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This thesis is an examination of the genre of the personal narrative in light of contemporary folkloristic theory. A theoretically derived genre, the personal narrative's inclusion into the discipline of folklore in the late 1970s and early 1980s was a result of developmental phases of inquiry into the nature of oral expression since the inception of the study of folklore. The thesis traces these phases in order to explain how current concepts of tradition and performance in folkloristics have developed and how these concepts have contributed to the theoretical feasibility of studying personal narratives. In terms of tradition based on conventions of oral expression and in terms of the artistry of performance, the personal narrative genre is defined, and then an example of a personal narrative, "Can Cattle Grow Thistles?", is explicated with emphasis on an analysis of its form, style, content, and function.

As a guide to research that utilizes personal narratives, the thesis

proposes that they be collected and interpreted by using reader-response methodologies of literary criticism, and, in turn, that they be interpreted in terms of their cultural significance. While contemporary folkloristics favors the analysis of personal narratives over the collecting of them, this thesis stresses the necessity to do both equally. The appendix includes seventeen examples of personal narratives--personal anecdotes, character anecdotes, and occupational stories--that are annotated in order to illustrate allusions that are significant to the culture of the Flint Hills.

"TIPPED ASTRONOMERS AND OUTLAW HORSES": A GUIDE TO THE PERSONAL NARRATIVE GENRE

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Introduction

A consideration of the genre of the personal narrative necessitates a presentation of it first in terms of what has led to its inclusion within folkloristics and then in the light of contemporary theories of folklore.[1] Because the genre itself is theoretically derived, its definition requires an understanding of the shifts or changes in the approaches to oral expression since the inception of the study of folklore. For example, throughout the history of folkloristics, folklorists have emphasized traditionality, but current notions of tradition are understood more in terms of the conventions of oral expression used in the communication of folklore than in terms of its basis on historical fact. Without some kind of understanding as to how this change in one of folklore's fundamental tenets occurred, a definition of the personal narrative genre would make little sense. Moreover, the same is true for contemporary concepts of individual artistry, performance, and the situated use of folklore. These concepts and others allowed for the emergence of personal narrative study in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

In the first chapter of this thesis, I explore the developmental phases of oral narrative study that have provided folkloristics with grounds for the conceptualization of contemporary folklore theory--the literary historic-geographical method of folktale research, the cynosure of early folkloristics; the merger of literary and anthropological approaches to folklore from roughly the 1930s until the 1960s, evident in many of the definitions of folklore articulated at the time; and the rise of performance theory in the 1970s and 1980s, the impetus which gave rise to the personal narrative genre.

Chapter two offers a much more focused consideration of many of the concepts of current folklore theory touched upon in chapter one, particularly the artistry of performance, tradition, and the relationship of folklore to society

and culture . In light of an understanding of these concepts and in light of chapter one's delineation of the inclusion of the personal narrative into folkloristics, I offer a definition of the personal narrative, using the most frequently cited theories by other scholars who have defined the genre. I focus on a personal narrative told to me by a resident of Cassoday, Kansas, in the east central region of the state known as the Flint Hills, in order to explicate it and illustrate its folkloric credentials.

My principal purpose for doing a thesis on the personal narrative genre, however, is to present and define it for other folklorists in Kansas and the Midwest. Throughout other regions of the United States, folklorists have focused on the personal narrative to present the folklore of several different folk groups. Not only have these folklorists presented collections of personal narratives, they have also offered extensive commentary on the significance of these collections. Current folkloristics requires this kind of scholarship. This thesis is my proposal to scholars and critics with an interest in the folklore of this area to utilize the personal narrative genre much more frequently than in the past. It is also a guide to the kind of research currently being undertaken in the light of folkloristics that attempts to explain folklore's significance in culture. I provide numerous examples of this kind of research that one would do well to consult. In the appendix I have included several examples of personal narratives I recorded from two storytellers in the fall of 1992 and the spring of 1993. Where I have thought it necessary, I have annotated these stories to further illustrate the uniqueness and genuineness of the personal narrative genre in terms of the culture and society of the Flint Hills, an area where these stories flourish.

Chapter One

The Evolution of Folkloristics and the Inclusion of the Personal Narrative Genre

Before raising questions concerning research into the personal narrative, thought should be given to what has led to its inclusion within the discipline of folklore in the first place. Since there are so many reasons to explain its emergence and persistence in contemporary folklore studies that call for reservation because of the exceptions raised, questions concerning the rise of the personal narrative are highly speculative. Historically, nonetheless, the degree and nature of interest in the personal narrative is indicative of developmental phases of oral narrative study and also the increasing willingness of folklorists to adapt theories and methods developed by other disciplines in their approach to narration.

Since the inception of the study of folklore, there has been a gradual shift or change in the approaches to oral expression. Maintaining an emphasis on the given that folklore is traditional, for example, contemporary notions of tradition are much more relative than in earlier understandings of it. Today, tradition is not so much based on historical fact, retellings of cultural precedent traceable through time and space, as it is based on the conventions of oral expression used to communicate those tellings within varying, traditional, social and cultural contexts (Bronner, Creativity 2-3; Ben-Amos, "Seven Strands of Tradition" 26-28). Obviously, what this has meant for folklorists in pursuit of personal narratives is significant because it has given them room to work with more readily occurring forms besides the folktale, myth, and legend, which were for so long the emphasized genres of narrative in folklore studies. The search for creativity of a folk nature calls attention to individual artistry in

varied forms and is reflective of current trends in folklore scholarship to get back to the folk after the largely theoretical and impersonal decades of scholarship in the 1970s and 1980s. In these two decades folklore was recognized as a dynamic force in people's lives, as a self-expression of significant encounters with the realities of society and the environment. Thus, folklore, in all of its complexity, has become something that is much more operative than was thought throughout the nineteenth century and for much of the twentieth century.

THE LITERARY HISTORIC-GEOGRAPHICAL METHOD OF FOLKTALE RESEARCH

During these early years, folklore was not nearly as democratic as it is today. Early folklorists mainly placed critical emphasis on the folktale, myth, and legend and worked under a much more narrowly defined set of principles regarding narrative. By making no clearcut distinctions initially between literary narratives and oral narratives, these scholars created a conceptual foundation from which to study archaic written and unwritten fictional stories. In fact, as MacEdward Leach has argued of folklore collected in the past, it was collected more as written literature than as oral literature; one discovers from many early collections that it was collected with few examples or descriptions of how it was communicated, as if it were "eye literature, rather than ear literature" (Leach 335). The precedent for this kind of scholarship was established by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm in 1812, the year the first edition of their Kinder und Hausmarchen appeared (Thompson, The Folktale 368). This work offered the first serious consideration of fictional oral narratives. Even though the Grimms had given little thought to the international aspect of folktales when their work was first published, they helped to create interest in similar tales in locations outside of Germany, and they raised the question of

how resemblances among tales and their identical plots could be explained. The final statement of the theories of the Grimm brothers was made by Wilhelm Grimm in 1856:

> Such stories may be compared with the isolated words which are produced in nearly or entirely identical form in languages which have no connection with each other, by the mere imitation of natural sounds. We do meet with stories of this kind in which the resemblance can be attributed to accident, but in most cases the common root-thought will by the peculiar and frequently unexpected, nay, even arbitrary treatment, have received a form which quite precludes all acceptation of the idea of a merely apparent relationship. . . .
>
> Wherever assured and well-established order and usages prevail, wherever the connection between human sentiment and surrounding nature is felt, and the past is not torn asunder from the present, these stories are still to be found. . . . Fragments of a belief dating back to the most ancient times, in which spiritual things are expressed in a figurative manner, are common to all stories. The mythic element resembles small pieces of a shattered glass which are lying strewn on the ground all overgrown with grass and flowers, and can only be discovered by the most far-seeing eye. Their significance has long been lost, but it is still felt and imparts value to the story, while satisfying the natural pleasure in the wonderful. They are never the iridescence of an empty fancy. The further we go back, the more the mythical element expands: indeed it seems to have formed the only subject of the oldest fictions. . . . (qtd. in Thompson, The Folktale 369)

Grimm speaks of the folktale in a general sense here, but he puts forward two ideas that were to secure general acceptance as late as the 1940s: (1) the idea that folktales and other fictional narratives share ancestors of a common antiquity; (2) the idea that fictional oral narratives are somehow the aesthetic equivalent to written fictional narratives. These notions give expression to what is generally regarded as the Literary Historic-Geographical method of comparative folklore.

Inspired by the Grimms, scholars began to collect directly from human subjects what they conceived to be ancient tales, while other scholars searched through early manuscripts and printed works in an attempt to find pre-nineteenth- century narratives that seemed to be literary antecedents or counterparts of stories recorded and reported by fieldworkers (Georges, "Folktale" 159). The assumption in early folklore studies that there was little or no difference between the aesthetic quality of oral and written narratives was one reason why the differences between written and unwritten narratives were of little importance. The fact that stories of unknown, obscure origins had been or were being transmitted over and over again, however, was primary in early studies of fictional narratives. The theory that folktales, myths, and legends of one location have similar forms in other locations led early folklorists to believe that these genres had common origins in the ancient past and was a natural result of the great interest in comparative philology in the early years of the nineteenth century. It was at this time that linguists were busy reconstructing the parent Indo-European language from which descended most of the languages of Europe (Thompson, The Folktale 371; Georges, "Process" 320). Consequently, the thinking among early scholars used to ground the comparative method of tracing the history of folktales back to a common origin included criteria for finding linguistic commonalities or "traditionalities," . . . "morphemes, words, expressions, and syntactic structures discernible in the

language of a text; seemingly 'primitive' or 'outmoded' notions conceived to underlie or to be implicit in narrative content; and references or allusions [in a tale] to individuals, events, or practices known or presumed to be of, or associated with, past eras" (Georges, "Folktale" 166). In early folklore this orientation to tradition was accepted *a priori;* the tales individuals told were thought to be linguistic survivals from the past.

The earliest publications of folktales from Europe consist, for the most part, of story texts discovered in little known and relatively inaccessible written sources or recorded directly from storytellers and translated into the native languages of the audiences for whom they had been gathered together. Characteristic of these early collections is that little information is provided about the individual storytellers from whom the tales had been obtained or about the circumstances under which the tales had been told and recorded (Elizabeth Fine 28; Georges, "Process" 321).[2] The general linguistic or plot similarities among folktales collected in Europe were readily apparent to editors of these early publications. "Many an old nursery favourite will be recognised through its Greek disguise by English children when they read. . . this book," wrote E.M. Geldart in the Preface to his Folk-Lore of Modern Greece: The Tales of the People (Introduction v). The point of view implicit in this remark is typical of that of most folklorists writing in the nineteenth century. As a rule they did not include many editorial comments and their interpretive statements tend to be relatively brief because they were more appropriately interested in the texts or records of tales than they were in the individuals from whom the stories had been elicited. The tenacity with which early investigators plotted the historical and geographical distribution of folktales demanded more of an allegiance to texts of tales and less of an interest in the tellers who communicated them. However, folktales collected in Europe are explained and interpreted as being tales told repetitively by a

collective "folk mind," and in this regard, they tend to be viewed as primary data that provides proof of the lifestyle of the peasantry, specifically its stereotypical simple and idyllic characteristics. (Georges, "Process" 321-22). Although it would seem there was an interest in the human context of oral expression in early folklore, it is extenuated by the significance such a context yielded in collective terms rather than in terms of the individual context of a storyteller speaking to his audience. In this sense researchers assumed that those who were communicating traditional folktales evolved from some kind of ancient parent culture with their stories intact, suggesting that among these "bearers of tradition" were common lifestyles and worldviews.

As the comparative study of folktales attracted more and more researchers throughout the nineteenth century, however, and as large quantities of new forms of tales became available as a result of the efforts of folklorists to provide more comprehensive historical and geographical coverage of traditional folktales, it was inevitable that early assumptions about the origin and nature of these forms would come under increasing scrutiny. Furthermore, as the reliability of story data increased as a result of more careful and intensive recording methods and techniques, scholars began to become increasingly aware of the fact that differences in folktales, which early investigators had tended to ignore or which they conceived to be relatively unimportant, would have to be accounted for in some way (Fine 30). These developments had significant effects upon folktale scholarship in Europe and an important influence on research in America into the twentieth century. As many folktales were found to be of more recent origin than had been assumed, questions as to their common origin in some ancient culture increased. Moreover, the differences that had become apparent in the folktales of different groups of people became increasingly more significant and suggested that the tellers of tales either were more innovative than originally thought or

that they were descendants of multiple cultural origins rather than just one. Consequently, a number of alternative theories were developed to explain these accounts, each of which was based, with a few extremely important exceptions, on the prevailing thought concerning the likelihood that European peoples descended from multiple prehistoric cultures (Thompson , The Folktale 367-90).[3] Very few of these theories, at first, addressed questions concerning the innovative abilities of narrators other than to suggest, on the one hand, that storytellers were creating kinds of communicative distortions or "variations" in the process of narrating stories over and over. On the other hand, as Georges observes, "there were explanations based upon what can be termed 'the principle of adaptability,' stories. . . adapted to differing physical environments or to various linguistic, cultural, [and] local . . . subgroups, resulting in the perpetuation of distinctive variants . . . of traditional stories or tale-types" ("Folktale" 161). Common to these explanations was the assumption that the variations that occur in tales were relatively minor and inconsequential, especially in terms of individual narrative ability. Other than a means to trace the histories of folktales and, in turn, the origins of mankind, variations in tales received little emphasis. Since tales were thought to be traditional in the first place, researchers assumed that the similarities they exhibited included their variations. Thus, differences among tales became essential to proving their traditionality.

Eventually, however, the acknowledgement that folktales of different origins could be altered as they were communicated directly among tellers revealed to a few scholars the need for modification in the conceptual foundation for storytelling research, because it implied that narrators were not merely tellers of preexisting tales, but that they often created their own alterations. The development of an awareness that tales can change in the natural human process of their communication prompted a shift in emphasis

from the stories people tell to those who tell stories and to the act of storytelling itself (Fine 30-31; Georges, "Folktale" 161-62). Consequently, in the later years of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, publications of tales began to be supplemented with information about narrators and descriptions of individual and cultural storytelling styles and practices.

This movement in folktale research helped to create the conditions that would later lead to the inclusion of personal narratives in folklore by establishing the anthropological emphasis necessary for research into these forms. Although, initially, American folklorists could muster little acceptance of personal narratives and similar forms, the turning of the tide for their widespread acceptance occurred in the years after World War II. In response to a lack of success in finding additional archaic folktales in the modernized world and as a result of new interests in the social and cultural function of the act of storytelling, folklorists developed a new kind of approach to oral narration by combining their interest in literary aesthetics and stylistic patterning of fictional narratives with anthropological methods for analyzing culture (Degh, "When I Was Six" 99-100; Bauman, "American" 362-65; Dundes, "The Concept" 238-42; Georges, "Toward" 314-15; Fine 6-8, 16-18). Conceptually, folklore of this nature created grounds that allowed folklorists to recognize the value of personal accounts containing true information on the life, work, and worldview of individuals in various communities and cultures, and prompted them systematically to record autobiographical stories. This kind of orientation to traditional folklore items of the nineteenth century was gradually changed during the twentieth century to include orientation to and open-minded search for any form of narrative communication. Life experiences, people's reflections on reality, and reaction to encountering, creating, and being affected by events, places, and people became new sources of folklore in the modern world.

ANTHROPOLOGICAL AND LITERARY DEFINITIONS OF FOLKLORE: THE DEVELOPMENT OF INTERDISCIPLINARY FOLKLORISTICS

Unfortunately, the majority of early American folklorists concerned with oral expression, unlike their European colleagues, neglected the study of narration, i.e., of the creative process of storytelling, until relatively late in this century. Research into narratives other than folktale, myth, and legend could not emerge in early twentieth century American folklore because the study of other more prevalent forms was discouraged by the literary historic-geographic framework with which, for the most part, folklorists worked during this time. By retaining the concern of their nineteenth century predecessors for the comparative identification and classification of folktales and other fictional forms, they militated against theories of other scholars, mainly anthropologists, who tended to engage in more synchronic studies of individual cultures in order to determine the relationships between narrative content and aspects of social structure or the psychological implications of narrative content for individual members of particular cultures (Georges, "Toward" 313-15; Penniman 15-17). Within the field of anthropology, itself a maturing discipline in the early decades of this century, the study of cultures revealed that individuals can be affected by cultural reality and provided evidence for hypotheses about the nature of society and the dynamics of individual participation in culture (Voget 317). But because narrative research existed primarily as a means of achieving a historical understanding of mankind's origins and as a means of preserving the lore of the past, little contribution was made to knowledge of oral expression in terms of living cultures and their forms of narration. This can best be understood in light of early definitions of folklore and the theoretical biases of leading American folklorists.

There are essentially two perspectives which, in various combinations,

answer the question of what is American folklore. Because of certain theoretical and methodological differences inherent in these perspectives, there have always been tensions between scholars of each position. One perspective, largely held by literary folklorists, views American folklore more as folklore in America, an aggregate of the diverse oral traditions imported to America by various groups that constitute the American people. In this conception American folklore mainly consists of surviving remnants of old ways brought to America as it was colonized and populated (Bauman, "American" 362). The second approach, held more by anthropological folklorists than by literary folklorists, views American folklore as an emergent and living cultural phenomenon, born of the interplay among various groups of people, both foreign and indigenous, that populated America and their distinctive American experience. The former view, in the tradition of nineteenth century scholarship, looks for preservation of traditions transplanted into America from other locations, and for continuation of the historical and geographical search for the origins of mankind; the latter view explores the growing and shaping of a distinctive American brand of folklore, living in the present. The perspectives of individual folklorists in America have consistently run along a two-way street between these fundamentally opposite positions.[4]

American folklore has a long history of differing opinions along these two lines. William Wells Newell, for example, one of the founders of the American Folklore Society in 1888 (Bronner, American Folklore 16), articulated a view that contained elements of the first position. He emphasized the need to collect the "relics" of "Old English Folk-Lore" in the United States, spoke of the survival of French and Spanish folklore in the New World, and directed attention to the imported folklore of the German, Irish, Bohemian, Russian, Armenian, and Japanese immigrants to American cities ("On the field" 3-7;

"Folk-Lore" 231-42). All of this represents the view that American folklore is made up of traditions brought from somewhere else.

When writing of African Americans, however, Newell reveals a different perspective:

> The true character of the plantation Negro, a mystery to his former masters, who viewed him only from the outside, is to be found in his folk-lore. The interesting music, which he has developed in his new home, hitherto imperfectly recorded and understood, offers a series of problems of the utmost importance to the theory of the art, exhibiting as it does the entire transition from speech to song. ("Folk-Lore" 233)

Here is a distinctively American form of folklore, with affinities to the imported folklore perspective, but unquestionably the product of an American experience. Newell's implication that the plantation Negro should be understood through his folklore internally follows the second view of folklore as living and emergent.

Alexander Krappe, another early folklorist, represents an extreme version of the first position on American folklore when he writes that:

> There exists no such thing as American folklore, but only European (or African, or Far Eastern) folklore on the American continent, for the excellent reason that there is no American 'folk.' . . . The fact is that 'folk' cannot be transplanted by colonization and centuries are required for a renewed growth of traditions on the new and hence thoroughly uncongenial soil. . . . American folklore, then, means the folklore imported by Europeans, Africans, and Orientals. There is nothing American about it, and the very term 'American folklore' is a bad misnomer. (qtd. in Bauman, "American" 363)

Krappe's position rests on a special view of the folk as having a long established tradition; in this respect, he was following the European conception of folklore.

Toward the opposite extreme is Richard Dorson, one of the major influences in American folklore studies of this century, who claims that American folklore is the product of the American historical process. Dorson finds the foundation of American folklore in the great movements of American history: exploration and colonization, revolution and the establishment of a democratic republic, the westward surge, the tides of immigration, the slavery debate that erupted into the Civil War, and the triumph of technology and industrialization. Dorson argues that these forces have affected the folk traditions brought into the United States from Europe, Africa, and Asia, and that they have shaped and created new folklore, or new adaptations of old folklore themes ("Historical" 336). This conception takes account of the perspective of folklore in America, and yet views what appears to be outside components in American culture as a distinctive part of the American tradition, altered through its history.

It is important to note that the view of American folklore as living and generative is built upon a fundamentally pluralistic conception of American society and culture, more so than the view that maintains that American folklore is comprised of relics of other cultures that immigrated America. The former view is much more integrative of various cultural contexts and shows a willingness on the part of folklorists who subscribe to it to look for purely American qualities in the cultural diversity indicative of the United States. In the history of American folklore studies, however, there is a widespread tendency to treat the elements derived outside of America in the conception of American folklore as somehow having priority, historically and proportionately, as in Newell's emphasis on Old English Folk-Lore, or Krappe's special

emphasis on the "old stock" of English folklore.

The problem with the practice of giving priority to elements of American culture derived from other places, a practice, fortunately, that is now outmoded, is that it delayed efforts of folklorists to form innovative theories of folklore in contextual terms, that is, in terms favorable to the view of folklore as living and functional within American culture. When such theories were developed and applied, usually by anthropologists, they were used to explain Native American cultures and other groups, such as African Americans.[5] In regard to Native Americans there was always some question whether they were part of American society in the same way as Americans of European and English descent (Bauman, "American" 364; Dundes, "The Concept" 230). Because the dominant conception of folklore until as late as the 1940s consisted of survivals or relics of old and traditional ways of life found in the verbal record of people who immigrated to America, the concept of the folk consisted of the agrarian class of American society where these items were thought to survive. By such criteria, Native Americans are excluded in early conceptions of American folklore, on two counts: they do not fit the popular definition of folk because they are indigenous to America; and because of this, their customs, expressions, and rituals, while integral to their contemporary culture, are not survivals, and therefore are not folklore (Bauman, "American" 364).

Newell restated the problem early by distinguishing between folklore and mythology: "The appellation 'mythology' will . . . be applied to that living system of tales and beliefs which, in primitive peoples, serves to explain existence; 'folklore' was primarily invented to describe the unwritten popular traditions of civilized countries" ("Folk-Lore and Mythology" 163). The distinction notwithstanding, Newell believed that since the popular oral traditions of both civilized society and primitive society "were formally

isomorphic and genetically homologous, it was productive to study them together" (Bauman, "American" 364). As is well documented, Newell was apparently compelled to include both folklore and mythology in one conception of American folklore because folklorists and anthropologists of the American Folklore Society made demands for their inclusion (Bauman, "American" 364; Bronner, American Folklore 16-17; Fine 17). This illustrates the earliest signs of strain in what has remained an uneasy marriage between folklore and anthropology in the United States. The significance of this merger, however, cannot be exaggerated in terms of contemporary folklore theory and the inclusion of the personal narrative genre into folklore studies. If these two fields had remained separate, the current holistic and interdisciplinary approach to oral expression might never have emerged.

Although the history of the relationship between anthropologists and folklorists is one marked by strong differences in the theoretical approaches to folklore and the methods with which theory is applied, gradually in the first half of the twentieth century, and even later in many cases, an awareness developed that anthropological theory could contribute to folklore methodology. One must recall that in nineteenth century Europe, folklore was conceived of as a historical linguistic science. The aim of early scholars was as much of a way to preserve what was thought to be the ancient lore of past cultures as it was a way simply to document the evolution and diffusion of oral traditions. In the United States the early folklorists who formed the aristocracy of folklore scholarship looked to the past as had their European precursors. Scholars such as Francis James Child, Newell, George Kittredege, Archer Taylor, and Stith Thompson sought to reconstruct past forms from present folklore. They provided folklore with distinction, as well as a following of scholars who were interested in the folklore of the past. Child, "the great ballad student," made Harvard University at the end of the nineteenth century the unrivaled center

in America for the study of folklore (Thompson, The Folktale 403). Thompson's Motif-Index of Folk-Literature has had a lasting influence on the organization of large bodies of material for folktale research. In addition, the development of one of the principal American contributions to folklore theory, the oral-formulaic theory of Milman Parry and Albert Lord, was motivated by an interest in cultures of the past. Parry's and Lord's extensive fieldwork in Yugoslavia and their detailed analyses of Serbo-Croatian folk epics were undertaken principally because of the hope that an analysis of present-day epic creation would shed light on the epic-making techniques employed in Homer's day (Fine 34).[6] Inasmuch as the majority of American folklorists were either trained or heavily influenced by these scholars, emphasis on the origins of oral tradition, borrowed from European methodologies, dominated early American folklore studies.

Nevertheless, to an equal or perhaps even greater degree, early American anthropological folklorists contributed to folklore theory and methodology by documenting the fallacy of the nineteenth-century European notion that folklore reflects only the past and is evidence for some kind of grand evolutionary cultural design (Voget 317-19). Franz Boas, who edited the Journal of American Folklore from 1908 to 1924, was perhaps the first major influence in American folklore studies to see the anthropological credentials in folklore (Bronner, American Folklore 68). He considered folklore to be a kind of mirror for a culture, and he suggested that a people's folklore was that people's "autobiographical ethnology" (Voget 319-22). Although this implies an emphasis on the past, Boas was more interested in histories of individuals and cultures than in a universal cross-cultural history of mankind. Boas' influence had a more direct impact on anthropology than on folklore,[7] but his ideas eventually found their way into folklore as the interdisciplinary climate between the two fields improved throughout the 1930s and 1940s.

One of Boas' students, Ruth Benedict, who succeeded him as editor of the Journal of American Folklore in 1925, was more willing to grant folklore a position within her approach to anthropology than many anthropologists, including Boas, who worked before her. Benedict's work began what was to be an ongoing reconciliation between anthropological and literary perspectives of folklore. In the introduction to her 1935 work Zuni Mythology, Benedict argued that the study of folklore must achieve fulfillment before any worthwhile study of folklore in a single culture can yield any profit (Introduction xii-xiii). In Benedict's opinion the study of folklore needed to be much more sophisticated than simple collections of folktales for amusement. Most important, however, Benedict believed that folklore should be viewed as a functioning characteristic of culture, that it should be recorded and studied over as long a period as possible in order to understand more fully what, exactly, is the significance of a people's culture. Implicit in her appeal for fulfillment in folklore study is Benedict's idea of folklore as a creative process of oral expression, an idea that she developed throughout her career (Model 216-22). She was firmly against the idea of folklore as a collection of literary artifacts. Although both conceptions are literary, the latter idea was certainly more widely understood and applied in 1935 than the former idea because folklorists of a literary frame of mind were limited to nonfunctioning artistic relics of the past, rendered in present oral traditions, and by definition they found no point in considering notions of imagination and creativity in folklore found in contemporary contexts.[8] Benedict did much in the 1930s and 1940s to alter the widely held understanding that folklore only reflects the past by arguing for anthropological literary conceptions of folklore. Judith Modell writes, "Benedict's folklore studies, typically, marked a beginning, an awareness of the need for 'imagined alternatives' in all societies and in a war-torn world. She posed against the 'precariousness of rationalistic attitudes'. . ." (246). By

stressing the importance of self expression in confirming fundamental human values, Benedict believed that fictions are necessary for a culture to thrive, that the ways people construct fictions take diverse and wonderfully elaborate forms (Introduction xiii-xiv).

Like Boas, Benedict, too, had lasting influence on scholars who succeeded her. One of these individuals, William Bascom, made strong contributions in the 1950s toward bridging the gap between anthropology and folklore. In "Anthropology and Folklore," published in 1953, Bascom clearly delineated an argument for bridging the gap between folklore study that is affiliated with the humanities and social sciences, approaches that he felt are complementary (25-33). Bascom presented the anthropological approach to folklore as a means of clarifying its affinities to the literary approach. While he pointed out that there was a definite presence of intellectual isolationism during his time and that it was common enough to present a challenge to folklorists of both schools, he remained hopeful that folklorists could see through the separatism in order to utilize each other's methodologies for more responsible scholarship. What Bascom saw in the anthropological approach to folklore was a trend among anthropologists of his time, in the tradition of Boas and Benedict, to study folklore's dynamic qualities. Bascom's paper is a description of anthropological interests in narrator creativity and stylistic features; he suggested that literary folklorists cooperate in studying them. In addition, he advocated that literary folklorists cooperate in recording local attitudes toward folklore and its social contexts, in analyzing the relationship of folklore to culture, and finally in seeking to define its functions. Bascom's strongest suggestion, however, was that "the most effective way to bridge the gap between the different groups of folklorists is by a common concern with common problems. . ." ("Anthropology" 33).

In another paper, "Verbal Art," written in 1955, Bascom promoted a

fusion of interests by further emphasizing the aesthetic dimension in defining folklore, an area in which he believed, like Benedict, that folklorists and anthropologists could find common ground. Rather than further defining the artistic qualities of oral expression in traditional literary terms, however, that placed emphasis on the art of the folklore item, Bascom chose to define the artistic value of the creative process in the formation of oral expression. By comparing literature and verbal art, he sought to persuade other folklorists to recognize the literary value of folklore in ways that were much more conducive to the study of folklore within the living context of culture and society. Moreover, Bascom challenged literary folklorists to understand the differences between literature fixed in writing and oral literature, intangible and dynamic in the spoken word. Although these differences are largely a matter of opinion as to what can constitute literature, the commonly held idea among folklorists throughout the history of the discipline of folklore is that oral literature is the same, essentially, as written literature. To Bascom this was an irreconcilable contradiction and one of the principal reasons he believed that folklorists had for so long ignored and misunderstood anthropology and its discussion of the legitimate literary characteristics of folklore ("Verbal" 67-68). One will recall the idea of "eye literature," MacEdward Leach's explanation as to why early folklorists had gone about collecting folklore as if it were written down and fixed within oral tradition. In the search for surviving relics of past cultures, the notion of eye literature certainly lent itself to the effort to "find" these forms more than any notion that folklore could have dynamic creative qualities as well. Folklore as a creative process is as much an anthropological conception of folklore as it it a literary one. From this point, Bascom made his argument.

Although Ruth Benedict had a similar argument twenty years prior to Bascom, she was not as explicit with it as Bascom was with his. The likelihood that Benedict would have been understood had she been more clear with her

ideas is questionable, but in Bascom's case, he had a far different climate in folklore scholarship in which to work. His seminal paper was likely a godsend to many scholars because it helped create grounds for alternatives to the scientific style of folklore study that sought simply to continue the recording of tale-types and motifs. The thought that folklore could be a much more humane discipline was increasingly appealing to a number of folklorists in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Assessing the quality of folklore collections in 1945-46, for example, Herbert Halpert found that the scholarship put into collecting folktales was, for the most part, a shallow form of study influenced by the old view that folklore consists only of remnants of past cultures (357). He pointed out that many of the collections included annotations to folktales but that they contained only a few comments as to their significance. Halpert argued that folktales were printed in an unsophisticated listing, with a few references in footnotes to parallels among them. In regard to folk beliefs he believed that with one or two notable exceptions, one does not get even the exact words of informants. "Attempts to determine how thoroughly or widely these beliefs are held and what purposes they serve in society are extremely rare" (Halpert 358-59).

As an alternative to the bare, dry, scholarly collections of folktales, many folklorists incorrectly turned to popularized collections, rewriting tales to add more artistic features and to rejuvenate folklore.[9] While their intentions were good, the manner of embellishing original tales obscured and distorted the aesthetic qualities of the original item. Since most folklorists could not conceive of folklore to be something other than eye literature, they were appropriately dissatisfied by the narrow range of artistic features in the relics they searched for. This attitude is exemplified in Richard Dorson, one of America's greatest folklorists, who, in 1952 wrote his classic Bloodstoppers and Bearwalkers: Folk Traditions of the Upper Peninsula. Deep in the tradition

of romantic nationalism, of Emerson and Whitman, the America of Dorson's informants is revealed in a true, all-inclusive, cataloging style:

> I went to the Peninsula believing that one could uncover many kinds of living folk stories in America, in a limited time and area, and need not dream them up or copy them out in the library. The quest succeeded most happily. . . . I hear creation myths, fairy tales, tall tales, occult tales, legends, romances, exploits, jests, anecdotes, noodle stories, dialect stories, told by Ojibwa, Potawatomi, and Sioux Indians; by Finns, Swedes, Poles, Germans, Italians, Irishmen, Frenchmen, Englishmen, even Luxemburgers, Slovenians, and Lithuanians; by farmers, lumberjacks, copper and iron miners, fishermen, sailors, railroaders, bartenders, undertakers, authors, county officials, newspaper editors; by the senile, venial, the educated and the illiterate; by family circles and boarding house cliques in full blast, and by solitary old-timers in tar paper shacks. (1)

As a precursor to more formal studies of verbal art and as a forerunner to later works that would also include true stories, Bloodstoppers is an immense work, indicative of a style of scholarship far more ambitious than the kind Halpert found so stagnant and unprofessional. Dorson, too, perhaps, realized that folklore in the late 1940s and early 1950s was too narrow. The immensity of his attempt in Bloodstoppers to discover the "true folk" required attention to several more styles of narrative than simply folktales. Most likely, Bascom read the work and was influenced by it. Bascom's ideas of verbal art are certainly explicit in its persistency and breadth.

In order to study verbal art more closely and formally, folklorists throughout the 1950s increasingly began to scrutinize the storytelling or performance situation, both textually and contextually. Much of this effort

clearly anticipated the work of contemporary folklorists. Within the framework of folklore as verbal art, folklorists were left with all kinds of room for the study of several different forms of narrative in addition to folktales. Although critical understanding of the nature of the storytelling situation was not refined enough at this time for such study, research into personal narratives emerged on the threshold of acceptance into folkloristics. It would not be formally considered folklore until the late 1960s and 1970s, largely because it took roughly ten years for more sophisticated approaches to the verbal art of folklore to develop.

In the 1950s several important preliminary considerations of verbal art were undertaken. For example, in a paper entitled "Classifying Performance in the Study of Verbal Folklore," William Jansen expressed the urgent need "for notes about the conditions" of the storytelling performance, notes about the background of the narrator and the manner in which he or she handles his or her material (110-11). Another example of a preliminary study on verbal art is Dorson's "Oral Styles of American Folk Narrators." Under Jansen's influence Dorson describes, with concentration on folktales, the backgrounds and individual narrative styles of seven storytellers ("Oral Styles" 27-51). He then applies the same technique to Abraham Lincoln's folk narrative style. Dorson's essay demonstrates that the individual style of a storyteller, within his or her cultural context, can be critically appreciated, just as the style of a literary writer can within his or her particular context.

Although folklore scholarship in the 1950s was important in the large scale reorientation of folkloristics begun in the middle 1940s, more intense methodological study of folklore occurred in the 1960s and 1970s. During these years, the increasing interest in verbal art in context and the nature of the storytelling performance reached a critical mass. Personal narratives appeared on the doorstep of folklore as folklorists such as Kenneth Goldstein,

Dundes, and Roger Abrahams, among others, offered practical solutions to improving fieldwork by utilizing more in-depth approaches to the textual and contextual elements of folklore conducive to personal narrative research. Stressing the necessity of a comprehensive guide for folklore collectors, for example, Goldstein's A Guide for Fieldworkers in Folklore, published in 1964, emphasizes folklore collecting that serves both anthropological and literary folklorists. Goldstein argues for methods of collecting that can offer the most reliable information to a large number of folklorists (5). By continuing the conversation between the disciplines of anthropology and folklore in the same manner as Benedict and Bascom, Goldstein suggests that collecting data that would fulfill the needs of the anthropologist would equally satisfy the needs of literary folklorists. He finds that the developed, systematic approach of anthropology to fieldwork has much to offer folklore research. Goldstein's Guide, in fact, provides the first formal and extensive ethnographic methodology for folklore research based on the problems and needs of modern folklore theory in its movement to include context- and performance-centered approaches (Fine 42).

The strong ethnographic thrust of Goldstein's Guide was echoed by another work published in 1964, which developed more of a theoretical examination of three aspects of folklore. In "Texture, Text, and Context," Dundes attempts to improve the definition of folklore genres by proposing that folklore can be analyzed in terms of those three analytical levels. By retaining a connection to the linguistic apparatus used by earlier folklorists to plot the diffusion of folktales, Dundes regards texture as "the language, the specific phonemes and morphemes employed" ("Texture" 22). He also includes under texture such things as stress, pitch, juncture, tone, onomatopoeia, rhyme, and alliteration. Dundes's purpose is to emphasize that a textual or linguistic approach to folklore alone, similar to the approach used by many folklorists in

early folklore studies, leaves one open to commit what he terms "the linguistic fallacy," that is to reduce the analysis of folklore to the analysis of language ("Texture" 23). Dundes argues for methodological integration and analysis of the texture of a folklore item with both its text, "a version or a single [translatable] telling of a tale . . . independent of its texture," and its context, "the particular social situation in which [a] particular item . . . is employed" ("Texture" 23). The best methodology of studying folklore, according to Dundes, is based on all three analytical levels. Thus, he criticizes the practice of leaving analysis of texture to linguists and analysis of context to anthropologists and argues that a good folklorist should study all three aspects of folklore ("Texture" 32).

Another folklorist who contributed in large measure to the establishment of a significant body of methodological approaches to folklore study is Roger Abrahams. One of his essays, "Folklore in Culture: Notes toward an Analytic Method," discusses the use of anthropological and comparative approaches, specifically how they have been used in folklore study of the past and how their use can be expanded. Abrahams argues that:

> Too often . . . the folklorist has seen himself as dealing with sacrosanct matters, lore transmitted from the pure 'golden age' of the primitive past of Indo-European culture by word of mouth, and thus divorced from contemporary discourse, except as vestige. But recent scholarship has slowly erased the concept of a pure process of oral transmission. . . . We must realize concurrently that folklore is not only made up of . . . antiquities but is in fact a very live cultural phenomenon, subject to the same processes as other things cultural, and therefore available to the same type of analysis as other similar humanistic studies. ("Folklore in Culture" 99)

Viewed in this way, folklore for Abrahams is living and functional within culture. He echoes the same thinking of several theoreticians of the 1960s, but he goes a step further by suggesting that folklore's function is purposeful. In his examination of the nature of folklore, Abrahams argues that folklore "inherently contains . . . numerous oppositions, the analyses of which can cast much light on the lore itself and its creation and transmission. . ." ("Folklore in Culture" 101). He cites the differences between male and female that cause polarities to exist in groups because of the relative, gender-determined positions of men and women, oppositions between generations in groups, and the oppositions found naturally in social hierarchy, based on "strength, verbal ability, inheritance, or any number of other 'mysteries' which may cause oppositions" (Abrahams, "Folklore in Culture" 101). In this sense, Abrahams believes folklore is a means for the expression of society's dialectic in its infinite array of manifestations. The dramatic antagonism found often in oral narratives, he argues, is an expression of the dialectical unity of culture.

During the time that these largely methodological works were published, several new collections of folklore revealed more detailed consideration and integrative study of folktales within the context of their telling. Crowley's I Could Talk the Old-Story Good (1966) presents Bahamian folktales collected in their natural settings. His texts record the tales' styles of opening and closing, local dialect, and contextual surroundings. Crowley's descriptions of the narrators, their typical styles, and the responses of particular audiences enable a fuller appreciation of the art of Bahamian folklore. Ruth Finnegan's Limba Stories and Storytelling (1967) contains detailed descriptions of the storytellers she recorded and their occasions for telling stories. In Folktales and Society: Storytelling in a Hungarian Peasant Community (1969), Linda Degh, while criticizing older collections of folktales as "unauthentic," thoroughly describes the backgrounds of the storytellers she met with between 1948 and

1960, their communities, and their storytelling occasions. In addition, Folktales and Society contains an exhaustive survey of folktale scholarship in Europe. Originally published in 1962 under the title Marchen, Erzahler, and Erzahlgemeinschaft the work had a huge impact on folk narrative research in the United States when it was first translated and issued through Indiana University Press in 1969. Before its release in America, American folklorists had little to do with European folk narrative research that, at the time, was much further advanced than research into folk narrative in the United States.[10] Sandra Dolby Stahl, one of Degh's students at Indiana, was one of the first American folklorists to study the personal narrative and to develop a folkloric definition for the genre.

THE RISE OF PERFORMANCE THEORY

The work of Crowley, Finnegan, and Degh indicates how far the field of folklore had come during the post-World War II era in situating itself between literary and anthropological schools of thought concerning oral expression. By the end of the 1960s few professional folklorists would think of publishing anything without some kind of acknowledgement, either through their style of scholarship or through more explicit means, that folklore is an interdisciplinary field of study. Many folklorists at this time draw attention to folklore as a dynamic and ongoing creative invention rather than as a body of stationary artifacts. The growing interest in studying the dynamic qualities of folklore was heightened in essays articulating the conception of folklore as a communicative event, an approach to folklore commonly understood as the "performance" approach. Although the theoretical works that deal with performance published in the late 1960s and 1970s did not favor the collection of folklore or, consequently, the individual storytellers of a folk group, the

theories put forth in these studies provided the stimulus to persuade some folklorists inclined to publish collections with emphasis on individual storytellers to find new genres that could be gathered and yet studied in the light of the theoretical preference for dynamic processes rather than static items. Within this atmosphere, the rise of the personal narrative occurred largely because some folklorists deemed the collection of folktales exhausted at the same time they realized that folktales could not be studied as adequately as other more functional forms such as the personal narrative under the new and fashionable holistic approach to folklore. In the next chapter I explain in depth why the personal narrative functions more explicitly in culture than the folktale. Here, however, I briefly outline the development of the performance approach to folklore and review some of its more salient points in terms that contribute to my discussion of the personal narrative in the following chapter.

The first conceptions of a performance theory of folklore were published in the late 1960s and early 1970s in three, influential, preliminary articles by Abrahams, Georges, and Ben-Amos (Azzolina 7-9). In his essay "Introductory Remarks to a Rhetorical Theory of Folklore" (1968), Abrahams continues one of the main arguments that studies of folklore had been hampered by the split between literary and anthropological folklorists and suggests that the best aesthetic approach to folklore would be a method that would emphasize all aspects of the aesthetic performance: "performance, item, and audience" (144-45). Abraham's thesis, influenced by the rhetoric of Kenneth Burke, that oral expression assumes a dimension of personal power provided one way of conceptualizing folklore as a communicative performance. Abrahams illustrates that the importance of performance theory is that it allows folklorists to analyze both the form and function of isolated expression (i.e. personal narrative) ("Introductory Remarks" 145). Abrahams's idea that the functions of oral expression and the relations between the forms such

expression can take within the context of culture are equally critical helped to crystallize awareness of a performance-centered perspective of verbal folklore.

Adding force to this new emphasis on the artistic function of folklore, Robert Georges's "Toward an Understanding of Storytelling Events" (1969) developed a communication model of storytelling events. Georges attacks previous story research on the grounds that it was based on inadequate emphasis to parts of the communication design: "To isolate any one aspect of a storytelling event . . . and to disregard or consider as subordinate or incidental all other aspects of a storytelling event is to give that one aspect an independence and a primacy it simply does not have" ("Toward" 317). His storytelling model puts forth a set of postulates that were to secure widespread acceptance throughout the development of theories governing the performance of folklore (Langellier 249).[11] According to Georges, every storytelling event is a "communicative event" that marks a "social experience"; "in every storytelling event the participants operate in accordance with a specific set of status relationships"; and "every storytelling event has social uses" and "functions" ("Toward" 317-19). Georges suggests that these postulates governing the storytelling process require new research directions, such as recording stories in natural field situations, using "every attempt" to capture their wholeness.

Following the same line of thinking used by Georges, Ben-Amos's 1972 essay "Toward a Definition of Folklore in Context," the most widely cited essay during the 1970s (Bronner, "Art, Performance, and Praxis" 86), provided a new definition of folklore as "artistic communication in small groups" (13). In a manner similar to Georges's, Ben-Amos criticizes past definitions of folklore for mistaking a part of the design of storytelling for the whole and for defining folklore as a "thing" rather than as a process. Particular to his definition of folklore is Ben-Amos's omission of the prerequisite found in most previous

definitions, that folklore has to be traditional. He argues that the notion of tradition as it relates to antiquity is "a scholarly and not a cultural fact." He writes:

> . . . the traditional character of folklore is an accidental quality, associated with it in some cases, rather than an objectively intrinsic feature of it. In fact, some groups specifically divorce the notion of antiquity from certain folklore forms and present them as novelty instead. Thus, for example, the lore of children derives its efficacy from its supposed newness. Often children consider their rhymes as fresh creations of their own invention. Similarly, riddles have to be unfamiliar to the audience. A known riddle is a contradiction in terms and cannot fulfill its rhetorical function any more. In fact, riddles may disappear from circulation exactly because they are traditional and recognized as such by members of the group. (13)

Ben-Amos's idea that the traditional character of folklore is an analytical construct prompted several folklorists to develop conceptions of tradition in folklore that are more conducive to understanding folklore as a process and in terms more responsible to folk groups that are usually unknowledgeable of tradition . Largely because of Ben-Amos's ideas of tradition, the key term in any new theory of folklore came to mean more of a convention in terms of folk expression than as a convention dependent on historical fact. I provide a more extensive explanation of these concepts in the next chapter than I do here.

The performance approach gained momentum in the 1970s with the publication of three books of collected essays: Toward New Perspectives in Folklore (1972), edited by Americo Paredes and Richard Bauman; Explorations in the Ethnography of Speaking (1974), edited by Bauman and Joel Scherzer; and Folklore: Performance and Communication (1975), edited by Ben-Amos

and Kenneth Goldstein. Explaining the common link among the essays in Toward New Perspectives in Folklore, Bauman writes, "[i]n particular, there is an emphasis upon performance as an organizing principle that comprehends within a single conceptual framework artistic act, expressive form, and esthetic response, and that does so in terms of locally defined, culture-specific categories and contexts" (Introduction xi). The strong anthropological focus of this work continued in Explorations in the Ethnography of Speaking. A number of the essays in this book specifically examine artistic verbal performances. In Folklore: Performance and Communication, Ben-Amos and Goldstein note the relationship of the new performance approach to work in Ethnography of Speaking and point out that the essays in Performance also concentrate upon primary ethnographic observation (Introduction 1-3).

The wide range of this growing body of work on performance seemed to demand integration and analytical development. In a way, performance came to search for its explanation during the 1970s and 1980s.[12] By 1975, Bauman found the times ripe for expansion and clarification of performance theory ("Verbal Art as Performance" 290). In his essay "Verbal Art as Performance," Bauman articulates a formal definition of performance and discusses the key concepts of "framing" and "patterning" and how they relate to performance of folklore. He defines performance "as a mode of spoken verbal communication" which "consists in the assumption of responsibility to an audience for a display of communicative competence" ("Verbal Art as Performance" 293). An expanded version of Bauman's article, with supplementary essays by Barbara Babcock, Gary Gossen, Roger Abrahams, and Joel Sherzer, was published in 1977 as Verbal Art as Performance.

All of the preceding works had sufficient strength and number to constitute a new school or approach within the study of folklore. The emphasis on the primacy of performance and its holistic and interdisciplinary qualities

stimulated a new search for forms of narrative that could allow for both attention to the collection of folklore and the dynamics of it in action. This direction was spawned equally by what many folklorists felt to be the shortcomings and strengths of performance theory. While it did well methodologically to describe and analyze the processes of folklore in present contexts, with emphasis on the group or community, its theories also hindered the efforts of folklorists who allied themselves with notions of individual artisanship. It seems that this theoretical dilemma created a rush to identify more thoroughly the artistry of individual expression in the late 1970s and early 1980s. In this effort to get back to the folk from the theoretical drawing board, which I explain in the beginning of the following chapter, the personal narrative was discovered to be a viable form of verbal folklore. In the next chapter I review the research into the personal narrative, using a story told to me by Chet Unruh, a long time resident of Cassoday, Kansas, in the east-central Kansas region known as the Flint Hills, in an attempt to define and explain why the personal narrative is such a good item for continued study in the light of contemporary folkloristics and why folklorists have been so inclined to study the genre after many years of neglect. Specifically, I will focus on the personal narrative's folkloric qualities--form, traditional content, function, and style, all of which I will describe in reference to the ideas of folklore theory which have evolved in much of the way that I have delineated in this chapter.

Notes

[1] Throughout this thesis, I occasionally use the word "folkloristics" to refer to the "study of folklore."

[2] For a good indication of how little information is provided about the storytellers in early collections of folktales see Joseph Jacobs, English Fairy Tales, (London, 1890).

[3] In addition to Thompson's discussion of these theories see Richard Dorson's article "The Great Team of English Folklorists" for a more focused explanation of the controversies that developed in regard to the locations of the Europe's cultural origins.

[4] It is noteworthy that the debate between the two camps of American folklorists seems to parallel the debate concerning what American literature was and should be, starting in the late eighteenth century with Washington to Cooper, etc. While the literary argument antedated the establishment of a scholarly discipline of folklore in America by more than a century, it seems to have helped generate interest in the establishment of the American Folklore Society in 1888, as writers became more interested in defining and writing about American culture. See, for example, the works of Mark Twain, Edward Eggleston, Joel Chandler Harris, and other early realists.

[5] See Elsie Clews Parsons, Folklore of the Sea Islands of South Carolina, (Cambridge: Metro Books, 1923, rpt. 1969) and Frances S. Herskovits, The New World Negro, (Bloomington: Funk and Wagnalls, 1966).

[6] Parry's and Lord's work informs many contemporary methodologies in comparative literature. See, for example, John Miles Foley, Oral Traditional Literature: A Festschrift for Albert Bates Lord, (Columbus, OH: Slavica, 1981).

[7] Boas is considered the father of cultural anthropology.

[8] Another reason why many folklorists were limited from recognizing

folklore more as a creative process than as an artifact was because the methodologies of evaluating literature were, in the first place, product oriented in the 1930s. Anthropological ideas of literature require their own kind of specialization. In terms of literary theory, this specialization was largely undeveloped at the time.

[9] See, for example, Edwin Valentine Mitchell, It's an Old Pennsylvania Custom, (New York: Bonanza Books, 1948).

[10] Much of this research is recorded in the congresses of The International Society for Folk Narrative Research.

[11]Langellier's survey covers much of the personal narrative research undertaken by scholars in disciplines besides folkloristics.

[12] This search really was one to provide performance theory more authenticity.

Chapter Two

A Definition of the Personal Narrative

To many critics and scholars of culture, folklore is still an active medium of genuine artistic expression. W. Edson Richmond , for example, contrasts the expressions of the tellers of folklore and politicians: "Though an oft-repressed and subliminal aspect of our culture, its repertoire of 'dirty' jokes, of racist jokes, is certainly far more revealing of popular attitudes than are the pronouncements of politicians" (Introduction xviii). Henry Glassie, in the same book, compares the assembly-line manufacture of automobiles with folk construction of objects and concludes that the former "seems more the product of circumstance than of culture" (381). Folklore contains a human involvement and genuineness, Richmond and Glassie suggest, that is not found in the popular expressions of American life. I draw attention to these two examples in order to begin this chapter on what exactly has allowed for the inclusion of the personal narrative into folklore study, what exactly the personal narrative is, and why I feel it is a genre worthy of more attention in the study of Kansas folklore.

THE "ARTISTRY" OF PERFORMANCE

The emergence of the study of the personal narrative in the 1970s was a result of the response of some folklorists to what they perceived as a lack of scholarly attention among many folklorists to the "real" aesthetics of personal expression brought about by their overzealous theorizing into the performance situation, theories developed initially to "heighten" awareness of the process of expression in the face of the raging forces of modernity. Because early

performance theory did not favor the collection of stories themselves, but favored, rather, the theatrics of their transmission, many folklorists felt the theory neglected the very thing it set out to explain.[1] At the same time, however, folklorists recognized the credentials of the theory that could allow for the study of personal narratives. The theory's methodological approach to the context of small group interaction, particularly, makes the study of personal narratives possible.

Initially, performance appeared most appealing to a majority of folklorists not interested in the collection of oral folklore because of its application to our era's emphasis on showmanship and "impression management."[2] To Bauman, for example, "performance thus calls forth special attention to the heightened awareness of the act of expression, and gives license to the audience to regard the act of expression and the performer with special intensity" (Verbal Art as Performance 11). This special intensity is one of sincerity, of being really alive. Being really alive was an implied issue because of fears that television and other forms of popular culture, the mass media, political bureaucracies, among other modern cultural phenomena in a highly technological time, made Americans less active, less creative, less feeling. Mounting accountability to others as well as to organizations and other "systems" rather than to an inner sense of tradition and identity, so persuasively explained in Wylie Sypher's Loss of Self in Modern Literature and Art, caused Americans to ask who they really were and if their identity was real in the conforming life of modern society. The performance of folklore, many folklorists implied, is where people reveal themselves and even find themselves. Abrahams commented, for example, that:

> reality itself . . . appears to be layered, made up of different levels of intensity and focus of interaction and participation. A very precious commodity is being negotiated, after all, one which is

> remarkably vital and which, in fact, we might call our socio-cultural vitality. For it is in these states of ritual or performance, festive or play enactments that in many ways we are most fully ourselves, both as individuals and as members of our communities. ("Toward an Enactment" 163)

Early performance theory looked at a modern life that is spontaneous and disjointed. It tenaciously proposed to offer some predictability and comfort to modernity's situations, all the while assuming that the folk are no longer capable of true personal expression. In this respect performance is a theoretical deception. To some folklorists in the 1970s, however, folklore was still an active medium of identity and feeling, of genuine artistic expression. Yet in the rush to identify this authenticity, many folklorists missed the artistry of expression and tradition (Bronner, "Art, Performance, and Praxis" 91). It seems as if the significance of performance theory, especially of the style that perceives a high level of intensity in the performance situation, was strong enough to persuade many critics of culture that individuals had lost the ability to express themselves.

This is not true for most folklorists today, however. In an age that may very well pose a threat to the artistry of genuine expression, many feel that today's folk are resilient in the face of modernity. Couched within a far different brand of performance theory than the theory that was initially laid out, folklorists currently are offering insight into the art of folkloric expression at the same time they are collecting it once again. Current performance theory allows for variations in intensity and degree of symbolism given to the performance of folklore rather than a single high level of intensity or symbolism it seems to have granted performance in its initial stages of development. Ranging from the most prominent cultural events that are scheduled and announced (i.e. festivals, spectacles, speeches, fairs, etc.), using

the most highly formalized design of performance and featuring accomplished performers, to the fleeting, mobile, unmarked, and private encounters of individuals or small groups in everyday life (i.e. conversations, family dinners, parties, etc.), current definitions of performance are much more versatile and inclusive of several forms of oral narrative.

In his article "American Folklore Studies and Social Transformation: A Performance-Centered Perspective," Bauman clarifies this versatility of performance by outlining "three principal senses of the term": "Initially, performance centered the discourse of folklorists in the late 1960s and early 1970s as a cover term for folklore as practice, the situated use of folklore in the accomplishment of social life. . . " (the general sense as outlined in chapter 1). The second "and more marked sense of performance," he continues:

> centers on performance as a special, artful mode of communication, the essence of which resides in the assumption of accountability to an audience for a display of communicative competence, subject to evaluation for the skill and effectiveness with which the act of expression is accomplished. . . . Individual artistry is a central concern, though always by reference to the dynamic tension between the socially given and emergent [i.e. context], between conventions of performance on the one hand, individual creativity and situational uniqueness on the other, in the use of a proverb, the telling of a tale [or personal narrative], the delivery of an oration, and so on. ("American Folklore Studies" 177; emphasis added)

Bauman's third sense of performance takes "'cultural performance' or 'enactment' as its frame of reference, focusing on . . . the social organization of the process by which cultural performances are prepared for and enacted, and the devices by which experience in such events is heightened and meaning

intensified," the sense described above ("American Folklore Studies" 177). Of course, it is ideas in Bauman's second sense of performance that has prompted folklorists to study the personal narrative more than anything else. Because focus is on the artistry of performance rather than on the collective practice or enactment of folklore, this tends to center attention on small groups and individuals, and is the main reason why personal narrative scholars who utilize this aspect of performance are able to offer collections of personal narratives that are as genuine as they are artistic. Research of this kind is very much similar to the kind of study done before the development of sophisticated performance theories and the movement away from collecting. While personal narrative research achieves a level of sophistication in its own right, it is also connected to the old style of folklore study that was not prone to sophistication, that was more extensive than intensive. Indeed, research into personal narrative offers the best of these two worlds.

For example, in an evocative article on the cultural polemic represented by the contrast between two forms of nostalgia in the contemporary era of late capitalism, Kathleen Stewart casts light on an idea of long standing importance to folklorists, namely, the rootedness in place of certain narrative forms like the local legend, local character anecdotes, and personal experience stories. Stewart draws a contrast between the comfortable and consumerist nostalgia of the middle class and the fiercely resistant nostalgia of working class and marginalized peoples. As her collection of narratives shows, storytelling is an instrument of both forms: "By resurrecting time and place, and a subject in time and place, it shatters the surface of an atemporal order and a prefab cultural landscape" (Stewart 227). For the people of the played-out West Virginia coal mining county where Stewart worked, storytelling is invested with special intensity as a potent means of struggling against the ravaged, decentered, and alienating social and physical landscape in which they

live as exiles in their own country. Telling stories is literally a means of *"remembering" a way of life by insisting on the personalization of place*, "revivifying" the ruins with stories. In one of the stories Stewart records, "The Vacancy of the Lot in Rhodell," the storyteller, "remembers the fire that burned Johnny Millsap to death while he cried out for help by relating the graphic events of the cries and the flames and the lasting effect it had on those who were there at the time but could do nothing but watch" (235). There is also the story of Buddy Hall, a nine-year old boy who was electrocuted on an exposed electrical wire in the hills above "'Amigo Mines #2,' as one storyteller relates: 'An when hit finally dropped im it had blowed his heel plum off. Blowed a hole right through his heel, tuk the meat out of it, buddy. They said there was the meat on the ground next to his foot'" (Stewart 235). These are true stories, localized and inherent in community, with a style of artistry and genuineness of a kind with which all folklorists have been familiar for years but which were not accessible until the 1970s because of the theoretical limitations of folkloristics. Until folklore became the interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary pursuit that it is today, equally comprised of several theories from several disciplines, stories like the ones recorded and studied by Stewart could not be reached.

Another example of recent personal narrative research is Timothy Cochrane's essay "Place, People, and Folklore: An Isle Royale Case Study." Cochrane's purpose is to examine the ways in which personal narratives of fishermen reflect "sentiment toward place" on a large archipelago or "island," as the storytellers he records refer to it, in northwest Lake Superior, just south of the border between the United States and Canada. In ways similar to Stewart's, Cochrane records the reactions of residents of Isle Royale to traumatic events that jarred the tenure of the community. One of these events was the creation of a national park in the area that forced the fishermen to relinquish their permanent claims to their island fisheries. One of

the stories Cochrane captures is about a family's move from Chipewa Harbor to Wright Island, which implies an "acceptance of island hardships that is difficult to imagine today":

> And the day we moved, we got all into the boat [six family members] and . . . Mother, she couldn't go anywhere without her huge trunk . . . and all this stuff in the boat. And the sails were up, you know. And we got just, well, just around the point and the wind died . . . and Dad had to row the whole way, ten miles. (8)

Cochrane's central concept--place--is explained in the light of the stories, using ideas found in "environmental perception theory." For example, in making the distinction between location and place, he argues that "place is currently understood less as a physical location than a deeply affective characterization crystallized from an individual's emotions, experience, and cultural background" (10). Cochrane, like Stewart, chooses to offer a collection of personal narratives that can be used to understand the folk of a particular area. He theorizes about the folk of Isle Royale by using the personal narrative genre in addition to theories about place. He does not simply theorize using theories, in other words, and neither does Stewart.

It is this kind of study and collection of personal narratives I am suggesting be undertaken more extensively in the study of Kansas folklore.[3] The two works I just described are excellent examples of what I consider good folklore scholarship. They are also pertinent to the kind of study that I think is needed in rural Kansas or any rural setting in the Midwest. Folklorists in these areas are in a prime situation to record and study the lore of a folk who are especially resilient in the face of modern social conditions. In addition to the works I have highlighted above, one would do well to also consult the following works, which, in varying degrees, utilize the personal narrative for commentary on the culture as well as to record the verbal artistry of various

areas, groups, and individuals. All of these works offer both collections of personal narratives as well as insight into their significance: Elizabeth Tucker's "I Saw the Trees Had Souls: Personal Experience Narratives of Contemporary Witches" (1992), Barbara Johnstone's Stories, Community, and Place: Narratives from Middle America (1990), Richard Bauman's "Ed Bell, Texas Storyteller: The Framing and Reframing of Life Experience" (1987), W.F.H. Nicholaisen's "Names and Narrative" (1984), James Leary's "Strategies and Stories of the Omaha Stockyards" (1978), Yvonne Lockwood's "Death of a Priest: The Folk History of a Local Event as Told in Personal Experience Narrative" (1977), Jane Masi Hall's "Homer Spriggs: Chronicler of Brummetts Creek" (1977), Linda Degh's People of the Tobacco Belt: Four Lives (1975), and Bauman's "The La Have Island General Store: Sociability and Verbal Art in a Nova Scotia Community" (1972).

A DEFINITION OF THE PERSONAL NARRATIVE WITH AN EXPLICATION OF "CAN CATTLE GROW THISTLES?"

In what follows I use many of the current theories of the personal narrative in order to explain precisely what it is. My purpose is not so much an interpretation of particular stories in terms of their cultural significance, as in the analyses developed in the works above, as it is to define what personal narratives are so that folklorists in this area can get a more firm grasp on what they have to deal with for later more in-depth interpretation and commentary. In light of performance theory that focuses attention on the artistry and tradition of individual narrative expression, I use the most frequently cited definition of the personal narrative in order to define and analyze an example of a story told to me by Chet Unruh, a resident of Cassoday, Kansas, in the central Kansas folk region known as the Flint Hills. I also utilize the most frequently used reader-response methods and the literary

conventions of form, style, content, and function in order to describe, explicate and reveal the artistry and function of Unruh's story, the qualities that make it a viable folklore item in this area.

Among folklorists who have researched the personal narrative, Sandra Dolby Stahl has most fully theorized its ground rules. She defines its forms as:

> first-person narratives usually composed orally by the tellers and based on real incidents in their lives; the stories 'belong' to the tellers because they are the ones responsible for recognizing in their own experiences something that is 'story-worthy' and for bringing their perception of those experiences together with the conventions of 'story' in appropriate contexts and thus creating identifiable, self-contained narratives.[4] ("Personal Experience Stories" 268)

Emerging at a time when performance theory was the hot item in folklore, Stahl's definition prompted a take-off point into new realms of research into verbal expressiveness that was far less prescriptive of folklore. In "The Oral Personal Narrative in Its Generic Context," she concludes that the personal narrative is "a clearly separable, autonomous genre with its own defining features and its own place in the conventional system of oral narrative genres" (39). Her first article, "The Personal Narrative as Folklore," draws on Bauman's and Abrahams's ideas concerning the notion of performance that allows for individual expressiveness to argue that personal narratives combine nontraditional content (i.e. a "true" story) with traditional narrative forms and functions. Specifically, the personal narrative as a folkloric performance can be understood in three ways: as part of established oral storytelling traditions, as the narrative embodiment of traditional values, and as an item in a storyteller's repertoire.

The personal narrative as part of an oral storytelling tradition focuses

less attention on traditional stories than on the process of telling stories. Stahl explains, "'tradition' in this instance refers to all aspects of the act [of expression]--the performer's competence, the actual performance, the reactions of the audience, as well as the content and stylization of 'texts' or items as usually recognized by the folklorist" ("Personal Narrative as Folklore" 10). Seeing the traditional aspects of the personal narrative for Stahl requires looking at "tradition" as a quality tied to the idea of folklore as process, in terms of the repetition of the events of storytelling (Georges, Bauman) and in terms of the conventions of expression (Ben-Amos, Bauman, and Abrahams).[5] Thus, Stahl's prerequisite that the personal narrative be a first-person narrative is one of its traditional components. So too is its style and form, both of which are conventions of expression.

Stahl describes examples of two different types of personal narrative tellers, "other-oriented tellers" and "self-oriented tellers" (Personal Experience Stories 268-76). Other-oriented tellers play a minor role in their stories, usually acting as a witness or observer to the more primary protagonist in the stories they tell. They underplay the personal to heighten the extraordinary or unusual nature of the experience they tell about. Personal narratives told by other-oriented tellers take a form related to the legend, family stories, anecdotes and gossip. Conversely, self-oriented tellers emphasize the personal, building the story in such a way as to feature their own actions within and reactions to the reported event. Their own self-image, exemplary or humorous, unifies the experience. Self-oriented tellers more nearly approximate the form and style of the tall tale, the parable, or the joke. Despite the different orientations to self and other, however, Stahl stresses the personal narrative's generic resemblance to the memorate. Whereas the memorate identifies personal accounts of experiences with the supernatural or first-person stories that illustrate beliefs (Brunvand 161), the personal narrative contains secular

accounts that represent the teller's personal system of values, values that influence what stories the teller tells, how the stories are narrated, and in what situation they are repeated.

Without the personal narrative as a genre and frame of reference, more conventionally traditional genres such as the tall tale and lie cannot be understood as clearly as they are when explored in and of themselves. For example, in his study of the tales of Ed Bell, a Texas storyteller, Bauman shows how personal narratives occur simultaneously with the tall tale and expressive lying as the narrator weaves a series of narratives about his experiences. As Bauman clarifies:

> Tall tales told in the first person masquerade as personal experience narratives. . . . They [tall tales] aim to elicit the kind of belief accorded to personal experience narratives. But tall tales are ultimately fabrications . . . manipulations of understanding that induce in the hearer a false sense of what is going on. At some point in their telling, tall tales begin to challenge the belief of the hearer as they . . . shift into the hyperbole central to the genre. They move the hearer from a sense that 'this is true' to a stage of wondering 'is this true?' to the conclusion 'this is not true. . . .' ("Ed Bell" 211)

Thus, the personal narrative, as it co-occurs with the tall tale, actually is a means for the storyteller to make his tall tales more effective. Without some kind of discrepancy between whether or not a tale is true in the opinion of the hearer, the tall tale loses its effectiveness. Viewed in this way, the genres of the personal narrative and the tall tale become more distinct than if they are looked at by themselves. I would argue that the reverse of Bauman's point is true as well. The storyteller who tells personal narratives also uses the genre of the tall tale to enhance the truthfulness of his stories. This is evident in the

teller's embellishment of his or her personal narratives.

Folklore's reliance upon the collective knowledge of the personal narrative tradition points to the traditional values that form the core of the personal narrative. Stahl argues that the personal narrative is the primary mode for expressing the traditional attitudes of a culture because the stories recount actual experiences deemed valuable by the tellers. "Existentially," Stahl writes, "the personal-experience narrator not only acts or experiences but 'thinks about' his [or her] action, evaluates it, learns from it, and tells the story--not to express his values, but to build them, to create them, to remake them each time he[or she] tells his [or her] stories" ("Personal Experience Stories" 274). Such expressiveness forms the point of the story and the function of the genre. As Stahl acknowledges, traditional attitude is a difficult concept to extract, as it is most often expressed indirectly. She likens the identification of attitudes and values in personal narratives to an exercise in literary criticism that identifies themes in literary works. In "A Literary Folkloristic Methodology for the Study of Meaning in Personal Narrative," Stahl proposes reader-response methodology as a way to analyze personal narratives (45-69). She writes that while folklore "may be personally inspiring, . . . it must somehow be translated to be useful in the external world" (63).

In this respect, Stahl draws a distinction between "communal" and "private folklore," arguing that private folklore (intimacy) gives significance to communal folklore (universality) ("Literary" 46-7). For example, in Stewart's essay, referred to above, on the polemic between two opposing forms of nostalgia in a West Virginia county, her interpretation of the significance of the stories she records constitutes her perception of what the area's communal folklore is, folklore that is "corroborated through research but not necessarily acknowledged as 'public' nor even traditional by the people involved" (Stahl,

"Literary" 48). In order to recognize and interpret this polemic, Stewart first extracts and interprets the private folklore found in the personal narratives of people in the area. This level of interpretation can only occur within the context of the personal or private history of the individual members of any particular group.

Thus, an interpretation of a group's communal folklore should only be undertaken in light of one's explication of the intimate "impressionistic" store of memories and experiences of one's life recorded in personal narratives and other intimate forms of expression told individually by several storytellers. The most frequently used method for interpreting the meaning of personal narratives on the level of their intimacy is to treat them as if they were literary texts, transcribed, of course, and then to read them in a reader-response fashion (Tompkins, Fish). Admittedly a highly subjective approach, this is nonetheless an effective way to develop an accurate understanding of folklore's significance within any number of cultural contexts. And since the personal narrative's primary purpose is to convey intimacy in the first place, unlike the purposes of other genres, folklorists have a whole realm of sub-genres which fall under the personal narrative, replete with an infinite amount of personal folklore at their disposal (Degh, "When I Was Six" 101-2). As long as they are true, distinguishable from ordinary conversation, and follow the conventions of self-contained narrative, personal narratives can include character anecdotes, personal anecdotes, life-histories, family stories, gossip, adventure stories, and occupational stories, among others.[6]

Below is my description and explication of a personal anecdote told to me by Chet Unruh. I recorded the story on a tape recorder in November 1992 as we talked in the old Santa Fe Railroad depot that has been relocated approximately two blocks, where it is now used to house the museum of Cassoday. Chet worked for the Santa Fe for thirty eight years. He told me

various kinds of personal narratives in addition to this one, many of which are included in the Appendix. The events in this story actually occurred on Chet's first day of high-school in Cassoday, where he had moved from rural Greensburg in 1938:

Can Cattle Grow Thistles? (my title)

Chet: The first day I was here in high school--they had the old grade school settin' over here back behind this grade school--and, they give us the afternoon off at the high school. They was goin' to have a ball game down here. So, I think I told you this, but--when you was here a while back--that ole Herman Schuler's mother [Hallie Schuler]; she cut her hair like a man and they had an old coupe car. So, I had an old Model A Ford I was drivin' to school; I lived five miles out in the country, here, south, where my dad lived. So when they let school out for the ball game, these girls all piled in my old Model A Ford; I didn't know none of 'em. And I parked alongside that old lady, you know, and she was the meanest lookin' woman I ever seen just by lookin' at her, you know. And one of the girls' windows was all rolled down in the car, you know, and one of the girls says, "Say, tell us about dust storms." I said, "Well, they got so bad out there that thistles would grow on the back ends of cows' backs." And, man that old woman looked at me and says, "You're a God Damned liar!" Just like that, see. Boy, I looked at her and I said, "I believe you're right."

And, you know, that went on for about two or three years, and she was a beautiful lady. Man, I really thought the world of her after I learned to know her. And one Sunday morning after church she met me at the back of the church, and she put her

arm around my shoulder and says, "Chet, I've got to ask for your forgiveness." I said, "My God, what'd I do now?" She said, "Remember when I called you a God Damned liar?" I said, "Boy, I'll never forget." She says, "Me and Dode--" that was her husband, Herman Schuler's dad-- "was out at the stockyards yesterday and we seen it." The cattle come in--you know a cow, they tell me, don't sweat, and you get a little tiny shower of rain and them thistle seeds embedded in that dirt and stuff; them damned things would sprout and grow, you know, and it was the truth! But I wasn't goin' to tell her. But she finally admitted it to me that she'd seen it.

The events central to this story probably happened during the fall of 1938. Unruh moved to Cassoday in 1938 and graduated from high school there in 1940. Because he tells us that it was his first day of high school in Cassoday when he met Mrs. Schuler and that there was a ball game that afternoon, one can surmise it must have been during his first fall there when the events of the story happened. Although Chet never says what type of ball game he went to that day, it most likely was a baseball game because high school football was not played in Cassoday. The day Chet met Mrs. Schuler was probably a fall day on which school was let out for the students to attend a baseball game. The time frame is factual. In addition, one must take at face value the fact that Chet met Schuler on this particular afternoon of what he remembers as his first day of school, certainly early in his matriculation there. Furthermore, one should believe that she called him a liar from disbelief in overhearing him tell the girls in his car that thistles would grow from the backs of cattle as a result of the dust storms he had witnessed during the drought of the 1930s. Finally, one should also believe that an apparent, playful sort of argument continued for "two or three years" between the two, resulting in a resolution

only after Schuler saw for herself that Chet's account of cattle and thistles was true.

This experience, as Chet perceived it and continues to perceive it, has left him years of opportunity to fashion it into a good story. Whatever his personal motivation for telling any particular story, including this one, his literary or artistic motivation is to use the genre of the personal narrative, one whose capabilities he inherently knows and utilizes fully. Since I look at this story as if it were literature--a short story, perhaps, I know that its narrative is self-contained from ordinary conversation, "talk" that is unstructured. Similar to a literary work, Chet's story has a definite form or dramatic structure, that is it has a conflict that arises and is resolved. In and of themselves, the facts of the story do not constitute this structure. Chet, in a manner similar to the way a writer creates a work of literature, stylistically embellishes the facts of his experience to create his narrative. A personal narrative must have a dramatic structure, and yet remain true as well. Chet's problem, which his ability of storytelling encounters naturally, is how to merge effectively facts of the exchange he had with Mrs. Schuler into a more dramatic form. While the facts of his experience with her are not enough by themselves to become a personal narrative, they provide a natural sequence from which to form one. In an act of improvisation, Chet makes stylistic and thematic choices to render fully his experience in a pleasing story. As he goes about crafting "Can Cattle Grow Thistles?", he casts himself as the protagonist and Schuler as the antagonist in a dramatic situation that goes beyond the factual argument each had in regard to thistles and cattle, and, as the story unfolds, he is able to incorporate and communicate a theme of acceptance by giving what otherwise is a harmless argument literary value.

As in any dramatic structure, there must be some kind of situation that is complicated and resolved. This is especially true of prose. Similarly,

because the personal narrative follows the conventions of narrative, it too exhibits this form. Chet is able to present such a structure in his story because of the thematic content he creates in it--his acceptance by a long time resident of Cassoday; he pulls it off stylistically by focusing on two opposing perceptions he has of Mrs. Schuler. The initial situation he presents is one that implies that he was sort of a timid, young newcomer at the time of the experience in meeting Schuler on his first day of school in a new town. He begins his narrative with an immediate orientation to the situation: "The first day I was here in high school. . . ." And then, almost immediately after this, Chet alludes to Schuler to set the stage for things to come: ". . . that ole Herman Schuler's mother; she cut her hair like a man. . . ." The distance between the two is suggested by the style in which he introduces her, knowing her simply as another individual's mother. The initial situation is, then, complicated, after school has been dismissed, when a group of girls, none of whom he knew well, all "piled" into his car. Chet's embellishment of the experience thus far is a means to illustrate the uneasiness he felt in being surrounded by strangers in a new town, the complicated situation which makes his story dramatic.

After another reference to the antagonist of the story, "the meanest lookin' woman [he has] ever seen," the climax of the narrative is reached when Schuler overhears Chet tell the girls in his car about the cattle and thistles; she calls him a "God Damned liar." Chet did not want to further complicate his afternoon by, in addition to already feeling out of place, feeling embarrassed in front of the strangers in his car. His account of this experience shows that Mrs. Schuler represented the one individual whom he needed to believe his story in order to alleviate the uneasiness of his first day of school in Cassoday. Unfortunately and ironically, he told an unbelievable story that happened to be true. The ongoing disagreement between the two for the next "two or three years" is finally resolved one Sunday morning when Schuler admits to Chet

that he had been right all along. Before this admission occurs, however, he acknowledges that his perception of her, in his first days at Cassoday, was, perhaps, wrong: ". . . and she was a beautiful lady. Man, I really thought the world of her after I learned to know her." Initially, because Chet once perceived himself to be an outsider in Cassoday, he exaggerates his first perception of Mrs. Schuler in order to set up a contrast between it and a second perception of her he acquired after she believed his story. For Chet this represents the acceptance and respect he gained from her and, by extension, the community of Cassoday.

A personal narrative, such as "Can Cattle Grow Thistles?", always involves some degree of compromise between the truth of an experience and the demands of the genre. This usually occurs as some degree of enrichment. Many storytellers recognize possible stories for the main reason that their perceptions of the incidents and their general sense of the genre fit together easily. Other times, as Stahl writes, "a bit more work is involved: the teller must negotiate between accuracy and the demands of the genre in order to enhance the credibility or 'tellability' of [their] material . . ." (Literary 18). As Polly Stewart suggests of the oral legend, personal narratives are "told convincingly rather than fictively" (qtd. in Stahl; Literary 18). Manipulation of the facts involved in any narrative is for the sake of rhetoric--to persuade the listener toward an appreciation of cultural truths rendered in the story. Chet, for example, leads his listener to an understanding of how significant it is to have respect and to be accepted in one's community. No matter how a story is enhanced, however, both the teller and the listener work under the assumption that the story is true. In effect, then, the implied assertion that a personal narrative is true is maintained despite the contradictory demand that the story exhibit an esthetically pleasing dramatic structure. Within these contradictory demands is also the third feature of the personal narrative--the

self-same identity of the teller and the story's main character. The teller's identification with the story character is the primary means of certifying the truth of the incidents upon which the story is based. That is, the teller offers the authority of his or her own integrity and personal experience as the basis for the truthfulness of the story. However, as Stahl argues, "the teller is easily implicated in the 'literariness' of the interaction (storytelling) since he or she is the one who has given a piece of reality its dramatic structure and has as well transformed a subjective 'self' into a dramatic character" (Literary 19). In any situation where intimacy is involved, there is always some degree of risk, which is one reason why not everyone enjoys telling stories. A good storyteller, however, eagerly confronts the fact that he or she is the main character, the "I" of the narrative from whose point of view the story is to be defined and evaluated. Chet, for instance, in his story, is more than able to present an enriching, true account of his own personal experience in meeting Mrs. Schuler. One appreciates his story because it is an intimate truthful creation, an oral literary representation of differing perceptions he had at a very impressionable time in his life. "Can Cattle Grow Thistles?" is a personal narrative because it has form, style, thematic content, and function. It is an aesthetically pleasing true story.

An exegesis such as this may seem trite; Chet's story is not very sophisticated when it is compared to literature. However, I have analyzed and interpreted "Can Cattle Grow Thistles?" in order to highlight the importance of the fundamental interpretation of personal narratives that can inform one's more complicated interpretation of an area's communal folklore, the significance of the personal folklore in narratives arrived at by extension from one's response to hearing them told. Too often one develops an interpretation of what one hears too quickly, or one chooses not to bother with an interpretation at all. Perhaps this is because with personal narratives the

drawing of inferences is more of a low-level kind of interpretation than the kind literary theorists dwell on so much. Interpreting personal narratives seems to be a kind of filling-in process, a mere reflex action of the listening mind that is easily and thus too often neglected. From a scholarly point of view, to do this is to make a critical mistake, particularly if one is interested in commenting on folklore in addition to one's collecting of it.

In contemporary folkloristics, perspective of the dynamics of folklore in terms of its significance within society is the currency among American folklorists. This perspective sees the artistry in the communication of folklore and rests upon an understanding of folklife as it is communicatively constituted. In this sense folklore in all of its forms is symbolic of situated and circumstantial contexts where folklore is spoken and shared. Personal narrative research was born of this understanding and it continues to uphold it. Since the folklore found in personal narratives is altogether constituted in their oral expression, their form, style, content, and function, whatever level of attention one gives them, one should look at a corpus of personal narratives as being a discrete set of data that can lead one to an understanding of their cultural significance. In this way folklore is explainable in terms of its use in various social and cultural situations. Unruh's use of the personal narrative is a means to convey a theme of his acceptance in a rural Kansas community. One suspects whether or not the theme is generally significant for many individuals in similar settings and under similar circumstances elsewhere. Invariably, a large corpus of personal narratives that is given the kind of careful interpretation that I am suggesting will lead one to answers for this and many other questions regarding the significance of the folklore revealed in stories.

In the appendix to this thesis are more examples of personal narratives I recorded from Chet and a storyteller named Milton Hettenbach from Cedar

Point, Kansas, a community also located in the Kansas Flint Hills. In much the same way that Chet uses the personal narrative to convey his memorable first day in Cassoday, Milt uses his stories to reveal several themes of importance to him, themes which may be generally significant to the area as well. In his story, "A Country Boy Steals the Show" (pp. 67), for example, there seems to be little question as to how Milt thinks of himself in his rodeoing days. He's proud of his own independence and ability, proud of the way he used to ride bucking horses, and proud of the rural area where he's from. The theme of his rootedness to the area is touched upon as well as how it all seems to have changed so much--Ty Murray seems dislocated in comparison to the way Milt presents himself in the story. And the sport of contemporary rodeo seems less honorable in Milt's opinion. His memory captured in the story seems to be a kind of resiliency in the face of change.[7]

I have included an appendix with personal narratives from the Flint Hills for the simple purpose of presenting some of the various forms of the genre folklorists in this area have to deal with. The kind of attention to these stories that I am suggesting be given more frequently involves an interpretation of them in a manner similar to the way I have explicated "Can Cattle Grow Thistles?" In light of reader-response methodologies for interpreting works of literature, of course, one's interpretation of these stories will differ depending on the experiences and biases the reader brings to the interpretive situation. In any case, the necessity of their explication and interpretation is primary.

Notes

[1] When performance theorists have collected stories or other forms of oral folklore, they have used them more as a means to explain the nature of their theories than as a means to arrive at an understanding of the cultural significance of the items.

[2] These concepts are developed in light of modernity's influence by Erving Goffman, Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience, (New York: Harper, 1974). Bauman, especially, cites extensively the importance of Goffman's ideas in his early work on performance.

[3] It is my opinion that personal narratives are being collected in Kansas, but that they are given little or no scholarly attention. Their significance in terms of the culture of this area is often unexamined.

[4] See also William Labov, Language in the Inner City, (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1972) and John A. Robinson, "Personal Narratives Reconsidered," Journal of American Folklore 94 (1981): 58-85.

[5] For an excellent discussion of the various meanings of "tradition," see Ben-Amos, "The Seven Strands of 'Tradition': Varieties in Its Meaning in American Folklore Studies," Journal of Folklore Research 21 (1984): 97-131.

[6] The differences between these forms of personal narratives has much to do with the coherence of the narrative. A life-history, for example, can encompass much more in its narrative than, say, a personal anecdote. A life-history requires a more loosely arranged narrative, and in many instances it can resemble conversational narrative. The degree of its intimacy, however, is much higher than that of the personal anecdote or character anecdote.

[7] While not a study of personal narratives per se, William Least Heat-Moon's PrairyErth (a deep map), (Boston: Houghton, 1991) utilizes aspects of current personal narrative scholarship to explore this and many other themes revealed in narratives told by residents of Chase county, Kansas.

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Appendix: Personal Narratives of the Flint Hills

In addition to Chet Unruh's stories, I also include stories I recorded from Milton Hettenbach. Milt broke horses all of his life in the areas around Abilene, Kansas, and Cedar Point, Kansas, a community he moved to in 1950. Born in 1912, south of Chapman, Kansas, Milt estimates that he has started nearly 2,000 horses in his lifetime. He has ridden in rodeos, entertained as a trick rider, and was a leading draft horse breeder during the 1930s and 1940s.[1]

I have arranged the stories by their type. One should note that Milt's character anecdotes are stories about many of the horses he has owned. I include them under character anecdotes because Milt personifies these horses and because he firmly believes that "a horse is smarter than any man." He perceives several of the horses' qualities that are suggestive of many of his values. He showed me pictures of these horses as we talked.

As one reads and studies these stories, one should remember that they often overlap in terms of the kind of story by which I have arranged them. For example, Chet's story "'One Lick'll Do': The Time I Met Buss Young" can be construed as a personal anecdote just as well as it can a character anecdote. The story relates one of Chet's experiences at the same time that it reveals the character of Buss Young. Chet is a participant in this story as well as an observer. Another example of this is Chet's story "The Meanest Foremen I Ever Worked For." It contains character anecdotes about the foremen Chet remembers and is also an occupational story as well, because it provides a good description of what it was like to work for the railroad in the 1930s and 1940s.

In a few instances, I have included the questions I asked to present an accurate picture of the kinds of things one can ask a storyteller to get them

talking. The questions are also there as part of the context of the story as well. I have given the stories my titles, and I have tried to transcribe them in a way to preserve as much of Chet's and Milt's styles of speaking as possible.

PERSONAL ANECDOTES

Ridin' an Outlaw at the Abilene Fair
by Milt Hettenbach

Milt: I've been throwed, as far as that goes. Course, like a lot of fellas that know me real well said I've been lucky not gettin' hurt, and being throwed and everything, as many as I've rode. But back in '36, in March, I bought a three year old sorrel stallion. They called him [Baldy] an outlaw.[2] He wasn't. The people were. And I started riding him, then that summer, and that fall I was invited to the fair at Abilene to show the horse, course everybody knew about it by then, cause we had, well, we got married in January the 19th, that's on her birthday, in 1938, and she kept a guestbook.[3] There was 2,276 signed up in eleven months, well you know we had a lot of company (laughter). And, sometimes if we had a horse that had a bad reputation, this one time, I was talkin' about, in 36, there was about two hundred people there (Abilene) that day to see him rode. They just told each other, and found out about it, and that's just kind of the way it's always . . . always went.

Controversy at the Fair
by Milt Hettenbach

Milt: There's the first Percheron horse when I started in '33. We worked him and everything, just the way you do. It's like I always said, with our draft horses, we worked our draft horses, showed our work horses and worked our show horses. Go the fair,[4] a lot of times you'd hear somebody say, "Well, them horses never been worked." But they was always in good shape, always, shoulders and everything's clean, but when I worked in the field, come to the end of the field, I always raised that collar and wiped that sweat and that off, see, and cleaned it, but then what was funny, somebody'd come right in about that time and say, "Well I know better cause I saw Milt out there yesterday with about six of 'em on the disk," or somethin' like that, see, (laughter).

A Country Boy Steals the Show
by Milt Hettenbach

Tim: So when you hear about these horses with their bad reputation like Baldy, that would spark your interest, wouldn't it?

Milt: Yeah, yeah! I wanted to see if I was man enough to ride him! I never had nobody to help me, not like these professionals, now, these boys that are good like Ty Murray, you probably heard about him? He's just a little thin guy, I've seen him before. Well, he's got guys like, I mean professionals, see, that talk. Well, they'll be back of the chute giving him some instructions, which helps him, where I never had anybody help me back in those days, you know. But, that fall they had us come to Abilene to show him, why Clyde Miller from Iowa was there, he got a bucking string and he used to have a lot of good ropers and riders in his rodeo, but I rode three outta four of his top buckin' horses at Abilene. He says, "That boy just can't come in out of the country and ride our top buckin' horses." His wife says, "Yes. But he's doin' it." (laughter)

Roping Buffalo with a Three Year Old
by Milt Hettenbach

Milt: So and so down south, I forget his name, now, but he used to have buffalo, but they traded bulls down . . ., anyway they went to unload them and the guy who owned them down there had some horses, see, he said, "How are you goin' to ketch 'em?" Well they was going to ketch 'em off a pickup. What would you do if you caught a buffalo off a pickup? So they couldn't catch them and they come over and wanted me and my neighbor to go down and help out, but, course you know how these stories get, this one said, "Oh they go 75 miles an hour." I said, "Well there ain't no use goin' down there." The horse couldn't, you know, do that, but anyway we went down there, but I can tell you a little joke about this: When we was going down, why the guy who owned the buffalo, and I don't know if you know him or not, he's got some other animals and all, or did have. He's alright, but some days he may never speak to you; he may be on a blue streak and that's just his nature, but anyway going down, him and a neighbor and I--we was in the truck--and he had some others go too, you know, and going down he says, "A horse ain't no good to rope off of until they're eight or nine year old."[5] I looked out the window. I never said a word. Arch Walker was sittin' right by me and I broke his horse and the horse I was ridin' was just three, but anyway when they ended up, I caught the buffalo with this three year old horse. He worked good, course I'd used him.

Debbie Buller's Damn Good Barrel Racer
by Milt Hettenbach

Milt: Now this isn't my horse here, but I can tell you a little story about him. The girl, Debby Buller, over at Peabody had him, she's good, now I mean that girl can ride. But the damn horse got to throwin her, course he was fast and he knew how to do it too. And they was going to haul him to the killers or something because, see, they couldn't handle him. Somebody told them over there, No take him to Milt's, so they brought him over here one Sunday and I saddled him in the barn and he stood just nice as could be and this girl was honest. She says, "Now he's tricky when you get on." Well, hell, he stood good and I took him outside, stepped up, but I never could find the other stirrup. Oh my God, the hairs just about--I was afraid he was going to run over her and her dad! Hell, there's nothin' I could do! Carl Evans was sittin' down there in his car, he and his wife, and he seen me.[6] I started right close to forty for Carl and he had some of the orneriest devils, some were good, some were ornery. And he said to his wife, "Milt's gona get throwed, he can't find that stirrup." Sure as hell, I was throwed (laughter). Here I had rode all of his, they bucked and everything and never did get throwed, but anyway I got right back on him and rode him, went ahead and broke him.

Well then that summer, she'd come over and ride that horse down there at the ranch Well, I always kind of hated it cause I was afraid she'd jimmy him up; she wanted him for a barrel racin' horse, but that didn't matter, she rode him. Well anyway, that fall she was bid 3500 for that horse and I thought oh God, girl, you ought to take that money! I'd a grabbed it! (laughter) I never sold one that high! And she didn't. Little later on she sold it to a girl she had been runnin' competition with. 6500!

And her dad, I haven't seen him for years, he did barber then for awhile in El Dorado. But anyway I said to him one day, "You never thought when you brought that horse over. . . " No," he says, "We was going to haul him off." But she rode him and she done good with the barrel racin' and that, but I never sold one that high, I'll tell you. Sold a lot of good horses, though.

Can Cattle Grow Thistles?
by Chet Unruh

Chet: The first day I was here in high school--they had the old grade school settin" over here back behind this grade school--and, they give us the afternoon off at the high school. They was goin" to have a ball game down here. So, I think I told you this, but--when you was here a while back--that ole Herman Schuler's mother;[7] she cut her hair like a man and they had an old coupe car. So, I had an old Model A Ford I was drivin' to school; I lived five miles out in the country, here, south, where my dad lived. So when they let school out for the ball game, these girls all piled in my old Model A Ford; I didn't know none of 'em. And I parked alongside that old lady, you know, and she was the meanest lookin' woman I ever seen just by lookin' at her, you know. And one of the girls' windows was all rolled down in the car, you know, and one of the girls says, "Say, tell us about dust storms." I said, "Well, they got so bad out there that thistles would grow on the back ends of cows' backs." And, man that old woman looked at me and says, "You're a God Damned liar!" Just like that, see. Boy, I looked at her and I said, "I believe you're right."

And, you know, that went on for about two or three years, and she was a beautiful lady. Man, I really thought the world of her after I learned to know her. And one Sunday morning after church she met me at the back of the church, and she put her arm around my shoulder and says, "Chet, I've got to ask for your forgiveness." I said, "My God, what'd I do now?" She said, "Remember when I called you a God Damned liar?" I said, "Boy, I'll never forget." She says, "Me and Dode--" that was her husband, Herman Schuler's dad-- "was out at the stockyards yesterday and we seen it." The cattle come in--you know a

cow, they tell me, don't sweat, and you get a little tiny shower of rain and them thistle seeds embedded in that dirt and stuff; them damned things would sprout and grow, you know, and it was the truth! But I wasn't goin" to tell her. But she finally admitted it to me that she'd seen it.

CHARACTER ANECDOTES

Showin' Bill to the Government
by Milt Hettenbach

Tim: Do you remember any particular horses that were your favorite or that you can remember as being an especially good horse?

Milt: I have a number of good, favorite horses that, like I told you, like those mares that worked without a bridle on; you don't forget those kind. I'll just show you a picture. My book's gettin' kind of bad. Now there's the horse that I learned to ride on. When we used to drive cattle, my mother had a pasture twenty-two miles from home. I'd get tired of sittin' there all day followin' cattle. Well, there's how I learned, see, I'd get up and stand on him, play with the rope, whip and everything. I got to doin' that, then, of course, later why I started trick ridin'. I liked to do that. There's one of the best horses a man ever rode.

Tim: This one right here?

Milt: Yeah. This is the same horse. Now, this horse is out of a Percheron mare and a government remount stallion. See, the government used to furnish a remount, a horse off the track, and Wes Stats up there stood one for eighteen years (not the same horse), see it changes every so many years, but then the government came back to buy those colts sometimes, but Wes stood this horse.[8] He'd always call

me and I'd go down and show the horse. A lot of farmers can't get a horse to walk, trot, and gallop, and they got to do that in front of the officers, see, but of all the horses I ever showed there, an officer never spoke to me, never said a word until I took this horse down. He was mine.

Tim: Now, what's his name?

Milt: Bill. And older guys know him. Hell, her brother up in Michigan still talks about Bill. Well that's the same horse right here. They're all the same. He lived as different the way the pictures show. But when I took him down there that day, they bought some other horses; he looked at him, the officer backed off, and he says, "Is that your horse, boy?" And I said, "Yeah." He said, "Just one thing wrong with him, you know what it is?" And I said, "No." He says, "Well, I want two hundred more just like him." And then after they got done buyin' they'd go down to the barn; they'd put a 'US' stamp on 'em, you know. And, he says, "You know what I told ya?" And I said, "Yeah." He says, "I mean it." He says, "I'll take two hundred just like that horse." I says, "Well, I don't know where to find one just like him." You know, but that's one of the first horses that I rode. Back then, I never did have no truck or anything, and thataway anywhere we went, why I'd ride him. We had a pasture twenty two-miles from home, and I'd ride up the day before and stay with the old bachelor on the place over night, next day I drove a herd of cows home, just him and I, but he'd stay in the road long as you left the reins up, he'd bring the cattle, if you dropped 'em he'd wait there till you came back, but, that's the way we done it. Part of the way we went down old highway 77, course there wasn't the traffic then that there is today.

Baldy, the Outlaw
by Milt Hettenbach

Milt: Now you talk about your reputation, a man has a reputation, this horse, Baldy, was down at Diamond Springs, I lived at Woodbine, but I heard about his reputation.[9] He'd threw a school teacher once; the horse threw him and hooked the saddle horn here in his leg, course he had a bad leg. Well, they turned him out, just give up breakin' him, and they tried to run him in one Sunday, but they came down a draw, and when he came to the bank, you know, he jumped it, where the other horse didn't it, and it ruined their good horse, so they turned him out, never tried to get him in, and I heard about it, and I went out and bought him then, and, that's when the first time I rode him; that's when there was a couple hundred people there to see if I could ride him. But he was unusual. I never seen another one like him and probably never will. He was thin like he looks there, that's the way he was, but that son-of-gun, one day, got away, when I went through the gate, he run off from me, but we took two of the horses to get him. He could run down the fence, like that, with it, lengthwise, and he'd raise up and jump between those poles and light on the other side a runnin', turn right around the other way, face it, and jump it, but I never seen him--the first day I rode him he slipped on the grass--but after that I never seen him ever fall. There was quite awhile when you couldn't hold him, he'd run off with ya, but he wouldn't buck ya off, but he'd try to scare you to death; he'd run and when he went about so far, just on his own, he just turn a circle and come back, and he'd lean clear over and come back, but there you could see that I got so I could stand up on him there, and here I'm layin' up on his head and neck.

Prince, World Famous Cow Horse
by Milt Hettenbach

Milt: But anyway, that little girl on Prince is from Michigan, She was on this horse, and I traded him to Jim Williams, and of course, he'd (Prince) follow a cow anywhere it went, I mean (laughter) one time they had a little deal up here at Florence. They were going to catch some calves up there and this netting across the end of the place. A calf jumped it, but I caught him then. But he would follow anywhere, work, couldn't ask for a better cow horse, but this friend of mine sent him to Colorado to his grand daughter, and she got to ropin' goats on him and everything and when she'd catch her goat, now I never did get to see it, but anyway the announcer would always say, "Watch that grey horse." Cause she'd run back to the other end of the arena, the horse would be right with her, follow her, where the other horses run off. But he made history after he got out there. They got to playin' Polo on him. Hell, he'd never played Polo! But he'd follow that ball like he would a cow. And he got, was in, I think five different states, he was on T.V. And I don't know what all (laughter).

One Lick'll Do: The Time I Met Buss Young[10]
by Chet Unruh

Chet: If you recall, you know, I told you about that time when I met Buss Young. Were you here that day? Well, anyway, you know, I didn't know who Buss Young was. In fact, they just buried Frank, his brother, here the other day, out here in the cemetery. I was standin' in front of that barber shop and beer tavern there, didn't know a soul, and there was two guys from Matfield Green come in here with an old pickup and they had some broad with 'em. This tall guy--he was tall--and the little short guy reminded me of a couple of cartoon characters. The tall guy and this little shorty, they got in an argument over this beetle they'd brought with 'em, you know. And all of a sudden this tall guy just went and knocked the tar out of that little short guy. And I seen this guy standin' there all in cowboy uniform, you know, holdin' on to his saddle horse with his reins, and I heard this voice say: "I believe that's enough." And man, he walked across the street, led that horse across there, never turned that horse loose, hit that big tall guy and stretched him out on the street there. And, they had an old pickup setting right there--the tail gate was down on it-- and old Buss Young reached down and got him by the belt buckle--he had a big belt buckle on, this tall guy--picked him up, threw him in the back end of that pickup, told that little short guy, he said, "Now get him out of town and don't make the mistake of comin' back." That little shorty got in the pickup--when they left town, them feet was stickin' straight up--and that's where I met Buss Young.[11]

Gus Larson
by Chet Unruh

Chet: His name was Gus Larson. He was an old Norwegian. He come from the old country--Norway. And he no more than got over here, that was in World War I, and by God, they drafted him and he had to fight his own people. (laughter) He was a character. We'd get these coal cars right on the north side of the depot here, where the bathroom is now. They had a little window there where we'd unload a load of coal from the track. We had a chute that we'd put from the car to the window, and we'd have to unload that darned car 'til we got that coal house full of coal for the agent to burn, see. And we'd be unloading that coal and, my God, that Gus Larson--he'd get so dirty and dusty, and he always chewed that snuff, and God Damn, come time to eat dinner, he'd take that sandwich, you know, and he'd grab her like that, with both hands, and break her in half and the bread was just black when he got through with it, you know. Hell, he'd go ahead and eat it and, boy, he was a character, I'll tell you!

And one day we was workin' on the hill near Aikman, and he always looked like he never took a bath, and he was the nicest guy in the world. We was standin' there watchin' a train go by, you know, and we had our shovels--we'd been workin', you know--and God it was cold that day, boy, in the dead of winter up on top of that hill, and pretty soon he says, "Vell [in a Norwegian accent], it is not so cold." And I looked at him, you know, and I had quite a sense of humor in them days, and I said, "Gus, by the time that cold gets through all that damned dirt and coal dust, you got on you, it's bound to be warm." He said, "You little son-of-a-bitch," and up the track he took me with that shovel, you know, and he walked like a duck. He was swipin' at me and I was stayin' ahead of him. (laughter) Yeah, he was a card![12]

One Tipped Astronomer: The Deaver Stories
by Chet Unruh

Chet: We had an old man that lived right next door to the high school by the name of Deaver,[13] and he was a card within himself. This Duane Harsh, you know, I was tellin' you about, had and old Model T that he stripped down and had a flat bed on it. And old Deaver, he was always moochin' rides, you know, and so Duane Harsh and Clark Harriger was up town in this old Model T Ford. And when they come out of the beer tavern old man Deaver was standin' flat footed, you know, on the bed of the old pickup--the Model T--and wanted Duane to take him home. He lived right next to the high school there--old man Deaver. And so, old Duane, he fired her up, you know, and man he left town and he had both ears wide open and he took out alongside 177 instead of goin' to Deaver's house. When he got from where the old car bodies was, where the pumper lived, old Duane, he stepped on the reverse pedal, you know, and never slowed down--just slid her around, and when he did old Deaver just slid off the back end up by the railroad track, and the dust flew around. He got up and said, "By God, I ain't never goin' to ride with you again." It's a wonder it didn't kill him. Boy, I'll tell you!

And then, come out of church one Sunday morning and Perry Whitam had dropped his wife off to church in a big, well, he had an old cattle truck, and he had it loaded with horses, and old Deaver comes out of church and unbeknownst to Perry Whitam, he crawls in the back end with them horses, you know, figured old Perry'd take him home. Perry didn't know he was back there and he got plumb to Matfield Green and unloaded them horses out in the cow pasture and when he did, here come old Deaver a staggerin' out of there.

Deaver went to town one day in El Dorado and he was on--see,

that used to be a--I can't even think of the highway now. It was an old gravel road, you know, from here to El Dorado, and old Deaver got out there an the Y where you cut off of 177 and come--I mean 77--to come down 177, and he didn't have a ride, so he laid down in the middle of the street and when they gathered around him, he just automatically got in somebody's car and they had to bring him home, you know, that's the way he was. He was an old astronomer, a pretty tipped one too, I'll tell you--is that what they call 'em that study the stars? And that's what he was, you know, and he was an intelligent man. Man, he was intelligent. But he was somethin' else, and they'd pass the collection plate in church, you know, and he was liable to take some out instead of puttin' somethin'. You know, they had some characters around town. Yeah.

The Meanest Guys I Ever Worked for
by Chet Unruh

Chet: Them foremen I told you about, they were rough and tough foremen, I mean, we had one foreman by the name of Lope Woolridge here in later years and he was from the old school. Boy, he carried his pistol right in his pocket. I ain't kiddin'. Then we had an old section foreman at Belle Plaine by the name of Whitehurst, and he had two pistols that he carried on a belt. I'll tell you, they didn't have no union. This Herman Mitchell--I gotta tell you this one--I was workin' for him in later years, and we had five miles of track east of town and he'd load all them guys up on the motor car and we had saddles where we rode on push cars like ball bleachers. He'd take us to the end of the section, turn the motor car around, and then he'd fire the best man he had and make him walk to town. Sometimes we'd have to set off to let a train by, and he'd set there 'til he figured that that guy he fired was about here in town, and then he'd put the motor car back on, load us all up, go through town here and make the guy he fired walk in.

In the early or the late 1930s and early 1940s, when I went to work with 'em out there one morning, there was three farmers, five farmers, standin' along the right-of-way there, waitin' for the foreman to fire a guy so that they could try to get his job. One morning he fired a guy, made him walk to town, farmer crawled across the track, come up to the track and give Herman Mitchell fifty cents, and Herman worked him that day, next morning he fired him. I tell you, they were mean! By God, they was mean![14]

Raising Cattle and Horses in the Early Days
by Milt Hettenbach

Tim: Can you tell me a little bit about your operation, I mean, you have raised cattle?

Milt: Yeah! Well, I started back in 1933 raisin' registered Percheron horses and we had Hereford cattle at the time and, well, we raised horses and cattle then, until '45 and we had a sale, sold the registered stock and then after that in '47 why I went to Angus cattle until here, until a few years ago why we always raised Angus. Until then.

Tim: Was there a reason why you switched?

Milt: Well. The horses, the Percheron horses we just had to quit because, see, that's when they quit, the tractors came in. We had a grey horse that came from Indiana and he'd been showed at the Illinois state fair, Indiana state fair, International, Royal, and won at all them places. And, colts outta him and mares like at 42 dollars a head, you can't raise, see, your feed and all, so I had to quit, and, so we just sold the registered Hereford cattle, and the horses both, then I went to Angus, but I never did keep up papers on the Angus. We used registered bulls, but I find found out over the experience that I could raise better if I kept the very choice heifers out of these good Angus cows better than a lot of registered stuff cause so many registered people. . . . Now I'm not opposed to registered stock, don't misunderstand me, but so many will just keep that calf, well now that don't work.[15] Not like with registered horse or cattle, you take the best horse and the mare or the best bull and cow and the calves won't always be the same, you know, and so

that's the reason why we switched to Angus. We just kept the very choice heifers each year, just some, we didn't keep 'em all, just a few and same way with bulls, we just kept a few choice bull calves each year out of 'em, and we always had buyers for 'em.

Of course, with horses, or cattle what does a man the most good is your repeat buyers. You know what I mean? If it satisfies a man, it's just like, I went over some of my books yesterday, this fella down at Yates Center has got, well, he wouldn't have 'em now, of course, they've aged, but he bought a saddle mare from me. Well that mare would, I could rope a calf out in his big pastures without a bridle on her. Well there ain't many horses you can do that with, you know? And the same way then he came back and bought another mare from me, and that mare worked cattle without a bridle. She'd put a calf through a gate with no bridle on, but you better know how to ride her, you know? And, then he came back and bought the third one, and when they came one Sunday, her brother and his wife was here from Michigan, and they had their camper out here. We go in to feed the cattle and these people came, and I didn't know this till afterwards, but they told them, they said, "Oh we wouldn't buy a saddle horse from anyone but me cause they had such good luck." So they ended up with the three of the top mares that we'd broke over the time. They didn't buy 'em all at once, see, as they got older, they came back and bought another one. That's the same with bulls. What I like is the fellas that'll come back and buy again, you know, they're satisfied, or they don't do that. That's the same way with horses. And with breakin' horses, I never, we never did run an ad, you know what I'm talkin' about, a paid ad, see the people, one would just tell the other one. One time somebody's talkin', I said I never advertised. This guy says, "The hell you do." Word, you know travels.

Breaking Horses
by Milt Hettenbach

Milt: Well. There's a difference in horses, all of 'em, but what we done, we just took them and as they brought 'em, I mean, anybody had a horse want broke. Course when I was little, I'll go back a ways. When I was a kid my dad died when I was ten. And I worked horses and hauled wheat and things when I was real little, see, but I kept right on and then when I got bigger and went into Percherons, why I always broke my own and everything, same way with saddle horses, but I lived in Dickinson County then, and whenever anybody had a horse they wanted rode or somethin', why they'd get me to ride it, but the way we always done it, now this may not agree with some people, but most always if they'd brought a horse they thought couldn't be rode or something, or wanted it rode, we took it out either in the pasture or in the field in the open. I'd rather ride in the open. If they're going to throw ya, I'd rather be there and, one thing I've always said, and I'll still say it. You can ask anybody that knows me, I've never cheated a horse when I broke him. I either ride him with a halter or the littlest, cheapest Hackamore bit that you can put on 'em. Never put a bit in their mouth. And that's one reason why I could break as many or start as many in a short time as I did because if you turned the colt loose, he wanted to buck. Well I'd aim to ride him till he quit, see, buckin', but I never believed in takin' a colt and go out and ride him clear down, you know, some guys'll ride a colt, well, once get on there, just ride him down.

Now I've got a little colt here. Won't be two till April. And I went and checked in the pasture yesterday and went quite a ways but I didn't ride hard and fast and all. I wouldn't on that young of a colt, see, usually they're a little older, but I'd been playin' with her a little this winter, now,

and startin' 'em thataway. And another thing, when I rode a colt the first time somebody'd hold 'im till I got on, and I'd go in and ride it. Well then I always got on and off, both sides, right away and everything, the first day. It's new to 'em and you get 'em started. And another thing with breakin' one, 'I've always made a habit of going different directions, you know, every day. A lot of these traders won't do that and the colt gets barnsour, you know, and, then another thing, as soon as we started riding them, why we had a couple here to break at a time. Why she'd [Lora] ride one, and I'd ride the other one, and we'd change off and go check cattle right away and everything, you know, go up and count 'em or something, gives the colt something to do, and, well they learned if they started working right away. And that's the way we've always done it.

Big Business in Cassoday
by Chet Unruh

Chet: Hell, railroadin was big business, I'll tell you! Early in the spring, you know, when they'd ship them cattle in . . . . My goodness, it was just car load after car load of 'em, you know, day and night, and the cowboys would line up and sleep in this waiting room while they was waiting on their cattle to get in, see. And that little restaurant where we ate [where I first met Chet], where we set, that was the old original restaurant. The other part wasn't even built, you know, where the other people sat on the far side. And I've seen them cowboys line up from the front of the cafe plumb to that stop sign up on Main Street there, waitin' their turn to eat because they only had about eight stools, you know, at the counter, and that was it! And I think I told you, when you was here, ole' Holt Green, his wife, you know run the cafe; however, when I come to this country first, that part was a cream station--where you and me sat and drank coffee--that was a cream station. They didn't even have a restaurant there. In later years, Miss Opal Green opened that restaurant, and God, them cowboys lined up, you know, and was a hot day I remember. My goodness it was hot--here come an old dead wagon truck around the corner, stopped right in front of the restaurant, 5,000 flies, and that old truck driver got out and he looked just as cruddy as his truck did, and old Holt Green herded him to that lady that run the restaurant--Opal. Holt was a friendly guy, you know, and he always wore shiney cowboy boots and he was a short guy and he always had a cowboy hat and everything--he wanted to be friendly to that guy, you know, and he said, "How's business?" And that guy says, "Deader than Hell." (laughter) I tell you, that was a circus.

Working for the Santa Fe Railroad
by Chet Unruh

Tim: Can you describe what your job with the railroad was like, what you did?

Chet: Well, I was on the maintenance department, you know, the track department. Like I said, we'd have about 20 guys, you know, and them old section foremen, man they were rough guys. I worked for, when I first come here, I worked for a foreman by the name of Leo Westerhaus. Yeah, and he was a section foreman there for years, and then before that they had a little guy there, and I can't recall his name anymore, but when I hired on with the railroad, I got on the steel gang first, and they had 150 men on the steel gang. They had a great big 16 tool air compressor that they'd run and we had spike drivers for layin' rail. They had four spike drivers on each end of the 16 tool air compressor. And us guys, we had some guys go on ahead that would set the spike in the tie and then we'd come along with these air guns and drive 'em down, and there was 16 spike spike drivers an that rascal who worked 10-hour days. If two guys went to the water keg together to get a drink, one of 'em was fired. Yes, sir, he was automatically fired because they claimed if two of 'em went to visitin', they'd kill time.

And then I got on the section here, after that steel gang went through. There was an old man by the name of Scorchy Quillin that run the steel gang. Scorchy Quillin--he was a steel layin' gang foreman, and they'd ship him all over, you know, and he'd take his gang wherever he went. And then, when they closed that steel gang down here--got through with this job--well, then this Leo Westerhaus give me a job workin' on the railroad for him. And we had motor cars in them days, you know. We had what you called "set off" every quarter of a mile on

the main line, where if you worked in that area, you'd set your motor car off on this set-off, and then you'd have to carry your tools to wherever you'd work, see. And they had about ten guys on--ten guys would be on each side of the track, like if you goin' to put in a new tie or something. The guy on the "off" side would dig his end out and you'd dig your end out and there was 10 of them scattered out through the area. And if two of you was workin', like say on the front end and you got ready to move back, you'd walk down to the end of the line and you'd fall in there and start another tie, see. If you moved and another bunch come back to where you was, and if you didn't have yours done, you'd have to tell the foreman why. Every time you moved, they moved, see, and you had to keep up.

There was no weeds along the right-of-way. Every so often, even around the telegraph poles, we'd have to scuff around them 15 feet in a circle, so if the prairie fires come they wouldn't burn the poles down, see.

And then we'd change rail out--these steamers was awful hard on rail. If he was comin' up the hill and he'd stop here at Cassoday, here to unload cattle, and if he'd get on to his train and the engineer would open the throttle a little too fast--steam was hard to control-- his drivers would spin and they'd burn a hole in the rail. After he had gone, why then we'd have to check that rail, and if it was burnt more than 1/ 16th of an inch, we had to change the rail because it would take the temper out of the steel. It would just get her red hot, you know, and then they'd add them sanders on these steamers which would cause it to grind more because it would give him traction, if he ever spun, man, he'd really take off, I'll tell you. I seen one train up here, well it wasn't near here, it was up east of McPherson there where I sectioned. This engineer's power got away from him and he burnt down into his rail and they had to get

another train to hook on to him and pull him out because once you dig down, you'd just set there and spin. Yeah, see, you can't get no traction. So, it was exciting.

Notes

[1] For an excellent feature story on Milt, see Frank J. Buchman, "Milt Hettenbach is a 'Real' Cowboy," Grass & Grain 24 Feb. 1981: 2-3.

[2] Stories of outlaw horses are probably fairly prevalent, especially if one considers how many people came to watch Milt ride one.

[3] Milt is referring to his wife Lora here. She was listening as we talked. Recently she had a stroke and is only partially able to communicate.

[4] Milt makes several references to fairs in various places. The activities of these events have given him many experiences from which to create his stories.

[5] In a manner similar to how one would research allusions in a work of literature, the attitude of how old a horse should be before it is any good for roping requires research into uncovering how diverse these attitudes are among horsemen. Milt alludes to what he feels is wrong about roping cattle with a horse that has to be eight or nine years old in the opinion of the man who bought the buffalo in the story.

Throughout these stories, especially the character anecdotes, there are allusions to people Milt and Chet have known in their lifetimes. I supply brief annotations to a few of these individuals. However, if one's purpose were a complete interpretation of the significance of these stories, one would certainly want to know as much as possible about them. See, for example, Jim Hoy, ed., Cassoday: Cow Capital of Kansas, (Butler County Historical Society, 1984).

[6] Milt told me that Carl Evans was a neighbor of his to the west.

[7] Herman Schuler's mother, Dode Schuler's wife, was named Hallie. She and Dode were married in 1908. She died in 1946. Dode lived until

1964 (Hoy 95).

[8] This is an allusion to the United States Government Remount Program to provide the Calvary with good horses. The program lasted until the

beginning of World War II.

[9] Milt makes a second reference to Baldy, the outlaw horse with a bad reputation he broke and rode.

[10] For a good study of "fight stories" in rural America see James P. Leary, "White Guys' Stories of the Night Street," Journal of the Folklore Institute 14 (1983): 105-117.

[11] Chet tells stories similar to this one about Frank and Howard Young as well. The family moved to the Cassoday area around the turn of the century.

[12] I have not been able to locate any information on Gus Larson.

[13] Deaver's full name was Lucern Deaver. He moved to the Cassoday area from Ionia, Kansas, in 1906 (Hoy 61). He died in 1948.

[14] During my interview with Chet, he made several references to the pre-union days of railroading. Many of these stories form a large part of his entire repertoire.

[15] This is an excellent allusion to the raising of registered stock. Milt's feeling on this is perfectly clear.

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