The Message of the
American Folk Sermon

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The author of *The Art of the American Folk Preacher* (Rosenberg 1970) had intended, in part, to disprove much of the theory of oral composition developed by Milman Parry and Albert Lord. Nearly all of their work had been done in Yugoslavia, the rest in neighboring Balkan states. The resultant research was based upon a language that few interested scholars could read and fewer could analyze. *Folk Preacher* was going to correct that problem by decomposing materials that were immediately available to English-speaking scholars. If the *guslari* used compositional techniques like those of Homer, thus making him accessible in ways that had not been possible before, then the preachers, whose techniques were also analogous, could be analyzed to comment on both. In the event, however, most folklorists found that the "discovery" of the folk preacher (of a certain kind) only reinforced the Parry-Lord thesis, that it was an extension of the Yugoslavian experience in the United States.

Thus, the original intention of the author had been to address oral-formulaic theory, indirectly, through a detailed examination of American folk sermons that were spontaneously composed and orally delivered; but during the course of recording and interviewing—1966 until 1971—the compelling power of American folk preachers commanded attention in its own right. In the final measure, the research of this scholar and others has concentrated as much upon the folk preachers for their own sake (and intrinsic merits) as upon principles of composition in Homer and several medieval narrators. Rev. Rubin Lacy, Rev. Elihu Brown, and Rev. C. L. Franklin eventually crowded off the page of this research the names of Homer, Turoldus, and the *Beowulf* poet. The historical comparisons have been undertaken, and contemporary American

folk preachers have proven to be of interest for what they can reveal not only about the compositional process of the making of *Beowulf* but about themselves and an American oral tradition as well.

These performances were described at length in *Folk Preacher*; nevertheless, the most graphic and effective contextual images are from observers of early nineteenth-century church services. Henry Fearon's 1818 account of a Methodist service, despite its exaggerations and inclination to portray Americans as uncivilized and undisciplined, captures the spirit of the event compellingly. Having heard that American Methodist services displayed "an extreme degree of fanatical violence," he visited an "African" church in which all of the celebrants were black. They numbered more than four hundred. Fearon wrote that the preacher "indulged in long pauses, and occasional loud elevations of voice, which were always answered by the audience with deep groans." After the minister had finished preaching and had departed, an impromptu prayer session followed in which one of the members sang a hymn and, following, another was called on to pray. Fearon felt that "he roared and ranted like a maniac" while "the male part of the audience groaned" and "the female shrieked." One man shouted and another continued for half an hour bawling. A young girl—Fearon thought that she was about eleven years old—was in convulsions while her mother held her up in arms so that the entire congregation might see her ecstasy. A Brother Macfaddin began preaching "with a voice which might almost rival a peal of thunder, the whole congregation occasionally joining in, responsive to his notes. The madness now became threefold increased. . . had the inhabitants of Bedlam been let loose, they could not have exceeded it. From forty to fifty were praying aloud and extemporaneously at the same moment of time: some were kicking, many jumping, all clapping their hands and crying out in chorus. . ." (Fearon 1818:162-67).

This is not dispassionate reporting by our contemporary standards; nevertheless, Fearon's descriptions sufficiently demonstrate that the style of the oral preacher has not changed noticeably since 1818, nor has the response of his congregation. For our immediate purposes one important element is missing from this description, that of the preacher's sermon. We assume that it was as it is today spontaneously composed and orally performed, without the assistance of a manuscript. By the time a black

Methodist or other Fundamentalist has reached the pulpit, he has heard quite a bit of preaching—probably for more than two decades—and has likely done some sermonizing himself. His sermons are not strictly speaking spontaneous, but are derived in large measure from his several years' experience; in that respect they are spontaneous in the way that the heroic songs composed by Parry-Lord singers of tales were spontaneous, in the way that an experienced jazz musician improvises during what used to be called a jam session.

I have partly characterized such sermons as "oral" in that the exclusive mode of delivery is from the preacher's mouth to the congregation's ears. A manuscript is rarely used, and, although a few preachers have been observed relying on small note cards to jog their memories, these sermons were never meant for silent reading. For that reason they have never been printed, though a few of the more famous and accomplished men have had their sermons recorded and then produced on phonograph discs. This is an authentic and exclusively oral form of communication.

These are also properly considered as folk sermons. The source of inspiration for Fundamentalist ministers is exclusively the *New Testament;* yet that book is thoroughly absorbed by the ministers who then preach from it from memory. But the preacher has also been exposed to a great deal of non-Scriptural lore during his life, and while he consciously recognizes that only the Bible holds the true Word, he nevertheless has usually deeply assimilated the unofficial traditions of his own culture. For instance, when the Rev. Rubin Lacy, while preaching a sermon on "Dry Bones in the Valley" (16 July 1967) said, "The Word of God/Come to the dry bones/Rise and live," what was primarily in his mind was the song, "Dem Bones, Dem Bones, Dem Dry Bones," which was more influential at that moment than was Ezekiel xxxvii, 5. The song has it: "Now hear the Word of the Lord." Ezekiel said, "Thus saith the Lord God unto these bones." Also in the back of Lacy's mind was the well-known spiritual line, "Dese bones gwine rise again"; *rise* is not used by Ezekiel in the King James translation. At another time, while preaching on the appearance of Christ at the end of the world, Lacy described Him "Dressed in raiment/White as driven as the snow" with a "Rainbow 'round his shoulder." Now, Revelation x, 1 reads, in part, "and a rainbow was upon his head. . . ." Lacy's primary inspiration was, again, a popular song: "There's a rainbow 'round his shoulder, and a sky

of blue above," etc.—not even a spiritual. So, even in this most Scripturally influenced of traditions, the popular song and the secularized spiritual have made their impact. Ostensibly and officially deriving exclusively from the written, learned Word, the preaching studied here is in fact heavily influenced and colored by folklore, by oral traditions.

Rev. Lacy had been a blues singer before he ascended to the ministry in 1930 (as he estimated the date), and so the lyrics of many songs should be expected to be racing around his memory and to find their way out in spontaneous sermons. His colleague, Rev. Elihu Brown (like Lacy from Bakersfield, CA), also incorporated folklore in his preaching, as in this sermon of 11 June 1967, "God is Mindful of Man"; here the non-Scriptural tradition employs a cosmic railroad:

> Jesus was so concerned about man
> Until he left richness and glad glory
> Came down here in this old sin-cussed world
> Stepped on the train of nature with a virgin woman
> And brought Himself out an infant baby
> On the train of nature nine months
> Stepped off the train at a little old station called Bethlehem
> Wrapped over there in swaddlin' clothes
> Stayed right there. . . .

A common enough metaphor in several spirituals, the glory train had in this sermon been elevated in status. Brown was never a professional singer, but he had spent many years in church choirs and had heard the songs which described the glory train many times. And even if he had never been in a choir, Brown would have had to be willfully closed to the music around him not to have heard these songs.

Oral sermons, like most performances of oral narratives, are difficult to define structurally. These edifying pieces are the products of preachers who may not have had much formal training and are recited for the benefit of peer group members. Usually no manuscript is used, enabling the preacher to draw upon Divine inspiration to a great extent. In those few cases in which a preacher has prepared a manuscript, the text is written as though in prose, but, once behind the pulpit during a holy service, folk

preachers of the kind we have been describing here will break away from the prepared text into their own rhythm and chanting. The following is a partial transcript of a sermon, "Three Strong Men from Jerusalem," written (for his own use) by Rev. Jerry H. Lockett of Charlottesville, VA:

> Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were three fellows from Jerusalem. They were three Hebrew boys whitch [*sic*] had been caught in a crisis away from home. The men of the text can justly be styled as fellows, because they were pardners [*sic*], and comrades, in every secse [*sic*] of the word.
>
> They were from the same country, held the same religious convictions, and had been appointed to the same position there in Babylon, by the same King for the same purpose. These three men had reached the same conclusion as to what to do about their religious conclusion.

Lockett's sermon began with these two paragraphs; by the time he had reached the last sentence he had begun chanting. The division of his utterances into sentences and of those units into paragraphs broke down. The basic unit of Lockett's performance became the phrase, its length determined by the length of time required for its utterance. However, the structure that Rev. Lockett intended when he wrote out the sermon remained, in large part, because he always had his notes to remind him of the sequence of ideas that he wished to express. (In this sermon, the sequence of events to be related was simplified because they followed the chronology of the Old Testament account.) After the narrative had been rendered, Lockett interpreted the moral values to be derived from this story.

Few oral folk sermons are even this well organized. The preachers interviewed recalled only the "text-context-application" format, which requires that they begin each sermon with an announcement of the Biblical text for the day, its context within the Bible, and its application to contemporary life and morals. That leaves a great deal of latitude for individual expression, both on the level of the single line and the organization of nearly the entire performance. The length of the sermon varies from fifteen minutes to over an hour, though most last for about thirty

minutes. However, since so much of each sermon is improvised, and is thus flexible, the preacher can spontaneously lengthen or abridge the performance as the immediate situation dictates. That is, if the congregation is listless, bored, or otherwise distracted, he can use any of several dramatic techniques to liven up his preaching (altering vocal volume and pitch, gesturing, changing expression, and so forth) or he can cut the service short. When this is the mode of the composition, generic definition based on structure is difficult—beyond the "text-context-application" formula.

After text and context, then, the sermon's form is fluid, and is in large measure open to negotiation between preacher and congregation, that negotiation taking place during the performance itself. The sermon's length, and consequently its form, will probably vary among performances. Nor is it accurate to speak of—or to think of—an ideal sermon in the preacher's mind. He does not have such an ideal fixed form before he starts each service, but rather a general outline of what needs to be said. The "text" opening, taken verbatim from the Bible, will be the only inflexible utterance in the performance. Fixity is in fact a notion contrary to these preachers' theology; since they believe that their sermons come from God and they are only His conduits, that He uses their organs of speech when they are preaching, they can hardly be expected to prepare the content and structure of their message when during their performance the Lord will assume command.

A different notion of structural units, and consequently of structure, was posited by Rosenberg and Smith (1975). This research took as the basic elements of structure the semantic groupings of the sermon. For instance, examples taken from four of Lacy's sermons indicated that the preacher used Biblical names and referred to animals, the Scriptures, life and death, faith, units of time, and colors, among many other semantic categories. State diagrams were then constructed which recapitulated the order in which these semantic components were spoken. Since two of the sermons had been enthusiastically received and in two others the congregation's response forced an evaluation of "unsuccessful," the four sermons were then compared to see what, if any, structural differences the state diagrams revealed.

The sermons' semantic clusters were developed in one of three ways. The most complex, and the oldest, mode of arrangement is

a parallel organization in which themes are introduced one at a time, developed individually, and then combined with other clusters either to be developed further or to be included in a conclusion. This structural type encourages subtle and extended development of the individual elements of an argument; however, to be effective, the audience must have recall of these developments prior to the conclusion when all components are joined into an organic and logical entity. With this type of structure, major themes will have similar distribution patterns: that is, the parallel structure should be reflected in themes that have important concentrations in non-overlapping portions of a sermon before coinciding at the very end.

A second type develops by free association. When the preacher begins with a fixed theme, he then moves from idea to idea in a seemingly random manner. Transitions may occur because of events in the preacher's life which impinge on his consciousness at such performative moments—an event taking place outside the church window that momentarily attracts his attention, a face in the congregation, or whatever stimulus influences the flow of thoughts through an undirected consciousness. Developmental structures of this kind produce truly unique sermons. Because the psychological, social, and physical environments of the churches studied were changing, it would be virtually impossible for a preacher to duplicate the arrangement of themes in an earlier performance.

A third possibility is a clustered structure. Such sermons consist of several major thematic sections that are independent of each other. Within each local development, or cluster, free movement or transition among a subset of ideas is likely to occur. Between ideas, however, there would be few, if any, links. The specific order in which clusters are presented could be the result either of free association or of predetermination. The latter possibility would greatly facilitate the memorization process which is so important for spontaneous composition in oral performances. The preacher could memorize the three or four major clustural developments and, once within a particular cluster, could "shift down" to a memorial partition (a commonly used mnemonic aid) or else freely associate. By using this predetermined mode of development, the preacher would most likely deliver sermons on widely separate occasions that, while not identical, would certainly be strikingly similar. Albert Lord (e.g. 1960:99-123) has made much of similar principles among the Yugoslavian *guslari*.

Thus the state diagrams revealed to Rosenberg and Smith that these seemingly rambling sermons actually contained definite, well-defined ideational structures. This research also demonstrated, by analyzing lexical selection, that a sermon's success is closely related to its specificity. The characteristic mode of development, at least in the case of the preacher whose sermons were analyzed (Rev. Lacy), is through relatively unrelated clustered sequences of themes. Nevertheless, the researchers concluded that development by thematic or ideational clusters may be the most reasonable mode, given both the desire of the preacher to repeat favorite sermons and the demands placed upon his memory by the stresses inherent in performance. By remembering the sequence of a few broad conceptual categories, he may rely for his development on contextual recall or on associative improvisation during actual performance. Finally, the ideational patterns of the successful sermons manifest a simple symmetry which is absent in the unsuccessful performances, and that seems to be a significant compositional factor in this highly organic art form.

Although the original idea of studying the folk sermon was to learn about the compositional techniques of the *guslari*—and by further extension of all oral singers everywhere, if that were possible—the folk sermon is not exactly like those other narrative traditions. And sermon formulas are somewhat different from those of Homer, of the *guslari*, or of the Central Asian *akyn*. The Homeric unit, for instance, is relatively rigid metrically and does not allow variation. Anglo-Saxon verse alliterates, and its metrics are more yielding. The Yugoslav meter is bound neither to the formal metrical patterns typical of Homeric verse nor to alliteration. Nevertheless, the methods of composition are similar enough to allow meaningful comparisons; in some ways what may be said about the folk sermon may be tentatively extended to the oral narratives of other singers of tales.

Lord sought to explain the process by which narratives were composed in the following manner (1960:65-66):

> From the point of view of usefulness in composition, the formula means the essential idea. . . . But this is only from the point of view of the singer composing, of the craftsman in lines.
>
> And I am sure that the essential idea of the formula is what is in the mind of the singer, almost as

> a reflex action in rapid composition, as he makes his song. Hence it could, I believe, be truly stated that the formula not only is stripped to its essential idea in the mind of the composing singer, but also is denied some of the possibilities of aesthetic reference in context.

Psycholinguists differ from Lord, assuming that the existence of ideas precedes and is discrete from their expression in utterances. The formula, that special group of words, does not "mean" its essential idea, but is rather an expression of it. And the essential idea of the formula does not have priority in the singer's mind, but rather the idea itself which must then be encoded into an acceptable language. Many linguists hold that the function of language is to convert ideas into sentences: we first have an idea, so this theory goes, and then we formulate the syntactic structure and lexicon with which to express it. After the syntactic structure has been generated, many of the "blanks can be filled in, which process materializes the actual sentence itself out of its deep structure. In many instances, however, key words form the basis of the generation of syntax, so that prior to forming a sentence the speaker has one or more words already in mind" (Deese 1970:50-51). The encoding process then would not necessarily follow the patterning of a generation of the syntax-supplying of lexicon, but could actually begin with the lexical choice. This seems to be what happens when the oral preacher carries over the same important word from line to line, as does Rev. C. L. Franklin in "Moses at the Red Sea" (Rosenberg 1970:108):

> What do ya think that ya want
> Why the *rod* of your deliverance is in your own hands
> Stretch out the *rod* that's in your hands
> I don't have a new *rod* to give ya
> 5   I don't have a new instrument to give ya
> I don't have a new suggestion for ya
> I do not have a new plan
> Your course has already been charted by destiny
> Stretch out the *rod* that's in your own hand

Each line has been created either by syntactic analogy with the one preceding, or through similarity of idea, or by the repetition of seminal words which are bridges to following lines and which are

the cornerstones for the syntactic constructions of them. "Rod" is in the preacher's mind when he chants this sequence, not the least because he is addressing "Moses," who is about to stretch out his rod to dry the Red Sea. When "the rod of your deliverance" has been uttered, the syntax of the next several lines is being pre-formulated around the seminal word, "rod." After a triplet using "rod," it is dropped, but the syntax of the fourth line and most of its lexical inventory is retained. "Rod" has already served its purpose.

Much has been made of the role of memory in oral performance. Lord (1960:36) thought that the singer

> does not memorize formulas any more than we as children memorize language. He learns them by hearing them in other singers' songs, and by habitual usage they become part of his singing as well. . . . The singer has not had to learn a large number of separate formulas. The commonest ones which he first uses set a basic pattern, and once he has the basic pattern firmly in his grasp, he needs only to substitute another word for the key one. . . . The particular formula itself is important to the singer only up to the time when it has planted in his mind its basic mold. When this point is reached, the singer depends less and less on learning formulas and more and more on the process of substituting other words in the formula pattern.

Lord's description of the compositional process is much like metaphors of the generative theory, the whole description sounding mechanical: new formulas are created by analogy with old ones, and the compositional process is primarily one of substituting words and phrases in unoccupied slots. There is no doubt that this process does often occur. But generative theory argues that given a certain deep structure, an infinite number of surface structures can be generated. Lord ties the creation of new formulas (metrically governed utterances) to the singer's recollection of "the commonest ones." Actually, the singer is freed from such "memory" and such hydraulic reliance. He has at his command not several score or even several hundred formulas which can be altered by word or phrase substitution, but rather a metrical deep structure enabling the generation of an infinite number of sentences

or utterances in the meter of his native language.

Memory is certainly involved in traditional conglomerations of formulas, rather than in the creation of a single unit. For instance, in 1967 and again in 1968, Rev. Rubin Lacy was recorded preaching two sermons on the same topic, "The Deck of Cards," a pious version of Aarne-Thompson Tale Type 1613, "The Deck of Cards." This is a type of counting song (see Wilgus and Rosenberg 1971:291) which assigns a religious meaning to each card in the standard deck; the two corresponds to heaven and hell, the three to the trinity, the four to the gospel writers, the five to the five virgins, and so on. A small part of the 1968 sermon included the following passage (Rosenberg 1970:130):

> And, God
> Said there's two ways to go
> Heaven
> Or either hell
> Mister Hoyle
> Made a two-spot
> He called it a deuce
> God from Zion
> And put it in the deck
> And God
> Made the father
> Son and the Holy Ghost
> Ain't God all right?
> And Mister Hoyle
> Made a three-spot
> And called it a trey

Several features of these sixteen lines illustrate how Lacy was able to recall this passage with great accuracy even after more than a year had gone by. The lines are closely related associationally. The "counting song" follows the very elementary sequence of the numbers, from one to ten. The identification of each card and its real religious meaning is alternated: God says or does something and Mister Hoyle (His minister on earth?) responds by encoding the Scriptural message in playing card form. Lastly, the syntax of each card-cluster is similar—

So God
Made a earth
* * *
And God
Made a year
* * *
And God
Made the Father

—while the responses to God's acts of creation are syntactically identical, and lexically similar:

Mister Hoyle
Made a deck of cards
* * *
Mister Hoyle
Made a two-spot
* * *
And Mister Hoyle
Made a three-spot

Lacy had good recall of this passage because of the simple arithmetic progression which corresponded to, in negatives, what "God" had done. The entire sequence was decomposed into a dozen or so sub-sections, each concerned with a different denomination card, each related with similar syntax; stitching them together produced the whole.

Rev. Lacy's friend and colleague, Rev. Elihu Brown, liked to describe the birth of Jesus metaphorized as the Glory Train (Rosenberg 1970:169), using similar techniques: "Got on the train of nature/ Stayed there nine months/ Stepped off at the station one mornin'/ Stayed right there/ Until God wanted Him to come on out/ God was so concerned brotheren/ Till He came all the way to this sinful world/ Came in the shape of a baby/ Wrapped Himself in human blood." Logical progression, of a train on the track and of pregnancy and birth, orders Brown's passage and assists in his retention of it. Length does not limit these mannered passages—Lacy often used a forty-seven "line" favorite on the Four Horsemen—but the addition of new and thematically disparate information does. If the content of new material is kept within the associational scope of the remembered material, as Lacy

and Brown have done in the above excerpts, the string could be substantially lengthened. Psycholinguists have long ago demonstrated that people can retain only about seven items of information in a random string, but several dozen in a sentence. We, like the preachers, are not limited as much by the amount of information we can process as by the number of symbols we may try to assimilate (Miller 1967:12, 25).

One trick, then, to effect a successful oral performance is for the performer to find ways of organizing his material. Repetition of his narrative, specifically of certain stories or exempla within the frame of the sermon, greatly helps. In repetition, the smaller units, whether sentences or formulas, tend to be grouped in the performer's mind into larger groups: this enables the performance of such strings as "The Deck of Cards" or "The Glory Train." Some literary scholars now call such sequences "themes" and "type-scenes," the former concentrating on the formulaic structure, the latter on the subject described (Fry 1968:48-53). If the oral performer can retain a few themes with reasonable accuracy (enough to make sense in a different performance), his job has been made far easier than if he had tried to manipulate and create anew several hundred formulas. The process of memorization is probably linked to the formation of such large chunks of information, the performer mentally enlarging the blocks until they include nearly all of the material appropriate for the moment (Bousfield and Cohen 1955:83-95).

A new narrative, or a new idea expressed as an exemplum and inserted into a sermon, is put into the idiosyncratic syntax and lexicon of the preacher. His own first interpretation is what the preacher remembers, even when the source is Scriptural; in this context memory is a recollection of the initial verbalization (Carmichael et al. 1932:73-86). This phenomenon provides the basis for the form of orally transmitted narrative. Thus sermons tend to change less the more they are performed, as the preacher recalls not the initial stimuli but his own mental organization of it.

One has only to read (or hear!) several analogous lines from separate sermons that have been repeatedly performed—or to listen to repeated *guslar* songs, for that matter—to appreciate that "by heart" memorization is seldom attained. Many of the sermon lines are non-grammatical jumbles which repeated listening exposure will not decipher. These are the other, salient features of oral communication: when Parry and Lord shifted the focus of their

research, and consequently ours, from the audience to the singer and his difficulties, they left the dynamics of the audience little understood. They changed our understanding of the performer's relationship with his audience, but mainly from the performer's point of view.

Again, the congregation responding to oral performances is in a position analogous to the audiences of other traditional transmissions. Like the *guslari* and possibly somewhat like the audiences of medieval epic and romance, the congregations are tradition-oriented. They expect to hear the old tales, from the Bible as well as from secular traditions, tales they themselves know well. New stories might well be suspect. Even stories used from the Bible are limited in number, there being fewer than fifty favorites.

The tradition-oriented audience brings to each performance a knowledge of narrative tradition, of language (lexicon and formal considerations such as ritualized openings, closings, means of advancing the story, and so on), and of aural style. The congregation enjoys the sermon because they know what is coming next, and how it will be expressed. Too much has been made of the comfort the audience allegedly derives from hearing familiar material; being able to anticipate the performer enables members of the congregation (or of any oral audience) to participate in the performance, to contribute to it (in the case of religious services to call out, rhythmically, to the preacher), to help make what is at that moment being created. Careful listening to audience participation showed that members of the congregation anticipated their preacher not only in the language that was still a few seconds away from his delivery, but occasionally in the melody he would use to express it. Some preachers seem to take their cues from exclamations in the congregation. The services are thus much more than antiphonal; they are mutually communicative and creative.

Many times during these "communicative events" the preacher's words were unintelligible. I could not distinguish the parameters of phonemes even after repeated tape reruns, and it does not seem likely that many members of the congregation could either. Yet during the original performance they responded alertly and vigorously. In this art form the message is pretty close to being the medium (Rosenberg 1970:40) because that message elicits a visceral response to rhythm and melody that is understood by

the congregational listener as having informational content. All of the preachers interviewed for *Folk Preacher* felt that they were imparting ideas.

Recorded sentences have been transmitted with background noise in experiments conducted by D. J. Bruce (1974:245-52), so that the sentences could not be intelligibly heard. The researcher told his subjects the topic of the sentences they were going to hear and then replayed more sentences, again after first introducing the stated subject. Actually, the sentences used for each topic were the same; the interpretation by the subjects differed, however, because each was predisposed toward certain information once given a topic introduction. Everyone heard not so much what he wanted to hear, but what he expected was going to be said. The interpreting apparatus in the brain, in other words, is able to generate sentences which will match input, even if that input is not real but merely expected.

In another experiment (Mehler and Carey 1967:335-38), sentences with different deep structures but identical surface structures, both beginning with the words "they are," were played to subjects, again with disruptively noisy backgrounds. The subjects had the most difficulty in identifying the sentences with the altered deep structure, suggesting that the inability to identify the deep structure distorts the accuracy of perception. To return to the noisy church services, it is clear that something is being understood. That something may not be precisely what the preacher is trying to communicate, but it is meaningful to the congregant, possibly something that he could not paraphrase individually.

The acceptability of sentences is a subjective judgment (Deese 1970:30). Poor grammar is common in oral sermons, not only because of the relatively low level of formal education of the ministers, but because rapid delivery often leads to mistakes. The following utterances were all spoken during moments of relative calm and were clearly enunciated and heard, yet none drew quizzical looks: "But he's a profession in his field," "He saw the dream, meaning seven years of poordom of no prosperity," and "You know, we as a whole, if we are told to do something, that we don't see any sense in doing that we don't think it oughta be did." Communication of some sort was being transacted.

Communication also occurs in the rhythm of language: in one more way, the message has been influenced by the medium.

The meter of the chanted sermon line differs slightly from that of the same line spoken in conversation; attention to the musicality of the language forces this change. Yet usually the pause in an utterance, punctuated in the sermon by an audible gasp, falls at the end of a major component, for example a noun phrase, or between the noun phrase and verb in a verb phrase:

> I heard a fellow—Oh Lord
> Is the strength of my life
> Then whom shall I fear?
> And the Lord is my Shepherd.

Phrases are usually broken at the end of a clause:

> If He hadn't 'a been my shepherd
> I'd 'a been gone a long time ago
> * * *
> The Lord is the strength of my life
> Then whom shall I fear?

In those cases when the break between components is not so clearly junctured, as in conversation, the auditor tends to interpret the break himself (Fodor and Bever 1965:414-20). In one experiment, tape-recorded sentences upon which clicks had been superimposed were played to subjects. When later asked to reconstruct the sentences, the subjects showed a marked tendency to place the clicks in the direction of or at the component junctures. The researchers concluded that, even when such delineating factors as hesitation pauses or inflections are not present, listeners interpolate component boundaries on their own. Congregations will, accordingly, punctuate in their own minds what the preacher fails to do behind the pulpit. If the congregation's rhythm is not that of the preacher, during the service they will actually help him regularize it.

Most preachers' performance utterances are grammatically acceptable, and the sermon style may be accurately characterized by a very high proportion of simple, active, declarative sentences. This style does not develop because of poor education or even a low intelligence. We know that nearly all adults have the competence to generate very complicated sentences embodying several transformations. Only speakers who are severely retarded

or who suffer from aphasia may be reduced to generating simple sentences exclusively. Rather, the conditions of performance, particularly the need to generate the next formula rapidly, profoundly influence syntactical structures.

Literary critics used to attribute the simplicity of oral narrative diction to the performer's concern for his audience. This explanation held that if the language was too complex, or the metaphors too recondite, the listener would lose the thread of the story. While trying to interpret what a particular line (and its image) meant, dozens of following lines would have been recited. That is why, so the explanation went, the style of the oral epic is as it is. Now, however, we are certain that the simplicity of oral syntax comes about because it is easier for the oral performer—the preacher—to recite that way, to compose simple sentences. While there is no evidence that simple active sentences have linguistic priority, they may have some kind of psychological priority. This ordering would be demonstrated if we interpreted complex sentences by first reducing them to their basic propositions in simple ones. But the evidence for this hierarchy is not at all decisive (Deese 1970:42-44).

Similar evidence for the ease of processing simple sentences has been deduced from experiments with self-embedded ones. Subjects who could read sentences which contained two embedded clauses were not likely to speak them, nor did they understand them readily when they were heard. Their syntax made them difficult to understand and induced a resistance in people to speak them. Memory is again the limiting factor: we have difficulty processing self-embedded sentences because it is difficult to remember which of the subjects go with separated clauses (Miller and Isard 1964:292-303). Remembering requires that we hold the entire sentence in mind while we sort out the clauses. This is difficult enough for formally educated people who have been coached on interpreting self-embedded sentences, and next to impossible for the oral performers studied.

Memory also exerts pressure on the sequence of clauses within a sentence. Clauses tend to be generated chronologically, matching their sequence to the sequence of the sentences describing them. Memory performs better with temporally arranged sentences, and in an experiment reported in Clark and Clark (1977:129-38) when the input was reversed—so that events were not arranged syntactically as they occurred in the lifeworld—the interpreted

sentence was transformed to correspond to events. Clearly the events have an effect on the way sentences are organized. The simplest sort of plot structure characterizes the stories in the sermons: a straightforward single-strand narrative, each episode of which is introduced by such formulas as "after a while" and "by and by." The semantic component of speech is what allows us to distinguish between a concatenation of formulas or lines and a semantically related string which we know as the sermon. Each line can no doubt be explicated in terms of generative theory (in recent years itself controversial) and can be described by the lexicon of psycholinguistics. But these theories are less helpful in understanding why certain sentences follow others or why certain speakers prefer certain expressions and particular melodies. The desire to be "scientific" has led linguists to view the formula as a discrete entity, almost autonomous, almost independent of the person who uttered it. The tendency, doubtless unintentional, has led to viewing the oral performer as a kind of applications system. However, creativity exceeds these parameters.

In an interview, the Rev. Otis McAllister of Bakersfield, CA told me that a preacher must entertain as well as educate, though he did not expand on this statement of poetics. He didn't have to; the aesthetics of chanted sermons are readily apparent. One of the deacons of the Union Baptist Church (Bakersfield) and I once heard a sermon that was unsuccessful. The preacher's language never became metrical: he never broke through oration into chanting. The deacon evaluated him with the laconic phrase that the preacher was "teachin', not preachin'": that is, though the message was theologically and morally sound, it had no aesthetic dimension; its preacher was not "preaching." Similarly, Rev. Rubin Lacy once summed up his own philosophy with two sentences: "You want to make the people glad twice: glad when you get up and glad when you sit down." And, "when you've said enough, sit down."

When the sermon's emotional peak has been reached, the preacher has said "enough," and he will sit down. If he has properly brought along the congregation's emotional and spiritual involvement, they will be "glad." And, in anticipation of his next sermon, they will be glad when he moves behind the pulpit to preach. To a great extent, the reader of this paper who has never heard these orally performed sermons cannot understand what is meant by "enough" and "glad." To that extent we can only rely

on the old folklorist's maxim that folklore is what gets left out of the performance when it is transcribed onto paper. The preacher's tone of voice, his delivery speed, and the responses of the congregation cannot be heard in a transcribed performance. The experience must be firsthand, or not at all. The only version in print that has come close to capturing the orally preached sermon's ambiance is in the last part of Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* (see Rosenberg 1969:73-87).

The preacher's skill is not slight. The sermon is developed with care, always with the congregation's emotions and emotional level in mind. But that is only one aspect of this aesthetic sense. Consistent observance of the meter of a single line, together with its rhythmical relationship to the lines of its environment, is perhaps the most important facet of the preacher's musical talent. The line is perpetuated with care in that it must be sustained, it must be consistent with its rhythmic environment, and yet it must be used flexibly throughout if the sermon is to have an impact. The preacher sustains, even develops, his rhythm in order to deepen his congregation's involvement in the performance. But he must have sufficient control of himself to be able to deflect or retard or even suppress the emotional response which he himself has largely created, if that should become expedient. Only a few of the most talented preachers can sustain their own rhythm regardless of the congregation's: an intricate symbiotic relationship is at play during the performance of an oral sermon, and the preacher will have to struggle to bring his audience to his emotional level—whether that is actual or merely desired—rather than descending to theirs. In the chanted sermon, syntax and even diction are greatly influenced by rhythm, and when the latter is irregular, other inextricable problems will inevitably ensue.

In these orally preached and spontaneously composed sermons, found in the American South and Southwest, the congregation and preacher are responding not only to each other (as in antiphonal services), but also to themselves and to God. As the preacher strives to move the congregation—to infuse them with the Spirit of the Lord—so is he moved and infused by them. He may have to struggle to keep above the dulled plateau of a listless audience. But when the congregation is "high" and the Lord's Spirit has entered the preacher, members of the audience withdraw more into their own personal experience. At one point during a successful service, manipulation or stimulation is no longer necessary; this is

the point at which the congregation have given themselves to religious ecstasy and are hardly aware of the preacher at all. At such moments the congregation members would say that they are consumed by the Spirit, and this is the intention of the preacher. At such moments the congregation is not responding to the preacher, nor he entirely to them; they are both responding to the Holy Ghost. This is likely to take the form of shouting, clapping, dancing, foot-tapping, even speaking in tongues. A catharsis occurs at the end of the service; then the congregation will rest, often exhausted yet exhilarated, thoroughly purged (their sins washed away), happy.

In traditional art, to re-invoke a truism, there is no surprise and little suspense. The listener is satisfied aesthetically because of a sense of the logic and justness of the procedure, the inherent dignity of it, because of the gratifying fulfillment of traditional expectations. Those expectations can be fulfilled on the level of the narrative, as when the master returns and casts out the lazy servant who has merely buried his talents. In learned art this effect can be accomplished, as did Wagner in *Tristan und Isolde*, by the retardation and diverting of the prime melody until the final scene when the melody is presented fully at the moment of the lovers' death. Such dramatic moments also occur in sermons, for instance in the passage below, once delivered by the Rev. C. L. Franklin, "Moses at the Red Sea." The Jews hesitate to try the crossing, but for Franklin their obstacle is not water; their task is to recognize that the power to overcome adversity (a Red Sea by any other name) is within each one. In this sermon the individual is embodied in "Moses":

> And here they were standing on the brinks of the Red Sea
> Here they were, when they looked behind them
> They heard the rattling of the chariot wheels
> Of Pharaoh who had regretted/ his decree of deliverance
> 5   And decided to recapture them/ and lead them back/
>   into the oppression of Egypt.
> When they looked on either side/ mountains prevented their escape
> When they looked before them the Red Sea/ and its perils loomed
>   large/ before their imagination
> I don't believe you know what I'm talkin' about

And the very same folk who had praised Moses
10   For his valor and for his bravery
For his courage and for his insight
For his great victory of deliverance
Began to complain
And Moses said to them stand still
15   And see the salvation of the Lord
I don't believe you know what I'm talkin' about
Stand still
Some time you know we can get in not only our own way
And everybody else's way
20   But it seems sometime we can get in God's way
Stand still
My God I heard Him say the thing you need
Is in your hands
I don't believe you know what I'm talkin' about
25   The instrument of deliverance
Is within your hands
It's within your possession
The-the-the way out
The powers that need to be brought into exertion
30   Is within you
Good God
What are ya cryin' about Moses
What are ya lookin' for
What do ya think that ya want
35   Why the rod of your deliverance is in your own hands
Stretch out the rod that's in your hand
I don't have a new rod to give ya
I don't have a new instrument to give ya
I don't have a new suggestion for ya
40   I do not have a new plan
Your course has already been charted by destiny
Stretch out the rod that's in your hand

The plot is simple. The Israelites, about to make good their escape, think that they are trapped by the Red Sea, the flanking mountains, and the pursuing Egyptians. They have complained, off stage, to Moses. Rev. Franklin in turn addresses his congregation, the larger community of American blacks, the Jews "caught" at

the Red Sea, and Moses. Each individual must seek within himself for the strength to overcome adversity. But more is happening than just that, more than even the text will reveal. Rev. Franklin thwarts our expectations for an easy solution again and again, presenting physical obstacles and emotional ones, delaying the simple truth that will solve the Jews' problems until the aesthetic moment is right, gradually building up our anticipations, our suspense over formal considerations inherent in his presentation—since we know that Moses and the Jews do escape, there is no informational suspense.

The scene is established in the first two lines of this narrative within a narrative. We know who "they" are, their relation to Moses, and the predicament of the Jews at that moment in history. The next lines establish the fact of the approaching Pharaoh and his army now that he has decided not to let the Jews go after all. But their escape is blocked, at the moment of this tableau, by the water in front of them and the mountains on either side. The Jews begin to panic (lines 9-17): those same people who had before praised Moses for his many virtues now complain of their plight. Moses advises them that they need do nothing, that the Lord will be their salvation. Franklin reaches a subordinate climax (line 17), significantly followed by three lines of evaluation (18-20); the first stage of the "action" is over, and Franklin culminates this section in the exemplum's message: stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord. But more than this transcription can show, Franklin indicates the climax of this section through his intonation.

The last twenty-three lines in this episode (18-40) repeat the message content of this sermon (the rod of your deliverance in is your own hands), while the expectation of the congregation for Moses' decisive action is thwarted. They know what that must finally be, of course, but they do not know what Rev. Franklin will say has caused Moses to act, or when he will finally act, or how long the preacher will withhold that information. And while this other suspense is being developed in them, they will come to look at retardation not as a hindrance to their aesthetic pleasure but as something pleasurable in itself.

This portion of Rev. Franklin's sermon also contains within it an instance of fulfilled form which provides one of its subordinate consummations, within the frame of the entire performance. That is, Rev. Franklin develops the emotional intensity of the sermon

slowly from the opening lines to the last, but along the way he infuses it with lesser peaks and troughs. The movement of the entire performance, as can be measured by the preacher's rate of word delivery, his tone of voice, and the frequency and quality of the congregation's responses, is peristaltic. Momentary peaks within sermons are common, since many experienced preachers work towards fruition through a series of them rather than approach the climax in a "straight line." Line 36, "Stretch out the rod that's in your hand," is the culmination of the preceding fourteen lines. As Franklin preached it, the line also relaxed the tension he had been briefly building, though he immediately resumed it while heading toward another subordinate peak. The transition to line 37, "I don't have a new rod to give ya," is provided by "rod." With this utterance a new anaphoric sequence commences which gradually rises in intensity to line 39, "I don't have a new suggestion for ya." The Parry-Lord explanation that new formulas are created by analogy with extant ones looks convincing in this series.

Although the three lines of this anaphoric set (37-39) do not seem alike in their typographical format, Rev. Franklin's interpretation renders them nearly identical in tone and meter. He thus establishes a metrical pattern which arouses an anticipation in his listeners that is largely fulfilled in the hypometric utterance, "I do not have a new plan." This sentence, as chanted, departs from the established pattern ("I don't have a new. . .") and terminates this set. However, Franklin does not end so abruptly, deciding to add a dénouement to the passage which again relaxes the tension that his own anaphoric lines had developed: "your course has already been charted by destiny." The coda is achieved by returning to the language of line 36, "Stretch out the rod that's in your hand." Once again, any transcription is impotent to express the finality with which this line is spoken, but the semantic fulfillment (the answer to Moses' problem) is communicated.

Rev. Franklin's comment on the panic of the Jews and Moses' momentary hesitation occurs in lines 18-21: sometimes we can even get in our own way, we can get in each other's way, and sometimes we can even get in God's way. The right way is that of faith: to stand still and watch the salvation of the Lord. In the next several lines (22-30), Rev. Franklin addresses his congregation in the words that God uses to advise Moses, explicating the previous lines and then applying them to

contemporary life. Finally, in another apostrophe, he again addresses Moses, giving him the ultimate command, further elaborating on the message, retarding the conclusion of the action for just a few seconds more. The last two lines summarize the advice and repeat the call to action. Now, but only now, God's evaluation stops and Moses is allowed to save his people.

In the following eleven lines excerpted from a sermon by the Rev. T. J. Hurley, audience participation and anticipation were present, though to a lesser degree of intensity:

        He said Oh Lord
        It's not my will
95   It's not my way
        It's not my thoughts
        It's not my ideas
        It's not my opinion
        It's not my theories
100   It's not what I think
        It's not what I do
        It's not what I say
        No God it's Your will be done

The expectations of the congregation for a dénouement are developed in more than one way in this series. "It's not my will" may evoke a slight anticipation for the following line, which effectively retains the same syntax, altering only the most important word—correctly uttered last—by substituting an alliterative partner. Experiments have shown that the rhythm of language is more readily retained than syntax, and so it is not wild speculation that the rhythms of such sets as "It's not my will/ It's not my way" involve the audience as much as does the lexical anticipation. The length of the set may vary without substantially altering the demand that the series end with the assertion that "No God it's Your will be done." Aphoristically, then, rhythm creates belief, further involving the congregation in its own religious experience, an experience which is induced by metrics even more than by semantics. So too when the famous preacher Rev. J. Charles Jessup begins his defiant challenge, "take it. . . ," the audience expects the concluding ". . . or leave it." So with "like it. . . ," and ". . . or lump it." Expectations in this instance are based on the frequency with which this sequence and these

particular variations of it are used in ordinary conversation.

One of the most important leitmotifs of this essay—most important "litanies" would be a more appropriate metaphor—has been the insistence that the sermons and the services being written about will never be adequately understood on the printed page, that folk preaching, like folklore, is everything in the performance that does not get copied down in writing. "You've got to have been there," we might say. And yet, in one important way, all of my readers have "been there." "Everyone" remembers hearing, or has heard of or seen video tapes of, Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech. That morning, the 28th of August, 1963, he preached his memorable sermon, and I call it a sermon even though it was received by the more than 200,000 in the audience as a civil rights "speech"—which it also was. Rev. King knew how to give a speech when he wanted to, and he knew how to preach. His speech to the Fellowship of the Concerned (delivered on 16 November, 1961), for example, is a model of a well-reasoned, precisely organized statement on behalf of "Love, Law, and Civil Disobedience" (Hill 1964:345-56). King began:

> Members of the Fellowship of the Concerned, of the Southern Regional Council, I need not pause to say how very delighted I am to be here today, and to have the opportunity of being a little part of this very significant gathering. . . . I would also like to express just a personal word of thanks and appreciation for your vital witness in this period of transition which we are facing in our Southland, and in the nation, and I am sure that as a result of this genuine concern, and your significant work in communities all across the South, we have a better South today and I am sure will have a better South tomorrow with your continued endeavor and I do want to express my personal gratitude and appreciation to you of the Fellowship of the Concerned for your significant work and for your forthright witness.

This speech outlined the philosophy that controlled the nonviolent civil rights demonstrations in America, detailing its chief features and manifestations. He concluded in the same tone of irresistably sweet reason:

That is the basis of this movement, and as I like to say, there is something in this universe that justifies Carlyle in saying no lie can live forever. We shall overcome because there is something in this universe which justifies William Cullen Bryant in saying truth crushed to earth shall rise again. We shall overcome because there is something in this universe that justifies James Russell Lowell in saying, truth forever on the scaffold, wrong forever on the throne. Yet that scaffold sways the future, and behind the dim unknown standeth God within the shadows, keeping watch above His own. With this faith in the future, with this determined struggle, we will be able to emerge from the bleak and desolate midnight of man's inhumanity to man, into the bright and glittering of freedom and justice. Thank you.

He was teachin', not preachin', almost; the repetition of parallel syntax in the clauses beginning with "there is something . . ." has the stamp of the pulpit. At the Washington Monument in late August of 1963, however, the teacher was subordinated to the preacher. "Five score years ago, a great American. . ." he began, ". . . signed the Emancipation Proclamation." The preaching style soon commanded this speech (Hill 1964:371-75):

But one hundred years later, the Negro still is not free.
One hundred years later, the life of the Negro is still sadly crippled
        by the manacles of segregation and the chains of
        discrimination.
One hundred years later, the Negro lives on a lonely island of
        poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity.
One hundred years later, the Negro is still languishing in the
        corners of American society and finds himself an exile in
        his own land.
So we have come here today to dramatize a shameful condition.

No American who was alive in 1963 will forget this preached oration's peroration:

So I say to you, my friends, that even though we must face the
difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream.

It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream that one day
this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its
creed—we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men
are created equal.

I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, sons of
former slaves and sons of former slave-owners will be able
to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.

I have a dream that one day, even the state of Mississippi, a state
sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the
heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of
freedom and justice.

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a
nation where they will not be judged by the color of their
skin but by the content of their character.

I have a dream today.

I have a dream that one day, down in Alabama, with its vicious
racists, with its governor having his lips dripping with the
words of interposition and nullification, that one day, right
here in Alabama, little black boys and black girls will be
able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as
sisters and brothers.

I have a dream. . . .

The conclusion of Rev. King's remarks was pure oral sermon:

So let freedom ring from the prodigious hilltops of New
Hampshire.

Let freedom ring from the mighty mountains of New York.

Let freedom ring from the heightening Alleghenies of
Pennsylvania.

Let freedom ring from the snow-capped Rockies of Colorado.

Let freedom ring from the curvaceous slopes of California.
But not only that.
Let freedom ring from Stone Mountain of Georgia.
Let freedom ring from Lookout Mountain of Tennessee.
Let freedom ring from every hill and molehill of Mississippi, from
       every mountainside, let freedom ring.
And when we allow freedom to ring, . . . (Sentence and paragraph
       format added for emphasis)

The Washington Monument speech called for rousing oratory, not for finely reasoned philosophy. The subject was basically a religious one, though heavily freighted with patriotic cargoes. Situation and subject called for just such a sermon: the formulas, the repetitive syntax and phrases were produced by a highly literate and sophisticated man, whose very different speech to the Fellowship of the Concerned was highly appropriate to that other audience; and his message showed that he could adjust his style of address according to the needs of the situation, and do it with great effect. He was a great speaker, but those of us who remember the Washington Monument speech know also what a great preacher he was. And we know, too, which style had by far the greater impact on the emotions, the spirit, of the audience.

Though Rev. King is dead, we have by no means heard the last of the oral sermon style; we have not been deprived of its great emotive power. At the 1984 Democratic presidential convention in San Francisco, (Rev.) Jesse Jackson delivered a preliminary speech which the Knight-Ridder reporter called "an emotional, triumphant valedictory address for the 42-year-old Baptist preacher who brought out both the best and worst in people in his eight-month campaign for self-respect and dignity for himself, blacks and the disadvantaged" (K.-R. Synd. Art.). Describing the speech in more detail, the reporter wrote that

For 50 spellbound minutes, the noisy Democratic Convention came to a stop last night as Jesse Jackson—a descendant of slaves who became this country's first major black presidential candidate—talked of the dream, passions and frustrations that inspired his historic bid for the White

House.
       Tears, cheers and chants of "Jesse, Jesse, Jesse," greeted Jackson, who came to symbolize the hopes of millions of black Americans.
       Thousands of delegates joined hands and rocked from side to side to a soothing gospel hymn when it was over. (*ibid.*).

When it was over—the next evening—TV reporter David Brinkley was not unduly moved or impressed, pointing out that, after all, Jackson was a Baptist minister and had been doing that sort of thing for years. One's inference has to be that Baptist ministers all have the ability to move their congregations (which is obviously not so) and that we ought not to be impressed by a preacher's skill in rousing the Spirit. But no church-goer could agree with this evaluation, which slights a great talent. Such comments are all the more surprising when they come from a professional media commentator who has for decades established a substantial career by his speaking voice.

      Rev. Jackson's speech began conventionally enough: "Tonight we come together bound by our faith in a mighty God, with genuine respect and love for our country, and inheriting the legacy of a great party—the Democratic Party—which is the best hope for redirecting our nation on a more humane, just and peaceful course." It began conventionally enough (except for the mention of Party) for a sermon, which it was in part. Not yet well into his performance, Rev. Jackson evoked heightened emotion when he apologized (AP Synd. Art., formatting added throughout):

> If in my high moments, I have done some good
> Offered some service
> Shed some light
> Healed some wounds
> Rekindled some hope
> Stirred someone from apathy and indifference
> Or in any way helped someone along the way
> Then this campaign has not been in vain.

He continued:

> If in my low moments

In word, deed or attitude
Through some error of temper, taste or tone
I have caused anyone discomfort
Created pain
Or revived someone's fears
That was not my truest self.
* * *
I am not a perfect servant
I am a public servant doing my best against the odds
Be patient
God is not finished with me

This political sermon invokes the message of Rev. Franklin's: "Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord." In this parable Rev. Jackson places himself in a position analogous to that of Moses at the Red Sea. Like that other public servant, he too is not perfect; his followers should be patient; God is not finished with him (either). These passages are replete not only with parallel syntactical constructions, but with internal rhyme and alliteration as well. Probably this sermon/speech was not composed with that poetry as a conscious compositional element in mind; rather they are the stock in trade of the oral performer of this tradition, one of whose most skilled practitioners is Rev. Jackson. "Suffering breeds character," he told the convention at the close of his sermon (AP Synd. Art.):

Suffering breeds character
Character breeds faith
And in the end faith will not disappoint
Faith hope and dreams will prevail
We must be bound together by faith
Sustained by hope
And driven by a dream
Troubles won't last always
Our time has come
Our time has come
Our time has come

"Thousands of delegates joined hands and rocked from side to side to a soothing gospel hymn when it was over," the Knight-Ridder reporter wrote. Rev. Jackson's use of the folk

sermon style—not, in this case, spontaneously composed—for a political speech demonstrates the form's adaptability. Rev. King's "I Have a Dream" sermon/speech was on behalf of a cause that evoked deep religious feelings; Rev. Jackson's performance was more secularized, but not entirely. He asked for forgiveness, pleading that he still had a Divinely inspired mission to fulfill: God was not finished with him yet. While it could be counter-argued that men of such backgrounds might well justify almost any of their actions with Scriptural support, their sermon/speeches demonstrate the close similarities between effective orations and moving sermons. In both instances, the minds of the audience were arrested and their emotions engaged. Revs. King and Jackson prepared manuscripts carefully, but realized that people are not always moved by reason alone; logic penetrates deepest in quiet chambers, by and by. The green in front of the Washington Monument, the Democratic conventional hall—like a church full of expectant worshippers—required another approach. The sermons that have moved millions since 1800 are thus shown to stimulate a response more fundamental than mere emotion, with more breadth than Protestant Fundamentalism.

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