IN THE PRECEDING PAGES, our goal has been to characterize the riddle as conventional performance. As a means of attaining this end, we have examined representative examples of English language riddles. Our comments, therefore, are tied to a general corpus and should be regarded as suggesting a relatively broad framework for riddle analysis. Certainly the focus and emphasis of any specific repertoire, whether individual or cultural, will vary within the parameters we propose. Despite such adjustments, however, certain patterns prevail.

As licensed artful communication, the act of riddling exploits our expectations concerning utterance and the frameworks generated by prescribed conventions. Thus, various sorts of norms, both utilitarian and ludic, are explored and manipulated. Therefore, as is the case with all cultural behavior, riddling is a system that is intimately connected to other systems; the riddle draws vitality from and revitalizes related contexts.

The contextual system to which we have devoted our most intensive analysis is language. The grammatical structure of the language in which riddles are realized affords rich opportunities for the creation of verbal duplicity. Thus, by discerning the malleable areas of grammar, the riddling tradition of a given group avails participants of the chance to simultaneously play and learn, to grasp both the flexibility and the immutability of language in a single act.

That it is the linguistic code in its entirety which is the issue is reaffirmed by the fact that some riddles exploit relationships between the spoken and the written system of the
language. In such instances riddling accommodates a range of the culture's expressive capacities by generating a product in which both our oral and our visual perceptions are called to question.

Similarly, just as riddling forces participants to come to terms with the mechanisms of expression, riddlers and riddlees are drawn into confronting the cognitive foundations of these utterances. As riddle mechanisms appear as a spectrum of techniques, the origins of riddles are similarly diverse. Obviously, those grammatical ambiguities that are incorporated as riddle performances also arise in utilitarian speech contexts as accidents. As such, these strategies are explainable in terms of the formal features of the linguistic system. Conversely, there are riddles that appeal not merely to linguistic but to cognitive frames of reference. This other strategy, though comparable to the grammatically ambiguous mode, entails act rather than accident as a catalyst and impels us to address yet another stratum of the creative process (see Green and Pepicello 1983).

In comprehending riddles, therefore, we encounter a larger sphere of art. Although riddles utilize an intentional overlap of referential frames to derive artful utterances, we discover that they are not unique in this regard. Therefore, we have demonstrated that a similar principle operates in proverbs and in metaphor. Elsewhere we have considered ambiguity as a strategy in folk drama as well (Green and Pepicello, forthcoming). Perhaps, then, the proposition put forth for riddling may suggest useful approaches to other genres of verbal art, also.

Cross-generic applications aside, it seems clear that riddles, far from being no more than an amusing bit of entertainment, are inextricably bound to those most sophisticated of human systems: language, culture, and art. There is nothing novel about this suggestion; we merely echo the sentiments of many of our colleagues (e.g., Abrahams 1980, McDowell 1979, Sutton-Smith 1976). We do hope, however, that the notions we have advanced will assist in the continued exploration of the means by which structure and license, sense and nonsense converge in the traditional riddle.