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"Talking Shit" in Rayne: How Aesthetic Features Reveal Ethical Structures

"Talking shit" is a well-established social activity in many African American speech communities. This study of such talk by one speaker in a small south Louisiana town describes the dynamics of such talk as a negotiation, within a flexible set of forms, of the nature of the relationship between the speaker and the researcher in order to place the latter within a traditional framework of relationships between individuals. The study focuses on how the interactional order is embedded in the very structure of talk itself, revealing the potential logic behind what seems at first glance to be "verbal filler" but, I argue, actually is an extension of the larger worldview at work in speaking.

"talking shit" is a venerable tradition in many African American speech communities. As an umbrella term, it typically covers only a particular portfolio of genres, both in day-to-day as well as in analytical uses. In performance, individual speakers deploy forms that are largely made up of reported speech, reflecting an understanding of authorship as diffused in the space of the fictive present as well as across performances reaching back to the historical past. A close examination of the forms involved in fact reveals that not only are texts generated, variously, in dialogue but that they are constructed of dialogue as well, creating a continuum across semantic and pragmatic domains which speakers use to great effect. This study, located in a small south Louisiana town, highlights the flexible nature of the genres involved, allowing speakers to move into and out of the performance frame, which is itself sometimes considered a dimension of the performance.

Beginning with close attention to the details of two forms, the rhymed couplet poem known as a toast among folklorists and the joke, the essay examines how the two forms are assembled out of constructed dialogue, and, in doing so, reveal a preference for speakers to distribute semantic authority through an implied dialogue with a past interlocutor. The effect is to mirror the current pragmatic context into a prior, but fictional, pragmatic context. This doubling of distributed authorship mimics the nature of the performances itself, which usually occur with at least a handful of performers available within a group. In the case of the author's first meeting with the central performer of the essay, Oscar Babineaux, the traditional interactional order for such a distribution was not available, and so Babineaux had no choice but

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to shift the performance context to the telling of memorates in order to achieve the kind of reciprocity that "talking shit" in Rayne normally achieves. This essay tracks the series of discursive moves that Babineaux makes, genre by genre, as he carefully constructs, or reconstructs perhaps, a social event, text by text, that makes sense from within his worldview.

This is a small study, focused on a particular performance by a particular performer within a much larger speech community and tradition. The performance itself did not occur in anything like a "natural" context, which is why to this day it remains such a compelling bit of artistry. After more than a decade of research into the folk cultures of south Louisiana, as well as other American folk cultures, I have recorded dozens of performers of various abilities in a wide array of circumstances, often working within event frames that were far more comprehensible and comfortable for them. Only a few of those performances, however, call upon me again and again to marvel at the application of native competence to an alien circumstance in such a way that the nature and function of the genres themselves is revealed so clearly. For what it's worth, Babineaux himself only smiles when we talk about this, and then he tells me another story.

A World of Talk

A few years ago, as I played a version of one of the most famous African American toasts, "The Signifying Monkey," to one of my folklore classes, one of my students looked up, her mouth open in surprise and delight, and exclaimed, "My dad talks like that to my little girl when he's putting her to sleep!" It was a great teaching moment, as the saying goes, and it brought to life the notion I had only hoped to argue about, the vibrancy of such poetic traditions in some of our everyday lives. After an opening dialogue between the student and me, I moved onto the rest of my planned lecture and discussion, but her astonishment remained and I heard her say: "And I thought he was just making that stuff up."

From time to time, as the semester unfolded, I would ask the student, Raven Babineaux, to tell me more about her father. All the signs were there that he was a "man of words," as Roger Abrahams dubbed speakers with an established reputation for performance within a community (1983), worth knowing more about. I continued to ask Raven questions about her father, and I continued to encourage her own exploration of her father, and her uncle as it turned out, as bearers of a tradition well worth her time to study and understand. My interest was particularly piqued when, as her own research project developed, one day she came in with a small dictaphone recording of a toast about a mule that I had never heard before. The recording crackled and hissed from the well-worn tape, but still the liveliness of the voices, even one telling a Brer Rabbit story, shone. At the end of the semester, Raven extended an invitation from her father to visit him at their home in Rayne whenever it was convenient.[1]

With the semester over and Louisiana's summer heat a constant companion, I decided to drive out one afternoon to put a face to the voice I had heard amidst the rumbles and pops. I pulled up to a trim Louisiana bungalow with a cedar tree in its front yard. The shaded lawn under the tree looked well used. Two short concrete steps

took me to the front door. I knocked. The white wood door swung inward and the screen door pushed outward. "Mr. Babineaux?" I asked. Yes, it was Oscar Babineaux. I explained I had come to hear more of his stories and jokes, like the ones his daughter had recorded. "Okay," he said, and then his own incredulity got the better of him, and he looked me straight in the eye and asked: "Like when we're standing around talking shit?" I looked him straight back and said, "Yes, sir, I want to know more about shit-talking."[2] Babineaux let out a laugh that at once let go any nervousness he had felt and, at the same time, established his quintessential nature as a man who likes to laugh and be surrounded by laughter.

For the purposes of this essay, I want to hold us here at the threshold, not yet having entered into Oscar Babineaux's home. Once inside, Babineaux would lead me to a side room, sit me down, offer me a glass of iced tea. Once inside, he would begin to tell me toasts, jokes, and then memorates.[3] Once inside, he would, in short, try to bring me inside. That is, having moved me physically into his house, he would attempt to move me textually and interactionally into that web of connections that each of us uses to constitute our worlds.

Inside that world, shit-talking looks and acts much like what has already been documented by folklorists and others. Abrahams's (1970) work is, of course, foundational here, but other scholars quickly filled out the historical record so that a genre that appeared to be largely urban (Wepman, Newman, and Binderman 1974) or the purview of adolescents or what some might consider the rougher elements within a folk group (Jackson 1967, 1972, 1974) was also revealed to be enjoyed by adults in both urban (Saloy 1998) and rural (Ferris 1972; Evans 1977) contexts.

However, as Ferris and Evans have pointed out, there are some significant variations in rural Southern contexts. There are differences in repertoire, of course, as will be immediately seen in the toast about a mule below, and differences in performers. Both Ferris and Evans, as well as Jackson in his earlier work, have noted that shit-talking in Southern rural settings is practiced by a wider range of age groups than studies in urban settings have suggested. There is also a concomitant shift in use, with shit-talking moving from the kind of dynamic, and sometimes volatile, tension between competition and cooperation of adolescent performances described by Abrahams and others to those more rooted in cooperative play intended to construct community among the performers and their audience. Lomax's documentation of the rich social life in a small Southern bar frequented by African Americans, where action moves easily between conversation, shit-talking, and honky-tonking is particularly useful (1990).[4]

Shit-talking in Rayne follows the larger Southern pattern. It occurs among older men, most of them well-established members of the community. Oscar Babineaux, one of the town's noted talkers, is married, has two daughters, and is a long-time employee of the city. Adolescents and children may practice, and perform, outside of eyeshot and earshot of adults, but among adult company, they tend to be merely members of the larger audience, albeit often an enthusiastic audience, often egging their own fathers and uncles on to tell the best tale or toast.

Inside the world of shit-talking in Rayne, people gather together for barbecues, family reunions, and holidays and, when they do, the men, at some point during the

day, will cluster around an ice chest parked underneath a shade tree, and they begin to perform toasts and jokes. Shit-talking is simply a part of the larger work of being together that people in Rayne perform on a regular basis. The toasts and jokes and other tales and genres float around among a loose network of individuals who are known variously either for the items they can perform or for their particular performances of those items. From what I have gathered in talking with folks in Rayne and in other Louisiana locales, and as Babineaux notes below, a lot of the ribald material was once considered adult-only. With the globalization of African American expressive culture, those boundaries have come down locally and audiences are much more mixed, with children now able to join an audience with no marking of the moment.

All of that is inside the world created and maintained by talk in Rayne, and were this a more straightforward ethnographic account of how a particular group constitutes its particular social reality using particular forms in particular ways, then this exposition would move quickly over the threshold and into that communally created world. But I want to hold us here, still in the doorway, not yet having stepped into Babineaux's home and into the world he helps to create on a regular basis.

It is perhaps part of our human curiosity but certainly part of our training and our disciplinary conventions to prefer the endogenous context, what we as folklorists have sometimes termed the "natural" context. Getting "inside" is our priority, since being able to report out from that inside is the anchor, or frame if you prefer, for our authority. Inside is the esoteric knowledge and behaviors of a group. Inside is the emic meanings of those behaviors. "Most academic reports," Deborah Schiffrin notes, "are written according to a reconstructed logic, but much of the work which underlies such reports is the product of a logic in use" (1988:312). Reporting to the outside from the inside makes our work interesting—perhaps something some of the overly reflexive documents of the late twentieth-century forgot. At the same time, to examine only the inside of a house is never to know how one gets inside it. Part of what master performers like Oscar Babineaux can do is create entrances for others.

Folkloristic accounts, be they collections or ethnographies, are full of such central, and centering, characters. Richard Dorson's James Suggs and Henry Glassie's Hugh Nolan are but two famous examples. Centering is borrowed here from ethnomethodological approaches, with which many readers of this journal will be familiar. In its originating conception, centering is the act of deploying a text in a given situation. Writers who use centering, or its equivalent contextualiztion, do so in order to emphasize the dynamic nature of discursive events, which must always be understood as emerging out of the flow of texts themselves as performers seek to negotiate the very nature of their social reality. My use of the term here is meant not only to signal the direction the analysis of this essay takes, but also to extend the meaning of the term by making sure to include the performer within the analytical horizon. The idea is that performers use texts to create a context. In doing so, they are not only making a play for determining the relationships of texts to one another but also of people to one another. Master performers are often known for their ability to tell tales or sing songs, but what that really means, the human pleasure of it, is that they bring people together and form them into a community, if only for the duration of the performance itself.

I linger at this figurative threshold of Babineaux's house in order to examine what might be called the "disturbed" context of my first visit there. Doing so allows us to see more readily the competence through which Babineaux interprets and constructs his world, the mechanisms by which he centers himself and others through those tools he possesses. Babineaux's repertoire is brought into especial relief here because while my stated purpose in showing up at his house was to interview him about shit-talking, he did not stay within the customary generic boundaries. Over the course of the afternoon, he regaled me with a tour de force of words, beginning with a string of four toasts, followed by eight jokes, and then a series of memorates (see table 1). While twelve of the twenty texts that I recorded that day—and this essay focuses chiefly on the recorded part of our interaction—were toasts and jokes, their performances account for a little less than half the actual time that the recorder was on (see table 1). The memorates account for the other half, after which, as I turned the tape recorder off, we engaged in a conversation about his family. In a way, Babineaux bracketed his own recorded performance by beginning with a composite of narration and exposition on shit-talking, and the geography of Rayne that it mapped in terms of social relations, and ending with a composite of narration and exposition that mapped his own family in terms of listening and talking by noting who told, or was told, different stories.

Moving smoothly and slyly from toasts to jokes, then on to memorates gave Babineaux the opportunity to do what we as folklorists have perhaps studied the least closely: opining and truly conversing. That is, having warmed himself to his task—or as John French states in *Mules and Men*: "Ah got to say a piece of litery fust to git mah wind on" (Hurston [1935] 1990:47)—with poetry, which is virtuosic display of verbal skills, he tested the depth of my listening with jokes and the depth of my understanding with stories about supernatural events he had encountered firsthand. In doing so,

Table 1. Recording inventory for Oscar Babineaux's interview

Item	Assigned genre	Assigned title	Recorded length
1.1	Toast	The Two Blind Boys	:20
1.2	Toast	Jenny, Jenny	:33
1.3	Toast	The Signifying Monkey	1:15
1.4	Toast	The Mule	:33
1.5	Joke	I'm Going to Leave You	1:12
1.6	Joke	Jess and Jesse and the Cow with Crooked Eyes	1:46
1.7	Joke	The Camel	2:25
1.8	Joke	Voodoo Dick	3:12
1.9	Joke	The Priest and the Five-Gallon Can	1:44
1.10	Joke	A Dick and a Toe	1:14
1.11	Joke	The Two Chickens	1:44
1.12	Joke	The Fastest Monkey	1:18
1.13	Memorate	Digging for Money	2:10
1.14	Memorate	The Pirate in the Tree	2:03
1.15	Memorate	The Singing Bird	:56
1.16	Memorate	An Evil Place	4:50
1.17	Memorate	The Bag in the Hospital Bed	~1:00
1.18	Memorate	Vomiting Snakes	1:15
1.19	Memorate	Mrs. Smail	:46
1.20	Memorate	The Missing Cow	~1:00

he could increasingly demand of me my own firsthand commitment to the community that our conversation created. What follows below is a close examination of those particular textual orders that I think drive, and are driven by, the interactional orders within which they normally take place. Text and interaction, text and context, are dynamic twins, each determining and being determined by the other as speakers, and their audiences, seek to negotiate, to whatever degree they can and to whatever purpose they have, the nature of a performance event.

My argument is that, in some sense, the disturbed or irregular nature of the context of this particular event throws into relief some of the things we already know about the foundations of African American ways of speaking. The appearance of a somewhat unexpected genre like the memorate can either be viewed as simply an oddity, a product of an unusual audience, or it can be understood as a product of a brilliant performance, a restoration of a social order otherwise lacking. In order to make a case for the deep structuring of texts by the traditional interactional order, the essay does dig perhaps more deeply than some may be willing to follow, with its examination of the use of "said" as a discourse marker. It is, again, part of my larger point that if we gloss over such usages as so much linguistic detritus or only as connective tissue, then we miss just how deeply ethical matters—like connection—shape aesthetic forms.[5]

Background

Rayne is a town of about 8,500 located about ten miles west of Lafayette (see fig. 1). It is in the middle of the Louisiana prairies, and its most significant shaping feature is the Southern Pacific rail line that runs through it. While the town was established in 1852, as Queue Tortue, which is the name of the bayou along which it once was located, the town was moved—lock, stock, and church—northward when the railroad bypassed it. While the railroad's economic significance has diminished, its role as a geographic boundary has not, with some of the persistence of such geographies being the cause not only of well-established class and color lines, but also because Route 90 parallels the railroad's bed. Interstate 10, which runs along the northern edge of the town, now functions as the crossroads for Rayne, with its collection of casinos, fast food restaurants, and gas stations.

Rayne is interesting for a variety of reasons, but one of which would have to be that with close to 34 percent of its population identifying as African American in the 2000 census, the town easily has the most significant proportion of African Americans of any of the towns in Acadia parish, or any of the surrounding parishes, for that matter. One potential explanation for this large ratio of blacks to whites (one black to two whites) in Rayne, where other towns have a ratio of one in five, was the availability of land in the late nineteenth century. Historian Carl Brasseaux conjectures that Rayne was the recipient of out-migration of African Americans from well-established populations in nearby Lafayette and Church Point (personal e-mail communication). The result is that African Americans in Rayne sometimes possess a good portion more land, and often in more places, than African Americans in the surrounding areas, a factor which plays a small role in one of Babineaux's stories later.

Mr. Babineaux lives with his family in a neat pale green house in a part of town

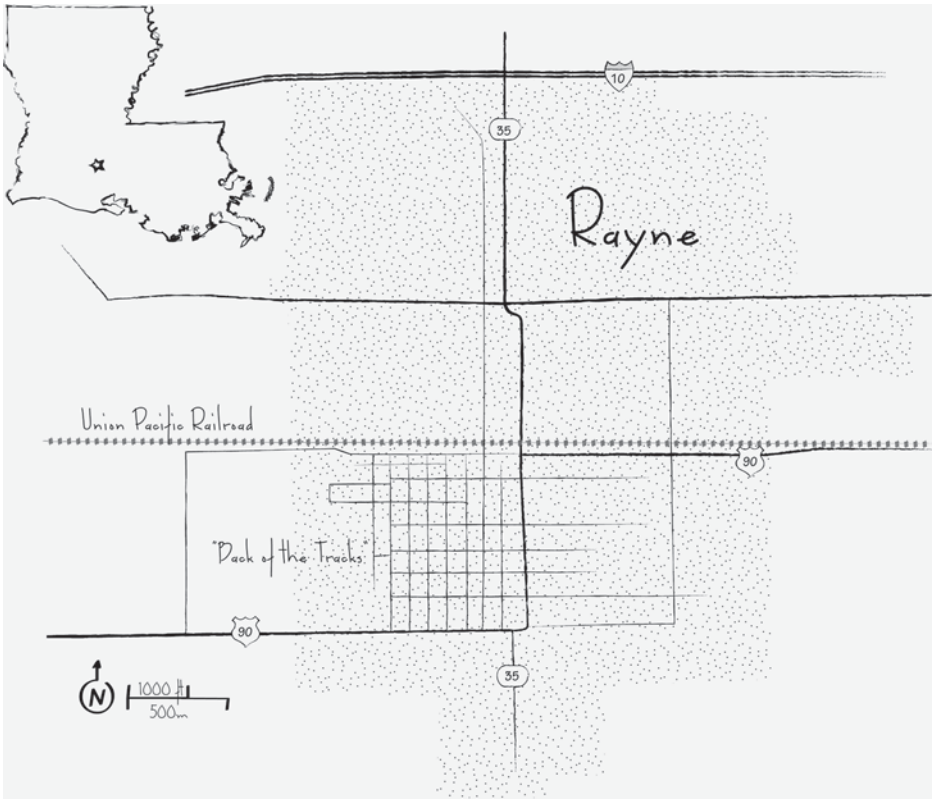

Figure 1. Map of Rayne, Louisiana.

once referred to as "Coontown" but now often known as "back of the tracks." He is a youthful man, with a trim beard and physique that support his energetic style of speaking. He is a self-described talker, having not too long ago invited a couple of Mormon missionaries—Babineaux himself was born and remains a devout Catholic—into the house just to talk with them: "I told them they weren't going to change my faith, and I probably wasn't going to change theirs, but maybe they could teach me something I didn't know before. And maybe I could teach them something they didn't know." When I arrived on his doorstep, he greeted me with much the same curiosity and willingness to engage in dialogue.

Shit-talking for Babineaux, and for most African American members of this community, consists of a wide variety of forms, including toasts, jokes, boasts, and insults—to name but a few of the genres that can be called upon. In Rayne it most often occurs during afternoons spent at a social, often family, gathering, when men—but also sometimes women and children—tend to cluster under a tree and around an ice chest, or during evenings spent on front porches or sometimes inside, when general sociability prepares the way for more pungent kinds of talk. Oscar Babineaux has gleaned his repertoire from a variety of sources, chief among which is his childhood spent riding with his father from house to house on weekends, where his father would socialize and sometimes gamble:[6]

> We just picked it up by listening to people talk. Just sitting around. In the olden days, you couldn't sit around and look in the old folks' mouth, you know, because they'd spit in your eye with some 'bacco or something to get you out the room. Because they didn't want you to hear their conversations. So as kids, you had your ears to the door. You know what I'm saying? You'd listen to what they was talking about. . . . They wouldn't want the kids to hear "motherfucker" and this and that. So they'd be in private, in the house. My daddy and some of his friends and my uncle. They'd gather around on a Sunday and they would play.

In Rayne, shit-talking is principally viewed as a form of play, and as a form of play, and of testing social relationships, shit-talking in Rayne is open to women as well as men. In his only example of such talk where a speaker was named as speaking within a text, Babineaux reported the speaking of a woman:

> It's just a bunch of things I learned from being around older guys and listening to people talk. I was in a different environment, because I was young and my dad was old, much older. It was a bunch of guys around talking shit. People get to talking about things they used to do, where they used to live, and this person was a drunk, and how she used to do. This lady used to hiss all the time. She would get drunk and *ssssss*. She even come to my house. Well, she come to the house one day, and I was pretty young, and she came up there and all of us was sitting on the porch. And my mother was named Viola. And the lady went, "Miss Viola, it's Mother's Day. I just don't understand about this Mother's Day. It's just so tempting to have a mother, then lose your mother. Miss Viola, I'm just so hurt." And so my momma was going "Well, Miss Eva that's all right." And she was going "Oh mother, my mother, mother, motherfucker." Like that. And everybody just bust out laughing because that was just the kind of person she was. And she just bust out laughing too because that's what she wanted to say in the first place.

Twice in the account above, Babineaux correlates shit-talking and "guys," but in both cases, he also follows it up with either the generic "people" or with the example of the woman, opening up speech play to a broader spectrum of speakers within this particular community. This particular passage also reveals how wide the spectrum of play is, that shit-talking is not confined to a predetermined set of genres but that any utterance that teases at the nature of reality, especially as constructed by or conveyed in language, is subject for consideration and use, as the example above of Mother's Day being an occasion to say "motherfucker" makes clear.

Diffuse Discourse

Given such a gamut of possibilities and a rather loosely framed inquiry from me, his daughter's college professor now at his screen door, to tell more about shit-talking, there was no obvious place for Babineaux to begin. Once we were settled in a side room of the house and he had told me a little of the background above, he launched right into "The Two Blind Boys," prefaced only by "it [shit-talking] was a lot of things. They got one says":

One late afternoon, in the middle of the night,
Two blind boys got up a fight.
Back to back they faced each other,
Drew their guns and shot each other.
The deaf police heard the noise,
And come around the corner and killed the two dead boys.
Now if you don't believe the story I'm telling you is true,
Ask the blind man, he seen it too.[7]

This was the shortest text of the afternoon and perhaps the one most heavily structured. It has only eight lines, in four rhymed couplets. Five out of the eight lines are eight syllables or less and regularly accented. In addition to these prosodic features, the poem has a regular ideational construction that alternates contradiction, like "one late afternoon in the middle of the night," with action, "two blind boys got up a fight," in the first four lines and then blends those two features in the next two lines, such that a contradiction, "the deaf police heard the noise," is followed by both an action, "come around the corner," and a contradiction, "killed the two dead boys." The closing couplet of the poem addresses the audience in the seventh line and then blends that address with a contradiction, a blind man who sees, to give the poem closure across three dimensions: prosodic, ideational, and interactional.

Babineaux chose to begin with poetry, with a toast, which allowed him a place to display his virtuosity and which also allowed him space to warm to his task. Within the routine of social gathering in Rayne, there is no set sequence, so there is no normal slot for toasts to occupy. They do, however, function as set pieces for certain individuals, who are often called upon to perform them at some point during a session of talk. Babineaux's use of a toast as a way to begin simply draws upon an established dimension of toasts: that of texts to be deployed on demand. This latter dimension of toasts perhaps explains its use as a discursive initiator here: toasts are marked performance pieces in Rayne, and by "marked performance," I mean performances tending toward the kind of one-way performer-audience dynamic of stage performances like in the theater. In being structured by rhyme and prosody, toasts are the furthest from daily discourse in nature.

With the first text out, Babineaux proceeded to reel off the next three, all toasts, in short order, with no appreciable gap between or introduction to each one other than "and then there's, you know, the one like" or "they got one" and with that "like" or "one" he would begin another toast:

It was like . . . Jenny Jenny crossed the ocean,
Jenny Jenny crossed the sea,
She landed to the little town name of Breadbug.
She walked in the bar.
She said, bartender, bartender give me a piece of meat.
Bartender pulled out a plate with a funky piece of meat.
Say, bartender, do you know who I am?
She said, Frankly speaking ma'am I don't give a damn.
So he said one son of a bitch who was in the back stood up and said well let's hang 'er.
Another son of a bitch stand up on the other side and he said No, let's cook her.
Said a big tall black guy stood up in the back and said let's barbecue the motherfucker.

Way up in the jungle deep
The lion stepped on the signifying monkey's feet.
The monkey said motherfucker can't you see
for you are standing on my goddamn feet?
He said the lion look and said I ain't heard a word you said.
You say three more and I'll be on your motherfucking head.
Said the monkey got wise, ran up in the tree, he started jumping up and down,
His feet missed the limb and his ass hit the ground.
Say with a bol'[t] of white lightning and a bowl of white haste,
He said he had a lion was on his ass with all four of his feet.
Said the monkey looked up and said please Mr. Lion, I apologize,
Say, but if you let me get my nuts out the sand,
Why I'll fight your ass like a natural man.
He said, after a while the lion got wise,
He said the monkey start to grin,
He said look you big bad motherfucker you been bullshitted again.
He said he jumped up in the tree, started jumping up and down,
His feet missed the limb and his ass hit the ground.
He said like a bol'[t] of white lightning and bowl of white haste
the lion was back on his ass with all four of his feet.
The monkey looked up and said please Mr. Lion I apologize,
Said I got four very lovely children and a very sickly wife.
He said to you and all the things I give,
He said if you let me get my nuts out the sand,
Why I'll fight your ass like a natural man.

I just come back from my motherfuckin' barn,
I look in my stall my old mule was gone.
Said Miss Lady have you seen my mule?
She said no man I just come back from bringing my kids to school.
He said but you give me time to put down my books,
I'll tell you exactly how that poor motherfucker looked:
Said he got three legs broke and he got one leg lame,
Said he's nine now but he'll be ten next spring.
He said he used to go with this girl named Mabel,
Fuck her three times and he's dead back to the stable.
He said I put him in the barn when he's catching a fit:
I put a light in his ass so he can see his own shit.
He said every time the dirty come to pass,
You can tell him cause he's got a star dead in the crack of his ass.

After these three toasts, Babineaux told me a series of eight jokes before moving on to the memorates that filled the second half of our conversation and moved it into a more fully reciprocal dialogue.

Reciprocity and dialogue are important in our understanding of what happens in general in Rayne and are the key to understanding the particular shape and structure of this one afternoon. And the reverse is equally true: the discursive moves that Babineaux makes over the course of the afternoon, deploying the less common genre of the memorate, reveal something about what happens at other events: that what is at stake is the creation and maintenance of an interactional community, which always reflects and helps create a larger sense of community. We have both romanticized and

now are sometimes suspicious of the notion of reciprocity and its importance within a group's sense of community, but it is nonetheless still a factor.

A text like "Jenny Jenny" reveals the importance of dialogue in the construction of the text itself. As I have noted elsewhere, this dramatic turning of narratives, where not only is narrative cohesion achieved but also the plot of the story unfolded, is not unique to African American speech communities but is part of a larger method available in American vernacular narration (Laudun 1999b). Here, the first four lines of the text act as a preface to the dialogue that transpires in the bar. The first two lines, of course, emphasize the poetic nature of the text, though they are not themselves acoustically but ideationally rhymed: "crossed the ocean / crossed the sea." In some ways, they foreshadow the rather loose rhyming scheme of the rest of the text: the third and fourth lines are unrhymed; the fifth and sixth lines rhyme through repetition—"meat / meat;" the seventh and eighth lines are actual rhymes—"am / damn;" and the final three lines build to the rhyme of cook her/motherfucker by starting with the verb phrase "hang 'er" in order to build expectations about how "cook her" will be finished. The joke, of course, is that not only does the rhyme leap from a verb and its objective pronoun to a noun, but a noun that is central to shit-talking in Rayne in the first place.

"Jenny Jenny" is interesting across a number of dimensions, but the one that I want to examine here is the role that the quotative verb "say" plays in the text. There are three distinct uses of "say," and its past tense conjugation, "said." Its first appearance, and its dominant role in the text, is as a quotative marking reported speech within the text itself: "She said, bartender, bartender, give me a piece of meat." The second function it serves is simply as the hortative say: "Say, bartender, do you know who I am?" The third function is less clear, though it occurs twice: at the beginning of line 9, "So he said" and again more simply as "Said" at the beginning of line 11, the last line of the text. We will explore this third function more in a moment. This third use of "said" as the way to mark the beginning of a line without any apparent quotative reference drops out in "The Mule." Looking at just this last text, the resolution of the line-beginning "said" would appear to be simply a matter of the pronoun getting dropped off for the sake of prosody. All the lines here could perfectly well begin with a pronoun, and all the pronouns would point to extant speakers within the text itself.

The use of "said" enjoys no such ready explanation in "The Signifying Monkey," where any pronominal reference scheme that might explain the use of "said" as a quotative referring to speakers internal to the text itself drops away in the first six lines. The quotative scheme at work in just these half dozen lines is amazingly complex and worth some attention. In the third line, there is the most straightforward use of a quotative verb, the introduction of reported speech: "the monkey said." The other dramatic persona, the lion, responds: "the lion look and said." Interestingly, the lion's response is in fact a negation of the monkey's speech and of having engaged in the building of any kind of conversational community—"I ain't heard a word you said"—and by telling the monkey that further speech will in fact be what starts trouble: "You say three more and I'll be on your motherfucking head."

But what about the "he said" that begins the fifth line? There is no clear evidence of who is the speaking subject. There is no "he" within the toast that the text itself could

be reporting. "He said" begins nine of the twenty-five lines that follow: that is a significant portion of lines, and thus "he said" is clearly a significant dimension of discourse production for Babineaux and other speakers in Rayne. (I should note that while I am focusing only on texts by one speaker here, his are representative of the larger tradition.)

There are instances in "The Signifying Monkey" where "he said" might ostensibly be the narrator, Babineaux, reporting the speech of the monkey directly to him. That is, the fictional character has told him something, closing the gap between the tale and its telling. Such an instance seems to occur in the tenth line—"He said he had a lion was on his ass with all four of his feet"—but this possible construction fades as the text continues, since over the next five lines, "said the monkey" occurs twice, which is a bit of an awkward referential scheme and not one I have ever heard the speakers in this community ever use elsewhere.

With just these four texts before us, it would be impossible to surmise that "said" or "he said" as line initiators occur in texts where the prosody and rhyme schemes are not as tight. Neither "The Two Blinds Boys" nor "The Mule," with their rhyming couplets and regular lines, possess any instances of quotatives without a clear reference to the speaker of the reported speech. Is it conceivable that "said / he said" is just fill, made possible by texts that are clearly so reliant on dialogue for their creation that redundancy, no matter how seemingly nonsensical, does not matter? A text with less dependence upon prosody might offer us some insight. The joke below came close on the heels of the toast about the mule above:

They had one, they said, they had this guy . . .
so he used to live across,
he used to live across like a lake.
So every day he would go to work and he would come home.
And when he would get home, he had this boat, he had to go across this river.
So, he said, he'd row across this river, said, he got home
and said his wife started messing with him.
So he told'em, he said, well, Lucille, he said, shit. It's going to come to leave you one day, chér.
So he said aw you ain't going to do shit.
So he said he went back to work the next day. He come back
he said the wife was just bitching at him again.
Said, You going to get me to leave you one day, Lucille.
Said, You ain't going do shit.
He said the next day he come home and he come across the thing in the boat.
He said he got there, said Lucille started bitching at him.
He said, I got enough of this shit.
He said he went in there and packed all his clothes in a suitcase and he put it down in the boat and said he got to cross the river.
Said he got about halfway.
Said Lucille run outside.
"Say Jean. Say what you going to do about the house?"
Jean said "Sell that motherfucker. I don't care.
He said Say Jean, what you going to do with the kids?
He said put them fuckers up for adoption. I don't give a shit.
He said Say, Jean, what you going to with this? [Points to his groin]
Jean said goddamn Lucille you going to come to make you leave you one day.

This example both confirms suspicions about the syndetic functions of "he said," but it also adds some new dimensions. The confirmation of the polysyndetic nature of "he said," its use to chain a series of lines together, comes in the occurrence of "so he said" six times in the first half of the text. "So" is a common discourse marker often used by speakers to indicate consequence, topical repair, or to mark a moment in which the end of a discursive turn is coming and thus a signal to the hearer that his/her turn approaches (Schiffrin 1988:316). "So," half the time in conjunction with "he said" and once with "he told'em," is used in the text above as a way to move through the dialogue in a kind of lockstep fashion, as if the nature of the conflict narrated, in our first report of the narrated couple's arguments, must be in some fashion repaired at the level of narration. Elsewhere in the joke, as in the other texts above, "he said" or "said" is simply used to construct dialogue.

The exceptions are those moments in which it appears that the narrated protagonist, Jean, appears to have told his story directly to the narrator, Babineaux. One such example is found in the last use of "so he said" above (line 10): "So he said he went back to work the next day." Such instances would seem to seek to close the gap between the narration and the narrated (see Briggs and Bauman 1992:146ff.). At first glance, this kind of mediation between the pragmatic and semantic realms happens with the use of "said" in a joke that came a little later in our conversation:

This is a old one.
There was a lady.
She was kinda . . . she wasn't ugly, but she wasn't too pretty, put it like that.
So a friend came by her house one day and told her said—
She said you know what she said I got a problem.
So what's your problem?
Said I just can't have nobody to have sex with me,
Because, you know, there's something wrong with me and people, you know—I can't get no man.
Said well that's not no problem.
She said I got a guy right around the corner.
Said he sells voodoo dicks.
Said a voodoo dick?
Said yeah! That son-bitch got all shapes, all sizes, and everything.
Said can you take me around there?
She said yeah.
So said knock on the door. [knocks on table]
Said the man come to the door.
Said yeah can I help you?
Said I heard that you sell voodoo dicks?
Said ah-ha-ha yeah.
Said I got some right there. See that little old cabinet?
Said look they right there.
Said long ones, short ones, fat ones, whatever.
Said whatever you want. Said pick one.
Said she picked one, man.
Said about that long. [Motions with his hand about sixteen inches apart]
Said—the guy said now you watch that. This dick's got instructions.
She said well what kind of instructions. Said come with a dick?
She said well.

He said you got to say voodoo dick in my pussy, for him to fuck you.
And he said when you're finished you got to holler voodoo dick out.
So he said.
So she said okay I'll take it.
So she took the dick and went home.
Said she was a nurse.
Said she got home that morning, said she lay on the bed.
Said right before she went to work.
Said opened her legs wide.
Voodoo dick in my pussy.
That fucker come off the dresser *shhhkk* jump in her pussy.
[Makes slapping noises with his hands—back of one hand into palm of the other]
Starts fucking her.
Said she said voodoo dick out.
Said that motherfucker jumped out, stood up on the fucking cabinet.
Said I got me something good here.
Said goddamn.
So they said she left and went to work.
Come back to the house that afternoon. Horny.
She horny and she ain't had it that long.
Voodoo dick in my pussy.
That fucker jump in there. [slaps hands]
Voodoo dick out—that motherfucker jump back out on the cabinet.
She said ohhhh shit I know this good.
She said tomorrow morning I'm going to try this motherfucker early.
So they said about eight o'clock that morning, said it was a Saturday morning she ain't had to go to work that day.
She looked at that dick like here.
Voodoo dick in my pussy.
That motherfucker jump off the cabinet. Puh puh puh. Jump in there.
Said voodoo dick out.
That motherfucker just kept on [slap hands].
Wouldn't come out.
So she said voodoo dick out.
Said that motherfucker [slaps hands].
Said goddamn she said I gotta find a way to get this shit out my pussy.
Said that motherfucker hurting.
Said she got to running.
She naked man.
Run out her house
She run down the street.
Said they had a little boy standing up on the sidewalk.
She said hey little boy would you help me take this voodoo dick out my pussy?
Said that little boy got all extreme, man. Ahhh-huh! This lady crazy. You know. Run away.
So she went on down the street a little far—a little while longer.
Said they had a lady walking. Kinda old lady.
Said ma'am would you help me take this voodoo dick out my pussy?
Said she said, uh, the lady just went hysterical. She threw the bag down. She got to running because she said the lady was crazy. She was running around with a dick in her pussy. And everything like that.
So she went.
So they had this guy, see.
Cutting some hedges.

So he say he look around like this and seen that woman.
So he said—so that woman said sir can you help me take this voodoo dick out my pussy?
So that man, ahhh, woman, you crazy. Ahhh, shit, voodoo dick in my ass.

In the joke, "he said" or "said" begins 33 of 81 lines. "Said" again manages the cohesion of syntactic units, and this time, with such short lines, the effect of it is something like the steady banging of the voodoo dick of the story.

But just as interesting is the appearance of another construction: "so they said." Encountering a similar phenomenon among Hindi-speaking Fiji Indians when engaged in a particular form of gossip, Donald Brenneis (1984) noted that the particular form of the quotative being used could also be used to mean something similar to the English "I hear" or "they say," to indicate unidentified speakers. In either case, Brenneis concludes that the use of such a subjectless, or a loosely implied subject, quotative "has the effect of distancing the speaker from the subject about which he is speaking; it is not one's own account but something which has been heard" (1984:494). "They say" operates similarly in American English, but its effect is clearly not the same here, and I think Richard Bauman largely has it right when he notes that "attributive forms like *bole*, said, etc., have a kind of evidential function, adding social weight to an individual's utterance: this is not just me saying it, but (at least) me and my source" (personal e-mail communication). "Said" in this usage acts as a brief deferment of authorship to a larger community of speakers, a larger tradition of speaking.

What makes the appearance of a subjectless "said" so interesting here—apart from the fact that it appears almost entirely in the highly entextualized forms of the toast and the joke and not in the memorate—is the number of dimensions that it cuts across. First, it has the same polysyndetic function as "and" or "so" in other texts, as a stylistic device to begin a line. Second, it has a traditionalizing function, effectively highlighting Babineaux's own speaking as itself quotative, closing any intertextual gaps by marking his own texts as simply repeated. Third, the proliferation of "said" within a text and its implied proliferation of texts that preceded such a text creates a diffuse field of authorship and authority, which has profound implications for any performance and the present it creates. This diffusion of authority that is, in some ways, embedded in the structure of these texts reflects not only an aesthetic for how texts are formed but also an ethics of what texts do. The proof of an aesthetics of textual production reflecting and driving an ethics of talking is in what happened next in our conversation: because the semantic dimension was not being mirrored in the pragmatic, Babineaux moved outside the normal range of genres in order to find a textual field that would drive our conversation toward the kind of reciprocity found in the texts themselves.[8]

Haunting Discourse

Looking back later on this session, the break from jokes to memorates becomes more clearly a move on Babineaux's part driven by a need to find a balance between the contents of his texts and the nature of our conversation (see table 1). The opening frame of the memorate below leads the listener to believe that the story is going to be about Babineaux's uncle, who along with Babineaux's brother, make up the trium-

virate of shit-talkers in the immediate family. But the story strangely switches gears, not only in terms of topic and genre, but even at the discursive level, where a long pause emerges as a result, and manifestation, of the shift:

Yeah, but he's still like that.
He still talks shit all the time.
He make you laugh just for nothing.
If you say something he's got something to kind of react on you.
Like that.
Because one day we was sitting around, and that was before he . . . well, I'll put it like this:
[Pauses]
One day . . . my family was kind of weird.
Because they would always try to dig for money.
So one day—I was young, about twelve I guess—so my mother, couldn't leave me home, had to take me out there.
So we went out there, to a place called the country, some property we had out there, about an acre of land.
So they said form a circle.
And this is . . . my eyes seen this myself:
We formed this circle, man, my brother, my brother was preaching.
He was digging in the middle. We were all around him and he was digging in the middle.
Man, he took that shovel. I guess from the way it looked it must have been a shovel deep, about like this.
Something went [snaps finger and speaks noise "yanga yanga yanga yang"],
And then went boom [snaps finger],
And when you looked again, they had a fucking coffin, man,
Solid gold.

Open it up, nothing but coins in there.
And then a bull appeared, just appeared out of nowhere.
The bull had fire coming out his nose and his eye was red red red,
And you hadn't supposed to talk, because it would break [snaps] the chain of everything, that's just how it was.
That bull started charging.
I was trying to get out of there. I'm young. I don't know what's going on.
My mother telling me just don't move. There ain't nothing, ain't nothing. You just seeing things.
And that sucker come up from me to like where I'm sitting to you and disappeared.
Now you know that scared the shit out of me.
I was damn near shitting in my clothes.
My uncle come up
in the car.
And when he drove in the yard that shit exploded.
And when I looked again it didn't look like anyone had dug in the ground at all.
Everything disappeared.

Stories about buried treasure are quite common in south Louisiana. Louisiana treasure tales also share a tendency to locate the treasure near a tree as well as sometimes featuring a bull. In a story very similar to this one, a group digs for treasure near *un certain chêne avex une marque* (a certain oak with a mark) identified for them by a *vieux Indien qui s'appelait Jim* (an old Indian named Jim). After they have been dig-

ging for a time, a fire-breathing bull comes out of the nearby woods: *un gros boeuf qui s'en venait en travers de bois avec la flame qui lui sortait du nez* (a big bull came out of the woods breathing fire from its nose). In this particular story, told by Samuel Gautreaux of Cecilia, one of the men returns with a spirit controller to find the coffin broken open (Ancelet 147–8).[9] Like a number of coastal areas where pirates and bandits have operated, there is a considerable tendency to include such figures, as occurs in the next memorate.[10]

A couple of things cue the listener to a change in genres. First, following the treatment of the quotative above, note the comparative lack of use of "said," except as a marker of reported speech. Second, Babineaux's use of "one day" three times alerts us that a temporal anchor for a text is not quite sticking the way he would like: "one day," of course, is not limited to non-fictional forms, but it does set up a shift to a particular moment in time, typically for the purposes of narration. Having committed to the change, however, Babineaux moves to pick up narrative speed, first with a series of three lines (lines 9–11) beginning with "so" and then later with a calculated use of "and." In the first instance, he uses "and" to begin two narrative lines that will be followed by a short, appositive line: "And then went boom / And when you looked again, they had a fucking coffin, man / Solid gold." He ends the story similarly: two lines that begin with "and" lead to a third, short, appositive statement: "Everything disappeared."

While he seems to be framing a further discussion of shit-talking at the start of the text, the mention of family struck another chord within him that, perhaps, inspired him to change course. I am somewhat confident in this assessment, given the evidence: after he had told me a series of memorates and our interview had moved far enough along from monologue to dialogue, by the stories asking me to confirm or deny my belief in such things being possible, Babineaux expanded his discussion of family to include the present and those members of his immediate family who had not previously been a part of any narrative—and would not. Instead, they would all be firmly anchored in the flow of conversation we call dialogue. Such an assertion is, I think, borne out in the following text. The move to dialogue emerges slowly, moving from "you know" to "you understand" to a "you understand" with a pause long enough that I felt obliged not only to nod my head but also to offer up verbal affirmation of my inclusion within the circle of belief, the circle of his family:

Like I said my family was weird, they liked to dig for money and stuff.
Said my grandfather had left us some money,
And they was digging for it.
So one day we went, and I was at work, so I can see, we at a country spot, like our property.
So I can see a lot of people dressed in white.
So I'm curious me. I said well shit what the hell is everybody doing out there dressed in white? I wanna see.
So I goes out there.
So they tell me you're working right now, just go home come back. You know, come back after work.
So I goes back, man, after work.
So, they all in the house.
We all praying man, everyone's on their knees praying.
They got an excavator in the backyard, digging.

[Laughs] You understand?
Find this money, I guess.
We're on our knees, man, we're praying.
It's like in the pit of the summer like here.
No wind nothing.
They had a wind come through the house.
That wind was so strong my aunt was holding onto the door like that and both her legs was in the air.
That's how strong the wind was. In the house.
So they said . . . they picked me, my nephew—the one I was telling you that talk all that shit, and my little niece to go bring some water to the workers in back, the one that was doing the work.
So we got to walking. We passed on the side of the house to bring them.
So my nephew said, say man you see that guy in the tree?
I said man fuck I don't see nobody in no tree.
He said yeah man he be right there sitting on that limb.
I said I don't see nobody man. I'm getting scared now. Man I don't see nobody.
But he's seeing this, you know.
So he said—I said how he look?
It's a guy, he said, it's a guy dressed in a pirate suit, man.
He said he got a pirate hat on. He got a pirate jacket—and he started talking to him!
The guy in the tree started talking to him while he's telling me this.
But the guy in the tree is telling him shut up don't tell me that.
So he telling me man look he right there. You can't see him? Look he right there on that branch.
He say he want something more to drink.
You know, because what they had did: they'd put a bowl in the back yard, under this tree, with some alcohol in it. You understand?

JL: Mm hm.

And I don't know if it was the sun that would dissolve it, but it would be gone.
Okay, so he say he say man he want another drink.
So I said fuck man don't tell me that I wanna get back in the house. I said I don't see nobody up there.
So we kept on walking. We went out there. We brung them some water.
So on our way back. Look at him.
He say, see you, you son of a bitch.
He say you don't wanna give me another drink, huh?
He say you gonna be just like me.
He say you see this here peg leg?
He say you going to be just like me.
He say for this out here y'all are going to have to lose something.
So, man, it got kind of scared. We started walking fast. By the time we got to the house, I broke out a run.
A shovel, man, come from the back of the house.
I mean full force.
That shovel stuck in that tree so deep we had to dig it out with an axe.
It stuck . . . you know with a shovel, it's hard to stick a shovel into anything.
That shovel went inside the tree halfway.

Babineaux begins both these memorates with a kind of qualification about the nature of his family. Both times he notes that his family was weird: precisely because, he suggests, they dug for money. The effect on the interactional frame is to draw the

listener close by positing a distance between the performer and the contents of the story: they are weird; we are normal. Having drawn his audience to his side, however, Babineaux then goes about telling how he himself was drawn into the course of events he narrates. In both narratives, he doesn't quite fit—he is young in the former and at work in the latter—which reinforces an ambivalence in interactional order of the text, which might also be found in the interactional order of the telling, thus reinforcing a kind of intimacy between himself and his audience.

Having mirrored this ambivalence in the telling of the tale into the tale itself, the texts then proceed to address the listener directly. In the first text, Babineaux says: "my eyes seen this myself." (Note that it isn't "I seen this myself." There is still a bit of distancing, even in this claim to being an eyewitness.) In the second text, he makes a reference to the current scene of narration when he notes that "it's like in the pit of summer like here," drawing the two events closer together. What follows in both tales is a gathering of family to pray or to preach in order to bring the treasure out. After that, something intercedes. In the first tale, it is a bull; in the second, a wind. The second tale grows in complexity by having an additional episode where he and his nephew encounter a pirate in a tree. At first, Babineaux can't see, and thus can't talk with the pirate, but eventually the pirate breaks through Babineaux's own unwillingess to see him and threatens Babineaux for having ignored him. The pirate issues a prophecy, that the family will have to lose something, and as Babineaux and his nephew flee the scene, makes his point, as it were, by driving a shovel into the tree.

With this climactic turn of events told in first person and with a regular turn to his audience for understanding, the memorates that followed grew smaller and more focused on particular turns of events within the immediate family. The very next memorate was about a bird in a tree speaking to Babineaux's older brother. The one after it featured another brother dreaming that someone had put "something" on their mother, and the one that followed that was about his father being treated for stomach cramps and vomiting snakes. With each memorate, Babineaux pulled further and further into the give and take of dialogue. Direct questions feature in almost all of the texts, almost always near the end. The questions asked me to understand or, short of understanding, to otherwise explain what happened.

His questions and my answers were the exact same give and take of dialogue that he had been performing for me all during our afternoon together. Interestingly, that performance of voices in carefully constructed dialogues emerged slowly over the course of the afternoon. While his delivery of the toasts was superb, and not unlike other performances I have witnessed, they were nowhere near as full as, for example, his delivery of "Voodoo Dick," which with its knocking on tables, screams, and shouts really marked the moment when he had fully warmed to his task. Unfamiliar with, and unwilling to presume, the standards of behavior for a shit-talking audience in Rayne, I at first sat quietly with the microphone nearby, smiling and nodding as he moved readily from one text to another. The entire time, however, Oscar Babineaux was gauging my reactions, seeking to establish what my boundaries and interests were, how I fit within his overall world.

The nature of his world, and of other speakers in this part of Rayne known as "back of the tracks," is one in which families and friends matter. They matter because they

form a clear and at the same time diffuse network of reciprocal relationships on which individuals depend largely because institutions and organizations, be they public or private, are either indifferent or aggressively opposed to their existence. (Events in the wake of the recent storms bear this out rather well.) Such a statement applies across a vast range of groups in south Louisiana, but it is especially the case for African Americans (see Abrahams 1992; Hall 1992). Maintaining such a network requires a constant sense of being in communication with others, either in the present or in the past, and the texts deployed in contexts where socializing is foregrounded in Rayne reflect this larger reality: even when monologic in nature, like a toast or a joke, they are dialogic in construction. The voices reported in individual narrations can be in the fictive present as well as from common cultural resources. Culture, however, is not understood as some network of ideas standing apart from the people who realize it, and so shit-talkers in Rayne tend to hew closely to words having come from somebody, even if that somebody is anonymized and abstracted into a "they."

This diffusion in the textual order, which occurs most clearly in the more traditional toasts and jokes, is paralleled in the interactional order of the memorates, where "you understand?" and other forms of direct address appear with regularity. I would argue that such a redundancy, traditional in nature but available to Babineaux as a series of rhetorical moves, allows him as a performer to situate me in an established landscape. In this sense, his leaving behind the usual genres of shit-talking for a series of memorates highlights that reciprocity must be brought into the interactional order to be considered real. My abilities as a traditional audience were lacking—I offered no toasts nor jokes of my own—but I could be drawn at least into a shared realm of belief as a memorate listener, and I certainly had to respond to his *you understands*. Memorates are not entirely beyond the sphere of social talk, and I have on a few occasions witnessed their use in speech events that might move into shit-talking or be moving away from it, but they do demand a different kind of interaction from their audience, a different kind of commitment. Oscar Babineaux in fact foregrounded this commitment as we walked out of his house that day. As we stood in the shade of the same tree where shit-talking sometimes occurs, squinting against the bright white of the summer sun on the oyster shell drive, he told me that now he felt he could call upon me if he or his family needed something.

In some way, this essay ends exactly where Roger Abrahams's examination of another set of speakers from a rural setting begins, with the principle that "communities have devised only so many ways to organize themselves. Once a program or arrangement develops in one sector of life, it tends to repeat itself in other areas" (1983:1). The rather simple illumination I have added to the ongoing project of African American studies is just how deeply embedded in discourse and discursive practices such organizing principles can be. Conversely, their place deep in the structure and structuring of discourse is a product of a particular set of histories and of responses to those events. I have teased only one thread out of a much more complex and interesting braid here.

In another way, this essay has been a kind of ethnography of a collection event, revealing that even when we are "just texts," the individuals with whom we work may have their own agendas, their own understandings that will, of course, have an effect

on the kinds of things we experience. Oscar Babineaux was not interested in telling "just a text" but a just text, and there is a huge difference between those two things, as Roland Barthes insisted upon (1982:70). Anthropologist Jane Hill's work has been exemplary in tracking these kinds of discursive moves that individuals make and in recognizing that there is surely middle ground in our examination of a culture between the collection of texts with little regard for context and the ethnography of endogenous contexts of use (Hill 1995; Hill and Zepeda 1992). Master performers like Babineaux highlight that continuum of effort and of results.

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Notes

1. I should note that an invitation to meet Oscar Babineaux came during the semester, but I delayed doing so until after the semester for a number of reasons. First, I wanted Raven to have the opportunity to work with her father in documenting oral traditions that were firmly a part of her family, and, second, I wanted to make sure that any relationship that might inhibit Mr. Babineaux in being as free and open, or as closed, as he would like would be behind us.

2. Interview with Oscar Babineaux in July 2000.

3. The use of the word "toast" to refer to rhymed poetic discourse within African American speech communities is somewhat contentious. Many African American scholars label it an outsider importation of at least the name of the genre. I have never heard the term used within any of the speech communities I have documented. While "joke" is fairly common and "memorate" clearly an analytical term, I use the term "toast" cautiously here, if only as a way to acknowledge the important work my fellow folklorists have done in documenting various African American speaking traditions. For those interested in the complex relationship between folklore studies and, especially, the use of the word "toast," the term appears to have been first used in the pages of the *Journal of American Folklore* in 1927 by Arthur Huff Fauset in his "Negro Folk Tales from the South," one page of which lists twelve "toasts" (sect. 7). Later, in 1975, as interest in toasts seems to have surged simultaneously with the development of performance studies, Alf H. Walle attempted to give the term a historical foundation, but even he noted that the strongest candidate for a possible origin, "toaster" as a man of words, was not very strong.

4. Mona Lisa Saloy's careful documentation of African American folklife in New Orleans is also quite useful here. Two of her essays can be found on the Louisiana Folklife Program's website (http://www.louisianafolklife.org). See especially "The African American Toast Tradition" for a version of "Shine and the Titanic" and a child's rendition of "The Signifying Monkey."

5. Elsewhere I have explored other similarities between how discourse is structured and how worldviews are structured in Midwestern ways of speaking (Laudun 2000). The larger project examined the way men and women, both black and white, spoke about a common past (Laudun 1999a).

6. A quick note on the transcription practices used here, if only because the first few quotations from Mr. Babineaux are rendered as blocks of prose while the rest of the materials are rendered as lines of poetry. In the case of the former, I have opted not to use a more thoroughgoing version of ethnopoetic transcription with these first few passages only because I am subordinating them to exposition, and I have elected to use block quotes for the sake of expediency in reading. In regards to the latter, I have followed ethnopoetic conventions in terms of rendering line breaks as places where substantial pauses or pauses combined with syntax indicate a turn in discursive production. Ellipses indicate momentary

pauses within lines, sometimes where a speaker is searching for the next word or, in Babineaux's case, where a drag on a cigarette is being used to insert a pause. Em-dashes indicate a break in syntax or the ideational structure. In a few instances I have used some "eye dialect," if only because "gonna" more clearly reflects the prosody of speech than "going."

7. "The Two Blind Boys" and "The Signifying Monkey" have been widely documented: both appear in Lomax's *The Land Where the Blues Began*, for example—the self-censored rendition of "The Signifying Monkey" (censored by the performer for the sake of the camera, it would seem) is made all the more masterful by the deftness with which he handles the word substitutions, for example, "grass" for "ass." Both "Jenny Jenny" and "The Mule" represent texts whose relative rarity in extant records would seem to indicate either they have been missed by a focus on urban folkways or that they are limited either in geographical or historical scope—though an agricultural toast told by a fairly urban speaker would seem to suggest some historical depth. The only record for "Jenny Jenny" that I have been able to find is for the Little Richard song of the same name.

8. Not discussed here but worth pointing out for future exploration is the occasional construction of "said he said" or "said she said." Their use is interesting for the kind of quotational enjambment that could occur and yet typically does not. Listeners simply are not confused by the rapid fire use of "said" in these contexts.

9. The two legends that follow in Ancelet's collection feature animals and coffins as well (1994:149–50).

10. Most narratives I have encountered take the form of legends, though memorates do emerge—since collecting these I have found myself asking more broadly about first-person accounts of such events. A surprising range of individuals, mostly older but both black and white, tell such tales. For more texts about buried treasure in south Louisiana, see Lindahl, Owens, and Harvison (1997:256–67). It should also be noted that the presence of a bird as a prophetic voice can be found in "The Rooster Knows" in Lindahl, Owens, and Harvison (1997:270).

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