



Toren, Beth Jane. (2020, March). Resurrection from a shallow understory grave: Visual orality restores shade and light to an Appalachian murder tale. Poster presented at the Appalachian Studies Association conference, Lexington KY.

ABSTRACT

This poster presents a transcript poem created with murder tales in oral history recordings. Leveraging the creative arts of storytelling, transcript poetry and visual orality, the poster brings light and music to Appalachian storyteller voices in tales of shady murders.

RESULTS

The poem presented with visual orality methods juxtaposed beside Standard English orthographic transcription, enabling a visual comparison.

A Damn Short Prayer

With the voices of:

Dallas Stotts
Bill Taft
Austin Selamn
Bob Aaron
V. Dodrill, Jr.
Ricky Swagger

Standard English Orthographic Transcription	Visual Orality / Ethnopoetic Transcription
Back then, there was no law like there is now, years ago.	BACK `EN there weren't no law like it is. YEARS ago.
He was a man from Virginia who was working for me. He went in there and when he got in, they had killed two fellows and covered them up in the corner with a blanket.	He was a man from Virginia' He was workin for me. An he went in there an when he got IN they's done killed two fellars and had `em covered up in the corner with a blanket.
And they told him, they said, "Now, if you tell this, we will kill you, and you will help carry these off or we will kill you," and by God, he helped carry them off.	And they told him they said NOW IF YOU TELL THIS we'll kill YOU. and you'll help carry these off or we'll kill yea AND by GOD he helped carry em off.
They carried them over, against the hill, along the way to the river and over, in a *swag. They carried them over and threw them down, and the rats ate their eyes out and their ears off, and their nose off. One was a Volks and one was Callen. * a traveler's or miner's bundle	They carried `em oo'er agin' the hill `long the way to the river an oo'er in to a swag `an carried `em over `an throwed `em down `an the rats eat their EYES out `an their EARS off `an their NOSE off One of them was a VOLKS an one was a CALLEN
He was going to kill him, and that fellow told him he wanted to pray, and he said "Make her a damn short prayer," and he killed him right there.	He was gonna KILL `im And that feller told `im `e wanted to pray an `e said make her a damn short prayer an `e killed `im RIGHT THERE
Well, yes, I would foresee it. Yes Sir, I would foresee it.	Well/Yeah III'd foresee it Yessssir I'd foresee it

INTRODUCTION

*Visual Orality and Ethnopoetics
breathe life
into Standard English Orthographic Transcription*

Images and Oral History Recordings: West Virginia and Regional History Center
Videos: West Virginia State Archives

Methods		Materials
Qualitative Research	Creative	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Storyteller voices• Oral history recordings• Murder tales• Videos
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Transcript poetry• Visual Orality• Ethnopoetics	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sampling• Remixing• World building	

Conclusion

- spoken language is not prose
- oral history is poetry
- oral and textual need not be viewed from a hierarchical perspective
- orality creates empathy
- writing creates objectivity and distance
- art can restore in/visible forms of voice, silence, and secrets
- ethnopoetics
 - is open to the creative side of performance
 - values features that may be rare

~ Given the diversity of oral history practitioners, this work will probably remain unknown to some, ignored by others, and viewed as inapplicable by another group. This work raises more questions than it answers, which is appropriate, if these questions can produce useful inquiry moving forward. If I've raised issues that invite disagreement, I've succeeded.

~ Paraphrased from a review of *Envelopes of Sound: The Art of Oral History*.

DENNIS TEDLOCK'S VISUAL ORALITY METHOD

Learning to Listen:
Oral History As Poetry
Dennis Tedlock

GUIDE TO DELIVERY:

A line change indicates a short pause, about ½ to 1 second;
a double space between lines, marked by . , indicates a long
pause, about 2 seconds;

bold type is loud;

light type is soft;

split-level lines indicate a chant-like delivery, with each
level at a separate pitch;

long dashes indicate lengthened vowels, short ones at the
ends of lines an interrupted delivery;

repeated consonants are lengthened;

other instructions are in (*parenthecized italics*).

Poetry is oral history

and oral **history**

is **poetry**.

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First of all, historical information
and the **ideas** of history just spoken of by Mr. Grele
are found not only in
the relatively casual
conversational narratives of the interview situation
but also in forms of oral discourse which are
traditionally classified

as **poetry**--

songs and chants, for example.

Second

conversational narratives **themselves**
traditionally classified as **prose**
turn out, when listened to **closely**
to have poetical qualities of their **own**.

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BRIEF READINGS ABOUT METHODS AND CONCEPTS

Orality and Literacy (Homeric oral performance)

Thus, we are like Penelope, not only in our weaving, but also in our immersion in a multi-media world. As Jay David Bolter observes, the ever-shifting nature of modern hyper-text is not unlike that of the fluid mutability of the Homeric oral performance. R.A. Lanham, similarly, points to “the computer’s oscillation between reader and writer,” which “reintroduces the oscillation between literate and oral coordinates that stands at the center of classical Western literature.” While the Toronto School (as well as post-structuralist theorists like Derrida and Levinas) did much, during the 20th century, to assert the primacy of the written word, the advent of contemporary internet culture has encouraged the recognition that ***oral and textual need not be viewed from a hierarchical perspective.***

(2007) MacNeil Courtney. “orality.” The Chicago School of Media Theory. Humanities Blogs. University of Chicago Division of the Humanities.
<https://lucian.uchicago.edu/blogs/mediatheory/keywords/orality/>

Orality and objectivity (Walter Ong)

For an oral culture learning or knowing means achieving close, empathetic [and participatory], communal identification with the known...Writing separates the knower from the known and thus sets up conditions for ‘objectivity’, in the sense of personal disengagement or distancing.

Ong, Walter J. “Some Psychodynamics of Orality.” Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the World. London, Methuen & Co. Ltd, 2002.

Visual Orality

Spoken language is not prose. Unlike prose, it utilizes more than punctuation, vocabulary and juxtaposition to convey meaning. Oral communication also uses intonation, emphasis, loudness, whispers, silences and pauses—both intentionally (as in volume and quickened speech used consciously to build suspense) or unintentionally (such as the hesitant pause before saying something difficult.) These augment the meaning of the spoken words, are key to understanding full intention behind what was said, and must be represented in the transcript.

Chow, Nyssa. Oral History as Poetry: Restoring a Visual Orality. Sept. 23, 2016 OHMA. Columbia University, Oral History Master of Arts blog.
<http://oralhistory.columbia.edu/blog-posts/People/as80byigoo84g0i5effatxx1h4zhef>

Transcript Poetry

An art-based research method using selected parts of transcripts to create poetry and represent the original text or recording in a new way. It can restore "in/visible forms of voice, silence, and secrets."

Bhattacharya , Kakali. "Voices, Silences, and Telling Secrets: The Role of Qualitative Methods in Arts-Based Research." IRQR, Vol. 6 No. 4, Winter 2013; (pp. 604-627) DOI: 10.1525/irqr.2013.6.4.604

Ethnopoetics ~ from the syllabi of Professor Dennis Tedlock (1939 – 2016) ~

Ethnopoetics is a decentered poetics, an attempt to hear and read the poetics of distant others, outside the Western tradition as we know it now. To have any hope of getting outside we must set aside any notion we may have that these poetics will necessarily come from a distant time, or from present-day peoples who are somehow living in the past, or that they will necessarily resemble Homer, or that they will be less complex than Western or metropolitan poetics, or that they will have been produced in some kind of isolation from other languages or cultures.

Ethnopoetics does not merely contrast the poetics of "ethnics" with just plain poetics, but implies that any poetics is always an ethnopoetics. Our main interest will indeed be the poetics of people who are ethnically distant from ourselves, but it is precisely by the effort to reach into distances that we bring our own ethnicity, and the poetics that goes with it, into fuller consciousness.

Ethnopoetics originated among poets with an interest in anthropology and linguistics and among anthropologists and linguists with an interest in poetry, such as David Antin, Stanley Diamond, Dell Hymes, Jerome Rothenberg, Gary Snyder, Nathaniel Tarn (E. Michael Mendelson), and myself. The emphasis has been on performances in which the speaking, chanting, or singing voice gives shape to proverbs, riddles, curses, laments, praises, prayers, prophecies, public announcements, and narratives.

Practitioners of ethnopoetics treat the relationship between performances and texts as a field for experimentation. Texts that were taken down in the era of handwritten dictation and published as prose are reformatted and/or retranslated in order to reveal their poetic features. In the case of sound recordings, transcripts and translations serve not only as listening guides but also as scripts or scores for further performances. An ethnopoetic score not only takes account of the words but silences, changes in loudness and tone of voice, the production of sound effects, and the use of gestures and props. Whatever a score may encompass, the notion of a definitive text has no place in ethnopoetics. Linguists and folklorists tend to narrow their attention to the normative side of performance, recognizing only such features as can be accounted for by general rules. Ethnopoetics remains open to the creative side of performance, valuing features that may be rare or even unique to a particular artist or occasion.