

VERBAL ART

The verbal arts include narratives, dramas, poetry, incantations, proverbs, riddles, word games—as well as naming procedures, compliments, and insults, when these take structured and special forms. Narrative seems to be one of the easiest kinds of the verbal arts to record or collect. Perhaps because they also are the most reproducible of the arts and have considerable popular appeal, they have received considerable attention from linguists and anthropologists.

In the 19th century, when scholars began studying the unwritten stories (and other artistic traditions) of rural peoples, they coined the word **folklore** to distinguish between “folk art” and the “fine art” of the literate elite.

Today, many linguists and anthropologists prefer to speak of a culture’s oral traditions and verbal arts rather than its folklore and folktales, recognizing that the distinction between folk and fine art is a projection imposed by European and Euramerican elites. Generally, the narratives comprising the verbal arts have been divided into several basic and recurring categories, including myth, legend, and tale.