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DISCLAIMERS OF PERFORMANCE

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I first became interested in the concept of performance as part of a general reorientation that has been taking place among students of folklore over the past twenty years or so from a conception of oral literature as things – texts, items, mentifacts – to verbal art as a mode of action, specifically as communication. Performance was an early focus of this reorientation, in part because it conveyed a dual sense of artistic action and artistic event (Bauman, 1977a; Ben-Amos and Goldstein, 1975; Paredes and Bauman, 1972); the ethnography of speaking, from which emerging performance-centered approaches drew much of their impetus, was organized in large part around the analysis of speech acts and events (Bauman, 1987a).

At first, performance was employed as a general cover term for verbal art as action, the situated doing of the artistic oral forms in which we had always been interested. This usage was – and remains – useful in its conception of oral literature as practice, a reuniting of text and context in action. By context here I mean situational context, not simply the general cultural or institutional setting in which a given item of oral literature is grounded, but the communicative event as a social accomplishment (Bauman, 1983). But it soon became apparent that to consider performance simply as the doing of whatever we had considered verbal art in traditional genre- and text-centered terms did not serve very well to advance our understanding of verbal art as a distinctive way of speaking. What was called for, clearly, was a conception of performance as a special mode of communication in its own right. Toward this end, I have myself been engaged for some years in the formulation and exploration of a performance-centered approach to verbal art (Bauman, 1977b, 1986; Stoeltje and Bauman, 1988).

Briefly stated, I understand performance as a metacommunicative frame, the essence of which resides in the assumption of responsibility to an audience for a display of communicative competence (the knowledge and ability to speak in socially appropriate and interpretable ways [Hymes, 1971: 58]), highlighting the way in which verbal communication is carried out, above and beyond its referential content. In this sense of performance, then, the act of speaking is itself framed as display, objecti-

fied, lifted out to a degree from its contextual surroundings, and opened up to scrutiny by an audience. From the point of view of the audience, the act of expression on the part of the performer is thus laid open to evaluation for the way it is done, for the relative skill and effectiveness of the performer's display. Performance thus calls forth special attention to, and heightened awareness of, both the act of expression and the performer. Integral to the conception of performance as a frame that puts on display the intrinsic qualities of the act of communication itself is the way in which this framing is accomplished, or, in Goffman's terms (1974), how performance is keyed. Each community will conventionally make use of a structured set of distinctive communicative means from among its resources to key the performance frame, such that communication taking place within that frame is to be understood as performance within that community. These keys may include special formulae ("Once upon a time ..."), stylizations of speech (e.g. rhyme, parallelism, figurative language), appeals to tradition as the standard of reference for the performer's accountability ("The old people say ..."), special codes (e.g. archaic language), and so on. The culture-specific constellations of communicative means that serve to key performance in particular communities are to be discovered empirically; they may be expected to vary cross-culturally.

Viewed in the terms I have just outlined, performance may be understood as the enactment of the poetic function, the essence of spoken artistry. But the poetic function is but one of a simultaneous multiplicity of speech functions, all of which are always co-present though in variable and shifting hierarchies of dominance (Jakobson, 1971). Accordingly, in any act of speaking, performance may be dominant in the hierarchy of multiple functions served by speech or it may be subordinate to other functions – referential, rhetorical, phatic, metalingual, or any other. Thus, for example, the Kuna *nia ikar*, used primarily to cure mentally deranged persons, may secondarily be appreciated by the hearers for the skill of the curing specialist's speaking; on the other hand, performance becomes primary when the specialist chants the same *ikar* at a puberty rite (Sherzer, 1983:148–9). The relative dominance of performance, then, will depend upon the degree to which the performer assumes responsibility to an audience for a display of communicative skill and effectiveness as against other communicative functions. It may range along a continuum from sustained, full performance (Hymes, 1974a:443), as when a Turkish *aşik* tells his tales at a coffeehouse (Başgöz, 1975), to a fleeting breakthrough into performance, as when a child employs a new and esoteric word in conversation with her peers as a gesture of linguistic virtuosity. Lying somewhere between the two poles might be hedged or negotiated performance, as when a salesman presents an off-color joke as having been picked up from someone else in case it is not well-received by his

client, but tells it as well as he can in the hope that the skill and effectiveness of his presentation may be positively evaluated.

Understandably, our analyses of oral literature have tended to center on forms and instances of apparent – or assumed – full performance. We tend to seek out and record the star performers and favor the most fully artful texts. But we lose something by this privileging of full performance just as we do by taking any doing of an oral literary form as performance. In order to understand the dynamics of performance in all its complexity, we must extend our investigations to performances that are hedged, ambiguous, negotiated, shifting, or partial – instances where speakers may not wish to take full responsibility to their audiences for a display of communicative competence. That is my concern in this paper.

One may find in the literature a very few studies that confront the problematics of performance along the lines I have suggested. The best of these is Dell Hymes' "Breakthrough into Performance" (1975), in which close textual and contextual exegesis of the renderings of three traditional Chinookan oral forms reveals in formal and functional terms the interplay of performance and other communicative frames (report, translation), as well as the key importance of the ethnographer's role in the interaction with regard to the framing of the oral presentation. I might also mention Harvey Sacks' "An Analysis of the Course of a Dirty Joke's Telling in Conversation" (1974), in which Sacks shows how performance can be hedged in such a way that, if audience evaluation of a joke's telling is negative, an intention to perform can be disclaimed and alternative framing of the presentation, already provided for, can be fallen back upon. What I propose to do in this paper is suggest some further extensions of these lines of inquiry into shifting, less than full performance.

The materials I shall treat are all drawn from a single afternoon's work (27 July 1970) with one individual during my fieldwork in the La Have Islands, which lie off the shore of Lunenburg County at the mouth of the La Have River on the south-west coast of Nova Scotia. The group includes about twenty named islands, fourteen of which have been inhabited at one time or another since the late 1840s by the largely Irish and German forebears of the present inhabitants. The islands vary considerably in size, from little more than exposed rocks to several square miles, with the houses ranged around the shore in settlements of from one to more than thirty households per island. Local communities are not confined to single islands, for segments of some adjacent islands are connected, rather than separated, by the channels that flow between them, while various parts of other islands belong to different communities. The region has always been one where people are oriented as much to the water as they are to the land.

The settlement and growth of the La Have Islands were fostered by the development of the Lunenburg County fishing industry. With the depletion of the inshore fishery and the mechanization of offshore fishing, the area has undergone a steady decline. Lobstering is the mainstay of the present economy, supplemented by some inshore fishing, but economic opportunity is severely limited in the area and most of the young people are leaving. At the height of island prosperity, between 1890 and 1925, there were approximately 100 households on the Islands; at the time of my fieldwork, a number of formerly inhabited islands were deserted and the permanent population numbered about 150 people.

A central concern of my fieldwork in the La Have Islands was to explore the locally defined esthetic of spoken language, which led me to a focus on the principal marked occasion for speaking in traditional Island culture, namely, evening sessions of male sociability at the general store (Bauman, 1972). As a people who depended upon fishing for their livelihood, the La Have islanders traditionally had little leisure time during the spring, summer, and early fall months when the weather allowed them to be on the water. It was only during the fall and winter months, when the days were too short and the weather too cold for fishing, that they could enjoy the luxury of leisurely evenings, and it was on these fall and winter evenings that the men congregated at the general store. Every night in this season, from early evening until 11 or 12 o'clock, the store at the north end of Bell's Island was filled with men who gathered to enjoy one another's company in cardplaying and conversation.

One of the major genres that figured in those encounters was the *yarn*. In La Have Island usage, a yarn was a narrative, told and accepted as essentially true, though with some license for creative exaggeration, about something that transcended common knowledge, experience, or expectation. Yarns dealt for the most part with unusual work experiences, travels to distant places, encounters with the supernatural, and memorable local occurrences. An important feature of the yarn was that it should report personal experience or the experience of others with whom the narrator was linked by a chain of transmission, and to whom it could be attributed. Although yarns were told and accepted as essentially true accounts of actual events, it is clear that some at least of the tales of encounters with the supernatural were traditional legends, also found elsewhere but localized by the islanders.

Now, at the time of my fieldwork in 1970, the last general store had been gone for thirty-odd years, and the heyday of the evening sessions had waned even earlier, so, like many ethnographers, I was studying memory culture and my sources were of middle age or older. On the particular afternoon in question, I was working with one of the best of them, a man named Howard Bush, of Bush Island, then eighty-seven years old. My

goal was to record examples of the kinds of yarns that figured so prominently in sessions at the store. While Mr. Bush had been present at many of those sessions, he had never been prominent among the active participants in the story-telling there, partly because pride of place was given to older men and he had still been comparatively young when the period of active story-telling entered its decline. He remembered a fair number of stories from the tellings of others – on that afternoon I recorded fifteen narratives from him – but a number of factors bore heavily on his recounting of them to me, relating to his willingness to assume responsibility for a display of competence in telling them.

First of all, while yarns were understood to be narratives recounting personal experience, my interest in the stories told at the general store constrained Mr. Bush to dredge up and retell what were not for the most part his own stories, but rather ones that had originally been the personal narratives of others. Furthermore, as I have mentioned, one of the basic conventions of yarns was that they be told and accepted as essentially true, with corroborating detail and other devices of verisimilitude, such as direct claims of veracity, appeals to eye-witness knowledge, and so on. Mr. Bush was at an obvious disadvantage here, telling the stories of others called up from distant memory at a remove of up to seventy years or more. Not surprisingly then – I say this with hindsight and hindsight is rarely surprising – our recording session became an extended negotiation about performance (see Briggs, 1986). I propose to look here at four of the yarns I recorded to illustrate some of the dimensions and products of that negotiation.

The first text I shall examine is also the first narrative that Mr. Bush told me during our afternoon session. In arranging my visit with him, I had indicated that I was interested in yarns of the kind told at the general store and when we began our conversation he told me that he had recalled one that he had heard his uncles – participants in the narrated event – tell "dozens of times."

Text 1

There was an old fella, years ago, he lived in La Have River and he kept a shop, a small shop, and he had a small vessel. And every ... about every week he'd come down here trading, uh, goods out of his shop for fish. And he had a monkey. [RB: A pet monkey.] He had a pet monkey. And he'd always bring that with him.

Well, uh, I get kinda worked up, and I can't think about what I want to say. [eleven second pause].

The people would salt their fish in butts, you know, puncheons we call them. And when the fish was forked out it would leave the ... it would leave the pickle about half, half in the butt.

And, uh, the people used to bring cod oil and bring, uh, fish and trade it for these shop goods, you know. And he was always three parts drunk himself. He sold ... he sold some and he was always about three parts, and he'd be in the cuddy and when the people would bring this oil – they'd tell him they was here

with some oil – well, uh, he'd say, "You go measure it." Well they'd measure one gallon of oil and two of water. They sold him more, uh, more water than what they did oil. But he didn't know it at the time.

And the boys – my father then was one of them at that time, but he must've only been a small boy, and his brothers – they was anxious to try to dump this monkey into the puncheon, into the puncheon of pickle (laughs).

So they rigged up a scheme. They took a board and they put it, uh, just on it . . . on a . . . so it wouldn't take much to tip it, you know. But this monkey's jumping around everywhere, like some dogs is. So when he jumps on this board it'll tip him into the pickle.

Anyway, it did. That's 'cause it . . . it dumped him in the puncheon of pickle one day. This old man was three parts drunk. He heard the monkey hollering and, uh, he couldn't find it right away, where it was.

And at last he did find it.

And I don't know how he got it out. That I can't tell you. He mighta maybe put the board down with a slant, and maybe he crawled out. I imagine that's the only way he would get it out.

And, uh . . . I don't know if I can tell you very much more about that or not. I don't think there's very much more to it.

This is a story about a practical joke, of a kind widely told in rural North America; practical jokes and narratives about them are, in fact, part of a unified expressive tradition (Bauman, 1986:33–53). Notwithstanding his having heard the story of the monkey in the pickle dozens of times and having planned to tell it to me in advance of our session, Mr. Bush expresses his difficulty in actually recounting it at two points in the text, once near the beginning, and once at the end. In the first instance, after a reasonably adequate orientation to the story by island standards, introducing the dramatis personae, locating the action in terms of place, and presenting the potentiating conditions for the narrated event, the narration breaks down quite decisively, signaled by Mr. Bush's statement, "Well, uh, I get kinda worked up, and I can't think about what I want to say," followed by an eleven second pause before he resumes the story. Then, at the end of the narrative, he encounters further problems in producing a satisfactory ending. After indicating that the old trader finally did locate his distressed monkey, he runs out of information concerning the narrated event and shifts into a confession of his difficulty in bringing the story to effective closure:

And I don't know how he got it out. That I can't tell you. He mighta maybe put the board down with a slant, and maybe he crawled out. I imagine that's the only way he would get it out.

And, uh . . . I don't know if I can tell you very much more about that or not. I don't think there's very much more to it.

These two trouble spots and Mr. Bush's metanarrational comments concerning them invoke both aspects of communicative competence. The earlier one indicates a breakdown in his *ability* to sustain the narrative

line and the flow of narration, while the second implicates his lack of *knowledge* concerning the outcome of the narrated event and thus of the conclusion of the narrative. Mr. Bush's confession of nervousness and inability to think of what to say after the opening orientation section constitutes a disclaimer of performance on the grounds of an incapacity to continue the very act of narration, though the story was familiar to him from repeated hearings. The problem, apparently, lay in constructing an adequate narration for me, as an outsider. I base this interpretation on the information presented as Mr. Bush resumed the narration after his disclaimer and the lengthy pause that followed, namely, the explanation of the practice of salting fish in barrels. Every adult islander would be expected to know all this, but Mr. Bush appears to have realized that I might not. Because the nature of the pickle is so central to the point of the story, he felt the need to provide the relevant information as his uncles never had to do, and I believe this realization was sufficient to undermine his narration, never strongly confident to begin with.

The difficulty that Mr. Bush encounters at the end of his yarn is of a different nature. Whereas the early breakdown stems from a lapse in his ability to sustain the narration, the problem at the end implicates the other aspect of communicative competence, that is, his lack of knowledge concerning the features of the story that he feels are necessary to an appropriate telling. The problem, as noted, has to do with bringing the narrative to effective closure. Mr. Bush apparently senses that the eventual finding of the monkey in the barrel of pickle, the last thing he recounts with assurance, is not an effective point on which to end the story. A comment on the appearance of the pickled monkey or the reaction of the drunken old trader would have been effective here, exploiting the potential for burlesque provided by the monkey's immersion in the strong brine or the trader's inebriated state, but we cannot know how Mr. Bush's uncles ended the story, or whether he had forgotten what they said. We can observe, though, that Mr. Bush fulfills the need he feels for more detail by speculating, rather anticlimatically, on how the monkey was extricated from the barrel, concerning which he has no definite knowledge. Having suggested what might plausibly have happened, he still feels a lack of closure, and so confesses to a lack of anything else to tell. This, then, is a disclaimer of performance on the grounds of insufficient knowledge. In both instances, whether on the basis of a lack of ability or knowledge, he excuses himself from full competence and thus from full responsibility in recounting the story. The first yarn, however, is the only one in which Mr. Bush's disclaimers of performance invoked his ability to narrate; all subsequent disclaimers appealed to insufficient knowledge, as his nervousness in the encounter diminished.

In the second example (Text 2, below), I had asked Mr. Bush if he had

heard a story told to me by another man, the father of his son's wife. This is, in fact, a localized version of a widely told traditional treasure legend (Granger, 1977:168; Thompson, 1955–8, motifs C401.2, N553.2), of special sociolinguistic interest because of the core motif in which successful recovery of a buried treasure, associated with the devil or other forces of evil, can be achieved only by the strict maintenance of silence; when one of the diggers speaks, an expression of his humanity or a reaffirmation of his human social ties, the treasure is lost, reclaimed by the devil:

Text 2

RB: Did you hear ... [the story about the treasure]?
HB: I don't ... I can't tell any story about it. But, uh,
I know ... I know I heard the story about where they went to dig this chest of money, and, uh, they was down to the chest of money, far enough for to see the handle on it. And they hadn't, uh, they wasn't to speak. There wasn't a word to be spoke. And they had the rope through the handle ...
RB: Mn hmm.
HB: ... for to snake it up out of the ground. And one fellow spoke, and tore the handle right off the chest. They had the handle. They had the handle on the rope.
Now I ... now that's the story I heard, now.
RB: Yeah. That's ... who ... who was it told that story?
HB: I don't know. I don't know. I can't say.
RB: Do you recall how they found that money? Was it in a dream?
HB: No, I don't think ... I don't think so.
They lost the money. The money went down. The Old Fellow to ... took it back again.

Mr. Bush's opening response to my request for this yarn is a disclaimer of his ability to "tell any story about it." But then he proceeds to recount precisely the narrative I was asking about, but framed at both the beginning and the end as a *report* of his having *heard* the story: "I know I heard the story," and "Now that's the story I heard, now." The narrative itself is very lean, containing none of the locational, motivational, or personal orientational information that conventionally opens a yarn: where it happened, what motivated the action, who was involved. Thus, Mr. Bush's opening disclaimer is not a denial that he knew the story, at least in its outlines, nor a breakdown in his capacity to narrate, but a statement of his lack of competence to tell it as a yarn should properly be told. He is unwilling to assume responsibility for an adequate narration, an appropriate telling in island terms. He does produce a narrative, but won't undertake to perform it because he does not know it well enough.

Moreover, the narrative he does present is not even a full outline of the story as he recalls it. He ends his account initially with the tearing of the handle from the treasure-chest. It is only in response to my further questioning – though not in direct answer to my question – that he

provides the additional information that the money was lost, reclaimed by the devil. Thus, consistent with his professed unwillingness to perform the story, resorting rather to a report of having heard it, Mr. Bush's initial report is restricted to what is in effect a metonym of the full story, sufficient to identify it but short of a complete account.

In examining the formal features of the narrative, we may observe that the text is marked by a number of parallel syntactic constructions which become more apparent when it is set out in lines determined by breath pauses (see Tedlock, 1972). I have connected the parallel lines in brackets:

I know I heard the story about where they went to dig this chest
of money,
and uh,
they was down to the chest of money far enough
for to see the handle on it.
And they hadn't, uh,
┌they wasn't to speak.
├There wasn't a word to be spoke.
│ ┌And they had the rope
│ └through the handle
┌┤ for to snake it up off the ground.
│└And one fellow spoke
│ and tore the handle right off the chest.
└ ┌They had the handle.
 └They had the handle on the rope.

I draw attention to the parallelism in the text because this device is frequently employed in oral literature as a key to performance. The question must arise, then, of why parallelism should be so prominent in this text when Mr. Bush has so clearly disclaimed responsibility to perform it. The answer, I believe, is that parallelism is not here as a market of artfulness, but is rather an artifact of the narrator's insecure command of the story line, a means of nailing down successive bits of the story as he recalls them, and as he tries to call up what happens next. The parallel constructions represent a reuse of already proven constructions in lieu of providing new information of which Mr. Bush has relatively little at hand. Parallelism is, after all, a basic device of cohesion in a discourse which can serve, as here, to maintain discursive continuity in the absence of other means to do so. This is an instance of what Silverstein (1984) aptly calls "the pragmatic 'poetry' of prose," the quotation marks around "poetry" indexing the absence of purposeful artfulness. Parallelism is thus not here a key to performance, but an index of its absence.

The third narrative (Text 3, below) has certain features in common with the preceding two but contrasts significantly with them in regard to performance. This is a story that Mr. Bush had from his uncle, from whom he heard it on a number of occasions. Like the account of the lost

treasure, this is a localized version of a widely told legend in which the devil, sitting in on a card game (here because the blasphemous participants had in effect called him into their presence by their swearing) is given away by his monstrous feet (Thompson, 1955–8, motif G303.4.5.3.1):

Text 3

RB: I wanted to ask you also about that Solly Richards story, about the ...

HB: Oh, about the devil (laughs).

RB: Yeah.

[I]

HB: Well, when they was in this old shop playing cards, they played every night, or near about every night outside of Sunday night. It was in Elmer Cane's shop, was called Elmer Cane's shop, well it was Elmer Cane. And they carried on the devil, they swore, you know how it went on, maybe I suppose half tight. And one of them was my uncle, was ... was my wife's [sic: mother's] brother.

[II]

And one night they was playing and a man come to the door. I don't know if he knocked or not. There's no doubt maybe he did, for he was a stranger.

Anyway he went in, and he asked them if he could have a game of cards with them and they said "yeah." And he sat down to the table.

And after a little while one fellow looked under the ... lost a card and he looked down under the table to get to it and he saw this funny looking foot (laughs). Looked like a horse's foot.

They knocked off playing. And he left. The man left.

But I don't remember ... I don't know what to tell you, what he done when he left, but I think he done something to the shop. I think he took a chunk with him. I think he took a piece of the shop with him or tore it to pieces or something.

It was the devil.

RB: Yeah.

[III]

HB: And my uncle told me ... well, he didn't tell me, he told us within the house, all hands. He went home, he went to bed, and he had no rest the whole night. He couldn't get asleep, he said. He was playing cards with the devil all night. He had no rest at all, he said. He was ... like it seemed he was in a blaze of fire. "That settled the card playing there," he said. It settled him and it settled it there.

The text may be seen to fall into three parts, indicated by Roman numerals. The first part (I), the orientation, is fully adequate by traditional standards, setting the scene for the narrated event by place (the shop), participants (including Mr. Bush's uncle), and potentiating action (playing cards, drinking, and especially blasphemy).

The middle section (II) does not display the confidence of the orientation. Here Mr. Bush makes two admissions of ignorance, once with regard to whether or not the devil knocked at the door of the shop, and

later with regard to damage caused by the devil on his hasty departure from the premises. In the former, he is able to make some effort toward supplying circumstantial detail of the kind called for by the genre by drawing on his cultural knowledge concerning island etiquette: strangers are required to knock before entering. Nevertheless, he hedges his guess by saying, "There's no doubt maybe he did," the "maybe" undoing the apparent certainty of "There's no doubt." Concerning the damage to the shop, his memory fails him again, but here he has no cultural knowledge to furnish narratively relevant information. Accordingly, he confesses, "I don't know what to tell you," that is, in effect, "I don't have sufficient information to sustain an appropriate narrative performance at this point." Here again, the apparent syntactic parallelism of "I think he done something to the shop"/"I think he took a chunk with him"/"I think he took a piece of the shop with him," are not keys to performance but indices of insecurity, the repetition of the same syntactic frame while trying to dredge up additional forgotten elements of the story.

In the concluding part of the narrative, however, Mr. Bush is on his firmest ground yet. Note that here the narrated event has shifted; he is no longer recounting the encounter with the devil in Elmer Cane's shop but his uncle's later account to himself and others concerning the effects of the diabolical experience. Here Mr. Bush was himself a participant and can supply a full personal account. At this point, his mode of presentation shifts markedly. I have set out this concluding passage in lines to make its artfulness more clearly apparent:

He went home, he went to bed,
and he had no rest the whole night.
He couldn't get asleep, he said.
He was playing cards with the devil all night.
He had no rest at all, he said.
He was . . . like it seemed he was in a blaze of fire.
"That settled the card playing there," he said.
It settled him and it settled it there.

The passage is marked, first of all, by parallel syntactic constructions in the first six lines and the last two lines of the above excerpt, making for two parallel sets. This is not the hesitant, repetitive, insecure parallelism of the earlier examples; beginning with "He went home," Mr. Bush's voice becomes louder, more forceful, and higher in pitch, and in the seventh line the quoted speech of the uncle's statement takes on a shift in voice, re-enacting his emphatic delivery. Moreover, the lines display perceptible patterns of rhythmic stress, with two beats in the first line and four in each of the remaining lines (the sixth line is garbled):

He went hóme, he went to béd,
and he had nó rést the whóle night.
He coúldn't gét asleép, he sáid.
He was pláying cárds with the dévil all night.
He had nó rést at áll, he sáid.
He was . . . like it seemed he was in a bláze of fire.
"That séttled the cárd playing thére," he sáid.
It séttled hím and it séttled it thére.

This is a breakthrough into performance, signaled, or keyed, by this confidently rendered, mutually reinforcing set of formal devices: syntactic, prosodic, and paralinguistic.

The final narrative we shall consider is a local character anecdote, recounting an event at which Mr. Bush himself was present. As it happens, the event took place at the general store itself, in a milieu of male sociability within which such stories were characteristically told:

Text 4

RB: One story I know you know about was Frank Bell and the eggs.

HB: Right. Yes, that I know is true. That I seen him do. I sat right, right in the shop and seen him, seen him do that.

He always used to torment Aubrey Sperry, that was the boss of the shop, 'bout he could . . . he could suck three dozen eggs and eat the shell of the last one. Well, every time he came to the shop he'd be tormenting Aubrey. At last, Aubrey got kinda tired of it.

One day he come up starting in, he says, "I could suck three dozen eggs and eat the shell of the last one, and I want a bet for five dollars." Aubrey goes to the till and he lays down a five-dollar bill and he counts out three dozen eggs.

And . . . oh, there was – I don't know – maybe seven or eight young fellows, lot though, not my age, but young, young fellows, sitting around. All hands begin to laugh. He didn't go right away, you see, and they begin to laugh. Well, he thought they was laughing at him while he didn't take right ahold of the eggs. He was going to take back water [i.e. back off], and it looked like if he was going to take back water. But we laughed at him, and then that give him . . . he went to work at it.

Now I don't know how many he sucked – he punched the holes in the ends and he . . . I guess he must have sucked pretty near a dozen the first time. Then he lit his old pipe. He had a little smoke, not very long. He took a couple more, half a dozen or so. And that's the way, till he had them all down. He'd suck so many and then he'd have a little smoke. And he talked a very, very short time, and he left. "I guess I'll go home."

He went down the road, not very far down the road, there was a man coming up while he was going down – they passed when they was coming up – and they seen where he stood right over there and vomit them up. He put his finger down, you see, and he vomit them up, so that they wouldn't make him sick (laughs).

In this story, by contrast with others, Mr. Bush is fully secure in his performance from beginning to end. The key factor, obviously, is that this yarn allows him to speak from his own personal experience as a marginal

participant, as he is clear to establish at the outset: "Yes, that I know is true. That I seen him do. I sat right, right in the shop and seen him, seen him do that." Not only can he testify directly to the veracity of the story, but he can supply abundant circumstantial detail, a hallmark of good yarn narration. The two fleeting departures from the assured and fluent narration that characterizes his telling of this story occur in his hedging about exactly how many men were in the shop and exactly how many eggs Frank Bell sucked before taking up his pipe for the first time, small lapses quickly redressed by settling on the figure of seven or eight young fellows and a dozen eggs. This is, on the whole, a confident narration. With this yarn, then, Mr. Bush is ready to take full responsibility for correct, authoritative performance, keyed by his opening appeals to firsthand knowledge and the resultant truthfulness and reliability of his account.

The four narratives we have examined are, as I have indicated, selected from a total of fifteen told to me by Howard Bush in the course of one afternoon. Nevertheless, I believe they serve well to illustrate the negotiated and shifting dynamics of his narration *vis-à-vis* performance. The first of his yarns, about the monkey in the pickle, highlights clearly the two dimensions of communicative competence on which performance rests, namely, the knowledge and ability to communicate in socially appropriate and interpretable ways. In Mr. Bush's attempt to recount this narrative, each in its turn serves as a basis for a disclaimer of performance, that is, a statement of unwillingness to assume responsibility to his audience for a display of skill and effectiveness in story-telling. Early in the story, Mr. Bush confesses an inability to proceed with the act of narration itself because he can't think of what to say, and his speech is broken off for a time until he can gather his thoughts sufficiently to resume. Then, toward the end of the story, he excuses himself from responsibility on the basis of insufficient knowledge to render the story effectively by local standards. Thus, first a lack of ability, then a lack of knowledge constitute the basis for his incapacity to perform the narrative.

In the next text, about the lost treasure, performance is again disclaimed on the basis of inadequate knowledge of the story. Here Mr. Bush undertakes only to report the yarn, which he does by presenting just the core motif as a metonym of the complete narrative.

In the story of the devil as cardplayer, by contrast, we find a more complex dynamic at work. Mr. Bush's presentation reveals a shifting hierarchy of dominance in this text, in which he is willing to assume responsibility for the correct doing of the orientation section, disclaims performance in the course of recounting the central narrated event – the recognition of the devil by his fellow cardplayers and his departure through the wall of the shop – and breaks through into full artistic performance at the end, where the narrated event has shifted to one in

which he himself was present, namely, his uncle's account of the terrible aftermath of his diabolical encounter.

In the final example, the anecdote about Frank Bell and the eggs, the narration is framed fully as performance. Here, Mr. Bush is able to assume responsibility for a display of narrative competence throughout, sustained by his own eye-witness participation in the actual event.

What implications can we draw from this sampling of four narratives and the presentational dynamics that give them shape? First, I would like to argue, on the basis of this exploration, for the productiveness of considering performance not as any doing of an oral literary form, but as one of the range of interactionally defined presentational modes, or frames, which may be more or less functionally dominant in any act of spoken communication or at any given point during its course. This perspective allows us to chart more closely the culturally shaped, socially constituted, and situationally emergent individuation of spoken art. Investigations along these lines, must, of course be founded on the ethnographically determined understanding of the standards of communicative competence that are placed on display in performance, and how the speaker signals or disclaims the accountability to an audience for a display of competence. All of these factors are to be discovered in community specific contexts; what may be accomplished by code switching in the breakthrough into performance by Philip Kahclamet, as reported by Hymes (1975), may be signaled by certain formal patterns or claims to eye-witness knowledge by Howard Bush. Likewise, a disclaimer of performance may itself be a key to full performance, as in the Iroquois oratory described by Michael Foster (1974b:84), or, as in the case of Mr. Bush's narration, it may signal a genuine unwillingness to be accountable for performance. Moreover, while there are a number of devices and patterning principles that have been widely documented as features of verbal art, the discovery of keys to performance cannot rely on a priori formal assumptions about what constitutes artful language. Our analysis has suggested, for example, that parallelism, identified by Jakobson as constitutive in the poetic function (1960), may be an artifact of an incapacity to perform, a signal, indeed, of the absence of performance. On the other hand, a fully crafted use of parallelism, reinforced and intensified by other formal features and evidences of presentational confidence, may in fact key a display of communicative competence in the performance of the same individual. Only by close ethnographic analysis of form–function interrelationships in situated contexts of use can such nuances be discovered.

Finally, I would underscore the importance of a sensitivity to the influence of the ethnographer on the dynamics of performance. The situation and the audience may have a determinative effect on a speaker's

willingness to assume responsibility for a display of communicative competence and this is no less true when the audience is an ethnographer than under conditions of so-called "natural" native performance – another problematic concept. It is evident that the texts produced by Howard Bush are, to a substantial degree, the emergent products of my casting him in the role of oral narrative performer, and of his own ambivalence about assuming that responsibility because of a sense of the limits of his competence to do so. This can hardly be a unique situation; I have observed a similar dynamic in other fieldwork encounters not my own. But just as presenters of oral literature may subtly reject the mantle of performer that we wish to impose upon them, so too many individuals from whom we seek straightforward ethnographic information perform to us without our being aware of it (Paredes, 1977). Ethnographers, like linguists, have a strong bias toward the referential function of language – we tend to believe what we are told and expect straight answers to our questions – but we are all susceptible to being performed to, and we must be able to understand when the forces of performance take precedence over straightforward referentiality. A sensitivity to performance is thus a necessary part of critical, reflexive ethnography, not only in the study of oral literature but in fact in all instances of data gathering through verbal interaction with native sources. Thus, I submit, the more we can learn about performance, the better will be not only our understanding of oral literature but our general practice of ethnography as well.