

## **Milman Parry and A. L. Kroeber: Americanist Anthropology and the Oral Homer**

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The view of Homer which . . . was to render earlier scholarship obsolete . . . was apparently arrived at by the reaction of an unusual mind to the text of Homer: nothing in Parry's background (middle-class, not particularly intellectual, Welsh Quaker origins), nor in the place where he was born and lived until he went to France in 1923 . . . makes that reaction likely. Parry's teachers in Greek at the University of California included two of the finest Hellenists of their generation, George Calhoun (1888-1942) and Ivan Linforth (b. 1879). Both men knew Homer well and had a sensitive understanding of his poetry. But they were not the source of any of Parry's specific ideas. His work was as much a surprise to them as to the rest of the world. The mind that presented Homer to the world as the singer of traditional poetry was itself the product of no traditions.

A. Parry 1971:xxii-xxiii

### **Introduction**

Milman Parry's mythic reputation derives from the brilliance of his scholarship, the suaveness of his rhetoric, a mysterious and untimely death, and above all his standing as a revered ancestor of American Homeric scholarship in the predominant form it now takes. Adam Parry's words enhance the sense of something unaccountable, even miraculous, in his father's genius; yet we can read them today, if we want to take the study of intellectual history seriously, only with a skeptical eye. Even in his life of Parry, which he affixed to his edition of the elder's papers, Adam seemed ill at ease with mythmaking; he was elsewhere at pains to emphasize that "each of the specific tenets which make up Parry's view of Homer had been held by some former scholar."<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, he asserted that it was his father

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<sup>1</sup> A. Parry 1971:xxii. Henceforth, I refer to Adam Parry for the most part simply as 'Adam'; 'Parry' stands for Milman throughout.

who transformed the disparate findings of other scholars on diction and metrics (Heinrich Düntzer and others), formulary texture (Antoine Meillet and Arnold van Genep), the contrasts between the techniques of oral and literate poets (Matija Murko, Marcel Jousse), and the Yugoslav analogy (Murko) into an original theory. It was his father who rendered the contentions of the Analysts and Unitarians moot, for both sides were right in ways that neither had imagined.

The history of some of the “specific tenets” has been filled in even further since Adam’s fine essay of 1971. For example, David Bynum has placed the elder Parry at the end of a succession of Harvard folklorists; Joachim Latacz has laid firmer emphasis on the achievement of Parry’s German predecessors, while Charles de Lamberterie has assigned Meillet due credit for his influence on the young Parry’s appreciation of Homer’s orality; John Foley has shown the value of V. V. Radlov’s work among the Turkic peoples of the central Asian steppes.<sup>2</sup> Yet it remains the case that Parry’s specific innovation, his explication of the mechanisms of traditional oral composition, has not been fully accounted for in the disciplinary history of oral tradition studies, owing in part to Adam’s poignant but misleading claim that his father was, in this regard, *sui generis*.<sup>3</sup> Parry could cite German scholarship to the effect that the poet’s choice of epithet for a given noun was governed above all by metrical fit; the concept of the formula was known. But his interpretation of these facts was another matter. His central innovation was the development of philological techniques for detecting traces of traditional behavior in textual artifacts. It is precisely here, in the detection and explication of tradition, that Adam claims his father stood alone. In this essay, I will suggest that Parry’s original emphasis on the traditional formation and transmission of Homeric diction was more an outgrowth of his intellectual training than his son would allow. Parry was indeed the product of traditions, and here I want to explore the legacy in his work of the Americanist tradition in ethnography.

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<sup>2</sup> Bynum 1974; Latacz 1979; de Lamberterie 1997, which corrects Adam’s view that Antoine Meillet “cannot be said to have vitally affected the direction of [Parry’s] thought” (1971:xxiii); Foley 1988:10-13, but the whole work provides a more comprehensive and balanced survey than A. Parry 1971.

<sup>3</sup> More work needs to be done on Parry’s years at the Sorbonne. Peradotto (1997) rightly calls attention to the influence still exerted there in Parry’s day by the pupils of Emile Durkheim, but we still lack details that go beyond the thin account offered by Adam. For example, did Parry know Maurice Halbwachs, who was publishing *Les Cadres Sociaux de la Mémoire* (1925) just as Parry was getting started?

The Master of Arts thesis that Parry presented to the Classics faculty at the University of California, Berkeley already contained the germ of his thinking on traditional poetry, as Adam observed, and clearly Parry had already developed a concentrated interest in the workings of tradition before he arrived in Paris. Since he also attended Berkeley as an undergraduate, since his home life was “not particularly intellectual,” and since Adam seems right that Berkeley’s faculty in classical studies did not show any special interest in the problems that exercised Parry’s mind,<sup>4</sup> it is reasonable to look for influences where Adam apparently did not: thinking on culture, folklore, and tradition to which Parry was exposed in his Berkeley days. His academic transcripts look normal, on the whole, for an American majoring in classics at the time.<sup>5</sup> Apart from advanced work in Latin—Parry had studied it when he attended high school at Oakland Tech—and less advanced Greek, which he came to favor over Latin by his second year, there are the ordinary courses in physical education, hygiene, public speaking, political science, and so on. What does stand out, however, is that during the academic years 1921-22 and 1922-23, he took three semesters of anthropology. This young field cannot be said to have been a normal choice for a promising classicist at the time; in fact, the field was in some ways still in its infancy. As he rose through the ranks, from college freshman to senior, working through his requirements for graduation, Parry winnowed his competing interests, leaving in the end only English, Graphic Art (did he think of pursuing archaeology?), German, Anthropology, Greek, and Latin. It is even more striking that he continued with anthropology in his last term

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<sup>4</sup> Adam mentions George Calhoun, but the signatories to Parry’s Master’s thesis were Ivan M. Linforth, James T. Allen, and R. W. Gordon. Nevertheless, it is true that of Parry’s Berkeley teachers, graduate or undergraduate, Calhoun took the liveliest interest in the former pupil’s later work as soon as it became known. In works of 1933 and 1935, Calhoun would cite Parry and engage him in genial debate. Berkeley’s library copy of Parry’s MA thesis was apparently lost for some time before the summer of 2000. When I tried to have it paged at Berkeley’s Doe Memorial Library, I found no catalogue record of it. After I reported this, the head archivist at the Bancroft Rare Book Library eventually tracked down a typewritten list of MA theses in the collection that did show Parry’s on deposit. The shelves were read and the thesis found (call number at Doe, 308t P265). It is included entire (save the title page) in Parry 1971:421-36.

<sup>5</sup> University of California, Berkeley, Office of the Registrar. Transcript of Record: Parry, Milman, 1919-23. According to notations on the documents themselves, they had been requested only twice before my own enquiry: in 1925, presumably by Parry himself for his application to the Sorbonne, and in 1967, presumably by Adam Parry for the biographical essay on his father (1971).

as an undergraduate (he took his A.B. in December 1922)—this and German were the only non-classics courses he was taking when he graduated.

## **Kroeber**

It has not been reported, to my knowledge, that Parry studied his anthropology under A. L. Kroeber (1876-1960), one of the leading figures in twentieth-century American Indian studies and a major linguistic anthropologist and cultural theorist.<sup>6</sup> The courses were simply titled: Anthropology 1a (first term 1921-22), 1b (second term 1921-22), and Anthropology 103 (first term 1922-23). In the first of these, Kroeber was assisted by Robert H. Lowie and E. W. Gifford, both already prominent Americanists; in the second by Lowie only; Kroeber taught the third alone. There is a possibility that Kroeber's colleagues did much of the work in the first two semesters, since he was then spending a good deal of his time practicing psychoanalysis in Berkeley. Parry entered U. C., Berkeley in 1919 when Kroeber, who lived and wrote until 1960, was already a major figure in his field, a freshly promoted full professor, and something of a public intellectual. Apart from his many technical treatises and articles, he published often in popular magazines.<sup>7</sup> In the years before Parry's arrival, Kroeber had won a considerable share of public attention as friend, guardian, and observer of a Yana (Yahi) Indian, Ishi, who alone had survived the massacre of his fellow tribesmen by a white gang of vigilantes. Kroeber's advocacy for Ishi established his reputation among non-specialists as an erudite mediator between the two worlds of Indian and white man. He was one of the most prominent and visible figures in Berkeley at that time.

Kroeber was the first doctoral pupil of Franz Boas at Columbia University and thus belonged to the first generation of trained Americanists.<sup>8</sup> It was a time of foundations. Even before Kroeber had completed his doctorate, he was hired as ethnologist for the California Academy of Sciences in San Francisco, a position that provided the experience and

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<sup>6</sup> See T. Kroeber 1970:104-7; further, n. 8 below. Apart from Theodora Kroeber's biography, see also Steward 1973; the former, by his widow, is admiring and anecdotal, while the latter is more analytical and interpretative. Many good obituaries followed Kroeber's death in 1960, but best for present purposes is Hymes 1983, which originally appeared in 1961.

<sup>7</sup> Kroeber's bibliography is surveyed in Gibson and Rowe 1961.

<sup>8</sup> See, in general, Darnell 2001.

contacts to make him the obvious man for a job directing the new Anthropological Museum and Department of Anthropology at the University of California (1901). (He would remain at the university until his retirement in 1946 and maintain a house in Berkeley until his death.) The first decades of this century were also a formative period for the steady elaboration of theory and method in anthropology, and Kroeber quickly distinguished himself as a fieldworker of exacting empirical standards, possessing a love for quantification and statistics coupled with an extraordinary talent for abstracting theoretical insights from his field experience. By 1923, the year in which Parry earned his Berkeley Master of Arts degree in classical studies, Kroeber had produced numerous ethnographic monographs and articles, a textbook (*Anthropology*), and *A Source Book in Anthropology* (with T. T. Waterman).<sup>9</sup>

The source book, published by U. C., Berkeley, may have been required for one of the courses Parry took; the textbook came out too late to have been used in its published form but does give a good idea of the substance of Kroeber's lectures.<sup>10</sup> Parry was thus exposed for three consecutive semesters to Kroeber's theory of culture, already highly developed. A sketch of that theory follows.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> The best review of Kroeber's professional activity in this period is Hymes 1983, which emphasizes Kroeber's contribution to the nascent field of linguistic anthropology. 1923 was important in his career for another reason. It was then that he decided to abandon the professional pursuit of Freudian psychoanalysis, which he had undergone and studied in Vienna some years earlier, then practiced at his home in Berkeley; see Steward 1973:11-12; T. Kroeber 1970:101-18. I doubt that this is relevant to the present study, because with few exceptions (e.g. A. Kroeber 1920), he segregated his interest in psychoanalysis from his professional writings in anthropology (T. Kroeber 1970:119); it is unlikely that he lectured his classes on it.

<sup>10</sup> Brief descriptions of the courses are given in University of California 1921 and 1922. These do in fact correspond broadly with the material presented in A. Kroeber and Waterman 1920 and A. Kroeber 1923: *Anthropology 1a, General Anthropology: Origin and Antiquity of Man*: "Man as an animal; heredity; races and race problems; earliest culture;" *Anthropology 1b, General Anthropology: Origin and Development of Civilization*: "The source and growth of institutions, arts, customs, industries, language, and religion;" *Anthropology 103, Outlines of Culture Growth*: "Human origins and classification; beginnings of culture; growth of civilization in the great centers of Egypt, Europe, and Asia; diffusions in Africa and Oceania; belated and marginal peoples; world religions and international contacts."

<sup>11</sup> Kroeber himself (1952) assembled his principal statements on culture, dating from his 1901 study on symbolism in Arapaho art; see also A. Kroeber and Kluckhohn 1952. Here I consider only those aspects of his theory that were elaborated by the time

Kroeber summarized the doctrines he had developed in the years before Parry encountered him in a set of eighteen tenets, which he published in the *American Anthropologist* for 1915. With these “professions,” as he called them, he aimed to align the parameters of sociocultural anthropology with those of history, rather than those of science, as Boas would have it. He also began here to enunciate an important part of what would become his mature theory of culture.<sup>12</sup> What most interests us at present is Kroeber’s insistence that the business of anthropology, as a historical endeavor, is not with individuals, but with arrays of human activity issuing in culture: “The material studied by history is not man, but his works” (profession 2, 1915:283); “The personal or individual has no historical value save as illustration” (profession 6, 1915:284). For Kroeber, anthropology was the study of man’s cultural gestures as they appeared in acts, customs, institutions, and artifacts, and as these were gradually stored up in the great accumulation that defined a people’s progress.

A second trend is visible in the professions. The liberalism on questions of race that Kroeber had been exposed to as a young man received the disciplinary endorsement of Franz Boas, and both men integrated this ideology into their scholarship:<sup>13</sup> “The absolute equality and identity of all human races and strains as carriers of civilization must be assumed by the historian” (profession 8, 1915:285); “Heredity cannot be allowed to have acted any part in history” (profession 9, *ibid.*). For Boas, sentiments such as these had validated each society’s integrity and worth, making each a legitimate object of concentrated study; but as I mentioned earlier, he generally did not welcome cultural comparison *per se*, preferring instead to interpret cultural artifacts in terms of the several societies that produced

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he taught Parry, though Kroeber himself admits that the substance of his theory was in place by the time of his famous essay of 1917 and remained stable. Apart from the studies mentioned so far, I am particularly indebted for background to Thoresen 1971, Buckley 1996, Bennett 1998, and Kuper 1999.

<sup>12</sup> A. Kroeber 1915 raises many important issues in this history of anthropological thought that I cannot discuss here. See further Buckley 1996.

<sup>13</sup> On Kroeber’s background, see T. Kroeber 1970:espec. 24-27; for Boas on race, see Boas 1974:221-42 (= Selection 31, “Human faculty as determined by race”) and espec. 310-30 (= Selections 42-44, “The outlook of the American Negro,” “Changing the racial attitude of white Americans,” “Race problems in America”), as well as the comments of the editor, George Stocking (Boas 1974:307-9).

them and to trace their diffusion from one people to another.<sup>14</sup> But in Kroeber's hands, relativist principles issued in methods different from his master's: it was precisely the "absolute equality and identity of all human races" that rendered them suitable for comparison, one to the other. This of course was not to be performed for its own sake, but in order to bring 'configurations' into relief and reveal the shape of the growth of civilization.<sup>15</sup> The result was a forceful defense of comparison in the study of civilization's artifacts.

### The Superorganic

In 1917, Kroeber published an essay on "The Superorganic" in the *American Anthropologist*, which had long since become a major organ, alongside the *International Journal of American Linguistics*, of Boas and his pupils.<sup>16</sup> The essay in some ways simply carried on Boas's assault on social evolutionism and racial determinism, though Kroeber was by temperament impelled to move well beyond Boasian particularism, the insistence that cultural comparison and historical reconstruction were to be minimized in favor of the thorough synchronic description of a given people.<sup>17</sup> He took

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<sup>14</sup> On Boas's intellectual inheritance, see G. W. Stocking in Boas 1974:1-20; Boas himself discussed the work of an important influence on him, the German anthropologist Virchow (*ibid.*:36-41); cf. his more popular account of his early years, 41-43; on the influence of Bastian, see Koepping 1995.

<sup>15</sup> See espec. A. Kroeber 1944, discussed by Bennett 1998:272-81.

<sup>16</sup> Murray (1994:47-76) provides a brief intellectual history of the Boas school, particularly its linguistic activity. His sociological model emphasizes the dissemination of the doctrines of "theory groups" through various channels including journals; for the importance of the *American Anthropologist*, see espec. 51-52, 75. An indispensable review of the immediate intellectual milieu in which Kroeber developed his thoughts on the superorganic is supplied by Thoresen 1971:240-64. See also Bennett 1998; Darnell 2001:69-102.

<sup>17</sup> See further Buckley 1996. Bennett (1998:282-83 n. 2) quotes a late statement by Kroeber on the original motive behind his 1917 paper: "Looking back thirty years on my essay called 'The Superorganic' I am struck by the sense that pervades it of a great need for freeing cultural phenomena from the oppression of biological thinking."

another stride beyond Boas, as we have seen, in wanting to detach anthropology from what he thought was an illusory grounding in science.<sup>18</sup>

In his 1917 paper, Kroeber drew a sharp dividing line between organic (evolutionary) developments, on the one hand, and civilization on the other (167): “We do not, in gradual alternation from father to son, change our arms into flippers and grow a tail. We do not enter the water at all to navigate it. We build a boat.” The evolutionism that Kroeber was combating was not so much Darwinism as Lamarckianism, which enjoyed a stealthy revival in social thought around the turn of the century. This is not the place to sketch out the ramifications of these trends,<sup>19</sup> but it is important to our thesis that Kroeber set out to demolish the social application of the theory of acquired characteristics, which had been taken over by some social scientists from Lamarck. This theory held that factors in the environment of organisms produced adaptations in them that they then passed along to their young. Darwin first, and Mendel’s successors later, would radically qualify the influence of environment on the development of organisms in ways that were not consistently sifted into the social sciences. But what was discredited in science should not, for Kroeber, be allowed to make a stand in the study of culture, society, and civilization: “Heredity by acquirement is equally a biological and historical monstrosity” (profession 10, 1915:285).<sup>20</sup> The principle was vital to Kroeber’s theory of culture, with its emphasis on the accumulation of knowledge and artifacts. At the same time, it posed a further argument against racial determinism. As he argued in the 1917 paper:

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<sup>18</sup> See also the later essay, A. Kroeber 1936. Buckley (1996:espec. 268) questions Kroeber’s immunity from scientific methods; on Kroeber’s use of quantification, see Hymes 1983:247.

<sup>19</sup> See for general background Barnard 2000:27-46 and espec. Stocking 1968:234-69.

<sup>20</sup> Kroeber argued this “profession” as follows (1915:285-86): “This naive explanation may be eliminated on the findings of biology; but should biology ever determine that such heredity operates through a mechanism as yet undiscovered, this heredity must nevertheless be disregarded by history together with congenital heredity. In the present stage of understanding, heredity by acquirement is only too often the cherished inclination of those who confuse their biological thinking by the introduction of social aspects, and of those who confound history by deceiving themselves that they are turning it into biology.”

. . . [I]t must be maintained that little really satisfactory evidence has been produced to support the assumption that the differences which one nation shows from another—let alone the superiority of one people to another—are racially inherent, that is organically founded. It does not matter how distinguished the minds that have held such differences to be hereditary—they have in the main only taken their conviction for granted. The sociologist or anthropologist can, and occasionally does, turn the case inside out (181).<sup>21</sup>

But what made perhaps a bigger impression on Kroeber's contemporaries was the metaphysical character of the notion.<sup>22</sup> The great linguist and Americanist Edward Sapir recognized this aspect of Kroeber's thought already in his response to the essay on the superorganic, which appeared, also in the *American Anthropologist*, later in 1917. He objected that Kroeber had recklessly minimized the role of individuals in the shaping of history (443): "One has only to think seriously of what such personalities as Aristotle, Jesus, Mahomet, Shakespeare, Goethe, Beethoven mean in the history of culture to hesitate to commit oneself to a completely non-individualistic interpretation of history. I do not believe for a moment that such personalities are merely the cat's-paws of general cultural drifts." Although he agreed that man stored up knowledge in his cultural gestures, Sapir further argued that Kroeber had blundered into a heavy-handed reification of civilization (*idem*):

If I understand him rightly, he predicates a certain social 'force' whose gradual unfolding is manifested in the sequence of socially significant phenomena we call history. The social is builded out of the organic, but is not entirely resolvable into it, hence it implies the presence of an unknown principle which transcends the organic, just as the organic, while similarly builded out of the inorganic, is not resolvable into it but harbors a new and distinctive force that works itself out in organic phenomena. I consider the analogy a false one.

Sapir and Kroeber carried on their discussion in their letters. They clearly enjoyed their disagreements, even conspired to make them

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<sup>21</sup> = A. Kroeber 1952:33-34; cf. Bennett's discussion of this passage, 1998:260-61.

<sup>22</sup> Aside from a public controversy with Edward Sapir, on which see below, Kroeber named four contemporaries who accused him of entertaining a nebulous metaphysics: Paul Radin, Elsie Clews Parsons, Hermann K. Haeberlin, and Alexander Goldenweiser. See Sapir and A. Kroeber 1984:245.

interesting when they surfaced in public.<sup>23</sup> But on matters of doctrine, the letters stress their agreements. “. . . [I]t does strike me,” wrote Sapir, “that our common tendency is away from conceptual science and towards history” (Sapir and A. Kroeber 1984:258). Still, on the accusation that he was imposing needless abstraction on the notion of culture, Kroeber would ultimately cede to his younger colleague. In the introduction to his paper on the superorganic, as collected in his 1952 anthology of writings on culture, he wrote, “. . . I retract, as unwarranted reification, the references. . . to organic and superorganic ‘substances’, entities, or fabrics. While it certainly is often needful to view different kinds of phenomena as of different orders and to deal with them on separate levels of apprehension, there is no need for metaphysically construing levels of conception or orders of attribute into substantial entities or different kinds of substance” (A. Kroeber 1952:23).<sup>24</sup> By then, however, Parry was long dead; the theory of culture that he imbibed from Kroeber’s lectures was much the same as the one published in 1917.

### **Parry and Kroeber’s Anthropology**

Parry entered Berkeley in 1919, in the thick of the superorganic controversy. The fields of classical studies and anthropology as they are cultivated today do not cross-pollinate equally. To the extent that ideas migrate between them, it is mainly from anthropology to classics. This was not always the case. George Stocking has persuasively argued that in the early days of American anthropology, Franz Boas set out to establish methods that would place his young science on an equal footing with the tradition of European classical studies. Boasian particularism, to which I have referred above, aimed not only at endowing each indigenous society with its own autonomous culture, but more specifically with recovering a classical past for it. This was done by setting out into the field to recover a people’s texts and artifacts, which bounty would then be brought back, to Washington or New York, and distributed to the appropriate specialists,

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<sup>23</sup> Kroeber wrote to Sapir, “The decadence of linguistics [of which ES had complained] is largely your own fault. You’re an individualist and haven’t built up a school. Do something general in character and you may get opposed. At least I promise you an opponent if you can make me disagree” (Sapir and A. Kroeber 1984:260).

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Bennett 1998:265 with further self-criticisms by Kroeber of early formulations of his cultural theory.

archaeologists, linguists, and so on.<sup>25</sup> This ideology of the artifact was then passed on to Boas's pupils. A perusal of Kroeber's early titles reflects the quest for "texts": "Animal Tales of the Eskimo" (1898), "Tales of the Smith Sound Eskimo" (1899), "Cheyenne Tales" (1900), "Ute Tales" (1901), "Wishok Myths" (1905), and so on. Kroeber too had received a classical education and was clearly receptive to this methodological bequest from Boas. This artifact-centered approach to anthropology would certainly have resonated with the young Parry, and as he absorbed one example after another, cultural comparison would surely have prepared him to look at the project of the Homerist as closely analogous. The doctrine of the "absolute equality and identity of all human races," as put forward by Kroeber, who in turn inherited it from Boas, may well have given Parry some of the considerable courage that it took to compare Yugoslav peasant singers to Homer—a comparison that remains unsettling to many Hellenists.<sup>26</sup>

But there are several areas of influence that relate to more precise teaching that Parry may well have inherited directly from Kroeber himself. I suggest the following:

1. *The "Superorganic."* Parry did not use the word itself.<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, already in his Master of Arts thesis (1923), Parry can be seen wielding a fully formed notion of tradition that, like Kroeber's theory of culture, minimizes the role of the individual. He compares composition in traditional diction to Greek sculpture, using the work of Phidias as an example (1971:425, italics added):

By following this tradition of design and expression [in the representation of divinity,] Phidias has filled his work with *the spirit of a whole race*: he has not only followed its conception of the nature of the goddess, he has also represented her in the position and with the attributes *which the race had chosen and approved* as the most fitting to represent the beauty, the strength, the calmness of her nature. In a sense it might also be said that the statue was *produced by the Greeks in collaboration with Phidias*. Nor, by accepting these broader lines has he hampered the strength or subtlety

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<sup>25</sup> Stocking 1977; Jacknis 1996b; Darnell 1990.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. the comment by Hugh Lloyd Jones (1992:52): "For the understanding of Homer's poetry, German is a more important language than Serbo-Croatian."

<sup>27</sup> Kroeber himself did not use it much either. Though it stands as the title of his famous essay (1917), he did not use it even in the body of that work. The word is absent from the index to his *Anthropology*, though it is used in passing in the text (1923:57).

of his own personality. He has used them for the further perfection and purification of the popular ideal. *He has blended his own genius with that of his race*, so inextricably that the two are hard to distinguish: they can only be realized in the perfection of the result.

Such is the role of convention in Greek sculpture, and we can now see that its role in epic poetry is much the same. We realize that the traditional, the formulaic quality of the diction was not a device for mere convenience, but the highest possible development of the hexameter medium to tell *a race's heroic tales*. The poetry was not one in which a poet must use his own words and try as best he might to utilize the possibilities of the metre. It was a poetry which for centuries had *accumulated* all such possibilities—all the turns of language, all the words, phrases, and effects of position, *which had pleased the race*.

We were obviously wrong in applying to the diction of this verse the standards of modern art which made it seem a patchwork technique. We cannot speak here of making a figure *subtle and individual as the artist's imagination*; for the artist's subtlety was a sort which expressed itself *not in individuality* but in refinement of the popular conception. We cannot speak disparagingly of the fact that all the work of the school was much the same; it was similar only in kind, not in the degree of perfection. And while it was a technique which might be learned parrot-like by men of little genius who added nothing to their inheritance, it was also a technique which furnished inexhaustible material for genius: the work of bringing to perfection is never finished.

We must keep these things in mind if we would understand the values of epic diction, if we would understand the epics at all. *We must not look upon this poetry as we would upon our own contemporary, individualistic art*. Rather it is Phidian; for it may be said that like the Lemnian Athene *it was produced by the Greek race in collaboration with the artist*, whose proper task was the perfection and refinement of the popular ideal.

In this brief passage, striking in its repetitiveness, I count ten instances of the individual artist contrasted with the social group; Parry also uses the word “race” no fewer than six times. The blend of “spirit” or “genius” with “race” arises in direct descent from Boas through Kroeber. Boas himself appeared to prefer “people” to the ideologically charged “race,” speaking of the “genius of a people,” but race remained a central topic of reading and discussion in the anthropology courses that Parry attended in Berkeley.<sup>28</sup> In

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<sup>28</sup> For Boas on the “genius of a people,” see G. W. Stocking’s “Introduction” in Boas 1974:espec. 5-7. On the anthropology courses, see, apart from the course descriptions cited earlier, the readings in A. Kroeber and Waterman 1920, a third of which deal with this topic (including one by the racial determinist Francis Galton). The editors of the latter work offered this disclaimer (1): “The passages in this volume have

addition, Parry cites the notion of accumulation, key to Kroeber's theory of civilization, here applied to the development of traditional diction. It too stems ultimately from Boas. In words that would echo in Kroeber's work, Boas wrote, "the mythologies of the various tribes [of the Northwest and Canada] as we find them now are not organic growths, but have gradually developed and obtained their present form by accretion of foreign material. Much of this material must have been adopted ready made, and has been adapted and changed in form according to the genius of the people who borrowed it" (1974:96).<sup>29</sup> The idea that Homeric diction is a treasury of accumulation is at least as old as the ancient biographical rationalization that had Homer traveling the Greek world collecting dialectal forms, the stuff of which he would make his verses ([Plut.] *Vit. Hom.* 8, etc.). Parry's work on traditional diction gave a theoretical basis to the diachronic accretion of forms, and by corollary, the same traditional device is capable of preserving the memory of material and social forms that had long since passed out of currency.<sup>30</sup>

What, then, did Parry learn from Kroeber's theory of the superorganic? Throughout his career, from his Master of Arts thesis to the unfinished field notes entitled "Ćor Huso," Parry promulgated the view that the development of Homeric diction could not have been the work of a single man.<sup>31</sup> This creation was thus vested in the "genius of the people." Within the discipline of Parryist studies in Homer, it is only a small step

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been selected for their utility in stimulating discussion. They are included not because they present ultimate scientific truth, but because they embody facts and interpretations which are useful for the exercise of thought on some of the larger problems of anthropology." Despite his position on the question, Kroeber professed his admiration for Galton's diligence (1952:22): "Indeed, Galton has always evoked my complete respect and has been one of the largest influences on me." Galton nevertheless misinterpreted his findings, in Kroeber's view.

<sup>29</sup> See further Stocking's discussion, n. 28 above.

<sup>30</sup> On material forms anachronistically preserved in traditional diction, see Lorimer 1950 and Sheratt 1990. For social forms, see additionally Morris 1986, 2000.

<sup>31</sup> Thus in his 1923 MA thesis: "To think that [traditional diction] would soon disappear from epic poetry [after Homer] would be as foolish as to think that a technique so elaborate, so complex, and so much the very essence of the epic, could have been evolved by one man or even by a single generation" (1971:423). And again in *Ćor Huso*: ". . . [M]y study of the Homeric language led me to see that such a language could be created only by a long tradition of oral poetry. . ." (1971:39-40).

from such a “superorganic” view of tradition to one that predicates verbal action of a reified Tradition. To think of culture or civilization—or tradition—as “a social ‘force’” (in Sapir’s words) makes it possible for Parry’s successors to say things such as “the *Iliad* demarcates its subject and orients the audience toward its treatment of its themes” or the like, especially as the authorial control of the Poet dissipates into the generations of his forebears or fellow guildsmen.<sup>32</sup>

2. *The “historical method.”* A second influence was on Parry’s identification of his method as a fundamentally historical one. He expounded this position in an address delivered near the end of his short life, “The Historical Method in Literary Criticism,”<sup>33</sup> which I suggest is influenced by Kroeber’s 1915 essay, “Eighteen Professions,” as well as by the “superorganic” essay, or at least by their tenets themselves as they were presented in Kroeber’s lectures. In the most substantial discussion of this piece available, Seth Schein took Parry to task for an overly simple model of the relationship between poet and audience. It is true that this talk, which was delivered before an audience of non-specialists (namely, the Overseers of Harvard College), disposes of a rather unsubtle theoretical grounding. But there is more to Parry’s project than Schein allows; and this can best be understood when we take into account Parry’s California experience.<sup>34</sup>

Reading Parry against an Americanist background, he can be seen affirming Boasian particularism as filtered through Kroeber’s theory of culture. In Parry’s eyes, the historical method itself is subject to the

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<sup>32</sup> The quotation, taken from Slatkin 1991:15, is meant as an example only; this kind of verbal predication is quite common now.

<sup>33</sup> Presented in 1935 and first published in the *Harvard Alumni Bulletin* in 1936; reprinted as Parry 1971:408-13.

<sup>34</sup> Schein suggests that Parry’s views are the “product of [his] graduate study in France rather than Germany, to which most American classicists from Gildersleeve on seem to have gravitated” (1997:277). It is certainly true, however, that his choice of France over Germany is remarkable, especially because Benjamin Ide Wheeler, a prominent Indo-Europeanist (and eponym of Wheeler’s Law of Greek accentuation, not to mention Wheeler Hall at Berkeley) who was trained in Germany, had been President of the University of California until 1919, the year of Parry’s entry, and a major influence on the development of classical studies there. According to his son, Parry had sought out Victor Bérard, but was disappointed; he fell in at last, in part through the good offices of Maurice Croiset, with Aimé Puech, who supervised his *thèses* (A. Parry 1971:xxiii; see also de Lamberterie 1997:9-11).

cumulative progress that Kroeber had argued for in reference to civilization (Parry 1971:409): “The students of each generation, approaching the literature of some past period with the clearer sight which has been won for them by the earlier generation, will find in the best opinions on that past elements which jar with one another, or things which have been left out, or things which have been given too much place; and if they have head enough not to become befuddled by details—which is the great hazard—they will in their turn give a truer picture.” But he goes even further: particularism is to be seen as part of this trend. For this, Parry uses the key term “relativity,” which Schein seems to pass over. Parry describes what he means thus (*idem*):

The notion of relativity surely lies in this direction: if I say that Grote’s account of democracy at Athens is more revealing of the mind of an English Liberal of the nineteenth century after Christ, than it recalls what actually took place in Athens in the fifth century before Christ, and then go on to admit that the opinion which I have just expressed about Grote may in turn reveal even more my own state of mind than it does that of Grote. . . even in that case I am still doing no more than to try to attain a more perfect method for the historical approach to the thought of the past.

For Parry, then, “relativity” is the principle of letting each culture speak for itself. The technique that he proposes for achieving this is suggested to him by the passage from the writings of Ernest Renan that he had placed towards the opening of his first *thèse*. In Adam’s English, it reads: “How can we seize the physiognomy and the originality of early literatures if we do not enter into the moral and intimate life of a people, if we do not place ourselves at the very point in humanity which it occupied, in order to see and feel with it, if we do not watch it live, or rather if we do not live for a while with it?” (1971:409)<sup>35</sup> Now, Schein may be right that this viewpoint is naive: “In this respect, Parry resembles the anthropological fieldworkers of earlier generations who optimistically thought that their ‘participant observation’ of traditional cultures not their own enabled them to understand—objectively and without distortion—the institutions, social structures, and values of these cultures” (1997:276). He is surely correct in likening Parry’s attraction to Renan’s sentiment to that of early anthropologists (though it was not so much a matter of Parry’s imitation of them, since participant observation as we know it today was more a legacy of Malinowski than the earlier Americanists whom Parry had known).

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<sup>35</sup> Cf. the different rendering at 1971:2.

But Schein seems to go astray when he attempts to account for Parry's clear effort to move beyond Renan's simple formulation. Parry acknowledges that this "point of view . . . is one which can never reach completely, but only come nearer to its attainment," and that "the students of each generation, approaching the literature of some past period with the clearer sight which has been won for them by the earlier generation, will . . . in their turn give a truer picture" (1971:409).<sup>36</sup> Schein rightly detects a breach between Parry's approach to his subject and that of the German philologists, but comments that "this sense of Classics as one of the 'human sciences' rather than the 'Humanities' (and of the comparative study of 'forms of society other than our own' as a legitimate 'field of learning') is perhaps a product of Parry's graduate study in France rather than Germany . . ." (277). Now, it is certain, not least thanks to Parry's own autobiographical remarks in this regard,<sup>37</sup> that much of his later thought was given definitive shape in Paris, but his view of classical philology as he would practice it is strongly influenced by Kroeber's defense of a historical (rather than biological) basis for anthropology. Adam Parry's insistence that his father was, as a theorist of tradition, *sui generis* is carried too far. This insistence leads Schein to underestimate the importance of the view that Parry expounds in his essay on historical method. It is true, as he says, that Parry could have gained from modern theoretical sophistications (1997:281), but it took considerable courage to address to the Overseers of Harvard College, men who must have imagined themselves guardians of a sacred cultural trust, his challenge to a triumphalist strain in western classical scholarship that still commands adherence today. Parry's "historical method," like the grand comparative projects of Kroeber, would brandish a principle of "relativity" learned from Americanist ethnographers in California. Armed with that theory, they would open the gates for successors who would set Homer's songs beside those of South Slavic Moslem *guslari* or peers from farther abroad.

3. *The Phonograph and "Salvage Ethnography."* Another bequest that Parry received was the use of the phonograph in the field and the general mood of "salvage ethnography." When he took to the field in 1929, the year following the defense and publication of this French *thèse*, he had only the inspiration of Matija Murko and his own genius, according to the

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<sup>36</sup> Cited by Schein 1997:276.

<sup>37</sup> On which see de Lamberterie 1997.

usual account. But his California background prepared him for this adventure in many ways not as yet acknowledged. Franz Boas had instilled in his pupils a sense of urgency regarding the preservation—“salvage” was the word often used—of Native American cultures, languages especially. Kroeber himself privately lamented the rapid destruction of native culture in California.<sup>38</sup> It is very possible, then, that Parry inherited this attitude from Kroeber, but it was to some extent in the air among anthropologists, and there is even an early work on South Slavic heroic song by Beatrice Stevenson that pleads for its salvage.<sup>39</sup>

From the start, Americanists used the phonograph and portable cameras in their acts of preservation and collection.<sup>40</sup> Kroeber himself had enthusiastically adopted the latest technologies: already in 1914 he contracted a commercial company to make films of Ishi engaged in traditional activities such as fishing and archery; he used photography and phonography extensively in the field as well.<sup>41</sup> Heider tells of the blunder

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<sup>38</sup> Buckley 1996. According to Theodora Kroeber (1970:51), Boas had taught her husband that “the time was late; the dark forces of invasion had almost done their ignorant work of annihilation. To the field then! With notebook and pencil, record, record, record. Rescue from historylessness all languages still living, all cultures. Each is precious, unique, irreplaceable. . . .” Brady quotes these verses by the most zealous of all salvage ethnographers, John Peabody Harrington: “Give not, give not the yawning grave its plunder, / Save, save the lore for future ages’ joy; / The stories full of beauty and of wonder / The songs more pristine than the songs of Troy, / The ancient speech forever to be banished – / Lore that tomorrow to the grave goes down! / All other thought from our horizon banish, / Let any sacrifice our labor crown” (Brady 1999:52; see further Walsh 1976).

<sup>39</sup> Stevenson 1915. She writes in tones that recall those of Boas’s pupils (1915:58-59): “That [the guslar] is a relic of the past cherished only by a few individuals who recognize the importance of this messenger of an older time, is regrettable. The many pass on unattentive to the sensitive melody of his compositions, or to the significance which these compositions may bear to the folklorist, the ethnologist, and the musician.” Because her article appears in the same issue of the *American Anthropologist* as A. Kroeber 1915, it is at least conceivable that Parry encountered it in his student days.

<sup>40</sup> On the use of the phonograph in ethnography, see Shelemay 1991, Jacknis 1996b, and Brady 1999; on film, Heider 1976:espec. 16-45.

<sup>41</sup> On Kroeber’s use of photography, see Jacknis 1996a; on his use of phonography, Brady 1999:66, where the early Americanists’ study of what they called folklore is well emphasized; on his use of film, see note 42 below, but add the observation by Ira Jacknis (personal communication, 1 November 2000) that Kroeber himself did not make the films, but paid to have them produced.

that cost posterity the films of Ishi: they were stored too near a source of heat in the University of California museum and were destroyed (1976:128-29). But according to Ira Jacknis, the curator of the Ishi exhibit for the Hearst Museum of Anthropology at Berkeley, museum records place the destruction of the film only before 1928. Though it is purely a matter of speculation, it is at least possible that the film was screened in public during Parry's years there.<sup>42</sup> On his own Yugoslav salvage expeditions, Parry, too, sought out the most up-to-date technology. For example, his film—he called it a *kino*—of Yugoslav singer Avdo Medjedović (1935) was among the earliest ethnographic films, and its importance in this regard has been seriously underestimated.<sup>43</sup> The use of film in the field was pioneered by American ethnographers.

But his phonographic work was even more innovative. Here I quote from the description of Mitchell and Nagy:

As late as the mid-1930s, no one had collected songs of this sort in what might be regarded as a natural way, that is, without artificial breaks necessitated by the demands of the limited recording technology available. To this end, Parry commissioned Sound Specialties Company of Waterbury, Connecticut, to prepare a recording device for him consisting of two turntables connected by a toggle switch. The careful back-and-forth alternation of the turntables allowed the normal time limit of several minutes of recording on a twelve-inch disk to be expanded virtually infinitely (2000:x).<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Jacknis (personal communication, 1 November 2000) doubts that Kroeber screened the films publicly or for his students; he suggests that a likelier influence for Parry may have been Robert Flaherty's *Nanook of the North* (1922). On the scanty efforts in ethnographic film before 1922, see Heider 1976:19-20.

<sup>43</sup> On Parry's term *kino*, see Mitchell and Nagy 2000:vii. Even among American anthropologists, ethnographic film got off to a slow start. Boas, not at first appreciating the potential of Flaherty's innovations, did not come to film until 1929. The collaborative film work of Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson in Bali, which represented a major advance in ethnographic method, was not to be published until the early 1950s (Jacknis, personal communication, 1 November 2000; Heider 1976:19, 27-30). Thus, Kroeber's film of Ishi stands out as a striking early landmark, and Parry's film of Avdo Medjedović is not far behind.

<sup>44</sup> See further x-xii on the technological obstacles that Parry overcame in the field.

This innovation permitted Parry and his fellows to capture on record what Daniel Melia has recognized as a key property of the oral-formulaic method of composition, namely that it “allowed the singer to compose narratives of arbitrary length” through the recombination of traditional “words” guided by traditional knowledge (2000:731).<sup>45</sup> And having recognized Parry’s early association with Kroeber, we are now in a position to relate his technological triumph to an earlier one achieved by Franz Boas, which he would have come to know in lectures or discussions on field methods in ethnology. Ira Jacknis has described Boas’s innovation (1996b:204, italics added):

Boas was always concerned about the technical problems of these new recording devices, such as the inability of cameras of his time to take pictures of potlatches in a darkened house. Similarly, early phonographs could not accurately record rhythm, faint notes, or the sounds of the choral singing common on the Northwest Coast, and the wax cylinders could only record for short periods. During his 1893 World’s Fair session, *Boas overcame this limitation by recording a single song across two cylinders.*

Parry explicitly attributed part of the success of his theory of oral composition to his use of recent technology: “It is even more than likely that someone else would have done this before had it not been for the lack of the mechanical means: it has only been in the last few years that the science of electrical sound recording has given us an apparatus of such a sort that it can record songs of any length and in the large numbers needed before one can draw conclusions, and finally which can make records which are so good that the words on them can be accurately written down for the purpose of close study” (1971:470). With a certain inevitability, it also encouraged Parry’s comparison of Avdo with Homer himself, here described by his assistant, Albert Lord: “Avdo’s songs were longer and finer than any we had heard before. He could prolong one for days, and some of them reached fifteen or sixteen thousand lines. Other singers came, but none could equal Avdo, our Yugoslav Homer.”<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> On formulae as “words,” see Foley 1995:2-3, 7, and *passim*, 1999:65-88; on recombination, see Edwards 1983.

<sup>46</sup> Lord 1937; cited in Mitchell and Nagy 2000:xii.

## Epilogue

Given Kroeber's own professional interest in cultural transmission and diffusion, linguistics, and metrics and prosody, did he come to recognize Parry's work?

"L'Épithète Traditionnelle dans Homère," Parry's doctoral thesis (Paris, 1928), did not make an immediate impact on classical or broader humanistic studies, despite a flattering review by the eminent Homerist Pierre Chantraine (1929). With the exception of Martin Nilsson's favorable reception of the thesis in the opening chapter of *Homer and Mycenae* (1933), which Parry did live to see (he died in 1935), the Hellenic world did not notice the broad ramifications of his achievement, on the whole, until after the Second World War.<sup>47</sup> Although Kroeber was famous for a capacious memory and would have been proud of Parry's success in attaining a posting at Harvard University in only his second year of teaching, I found no evidence among Kroeber's papers on deposit at the University of California that clearly indicated any recognition of Parry—no correspondence to or from Parry, no apparent references to him in the files on metrics and prosody.<sup>48</sup>

Yet there is evidence that Kroeber did keep up with Parry's work at some level. Kroeber's son Karl, who teaches English and Native American studies at Columbia University, where his father got his start, remembers that the elder Kroeber spoke about Parry's discoveries in "the forties or fifties"<sup>49</sup>—precisely when Parry's writings were gaining recognition and instigating bitter quarrels among specialists and the broader community of comparatists; at a time too, I should add, when Kroeber himself was

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<sup>47</sup> A. Parry 1971:xlili-xlvii. One of the few earlier champions was George Calhoun, with whom Parry had studied at Berkeley. He cited his former pupil's thesis in his own study of repetitions in Homer (Calhoun 1933; A. Parry 1971:lxix-lxx). Kroeber knew Calhoun—at a minimum—in the latter's capacity as secretary of the Faculty Senate Editorial Committee (University of California, Bancroft Library, Kroeber Papers, Incoming Correspondence), and although it is a good guess that they had occasion to discuss Parry, there is no documentary evidence to this effect.

<sup>48</sup> The solitary hint in the Kroeber papers of the scholar's recognition of Parry was a bibliographical notation of volume one of *Serbocroatian Heroic Songs*. Writing down the editors, Kroeber only underlines Milman Parry, though not "ed. & tr. by Albert Lord, transcr. by Béla Bartok." University of California, Bancroft Library, Kroeber Papers, files on "Meter, Rhythm," microfilm reel 164, frame 5.

<sup>49</sup> Karl Kroeber, personal communication, 10 September 2000.

surveying metrics and prosody for his own teaching.<sup>50</sup> There is further evidence that Kroeber knew and admired his former pupil—though mysteries still envelop it. When his grandson Paul Kroeber, now a specialist in Salish language and society, was departing for college in the 1970s, he selected from his grandfather’s library a number of books that he thought he could use at school. One item in particular caught his eye. He took down from the shelves a set of Homer’s works, the Allen and Monro edition from the Oxford Classical Texts series. As he progressed in his studies, Paul came to recognize the special significance of these books from Alfred Kroeber’s collection: the inside flyleaf of the first volume was inscribed, in red ink, “Milman Parry.” The text itself was annotated by its first owner, with phrases in certain passages underscored, struck through, or circled with solid or dotted lines, and an arcane system of numerals and brackets recording his observations on phraseology and meter, also in various colors. How Kroeber came upon these books remains a mystery to his grandson, and it will probably remain so to us—there is no presentation message or other clue to provenance, save a bookseller’s notation at the upper righthand corner of the inside flyleaf, just above the name: “4 vols 4<sup>00</sup>.” Kroeber had apparently added annotations of his own on slips of white paper left between certain pages, tables of statistics on prosody, in fact, that closely resemble similar notes to be found among his papers on deposit in the Bancroft Library in Berkeley. The books themselves remain in the personal collection of Paul Kroeber at Bloomington, Indiana.<sup>51</sup>

We can locate, then, or begin to do so at least, one tradition from which Parry emerged. This was the Americanist tradition of anthropology represented at the University of California by the most influential pupil of Franz Boas, A. L. Kroeber. It is a tradition on which Parry drew in his account of Homer’s art of epic composition and that is in fact thriving to this day, in broad projects of cultural comparison, in the study of performance in

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<sup>50</sup> Though he retired from the University of California in 1946, he did return from various visiting professorships around the country to teach there occasionally. On one such occasion, he taught a course in metrics and prosody; his notes are in the file on “Meter, Rhythm” (see n. 48).

<sup>51</sup> The above description of the books is based on photocopies of selected pages that Paul Kroeber kindly supplied to me; I repeat my thanks to him. However, the description here is incomplete; Parry’s Homer awaits fuller description.

verbal art, and in the continuing debate among anthropologists on the status of culture as an analytical category.<sup>52</sup>

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