on them; and just as we was leaving I found a tolerable good curry-comb, and Jim he found a ratty old fiddle-bow, and a wooden leg. (78)

There are also examples of alliterative, onomatopoeic and repetitive description, which move the narrative but also function by means of their sound value just as the descriptions included in oral performance art do.

So they dug and dug, like everything; and it got awful dark, and the rain started, and the wind swished and swushed along, and the lightning come brisker and brisker, and the thunder boomed; but them people never took no notice of it, they was so full of this business; and one minute you could see everything and every face in that big crowd, and the shovelfuls of dirt sailing up out of the grave, and the next second the dark wiped it all out, and you couldn't see nothing at all. (258)

Beyond these examples of Huck, the narrator's, use of oral performance techniques, Huck, the character, also carries some of the contextual personal characteristics which audiences attribute to oral performance artists. The deception, the at least ambivalent if not malevolent influence exercised by the pitchman in his contested control of his audience, is exercised by Huck as he carries out the many instances of deception he practices. In these instances, though, Huck feels strongly the ambivalence

of his position. He is constantly questioning, defending, and justifying, with guilty feelings and a troubled conscience, the ethics of his deceptive masquerades.

For example, when Huck pretends to Jim that his disappearance from the raft has only been a dream, he finishes the deception by pointing out to Jim the physical evidence (the leaves and rubbish and the smashed oar) that proves the disappearance was real. Huck performs the manipulation, making what is not true seem true (in fact, the opposite, making what has actually happened appear to be a dream), but he cannot continue the manipulation, giving it away himself. In the end, he feels sincere regret and apologizes.

Then he got up slow, and walked to the wigwam, and went in there, without saying anything but that. But that was enough. It made me feel so mean I could almost kissed his foot to get him to take it back.

It was fifteen minutes before I could work myself up to go and humble myself to a nigger—but I done it, and I warn't ever sorry for it afterwards, neither. I didn't do him no more mean tricks, and wouldn't done that one if I'd a knowed it would make him feel that way. (121)

Huck makes "mean tricks" a distinctive category, and this sets him up not as someone who never plays tricks (never practices deception) but as someone who tries not to play "mean tricks." Huck can be intentional, conscious and active in his trickery, and can mitigate any damage caused by his trickery. This makes Huck more like a pitchman, at least more like a successful pitchman, than not. A pitchman must be able to return to the fair—the deception must be accepted with good humor so the audience will be willing to be deceived again. In translating this element of the pitchman's character into his narrator's character, Twain allows his audience to share in the fun (the sublimated or direct hostility) of the deception, treading close to the line of ethical behavior, but withdrawing if that line is crossed.

This opposition of two different types of oral performance artists, two types of pitchman, is emphasized further in Twain's portrayal of two other characters in the novel,

the king and the duke. These two characters represent the more negative end of the continuum of morality and trustworthiness in oral performance art. They are skilled and professional, but they are not ultimately successful examples of the oral performance art of the pitchman.

Together, the king and the duke play an important role in the novel. By occupying the negative end of the continuum, they can define a space in which other types of oral performance art (and behavior in general) can be more moral than their type of performance. They are negative examples, but they are attractive negative examples. They are entertaining, and they, with the audience, can enjoy their skill at deception. In this way they can provide the mirror in which the immorality of high culture can be reflected. The king and the duke are liars, but they are not, like the more "moral" members of the high culture, hypocrites. They use disguise, but they do not disguise their true nature and motives to themselves. In fact, they are proud:

'Jour printer, by trade; do a little in patent medicines; theatre-actor—tragedy, you know; take a turn at mesmerism and phrenology when there's a chance; teach singing-geography school for a change; sling a lecture, sometimes—oh, I do lots of things—most anything that comes handy, so it ain't work. What's your lay?'  
 'I've done considerable in the doctoring way in my time. Layin' on o' hands is my best holt—for cancer, and paralysis, and sich things; and I k'n tell a fortune pretty good, when I've got somebody along to find out the facts for me. Preachin's my line, too; and workin' camp-meetin's; and missionaryin' around.'  
 (162)

Their performances are direct deception and manipulation, and their hostility and self-centeredness are not only real, but also relished:

Well, the old man he liked that speech, and he mighty soon got it so he could do it first rate. It seemed like he was just born for it; and when he had his hand in and was excited, it was perfectly lovely the way he would rip and tear and rair up behind when he was getting it off. (179)

It is "perfectly lovely" to watch the performance of these fraudulent fakers, as it is to watch the performance of many other oral performance artists. Twain's audience can have their conceptions of the untrustworthiness of performers of this type confirmed, and enjoy even more their ultimate end, as they escape rotten vegetables, but finally depart from the novel on a rail, covered in tar and feathers (291).

Just as the king and the duke represent one end of the continuum of oral performance artists, another, more positive end is represented by the character of Jim. Jim, as a genuinely illiterate slave, represents a kind of simplicity, a membership in the "folk" that is very important to Twain's themes. This simplicity comes attached to an innocence and virtue, like that attached to the young as represented by Huck. Jim is often seen, because of this simplicity, as no more than a stereotype, not a fully developed character. He has been compared to the stereotypical caricatures of the minstrel show tradition. (Knoper 45) Although Twain was certainly familiar with this tradition, and although he clearly would not be surprised to see this comparison made, Jim's character is more than just that of a stereotypical comic figure within a folk performance genre. Jim, rather, is a performer himself, in a manner and to an extent that has not often been recognized. Jim's role as a performer and audience member for oral performance art gives his character a far greater degree of competence, depth and complexity.

For example, after Tom and Huck trick Jim by taking his hat off and hanging it on a tree limb while he is asleep, Jim uses the incident to gain the ability and authority to seize the stage of oral performance events.

Niggers would come miles to hear Jim tell about it, and he was more looked up to than any nigger in that country. Strange niggers would stand with their mouths open and look him all over, same as if he was a wonder. Niggers is always talking about witches in the dark by the kitchen fire; but whenever one

was talking and letting on to know all about such things, Jim would happen in and say, "Hm! What you know 'bout witches?" and that nigger was corked up and had to take a back seat. (24)

Jim is not just a passive victim of deception, he is an active performer, incorporating the deception of which he has been a victim into his own performance and using it for his own manipulation of his audiences.

While this type of manipulation is clearly deception, since Jim embroiders the tale as all performers do, making it better each time he tells it, the moral ambivalence attached to this type of performance incites far less outrage than does the performance of the king and the duke. In fact, as in Jim's telling of the tale of his daughter's deafness, he can co-opt the force of the questionable morality of oral performance art to add to the emotional force of his performance:

My breff mos' hop outer me; en I feel so—so—I doan' know *how* I feel. I crope out, all a-tremblin', en crope aroun' en open de do' easy en slow, en poke my head in behine de chile, sof' en still, en all uv a sudden, I says *pow!* Jis' as loud as I could yell. *She never budge!* Oh, Huck, I bust out a-cryin' en grab her up in my arms, en say, 'Oh, de po' little thing! De Lord God Amighty fogive po' ole Jim, kaze he never gwyne to fogive hisself as long's he live!' Oh, she was plumb deaf en dumb, Huck, plumb deaf en dumb—en I'd ben a-treat'n her so! (202)

Jim's authority as an oral performer, the power to persuade which is contained in his tales, is also respected by Huck, at least in the cases of the hair ball, snake skin and so on. Jim's authority comes from stories, and stories that are told, as opposed to written sources.

A further example of this is Jim's expertise in another sub-genre of oral performance art, the competitive striving of debate and argumentation. In Huck and Jim's arguments about the wisdom of Solomon and about whether French people "talk de same way we does," Jim is the clear winner of the arguments, even though, as the reading audience knows, Huck is probably right, or at least arguing the side of the issue generally

accepted as being right. Huck's arguments, although empirically factual, are neither as verbally persuasive nor as artfully deployed as Jim's, who can not even be successfully accused of missing the point:

'Blame de pint! I reck'n I knows what I knows. En mine you, de *real* pint is down funder—it's down deeper. It lays in de way Sollermun was raised. You take a man dat's got on'y one er two chillen; is dat man gwyne to be waseful o' chillen? No, he ain't; he can't 'ford it. *He* know how to value 'em. But you take a man dat's got 'bout five million chillen runnin' roun' de house, en it's diffunt. *He* as soon chop a chile in two as a cat. Dey's plenty mo'. A chile er two, mo' er less, warn't no consekens to Sollermun, dad fetch him!'(112)

Huck's literary sources (although he generally, and hilariously, misreads them—as in Solomon's million wives) do not lead him to the deep and complex point. The point that is "down funder...down deeper" is the point discovered by the supposedly simple oral performance artist, Jim. Similarly, when he tries an argument by an analogy (Frenchmen are like cats and cows) Jim neatly dismantles it. He controls the flow of the argument, in fact, leading Huck along by pretending to follow his steering:

'Looky here, Jim; does a cat talk like we do?'  
 'No, a cat don't'  
 'Well, does a cow?'  
 'No, a cow don't, nuther.'  
 'Does a cat talk like a cow, or a cow talk like a cat?'  
 'No, dey don't.'  
 'It's natural and right for 'em to talk different from each other, ain't it?'  
 'Course.'  
 'And ain't it natural and right for a cat and a cow to talk different from us?'  
 'Why, mos' sholy it is.'  
 'Well, then, why ain't it natural and right for a *Frenchman* to talk different from us? You answer me that.'  
 'Is a cat a man, Huck?'  
 'No.'  
 'Well, den, dey ain't no sense in a cat talkin' like a man. Is a cow a man?—er is a cow a cat?'  
 'No, she ain't either of them.'  
 'Well, den, she ain't got no business to talk like either one er the yuther of 'em. Is a Frenchman a man?'  
 'Yes.'  
 'Well, den! Dad blame it, why doan' he *talk* like a man? You answer me *dat*!

I see it warn't no use wasting words—you can't learn a nigger to argue. So I quit. (113-114)

However, Huck quits only after Jim has thoroughly destroyed his arguments. Jim lays his trap with all the skill of an accomplished oral performance artist, throwing Huck's Socratic questioning back at him, and tying his arguments together with repeated phrases ("Well, den"). These repeated phrases build to a final triumph, forcefully emphasized with voiced stress (indicated by Twain in the text with italics and exclamation marks), and driven home when Jim throws Huck's own question back at him—"You answer me *dat!*"

Jim, the illiterate, turns out to be not just a more successful and admirable oral performer, but also a more accurate source of information and criticism and a more practical judge not only of what is possible or impossible, but also of what is moral or immoral—especially in regard to what is a crucial question in the novel, the question of how a human being should be defined. If a Frenchman is a man, not a cow, not a cat, than so, it may be extrapolated, is a slave. Huck's attempts at literate argument, and storytelling from literary sources, are neither as skillful nor as successful as Jim's oral performance.

This type of unsuccessful translation, from the literary to the oral, is also represented by the king and the duke's most humorous and dramatic errors, which they make when working from literary sources, translating literary performance into oral performance. There is, for example, the duke's version of Hamlet's soliloquy, with its beginning:

To be or not to be; that is the bare bodkin  
That makes calamity of so long life;  
For who would fardels bear, till Birnam Wood do come to Dunsinane,  
But that the fear of something after death

Murders the innocent sleep,  
 Great nature's second course,  
 And makes us rather sling the arrows of outrageous fortune  
 Than fly to others that we know not of.  
 (179)

In this, and the other mistranslations perpetrated by the duke and the king, the effect is to transform what is serious and literary into what is ridiculous. These hilarious mistranslations can be enjoyed by the reading audience, and that reading audience, recognizing the king and the duke's errors, can also feel superior to the limited understanding of these characters.

It is through the character of Tom Sawyer, however, that this type of unsuccessful translation is most thoroughly explored and clearly represented. Tom, in his every appearance in the novel, relies on literary authorities, and it is in his translations of these literary authorities that much of the ridiculous failure of understanding and accuracy that gives the novel its humor appears. Huck does this as well, as I have mentioned, but Tom is the true intentional champion of this kind of misreading and mistranslation.

In many cases, even in those instances where oral performance is clearly called for, Tom substitutes a translation into the oral of a literary source.

So Tom got out a sheet of paper that he had wrote the oath on, and read it . . . . Everybody said it was a real beautiful oath, and asked Tom if he got it out of his own head. He said, some of it, but the rest was out of pirate books, and robber books, and every gang that was high-toned had it. (25-26)

The oath comes from books, as does Tom's story of the lamp and the genie (32-33) which Huck ends up judging as Tom's lying. Tom's plans, at the end of the novel, for helping Jim to escape from captivity are similarly ridiculous, similarly literary, and similarly unsuccessful.

Well, if that ain't just like you, Huck Finn. You *can* get up the infant schooliest ways of going at a thing. Why, hain't you ever read any books at all?—

Baron Trenck, nor Casanova, nor Benvenuto Chelleeny, nor Henri IV., no none of them heroes? (301)

Tom's plans, translated from books and told to Huck, are completely illogical and counterintuitive—and completely unnecessary. The long section at the end of the novel, detailing Tom and Huck's attempts to carry out these plans, has frequently been criticized as a failure in the novel (Doyno 17). However, when seen in the light of Twain's opposition of oral and literary art, this episode, like the robber-band incidents at the beginning of the novel, works quite successfully as an extended exemplification—in translated oral form—of the drawbacks of relying on literary sources. Huck "tells" with his oral performance translated into the literary work *Huckleberry Finn*, a successful tale (because of its ironic humor and satiric effect) of the consequences of translating, or even paying attention to, literary performance.

This connection of books and the literary with the ridiculous and useless—the false—appears in other instances, often more subtly, as well. One of these instances, in particular, makes clear that there is another connection to be made. Books and respect for books are, for Twain, the province of high culture, and more important, the province of those people who aspire to be members of high culture. The connection between books and high culture is, of course, an easy one to make, even without the emphasis Twain gives it. This emphasis is especially clear in the case of the Grangerfords, the feuding family, foolishly and tragically attached to high culture ideas of "honor" and family pride. Huck's description of their home subtly illustrates their use of books, and the uselessness of the books:

There was some books too, piled up perfectly exact, on each corner of the table. One was big family Bible, full of pictures. One was 'Pilgrim's Progress,' about a man that left his family it didn't say why. I read considerable in it now and then. The statements was interesting, but tough. Another was "Friendship's

Offering," full of beautiful stuff and poetry; but I didn't read the poetry. Another was Henry Clay's speeches, and another was Dr. Gunn's Family Medicine, which told you all about what to do if a body was sick or dead. There was a hymn book, and a lot of other books. And there was nice split-bottom chairs, and perfectly sound, too—not bagged down in the middle and busted, like an old basket. (137)

The books, while present, are piled up perfectly exact, generally unused, and, even when used (by Huck), they don't "say why" important things happen. They are "interesting, but tough" (perhaps another way of saying "incomprehensible") and tell about "what to do if a body was sick or dead." The books, like the chairs, are impressive and correct, but not used, not part of real human life.

Earlier in his description of this same room, Huck begins to make clear (in a description clearly translated from oral performance art's techniques) part of what the problem is, and part of what Twain's point is, about those connected with books and high culture:

Well, there was a big outlandish parrot on each side of the clock, made out of something like chalk, and painted up gaudy. By one of the parrots was a cat made of crockery, and a crockery dog by the other; and when you pressed down on them they squeaked, but didn't open their mouths nor look different or interested. They squeaked through underneath. There was a couple of big wild-turkey-wing fans spread out behind those things. On a table in the middle of the room was a kind of a lovely crockery basket that had apples and oranges and peaches and grapes piled up in it which was much redder and yellower and prettier than real ones is, but they warn't real because you could see where the pieces had got chipped off and showed the white chalk or whatever it was, underneath. (137)

Even the birds and animals, even the fruit, in this room and in this realm of the literary are false and deceptive, and even more than this, they are useless. The deception of literary performance is, for Twain, a deception which has no real purpose, and is not valuable even as entertainment.

About midway through the novel, Twain includes an episode "A Pirate at the Camp Meeting," which clearly contrasts this view of the deception of literary

performance with that of oral performance art. In this episode, Huck describes an oral performance event, complete in its context, in great detail. He includes the setting, with the festive and various atmosphere, the temporary, liminal nature of the place, and the abundance and display of edible and sensual bounty.

The woods was full of teams and wagons, hitched everywheres, feeding out of the wagon troughs and stomping to keep off the flies. There was sheds made out of poles and roofed over with branches where they had lemonade and gingerbread to sell, and piles of watermelons and green corn and such-like truck. (172)

He includes the audience, with its diversity and informality and scattered, multi-directional focus of attention.

The women had on sun-bonnets; and some had linsey-woolsey frocks, some gingham ones and a few of the young ones had on calico. Some of the young men was barefooted, and some of the children didn't have on any clothes but just a tow-linen shirt. Some of the old women was knitting, and some of the young folks was courting on the sly. (172)

And he includes the performance, with its textural and structural features, with the directly invited and necessary participation of the audience in the construction of the performance's text, and the audience's emotional and active engagement.

Oh, come to the mourners' bench! come, black with sin! (*amen!*) come, sick and sore! (*amen!*) come, lame and halt, and blind! (*amen!*) come, pore and needy, sunk in shame! (*a-a-men!*) come all that's worn, and soiled, and suffering!—come with a broken spirit! come with a contrite heart! come in your rags and sin and dirt! The waters that cleanse is free, the door of heaven stands open—oh, enter in and be at rest!" (*a-a-men! glory, glory hallelujah!*)

And so on. You couldn't make out what the preacher said, any more, on account of the shouting and crying. Folks got up, evrywheres in the crowd and worked their way, just by main strength, to the mourners' bench, with the tears running down their faces; and when all the mourners had got up there to the front benches in a crowd, they sung, and shouted, and flung themselves down on the straw, just crazy and wild. (173)

In addition, just as I have observed in the field, the preacher's performance is subject to, and is, in fact, subjected to expropriation by a member of the audience. The king seizes the stage, and makes the performance his own:

Well, the first I knowed, the king got agoing; and you could hear him over everybody; and next he went a-charging up on to the platform and the preacher he begged him to speak to the people and he done it. (173)

The king's seizure of the stage, though, is willingly accepted, even "begged" for, and the reception of his performance is quite positive. The audience bursts into tears with him, and even the preacher from whom he has seized attention agrees that he should be the one to pass the hat for the collection. The fruits of this collection include kisses and hugs ("some of them he hugged and kissed as many as five or six times"), invitations to stay a week, and eighty-seven dollars and seventy-five cents. All these fruits are the result of an oral performance which is exciting, emotional, effective and, of course, deceptive.

The king's performance of the story of the pirate's reform is false, but the audience's response is true, and the "pirate's" reward is merited. In paying for the king's deceptive performance, the audience is paying not, in actuality, for the redemption of the pirate crews of the Indian Ocean, but for the entertainment, the chance to participate in the performance event. As with the pitchmen I observed at the fair, the king's "sale" is actually a "show," and this show is worth paying for.

In fact, the price is not very high. Even given the possibility of inaccuracy in Huck's count of the audience, and even given the changed value of a dollar over the past century, the collection of eighty-seven dollars and seventy-five cents (and a three-gallon jug of whisky) from as many as a thousand people (an average of about seventeen cents a person, even if Huck's estimate is high by a factor of two), even leaving out the hugs and kisses, certainly seems a fair exchange for the entertainment value provided by the king/pirate.

This carefully detailed report of an oral performance event, then, joins with Twain's use of the characters of Jim, Tom, and the duke and the king, and most especially with the use of Huck's oral narrative voice, to make *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* a subtle and successful commentary on deception, truth and hypocrisy. By opposing the deception inherent in oral performance art to the deception inherent in books and literary art, Twain creates a definition of deception which admirably illustrates and criticizes the morality of the society through which Huck, as an outcast, moves.

There is morality and morality in this novel, and there is deception and deception. It is clear that some morality is more moral than others, and some deception is more deceptive than others. High culture, with its literarily derived morality and its ideas of truth which allow for ridiculous and even tragic outcomes, is infiltrated, criticized and undermined with the effective and practical deception connected to oral performance art, which actually produces more justice, more emotional honesty and more complex intellectual responses.

Of course, it is vital to recognize that false morality and injustice, along with their criticism and subversion by oral performance art are not exclusive to the era of the *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. In fact, by making the contrast between oral and literary performance such a central issue in the novel, Twain emphasizes a conflict that is central not only in Huck's American South, but in past times and future (our present) times as well. Twain ties the specific tensions of his novel to the longstanding, ubiquitous and familiar tension between literary and oral performance art. By means of his translation of oral performance art in his literary art, and by foregrounding the nature

of his translation as translation, Twain makes the novel's issues continuously relevant, applicable and appreciable.

The audience is also able to make the connection with popular oral culture, with the folk and even the "folksy." Twain allies the stereotypes of the child and the primitive with that of the pitchman. He opposes these to a culture, a morality, that would separate Jim from his family, that would make Huck's every move to help Jim evil rather than heroic.

Oral performance art, translated in the very fabric of the narrative, as well as the characters and the events of the novel, allows a deep and persuasive, humorous and insidious attack. Twain uses oral performance art, with all its associations, to help his literary work attack literate "high" culture. The novel's focus on the "high-toned" and the low and its inversion of this established hierarchy are strengthened and brought more powerfully to the familiar and personal level by this focus on the oral and the literary.

All the kinds of uses of oral performance art we have seen before are present in other literary works, as well. Of course, different specific literary contexts make for different specific techniques and effects in the translation of oral performance art. In the work of Simon Ortiz, the subversion of high and low, the foregrounding of contrasting forms, and the co-opted popular appeal of oral performance art are brought into explicit and contemporary play.

V. *"Part of that Path or Road or Journey": "The Killing of a State Cop" and A Good Journey*

For the contemporary Native American writer Simon Ortiz, the translation of oral performance art in his literary work is an explicit and acknowledged technique. He sees this translation as essential to his literary project, an integral part of his art;

Writing for me is the utilization of language, and 'the utilization of language' means referring to the oral tradition. So that the oral tradition is fundamental to how the language you learn and develop in writing then expresses itself in the contemporary period, in writing. It's not a step removed or even a bridge crossed, but actually part of that path or road or journey that you are walking. (Cotelli 105)

What Ortiz means by "oral tradition," however, is both broader and more specific than my definition of oral performance art:

The oral tradition of Native American people is based upon spoken language, but it is more than that too. Oral tradition is inclusive; it is the actions, behavior, relationships, practices throughout the whole social, economic and spiritual life process of people. In this respect, the oral tradition is the consciousness of the people. I think at times "oral tradition" is defined too strictly in terms of verbal-vocal manifestations in stories, songs, meditations, ceremonies, ritual, philosophies and clan and tribal histories passed from older generations to the next. When I consider the "idea" of Acoma oral tradition, I think of the interaction of the grandfather with his grandson, as well as what he spoke and what the story verbalizes as it is told. Oral tradition evokes and expresses a belief system, and it is specific activity that confirms and conveys that belief. (*Woven Stone*, 7)

This statement echoes several of my findings about the nature of oral performance art. First of all, Ortiz's idea that "'oral tradition' is defined too strictly in terms of verbal-vocal manifestations" implies, as I have found, that any study of oral performance art requires attention to the entire context of the performance situation, not just the text uttered by the performer. Oral performance art, Ortiz and I agree, is always situated in a human social and cultural network. It is a dynamic and fluid event, not solely a text. Ortiz attempts, as I will discuss below, especially by including representations of inconclusiveness and circularity, to translate this feature in his stories and poetry.

Secondly, by his definition and even by his use of the term "oral tradition," Ortiz is emphasizing the feature of oral performance art that I have labeled "familiarity of form." The connection with a past, the effect on an audience of placing a performance in a continuum stretching through time, is important to Ortiz, as it is in all oral performance art in context. The connection with tradition, particularly in his specific cultural context, allows Ortiz to connect his audience to a reclaimed, previously denigrated and ignored history. This connection allows a criticism and reversal of the erasures practiced by the dominant discourses of literary art. It also allows an accessibility and a direct invitation and inclusion of his audience.

In addition to this familiarity of form, implied in the use of the term "oral tradition," Ortiz makes particular use of several others of the techniques and effects of oral performance art. These include primarily (although they are not limited to) the managed inclusion of the audience in the creation of the performance, the connection to specific referential pegs, the ambiguity of moral reception, and the slippery relation to fact and truth.

All these features, as well, are given added force and a deeper complexity of associative meaning by the fact, the explicit and emphasized fact, that they are translated into literary art. These features are present and recognizable in many of Ortiz' works, but for the purposes of this analysis I would like to focus on several in particular.

Ortiz' story "The Killing of a State Cop" is clearly and cleverly constructed as a written report of an oral performance. The narration of this story begins with a reference to its being told, "Felipe was telling me how it happened." (101) And it ends with another

such reference, and a reinforcement of Felipe's and the narrator's relationship and roles as oral performer and audience:

That was what he told me that night when we were sitting at the water tank. He used to tell me all kinds of things because I would listen. (108)

However, what makes the narrative voice in this story even more closely an echo of that of oral performance art is the way in which that voice shifts, sometimes unexpectedly, between Felipe's voice and his auditor's voice. At times this audience/narrator's voice thoroughly intermingles with the storyteller/narrator's voice, even interrupting itself,

How that state policeman died was like this (Felipe wanted me to remember what he said always, and he talked very seriously and sometimes sadly, and again he said they would get him anyway):

'What the hell. He deserved to die, the bastard.'

It was the wine, Felipe said. And that thing he had about people, I guess. He didn't say, but I knew. (101-102)

There is, here, a confusion about just who is telling the story, who is the narrator and who is the audience and who is the character. This confusion, which is actually an inclusion, continues throughout the story. This story is told by many narrators, and owned by all (and none) of them. Ortiz is able in this way to alter some of the established definitions of who has the authority to get stories told. Voices are multiple, separate narratives intertwine, and all are included.

Throughout the story, the narrator echoes, comments, interrupts, explains, and criticizes Felipe's performance, just as does the audience of an oral performance art event in context.

'Hey, goddammy Indio, get the hell away from there. Get out of town.'  
For no reason at all.

'For no reason at all. Goddamn, I got mad and I called him a dirty, fat, lazy good-for-nothing Mexican.'" (103)

The repetition of "For no reason at all" in the different voices neatly translates the ways in which a pitchman's audience nods, laughs, or even whispers or mouths the words of the pitch along with the performer.

The performance of Felipe is intermingled with the performance of the narrator, and their responses work together. The reading audience, making a connection with the narrator who is Felipe's audience, can similarly enter into the narration. More significantly, the susceptibility of the story to interruption, repetition, affirmation, and commentary is foregrounded, standing in opposition to established hierarchical relationships between author and reader.

This story also includes a translation of the kind of specifically and narratively referenced concrete descriptions of terrain, place, and object which I observed in the field, and which I've detailed in my analyses of the other literary translations. As in all oral performance art, the pitchman's descriptions of places and objects are intimately attached to the audience's life-world, pictorially elucidated, and locked clearly into narrative and experiential references. In this story, these references are made both by Felipe and by the narrator, in an accurate translation of the ways they are made in the actual oral performance art context.

**Felipe reached behind the seat of the truck and brought out a .30-30 Winchester rifle which was wrapped in a homemade case of denim from old Levis....**

**'You remember that .30-30 I was using when I went deer hunting last year? The one I let you shoot even though you aren't supposed to before you shoot at a deer with it. That one. My father bought it when he was working for the railroad. That one.'** (104-105)

The rifle is described in the voices of both the narrator and Felipe, in ways that connect to people and events, but with a kind of shorthand, in which the experiential reference stands in for more detailed description. Similarly, the place and landscape are

described, again by both the narrator and Felipe, their voices intermingling. The description of the road and the forest serve to bring the audience into the story and the story into the audience simultaneously.

The dirt road led through a forest of juniper and piñon. This was near the heart of the reservation. They sped by a scattered herd of sheep tended by a boy who looked at them as they passed by. The sheep dogs barked at them and ran alongside for a while.

'The road is very rough and sometimes sandy, and we couldn't go too fast. No one uses it except shepherders and people going for wood in their wagons.' (105)

In addition to his translation of oral performance art's intertwining shared narration and experientially centered descriptions, Ortiz also includes some translation of the oral performer's direct manipulation of the audience and its attendant ambiguity about morality in the character of the oral performer. The character of the storyteller, Felipe, is presented with all the moral ambivalence always attached to the oral performer.

Felipe wasn't a bad guy. Not at all. A little wild maybe. He had been in the marines and he could have gotten kicked out if he had wanted to, he said. But he hadn't because he could play it pretty straight like a good guy, too. (101)

Felipe is just as marginal, just as simultaneously admired and feared, as is Marlow, and as are the pitchmen I observed. Felipe is, by his own admission, a murderer in this story, and he is, by the narrator's admission, an admirable character, as well as a slightly dangerous and slightly pathetic one. He is not always in control of his actions and emotions. He is also, more significantly, not the final arbiter on truth or falsehood, even the truth or falsehood of his own words. The narrator, as well, is uncertain about whether Felipe is telling the truth, or even about how to respond to the story, and how to act on whatever that response might be.

I sort of believed him, about the killing of Luis Baca the state cop, but not really, until a few days later when I heard my mother talking about it with my father. I asked something about it, and they told me to forget it and said that

Felipe would probably die in the electric chair. Every night, for quite a while, I prayed a rosary or something for him. (108)

The ambiguity, about truth, about right and wrong, about accuracy in reporting, and about prayer and religion ("I prayed a rosary or something for him."), which this passage presents, is a translation of the ways oral performance art works in context. Whether the report (or the story) is true or not, whether the response is regret or sympathy or not, even whether the story was worth reading or not, all these questions are left open. The narrative manipulation, the drawing in of an audience, and possibly (probably) misleading or cheating that audience is foregrounded.

All of this takes place in a written story. In this story, the reminders of the story's nature as a written translation of an oral performance are not as explicit. However, the writing narrator presents his role as that of a reporter, a narrator—in fact, a kind of translator. His interjections into the story ("Felipe was telling me how it happened" and "Felipe wanted me to remember what he said always" and so on) represent a translation of an oral performance art audience's interjections. However, they also represent the kind of expansive explanatory commentary that echoes the *literary* work of the written translation of oral performance art. The fact of the narration being a second-hand report, though, the presence of the narrator who is not Felipe, the audience/narrator, makes the story's true nature as a written translation more clear and also more clearly complex. I'll discuss this further in the context of another work by Ortiz, the poem, "And there is always one more story," from the collection *A Good Journey*.

This poem is, again, constructed as a written report of an oral performance event, in this case a traditional storytelling session. Even more than in "The Killing of a State Cop," this poem translates the polyvocality of oral performance art. The multiple voices



trickster character, is a popular subject of many tales, and a popular subject for many theorists and critics. (Bierhorst; Radin; Thompson, *Tales of the North American Indians*)

In presenting this traditional oral tale from the Acoma culture, Ortiz is clearly referring to the "oral tradition," as discussed above. However, certain features, particularly the complete title of this poem, complicate and enliven its place in tradition, removing it from static, nostalgic categories. This title echoes and emphasizes the multiple voices involved in the creation of oral performance art,

*"And there is always one more story. My mother was telling this one. It must be an old story but this time she heard a woman telling it at one of those Sunday meetings. The woman was telling about her grandson who was telling the story which was told to him by somebody else. All these voices telling the story, including the voices in the story—yes, it must be an old one." (177)*

The story is an "old one," but it is one which is told currently, at "one of those Sunday meetings," and by several different generations, including a grandson. This "old one" is also, in fact, two stories, not one, and they are joined by the statement of the poem's narrator, "Well, at this point, the story ends but,/as you know, it also goes on." (180) Even an old "one," in this way, is more than one—and the literary idea and convention of a beginning and end, as well as the firm placement of this type of story into a vanished or vanishing past, is subverted by the repetitive, cyclic structure of oral performance art.

The unusual title of this poem also makes another point, both about the poem, and about its relation to literary art and oral performance art. Titles, generally, are literary constructs, which are not present in most instances of oral performance art. Ortiz manages to emphasize that his poem is a translation of oral performance art into literary art, by including a title (a marker of literary art) but making it a non-title. He provides a

title which in itself is a translation, and which, by being set as a title, foregrounds that translation.

The poem also includes lines and passages in the Acoma language,

"Shuuwimuu shuuwimuu chuichukuu  
Shuuwimuu shuuwimuu chichukuu  
Bah Bah."

Which the poem's narrator translates, and calls attention to the translation, into English

(which is to say)  
Skeleton skeleton join together  
Skeleton skeleton join together  
Bah Bah.

The narrator directly interjects the label of translation, the parenthetical "(which is to say)," and even more significantly includes the blatantly unnecessary translation of "Bah Bah." Like the title, these interjections emphasize the poem's function as a commentary on the act of translation, not just of the Acoma language, but of the language of oral performance art into literary art. The length and multiple voicing of the title make fun of the very idea of having a title for this poem as an idea which is foreign to the oral performance art genre, just as the translation of "Bah Bah" makes the necessity for such translation ridiculous. Any decision as to whose words get translated, which language can be expected to be known, and which language must be transformed requires an exercise of power. In making this act of translation explicit and ridiculous in this poem, Ortiz begins a subversion of this power.

Another way in which the literary nature of Ortiz's translation becomes apparent is in the entire structure and actual existence of the poem. Like "The Killing of a State Cop", this is a *report* of an oral performance event—as such, it emphasizes the function of the writing narrator. In the poem, this narrator is the one who translates the Acoma

language, who wrote the title, who parenthetically interjects identifications of the various voices

(At this point, the voice telling the story  
is that of the boy who said,  
"But Tsuushki  
looked up and saw her butt!")  
(179-180)

He is the one who makes the poem a successful piece of literary art.

This poem is part of the collection *A Good Journey*, about which Ortiz writes:

In...*A Good Journey*, I was very aware of trying to instill that sense of continuity essential to the poetry and stories in the books, essential to Native American life in fact, and making it as strongly apparent as possible. Without worrying about translation, I tried to relate them directly to their primary source in the oral tradition as I knew it. (9)

Ortiz's effort to not "worry" about translation actually makes the translation not only more successful, but more visible as well. The impossibility of this type of translation is circumvented by being acknowledged and emphasized.

The same kind of translation is present in several of the other poems from this volume, including the similarly unusually titled "Like myself, the source of these narratives is my home. Sometimes my father tells them, sometimes my mother, sometimes even the storyteller himself tells them."

This poem begins "*I don't know how it started, / but this is the story*" (italics in the original), and the first story it tells ends, "I don't know if the story is true or not, / but that's the story I heard, / my father said." This story is of a rabbit hunt and its consequences for the Laguna and Acoma, as well as for Coyote. After this story, and after the emphasis on its being a story—valued for performance ("that's the story I heard") rather than for truth ("I don't know if the story is true or not")—the inconclusive and shifting nature of its truth-value is further emphasized:

Sometimes Coyote is Pehrru.  
 Sometimes Pehrru is Coyote.  
 Sometimes they're one and the same. (169)

Without the poem ending, another story begins, and this story is introduced and begun with a title which is not typographically set apart as a title. This integrated, subsumed title is also very much like the ways oral performances are titled in context: "This one is about Pehrru's wonderful kettle." (169)

At the end of this story within the poem, there is a similar type of translated oral performance art ending, which, similarly, is more of a call for a sequel than an ending. The last line of the poem is "and they rode away..." (171) (ellipsis in the original) The next poem in the collection, interestingly, *is* set apart typographically with a title, but that title is even more of an anti-title, even less of a setting apart, than in the other works. This next title, "And another one:" demonstrates quite clearly the type of "continuity" Ortiz intends his work to exemplify and produce. It also exemplifies the ways oral performance art works in context, where each pitch leads, sometimes without finishing, to another. Oral performances overlap, like these poems, without the distinct boundaries which are characteristic of literary art.

This story, these poems, are, for Ortiz, an attempt to make the traditional and contextual nature of oral performance art succeed in a new, literary context. In this way, he can claim a role and a place in the established aesthetics of literary art, and valorize the tradition which the literary world has so often and for so long neglected and denigrated. In addition, by translating the locally and narratively referenced descriptions of terrain and objects, he can allow his audience access to the engagement of a locally experienced lifeworld. By translating the moral ambivalence attached to the oral

performer (like Felipe) he can also take advantage of the sense of play engendered by a fast and loose relationship with the truth, as well as the dismantling of hierarchical authoritative judgment and ideals of morality and truth.

This relationship to the truth, as embodied in Felipe and the narrator of his story, and even more by the different voices in the poems discussed above, is an important feature of oral performance art and its reception, as well as the use and reception of its translations. The pitchman uses what is negative and threatening about the performance, and both the audience and the performer can play with the idea of the threat; it can be reveled in, enjoyed, and managed.

The audience's perception of the pitchman as possibly less than honest gives their interchange an emotional charge, as the audience must feel "on their toes" in order not to be cheated. This perceived dishonesty also gives the pitchman a stronger credential—raising the possibility that he has knowledge and abilities which more conservative and law-abiding individuals may not have. Finally, by means of the complicated balancing of approach and withdrawal—flattery and hostility—which pitchmen practice, the audience becomes allied with the pitchman. They enjoy the fruits of his dishonesty and profit from his immorality, but still maintain enough distance to see themselves as honest and moral, and the pitchman as worthy of condemnation. When a pitchman, with a wink, tells his audience, "You may wonder how that price can be so, so, low. It's like my old mother used to say, 'ask me no questions, and I'll tell you no lies,'" the pitchman lets the audience join his rebellion against the societal rules of honesty and morality. However, he still gives them just enough deniability to separate themselves from the rebellion. They are not the dishonest ones, because they know who is. They maintain their

competitive distance and individuality, from the pitchman and from one another.

However, they are also linked together. By means of the wink, by means of the familiar traditional form of the pitchman's reference to his mother, and especially by means of their own choice and decision to participate in the performance, the audience members are united—linked with the pitchman and with one another

Ortiz's translation of oral performance art can, similarly, link his audience together, uniting them against the literary forces in which they are, in fact, participating. The audience, diverse though it may be, has its diversity emphasized—the white audience and the Native American audience alike. In accomplishing this translation, as well, Ortiz's work opposes, and by opposing helps to end, the mainstream romantic stereotype of Native Americans and Native American culture (particularly Native American oral tradition). (see Dilworth, Clements) Oral performance art, for Native Americans and others, is diverse and contemporary, dynamic and adaptable, not static, remaindered, and fossilized. The voices which construct the performance are multiple, but they are individual, not collective.

Therefore, Ortiz's use of what he calls the "oral tradition" converts what is conservative and nostalgic to what is radical, empowering, and subversive. For Simon Ortiz, the translation of oral performance art is an explicit and direct use of the traditional, nostalgic links to the past so often associated with this oral performance art.

For Ortiz, as for many other ethnic writers, the project of entering the world of literary art implies an entry into the established power of the broader culture. However, the power of the original culture is one that they do not wish to give way. Indeed, it is

one that they intend to valorize, reclaim, and utilize. The translation of oral performance art within literary work is one of the methods they use.

In Simon Ortiz's work, this is essential, one of his stated goals in writing, part of his project of working to replace what he sees as a monolingual western poetics which he believes to be inapplicable to his art and identity. He also intentionally connects, through the associations of his translated oral performance art, to a tradition which has been commonly neglected or denigrated. For many non-canonical or ethnic third world writers and many other writers as well (see, e.g., Murray, Rose, Trudier Harris, Gayl Jones), the translation of oral performance art works in exactly this way—as a positive, desired feature—breaking down the structures and strictures of the dominant culture and dominant aesthetics and poetics.

## **Conclusion**

The literary translation of oral performance art, as we have seen, may take many different forms. However, these forms are linked together by their nature as translation, as the removal of an art form from its original generic context into a new context, which creates a new genre. In presenting these five case studies, these five exemplary analyses, my intention has not been to exhaust all the possibilities of this genre. Instead, I have attempted to demonstrate the results that my different and specific method of reading this different and specific kind of text can produce.

The type of reading I am suggesting and demonstrating in this dissertation begins, as I have shown, with attention to the history of writing about oral performance art, and the history of writing about the role of oral performance art in texts. In addition, and most important, my reading is informed and enriched by a familiarity with actual oral performers, performances, and audiences in their real-life contexts. My fieldwork with pitchmen, their performances and their audiences at the fair makes the identification and the analysis of their translations into literary texts deeper and more complete than would otherwise be possible.

These translations, as is evident in each of the five examples I have included, gain two main effects from their membership in this genre, from their authors' decisions to use oral performance art in the service of their literary art. First of all, they are able to share and co-opt some of the effects of the distinctive features of oral performance art. For the pitchman and his audience at the fair there is a contested control, a display of verbal virtuosity, and a familiarity of form. These features, for the audiences of the pitchman in

print, create the same kind of popular accessibility, edgy appeal, direct interaction, mingled satisfaction and suspicion, threatening subversiveness, and confirming comfort.

However, as I have said, there is a second aspect of the literary translation of oral performance art which is possible only in these translations. These translations succeed in a way that is possible for neither oral performance art in context, nor literary works which do not include this translation. Audiences, all audiences, are familiar with *both* oral performance art and literary art. When readers read the literary translation of oral performance art, *both* the nature of the genre and the constant reminders from authors remind them of the fact of the translation.

In these translations, there is an emphasis on the difference between the two forms, both familiar and both enacted in the specific literary work being read. The audience's experience of this difference between the oral and the literary allows a richer portrayal of other hierarchical differences which are associated with the oral and the literary, such as the difference between high and low culture, the elite and the popular, the modern and the primitive, truth and fiction. Being drawn in, by the act of reading, to the issue of orality and literacy, audiences are drawn in to issues which continually revolve, trade power and influence, and subvert one another. Audiences experience and understand those issues which are not resolved, not resolvable, but which require and celebrate, make familiar and threatening and cooperative and competitive, the issues themselves. This is the unique quality—the unique effect—of the genre of literary translation of oral performance art. My awareness and analysis of this unique quality provides the kind of unique and valuable interpretations which I have presented here.

There are, of course, other literary works—I've mentioned a few in passing—which may be read in the way I have suggested and demonstrated in this dissertation. I hope that others, including myself, will continue to conduct this kind of analysis. The literary translation of oral performance art, the art of the pitchman in print, is a rich and rewarding literary genre, and further analysis of this genre can only further enrich both literary and oral performance art.

At the end of the day, sometimes late in the night, audiences leave the fair. They rarely leave empty-handed, although they often leave empty-pocketed. There is a certain type of exhaustion, a certain type of satisfaction, as well as relief, at the end of a day at the fair. Audiences head for their homes, having been drawn together with strangers and now separated, glad to have attended, and glad it has ended. There will be another year, another fair. There will be another experience of oral performance art, another experience of the pitchman in his context. The pitchman in print, as well, will continue to shock and amaze, delight, threaten, entertain, intrigue, and educate, as long as audiences are willing, even half willing, to

step up, step in  
give it a try  
give it a spin  
we'll see who's the fool  
or by golly you win.

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