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Rethinking context

Language as an interactive phenomenon

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Contents

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5 Contextualization, tradition, and the dialogue of genres: Icelandic legends of the *kraftaskáld*

RICHARD BAUMAN

Editors' introduction

Richard Bauman is Professor of Folklore and Anthropology at Indiana University. He received his doctorate in American Civilization from the University of Pennsylvania. While there he was part of a small group of graduate students working under Dell Hymes who were actively involved in the seminal development of the field that became known as the Ethnography of Speaking. Before moving to Indiana to head its folklore program he taught for many years at the University of Texas. He is a former editor of the *Journal of American Folklore*.

In this chapter Bauman rethinks not only how **context** is relevant to the study of the speech genres (stories and verse for example) that have been a principal focus of folklore research, but uses a participant-centred, dynamic view of context to simultaneously rethink some of the core analytical concepts that underlie folklore, including **tradition** and **genre**. While doing this he also provides a very lucid exposition of how the work of the Russian semiotician and literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin can be used to develop new understanding of how language is organized as a cultural and social phenomenon. Bakhtin has become an increasingly influential figure in anthropological linguistics (in recent years several sessions have been devoted to his work at the annual meetings of the American Anthropological Association). Bauman tempers his genuine appreciation of what Bakhtin has to offer with recognition of some limitations in the analytic framework he has left us.[1] "As suggestive as they are, however, Bakhtin's writings engender a certain amount of frustration in the analysis of dialogic forms; his perspective seems to demand a dimension of formal analysis, but he never provides it." In the present chapter Bauman combines an approach influenced by Bakhtin with formal analysis of the speech forms being examined.

Central to the work of Bakhtin is the notion of the **dialogic** organization of language. The term **dialogic** can be somewhat misleading since it immediately conjures up visions of multi-party talk, i.e. a dialogue between different speakers. This is not what Bakhtin meant by **dialogic**. Rather he wanted to call attention to how a single strip of talk (utterance, text, story, etc.) can juxtapose language drawn from, and invoking, alternative cultural, social and linguistic home environments, the interpenetration of multiple voices and forms of utterance. A prototypical

example is provided by the phenomenon of **reported speech**, in which the quoted talk of one party is embedded within the speech of another (Bakhtin's most complete exposition of reported speech can be found in Vološinov 1973, which was written in conjunction with, indeed possibly by, Bakhtin). Speech genres vary in the extent to which they permit dialogic organization. "Frozen" genres, poetry with a fixed format for example, provide only limited opportunities for the incorporation of other speech forms, while the possibilities for dialogic embedding offered by the novel are almost endless. In the present chapter Bauman focuses his analysis on a particular kind of text, a story about a nineteenth-century Icelandic "magical poet" that was told by an old man to someone who was collecting folk materials in the 1960s. The text being analyzed contains a number of different types of speech embedded within other speech. Most striking is the prophetic curse of the poet, which takes the form of verse embedded within a framing narrative. One genre (verse) is thus embedded within another (narrative) which contextualizes it, thus generating what Bauman analyzes as a "dialogue of genres." Formal analysis of how the verse and narrative are linked to, and differentiated from, each other enables Bauman to draw on seminal insights of Bakhtin while overcoming some of their limitations. Such analysis is relevant to theory and practice in folklore in another way as well: it creates the possibility of moving beyond a somewhat problematic taxonomy of stable genres to explore the creative constitution of dialogic genres, in which a single text places one genre in dynamic juxtaposition to another. What Bauman has done here would seem to open the door to a new line of very productive scholarship within folklore.

The verse within the story is not however the only type of embedded speech found within this text. Before getting to the story proper, the teller provides a genealogy of previous tellers, locating "his discourse in relation to a sequential series of other discourses." Bauman uses such talk to radically rethink the notion of **tradition** by arguing that the teller is actively involved in a process of **traditionalization:** systematically linking the present talk to a meaningful past, while at the same time authenticating his story (much like an art or antique dealer) by "tracing its provenience." Instead of being treated as a static feature of the past, "a quality of traditionality that is considered to inhere in a cultural form conceived of as akin to a persistent natural object," tradition becomes an aspect of situated practice, work that members of a society actively perform to constitute objects as traditional. Such a framework shifts the analysis of context from events surrounding the object being examined to "the inside . . . using the text itself as a point of departure, and allowing it to index dimensions as the narrator himself forges links of contextualization to give shape and meaning to his expression." The contrast that Bauman notes between context viewed from the "outside in" vs. a view from the "inside" looking outward is in fact one major place where different approaches to the analysis of context actively challenge each other. For example, conversation analysis works from the "inside out", starting from the talk itself and insisting that all proposed contextual variables be shown to articulate within the data being examined (the work of the Goodwins in this volume provides an example of conversational analysis), a position that is actively challenged by Cicourel's chapter in this volume.

Bauman also notes that while citing past speakers the teller has the capacity to distance himself from what they say, and indeed from the story itself. Such analysis is quite relevant to the arguments made by Erving Goffman from *Asylums* (1961) to "Footing" (1981) about how the individual has to be analyzed as a "stance-taking entity."

Note

1 Bauman's critique of Bakhtin is elaborated in more detail in a paper presented at the 1988 meetings of the American Anthropological Association

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Contextualization, tradition, and the dialogue of genres: Icelandic legends of the *kraftaskáld*

1 Introduction

The field of folklore is currently in the midst of a highly charged period of critical reexamination of some of its most foundational concepts. Energized by the performance-centred approaches developed by folklorists themselves and related reorientations in adjacent disciplines, there is a movement in current folklore theory toward counterbalancing established structural, institutional, collective orientations toward expressive forms with more agent- and practice-centered perspectives that emphasize individual agency and the emergent aspects of performance in the accomplishment of social life.[1]

In regard to genre, for example, the emphasis of the late 1960s through the mid 1970s was on structural definitions of individual genres, stimulated by the translation into English of Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale* (1968) and the burgeoning of interest in the work of Lévi-Strauss, and on culturally established systems of classification discovered through the techniques of ethnoscience.[2] More recently, these concerns have been tempered by a conception of genre as a dynamic expressive resource, in which the conventional expectations and associations that attach to generically marked stylistic features are available for further combination and

recombination in the production of varying forms and meanings (Hymes 1975a, Sherzer 1979, Urban 1985).

Tradition, long considered a criterial attribute of folklore, is coming to be seen less as an inherent quality of old and persistent items or genres passed on from generation to generation, and more as a symbolic construction by which people in the present establish connections with a meaningful past and endow particular cultural forms with value and authority.[3] Thus, the focus of attention is the strategic process of traditionalization rather than a quality of traditionality that is considered to inhere in a cultural form conceived of as akin to a persistent natural object.

Likewise, we are seeing a shift away from context, understood as the conventional, normative anchoring of an item or form within institutional structures, event structures, or general patterns of cultural or psychological meaning, and toward the active process of contextualization in which individuals situate what they do in networks of interrelationship and association in the act of expressive production (Bauman 1983, Bauman and Briggs 1990, Briggs 1985, Young 1985). Indeed, so conceived, contextualization appears to be the most general process of them all, but that is too large a topic to undertake here. Rather, my purpose in this chapter is to suggest some of the ways in which the communicative exploration of genre, the act of traditionalization, and the situated management of contextualization may be seen as parts of a unified expressive accomplishment. This chapter is intended as a prolegomenon to a more extensive study of the materials on which it is focused.

2 Legends of the kraftaskáld

The corpus of materials I will examine in the full study is a set of Icelandic legends about magical poets. Many of the world's cultures attribute magical power to poets and magical efficacy to poetry. The theme is especially resonant in Nordic tradition: the poetic skill of the skaldic poets, for example, was seen as a divine gift (Almqvist 1965: 209); continuities have been suggested between skaldic poetry and shamanism (Kabell 1980); and the damaging effects of the shaming *níð* verses, best known from the famous episodes in *Egils Saga*, appear in at least some instances to have been attributed to their magical qualities (Almqvist 1974: 185–6). In Iceland, one of the expressive foci of this theme is the figure of the *kraftaskáld* or *ákvæðaskáld*. Kraftaskáld, the more commonly used term, is perhaps most literally translated as "power poet," but commentators also use the term "magical poet" to render kraftaskáld in English (Sigurðsson 1983: 437). *Ákvæði*, meaning "uttered opinion" (Cleasby, Vigfusson, and Craigie 1957: 42), "decision, verdict" (Zoëga 1910: 33), is also used in popular tales and superstitions in the more marked sense of "spell," or "charm." An ákvæðaskáld is thus a spell-poet, whose verse has magical

power. The two terms are often cited as synonyms (Cleasby, Vigfusson, and Craigie 1957: 42; Almqvist 1961: 73), though ákvæðaskáld may suggest the use of magical verse for more negative ends.

The kraftaskáld is an individual – most are men, but some are women – who has the capacity in problem situations to improvise verses which have magical efficacy: they may turn inclement weather, drive away predators, procure food and other provisions in time of need, or vanquish adversaries. It is important to emphasize that the verses of the kraftaskáld are not traditional, ready-made incantations, charms, magical formulae, or the like, but are composed spontaneously for a single occasion only. All of the approximately two hundred kraftaskálds[4] documented by Bo Almqvist in his historical searches (1961) were known to compose other poetry as well and for the most part they appear to be people of uncommon character and ability, strong-minded, passionate, and quick to anger (1961: 77). Three factors are worth noting with regard to the source of the magical power of the kraftaskálds and their verses. First, many of the kraftaskálds were ministers, with special spiritual powers. In addition, it appears that the artistic excellence of the kraftaskáld's verses was independent of their magical efficacy: it is said of one Þorsteinn from Varmavatnsholar that "Although Þorsteinn was a bad poet, he seemed to have in him a trace of the kraftaskáld" (Almqvist 1961: 76). Finally, the verses of the kraftaskáld are characteristically composed in moments of strong feeling. Taken together, these factors indicate that the magical power of the kraftaskáld's verses is the combined product of poetic formalization of the utterance and the charismatic power of the kraftaskáld's character – both seem necessary.

There are numerous legends about kraftaskálds in the classic Icelandic folktale literature, with the oldest documentary records stemming from around 1600, though the earliest mention of the terms kraftaskáld and ákvæðaskáld occurs only around 1830 (Almqvist 1961: 73–4). But this legend tradition is now moribund, if not fully dead, in contemporary Icelandic oral tradition. I am fortunate, though, to have a number of recorded texts, made available to me by Hallfreður Örn Eiríksson, Icelandic folklorist, from his own collection. These stories were recorded in the late 1960s from quite elderly informants in old-age homes. I will base this preliminary discussion on one of these narratives, a story about a well-known kraftaskáld of the nineteenth century, the Reverend Páll Jonsson (1779–1846) of the Westman Islands, widely called Páll skáldi, Páll the Poet. Páll was a difficult and quick-tempered man, who drank heavily and lived the last ten years or so of his life without a position in the church. Nevertheless, he was known to be a man of intelligence and a talented poet (Sigfússon 1946: 60). The story was recorded by Eiríksson from the telling of Jón Norðmann, in Reykjavík, November 10, 1968. A transcription and translation of the text are given below. Line breaks mark breath pauses, though not all breath pauses in the delivery of the text mark the beginning

of new lines; I have also taken account of syntactic structures in rendering the printed text.

Páll skáldi/Páll the Poet

HÖE 1 *Voru nokkrir fleiri . . . voru fleiri kraftaskáld talin þarna í Skagafirði?*
Were any others . . . were others reputed to be kraftaskálds in Skagafjord?

JN 2 *Ég man að nú ekki núna í augnabliki,*
I don't remember that now, just now at the moment,

3 *en eitt ég nú sagt þér ef . . . ef þú kærir þig um.*
but I can tell you now if . . . if you care (to hear it).

4 það er nú ekki beint úr Skagafirði,
It is, now, not exactly from Skagafjord

5 *og þó, það er í sambandi við Gudrúnu,*
although it is connected with Gudrún,

6 *dóttur séra Páls skálda í Vestmannaeyjum.*
daughter of Reverend Páll the Poet in the Westman Islands.

7 *Páll skáldi þótti nú kraftaskáld,*
Páll the Poet was thought, now, to be a kraftaskáld

8 *og það þótti nú ganga eftir einu sinni, honum lenti eitthavð saman við*
and that was thought, now, to prove true one time he had something of a conflict with

9 *einhvern vertíðarmann þarna í Vestmannaeyjum,*
some seasonal fishermen there in the Westman Islands,

10 *og . . . og hann . . . þessi vertíðarmaður, hann kvað einhverja vísu um . . . um Pál*
and . . . and he . . . this seasonal fisherman, he spoke some verse about . . . about Páll

11 *þar sem hann spáir honum því að hann muni drukkna.*
where he prophesies about him that he will drown.

12 *Og Páll reiddist og gerir vísu.*
And Páll got angry and makes a verse.

13 *þetta var á vertíðinni.*
This was in the fishing season.

14 *Og sú vísa er svona:*
And the verse is thus:

15 *Fari það svo að fyrir lok* Should it turn out that in the end

16 *fáirðu að rata í sandinn,* you get to fall into the sand,

17 *ætti að skerast ofan í kok,* may it cut itself down in your throat,

18 *úr þér tungufjandinn.* out of you, the tongue-devil.

19 *En það fór nú svo að þessi maður*
And it turned out, now, such that this man

20 *þegar hann var að fara í land,*
as soon as he was going to the mainland,

21 *þá drukknaði hann við Landeyjasandur*
that he drowned by Land-Isles Sand

22 *og þegar hann fannst, hafði marfló étið úr honum tunguna.*
and when he was found, a shrimp had eaten his tongue out.

23 *Og . . . ja* (laugh) . . . *etta gat nú vel allt hafa skeð án ess að visan hefði komið,*
And . . . well (laugh) . . . that could, now, all well have happened without the verse having occurred,

24 *en þetta hittist nú svona á.*
but that is how it turned out, now.

25 *Nú Gudrún dottir hans sagði föður minum þessa sögu.*
Now Gudrún, his daughter, told my father this story.

Kraftaskáld legends, as I suggested earlier, recount an instance in which the poet, confronting a situation of adversity, gains mastery by means of a magical verse, composed on the moment. In other words, what we have here are stories about poems, or better, narrating about versifying. One of the things going on in them, then, is the creation of a narrative context for reporting a poem, a problem in the interaction of genres. In addition to contextualizing the verse, the narrator also contextualizes the narrative itself, weaving a complex web of verbal anchorings for his discourse that link it to a range of other situations and other discourses, endowing it with traditional authority in the process. What I want to do is trace the strands of this web through the text before us to illuminate the ways in which contextualization in its various dimensions may be accomplished in the act of recounting these legends.

The story of Páll and the seasonal fisherman illustrates clearly the general structure of kraftaskáld legends. While the narrative may open and close with framing matter, as this one does (of which more later), the plots characteristically begin with the situation of adversity confronting the poet, here the prophetic verse attack on Páll the Poet by the fisherman. The poet then composes a verse to counteract the problem situation, which is recited by the narrator as part of the narration. The third structural plot element, following the verse, recounts the overturning or reversal of the adverse

circumstance – from the poet's point of view – a transformation of state brought about by the magical verse. In the story before us, the seasonal fisherman drowns and, to make Páll's victory still more complete, his adversary's villainous tongue is eaten out by a shrimp.

3 The dialogue of genres

Let us look first at the problem of contextualization in terms of genres, that is, the interplay of the two genres, verse and story, in the text. This is an instance, *par excellence*, of a Bakhtinian dialogue of genres, resting not primarily on dialogue in the turn-taking social interactional sense, as in riddles or knock-knock jokes, for example, but on the interplay of two (or more) primary genres, each with its own formal and functional characteristics (Bakhtin 1986: 60–102). That we are dealing here with the juxtaposition of two locally recognized primary genres within a more complex text is evidenced by the actual naming of the two generic forms within the text itself: *vísa*, or verse (lines 12, 14, 23), and *saga*, or story (line 25). Even a preliminary reading – or hearing – of the text reveals that the verse is contained by the story. Accordingly, we have at least a preliminary warrant to approach the interplay of genres in terms of the contextualization of the verse by the surrounding narrative. And indeed, the formal analysis of the text sustains this procedure.

Lines 1–6 in the transcript are framing matter, and I will return to them later. The actual recounting of the narrated event – the conflict between Páll the Poet and the fisherman and its resolution – begins with line 8, marked by the adverbial formula *einu sinni*, "one time," that marks the onset of the narrative action in so many Icelandic folktales. However, line 7 – "Páll the Poet was thought, now, to be a kraftaskáld" – is the opening step in the process that moves toward the presentation of the verse, by anticipating what is most reportable about a kraftaskáld, that is, the exercise of his magical powers. This process is further advanced by line 8 – "and that was thought, now, to prove true one time . . ." – which reinforces the expectation set up in line 7 that we will hear an account of an actual incident confirming Páll's status as a kraftaskáld. The mention of the conflict in line 8 establishes the situation of adversity that Páll will overcome with his magical verse.

In lines 10 and 11, the seasonal fisherman, also a poet, attacks Páll with a verse, identified as a prophecy, which means, importantly, that it is merely a prediction of the future, lacking the performative power actually to bring about the happening it foretells. Knowing already that Páll is a kraftaskáld and that this represents an incident in which his magical power was used, we begin to recognize a nascent parallel being set up by the narrator: the fisherman spoke a verse predicting Páll's drowning, but without the power to bring it about, while Páll will produce a verse about the fisherman's fate

that will actually cause it to happen. Note too that the fisherman's verse is merely reported in the narrator's voice, not quoted.

In immediate response to the fisherman's challenge, "Páll got angry and makes a verse" of his own (line 12), thus beginning the fulfillment of the anticipated parallel. It is worth observing that while the fisherman **spoke** his verse, Páll **makes** his, suggesting more agency, power, and immediacy in regard to the latter. Páll's anger represents the motivational impetus for him to employ the full force of his magical power; the magical verses of the kraftaskáld are commonly called forth by strong emotion.

Finally, line 14, culminating in the demonstrative adverb *svona*, thus, is the quotative frame that directly offers up the verse itself as direct discourse. Note the shift of tense here. To this point, the recounting of the narrated event leading up to the verse has been in the past tense or the historical present (line 11: "prophesies," line 12: "makes"), but in line 14 the narrator shifts to the present tense: "And the verse is thus." That is, the verb forms in lines 7–13 index the narrated event, the event told about, while the verb form in line 14 indexes the narrative event, the event in which the story is told. Line 14, then, accomplishes that merger of narrated event and narrative event that is characteristic of quoted speech, which does not merely recount, but re-presents the quoted discourse. The two instances of historical present tense mediate the transition. In this first part of the legend, then, we may observe that much of the narrative work in the text is in the service of the verse to follow, building a structure of anticipation for its presentation and ultimately (in line 14) pointing directly to it.

We arrive, then, at the verse itself, which is heavily set off from the surrounding discourse by formal contrasts, including the following:

- meter, with alternating 4 and 3 stress lines;
- rhyme, in an abab pattern;
- loudness, with the poem delivered more loudly than the surrounding narrative;
- figurative language, in the personification of the "tongue-devil";
- mode, marked by the subjunctive verb forms at the head of the first three lines, contrasting with the indicative mood of the surrounding narrative;
- temporal dynamic, shifting from the linear progression that moves from the more distant to the more proximal past in lines 7–12, to the future orientation of the verse;
- syntax, marked by the unconventional form of lines 17–18, which would more normally be *"ætti að tungufjandinn ur þér skerast ofan í kok."*

In general, with the advent of the verse the narrator takes on the voice of the poet, serving as a kind of surrogate for him. While the verse is performed as Páll ostensibly performed it, with Páll at the deictic center of the utterance (note the second person pronouns in the verse which index the fisherman, not the folklorist), the narrator is not making the verse but

re-presenting it and the verse is shorn of its performative power; it will not cause the person to whom it is directed in the narrative event to drown and lose his tongue.

When the verse is completed, the style shifts back to that of the preceding narrative, in the past tense, less heavily marked in formal terms, and so on. Stylistic contrast notwithstanding, however, there is marked cohesion established between lines 19–22, which follow the verse, and the verse itself. There is, first of all, a parallelism of action sequence, in which the drowning of the fisherman and the cutting out of his tongue, recounted in the narrative past tense, correspond to the anticipation of these events in the verse, delivered in the subjunctive mood. We may also observe the use of lexical cohesion through the use in lines 19, 21, and 22 of grammatical variants of the words used in the verse:

- *Fari* það (15) vs. það *fór* (19) = "Should it turn out" (subjunctive) vs. "it turned out" (preterite);
- *sandinn* (16) vs. *-sandur* (21) = *sand-* + definite article suffix vs. *-sand* + accusative case marker;
- *tungu-* (18) vs. *tunguna* (22) = *tung-* + genitive case marker vs. *tung-* + accusative case marker.

We can see clearly, then, in lines 19–22, that the verse has a strong formative influence on the narrative discourse that follows it; it has the capacity to shape and permeate the narrative beyond its own formal boundaries.

If we examine the verse in functional as well as formal terms, we can see why this should be so. In his analysis of magical discourse, Tzvetan Todorov has suggested that "the magical formula is a micro-narrative" (1973: 44, my translation), resting his contention on the essential presence in such formulae of a verb form that signifies a change of state, a necessary condition for the existence of a narrative. He goes on to point out, however, that the narrative of the magical formula is different from other narratives insofar as it designates a virtual action, not an actual one, an action that is not yet accomplished but must be. While I would reserve the term "narrative" for accounts of action reported as accomplished, I believe Todorov's observation of the structural relationship between magical discourse and narrative is very acute, holding the key to the relationship between the verse and the ensuing narrative in our legend text. The magical verse sets forth virtual action – the drowning of the seasonal fisherman and the cutting out of his tongue in the subjunctive mood – while the subsequent narrative portion of the text recounts the realization of that virtual action in the past tense. Hence the power of the verse over the narrative, its formative effect on the narrative discourse that follows it. The verse itself, however, is formally impenetrable, as we have seen. The preceding narrative stops short at the initial boundary of the verse, and the subsequent narrative picks up again immediately after it, but the narrative exercises no shaping influence at all in formal terms on the verse. Performative efficacy resides in the form of the verse; the narrative merely describes the external circumstances of the verse and reports on the realization of the change of state that it effects.

In this generic dialogue, then, the narrative is formally and functionally subordinate to the verse. While in one general functional sense we might perhaps say that there is a mutual process of contextualization going on since there are ties of cohesion linking the story and the verse together, the point I want to emphasize is that it is through the framing narrative that all the work of contextualization is accomplished. The narrative is accommodated to the verse at the end, while the verse retains its unitary integrity, if not its performative power. Note, however, that this is not a necessary consequence of merging narrative and verse. That narrative can take over and subordinate verse is clearly evidenced by line 11, in which the fisherman's verse is merely reported, preserving only a reference to its general poetic form and illocutionary force. It is Páll's verse, with its magical efficacy, that is the point of the story, hence its dominant position in the interplay of genres.

4 Traditionalization

Thus far in the analysis, I have focused my discussion on lines 7–22 of the text, which constitute the narrative portion of Jón Norðmann's discourse in the formal and functional senses I indicated earlier. Let me turn now to the other portions of the text to examine the dynamics of contextualization at work within them. There are, in fact, several kinds of contextualizing work evidenced in these opening and closing sections, including a small negotiation by which Mr Norðmann shifts the discussion from kraftaskálds in Skagafjord, his own region in the very north of Iceland, to Páll the Poet, a kraftaskáld from the Westman Islands off the south coast, a little job of contextualizing this story *vis-à-vis* the preceding discourse between himself and the folklorist. For present purposes, however, I am more concerned with a different order of business accomplished in the lines at the beginning and end of the transcript, in particular lines 5–8 and 23–5. First, lines 5, 6, and 25: "although it is connected with Gudrún, daughter of the Reverend Páll the Poet in the Westman Islands," and "Now Gudrún, his daughter, told my father this story." What I want to suggest is that this linking of his story to the antecedent tellings of his father and Gudrún represents the work of traditionalization, traditionalization in practice.

Now, in conventional folkloric terms, the story would be reckoned to be traditional by several interconnected measures. The tale can be documented in what is recognizably the same plot, though with some variation, in texts in the folktale collections, all gathered from "oral tradition," so

called, meaning the oral storytelling of narrators who heard them aurally from other narrators. In one of the more interesting of these, for example (Sigfússon 1946: 59–60), Páll's adversary is not a seasonal fisherman, but one Jón Torfabróður, a rival poet with whom Páll engaged in heated verse battles. Páll's magical verse is given as follows, clearly a variant of the verse in our text:

> *það færi betur fyrir þitt sprok*
> *þu fengir að rata í sandinn.*
> *það ætti að skerast uppvið kok*
> *úr þer tungu-fjandinn!*
>
> It would be better for (all) your talk
> (if) you got to fall into the sand.
> That may it cut itself up (out of) your throat
> out of you, the tongue-devil!

Interestingly, in this version both verses are successful: Jón drowns and his body is found with its tongue missing, but Páll drowns also. Thus, this story would be considered a traditional item on two standard grounds: it is handed down orally from generation to generation and it exists in different versions in the social group within which it is current. This is a kind of objective and analytical conception of tradition, in the sense that it views folklore items essentially as persistent objects, rooted in the past and passed on from person to person through time and space. And, indeed, Mr. Norðmann's testimony may be viewed from this vantage point as corroborative recognition by the folk of this handing down of the story from Gudrún, Páll's daughter, to Mr. Norðmann's father, to Mr. Norðmann, and ultimately to the folklorist.

From an agent-centered point of view, however, looking at Mr. Norðmann's storytelling as social practice, other questions must arise. What we have in this text is Mr. Norðmann directly and explicitly engaged in an act of symbolic construction, drawing the links of continuity by which he may tie his story to past discourses as part of his own recounting of it. This is the act of traditionalization, and it is part of the process of endowing the story with situated meaning. "The traditional begins with the personal" (Hymes 1975b: 354) and the immediate here, not with some objective quality of pastness that inheres in a cultural object but with the active construction of connections that link the present with a meaningful past. When examined, this process of traditionalization in the text before us manifests itself as a species of contextualization. Mr. Norðmann locates his discourse in relation to a sequential series of other discourses, starting in fact with Pall's own and proceeding through those of Gudrún and his father, so that his story, in effect, contains them all. That Gudrún told the story to his father, who told it to him, constitutes one dimension of the story's social meaning and value in the situational context of Mr. Norðmann's telling of it to Eiríksson. Specifically, traditionalization here is an act of authentication, akin to the art or antique dealer's authentication of an object by tracing its provenience. Mr. Norðmann establishes both the genuineness of his story as a reliable account and the legitimacy and strength of his claim to it by locating himself in a direct line of transmission, including lines of descent through kinship, that reaches back to Páll himself, the original speaker of those reportable words that constitute the point of the narrative. By orienting his talk to his father's talk, to Gudrún's talk, to Páll's talk, Norðmann endows his discourse with a dimension of traditional authority in a Weberian sense. If the original event is reportable, Mr. Norðmann's direct connection with it through the links with his father and Páll's daughter establishes and enhances the legitimacy of his claim to report it himself.

It is important to establish, though, that Norðmann's claims about the authenticity of the story, his argument for it as the real thing truly told about Páll by people with a strong claim to reliable knowledge, is not also an argument for the validity of others' interpretations of the story. In fact, Mr. Norðmann leaves open the possibility of calling into question certain aspects of others' tellings of the story. Observe, for example, his statements in lines 7–8 that Páll was "thought" to be a kraftaskáld, and that this was "thought" to prove true in the events narrated in the story, picking up on the framing of Eiríksson's question about those who were "reputed to be" (*talin*) kraftaskálds. This does not question the external events recounted in the narrative, but it certainly leaves open the question of whether Páll's verse actually did have the magical efficacy attributed to it. Even stronger is Mr. Norðmann's meta-narrational comment in line 23: "that could, now, all well have happened without the verse having occurred." This raises the question of alternative explanations quite directly; others may interpret the fisherman's drowning and loss of his tongue as brought about by Páll's verse, but Mr. Norðmann acknowledges that it might have happened anyway. Thus, his traditionalization of the narrative by contextualizing it *vis-à-vis* others' discourse has a dual thrust: it authenticates the story as a significant piece of discourse, strengthening its claim – and his own – on our attention, but it questions the authority of others' expressed interpretations of the story. In the process, then, he reframes the story by taking a different line toward its meaning, though one at least partially set up by the framing of the folklorist's question to him. The plot is accepted – even valorized – in terms of its connection with certain talk that preceded it but the meaning of the story, as also given expression in earlier talk, is subjected to question. This is an active engagement with tradition, the use of traditionalization to endow the story with dimensions of personal and social meaning; it is not simply a recognition of an inherent quality of traditionality in a particular cultural object.

5 Discussion: contextualization, genre, and tradition

This recounting of the legend of Páll the Poet, then, emerges from our examination as a structure of multiply embedded acts of contextualization in which talk is oriented to other talk: Páll's verse, Gudrún's story, Mr. Norðmann's father's story, the interpretive talk of those who commented on the story, and Mr. Norðmann's own recounting of it to the folklorist. I have intended in my examination of the text to suggest how an analysis of the management of these contextualizations may illuminate certain other foundational concepts beyond context itself, specifically genre and tradition.

Genre is a classificatory concept, a way of sorting out conventionalized discourse forms on the basis of form, function, content, or some other factor or set of factors. Scholarly thinking about verbal genres, both in folklore and linguistic anthropology, has been much influenced by canons of scientific taxonomy, whether from an etic or an emic point of view: genre classifications must be based on the application of consistent sorting principles throughout, they must be exhaustive, the categories must be mutually exclusive, and so on. But even in the enthusiasms of ethnoscience, there were constant reminders from the data that human expression doesn't fit so neatly into taxonomic categories. Gary Gossen (1974), in the most elegant of the elucidations of verbal genres in native terms, noted that he could only get agreement – more or less – from his Chamula sources down to five taxonomic levels, below which agreement on what went in which category was not to be achieved. And, in folklore scholarship, there has always been some unease about those anomalous, blended forms that do not fit neatly into systems of genre classification, such as neck riddle, riddle ballad, cante fable, and the like, that serve as nagging reminders that genres leak. These are themselves conventional forms of folkloric expression in which what are analytically considered as primary genres are brought into dialogue with each other.

Kraftaskáld legends represent another instance of such dialogic genres in Bakhtin's sense of the term, not necessarily involving two or more interlocutors but rather the interpenetration of multiple voices and forms of utterance. My use of Bakhtinian terminology here indicates the potential usefulness of Bakhtin's ideas in the elucidation of such compound forms, and, indeed, I have been much stimulated by his dialogic perspective (especially Bakhtin 1981, 1986; Medvedev/Bakhtin 1978; Vološinov 1973). As suggestive as they are, however, Bakhtin's writings engender a certain amount of frustration in the analysis of dialogic forms; his perspective seems to demand a dimension of formal analysis, but he never provides it. **How** are genres brought into dialogue? **How** is dialogization actually accomplished? What I have tried to suggest in this chapter is the productiveness of such formal analysis, framed as a problem in the mutual

contextualization of primary genres. In order to accomplish a telling of a kraftaskáld legend, the narrator must accomplish the management of contextualization, determined to a significant degree by the formal and functional capacities of the genres brought into dialogue, here *saga* and *vísa*, story and verse. My analysis has been meant to show for this one dialogic form how that generic contextualization gets done. For other mergers, it would have to be accomplished differently. One value of the kind of formal and functional analysis I have attempted, I believe, is its potential for establishing a basis for the comparative investigation of such hitherto poorly understood dialogic genres as a key to a significant dimension of generic creativity. Let me suggest some of the possibilities in a very preliminary way by reference to a few examples.

Consider, for instance, the class of epics known as shamanic epics (Oinas 1978: 293), such as the Finnish *Kalevala* (Lönnröt 1963), which deal in significant part with deeds that are accomplished by magical means. Throughout the *Kalevala* narrative, we find the heroes and heroines employing magical charms. Not surprisingly, in light of our examination of kraftaskáld legends, the virtual transformations given expression in the charms are subsequently reported as having been realized, with the charms pointing ahead and giving shape to these narrative reports. In the *Kalevala*, however, all is in verse. Thus, by contrast with the parallelism of action sequence and occasional lexical cohesion that we observed between the magical verse and the ensuing narrative prose in the story of Páll the Poet, we find a far tighter line-by-line parallelism allowed for in the *Kalevala* between the magical charm and the account of its working:

> Make a cloud spring up in the east, raise up a cloudbank in the northwest
> send others from the west, drive others from the south.
> Shed rain gently from the heavens, sprinkle honey from the clouds on the sprouting shoots, on the murmuring crops.
>
> He made a cloud spring up in the east, raised a cloudbank in the northwest,
> sent another from the west, drove one from the south.
> He pushed them right together, banged them against one another.
> He shed rain gently from the heavens, sprinkled honey from the clouds on the sprouting shoots, on the murmuring crops.
>
> (Lönnröt 1963: 12–13)

Or, take the tale often cited as the prototype of the cante fable, "The Singing Bone" (Grimm no. 28, AT 780), summarized thus by Thompson: "The brother kills his brother (sister) and buries him in the earth. From the bones a shepherd makes a flute which brings the secret to light" (1961: 269). The secret is brought to light by means of a verse sung by the bone flute (hence **cante fable**, singing tale). Here, once again, we have the merger of story and verse, but in this case it is the preceding narrative that

has at least a partial determinative effect on the embedded verse, as the verse recapitulates the preceding action. In "The Singing Bone," the verse, far from being impenetrable as it is in our legend text, is shaped into a narrative sequence of its own by the prose that precedes it.

A similar process is at work in the dialogic form known as the neck riddle, blending narrative and riddle (Abrahams 1980, 1985; Dorst 1983). The term "neck riddle" derives from the common framing of such narratives in terms of a man who saves his neck by propounding a riddle that his executioner cannot answer, but the form also includes the strategic use of unanswerable riddles as a kind of test or wager. According to Abrahams and Dundes (1972: 133), "The essential characteristic of this type is that the riddle must be based on some experience that only the riddler has undergone or witnessed." Perhaps the most widely known example is Samson's riddle (Judges 14: 14) "Out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong came forth sweetness," referring to a lion he had earlier killed by rending it apart and in whose carcass a swarm of bees later nested and produced honey. As in "The Singing Bone," the antecedent narrative gives shape to the inset form, here the riddle, but while the bone flute's verse is meant to reveal what has transpired, the riddle is meant to obscure it, hence the opaque language of the riddle.

These three brief examples represent the merest scratching of the surface of the possibilities suggested by an exploration of dialogic genres. Nor is this process confined to conventional blending alone; there is always the potential of bringing genres into dialogue in more spontaneous and emergent ways (e.g. Sherzer 1979). Ultimately, the exploration of how such generic blendings are accomplished in performance will highlight a creative dimension of human verbal expression that has tended to be obscured by established notions of genre, revealing more closely how people use verbal art in the conduct of their social lives.

Now this illumination of the problem of genre is but one of the outcomes of an examination of this text in terms of the contextualization of discourse by other discourse. Beyond the contextualization of the verse by the story, the other task accomplished by the narrator is the outward contextualization of his story by situating it in a lineage of other tellings or commentaries. This act of contextualization, I have suggested, represents traditionalization in practice. What is accomplished thereby is the authentication of his discourse, the endowing of it and himself with a species of authority, a claim on our attention and interest. Tradition here is a rhetorical resource, not an inherent quality of a story. To be sure, tradition is always such a resource, but in folklore and anthropology traditionalization has overwhelmingly been a resource of intellectual outsiders, a means of selectively and analytically valorizing, legitimizing, and managing aspects of culture frequently not their own by establishing them within lineages of descent and patterns of distribution for scholarly rhetorical and analytical

purposes. Examination of this text highlights the significance of a complementary strategy at the folk level, the active construction of links tying the present to the past. Oral tradition, in these active and local terms, is a particular strategic form of the contextualization of speech *vis-à-vis* other speech, a way that those who use spoken art forms as equipment for living invest what they say with social meaning, efficacy, and value.

There are many implications here for written literature as well, but that would carry me far beyond the scope of this chapter. I will confine myself to one especially relevant example. Devices that establish a linkage between current discourse and earlier discourses have been a prominent focus of discussion in the scholarship devoted to the classic Icelandic sagas, with special reference to saga origins (see, for example, Andersson 1966; Bell 1976; Liestøl 1974 [1930]: 33–4). Proponents of the "freeprose" argument that the sagas are deeply rooted in oral narrative tradition point to the frequent use of such oral "source references" as "*svá er sagt*" (so is said), "*frá því er sagt*" (it is related), "*þat segja menn*" (so men say), or "*er þat flestra manna sǫgn*" (it is the report of most men) as evidence of an active oral tradition antecedent to the written sagas, while adherents of the more literary "bookprose" position tend to dismiss such devices as mere stylistic convention.

While the written sagas as we have them unquestionably represent a literary genre, no one familiar with the dynamics of an oral tradition can doubt that the sagas are strongly tied to such a tradition in Commonwealth Iceland. Debates over origins aside, however, I would maintain that the findings of this chapter concerning the dynamics of traditionalization offer a useful vantage point from which to consider the "source references" of the classic sagas. Like the intertextual linkages forged by the narrator of our kraftaskáld legend, the establishment of ties to other discourses by the writers of the sagas represents traditionalization in action, the active process of contextualizing the saga narratives in a socially constituted field of verbal production that endows them with traditional authority in a society that relied centrally on such authority in the conduct of social life. The source references are stylistic devices in the service of rendering the saga accounts in which they are employed socially authoritative. Whether or not they point to what someone really said in every instance is to this extent beside the point. The rhetorical effect of traditionalization through the weaving of inter-discursive ties is what is significant; this process endows the sagas, like our kraftaskáld legend, with a distinctive element of social groundedness and force.

6 Conclusion

The analysis of folklore in context directs attention to the anchoring of folklore in the social and cultural worlds of its users, to the complex,

multidimensional web of interrelationships that link folklore to culturally defined systems of meaning and interpretation and to socially organized systems of social relations. In the general usage of folklorists, however, the notion of context invokes three principal dimensions of such interrelationships: (1) the context of cultural meaning, that is, what it is one needs to know about a culture to make sense of its folklore; (2) the functional context, social or psychological, that is, how folklore operates to validate social institutions, maintain social solidarity, socialize children, alleviate psychological conflict, and the like; and (3) the situational context, focusing on the social use of folklore in the conduct of social life, within culturally defined scenes and events. If I may venture a generalized, but still, I think, accurate, characterization of these three contextual perspectives, they tend largely to approach folklore from the outside in, constructing a kind of contextual surround for the foklore forms and texts under examination which is seen to have a formative influence upon them. I have endeavored in this chapter, by pursuing a more agent-centered line of analysis, to explore a perspective on context from the inside, as it were, using the text itself as a point of departure, and allowing it to index dimensions of context as the narrator himself forges links of contextualization to give shape and meaning to his expression. The aim is not to dismiss the more collective, institutional, conventional dimensions of context, but ultimately to provide an analytical counterweight to them in the service of moving us closer to a balanced understanding of that most fundamental of all anthropological problems, the dynamic interplay of the social and the individual, the ready-made and the emergent, in human life.

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Notes

1 For discussion of these trends see Bauman (1986, 1987) and Limón and Young (1986).
2 Prominent examples of structural definitions of genre, comprehending both formal structures and the structure of logical relations, include Dundes (1964), Georges and Dundes (1963), Maranda (1971), and Maranda and Maranda (1971). On culturally established systems of genre classification see Abrahams and Bauman (1971), Ben-Amos (1976), and Gossen (1974).
3 Ben-Amos (1984) is a comprehensive review of folkloric conceptions of tradition. Handler and Linnekin (1984), Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983), Hymes (1975b: 353–5), MacCannell (1976), and Williams (1977) have been influential in the reorientation from tradition as persistent cultural objects to tradition as symbolic construction.
4 In Icelandic, kraftaskáld is the same in singular and plural; in this chapter, I have anglicized the plural form.

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