

## **On the Sense and Nonsense of Performance Studies Concerning Oral Literature of the Balsa in Northern Ghana**

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The Balsa are an ethnic group of about 70,000 people in the dry Savannah zone of Northern Ghana, practicing subsistence agriculture and keeping fowl and cattle.<sup>1</sup> They live in settlements (so-called “villages” or “towns,” *teng*, pl. *tengsa*) consisting of dispersed houses or “compounds” (*yeri*, pl. *yie*). Every settlement is composed of several exogamous maximal patrilineages, that is, localized clans or clan sections, each of which claims to be descended from an original ancestor. Marriage is virilocal; upon marriage the women move to another clan section into the house of their husbands.

Buli, the language of the Balsa, belongs to the Gur languages of the Voltaïc region. The Balsa were completely without writing before the coming of the British.<sup>2</sup> The Balsa had, and still have, a copious oral tradition rich in folktales, songs, riddles, proverbs, and historical accounts.<sup>3</sup> Together with my Ghanaian and German collaborators I collected a corpus

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<sup>1</sup> For an introduction to the ethnography of the Balsa, see Schott 1970.

<sup>2</sup> In a punitive expedition on March 21, 1902; cf. “Diary of Expedition to the Tiansi Country” by Lt. Col. A. H. Morris, Public Record Office, London, CO 879, 78, 05939, No. 25352.

<sup>3</sup> For the latter cf. Schott 1977.

of more than 1,200 Balsa folktales from 1966 to 1989.<sup>4</sup> During my first stay among the Balsa, from the end of September 1966 to the beginning of April 1967, I began to gather Balsa stories in a rather haphazard way, assisted by my interpreter, Godfrey Achaw of Sandema-Kalijiisa, who was keenly interested in the folktales of his people and a good storyteller himself. He wrote down some of the stories as they were told to him by other people in Buli. Most of the stories, however, he transcribed from tape recordings that we had made together. He also added an English translation to each of the stories.

During and following my second stay among the Balsa, from the end of September 1974 to the end of March 1975, I received invaluable help from James Agalic, also from Sandema-Kalijiisa, and at that time District Pastor of the Presbyterian Church in Sandema. After my return to Germany, in 1976, Mr. Agalic worked with me for almost nine months at the Seminar für Völkerkunde (Institute of Ethnology) at the University of Münster in West Germany. He transcribed and translated many stories that I had collected and tape-recorded during my previous stays among the Balsa. Agalic himself had acoustically recorded quite a number of stories.

During a further stay from September 1988 until March 1989, I recorded the bulk of the Balsa stories. With the help of Agalic, who was granted leave of absence from his position as Research Officer at the Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, Legon, Accra, more than 1,000 Balsa stories were tape-recorded from tellers in many Balsa towns and villages.

Immeasurable help in translating the Balsa stories and in preparing their publication was rendered by Margaret Lariba Arnheim. A native of Gbedem, located in the center of Balsa territory, she came to Germany in 1979, working here as a nurse. As far as time has permitted, she has untiringly assisted me and my former student and present colleague, Franz Kröger, whose *Buli-English Dictionary* has just been published.<sup>5</sup> Without the constant help of Arnheim we would not have succeeded in our

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<sup>4</sup> I conducted ethnographic fieldwork among the Balsa for a total of about 21 months with the financial support of the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, whose assistance is gratefully acknowledged.

<sup>5</sup> From here on abbreviated as *BED*. The orthography of Buli words and texts used here conforms to *BED*; see pp. 10-13 for explanations.

endeavors in studying the language and culture of the Balsa. Arnheim also recorded almost 200 stories singlehandedly in her home town, Gbedem, during her stay from August 1988 to mid-summer 1989.

From January to March 1989, my former assistant and collaborator Sabine Dinslage took part in ethnographic fieldwork among the Balsa; in a relatively short period of time, she also recorded more than 200 stories and songs in Sandema-Kalijiisa and in Sandema-Kobdem. We were both assisted by many Balsa helpers, some of whom recorded the stories of their people on their own, that is, without the presence of any outsider.<sup>6</sup>

I have detailed the different “sources” of my collection of Balsa stories in order to make clear that the conditions under which they were recorded varied extremely. Some were written down from memory by literate Balsa or were dictated to my Balsa interpreters. Other stories were tape-recorded in a highly “artificial” environment: only the teller and myself and maybe a few other persons were present in a Government Resthouse or on a Mission station in a room of European style. Most of the stories, however, were tape-recorded in or before some Balsa compound.<sup>7</sup> They were later transcribed in Buli and translated into English by Balsa collaborators in Ghana; these “rough” transcriptions and translations were and are still being worked on in Germany,<sup>8</sup> where all the acoustic recordings and written stories have been archived in the Seminar für

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<sup>6</sup> Among our helpers were Melanie Akankyalabey, Headmistress of St. Martin’s Junior Secondary School in Wiaga; George Akanligpare of Wiaga-Yisobsa, a student of linguistics at Legon University; Isaac Apaabe of Sandema-Kalijiisa; Akamara Atogtemi of Sandema-Longsa, who transcribed and translated many stories; and Paul Anangkpieng of Sandema-Kobdem, to name only a few. The stories received by Akanligpare, Atogtemi, and Anangkpieng were all recorded without any external assistance. Balsa stories were also recorded by Barbara Meier and Martin Striewisch, two students from my institute in Münster who assisted me during my last stay in Ghana.

<sup>7</sup> For a description and drawings of Balsa compounds, see Schott 1970:14-17 and Kröger 1992:396-97.

<sup>8</sup> Pauline Akankyalabey, a native from Wiaga in the Balsa country and a former student at Legon University, rendered invaluable help in revising the tape-recorded Buli texts and in translating them. I also wish to thank the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft for the grant that made possible Akankyalabey’s stay from August 1990 to July 1992.

Völkerkunde at the University of Münster/Westphalia.<sup>9</sup>

The “public” storytelling sessions in the Bulsa country that I attended were usually prearranged by a Bulsa assistant. However, in all other respects, I tried to influence the storytelling sessions as little as possible. I never voiced any preferences for certain topics or certain tellers, but left it completely to the tellers and their audiences to decide upon what stories were told and who told them.

What was the nature of the performance of “public” storytelling among the Bulsa? In the early evenings, after the people had taken their meals, some of them gathered either in an interior yard or in front of a compound in or near a shelter called a *kusung* in Buli. Even informal storytelling is rather a formal affair among the Bulsa.<sup>10</sup> When some person starts telling a story, every sentence that the teller voices has to be repeated one-by-one by someone from the audience. While this is going on, no one else may interrupt the two. This practice is in fact customary for Bulsa storytelling performance: the tellers themselves are hardly ever interrupted, but left to finish their tale even if their performance is poor. Immediately afterwards the next teller, who can be anyone from the audience, takes his or her turn in telling another story. There is no fixed order according to age or sex or any other criteria.

The Bulsa storytellers hardly ever indulge in any mimicry or “role playing” while telling stories, and they also use gestures only very sparingly. Even in lively, animated rounds of storytelling (I had the pleasure of being present at many of these while recording Bulsa stories) the tellers hardly ever lost their poise. The reactions of the audience were also limited to occasional bursts of laughter, exclamations of astonishment, or applause at the end of the story told, but I almost never heard any

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<sup>9</sup> Each of the Bulsa stories has received a consecutive number preceded by the label BUL-E. For reports on the current research project on motif analysis of the Bulsa stories, cf. Schott 1989b and 1990b.

<sup>10</sup> The Bulsa folktales, while being told, undergo the process which Bauman and Briggs (1990:72ff.) have called “decontextualization,” that is, they are not part of the ordinary discourse. This process is also revealed by the fact that at least the end of most of the Bulsa folktales are clearly marked by some standardized phrase such as “This ends the whole of my story,” or by some standardized nonsensical phrases.

interruptions or other reactions of the public.<sup>11</sup> The tellers were also never corrected by anyone from the audience; the idea that there may be an authority who claims to know the “right” or standard version of any story seems to be utterly foreign to the Balsa.<sup>12</sup> Everybody is free to tell what he or she likes. There are good storytellers and those who are not so good, but there are no specialists or professional storytellers among the Balsa; storytelling is a pastime to be enjoyed actively or passively by anyone who cares to do so.

The performance outlined here corresponds to the traditional style of Balsa storytelling that has been described in detail by Agalic (1978). Instead of repeating his account, I would like to pose a question: what is the sense of studying the storytelling performances if one is, like me, more interested in *what* is told than in *how* it is told? Or, to phrase it differently: does the storytelling performance influence the content of the stories told among the Balsa and if so, in what way?

Limits of space permit only a preliminary investigation into this question. As examples, I have selected ten Balsa stories of the tale-type that may be called: “The Slaughtered Girl(s)” or “The Girl(s) Saved by God (or another Supernatural Being) from Being Sacrificed.”<sup>13</sup> Two specimens of this tale-type, a variant told and a variant written down, are presented here.

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<sup>11</sup> The audience may cheer a good storyteller on, but as a rule do not take an active part in the storytelling except in the case of the songs (*yiila*, sing. *yiili*) that form an integral part of many, if not most Balsa stories (*sunsuelima*, sing. *sunsueli*). The songs are usually begun by the teller, the audience joining him or her as a kind of chorus or by singing a refrain (cf. Blanc in prep.). In many cases, the singing of songs seems to be more important than the storytelling itself.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Bauman and Briggs (1990:77) who report Hymes’ view, according to which “performance consisted in the authoritative display of communicate competence” and that “authority has held a central place in performance-oriented analysis.”

<sup>13</sup> There is no equivalent to this tale-type in Aarne and Thompson 1961; it might be classified under II. B. Religious Tales (AaTh 750 squ.). For a content analysis of Balsa stories about God cf. Schott 1989a. Another publication deals with “African folktales as sources for the anthropology of religion, exemplified by folktales of the Balsa in Northern Ghana” (Schott 1990c).

The translations keep close to the original texts in Buli.<sup>14</sup>

### BUL-E0225

(1) It is said that in former times, when people brought forth girls, they killed them, but when they brought forth boys they left them [alive].

(2) A chief then begot a daughter and left her in a room and hid her. (3) The daughter lived and grew up. (4) The people of the house peeped [into the room], saw that the [chief's] daughter had grown up in the room, [and said to the chief:] (5) "It is you who said: (6) 'If someone brings forth a girl, she should be taken and killed', but you [yourself] begot a girl, took her and hid her and she has grown up"; now they [the chief's people] wanted to kill her.

(7) They sent the chief outside [the house] to the *kusung*, and spoke to him. (8) The chief got up and entered [the house] telling his wife that from now on<sup>15</sup>—he himself said<sup>16</sup> that if they brought forth girls they should kill them, but if they brought forth boys they should let them live. (9) And now that his [own] wife has borne a girl and she has grown up, the people of the [chief's] house disagree [to make an exception for the chief's daughter] and say that his daughter should also be killed; they would not let her live.

(10) And so they got up, took some malt,<sup>17</sup> gave it to her and said that she should go and fetch water. (11) The woman [the girl] took the malt and went into the grinding room. (12) A bird, oho!—called *gbiin*<sup>18</sup>—flew

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<sup>14</sup> The full texts of the ten stories of this tale-type are published in Buli and English in Schott 1993.

<sup>15</sup> This sentence is somewhat distorted.

<sup>16</sup> Translation of Pauline Akankyalabey "it was he himself who had given the order."

<sup>17</sup> *kpaama*, n. pl., "malt, germinated millet or guinea corn grains (first stage of brewing pito)" (*BED*).

<sup>18</sup> *gbiim* or *gbiin*, n., onomatopoeic rendering of a sound of an unidentified bird (cf. *BED*). This bird appears frequently in Balsa tales as a messenger announcing some misfortune or unlucky accident that has happened or will happen.

up and sat down on the grass roof<sup>19</sup> of the grinding room:

[Solo]

(13) Adugpalie,<sup>20</sup> 'dugpalie,

(14) you are grinding the malt of your death!

[Refrain:]

[Solo]

(15) And an ant<sup>21</sup> with a red waist will cook your intestines!

[Chorus]

(16) 'dugpaal-a!

[Solo]

(17) And an ant with a black waist will cook your intestines!

[Chorus]

(18) 'dugpaal-a!

[Solo]

(19) And an ant with a red waist will cook your intestines!

[Chorus]

(20) 'dugpaal-a!

[Solo]

(21) And an ant with a black waist will cook your intestines!

[Chorus]

(22) 'dugpaal-a!

[Refrain (15-22) repeated 3 times]

(23) She finished grinding the malt, went out, took her earthenware vessel<sup>22</sup> and set out for a river. (24) The *gbiin* bird came again and blocked the way to the river:

[Solo]

(25) Adugpalie, 'dugpalie,

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<sup>19</sup> *mipili* or *mimpili*, “sloping roof, hut with a sloping (straw) roof” (*BED*); usually conical in form.

<sup>20</sup> Proper name of the girl to be killed; the meaning of the name is not known.

<sup>21</sup> *kingkering*, in this case, a very tiny ant in two varieties: with a red and dark “waist,” i.e. back part.

<sup>22</sup> *liik*, n., “earthenware vessel with a narrow mouth (generally used for storing liquids)” (*BED*).

(26) look, you are fetching the water of your death!

[Refrain (15-22) repeated 3 times]

(35) She fetched the water and brought it [to the house] and then mixed the flour with the millet-beer, put it on the fire and [began] to stir<sup>23</sup> the millet-beer; it [the bird] came again and sat down on the thing [the straw roof]:

[Solo]

(36) Adugpalie, 'dugpalie,

(37) you are stirring the millet-beer of your death!

[Refrain (15-22) repeated 6 times]

(46) Then she stood and removed the millet-beer from the pot and put it into another vessel [in order to let it cool]; it [the bird] came again and sat down [on the roof]:

[Solo]

(47) Adugpalie, 'dugpalie,

(48) you are taking out the millet-beer of your death!

[Refrain (15-22) repeated 3 times]

(57) She began to filter the millet beer; it [the bird] again sat [on the roof]:

[Solo]

(58) Adugpalie, 'dugpalie,

(59) you are filtering the millet-beer of your death!

[Refrain (15-22) repeated 3 times]

(68) She again stood and put the millet-beer little by little with a calabash into another vessel<sup>24</sup> and added some yeast to it to ferment; it [the bird] sat again [on the straw roof]:

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<sup>23</sup> The process called *borigi*, "to stir millet-beer," includes: to mix the flour with the water in the pot, to put fire to it and then to stir it constantly.

<sup>24</sup> This vessel is a pot in which the millet beer is to cool and in which it may be sent to the market to be served out to customers.

[Solo]

(69) Adugpalie, 'dugpalie,

(70) look, you are preparing to ferment the millet-beer of your death!

[Refrain (15-22) repeated 4 times]

(79) At daybreak, they [the people] called one another to come out [and assemble at] the entrance of the house; then they entered, lifted the millet-beer<sup>25</sup> and put it on Adugpaalie's head, saying that she [herself] should carry it, and that they will go to the *tanggbain*<sup>26</sup> to kill [the girl]. (80) They sent her to the *tanggbain*, then sat around it and said: (81) "Formerly, the chief had said [ordered] that if someone brought forth a girl, she should be killed, whereas if someone brought forth a boy, he should be left [to live]. (82) Now they have killed all their girls, yet the chief took his daughter and hid her so that she grew up; [but] they disagreed [with him] and [insisted] that he should [also] kill his daughter." (83a) Today they had brought [her] and they were sitting [round the *tanggbain*] so as to give her [as a sacrificial offering] to the *tanggbain*; (83b) the *tanggbain* should receive her. (84) The "sitting thing"<sup>27</sup> then also sat down on top of the *tanggbain*:

[Solo]

(85) Adugpalie, 'dugpalie,

(86) you are sitting on the resting place of your death!

[Refrain (15-22) repeated 4 times]

(95) Then they [the people] poured [some of the] millet-beer and gave it [sacrificed it] to the *tanggbain*<sup>28</sup> and then went together and seized the woman [the girl] in order to put her down [on the *tanggbain*]. (96) Then

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<sup>25</sup> Millet-beer is carried in big clay pots to the market or other places where it is being consumed.

<sup>26</sup> An earth-shrine, or "spirit of an earth-shrine; sacred place of the earth-divinity, inhabited by an earth-spirit, who receives regular sacrifices from the (human) owner of the *tanggbain*; it may be a sacred grove, tree, rock, hill, river, lake, etc." (*BED*).

<sup>27</sup> The *gbiin* bird.

<sup>28</sup> They poured a libation for the *tanggbain*.

a ram came from God and landed beside the *tanggbain* saying that they should not kill the girl; they should rather seize it [the ram] and kill it and let the girl [live].

(97) This is the reason why nowadays, when they bring forth a girl, they let her [live]; in former times, a girl was something to be offered in sacrifice to a *tanggbain*; they took her to be offered as a sacrifice to a shrine (*bogluk*).<sup>29</sup> (98) This was what they did in former times.

## BUL-E1267

(1) Once upon a time, there was a man who had a wife, but they did not bring forth children.

(2) The man then went and made a solemn promise<sup>30</sup> to a *tanggbain* by saying: (3) If he begot children, and among them there was a fair-skinned girl,<sup>31</sup> he would give one of the children to the *tanggbain*.

(4) Not long after he had made this promise and returned home, they [the man and his wife] brought forth many children and they also brought forth a fair-skinned daughter. (5) The girl was so very fair that the man [her father] himself admired<sup>32</sup> her.

(6) After some time had passed, the *tanggbain* told the man that he should seize the girl and sacrifice her to it. (7) Since one cannot escape paying a debt to a *tanggbain*, the man agreed that he would sacrifice his daughter to it. (8) They named the girl Atog-tibanyin.<sup>33</sup> (9) In a very short time, the girl grew up and became even more beautiful.

(10) The man informed the girl about his intention to sacrifice her to the *tanggbain*. (11) He got up and made them<sup>34</sup> brew millet beer so that they could first go and give the millet beer to the *tanggbain*. (12) He did this

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<sup>29</sup> *bogluk*, “shrine or sacred object that receives sacrifices, altar” (*BED*).

<sup>30</sup> *dueni noai*, “(lit. to put down mouth) to swear, to take an oath, to promise, to conclude an agreement, to make a treaty” (*BED*).

<sup>31</sup> A (relatively) fair skin corresponds to the ideal of beauty among the Balsa.

<sup>32</sup> *maring*, v. “to like, to love, to be fond of, to admire, to be interested in, to be pleased with, to enjoy, to be glad” (*BED*).

<sup>33</sup> The name supposedly means: “Talk and they will go out.”

<sup>34</sup> The people in his house.

as a preliminary act<sup>35</sup> to show that they [the parents of the girl] were happy with it [the *tanggabain*], before he [the father] could then give it its human being [the girl]. (13) On the day they were to go [to the *tanggabain*] the girl entered a room, sat down and began to sing:<sup>36</sup>

[(14-15) Song]<sup>37</sup>

(16) They came out and went on and on till they arrived at the *tanggabain*. (17) They gave out the millet beer. (18) (They offered the millet beer to the shrine of the *tanggabain*). (19) When they had finished drinking the millet beer, the man went and took his knife and sharpened it. (20) [Then] he told the girl to lie down. (21) The girl lay down. (22) As he was about to slaughter<sup>38</sup> [her], they saw a very old, fair-skinned woman descending “swish!”<sup>39</sup> from the sky; she was wailing:<sup>40</sup> “*Wa ye-eee-ei-eie!*” (23) She descended and told them not to kill the girl, for she [the old woman] was [the girl] herself,<sup>41</sup> so they should let her go. (24) When she had said that, they again heard her wailing again:<sup>42</sup> “*Wa yie-e-e-e-ei-ie!*” (25) The woman rose up into the sky again and they [the people] got up and dispersed.

(26) That is why it is said that one does not take human beings and

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<sup>35</sup> I.e., he poured the libation of millet beer before he sacrificed the girl.

<sup>36</sup> The writer translated “the girl . . . started her song,” and he added in brackets: “(which carried the message about the sacrifice; it was a sorrowful song).” The writer did not give a translation of the song.

<sup>37</sup> The song is in a language other than Buli; it cannot be translated.

<sup>38</sup> *togri*, v. “to cut the throat, to slaughter or kill an animal (only by cutting its throat)” (*BED*).

<sup>39</sup> “*chaan-a!*”, exclamation, imitating the sound of a bird coming down and landing with its wings outstretched.

<sup>40</sup> *weliing* or *wuliing*, n. “ululation, high pitched cry (e.g.) in praise of a dance or a speech (esp. uttered by women)” (*BED*).

<sup>41</sup> I.e., she was identical with the girl.

<sup>42</sup> *ba ngman gaa nya ku ale kumu ain*: lit. “they again went to see[=hear] it cry;”, or “how it sounded.” The verb *kum(u)* means “1. to mourn, to condole, to cry, to weep, to lament . . . 2. to sound, to make a noise” (*BED*).

sacrifice them to a shrine.

The variants of this tale-type may be classified into three sub-types. In Sub-type 1 **all** girls must be killed (sacrificed), usually by the order of a chief; in Sub-type 2, **one particular** girl must be killed, that is, in most cases she must be slaughtered as a sacrifice to an Earth shrine (*tanggbain*); in the aberrant Sub-type 3, represented only by story BUL-E920, the girl intends to kill herself. In all types, the girl is finally saved by God, who—as in the Biblical tale of Abraham being prepared to sacrifice his son Isaac (Gen. 22, 1-14)—sends an animal to be sacrificed in the girl’s stead, or she is saved by some other supernatural being.

The motifs found in these stories are listed in Table 1 (see Appendix). Only motifs that occur at least in two of the stories have been considered. The first figure in this table refers to the five episodes into which the story may be divided. The second figure designates the sub-type, with the figure 0 indicating motifs occurring in all or most sub-types. The third figure indicates the number of consecutive motifs in each episode.

A comparison of these lists shows that no less than 12 of the motifs occur in 50% and more of the stories analyzed. These common motifs, printed in bold letters in the lists and compiled in Table 2 (see Appendix), may be called “core motifs.” This tale-type proves to be rather homogeneous in comparison with other Balsa tale-types. Yet at the same time the Balsa tellers show considerable variation in choosing different motifs when telling stories belonging to the same type and sub-type. How far can the variation found in these stories be attributed to differences in the storytelling performance?

I recorded the first of the two stories, BUL-E0225, in a place called Yuesi (or Wiasi) in the South of the Balsa District on November 1, 1988. Regarding this storytelling performance, I quote the following extract from my journal:

Mr. James Agalic had arranged a session of storytelling with the Chief of Yuesi. When we arrived there around 18 hrs., [...] we went to a big house, called Atong-yeri. There we met the Head Teacher of the local primary school, Mr. J. B. Agriba. An old man sitting in the *kusung* declared himself prepared to tell stories. He was later joined by a woman who sat beside him in the *kusung*. The repeater was, in most cases, a young man. About two dozen children and several adults assembled around the storytellers. The children joined in most of the songs vociferously. The general spirit was

lively. The telling lasted from approximately 18 h to 20 h.

The teller of story BUL-E0225 was a woman, called Awenpok, “housewife,” of about 35 years, born in Fumbisi, another town in Southern Bulsa District, and married to Yuesi. For the other story, BUL-E1267, Dr. Dinslage registered only one sentence: “Peter Atiniak wrote down the story during his holidays.” He was a student, 20 years of age, born and living in Sandema-Kori.

The first story is composed of 79 sentences (the repetitions of the refrain not included) and contains 13 different motifs; the second story is composed of 26 sentences and contains 14 different motifs. Thus, the story BUL-E0225 comprises one motif less than the story BUL-E1267; the ratio between sentences and motifs is 6.08 for story BUL-E0225 and 1.86 for story BUL-E1267. In other words, the story told in the traditional way has more than three times as many sentences for almost the same number of motifs as the story that was written down by a literate person. The written version is, in fact, the shortest of all stories of the sample presented here. The longest story of the sample, BUL-E0259, has 147 sentences and 18 motifs, the ratio being 8.17.

In Tables 3 and 4 (see Appendix), column 4, I have tried to rate the quality of the storytelling a) by the storyteller, and b) by the audience. This rating admittedly rests on my subjective assessment, but I have tried to differentiate between the evaluation of the performance and that of the contents. If we rank the list in Table 3 according to the length of the stories, that is, by the number of sentences, we see that the number of sentences correlates positively with a) the number of motifs and b) the quality of storytelling. There are, however, some exceptions to this rule: stories BUL-E0008 and BUL-E0920, ranking 5th and 7th in length (by the number of sentences), contain fewer motifs than some shorter variants. The story BUL-E1267, which was written down, also forms an exception.

The quality of the performance<sup>43</sup> may be judged by the vivacity of the teller in delivering his or her story and by the response of the audience in keeping with that performance. A good performance and lively response by the audience usually makes the teller lengthen the story told and, consequently, increase the number of motifs he or she reproduces in telling the story. A poor storyteller, on the other hand, will receive scant response

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<sup>43</sup> The full record on the performances will be published in Schott 1993.

from the audience and thereupon, as a rule, cut his or her story short. It can be said that in this respect the performance of storytelling has a direct influence on the contents of the story. But in the whole corpus of Balsa stories that were performed orally, some of the longest ones are of very poor quality in every respect: the tellers could not come to an end, made unnecessary repetitions, mixed motifs from other tale-types into the story, and so on. The audience reacted in these cases with boredom, but, as I said before, the Balsa are very polite, hardly ever interrupting or correcting the tellers. Thus, the quality of the performance is not *necessarily* expressed by the length of the story told and the length of the story told does not say very much about the aesthetic quality.

Actually, the *core motifs* appearing in 50% and more of the analyzed stories of the present tale-type, listed in Table 2, occur independently of whether the storytelling performance was rated as “good” or “poor.” In a way, the story BUL-E1267, although written down by a literate person and thus, in a way, “poorest” in performance (judged by the number of sentences), rated third in the number of motifs contained in this version. Some of the “best” stories I collected among the Balsa were completely “decontextualized,” using the terminology of Bauman and Briggs (1990:72); they were written down by Godfrey Achaw, my assistant and interpreter, in my absence. The word “best” refers to the overall aesthetic quality of the stories, their coherence, their richness in motifs, and their structural and logical consistency. This rating is not only mine, but also that of independent—admittedly “educated”—Balsa “natives.” Some of the “second-best” stories were recorded in a highly artificial environment; apart from the teller usually only my interpreter and myself were present with the tape recorder.

The bulk of the stories were, however, recorded in more or less “informal” gatherings in the evening; as I mentioned above, quite a few stories were recorded by my Balsa collaborators only, so that no foreign man or woman was present during the storytelling. From the tapes I cannot see that this made any difference, either in the style of storytelling or in the contents or structure of the stories told. Many are “incomplete,” garbled, mixed up with other stories, and so forth.

Thus we may conclude that among the Balsa the influence of the storytelling performance upon the contents of the stories is negligible. On the other hand, I also doubt “that the analysis of text remain[s] central to the study of performance,” as Bauman and Briggs (1990:67) paraphrase

Blackburn. Among the Balsa I have not found that the various themes of different stories have had any influence upon the selection and sequence of stories told in one session. Storytelling among the Balsa is a rather isolated and formalized event, in which teller and repeater play clearly defined roles, set apart from the audience. The teller also maintains a rather detached attitude to his text, as shown by the fact that most of the time the tellers use reported speech, occasionally wavering between reported and direct speech.<sup>44</sup> The preference for reported speech is so marked that it cannot be due solely to the “artificial” situation of storytelling before the outsider’s microphone.

I admit to being skeptical as to the value of performance studies with regard to folktales.<sup>45</sup> Are the performance studies not one of the many subterfuges we use in order not to get seriously involved with studying the contents of African folktales? I take the old-fashioned and maybe heretical view that it makes much more sense to study the meaning and the structure of the texts of African stories than to study the storytelling performance. Much more fruitful than performance studies seems to be an investigation into the variation of African folktales according to the sociocultural context (cf. Schott 1990a), but this is a different matter.

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<sup>44</sup> Cf., e.g., in the story BUL-E0225, sentences no. 5-9, 79-83, 96.

<sup>45</sup> For some critical comments on performance-centered studies, see the report by Limón and Young (1986:439).

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## Appendix

### EPISODES:

1. Initial situation
2. Dilemma
3. Further developments
4. Sacrifice/killing of girl
5. Intervention of God/Supernatural agent

### Sub-types:

- 0 00 All (most) Sub-types  
 0 10 **All** girls must be killed  
 0 20 **One** particular girl must be killed  
 0 30 Girl kills herself

**Table 1:** Analysis of motifs in stories of the tale-type  
“God Saves Girl(s) from Being Sacrificed”

BUL-E 0008 0225 0259 0292 0489 0572 0761 0920 1267 1435

<b>1 01</b>	+a +a +p +a +p +p +p +dl +p +d	<b>Daughter(s)</b> (girl[s]) must be killed (a=all d.; d= dl. disliked by parents; p=d. promised to earth-shrine [ <i>tanggbain</i> ]).
1 12	+ + +	<b>Kill, all</b> girls must be killed.

BUL-E 0008 0225 0259 0292 0489 0572 0761 0920 1267 1435

1 23		+		+	+	+		+	+	<b>Kill, one particular girl must be killed</b>	
1 34								+		<b>Kill, girl intends to kill (burn) herself.</b>	
2 01		+				+				<b>Husband</b> consults an earth-shrine ( <i>tanggbain</i> ) in order to make his barren wife fecund.	
2 02		+	+		+	+	(+)		+	<b>Earth-shrine</b> ( <i>tanggbain</i> ), parents (promise to) sacrifice girl to an e. s. ([+] Earth)	
2 03			+f		+	+f	+f		+	<b>Child(ren)</b> (f= first child) must be sacrificed to an earth-shrine ( <i>tanggbain</i> ).	
2 04		+	+t			+t			+t	<b>Beget</b> , man begets children, (t) after having consulted an earth-shrine ( <i>tanggbain</i> )	
2 05	+	+	+t	+	+	+t	+t		+	+	<b>Birth</b> , (barren) wife gives b. to children, (t) after having promised a child to an earth-shrine ( <i>tanggbain</i> ).
2 26					+w				+m		<b>Beautiful</b> , (w) woman gives birth/(m) man begets girl.
2 27					+l			+dl	+l		<b>Like/Dislike</b> , father (parents) like(s) (l)/dislike(s) (dl) his (their) daughter.

BUL-E 0008 0225 0259 0292 0489 0572 0761 0920 1267 1435

- 2 28 + + **Father** wants to kill his daughter because he does not like her/ because he thinks that she is not of his family.
- 2 19 + + +m **Hide**, parents (m = mother) hide(s) daughter, although all newborn girls must be killed.
- 3 01 +h +h +h +b +b +b **Room**, girl is in a r. (house?): h = hidden by her parents; b = before she is taken out to be sacrificed.
- 3 02 + + + **Cattle yard**, girl is taken into the c. y. before being killed.
- 3 03 +g +b +b +Br +Br +m +g +Br +g +sBr **Song** announcing girl's death sung by: b = bird; Br = brother; g = girl; m = mother.
- 3 04 +c +e +r +r **Ant** will destroy (c = cook; e = eat; r = remove) the intestines of the girl to be sacrificed [song].
- 3 05 +b +Brs +Brs +Brs +sBr **Brother** (Br) (sBr = senior brother; Brs = brothers; b = boy) has to bring girl out of house/room before she is killed.

BUL-E 0008 0225 0259 0292 0489 0572 0761 0920 1267 1435

<b>3 06</b>	+	+		+	+	(+)			<b>Millet beer</b> , girl ([+] people have) has to brew m. b. before she is sacrificed to an earth-shrine ( <i>tanggbain</i> ).		
3 07		+		(+)	+				<b>Mother</b> orders her daughter to prepare millet beer before the girl is sacrificed / (+) Mother and daughter prepare millet beer together.		
3 08	+	+					+		<b>Carry</b> , girl has to c. the millet beer she brewed to the earth-shrine ( <i>tanggbain</i> ) to which she will be sacrificed.		
4 01		+		+	+		+		<b>Drink</b> , millet beer as sacrificial d. of an earth-shrine ( <i>tanggbain</i> ).		
<b>4 02</b>	+g	+f,g		+g	+f	+g	+g	+g	<b>Sacrifice</b> , Earth- shrine ( <i>tanggbain</i> ) receives girl (g) / firstborn child (f) as a sacrifice.		
<b>4 03</b>		+	+		+		+	+	<b>Knife</b> , girl to be killed (slaughtered) by cutting her throat with a k.		
<b>5 02</b>	+w	+G-r	+G-r	+r	+pa	+G-r	+G-a	+s	+w	+s	<b>Death</b> , girl saved from d. by G = God ( <i>Naawen</i> ); a = animals sent by God; pa = paternal relative; r = ram; s = supernatural being; w = (old) woman;

BUL-E 0008 0225 0259 0292 0489 0572 0761 0920 1267 1435

**5 03**           +r   +r   +r           +r   +           **God** sends animal (+) (r = ram) from the sky to be sacrificed to an earth-shrine (*tanggbain*) instead of a girl.

**Table 2:** Motifs occurring in 50% and more of the analyzed stories of the tale-type “God Saves Girl(s) from Being Sacrificed”

- 1 01**    **Daughter(s)** (girl[s]) must be killed (a= all d.; d = dl. disliked by their parents; p = d. promised to Earth-shrine [*tanggbain*]).
- 2 02**    **Earth-shrine** (*tanggbain*), parents (promise to) sacrifice girl to an e. s. ([+] Earth).
- 2 03**    **Child(ren)** (f= first child) must be sacrificed to an earth-shrine (*tanggbain*).
- 2 05**    **Birth**, (barren) wife gives b. to children, (t) after having promised a child to an earth-shrine (*tanggbain*).
- 3 01**    **Room**, girl is in a r. (house?): h = hidden by her parents; b = before she is taken out to be sacrificed.
- 3 03**    **Song** announcing girl’s death sung by: b = bird; Br = brother; g = girl; m = mother.
- 3 05**    **Brother** (Br) (sBr = senior brother; Brs = brothers; b = boy) has to bring girl out of house/room before she is killed.
- 3 06**    **Millet beer**, girl ([+] people have) has to brew m. b. before she is sacrificed to an earth-shrine (*tanggbain*).
- 4 02**    **Sacrifice**, earth-shrine receives girl (g) / firstborn child (f) as a sacrifice.
- 4 03**    **Knife**, girl to be killed (slaughtered) by cutting her throat with a k.
- 5 02**    **Death**, girl saved from d. by G = God (*Naawen*); a = animals sent by God; pa = paternal relative; r = ram; s = supernatural being; w = (old) woman;
- 5 03**    **God** sends animal (+) (r = ram) from the sky to be sacrificed to an earth-shrine (*tanggbain*) instead of a girl.

**Table 3:** Data of recording, performance, tellers, motifs, and length of stories of the tale-type “God Saves Girl(s) from Being Sacrificed”

BUL-E	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.
<b>Subtype 1</b>											
0008	GS	89.02.26	RS	4/4	ill.	55	f	KU	08	061	+
0225	YU	88.11.01	RS	2/3	ill.	35	f	FU	13	079	+
0292	YU	88.12.07	RS	4/4	ill.	22	f	YU	10	035	+
<b>Subtype 2</b>											
0259	YU	88.11.06	RS	1/1	ill.?	40	f	YU	18	147	+
0489	KD	89.02.15	MS	4/4	ill.	35	f	KD	11	031	+
0572	KD	89.01.24	RS	2/2	ill.	26	m	KD	15	104	+
0761	GB	89.02.06	MA	2/3	ill.	15	m	GB	13	085	+
1267	NV	89.01.29	FA	wr.	lit.	20	m	SA	14	026	-
1435	SA	89.02.26	PA	?	ill.	40	m	SA	10	042	+
<b>Subtype 3</b>											
0920	SA	89.01.11	AA	4/?	ill.	40	f	SA	07	035	+

Abbreviations of place-names:

FU	Fumbisi	KU	Kunokoak
GB	Gbedem	NV	Navrongo (outside Balsa District)
GS	Gbedembilisi	SA	Sandema
KD	Kadema	YU	Yuesi (Wiasi)

1. Place of recording
2. Date of recording (year/month/day)
3. Recorded by:
  - AA Akamara Atogtemi (male Balsa assistant to author)
  - FA Francis Adocta (Balsa assistant to Dr. Sabine Dinslage, collaborator of the author)
  - GA George Akanligpare (Balsa assistant to author, student of linguistics in Accra)
  - MA Margaret L. Arnheim (female Balsa assistant to author)
  - MS Martin Striewisch (German assistant to author)
  - PA Paul Anankpieng (Balsa assistant to Dr. Sabine Dinslage, collaborator of the author)
  - RS Rüdiger Schott (author)
4. Quality of performance: of the teller/of the audience
  - 1 very good
  - 2 good
  - 3 satisfactory
  - wr. written version
  - 4 poor
  - 5 very poor
  - /0 no (Balsa) audience present

5. Education of the teller (illiterate/literate)
6. Age (approximate) of the teller
7. Sex of the teller
8. Place of origin of the teller
9. Number of common motifs in the story told
10. Number of sentences
11. Song(s) in the story

**Table 4:** Length of stories of the tale-type “God Saves Girl(s) from Being Sacrificed” in relation to number of motifs and quality of performance

BUL-E	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	
0259	1	YU	88.11.06	RS	1/1	ill.?	40	f	YU	18	147	+
0572	2	KD	89.01.24	RS	2/2	ill.	26	m	KD	15	104	+
0761	3	GB	89.02.06	MA	2/3	ill.	15	m	GB	13	085	+
0225	4	YU	88.11.01	RS	2/3	ill.	35	f	FU	13	079	+
0008	5	GS	89.02.26	RS	4/4	ill.	55	f	KU	08	061	+
1435	6	SA	89.02.26	JA	?	ill.	40	m	SA	10	042	+
0292	7	YU	88.12.07	RS	4/4	ill.	22	f	YU	10	035	+
0920	7	SA	89.01.11	AA	4/?	ill.	40	f	SA	07	035	+
0489	8	KD	89.02.15	MS	4/4	ill.	35	f	KD	11	031	+
1267	9	NV	89.01.29	FA	wr.	lit.	20	m	SA	14	026	-