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## Translating Orality to Literacy: Writing Both an Audible Text and an Oral Narrative Situation

Leif Lorentzon

Scholars of African literature have trouble comparing the modern African novel with traditional oral narratives from Africa—and yet for students of the former, the comparison has become necessary. Next to the fact that the reader often does not understand the language used by an African storyteller (an issue that is a central problem, but one I cannot address here), it is the transcription to the written form that creates seemingly overwhelming obstacles for satisfactory comparison.

During the almost 200 years since the publication of the Grimms brothers' *Kinder-und Hausmärchen* in 1812, there has been little respect for the oral storyteller. Rarely are their names mentioned in books of folkstories. Moreover, editors found it necessary to make changes to the collected narratives. During the 19th century an editor would, in his ignorance of oral narrating, have varied recurring epithets such as "swift-footed Achilles," "square-affluent Uruk," or "honorable Rama." The written language avoids repetition, whereas the spoken language uses them.<sup>1</sup> The result was a written text that did not depict what the storyteller had told, but rather that which the editors felt he ought to have told.<sup>2</sup> Today we know better, thanks in part to the thorough research by Milman Parry and Albert B. Lord on the Balkans.<sup>3</sup>

It took some time before editors of oral narratives heeded Lord's words from 1960 that the narrating or the performance of a story is a creative act. It is not a retelling of a story someone else has created: "An oral poem is not composed *for* but *in* performance /.../ Our singer of tales is a composer of tales. Singer, performer, composer, and poet are one under different aspects *but at the same time* /.../ a creative artist making the tradition."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> A very illustrative example of this is found in Harold Scheub, *The Xhosa "Ntsomi"* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975). See especially chapter VII, 146-167.

<sup>2</sup> See the first chapter in Albert B. Lord, *Epic Singers and Oral Traditions* (Ithaca & London: Cornell UP, 1991) for an informative discussion regarding this.

<sup>3</sup> See *Serbo-Croatian Heroic Songs*, collected by M. Parry, edited and translated by Albert B. Lord (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1953).

<sup>4</sup> Albert B. Lord, *The Singer of Tales* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1960) 13. See also Ruth Finnegan,

The most obvious consequence of this statement is that a new narrative, a new discourse, is created at every performance of the same story. (The distinction in narratology between narrative/discourse and story is very useful here.) This is why it is of immense importance when scholars collect different narratives of the same story. The most conspicuous example of this in Africa is the many different written versions of the Mandinka epic *Sunjata*. Gordon Innes has for instance collected three versions in one volume.<sup>5</sup> Imagine if we had three versions of the *Gilgamesh* and the *Iliad*!

Lord's statement also puts emphasis on the narrative situation. A video-camera of course captures much more than a tape-recorder or a notebook. In my essay, I assume that it is a written text we want, and thus the problem remains. In order to make the written reproduction as faithful to the oral original as possible—if this is the purpose, which is not at all certain—one should consider all aspects of the performance, "the event that is narrated in the work and the event of the narration itself."<sup>6</sup> For the purpose of our comparison, we need as much of this as possible on paper; music, mime, dance, clothes and masks, but above all, the audience should end up on paper—because, as Walter J. Ong affirms, the storyteller remembers publicly.<sup>7</sup> The listeners participate in the raconteur's recapitulation of the story into a new narrative. The story is often familiar to the audience and is common property. If this perhaps does not comply with all storytelling, it does so with the African epic, which is the kind of narrative I will discuss in this essay. In Africa the griot generally uses the very same repertoire the listeners are familiar with: "The audience is, in a sense, both spectator and participant; it is part of the raw material of the performance."<sup>8</sup>

A comparison between, for instance, a novel by Ayi Kwei Armah and the oral tradition can never be fully satisfactory, as it unfortunately is impossible to capture everything on paper. But there are editors of oral narratives and theorists who nevertheless have tried

*Oral Literature in Africa* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), and the discussion in her first chapter on the significance of the performance for the creation of the oral narrative in Africa, 1-12.

<sup>5</sup> Gordon Innes (ed.), *Sunjata, Three Mandinka Versions* (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, 1974).

<sup>6</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981) 255.

<sup>7</sup> Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy* (London & New York: Routledge, 1988) 145.

<sup>8</sup> Harold Scheub, "Performance of Oral Narrative," in William R. Bascom (ed.), *Frontiers of Folklore* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1977) 54. See also Scheub, 1975, 58-61.

to improve the situation. I would like to discuss two such efforts here, which I believe complement each other quite well—two endeavors pointing to two pivotal circumstances worth considering. On the one hand, I discuss the entire narrative situation, the social context within which the narrative is created, and on the other, I emphasize the whole repertoire of voices, mime, songs, body language and everything else a narrator may use in a given narration.

Gordon Innes has expressed serious doubts about the merit of his publication and translation of *Sunjata*, which illustrates clearly these difficulties.<sup>9</sup> Innes initially points to the language of the original, which is everyday Gambian Mandinka. When Western translators give African epics a high or elevated style, they corrupt the original. And this is not necessarily a 19<sup>th</sup>-century phenomenon. John William Johnson has in his translation of *Sunjata* used an English style that seems to this reader rather irritating in its mannerism.<sup>10</sup> The "elevated" style Johnson has chosen is, according to most experts in the field, foreign to African oral epics. It is instead precisely the common language of the narratives which guarantees the survival of the stories, even when they are epics. That African epics are narrated in everyday language has of course had ethnographers and anthropologists doubting the existence of the epic in Africa. We know better today.

What, however, makes Innes most apprehensive about his achievement is his suspicion that he has failed to convey any of the emotional quality of the originals. He mentions that the narratives have poor imagery and lack descriptive passages. In the English versions this comes across as stylistically simple. Yet he knows that for the audience it was an immense emotional experience to hear the narrative. Innes also mentions many praise names, which he of course also included in his translation. But for the English-reading audience, who may lack the needed socio-cultural experience to understand these, the praise names seem repetitive and unnecessary, while they have great emotional significance for the Mandinka listener. Innes concludes, "my realization that the resultant English texts, aiming at a close and faithful translation of the Mandinka, convey little, if anything, of the

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<sup>9</sup> Gordon Innes, "Formulae in Mandinka Epics: The Problem of Translation," in Isidore Okpewho (ed.), *The Oral Performance in Africa* (Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 1990) 101-110.

<sup>10</sup> John W. Johnson (ed.), *The Epic of Sun-Jata According to Magan Sisoko* (Bloomington: Folklore Publications Group, 1979).

emotional overtones of the original."<sup>11</sup>

His disappointment is partly a result of his strategy to be as faithful as possible to the original. Another possibility, which he also discusses in the article, is to "novelize" the griot's narrative, much like D. T. Niane's famous rendering of the Sunjata legend.<sup>12</sup> Niane's text is more his own literary version of the epic. Consequently the storyteller's name is not found on the cover, but first appears in the foreword. Niane's text has of course been dismissed by scholars; yet it is the Sunjata version which has reached most readers and has hence become a best-seller in both the French "original" and the English translation.

It is no wonder that academics have recommended other approaches to collecting oral narratives. Dell Hymes, probably the leading critic in the field of ethnopoetics, is very critical of the editing of collected oral material. He insists that what ought to have priority today is "showing the bones of the narratives."<sup>13</sup> Many folklorists apparently still edit their collected material. Hymes shows that when he compares field-notes with final text versions, lines have disappeared and been rearranged, and several versions of the same story have become one printed version.

His criticism also extends to another peculiar method suggested by Eric Montenyohl, also published in *Oral Tradition*.<sup>14</sup> In this case, instead of proceeding from the raconteur's narrative, it is the collector's version of the recorded performance that ought to be the point of departure for the written text. Thus, it is the researcher's personal experience of a performance that is contextualized.<sup>15</sup> This is unacceptable for Albert B. Lord and Dell Hymes, who argue that narrating is just as interesting as the story and the narrative. From their perspective it is desirable to have as faithful a documentation as possible of the narrative situation or event. Hymes also insists that as long as there are stories and narratives that are unknown, it is a matter

<sup>11</sup> Innes, 1990, 110.

<sup>12</sup> D. T. Niane, *Soundjata, ou l'épopée mandingue* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1960). See also another novelization of the same story by Camara Laye, *Le maître de la parole* (Paris: Plon, 1978).

<sup>13</sup> Dell Hymes, "Ethnopoetics, Oral-Formulaic Theory, and Editing Texts," *Oral Tradition*, 9.2 (1994): 353.

<sup>14</sup> Eric L. Montenyohl, "Strategies for the Presentation of Oral Traditions in Print," *Oral Tradition*, 8.1 (1993): 159-186.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

of making them publicly accessible. After that is done, edited versions are acceptable. Any other approach would be similar to regarding Alexander Pope's *Iliad* as Homer's, or children's stories from the Old Testament as the Pentateuch.

When we consider Dell Hymes, we realize that Gordon Innes does not have to despair, particularly as his three translations were published parallel to the original Mandinka. Innes, however, will also be able to find consolation in Dennis Tedlock's theories and methods for the transcription of oral narratives. From his studies of oral narrating among the Zuni Indians in New Mexico, Tedlock has developed a very attractive method of documentation. In the introduction and the first chapter of his book, *The Spoken Word and the Work of Interpretation*, he presents his theories and methods.<sup>16</sup> Since he insists that the stories are not merely narrated, but performed, or re-enacted in an oral narrative situation, his ambition becomes to write a performable text. For this a new approach to oral narrating is necessary. Tedlock's idea is to perceive oral narratives as dramatic poetry. He summarizes his arguments in the following:

The content tends towards the fantastic rather than the prosaic, the emotions of the characters are evoked rather than described, there are patterns of repetitions of parallelism ranging from the level of words to that of whole episodes, the narrator's voice shifts constantly in amplitude and tone, and the flow of that voice is paced by pauses that segments its sounds into what I have chosen to call lines.<sup>17</sup>

Tedlock's theories of course have their origin in the Zuni narrative he studied, but his description also matches much narrating from other parts of the world. It corresponds with the African epic; indeed the quoted sentence characterizes the Sunjata epic quite well. Tedlock claims that we do better justice to the oral narrative this way, and considerable analytical advantages are reached. The oral story loses its taint of original text if looked upon as dramatic poetry.

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<sup>16</sup> Dennis Tedlock, *The Spoken Word and the Work of Interpretation* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983).

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

Reiterations are, for instance, given another status; they become accepted as the poetic devices the raconteur utilizes for his or her desired impression.

When Gordon Innes is displeased with his translations, it may be because he regards the Mandinka narratives as prose. If he had perceived the originals as dramatic prose, and revealed this in an introduction to his English readers, as does Tedlock, perhaps the bareness of the style would have conjured something of the emotional richness of the originals. Tedlock offers a good example. Zuni narratives do not record feelings of its characters, but convey them in manners we recognize from poetic texts. Tedlock quotes three lines from a Zuni narrative:

He went out, having been given the quiver, and  
wandered around.  
He was not thinking of killing deer, he just wandered  
around.  
In the evening he came home empty-handed.<sup>18</sup>

For the Zuni listener this expresses in a conspicuous way that the man is depressed. When he dies three days later, the audience understands this as a suicide, despite the narrator's depiction of it as an accident. Even if it may be difficult for a non-Zuni listener to grasp such a nuance, the possibility increases with Tedlock's reading of the oral narrative as dramatic poetry. If Innes had the same viewpoint, he would likely be less critical of his translations. The emotional shades he claims are present in the original may in such a reading have a better chance of appearing in the translation.

Another analytical advantage of perceiving oral narratives as drama-poetry is that it offers a new transcription. Tedlock wants critical translations of oral narratives on paper to look like scrupulous and detailed libretti, which graphically reproduces the narrator's complete performance. It is the audible text Tedlock is looking for. This should be a performable manuscript, a libretto, which should force the reader to wonder whether particular phenomena in the text perhaps has to do with practical oral poetics. There should be audible

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

clauses, sentences and verses. If the result is a poor written text, this cannot be helped, indeed, it is beside the point, but it shall force the reader to understand it as good speaking. It is oral poetics that dictates the transcription, rather than the norms of written literature. "Oral poetry begins with the voice, and an oral poetics returns to the voice."<sup>19</sup>

In order to write the audible text Tedlock has constructed a method that transcribes oral style into verse. The tape-recorder makes it possible to break a line when a pause can be heard. If the pause is longer he jumps a line, or inserts a dot before the next line. He also manages to include other paralinguistic features in the audible text by splitting lines, using capitals, parentheses, italics. He writes gestures like stage directions, and drawn out vowels are represented by a long line, (e.g. he went o-----n), etc.

Since Tedlock's transcription is fashioned from the Zuni narrative he has studied, it needs to be modified for African purposes. To illustrate that his method is applicable for African material, I turn to Peter Seitel's translations of oral narratives from Tanzania. Seitel presents his notation as a modification of Tedlock's system. And this is the result:

They set out one day to travel.

Twelve o'clock passed...

                  one o'clock...

                                  three o'clock...

  and

they hadn't gotten f-o-o-d...

                                  or even water.

/.../

**The bird has brought *HER***

*They jump up and run out of the p-a-l-a-c-e.*

*They take out a l-e-a-t-h-e-r c-a-p-e.*

*They take out a s-e-c-o-n-d*

*c-a-p-e.*

*Eh-Eh: They take out a s-e-d-a-n c-h-a-i-r.*

**THEY FIND THE GIRL CRYING FOUR**

<sup>19</sup> Dennis Tedlock, "Toward an Oral Poetics," *New Literary History*, 8 (1977): 517.



**PATHWAYS OF TEARS.<sup>20</sup>**

The result undoubtedly becomes rather difficult reading, even if one has Seitel's guide to reading aloud. Niane's Sunjata volume would certainly not have been such a success with this kind of transcription. But according to Tedlock and Seitel, this is how an audible text appears. It is meant to force the reader to consider how it may sound. Paralinguistic qualities, such as pause, intonation, and even gesture, both Tedlock and Seitel want to account for in their scores. The purpose is to be as faithful as possible to the oral "text" and present an audible and performable written text.

However, the fact that neither Seitel—nor Tedlock in his volume of Zuni narratives<sup>21</sup>—presents the original parallel to their translations, results in a few fundamental problems. In both, the graphic conventions are of course based on the source language. This results, as we have seen, in a peculiar text which is difficult to critically grasp. When, for example, "f-o-o-d" is understood as an extended vowel sound, it may in the Haya be a three syllable word, or perhaps more than one word. But the reader of these collections will never know. If instead the originals had been published parallel to the translations, as Gordon Innes did, the comprehension and the value of the translations and transcriptions would enhance the narration. The reader would be able to follow the translator in his work, in spite of the fact that most readers, if not all, are likely to be completely unfamiliar with Haya.<sup>22</sup> If only one language is involved, matters are decisively simpler. Tedlock's method functions under such circumstances splendidly. Elizabeth Fine's collection of Afro-American narratives bears witness to this.<sup>23</sup>

In all these collections of audible texts, however, the social context of the narrating is missing. The raconteur's vocal qualities are accounted for in the notation, but the listeners seem absent. Tedlock discusses in a few places in his book the participation of the audience, and mentions that the audience ought to be inscribed in the totally

<sup>20</sup> Peter Seitel, *See So That We May See: Performance and Interpretation of Traditional Tales from Tanzania* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1980) 37-38.

<sup>21</sup> Dennis Tedlock, *Finding the Center: Narrative Poetry of the Zuni* (New York: Dial Press, 1972).

<sup>22</sup> Haya is a language of the Bantu family spoken in Tanzania.

<sup>23</sup> Elizabeth C. Fine, *The Folklore Text* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1984).

performable text.<sup>24</sup> But there is little of that in his collection, which may have to do with the fact that the Zuni listeners are quiet. They appear to participate only with an affirmative cheer (*eeso*). Yet Tedlock manages to include only one such response, due to the inhibiting effect of the tape-recorder.<sup>25</sup>

In Africa it is very different. The audience is most often a vital part of the performance—necessary for the narrating. This is best illustrated by J. P. Clark-Bekederemo's translation of the Ozidi saga. It appeared first in 1977, but was then out of print for a long time. As one of the best documentations of African narration that exists, it is satisfying that since 1991 it has been readily available in a new print with a foreword by Isidore Okpewho.<sup>26</sup>

Clark-Bekederemo has long been preoccupied with the Ozidi saga. When he returned to Nigeria from the United States to study the oral tradition of the Ijo people, it first resulted in his play *Ozidi* in 1966. Eleven years later he published his translation of the epic. The primary reason for critics to hail this as one of the best documents we have from African oral narrating is Clark-Bekederemo's account of the total narrative situation. He has not, like Tedlock and Seitel, listened to, or transcribed, the narrator's paralinguistic features. Instead it is the interaction between narrator and listener that Clark-Bekederemo has put on paper. Unlike Tedlock's audible texts, Clark-Bekederemo's is entertaining and easy reading. It is in prose, due to it being "told in plain everyday, speech," according to Clark-Bekederemo.<sup>27</sup> (Perhaps he would have chosen verse, had he been aware of Tedlock's arguments of oral narrating as dramatic poetry?) It is moreover an exciting story about Ozidi, the posthumously born hero who pledges to kill all his father's assassins, and cannot contain himself before he has slain every monster and antagonist in his way. Not until then can he rest, lay down his sword, and meet his destiny.

The epic is divided into "Seven Nights." Each night took the griot, Okabou Ojobolo, four hours to tell. So it is an epic of 28 hours, which in the bilingual edition of 1991 results in a volume of 400 pages.

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<sup>24</sup> Tedlock, 1983, 10, *inter alia*.

<sup>25</sup> Tedlock, 1983, 66.

<sup>26</sup> J. P. Clark-Bekederemo, *The Ozidi Saga: Collected and Translated from the Oral Ijo Version of Okabou Ojobolo* (Washington D. C.: Howard UP, 1991).

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, xxiii. Further references will be made parenthetically in the text.

That an oral narrative, an epic, is this long is not unique. If the *Iliad* was ever narrated in one sitting, it would have taken many hours as well. Harold Scheub writes of a female griot in South Africa who narrated an epic about the history of Xhosa civilization for 300 hours—between the 1st of July and 26th of November in 1975!<sup>28</sup>

Clark-Bekederemo's purpose was to offer a simple and readable text (p. xxxix). This was, however, not easy, as it is not a matter of "literature" or fiction in an ordinary sense.

It is a creation of a special type of artist who is a composer-poet-performer, all rolled into one person, working in the multiple mediums of words, music, dance, and ritual. The nearest European form to this is perhaps the opera—especially the Wagnerian type (p. xxix).

We can recognize both Tedlock and Lord in this statement. But it is the latter's words about the complete narrative situation that Clark-Bekederemo has considered. Nothing of what his tape-recorder captured has been omitted.

It is fascinating to see how even the tape-recorder is included in the written text as part of the discourse, admitting the reader to see how the griot changes in his attitude towards the machine. The first time he refers to it is when he is about to sing a song: "Shall we sing into it?" (p. 84) Further in the text he becomes slightly irritated with it: "Now will this thing not run out? Oh, well, let it be..." (p. 234). Its most remarkable appearance, however, is on the last night, during the narrating of Ozidi's fight with his most feared antagonist, and Okabou wonders if the tape does not have to be changed, as he needs to go to the bathroom: "Spectator I: Has the thing been changed? / Spectator II: Go on! / Okabou: If it's been changed say so for in truth I feel like stooling right / now... / (Laughter)" (p. 362).

Most editors of folktales would of course have omitted such a passage. It does after all not belong to the story. But if the purpose is to capture not only the story, but the narrative event, the whole narrative situation, while observing Lord's words about creativeness in each

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<sup>28</sup> Scheub, 1977, 72.

new narration, then Clark-Bekederemo of course does right. The English reader can laugh together with the Ijo audience. And by displaying the presence of the tape-recorder it is also possible to consider the significance of the machine for the narrating, the narrative, and the story.

The opportunity to study the listener's part of the storytelling is, however, the chief advantage of Clark-Bekederemo's method of printing everything from the tape-recorder on the paper. The audience participation in the narration is, as already mentioned, traditionally prominent in Africa. Nowhere can we observe it better than in *The Ozidi Saga*. The audience as a group encourages the storyteller with laughs and cheers. But it becomes more exciting when individual listeners intervene, which happens throughout the text. A listener may hurry Okabou on: "Spectator II: On with the story man!" (p. 285). Or when the griot himself tires: "By this time... (Oh, how immense the narrative!) / Spectator: Don't get distracted, just pilot it to port! / On this occasion..." (p. 320). There is also an example of a listener who adopts the part of a character and utter lines inside the story, to the enjoyment of the rest of the audience: "So this boy had eyes running with tears like this! Come on, come out quick! / Spectator I: I won't come out. / (General laughter)" (pp. 256-257).

Sometimes the audience tries to direct the story. After having related the fight between Ozidi and Tebekawene, a spectator expresses his disappointment: "Spectator I: Why, it wasn't much of a performance this time!" (p. 338). On another occasion the audience feels that Okabou elaborates too much. During the last night when Ozidi grapples with another one of his foes, and both combatants seem as weary as the raconteur and the listeners, the latter banter the former:

With the sound of each blow...

Spectator I: Why not rest!

The blows!

How could he pause for breath, when he was in the field of battle!

Spectator II: Leave off when he hasn't killed!

However hard he hacked at him, he danced away (pp. 367-368).

When Okabou is finally done with this combat, a relieved audience cheers their griot.

This particular audience also seems to be rather patriotic. Clark-Bekederemo informs us in his introduction that Okabou throughout the narration had to balance himself between his intentions and nationalistic ambitions of the audience, namely, their wish to place the events in their own territory, rather than in Ado of the traditional story. Following is an illustrative example, on which Okabou is congratulated on his "double-take" by Clark-Bekederemo:

Believe me, while Badoba went seeking battle—pardon the slip  
of the tongue—the citizens of Ado that stood on the sidelines to  
learn by sight-

Prompter: The citizens of Orua-

Oh, yes, that city of Ado in the forest of Orua- (p. 153).

The patriotism of the spectators is also expressed in their unwillingness to accept foreign words, particularly English ones, even if Okabou has "Ijo-fied" them. As the English and Ijo versions are paralleled along each side of the volume, even English readers can appreciate these rebukes: "Thus when he closed in upon the enemy, who was weary now of begging him for life... / Spectator I: The Ijo for when and now is kene seri! / (Laughter)" (p. 262). Comparing with the Ijo it is clear that Okabou has said "wan" for "when." But it is mostly "tain" for "time" that causes language commentary. Yet Okabou insists, with footnote support from Clark-Bekederemo, that "tain" has been accepted into Ijo (p. 274). Generally Okabou abides by his listeners' corrections, but it is clear that he is irritated by this language purism, and sometimes does not admit that he has heard the comments.

In this unsurpassable way Clark-Bekederemo accounts for the interaction between the audience and the raconteur. It is not a notation like that of Tedlock's method, in spite of Clark-Bekederemo's characterizing of the Ozidi epic as an opera. In contrast with Tedlock's texts, Clark-Bekederemo's *The Ozidi Saga* clearly demonstrates the advantages of bilingual editions—as these examples have shown.

Their respective practices regarding onomatopoeic expressions also indicate this. Clark-Bekederemo most often translates them. Initially Tedlock argues against the translation, since the context

always reveals what is meant. But in the next essay in his book he revises his opinion.<sup>29</sup> The result in *The Ozidi Saga* explicitly shows that onomatopoeic words should be translated in bilingual volumes. Even if the translation often can be cumbersome, and there are ample examples of this in Clark-Bekederemo's translation, it allows the reader to review the original expression, thanks to the original version on the next page or column. A lone, poor translation would be irritating, as would onomatopoeic words left untranslated. Herein lies another argument for bilingual editions.

*The Ozidi Saga* is a publication of a total narrative situation. By this I mean that Clark-Bekederemo does not lay claim to the final and absolute Ozidi epic, only Okabou's version during a week in 1963 in Ibadan. Nothing else. If we listen to Clark-Bekederemo's attitude to his own part in the proceedings, then we understand how he chose this approach. "With *The Ozidi Saga* I have simply presented a recreation of the epic by one bard /.../ It was my singular privilege to hear in action an actual Homer, recounting, in person, another of the world's great stories, this time, that of Ozidi" (p. iv). I also mean that it is precisely due to this perspective that it has become such a distinguished document of African oral storytelling tradition. Here the reader is allowed to appreciate the griot's public remembrance, and the participation of the audience in the storyteller's re-creation of a story. I believe that the listener's collaboration, as it is documented here, is representative of much of the oral narrating in Africa.<sup>30</sup> This is why *The Ozidi Saga* is such an important document—and it took a poet to accomplish this, rather than an ethnographer, folklorist or anthropologist.

In conclusion, I would like to return to the distressed scholar wishing to compare a modern African text, a novel by Ayi Kwei

<sup>29</sup> Tedlock, 1983, 44 and 67.

<sup>30</sup> All audiences in Africa do not, however, participate like this. "The Mande audience listens in silence, without any interjections." Christopher L. Miller, *Theories of Africans* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990) 88. It can also vary between individual griots. See Wanjiku Mukabi Kabira, *The Oral Artist* (Nairobi: Heinemann, 1983) 19. And Obiechina claims that only male adults are allowed to interrupt the griot in Emmanuel Obiechina, *Language and Theme* (Washington D.C.: Howard UP, 1990) 24. However, let me end this note on audience participation in oral performance in Africa with one of the major authorities on the subject: "This possibility of both clarification and challenge from members of the audience and their effect on the performance is indeed one of the main distinctions between oral and written literature." Finnegan, 1970, 11, see also 385.

Armah, with Africa's oral tradition. If he or she is going to use a written oral text, it appears that this text has to consider the complete oral performance, not just the story told. With Richard Bauman I view the "oral narrative performance as the indissoluble unity of text, narrated event, and narrative event."<sup>31</sup> Storytelling is situated in a fixed cultural environment that defines its form and meaning. For our comparative purposes, as much description as possible should end up in the translation. This is no easy task. It seems to me, however, that the poet Clark-Bekederemo and the anthropologist Tedlock in their respective ways have indicated possible strategies.

Naturally, the purpose of the translation and publication affects the choice of approach. If one wishes to reach as large an audience as possible, if the target-culture is the primary, then D. T. Niane's method is advisable. However, here I am considering critical and scientific editions of oral storytelling where the source-culture is primary. If one looks upon oral narratives as dramatic poetry, as does Tedlock, and uses his method of graphic transcription, together with Clark-Bekederemo's method of writing the entire narrative situation, the result ought to be an audible and performable text—a libretto that perhaps is difficult to read, but which in its bilingual publication becomes a singular, if bulky, document for all interested in oral tradition. The troubled literary scholar thus has decidedly greater chances of succeeding in his or her analytical comparison.

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<sup>31</sup> Richard Bauman, *Story, Performance, and Event* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1986) 7.