



ORAL TRADITION

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Oral Tradition seeks to provide a comparative and interdisciplinary focus for studies in oral literature and related fields by publishing research and scholarship on the creation, transmission, and interpretation of all forms of oral traditional expression. As well as essays treating certifiably oral traditions, *OT* presents investigations of the relationships between oral and written traditions, as well as brief accounts of important fieldwork, a Symposium section (in which scholars may reply at some length to prior essays), review articles, occasional transcriptions and translations of oral texts, a digest of work in progress, and a regular column for notices of conferences and other matters of interest. In addition, occasional issues will include an ongoing annotated bibliography of relevant research and the annual Albert Lord and Milman Parry Lectures on Oral Tradition. *OT* welcomes contributions on all oral literatures, on all literatures directly influenced by oral traditions, and on non-literary oral traditions. Submissions must follow the list-of-reference format (style sheet available on request) and must be accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope for return or for mailing of proofs; all quotations of primary materials must be made in the original language(s) with following English translations. Authors should submit two copies of all manuscripts. Most contributions will be reviewed by at least one specialist reader and one member of the editorial board before a final decision is reached. Review essays, announcements, and contributions to the Symposium section will be evaluated by the editor in consultation with the board.

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Editor's Column

With this issue we return to the “bedrock” format of *Oral Tradition*, the miscellany that offers the reader an interdisciplinary perspective on this naturally heterogeneous field. Susan Rasmussen opens the conversation with “reflections on myth and history” among the Tuareg of Nigeria, a people among whom she has done extensive fieldwork. Sabine Habermalz then continues with a discussion of orality in that most literate and textual of authors, James Joyce; this essay will acquaint our readership with the methodology developed by a group of scholars at the Universität Freiburg to treat a wide range of verbal art. Yet more recent in media evolution is the electronic text, the subject of Bruce Mason’s article and a fresh point of departure in the consideration of orality and literacy; anyone involved with the Internet and e-mail, not to mention other electronic tools, will find his “virtual ethnography” exciting and instructive. Mark Bender then returns to a fieldwork-based examination of oral tradition with his examination of Suzhou *tanci* storytelling, which emphasizes aspects of performance and offers the author’s firsthand experience as a guide.

The next two articles in this issue collectively stress the diversity of traditional oral forms and illustrate the tremendous variety of materials that can be better understood through their agency. First, Deborah VanderBilt recovers the orality of Old English prose, a significant addition to the nearly exclusive focus on the oral-derived poetry of that period. At the other end of things, Yvonne Banning recounts the evidence of various kinds of orality in the theater of South Africa during the last tumultuous decade. With Yang Enhong’s overview of Geser epic we are fortunate to be able to present a glimpse of an important oral tradition, half a world away, in Mongolia and Tibet, a region little explored in Western scholarship but one that boasts epics more than ten times as long as Homer’s *Iliad*. Closing out this issue, Craig Davis examines cultural assimilation in *Njáls saga*, explaining how the saga encodes reconstructions of social violence, while Ingrid Holmberg presents an intriguing explanation of the fragments and summaries of the lost Epic Cycle from ancient Greece as the oral tradition they no doubt once constituted.

In the future we plan to stay “close to the hearth” with heterogeneous, multidisciplinary issues like this one. To do our part to celebrate the millennium, however, we also have scheduled two special issues. The first of these will be a collection of short “position papers” on the state of studies in this field as we move toward 2001. Each essayist will address a simple but challenging question: “What’s right and what’s wrong with the way we study oral traditions?” For the second issue, to be guest-edited by Mark Amodio, the topic will be “Theoretical

Intersections.” In this collection contributors will examine how contemporary critical methods of all sorts can speak to studies in oral tradition. Please contact the guest-editor (amodio@vassar.edu) with your proposals for this second special issue.

As always, we welcome your input, reactions, and, most of all, subscriptions.

John Miles Foley, Editor

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Reflections on Myth and History: Tuareg Concepts of Truth, “Lies,” and “Children’s Tales”

Susan J. Rasmussen

Introduction

The Problem of Control in the Transfer of Knowledge

Among the Kel Ewey Tuareg in northeastern Niger, West Africa, a local intelligentsia existed prior to contact with French and central Nigerian state control. Local knowledge specialists are not passive creations of colonial and post-colonial infrastructures, but have always been profoundly influential in interaction with Europeans and other Africans. Tuareg society is characterized by semi-nomadism, social stratification, official adherence to Islam, and oral and written traditions. Although the traditional social system is rapidly breaking down in the towns, in rural communities status is based upon descent and inherited occupational affiliation, in principle controlled by official endogamy: nobles, smiths, and descendants of slaves and tributaries are each supposed to marry within their social stratum. In rural areas nobles and smiths still practice, in modified form, client-patron relationships: smiths make jewelry, weapons, and household tools for nobles and recite genealogies and oral histories, and nobles are obliged to give them presents of food and cash on demand (Rasmussen 1992). Although Tuareg women traditionally enjoy high prestige and economic independence, gender roles and relations between the sexes are characterized by contradictions and changing property balance: for example, sedentarization and Koranic law create legal conflicts between men and women (Rasmussen 1990, 1994a).

Thus social stratum, gender, and age interact with knowledge and power systems. In principle, men and women of diverse social strata may practice oral history and healing specialisms. In practice, however, specialists rank different kinds of history and healing knowledge by invoking values derived from social position and based on gender, inherited social stratum, and age. Tuareg texts on local origins and healing thus

provide insights into ways in which resources are marshalled for intellectual coercion in a hierarchical but flexible and negotiable social system.

A number of authors have discussed the impact of unequal dialogues in knowledge transfer, specifically, asymmetric power relations between external hegemonic forces and local knowledge specialists.¹ Mudimbe points to the need to identify the “specialist of the past with the most influence” (1985:150), to specify what constitutes knowledge, and to locate where sources of knowledge and power reside in changing sociopolitical and economic conditions. He describes how the colonial enterprise in Africa had an impact upon local social roles, in the production and reproduction of knowledge: the new organization of power specialized tasks and stabilized them in new social relations of production. In this process, the relation between knowledge and discourse became reconstructed, as one empowered the other. Yet the relation between local memory and political practice is complex and has another dimension: it is also reconstructed by internal power struggles. These processes constitute means of intellectual coercion in their own right, means that shape and are shaped by external hegemonic processes.

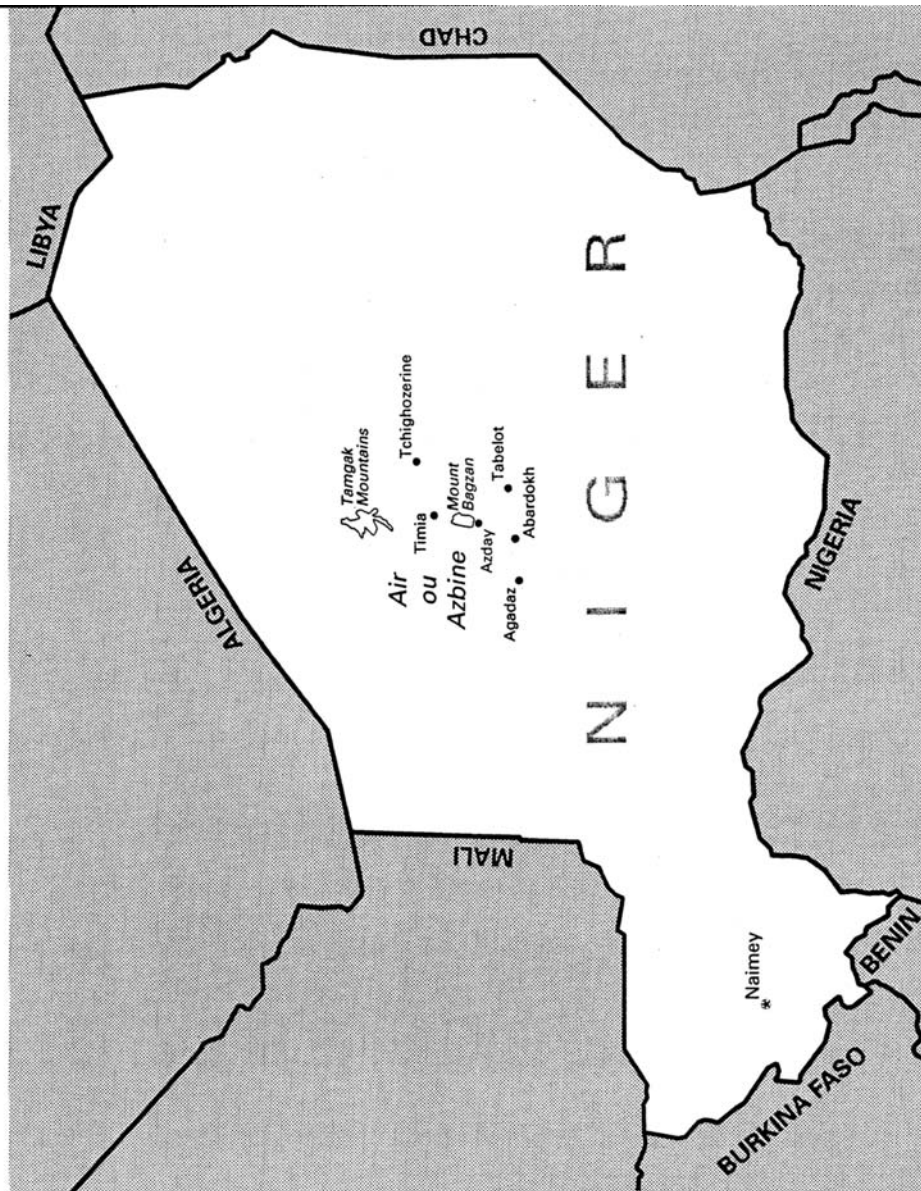
In this essay, I discuss the problem of how to interpret these processes without imposing Western paradigms and “black-box” terms, and yet still produce useful comparisons of different knowledge-power systems. My purpose is to discuss the problematics of Western-derived classifications and lenses used in describing and interpreting knowledge and power systems. For example, essentialist categories such as “myth,” “history,” “science,” and “art,” as well as “sacred” and “secular” domains, are of limited value as a measure in crosscultural comparison, since they are derived from a Western episteme. Tuareg categories, I argue, need to be analyzed in relation to local social and epistemological distinctions.

Research Area, Ethnographic Background, and Theoretical Focus

This essay is based on data collected during my residence and research in the Republic of Niger, West Africa, for approximately six and one-half years, initially as a Peace Corps volunteer, subsequently under local contract for the Ministry of Education, and more recently in anthropological research on gender, ritual, healing, and the life course. From 1974-77, I taught English in Niamey, the capital, and Agadez, a

¹ See Horton 1967, 1982; Jain 1977; Goody 1977; Said 1978; Comaroff 1985; Mudimbe 1985, 1988.

The AIR Region of Niger



Cartography by:
Adrienne Nold
Geographic Resources Center
Department of Geography
University of Missouri - Columbia
September 18, 1998

Source:
Edmond Bernus, 1981. *Touaregs Nigériens: Unité Culturelle et diversité régionale d'un peuple pasteur.*

Saharan town in the Air Mountain region of northern Niger. During that time, I also conducted preliminary study of the local culture and Tamacheq, the language of the Tuareg, as well as Hausa, a lingua franca throughout Niger. In my preliminary research on local culture, I visited families in the rural Air Mountain region in 1977 and 1978. Later, in 1983, I conducted doctoral research on female spirit possession among the Kel Ewey confederation of Tuareg in the Air Mountains, north of Agadez. In 1991, I returned to this region for postdoctoral research to study Tuareg aging. In 1995, I studied local healing specialists, and most recently, in 1998, I conducted a comparative study of rural and urban Tuareg smiths. In each phase of research, my methods included recording, transcribing, and translation of verbal art (folktales, poetry, song, riddles, and proverbs), life histories, musical performances, and rituals.²

In looking at the relation between knowledge and power systems in this changing society, one is struck by a paradox: Tuareg generally, and nobles in particular, are underrepresented in the formal higher education system of Niger, despite the existence of a local intelligentsia and cultural values that respect learning and knowledge. A local form of literacy exists outside the formal, secular educational structure. Both written and oral forms of expression remain vital today. There exist two types of written channels: Arabic literacy of the Koran and the Tifinagh script of Tamacheq, the Berber language spoken by Tuareg. Among Tuareg, oral art addresses medical as well as historical knowledge domains, and these are often practiced together. As different interest groups scramble to “own” meaning, interaction between the different media within a single culture significantly shape the directions of knowledge specialties.

Kel Ewey Tuareg specialists offer conflicting versions of knowledge in the domains of history and medicine. Competing claims to authority are contested most fiercely in these specialized but interrelated domains. Both bodies of knowledge—historical and healing—are transmitted in the form of texts, which affect the cultural construction of self/societal relationships; both employ oral art in their communication of this. Thus in their content and practice, both provide contexts for reevaluating forms of knowledge.

Specialists transfer knowledge of history and healing through several types of oral and musical texts, called by different terms in Tamacheq. These texts contain and provoke critical commentary on knowledge. I analyze four principal kinds of texts, as they are classified and evaluated by local residents in terms of their legitimacy and credibility as knowledge.

² In these projects, I gratefully acknowledge Fulbright Hays, Indiana Grant-in-Aid, Wenner-Gren Foundation, and University of Houston Limited-Grant-in-Aid support.

First, there are accounts called *imayen*, translated to me in French as *contes folkloriques* or folktales. These are primarily identified with children, young women, and smiths, who are the primary tellers of these tales. *Imayen* are viewed by some Tuareg—namely Islamic scholars and noble men—as “untrue.” By contrast, accounts called *idamen iru*, denoting legends of the past, are viewed as “true” by many Tuareg. These are associated with elders, noble men, and Islamic scholars, who relate these legends. I also analyze women’s spirit exorcism songs, sung by women at predominantly female possession rituals called *tende n goumaten*, in which women in trance undergo healing; and Islamic liturgical music, called *ezzeke*, praise-songs to God sung by men in mosques, which sometimes cause men to enter possession trance.³

Folk etymologies, explanations, and commentaries on these texts underline not solely problems of translation but also conflicts related to knowledge and power hierarchies, and highlight the problem of dealing with diversity within a single culture. Notions of truth (*teydet*) vs. lie (*behu*) play central roles in these conflicts. Different interest groups rank different versions of knowledge in perceived hierarchies of truth. For example, local residents of either sex and diverse social strata insist that “women tell lies and children’s tales” (*imayen*). This type of folk tale portrays what men and Islamic scholars (called marabouts) consider fictional, whereas, they insist, “men tell true historical legends (*idamen iru*) and true history (*tarikh*).” These narratives feature named heroes considered real persons in the past. Women’s possession songs are performed by a chorus in order to exorcise spirits believed to possess women. Their verses frequently make reference to knowledge/power relationships. For example, in one song the women sing, “These words are not the knowledge of the Koran (*tanestema*) . . . so let me not be struck down by a marabout when I pronounce them.” Transcribers/assistants explained this verse to me as indicating what they called the “unscientific” nature of possession songs, believed to address the spirits and considered

³ This term is derived from the synonymous Arabic *zikr* and entered Tuareg religious ritual by way of Sufi mysticism. The idea here is to pronounce the name of God, and in so doing to praise him, thereby gaining protection. Marabouts prescribe pronouncing the *ezzeke* a specified number of times, but warn against exceeding this limit, somewhat like a doctor’s warning against exceeding a given dosage of medication. It is through excessive zeal, in feeling the “inadequacy” of their own devotion, that certain persons surpass marabouts’ specifications and fall ill with the “illness of God” (*tawarna n Yallah*), seen as caused by spirits opposed to spirits of the Wild (*Kef essuf* or, sometimes, *goumaten*) believed to cause women’s possession illness.

anti-Islamic.⁴ Both men and women become possessed; however, the spirits possessing them are believed to differ, as do their cures. Women's spirits, called the People of Solitude or the Wild (*kel essuf*), require beautiful *goumaten* singing, accompanied by a mortar drum called the *tende*, for a cure. Men's *ezzeke* songs praising God, derived from Sufism, are identified with what local residents call the "science of the Koran" (*tanefema*). Men's possessing spirits, described as "illnesses of God," come about as a result of overzealous repetition of the *ezzeke* verses, in excess of the Islamic scholar's recommendation. Here, the notion is that the sentiments take over, obliterating logic, and the person "becomes crazy" from such a state.

Reserve and secrecy characterize some knowledge: specifically, noble male creativity is identified with solitude. For example, good poetry and men's singing should take place outside villages and away from groups. By contrast, openness and lack of reserve are associated with other specialties. For example, Tuareg say that "smiths and (former) slaves have no shame," and their drumming apprenticeships take place in public. Also relevant to these knowledge claims is the cultural opposition between prayer and song. Although they do not forbid them outright, Islamic scholars disapprove of secular evening festivals, music, and song.

My task here is to analyze the way these notions are used in asserting power, in terms of local social distinctions, thereby providing a critique of Western-based dichotomies and classifications such as "myth/science" and "sacred/secular." For example, possession song verses that oppose prayer to secular song on one level constitute debates surrounding gender and class asymmetry in Kel Ewey Tuareg society. Categories invoked in these debates resist translation into neat dichotomies and evolutionary phases such as the "sacred/secular" split characteristic of some analyses of literacy (Goody 1977; Comaroff 1985).⁵ The data also challenge extreme images

⁴ Local concepts of "unscientific" and "scientific" are problematic to translate. Local residents who speak French use these terms in French to explain Tamacheq terms *teghare* (learning; study) and *tanefema* (Koranic knowledge), as well as the concepts underlying them. They also use the terms to explain attitudes toward the female spirit possession (*tende n goumaten*) songs, as "based on sentiment rather than logic." These attitudes associate logical thought with Islam, thereby breaking down Western dichotomies between so-called "sacred" and "secular" thought and knowledge.

⁵ These works suggest a patterned distribution of power, but there remains the need to identify the agents conferring educational/political legitimacy and power, and to account for the greater prestige some forms of knowledge acquire in particular contexts. While Western-based colonialism and its mission and secular schools play important roles in these

of Tuareg gnosis in some ethnographic writings, which tend to overrepresent noble influence on Tuareg knowledge systems and also to exaggerate women's control over children's education (Foley 1930; Lhote 1955).⁶ In the sections that follow, I show how concepts of truth/lie, adult/child, prayer/song, and knowledge/ignorance articulate with gender, age, and class typifications and relationships within Tuareg society, as well as with those imposed from outside, through colonialism. In the transfer of Tuareg knowledge specialties, the established local intelligentsia fear some texts as more threatening than others. This suggests that specialists seek to "own" knowledge, but ownership does not always coincide with a single form of power, in that other resources come into play. Different kinds of power—political and cosmological—are available to persons in diverse contexts. I show how local evaluations of knowledge specialties are connected to social stereotypes and fill the need for a negative reference group. Each disputant, for persuasive power, appeals to different principles in the competition to control "collective memory" (Bakhtin 1984; Hebdigé 1979).

processes, in my view many authors tend to overemphasize this perspective and downplay the role of local intellectuals. In his analysis of traditional Western classification schemes used to describe differences between societies, Goody (1977:12-14) observes that one common theme in distinguishing between societies has to do with the contrast between myth and history. But this measure seems static and assumes that such categories are mutually exclusive. Among Kel Ewey Tuareg, most writing is identified with Islam. But specialists alternately use both verbal instructions and reading in transfer of similar types of knowledge, though toward different ends and audiences and with intervening mediating agents. Goody's scheme also leaves finer shades of contrast, as well as power relations, unaccounted for. For example, the role of Tifinagh, a script in which Tuareg women specialize, used in poetry, love messages, and graffiti, is currently enjoying a revitalization in Tuareg nationalism and cultural autonomy movements. However, women have always also studied Arabic and the Koran.

⁶ Some earlier European representations of Tuareg gnosis as noble-dominated in a rigid, ranked hierarchy tended to ignore competing and negotiable power bases (Campbell 1928; Foley 1930; Lhote 1955). Images were based upon authors' projections of European medieval feudal society, rather than on local commentaries. There is also a discrepancy between European accounts of Tuareg women's roles, which tended to portray them as the sole repositories of knowledge, and Kel Ewey residents' respect for Islamic scholars and assertions by some individuals that "women tell lies and children's tales."

The Setting

The focus here is on a rural community of semi-nomadic livestock herders, caravanners, and oasis gardeners. Kel Ewey Tuareg social relations and bases of power have been undergoing changes in recent years. Traditionally, in Saharan and Sahelian regions of Africa, sedentary agricultural populations who could not defend themselves militarily were subject to slave-raiding and taxation of their products by Tuareg nomadic pastoralists. Many became servile peoples, gradually incorporated into Tuareg society in this way, as either slaves or tributary groups who gardened and paid nobles a proportion of their produce in millet and dates. The roles of diverse social strata, however, have always been subject to negotiation and flexibility, and resist neat pigeonholing. For example, before slavery was abolished, there were varying degrees of servitude, some types resembling serfdom, in their greater independence from owners. Slaves could inherit from noble owners. But they were not free, and they performed all the arduous domestic, herding, and other manual labor. Smiths have never been owned or exploited economically; in fact, nobles have depended on smiths for technical and intermediary roles in tasks nobles disdain. For example, since smiths do not marry nobles, they assist in arranging noble marriages and in negotiating bridewealth. But pollution beliefs surrounding smiths—for example, their alleged malevolent, mystical powers—are still relevant in rural communities today (Rasmussen 1992).

There is now some degree of sedentarization, due to pressures from drought and government political policies. Consequently, sectors of subsistence activity have lost their one-to-one correspondence to social stratum. This situation has produced less coincidence between prestigious descent and prosperous socioeconomic positions, and has affected relations between the sexes, age groups, and social strata in ways discussed elsewhere in greater detail.⁷ Many former slaves as well as smiths are becoming prosperous through gardening in years of good rains, and some nobles are becoming impoverished due to diminishing returns from herding and caravanning. But caravanning and herding are still considered more prestigious than gardening. Other contradictions concern descent: the ancient local matrilineal system, which traces inheritance and descent through women, faces competition from Islamic law favoring men.

Recently, nobles' traditional bases of power (monopolization of weapons and camels, control of the caravan trade) have been eroding in

⁷ See Murphy 1967; Bernus 1981; Casajus 1987; Rasmussen 1985, 1988, 1989, 1990.

ecological disaster (intermittent droughts) and political tensions with the central government of Niger. Since the early 1990s, there has been increased Tuareg separatist/nationalist activity, with armed military resistance, in the North. Some Tuareg have dispersed to refugee camps in Mauritania.

I argue that these forces—internal, longstanding contradictions and ambiguities of the traditional system, as well as recently changing bases of power and their ecological and political effects—create marked dispute over ownership of knowledge. Nobles, smiths, and former slaves, as well as men and women of different ages, scramble to “own” meaning, but the role of written knowledge in this scheme has no clear-cut correspondence to a single social segment. Smiths and former slaves are often more literate than nobles in French, due to nobles’ avoidance of secular education. Islamic scholars (popularly called marabouts) and smiths, who did not customarily fight or collect or pay tribute, served nobles in client-patron relationships: the former as lettered religious specialists in regional history, Koranic law, and medicine and the latter as oral historians, musicians, ritual specialists, and intermediaries for chiefs. Although women were not active in the official political system of local chiefs, councils of elders, and Islamic scholars, they have always held high social status, represented themselves in legal cases, inherited and managed herds, initiated divorce, and been traditionally active in music, poetry, and the education of children.

Knowledge Systems and Their Transfer

Traditional, Koranic, and non-Koranic

In rural communities, Koranic scholarship includes religious, legal, and medical studies. Keenan (1977) and Norris (1972, 1975) have documented how Islamic education entered Tuareg regions through migrations of clans of Koranic scholars called marabouts and Sufi mystics originally from Tademekket in the Maghreb. Lettered Islamic scholars are similar in some respects to the Murabtin or Zwaya among the Moors, though among Tuareg they do not correspond to a coherent class. Only in a few cases do they wield any authority, and by and large while Tuareg nobles respect marabouts for their knowledge of the Koran and their piety, they consider marabouts to be semi-tributary (Norris 1972, 1975).

Tuareg nobles state, “The path followed by the noble leads one way, the way of the marabout is another.” A prominent Islamic scholar explained that a marabout practices *taneslema* or Koranic knowledge better

than others and is pacific, that is, does not fight. Traditionally, the noble warrior needed blessings and amulets from a marabout for protection in raids and battles. Today marabouts practice divination, counseling, and the interpretation of Koranic law. They are sought out by local chiefs for their advice. They are also expected to be generous, for example, in redistributing their wealth. In rural areas, there is less of a split between so-called "sacred" and "secular" knowledge and specialties of law and medicine. I noticed, for example, that many rural Tuareg friends conceptualized my role as scholar/anthropologist by referring to me as *tanéslem* (in Tamacheq, marabout, fem.) rather than by the French *professeur*, a term that is known from contact with secular primary schools in the region but less commonly used.

Koranic education extends beyond the primary level; students pursue higher education after memorizing Koranic verses. This next level includes study of Koranic verses' meaning. There follows introduction to other religious writings, such as the Hadiths (traditions of the Prophet). The student also learns Arabic grammar, logic, jurisprudence, theology, and commentaries on the Koran. Although many local residents would be considered nonliterate in French, the official language of Niger, and in their local language, they read and write Arabic. Elders told me that at one time there was a Koran written in Tamacheq with Arabic letters (similar to the Ajumi in Hausa religious tracts), but that this disappeared long ago. There were famous centers of higher education throughout the Sahara well before Europeans established universities: namely, at Timbuktu and Agadez. One story relates that the children of the Tuareg and Moors left their parents' tents to go to Sankore, where lectures were given more than 1,000 years ago.

Thus Tuareg have only recently opposed sending their children away to secular schools established initially by France and later by the central government of Niger. This opposition is an expression of resistance first of all to colonialism and subsequently to central state taxation and anything perceived as "secularism" (referred to as "non-Moslem"). Secularism is explained, in local terms, as urban and anti-Islamic. For example, one man who currently resides in the capital of Niger, but previously came from a rural community, disapprovingly commented, "Formerly, people here [in Niamey, the capital] were Moslem; they did not dress in tight pants, drink alcohol, go to bars or nightclubs, or dance. Now, they do all these things. . . . Here [in the town] people say they are Moslem, but they really are not." Another individual, the husband of a woman friend of mine in the rural Air region of Mount Bagzan, today a retired secondary school teaching supervisor, told me how, as a child, he and his family had resisted

efforts at recruitment of Tuareg children to secular schools. When authorities came to take children to primary school, they encountered local resentment and lack of enthusiasm: as he put it, “Me, I wanted to become a marabout. Everyone at that time did. I begged my parents to hide me. My mother first hid me and then told me to travel to a distant town to avoid school, but later they [the authorities] caught up with me.” Other friends of mine had acquired their French schooling by quite literally being marched off at gunpoint by soldiers. Tuareg nobles at first willingly sent only the children of slaves and smiths to school, and then as punishment.

The structure of traditional learning outside Islam in Tuareg society featured few specialized teachers apart from Koranic scholars. Nonetheless, there were other sources of learning besides Islamic scholarship, based on local religion and ritual, oral traditions, economics, and subsistence. There is a continuum—an embodiment of skills, social practices, symbols, values, and attitudes—that individuals learn through rites of passage and everyday activities, according to age, sex, and social stratum. The acquisition of knowledge is conceived of as a living process linked to the daily experience of every individual: in rites surrounding birth, marriage, and funerals, and in apprenticeships in herbalism, smithing, and musical performance. In more nomadic conditions, women in some Tuareg confederations became primary educators while men were away on raids and caravans. But marabouts have been more influential educators among the Kel Ewey. In the seminomadic villages and camps of my research near Mount Bagzan, many small boys who do not accompany fathers on caravans spend much time in Koranic schools. As they age, men frequently become practicing marabouts, regardless of social class origins.

Smiths and women also educate by telling tales that have a clearly didactic purpose. Yet elders, especially noble men and marabouts, call these “children’s tales” rather than history, and accuse women and smiths of lying. Yet local reactions to different versions of origins suggest that the circumstances of knowledge transfer are as significant for legitimacy as are the teller and the knowledge content, in local classification systems.

Intellectual pursuits are thus linked to age, descent, gender, and types of morality and upbringing identified with them, used in the sense of symbolic capital to mark off outsiders. Yet no sharp division exists between home and school or between religious and secular education in rural areas. Claims to legitimacy and power in knowledge specialty are linked to age, sex, and social stratum origin. This tradition persists alongside recent secular, central state, and urban influences.

Historical Knowledge: Oral Legends, Tales, and References to Events in Life Histories

Idamen iru is a plural term Tuareg use to designate oral historical legends, denoting that they are “from long ago” and believed to transmit history (*tarikh*). Many people, particularly youths, deny that they know origin tales; some types of these narratives constitute esoteric knowledge, and their telling is restricted by values of respect toward elders and deceased ancestors, particularly on the paternal side. The elderly know them and sometimes, after long acquaintance and proper approach through intermediaries, agree to relate them. Youths say that only old people should tell some kinds of tales. But asking them to do so is a delicate matter. For youths cannot pronounce names of deceased ancestors, in particular those on the father’s side; nor are such younger people supposed to ask questions of old people. This type of tradition is also linked conceptually to Islam. One elderly former slave whom I will call Adamou, now a prosperous gardener and successful Islamic scholar, told me, “Since I have grown old and become a marabout, I have stopped telling the other oral tradition, called folktales (pl. *imayen*, sing. *emay*); now I tell only historical legends (*idamen iru*) and true history (*tarikh*).” Folktales (*imayen*) told by smiths, women, and children focus upon female founding ancestors and sometimes hint of primal incest. Adamou expressed a view prevalent among many men, that these latter are “not Islamic” and therefore “not true.” However, despite his success, noble residents expressed mild disapproval of him for relating historical knowledge, in whatever form, in public, for to do so is to lack reserve (*takarakit*), an important cultural value. They also mocked him behind his back, despite his claims to credibility through identification with Islam, due to his servile social origins. “Of course,” they said, “he is really a slave; that explains his shamelessly pronouncing names of deceased ancestors and living elders.” Low social status (slave and smith), however, can become a source of power, for it enables the person to pronounce what others (nobles) are ashamed to say. Lack of reserve, while less prestigious, confers freedom to appropriate knowledge and tradition.

For example, Adamou gave the following account of the origin of two villages at the base of Mount Bagzan, about 200 miles northeast of town of Agadez. Residents there belong to the Kel Igurmaden clan or descent group of Kel Ewey Tuareg:

Now the people of Azday are all Kel Bagzan [i.e., from Mount Bagzan], from the time of Kaousan [leader of the Tuareg Senoussi Revolt against the French in 1917]. They left for Hausa country. They returned home, where

they have remained. Then they came to Azday. The Kel Bagzan, of the same *tawsit* (descent group), in the year of Kaousan left for Hausa country. They all left for Agadez [a Saharan town in the Air region] when the white people came. They [the whites] harassed them a lot. They taxed them. They made them pay taxes. The local residents went south to find a livelihood. They returned. The whites seized power and now there is peace. The whites all later abandoned the country. They spent six years in Azday and then they returned to Talat. The Kel Igurmaden remained in Talat. They stayed at their place, with Chetouna (pseudonym), an old woman in Azday now. They spent a long time over there. They lived there for six years. They went to Abardak for gardening. Now they are around Talat. Those who are gardeners garden in their gardens. Now they make their gardens there. All their work is the same. All our relatives are on Mount Bagzan. The Kel Chimilan [of Abardak] are from Timia [an oasis to the northwest]. They speak the same language. They left Timia and went to Agadez. The whites made them pay taxes. They returned. They stayed here in the Air. They did not go back to Timia. They went to Abardak where they remained without leaving. Those Kel Nabarro left for Agadez, and then they settled in Abardak, they did not go back to either Timia or Nabarro. The fathers of the chief of Talat and the chief of Abardak, I'll tell you their fathers: the father of the chief of Abardak was named Nano (pseudonym) and the father of the chief of Talat is named Elias (pseudonym). Elias is "father" of the Kel Igurmaden, Nano was father of the Kel Nabarro.⁸ These men are great marabouts, and their ancestors built a mosque and sank a well [here]. The Kel Igurmaden and the Kel Nabarro are the same, relatives. They all belong to the [larger confederation of] Kel Ewey.

Men encouraged me to gather stories about another early male hero, Boulkhou, who according to legend hung suspended by a thread inside a well for forty days, hidden from enemies, and who used special Islamic amulets to save the Kel Igurmaden in battle.

⁸ Several etymological notes are instructive here. *Adda*, though the term of address for "father," is less often heard in reference. Usually Kel Ewey refer to such figures as *amghar*, which denotes (masculine) "elder" and "leader." The latter term was used to identify fathers of the two current local chiefs. Also, while these men are described as the "fathers" of their respective descent groups within the larger Kel Ewey confederation of Air Tuareg, the fathers' ancestors are credited with actually founding the local sites where Kel Igurmaden and Kel Nabarro predominate.

Kel denotes "people (of)" in Tamacheq, e.g., *Kel Igurmaden* = "People of Tagunnat," *Kel Ewey* = "People of the Bull" (a reference to their offering a bull to the Sultan in Agadez to secure political autonomy from him), *Kel Bagzan* = "People of Mount Bagzan" (a reference to the original geographical location of many local descent groups). Many Tuareg call themselves, collectively, *Kel Tamacheq*, "People of the Tamacheq language" or, alternatively, *Kel Tagefmust*, "People of the Veil."

Women's origin myths tend to be related in fragments, and disagreement surrounds their telling. In addition, women tellers sometimes blur the boundaries between genealogical and mythical ancestresses. For example, women say they descend from "the same grandmother," and when asked for the name will initially give a recent ancestress' name. One woman, said to be the oldest in my research village, at first gave me the name Anta, her grandmother. On further questioning, however, she indicated that the "mother" of the Kel Igurmaden (a smaller descent group of the Kel Ewey) was a woman named Tagurmat, who led the Kel Igurmaden on horseback into a battle near Mount Bagzan long ago. This ancestress had children, and they were the original ancestors of the Kel Igurmaden. Another elderly noble woman, from a *maraboutique* family, related another variant on this theme:

There was a man named Mohamed of Ibil. He had his wife, they were inside their house, and the woman saw some *cameliers* who were passing, and she went outside to watch them. She looked at them to see them clearly. The husband slapped his wife, she died, he cut open her stomach, and he took out two little girls who were twins, whom they called "Those girls who were cut." The two little twin girls, it was they who founded all the Igurmaden. One made the Igurmaden of Mount Bagzan. All Kel Igurmaden are from these two girl twins.

A group of smiths told a different version of Kel Ewey origins:

Kel Ewey descended from seven sisters who came from Turkey to the Tamgak mountains. They had children: these were ancestresses of major Air Tuareg divisions, the Kel Ewey, Kel Perwan, and others. These divisions are cousins; they joke with each other.

Other historical knowledge concerns the origin of the Tuareg men's faceveil. Like founder/ancestor origins, variants narrated by marabouts and men on the one hand and women and smiths on the other differ. The following account, told by Adamou the marabout/gardener, contrasts markedly with the versions told by women and smiths: "Now I know how the faceveil that men wear originated. The Hausa and the Tuareg made another type of headdress before. When the Tuareg saw Mohammed (the Prophet) with the faceveil (turban), they began to wear it. Women wear only the headscarf." Other variants, circulated among women and smiths, relate the origin of the men's faceveil to inversion in the remote past: they allude to men formerly wearing the women's wrapper skirt and women formerly wearing the men's faceveil. One tale called *Kuchinanga* that I

collected from a young noble woman relates how long ago women wore the men's veil and men wore the women's wrapper skirt. This is related, in the plot, to hostility between the sexes, disguise/deception, and murder.⁹ In a tale recorded by Lhote (1955), upon men's return from defeat in battle, women threw aside the faceveil and told men to wear it, shaming them. In these latter etiological myths, called "folktales" by local residents, the origin of the faceveil is linked to the noble value of reserve, whereas in the marabout's version, called legend and considered "true" history despite its oral rather than written transmission, the men's veil was linked to the Prophet and Islam.

Women's and smiths' accounts of local origins emphasize matrilineal kinship, gender role ambiguity, and shameful primal events. Conversely, the marabout's version, considered "true history," emphasizes external contact with Europeans, Islam, and construction of the first local mosque and well. Local residents distinguish legends they translate into French as *histoire* predominantly told by elders and men, or *idamen iru*, from the category of *imayen*, a term denoting folktales. This latter is a larger category, including animal tales, stories about kinship (a common motif is the brother/sister relationship), and accounts of matrilineal ancestresses as founding culture heroines. This last type alludes to matrilineal vestiges in the modern bilateral kinship system, which combines matrilineal and patrilineal descent and inheritance.¹⁰ Predominantly women of diverse social strata and male smiths tell these folktales.

⁹ Elsewhere (1990) I analyze this theme in greater depth. Disguise and covering/veiling are pervasive in the cultural values and imagery of the Tuareg. But only men wear the faceveil.

¹⁰ Among the most recent authors (Nicolaisen 1963; Murphy 1967; Bernus 1981; Casajus 1987) there is agreement that the Kel Ewey division of Air Tuareg follow a bilateral kinship/descent/inheritance system, which traces descent and inheritance on both mother's and father's sides of the family, with vestiges of ancient matriliney from pre-Islamic eras. While many of these matrilineal features have persisted in contemporary social institutions, patrilineal bias (of descent and inheritance calculated through men) is apparent in areas of Koranic law (for example, in Koranic inheritance granting approximately two-thirds of property to male heirs, and one-third to female heirs). Alongside these, however, exist counterbalances in the system to protect women against such biases (for example, *akh hudderren*, livestock herds transmitted to daughters and nieces). Yet patrilineal/patrifocal bias in social institutions does not result solely from Islam; elsewhere (1985) I have discussed the influence of tendencies toward patrifocal households, stronger imposition of Koranic law, and polygyny upon sedentarization and gardening.

Thus while both history and folktales deal with origins, their content is contradictory. Their modes of transmission and perception by local residents also differ. Male nobles, in particular marabouts of noble origin, became irritated when I attempted to elicit stories of female founding ancestresses. They insisted that because these stories were not true they represented a distortion of their history, and therefore had no value as part of my ethnographic data. The question I pursue here is as follows: who has the edge in knowledge transfer, and how are claims to this legitimacy established?

As shown, many local residents classify only certain original accounts as serious historical legends (*idamen iru*). Noble men and marabouts generally do not take *imayen* folktales seriously, in particular those that women and smiths relate, which portray matrilineal ancestresses or nonIslamic origins of the men's faceveil; they call these tales childish, thereby denying them adult status, and equate them with lying rather than truth. Furthermore, folktales and their associated riddles are often told in the relaxed context of joking relationships, between friends and cross-cousins. Women tell folktales at night as they weave mats for tent construction, to make a point during tea-drinking, and during conversation. These are sometimes accompanied by stylized hand gestures called *sikbar*; a tale is not considered complete without them. Among female performers, I also noticed a frequent preference for telling tales in pairs and via improvisation: the performers debated details of plots, one interrupting and correcting the other.

Historical legends and folktales further differ in the circumstances giving rise to their telling. The former are almost always told upon special demand; they are given in response to someone formally seeking information about the past, who elicits accounts from the teller. The latter are told more spontaneously, in situations of sociability, and do not necessarily need to be elicited by special request in a context of information-seeking.

The personal reminiscences of one older woman, literate in Arabic and the Koran, and coming from a family of prominent marabouts, provide further insights into the relation between different media of knowledge-transfer and social roles:

From the moment of my youth, I entered Koranic studies. At that time there were studies. We had our elder who taught us. He got us started in studies. At that time we were with our older and younger brothers. We studied and studied. Then we read alone, holding pages of the Koran. Even if no one was present to make us read, we did that ourselves. So if we wanted to

increase our knowledge, we went to other marabouts to learn. We progressed. Because Tuareg women are not marabouts, they do not [usually] seek to study the Koran. Some also know how to read it, but their studies are not the same thing [as men's]. Others have studied it more. Some only a little, only some prayer verses. They did not continue studies. Some were obliged by others [relatives]. Now the woman who willingly, on her own wishes to do so can find someone to study with and learn. Also she needs intelligence. Now if she goes to someone she can learn well, with someone she prefers . . . the woman who has motivation, if she wants will learn and find ways to study. If she wants to participate in festivals she can go; writing is the same thing. That of the woman and the man. When she goes to write, she writes only what she must write. Me, I have never written healing amulet [talisman] charms for anyone. Writing Koranic verses for curing amulets must be done by a great sage. Me, I do not do writing for medical cures now. Because now there is too much work [to do] at home [for me] to study.

Women say they are afraid to touch the Koran. Furthermore, much ideology opposes female sexuality to Islamic ritual; for example, menstruating women cannot have contact with Islamic amulets. However, women told me that, in the past, there were more female Islamic scholars than there are today. I have discussed reasons for women's changing status elsewhere (1985, 1994b). In brief, these include greater freedom in the past for noble women to practice the arts and education because of the availability of domestic slave labor; since the abolition of slavery, many noble women are today more constrained by domestic tasks such as processing food. But a number of women still receive some Koranic education and are literate in Arabic as well as the Tamacheq Tifinagh script. The use of the latter script, however, is specialized: it is used primarily in love messages, poetry, graffiti, inscriptions on musical instruments, and a few folktales. Contrary to what has been reported about women from some other Tuareg divisions,¹¹ Kel Ewey women tend to echo men's disdain for Tifinagh as being less important than Arabic, the alphabet of the Koran. The woman above, for example, at least gives "lip-service" to this view; when questioned about Tifinagh, she stated, "Tifinagh and Koranic studies are not the same thing. Islam is worth more; I do not know Tifinagh, but I know Koranic studies." This response contrasts with some Iwllemeden women from Mali with whom I became acquainted in the capital of Niger, who enthusiastically taught me some Tifinagh script.

Thus the content of men's versions of historical knowledge, Arabic, and the Koran appear more highly valued. Yet women's and smiths' tales,

¹¹ See Murphy 1967; Borel 1987, 1988; Worley 1988.

when viewed processually, like informal gossip, become powerful in their enactment, and significant in some practices. Women enjoy a large degree of prestige and also exert influence through property ownership. They have the right to initiate divorce, inherit camels, sheep, goats, and donkeys, and own the tent, from which they may eject the husband. Today, women's previous position of privilege is undergoing some change due to increased sedentary lifestyles, influence of Islamic scholars, greater dependence on a money economy mediated by husbands as middlemen, and irregular returns from herding (Rasmussen 1985). Smiths are believed to retaliate against nobles who do not give them presents on demand by activating malevolent powers causing illness and death. A smith is described metaphorically as "like a cousin or a woman; you joke with him (or her)." Smiths frequently circumvent official authority roles by acting as intermediaries and go-betweens, particularly in love affairs, and by exercising their right to "pronounce what other Tuareg are ashamed to pronounce." Smiths are able to do this because they lack reserve, the important noble cultural value. Women and smiths are considered closer to the spirits, and both groups also exert power indirectly in performing poetry and song.

Thus in actual practice, and contrary to official ideology, local knowledge systems undergo reversals in relative influence. These shifts are due to the need for mediators and facilitators, who intervene in the chain of knowledge expression between composition of content and its performance in context.

Medicinal Knowledge

Traditional medicine consists mostly of Islamic ritual knowledge and centers around either curing specific physical/psychological ills or providing protection against social misfortune (theft and forms of sorcery including gossip, jealousy, and love problems). On first scrutiny, from the point of view of ideology, specialized Koranic healing knowledge enjoys higher status and prestige as the standard medical treatment of choice in many rural communities. It is conceptually opposed to other non-Islamic forms. Closer inspection of its practice reveals a more complex relationship, one that conforms to neither sharp opposition nor the "syncretism" conventionally used to describe African Moslem societies.

Islamic scholars (marabouts or *ineslemen*) are skilled in diverse healing methods. They insert Koranic verses written on paper into leather or silver amulet cases manufactured by blacksmiths. Another method consists of writing verses onto a wooden tablet with a vegetable-based ink

solution, which is then washed off and given to the patient to drink. Alestakhara refers to marabouts' divination by writing Koranic verses and numbers on paper, placing the paper underneath the head, and sleeping on it. The marabout then dreams and counsels the patient on the basis of the content of his dream. Alkhukum is a week-long period of seclusion with a marabout following a possessed person's exorcism ritual. Another cure consists of the marabout writing certain combinations of Surat (Koranic verse) numbers together in geometric designs in a small book for curing a given illness. Marabouts state that the entire Koran consists of medicine; each verse, numbered and named, contains a remedy for any illness (except some requiring the music and noise of exorcism, to be discussed presently). It is the order and geometric pattern of numbers that is important; some illnesses and misfortunes require one pattern, others a different pattern.

Most residents indicate that knowledge of these healing skills is accessible to almost everyone; being a specialist in the field merely requires practicing Islam "better" than most others, that is, leading an exemplary life. Yet they emphatically state that maraboutism is a science, called *taneslema*, in contrast to other types of knowledge such as non-Islamic divination, herbalism, and spirit possession exorcism, which I examine in subsequent paragraphs. The science of maraboutism consists of knowing and writing the Koran, praying, fasting during Ramadan, almsgiving, and respecting other people. Anyone may learn to practice the science of maraboutism, although there is a subtle terminological distinction indicating occupational specialization rather than clan affiliation. Adamou exemplified this: he was called *al faqir* rather than *aneslem*. Clans claiming descent from the Prophet or from Sufi mystics who brought Islam to the Air from the Maghreb, known as *icherifan*, are usually called "true" *ineslemen* and are considered powerful healers. One spirit possession song verse refers to the need for a "cure by cows' milk from herds of the *icherifan*, kept in gourds." Marabouts' sources of prestige are primarily in Koranic knowledge. Although this is to a large degree lettered knowledge, much of its transfer occurs through oral tradition and ritual processes. Furthermore, in actual content as well as in practice, the written and the Islamic frequently overlap with the oral and the non-Islamic, contrary to local cultural ideals (and anthropological theories) of opposition between these different knowledge systems. The question that arises is how power is channeled in this system.

Some Islamic rituals do not directly cure specific ills, but rather ensure community well-being generally by transmitting God's and the marabout's blessing power or benediction, *al baraka*. One example of this is animal sacrifice, *tawatrai*, which takes place on Friday. After collection

of alms and a donated animal, the marabout slaughters it, reads the Koran, and prays, pronouncing a benediction. Each contributing household receives a portion of the meat. Another important duty in practicing maraboutism is the *tahajira*, a religious retreat to mosques and saints' tombs, where study groups discuss and debate issues in Koranic law and medicine. These often take place in the hot and rainy seasons (April–September), or around the Ramadan fasting month. Important pilgrimage centers are Tabelot and Tchighozerine in northeastern Air.

An important body of knowledge in Islamic ritual is *ezzeke* music, derived from Sufi mysticism. These are songs praising God and the Prophet, including the pronouncement that there is only one God and his Prophet is Mohammed. Men perform *ezzeke* songs in mosques, and sometimes enter a trance state while doing so. But this type of possession is considered very different from the spirit possession cured by public exorcism rituals: the former is more positively valued, said to result from a feeling of inadequacy from seeing the contrast between the Prophet's devotion and that of the worshipper. Nonetheless, *ezzeke* possession may become destructive; friends related several cases to me concerning men who were said to become "crazy" from this practice and had to be forcibly carried home from the mosque. A marabout explained, "One problem is that some worshippers recite *ezzeke* many more times than a marabout prescribes; it is this excessive repetition that causes them to become crazy. For ideally, the name of God is pronounced nine times." There are different kinds of *ezzeke* songs; it is a generic term for songs praising God and the Prophet. The songs are sung in canon (round) style. Some marabouts told me they considered reading the Koran to be also a type of *ezzeke*, "because everything in the Koran is from God." These songs also have certain protective or curative powers; individuals do not do anything (for example, satisfy one's hunger) while reciting these praises, "because the power of God enters the reciter through the mind." Marabouts state that before the first man, Adam, could marry Eve, he had to give bridewealth by pronouncing the *ezzeke*:

God is one
 If all the world dies,
 it is God who will remain
 I cry out in the name of God
 God is one
 There is no other
 God Come praise God
 I cry in the name of one God.

There are other songs praising the Prophet, also believed to confer protection. These are called *almodahan* (or *almohadan*), and are sung by elderly women near the mosque during the Ramadan fasting month. They are learned from other elderly women and marabouts. A text I collected appears below:

I change my words. I say there is no God except Allah.
 Of all that he has created, he prefers Mohammed.
 The father of the Prophet (Rabdullai) when he is in the viscera of the
 father, his light is outside.
 The day that Mohamed descended into the world, blind people saw the
 road, paralytics stood up.
 Even those who are deaf heard.
 Even animals love the Prophet Mohammed. Even birds praise him.
 Even frogs and fish in the water send their greetings to Mohammed.
 Even when a man has wealth, death is near him.
 Death surrounds each time. These days it sends arrows, there they are
 falling among the herds [of livestock].

This type of singing is considered very beautiful and the apprenticeship for it is long and demanding. Young women generally do not participate, saying it is better to wait until they are older to do so. Elderly female singers perform these songs very late at night, or in the pre-dawn hours, before the first morning prayers and the beginning of the daylong fast. They are seated outside of, but close beside, the mosque.

Koranic verses, written or sung, cannot cure some spirits, however. Some spirits require the *tende n goumaten* ritual. This public ceremony features loud music, singing, drum music, joking, and flirting among audience members. Its oral art is conceptualized entirely differently. *Goumaten* songs and their accompanying drum music are conceptually opposed to Islam and the Koran, in local references to them and the secular content of their verses. Many local residents, both men and women, were reluctant to transcribe these texts because they were afraid of songs that addressed spirits. Adamou the marabout warned that, after listening to *goumaten* songs, “it is necessary to wash, remove, and change clothing before entering a mosque.” Most exorcism songs feature secular subjects of love and economics, and contain jokes and social criticism. However, many refer to Islam. A recurring theme is the opposition between the oral tradition of exorcism songs and knowledge of the Koran (*tanestema*), as in the following verses: “[It is] Word of the mouth (*awal*). It is not science of learning (*teghare*), let me not be struck down while reciting it before a marabout.” Drumming is usually performed by smiths or former slaves.

These possession rites are, however, grudgingly tolerated by marabouts, provided they are carried out in neighborhoods far from mosques and at times that do not coincide with Moslem holidays.

Despite their pronouncement of some Koranic-derived Arabic blessings, marabouts consider herbalism and divination rituals “non-Islamic” healing knowledge. Herbalist curing specialists are usually women, called *tinesmegelen*, and reach full professionalism after youth. Their specialty is curing stomach-aches of women and children, who rarely consult male Islamic scholars for these problems. Significantly, in Tuareg culture, the stomach (*tedis*) is symbolically associated with secrets and with the matrilineage. The major technique herbalists use is touching the patient’s stomach after touching the earth, and then pronouncing a blessing. The herbalist consults at the same time, and may perform some divination. Herbalists inherit the skill in certain clans, but they must also undergo a lengthy apprenticeship with their mother or aunt. Many herbalists told me that they do not treat people independently of their mother’s supervision until they are older; this is due to respect and also to belief that “the treatment of old women works better” in this type of curing. Upon my visit to the nomadic camp of one family of herbalists, the daughter of a famous healer refused to treat patients who arrived while her mother was away on travel. She said she was still too young, and practicing only with her mother present. When I received treatment from an herbalist in the caravanning village where I resided, she gave me a massage, and as she did this pronounced the Koranic benediction, “Bismillallah,” and then touched the earth twice; this is believed to make the medicine (massage) work more effectively. On one occasion, I accompanied an herbalist to the home of a mutual friend who was ill. The herbalist waited until the moon had appeared before she assembled medicines (mostly leaves and bark). She filled a small basket with millet, held it up over the barks and leaves mixed with water, and rotated it in a counterclockwise direction three times. This is a recurrent ritual gesture among Tuareg, particularly used at rites of passage and believed to ensure *al baraka*. The herbalist then took the medicines to the sick woman’s home, where she rubbed her stomach with goat fat and had her drink an infusion of millet, goat cheese, and dates. Throughout the treatment, she kept up a steady stream of pleasant conversation. Afterward, she was paid cash (about \$.50) for her treatment and was given dinner and tea.

The Cultural Construction of Knowledge: Curiosity and Creativity

Traditional Education and Apprenticeships

According to Alioto (1987:116), Islamic views of knowledge were characterized by regarding knowledge as essentially that which was passed from master to disciple, almost as a secret rite, in contexts of client-patronage systems, instead of from teacher to class. Among Tuareg, learning a skill is similarly linked to upbringing; local residents told me that in order to sing or cure well, the person must be well raised. This belief has moral connotations. Emphasis is put upon the conduct of parents and elders, which is seen to reflect purity of origins as well as to ensure good marriage of children.¹² So learning is bound up with ideals of noble descent and increasingly, nowadays, with ideals of cultural revitalization and autonomy. Part of ideal conduct is correct behavior toward parents and other respected authority figures such as Islamic scholars and in-laws. Paradoxically, however, much knowledge is ideally imparted without direct questioning by youth. This view is expressed in a tale I collected from a young married noble woman with children. It concerns the fate of a youth who seeks the unusual:

The Man Who Wanted to See the Marvelous

A man said that he wanted to see something marvelous.¹³ He walked, walked, and encountered a stream of flowing oil. A woman spirit said, "Sir, aren't you astonished?" He said to her, "What is so astonishing about a stream of flowing oil that I already know?" He walked, walked. He encountered buttocks that were fighting. She asked him, "Sir, aren't you astonished?" He said, "What is so astonishing about buttocks that fight, which I already know?" He walked, walked, and met eyes fighting. She asked, "Sir, aren't you astonished?" He told her, "What's so astonishing about eyes that I already know?" He walked, walked, and arrived at a home. She [the woman spirit] turned into a woman and told him, "Come here." He came, and she prepared a meal, she had many children. She picked up the stick. He licked it. The meal was finished. She prepared

¹² As they put it, "The marriage of children depends on the conduct of parents."

¹³ Although this tale is a Tuareg tale related in Tamacheq, the woman teller used a term from the Hausa language, *mai maki*, denoting "something (or someone) surprising." Kel Ewey Tuareg have close contacts with Hausa culture, due to historical migrations during the Senoussi Revolt against the French and also to men's continuing caravan trade expeditions to Zinder, Niger, and Kano, Nigeria. Many men and older women speak Hausa as a second language.

another meal. He slept. Then she sharpened her knife. The rooster cried, "Yako!" She cursed it. But the rooster did not sleep. The rooster cried, "Kikikiyako!" She sharpened the knife in order to cut the man's throat. The rooster crowed again. The woman put down the knife. She lay down and herself fell asleep.

The man went out. He packed his baggage, he left. He went along. He walked, walked. The female spirit awakened. There was no one there. The man traveled for a whole day. She got up and followed him. She was very tall, [stretching] from sky to earth. She walked like a sand devil. Like that, like that. Until she saw him throwing down his cat [from his camel baggage]. She swallowed it, she pursued him. He dropped the rooster from the camel. She swallowed it, she followed him. Like that, like that. She saw a camel's paw and she swallowed it. The camel ran, foot on foot, until only one paw was left. Then she ran. She told him, "Even if there is only one paw, I want to try to take you over to that tree over there." Run, run, arrival at the tree. The sole [remaining] paw, also, was pulled out, she ate the camel, until she ate all of it. She looked up into the tree. The man had climbed up into its top. She looked at him. She did not know what to do. She tore off his penis, and changed it into an axe. She cut the tree. When she tried to cut down all the tree, the chameleon said, "Give it to me." She gave it to him. When the chameleon began to cut, he said to the tree, "Return to what you were before." So the tree became as [it was] before. Then the chameleon seized the axe, and cut. She said, "Become what you were before." The tree became as before. So the man called his dog. He called and called. He had two dogs, and his wives. He said to them, "When you see the dogs, try to run, and unleash them." They told him, "All right." They left, they tried to run, one wife said, "We'll unleash them." One said, "We must not unleash them." They argued, until finally they unleashed them. The dogs ran, they arrived, they saw the spirit woman, and they ate her. They tore her all up, they said to the man, "Come down." He said, "I don't want to come down until you pick her up, pick up her bones from there. Then I'll come down." He said, "Oh, I've seen the marvelous." He divorced the wife who had argued against unleashing the dogs. The tree had to be shortened in order for him to descend.

The term here for female spirit, *djinniya*, refers to the type of spirit mentioned in the Koran. Chameleon, *tawoutte*, is considered a very wise and good animal, and among Kel Ewey the term is also slang for a very devout marabout (*taghaghen tawoutte*). Here, seeking the marvelous or astonishing is implicitly understood as knowledge outside the sacred religious tradition, dangerous at least to men. Spirits are conceptualized as inhabiting remote places outside human habitation and attacking those who walk there unprotected by amulets and swords made by Islamic scholars and smiths. Here, the female spirit is portrayed as a kind of Siren temptress who lures, tests, and later attacks the man.

Much knowledge transfer is channeled according to who may and who may not pronounce the forbidden and shameful: names of husbands, fathers, or deceased ancestors (especially on the paternal side). Furthermore, despite the importance of literacy and Islam, much specialized knowledge, including that of the Koran, is often transmitted orally in rural areas. This transmission occurs through storytelling, sacred and secular songs (which, as shown, have hazy boundaries), and healing rituals employing these songs and other verbal and nonverbal expressive media.

Another way knowledge is transmitted is through musical apprenticeship. In the classical repertoire each poetic rhythm, based on the author, event, or person to whom it is dedicated, is a kind of matrix from which poets (predominantly men) are obligated to be inspired to create and pattern poems and songs. These rhythms are memorized with the aid of inherited formulas that permit pursuing the song by recourse to verses extracted from any other poem, provided that their meter corresponds to the rhythm. Noble values of reserve and respect obligate a noble man to sing in relative seclusion, in the company of listeners from the same age group with whom he has relaxed, joking relationships. A man caught in a situation of inferiority, particularly before those persons with whom he practices a reserve or respect relationship (namely, in-laws, elders on the paternal side, marabouts, and chiefs), is vulnerable to mockery in the poetry and songs of others. But traditionally, smiths attached to a noble warrior were the first to repeat his poems and songs, a privilege that they alone possessed. Today it is among smiths that one finds the greatest number of poets and singers. Smiths lack reserve; as observed, they are “like cousins,” and they joke with nobles, even marabouts and chiefs. Thus smiths’ social status permits them to circumvent constraints surrounding creativity. They are the principal purveyors of the repertoire.

Some marabouts have recorded melodies and rhythms in a book written in Tamacheq in the Arabic alphabet, with commentaries on their origins and the history of their creation. In epic poems the personal creativity of the singer intervenes only rarely. It is, however, permissible to mix poems and to insert verses borrowed from other authors, but one must respect meter, rhyme, and scansion, hallmarks of noble warrior sung poetry, and at least cite verses of the original poem (Borel 1987 , 1988).

Vocal and instrumental performance can take place only by executing known melodies, and can never be detached from their melodic context. In poetry generally, each poem has a corresponding melody played on the *anzad*, a one-stringed, bowed lute played by women and sung to by men. The same author usually composes both poem and melody. Borel reports that, among the Iullemmeden Tuareg confederation, different poetry

rhythms are the property of different noble divisions (1987:79). They thus have a kind of copyright, and only the *anzad* players have license to diffuse rhythm and melody, and then only in instrumental form. Today, when asked to name the melody they are playing, they answer according to the name of the rhythm or one of its derivatives.

Borel classifies Tuareg music into three principal categories: vocal music of noble, tributary, and male smiths; instrumental *anzad* music of noble and tributary women; and instrumental *tende* drumming music of smiths and former slave women (1988). Among the Kel Ewey confederation, I collected additional music: drum patterns, songs, and poetry performed specifically during the spirit possession curing rite; and brief, half-sung, half-told lamentations often performed by women. Competence consists of following aesthetic rules of vocal technique transmitted from generation to generation. Thus familiarity with the repertoire and its mode of reproduction are inseparable. Poems are faithfully memorized and reproduced by recitation. For a Tuareg singer, form counts much more than faithfulness to the text; it is by his melodic creativity that he is recognized.

Apprenticeship to the *anzad* takes place with the onset of female adolescence, when the girl first begins to wear the headscarf. She starts with a practice melody called *melloloki* that allows her to perfect the movements of the bow first. Classical *anzad* melodies are first acquired by song, in solitude, and then transferred onto the instrument, but always accompanied by a murmur of the throat, called "song in the soul." One friend described to me how she first observed more experienced players, and how they then placed her hands in the correct position. She told me that in recent years, due to her advancing age, she had abandoned this instrument and now devoted herself to Islamic duties of prayer, thereby opposing secular music to prayer and youth to old age.

Apprenticeship on the *tende* drum, an instrument traditionally identified with slaves and smiths, is of a different order. Here the learning process is not hidden, for the game of *tende* is part of childhood amusements in which all smiths and former slaves participate. The different drum patterns are acquired progressively during evening festivals at which this drum is featured, as well as at exorcism rites, and are easily imitated on rocks and other objects. I observed small children playing at drumming for the possession ritual, enacting the process in detail, complete with possessed patient beneath the blanket, chorus, drummer, and a small toy drum. Therefore drumming is a less formalized musical apprenticeship than that associated with the *anzad*. The drum is assembled on the spur of the moment from a mortar used to crush grain, and can be reconverted into

the mortar; it is identified with domestic servitude, and more often played in public, informal contexts. The *anzad*, constructed especially for playing music and permanently a musical instrument, is used in more structured situations or in formalized musical practice. Women learn possession songs from their mothers; singers at the exorcism rite are usually close in residence and kinship relationships, such as wives of pairs of brothers or close cousins.

The foregoing description of musical practice, based upon both Borel's (1987, 1988) and my own observations, suggests that this is one of the major activities still consciously structured, repeated, and reproduced by individuals; it represents a kind of refuge for identity, regardless of the social stratum to which the player belongs. Furthermore, among Tuareg it is permissible to borrow and mix learned traditions as long as they appear "noble," and the noble origin of composition is given credit. Yet persons entrusted as vehicles for transmission do not appear to be exclusively male or noble; on the contrary, smiths, slaves, and women predominate in the transfer of musical skill and thus enjoy the prerogative to change knowledge conveyed in these texts.

Interaction Between Pre-Colonial and Contemporary Knowledge Systems

Official Colonial and Post-Colonial Central State Policies in Formal Education

French colonial policy toward Tuareg regions (present-day eastern Mali, southern Algeria, and northern Niger) in the early twentieth century initially neglected education, since there appeared to be no wealth in those regions. Later, policies became more directed toward centralization. In education, the French saw their colonies as overseas units of Europe and France. Accordingly, they imposed European categories of study and a Eurocentric viewpoint upon local curricula; for example, many history books in the Republic of Niger spoke of "our ancestors the Gauls" until the mid-1970s.

While it is true that recent educational policies affect local social elites, the local entities and traditional systems have also affected official educational policy. Although the secular educational system became more compartmentalized and separated during colonialism, it has been shown that formal (albeit non-Western) education was longstanding in local culture. Traditional education, of pre-Islamic and Islamic origin, had its own system

and logic, and has interacted with colonialism and the nation state. In this scheme, elite status and its relation to knowledge and power become complex, because forms of knowledge and sources of power do not always coincide. For example, one young man, a friend of mine in the Air region, an agricultural extension agent with a primary school education, was chosen to teach literacy to local villagers. He related to me how, due to his youth, he was prevented from teaching the elders and marabouts in his village. Other primary school teachers are of low social status because they often come from a different ethnic group, having been transferred from a distant region of Niger in an effort to promote nationalism and discourage local-level patronage.

As shown, in many rural communities knowledge specialization and decisions about its transfer are based on internal status distinctions; however, composition of knowledge content or form is sometimes separate from its transmission and the context of this transfer. Agents of composition and agents of performance are not always the same. While knowledge specialties are sometimes seen as property “belonging” to particular social segments, performers who transfer knowledge may in fact alter its content to a significant degree, or reveal what is supposed to be kept secret. This data challenges overly static discontinuities or oppositions and monolithic, consensual conceptions of culture (Horton 1967, 1982; Goody 1977; Comaroff 1985). It also challenges tendencies to portray colonized peoples as passive and reacting solely in relation to outside impetus. There is unquestionable influence upon local systems by the new infrastructure. But the traditional intellectual elite is not necessarily the same as the new secularly educated elite. Former slaves with more secular education are often employed in towns as government functionaries, where they are respected and where they derive status and prestige from achieved rather than ascribed criteria. Such persons are less likely to return to the countryside, still dominated by nobles, in order to contribute to local development projects. There is a relationship between growth of knowledge and emergence of a diversified society with incipient class cleavages, but this relationship is not static, one-directional, or always predictable; it is based on changing bases of power including, but not

limited to, traditional material resources of weapons, livestock, and prestige based on descent.¹⁴

Conclusions

Among Tuareg, the need for mediators and facilitators enables “bedrock truths” and “party lines” to be easily appropriated. As shown, knowledge specialization and decisions about its transfer are officially based on internal status distinctions. On the other hand, knowledge composition and content are often separate from transfer and its context. The principal statuses to which Tuareg explicitly defer in knowledge transfer are based on religion, age, and social stratum—specifically, Islamic practitioners, elders, and nobles—but persons of either sex within these categories, and persons of diverse social origins, may dominate some situations of knowledge transfer. As shown, for example, the mother-daughter tie is as important for traditional apprenticeships as the father-son tie is for official Islamic scholarship; the former is a power channel for esoteric knowledge of exorcism songs, folktales, and herbalism divination, but also for women’s liturgical singing near the mosque. Although local cultural values nominally place the former bodies of knowledge lower on the hierarchy of legitimacy than the latter, in practice they enjoy equal if not greater currency, and are often used syncretically by almost everyone. Written and oral traditions, as well as young women, former slaves, and smiths, often play mediating roles in this scheme rather than lining up neatly on either side of the spectrum. Women consult both Islamic scholars’ written cures and exorcism practitioners’ sung verses; marabouts refer some women to possession cures after diagnosing spirits believed to be incurable by Koranic

¹⁴ Keenan (1977) documents how, by mid-century, servile Tuareg agriculturalists were becoming more aware of gradual transformation of their social order, of emergence of a modern elite in oases and towns. There was resentment toward nobles’ authority and the agricultural tax they imposed. Noble attitudes toward nomadic schools established by the French, and later toward boarding schools established by central-state authorities, were hostile because these innovations symbolized the new social order with its centralized tax system, alien values, and challenge to the client-patron system. In Tuareg society, therefore, secular education was initiated by moves toward sedentarization and breakdown of noble elitist positions. At first, nobles willingly sent only children of slaves to school in order to punish them; nobles’ children were coerced to attend by outside military force. Yet later, many nobles, subjected to pressures of drought, meager returns from caravan trade, and former slaves’ taking over the gardens, finally realized the crucial factor in securing employment in towns was achieved and not ascribed.

verses. Many smiths and former slaves become practicing marabouts, though those who do so usually refrain from drumming at exorcism cures.

Yet all these maneuverings occur within larger efforts to discredit and target “hoaxes,” in order to counter perceived subversion of “original” knowledge content. Composition and transfer of knowledge are separate strands of activity. These conditions enable specialists to alter knowledge content, thereby creating a need for proof of credibility through contrasts: youth is opposed to age; the openness of youth, slaves, and smiths is opposed to the secrecy and reserve of elders and nobles; and the secular (not sacred) and non-Islamic are opposed to science and Islam. In this process, the hierarchy and claims to knowledge take an unusual turn, somewhat different from expectation. Koranic learning interweaves oral and written modes of transmission; much secular knowledge is identified with pre-Islamic, “unscientific,” and stagnant conservatism rather than modernity. The Tuareg material suggests that knowledge classified as “scientific truth” is not uniformly equated with secularism or writing in a clear-cut fashion. Nor does science seem invariably attached to a single social elite, official political authority, or monopolization of material resources—for example, to male gender roles or Islamic scholarship. Knowledge is a commodity, but it is not static. There are brokers within the community who interpret it even as they process and redistribute it.

The Tuareg data inform broader issues in crosscultural humanities, namely problems of transforming local philosophical “folk” concepts into technical/philosophical metalanguages; delineating how the postmodern symbolic economy operates in local media; and discovering which relevant categories facilitate local discourse in religious/scientific thought in a fashion that avoids representing cultures as monolithic. In addressing the problem of transfer of knowledge and power in systems of thought, it is misleading to isolate a single prime mover in a process that is in reality a mosaic. Its configuration emerges from active manipulation of notions of truth/deception, involving challenging, but also protecting, local knowledge as property from within the community, rather than solely from passive reaction to conquest or contact imposed from outside.

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Appendix (Texts)

Mohamed in Ibil (Mohamed of Ibi¹⁵)

Eliss iyan yigan Mohamed in Ibil

There was a man called Mohamed of Ibil

*Ila tamtot net ahan amass in aghiwan nassan, issira tamtot tai toga rigansu izgaran
tigmadou etakass tiswadissan*

He had his wife, they were inside their house, and the woman saw some *cameliers* who were passing by

Achinaticigawe atagou rigansu

She (went out and) looked at them in order to see them clearly

Da yikal tchiquess yifastate tamtot

He (the husband) slapped his wife

Timout, yiflaytate, yicass dou sonat tchibararen in techawen tchiffelen

She died, he cut her open, he removed (from her) two little girls who were twins

Sonat tchibararen tchin techawen de atinitchi ayiknan Igurmadan

The two twin girls it was they who made (founded) all the Igurmaden (people)

Iyat tekna Igurmadan win Berge

One made the Igurmaden of Berge (a nomadic camp near Mount Bagzan)

Iyat tekna Igurmadan win Kef Bagzan

One made the Igurmaden of the (People of) Mount Bagzan

Igurmadan koulou techawen tchinida a tchinyikan

All the Kel Igurmaden are from these two twins who made them

Akujat tikna iyat tizoun

Each one made a part (of them)

Elis wayakodayenajabe or (mai maki) (The Man Who Wanted to See the Marvelous)

Elis iyan ayinan inta yakodaillenajabe

A man said that he wanted to see something marvelous

¹⁵ A region at the gate of the Tenere, a vast desert plain in the Eastern Sahara, to the east of the Tamgak Mountains in Niger.

Yorgaz, yorgaz, yiminaille dechelle in wouji

He walked, walked, he encountered a dried riverbed flowing with oil

Tijinniya (or Teljen) tinass, "Elis, wur tojeba?"

A woman spirit asked him, "Mister, aren't you astonished?"

Yinass, "Ma dejiyouyijilben ed wouji asena?"

He said (to her), "What is so astonishing about a stream of oil I already know?"

Yorgaz, yorgaz, yiminaille ichtizoukin itakannassnat

He walked, walked, he encountered buttocks fighting (each other)

Tinass, "Elis, wur tojeba?"

She said to him, "Mister, aren't you astonished?"

Yinass, "Ma dejiyouyijilben ichtizoukin asena?"

He said, "What astonishes me about buttocks that I (already) know?"

Yorgaz, yorgaz, a jiminaille achtitawin itakannassnat

He walked, walked, until he encountered eyes that fought

Tinass, "Elis, wur tojeba?"

She said to him, "Mister, aren't you astonished?"

Yinass, "Ma dejiyouyijilben achtitawin asena?"

He said, "What astonishes me about eyes that I know?"

Yorgaz, yorgaz, ajingnosa aghiwan iyan

He walked, walked, until he arrived at a house (or camp)

Yosin tamtot iyat

A woman arrived (the female spirit)

Tinass, "Iyaw"

She said, "Come here"

Yekna echik, tela chaghatnet egotnen, agotnen

She prepared a meal, she had many, many children

Toukousdou asiroui

She took a stick

Wa yilighe wa yilighe

He licked it

Echik yekna

The meal was finished

Tekna iyan arwan

She prepared one (another) again

Tiqalle tiskadawe iyan

She returned it (again) to the fire

As tilagha asiroui, elis wounin yigiware yiswadis

When she licked the stick, the man was seated, and he looked at her

Yilla ekijinet

He had his rooster

yilla ibisnet

He had his cat

Arwan tiqalle tisskadawe iyan

Again she returned (the meal) to the fire

As tilagh asiroui yinass, "Siliroui, siliroui"

When she licked the stick, he said, "Let us lick, let us lick"

Arwan ilirouen koufou

Again they licked (the entire stick)
Ajakasawe
 It was finished
Elis wounin yiswadis
 The man looked at her
Tibisin istinaille inka
 The cat when it saw that
tagaze teghajamt
 it dug into the adobe (in order to escape)
Elis wounin ajidare tamigi abatat
 That man had not eaten
Yensa
 He slept
Mara tisawale azikiznet
 Then she sharpened her knife
"Kikikiyako," ekiji yinou
 "Kikikiyako" [onomatopoeia], the rooster cried
Tinass, "Tiqadamanake!"
 She said, "May God burn your soul!" [pronounced a curse]
Ekiji wourninisou wa
 The rooster did not sleep
"Kikikiyako!"
"Kikikiyako, kirchitt-kirchitt!"
 [Repeated refrain; vocables, onomatopoeia]
Tisawale azikiznet ta, kastoutisarwalle de fel atougzoum amagar
 She sharpened her knife in order to cut the throat of (slaughter) the guest (or stranger)
Koum! Tibisin tagaz tibada teghajamt se!
 You! The cat in the process of digging (into) the adobe over there!
Tidtakass kaya, atintikas koulou
 She (the cat) picked up and took away all the baggage, everything
Toubaze dou talem tichigentat
 She (the cat) caught the (female) camel, she sat it down
Tiqal arwan tichafe
 Again she (the female spirit) began
asouwouille tazigiznet
 sharpening her knife
Ekiji yina, "Kikikiyako!"
 The rooster said, "Kikikiyako!"
Tiqalle tisinset
 She returned it (the knife), put it down
Tensa
 She (the female spirit) slept
Elis yigmadin
 The man went out
Yisiwar kayanet
 He lifted his baggage
Yirdafa tibisinet

He attached his cat
enten ekijinet, yigla
 and his rooster, he left
Yorgaz, yorgaz
 He traveled, traveled
Adou tinkarre, da abatan
 She woke up, there was no one
Inta yiga teklin nijil yimdan
 He traveled for only one day
Tinkar dou
 She got up
Tilkam as
 She followed him
Tasaghadijina damadalle
 She was very tall, (extending) from sky to earth
Teklenet inkan tafranfaroutte
 She went along like a sand devil
Wourin wouratte, wourin wouratte
 Like that, like that
Atoutoga yisirtakasdou tibisin
 Until she saw him drop the cat
Tourolaqatatte, tilkamas
 She swallowed it (the cat), she pursued him
Yisirtakasdou ekiji
 He dropped the rooster
Tourolaqatatte, wourin wouratte
 She swallowed it (the rooster), like that, like that
Toga adre in talam chtinin titlagatou
 She saw a paw of the camel and she swallowed it
Talam chtinin tozal sadore adire
 The camel ran foot by foot
a dou yqal adar iyan
 until it arrived at (had only) one (paw) left
Mara tozalle
 Then it (the female camel) ran
Tinass, "Immochara achrin iyan ika, kininechirou da attasse win"
 She (the female spirit) said, "Even if it is only one paw, I am
 going to try to bring you over to the tree over there"
Azal, azala ajinteyade atisse wounin
 Run, run until (it) arrived at the tree
Adarre iyan wounida tighassechtidou, tozga talam chtinin, adoutichta talam chtinin
 The other only paw also was pulled out, she ate the camel, until she ate it (all)
Toufoulawe atiss wounin
 She looked high up into the tree over there
Elis yiwarre afala
 The man was (had climbed) high up in it
Mara tifilawoutou

Then she looked at him
Wourtilla atiga
 He did not know what to do
Teghatas dou, agadgadnet,
 She tore off his penis,
touge tazoufe
 she transformed it into an axe
Tika atisse
 She cut the tree
"Ghitisse ghitisse"
 [Onomatopoeia]
Achahoze ajikatikate tamasse tawoutte, "Akfidou"
 When she tried to cut the entire tree, the chameleon said, "Give me that"
Takfas
 She gave it to him
As dastibaze tighatas
 When the chameleon began, he cut
Tinas, "Similmila similitte"
 It said, "Become what you were before"
Mara tawoutte tibizasse taghatas timalle
 So (then) the chameleon seized the axe and cut, it said
"Similmila similitte, yismillitte"
 "May you (You must) become as you were before"
Atisse, yiqille inkanadtlet
 [Repetition, refrain]
Mara yigharou yibikasnet
 Then the man called his dog
Yagherin, yagherin
 He called, he called
Yilla bikasnet ichin
 He had his two dogs
Yilla chtidodennet
 He had his wives
Yinasnet
 He told them
"Astinaymat ibikass
"When you (two) see the dogs,
wouna itajyaten, tariwaten"
 over there, try to run and unleash them"
Inanatas
 They told him
"To"
"Ok"
As tininaynat itajgatten iyatte tinasfi
 When they left him, they tried to run, one said
"Nariwaten"
 "We are going to unleash them"

Iyatte tinass

One said

“*Ma tounariwaten*”

“Let’s not unleash them”

“*Abe warge adinina asse tininay itajgaten wage yinana atinarou*”

“He just said when we see them, we must unleash them”

Yibikasse younin, adosen ikan tamtot chtinin ichtantat

The dogs ran, they arrived, they saw the woman (spirit) there,
and they ate her

Zekfankaladan tat, inanas

They tore up everything, they told him (the man),

“*Zabadou*”

“Come down”

Yinasen

He told them

“*Wour dejinazabe koul, tikasamtat, ji, tifradaamin yighasanet*

“I do not want to come down, you must pick up (all her bones)

Alaqaille ajiinazabe”

After that, I am going to come down”

Yina, “kiya, nakou ineya ajabe”

He said, “Oh, me, I have seen the marvelous”

Tchadoden tatinat botounora taye yimijaytat

(From among) those women, she who said not to unleash the dogs, he divorced her

Atisse wa iritte, wakgen zigrinzigrin, yisoughilekike, inkan taduboute mananin

That tree, the thing that grew very tall, had to be cut down¹⁶ so he could descend

¹⁶ Shortened; literally, “to the size of my mother’s bed.”

“Signs on a white field”: A Look at Orality *in* Literacy and James Joyce’s *Ulysses*

Sabine Habermatz

Rediscovering Orality: Literate Perspectives

Writing and the written word have been the shaping forces of modern culture and consciousness. But while the *litterati* of our hemisphere predict and bemoan the decline of this culture—as evidenced by reduced reading and writing skills and the ascendancy of new audiovisual media—their clamor testifies to the status of literacy in modern societies.¹ Although most of our daily communication and transactions are carried out orally, writing is accorded the highest authority and provides the norm not only for the evaluation of discourse but for value judgments in general. This attitude towards writing—unquestioned and largely unconscious—has for a long time prevented consideration and appreciation of phenomena of orality (Ong 1982; 1986).

Over the last three decades, however, there has been an increasing awareness of problems associated with orality and literacy, far transcending the mere availability or choice of either medium—the phonic in speech and the graphic in writing. And as this new heuristic approach gained in scope, it also produced an extraordinary interdisciplinary exchange and new alliances in research. For those involved in orality/literacy research, which cuts across all the branches of the humanities, recognition and delineation of this heuristic dichotomy has constituted something like a “paradigm shift” (Schaefer 1997).

¹ The restrictive view that simply equates “culture” and “literacy” is reflected, for example, in Hirsch 1987. In English the term *literate* is ambivalent: it can denote the antonym of either *illiterate* or *oral*. I want to make it quite clear that I am not concerned with the opposition between *literacy* and *illiteracy* here but rather with *orality* and *literacy* as both means and modes of discourse.

At first, only isolated aspects of orality and literacy were treated by scholars from various disciplines, such as cultural anthropology, classical philology, or medieval studies.² It would appear that the analysis of spoken and written language was also the prime domain of linguistics. But while structuralists have concerned themselves mainly with spoken language, other linguists have based their research on written material, more often than not without even making this choice explicit. Since it was assumed that writing simply represents spoken language in visible form—an assumption that also underlies Saussure's postulate of *the primacy of oral language*—the difference between speech and writing has largely remained uninvestigated. Only since the later 1960s have new impulses contributed to the emergence of studies in linguistic variety, including the investigation of variations across speech and writing.

As a consequence, the differences between fictional dialogue and natural speech on the one hand and the variations in the *representation* of speech and writing *in* literature on the other are only slowly being recognized and investigated. In this essay I want to introduce to a wider audience a linguistic approach that has built a convincing model of the use of oral and literate strategies in both speech and writing and is thus applicable also to the analysis of literature. This model has been developed by the two leading theoreticians of an interdisciplinary research project on "The Oral and the Written in Tension and Transition" at the University of Freiburg.³ The original article by Peter Koch and Wulf Oesterreicher, entitled "Sprache der Nähe—Sprache der Distanz: Mündlichkeit und Schriftlichkeit im Spannungsfeld von Sprachtheorie und Sprachgeschichte," was published in German in 1985; no translation has as yet appeared in English.⁴

² Havelock (1986:24-29) identifies four publications from the early 1960s that focused on the fundamental differences between oral and literate cultures and thus paved the way for subsequent research: Claude Lévi-Strauss' *La Pensée sauvage* (1962), Marshall McLuhan's *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (1962), Jack Goody and Ian Watt's "The Consequences of Literacy" (1962-63), and his own *Preface to Plato* (1963).

³ The Sonderforschungsbereich 321, "Übergänge und Spannungsfelder zwischen Mündlichkeit und Schriftlichkeit," was founded in 1985 and numbered over one hundred members, from graduate students to senior professors, who conducted their research in 27 subprojects, financed by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft. I myself have been a member of SFB 321 since 1988.

⁴ This model is discussed in some publications in French and Spanish by the same authors (themselves linguists in Romance Languages), e.g. Koch 1993; further specifications of the model for the investigation of oral features in written texts, both

By applying this model to select passages from James Joyce's *Ulysses*, I intend to illustrate the concepts of *Sprache der Nähe* ("language of immediacy") and *Sprache der Distanz* ("language of distance") and demonstrate the usefulness of the orality/literacy approach for the study of literature. Not only can it serve as a metaphor for interpretation, but it can also be employed in the analysis of several levels of literary discourse, from character language to overall narrative strategies.

The double purpose of this essay demands some restrictions on the material considered. In the middle sections I will therefore focus on two extreme instances of the representation of character language that are contrasted in fictional medium and linguistic mode: Stephen's talk about *Hamlet* in the National Library (spoken/literate mode) and Martha Clifford's letter to Bloom (written/oral mode). In addition, I will discuss some metatextual commentaries on speech and writing in *Ulysses* that testify to Joyce's awareness of oral/literate phenomena.⁵ Finally, the particular status of *orality in literature*, which differs markedly from *naturally occurring orality* both generically and functionally, needs to be addressed.

The Medium and Beyond: Linguistic Conception

In the *Proteus* episode of *Ulysses* Stephen is walking along Sandymount strand and his thoughts merge into a few lines of poetry. He puts them down in writing, since he does not want to forget them. But only a moment later he wonders (3.414-16):⁶

Who watches me here? Who ever anywhere will read these written words?
Signs on a white field. Somewhere to someone in your flutiest voice.

Here, as throughout the whole episode, Stephen questions his own literary ambitions. His fear of failure, however, not only concerns his creativity and his command of language; it also relates to the medium through which he will address his audience: a written text as opposed to an oral performance. Yet the promise of success and the fear of failure do not reside

fictional and non-fictional, are provided by Oesterreicher 1997.

⁵ Just the collection and interpretation of such commentaries in literature would provide ample and interesting material for the evaluation of individual and cultural attitudes towards and consciousness of problems of orality and literacy; see also Goetsch 1987.

⁶ Here and in the following I quote from Joyce 1922 (1984), cited by episode- and line-number.

simply in the difference between paper and voice, but in the communicative conditions they establish.

The situation of a writer is quite different from that of a speaker, and both need to adjust their communicative strategies to suit the medium through which they communicate. Writing, for instance, normally takes place in the absence of the prospective reader, and reading takes place in the absence of the author. It is this mutual absence that also troubles Stephen in *Proteus*: "Who ever anywhere will read these written words?" Only by fictionalizing the audience whom he means to address can an author escape this dilemma.⁷ Furthermore, the distance in time and place that separates conception and reception of the text needs to be compensated. It is essential that information necessary for the understanding of the text but not immediately accessible to the reader be verbalized: contextual information has to be made textual when experience is transformed into "signs on a white field."⁸

Interestingly enough, Stephen envisions a personal setting in which he himself will read out his little poem, albeit with some self-irony: "Somewhere to someone in your flutiest voice." A recital would allow him to control his audience by using a particular intonation, facial expressions, and gestures.⁹ Such paralinguistic signals are essential to an oral performance, but they can be captured only very insufficiently in a written text. This problem is reflected in the *Aeolus* episode when Dan Dawson's speech fails on rereading. Bloom's comment is therefore also a restatement of Stephen's fear: "All very fine to jeer at it now in cold print but it goes down like hot cake that stuff" (7.338-39).¹⁰

⁷ On this particular problem, see Ong (1975), who convincingly argues that this fictionalization is part of all writing, personal or public, factual or fictional. He describes the process thus (60): "If the writer succeeds in writing, it is generally because he can fictionalize in his imagination an audience he has learned to know not from daily life but from earlier writers who were fictionalizing in their imagination audiences they had learned to know in still earlier writers, and so on back to the dawn of written narrative." The situation of writers in the Middle Ages is discussed in Bäuml 1980, 1987.

⁸ On the locus of meaning in oral and literate discourse, see Olson (1977), who coined the pertinent formula that in writing "the meaning is in the text;" the corollary is that in oral discourse "the meaning is in the context."

⁹ On Joyce's own performances of his writings, see Saucedo 1991.

¹⁰ Although Bloom's formulation in the interior monologue is elliptical, it should be clear that the opposition implied is between print (cold) and speech (hot). Stephen also associates script with coldness when he alters "the Polished Public" to "callous public" in

It is of course possible to transpose language from the one medium to the other because human language has the property of “medium-transferability” (Lyons 1981: 11). But it is only in this sense that language is independent of the respective medium in which linguistic signals are realized. The effects of the original and the transposed versions are necessarily quite different, even though they render “the same words.” It is therefore not surprising that a person will tell a certain story differently when delivering it orally versus when he or she is putting it down in writing (cf. Tannen 1980). Yet, while these differences appear obvious enough, the underlying reasons are obscured rather than illuminated by classifying texts as either “oral” or “literate.”

In the first place, these terms are used to denote the *linguistic medium*, forming an exclusive opposition: sound versus writing, phonic versus graphic representation of language. Alternatively, the terms “oral” and “literate” are also often used to denote something like the “mode” or “style” of language. However, “oral style” as opposed to “literate style” is not an absolute quality in itself but a matter of degree, because in any discourse the dominance of oral or literate features may vary. With respect to the mode of language, therefore, the terms “oral” or “literate” do not represent an exclusive opposition, but refer rather to the extreme poles of a large and continuous spectrum. A particular utterance or text may be located anywhere on this spectrum, yet it need not tend towards the pole that corresponds to its medium.

The use of oral-type language is thus not restricted to spoken utterances, nor is literate-type language employed exclusively in written texts: it is possible to find quite formal, quasi-literate language used in free oral discourse, as in a scholarly discussion, while personal notes or letters may be written in a very informal, quasi-oral mode. In view of these mixed patterns it is essential to distinguish sharply between the medium and

the second line of Douglas Hyde's *envoi* to his *The Story of Early Gaelic Literature*: “Bound thee forth, my booklet, quick / To greet the callous public, / Writ, I ween, ‘twas not my wish / In lean unlovely English” (9.96-99; Gifford and Seidman 1988:200). Note that Marshall McLuhan's distinction between “hot” and “cold” media does not correspond to the aural/visual opposition. McLuhan (1964:22) defines a hot medium as one “that extends one single sense in ‘high definition.’ High definition is the state of being well filled with data.” In his analysis of the Aeolus episode from the point of view of classical rhetoric, Erzgräber (1992:192) points out a passage from Aristotle's *Rhetoric* (Book III, 12, 1413^b) that is reflected in Bloom's comment: “Compared with those of others, the speeches of professional writers sound thin in actual contests. Those of the orators, on the other hand, are good to hear spoken, but look amateurish enough when they pass into the hands of a reader” (trans. Roberts 1971).

the mode of communication. In English-language publications, this distinction is sometimes indicated by using the terms “spoken” and “written” with respect to the medium and the terms “oral” and “literate” with respect to the mode of language. But this distinction is neither regularly defined nor universally observed, since the respective terms are basically synonymous. I therefore use the terminology of Peter Koch and Wulf Oesterreicher, where the term “language of immediacy” (“Sprache der Nähe”) refers to the oral mode of language and the term “language of distance” (“Sprache der Distanz”) to the literate mode of language.

This change in terminology is more profound than it may seem at first glance. There is more at stake here than a mere trading of an ambiguous label for a complicated one. “Language of distance” and “language of immediacy” not only denote certain styles of expression but rather the linguistic conception of discourse, reflecting also the underlying *communicative conditions* that induce oral or literate *communicative strategies*.

Since there is no one-to-one relation between medium and linguistic conception, the type of language and the degree of “immediacy” or “distance” of an utterance or text must depend on factors other than the medium itself.¹¹ Koch and Oesterreicher have shown that the concurrence of a number of *communicative conditions* determines the *communicative strategies* in a given communicative situation: dialogue, familiarity of partners, face-to-face interaction, free choice of topics, private setting, spontaneity, involvement, context-embeddedness, expressiveness, and affectivity are constituents for a language of immediacy; monologue, unfamiliarity of partners, time/space distance, fixed topics, public setting, reflection, detachment, contextual dissociation, and objectivity are constituents for a language of distance. Depending on the actual combination of these features, the resulting communicative strategies will show different degrees of information density, compactness, integration, complexity, elaboration, and planning. These characteristics are less marked in a language of immediacy—which tends to be processural and provisional—than they are in language of distance—which tends towards reification and finality.

¹¹ The following is a summary of sections 2 and 3 of Koch and Oesterreicher 1985. The rendition of their terminology in English poses some difficulty. The German word “Nähe” means “closeness” or “proximity,” but these translations capture the concept of “Sprache der Nähe” only insufficiently. In a private communication Wulf Oesterreicher suggested to me the notion “immediacy,” which basically corresponds to the French translation *immédiat communicatif* used by Koch (1993).

Although linguistic conception is not determined by the medium, there is nevertheless a certain *affinity* between the two. In general, written language shows more traces of language of distance than oral language, which tends to be more immediate. And it is obvious that, with respect to the communicative conditions, some—but not all—parameters, such as dialogue vs. monologue and face-to-face interaction vs. time/space distance, are basically predefined by the medium. The influence of the medium on the linguistic conception, however, is a matter of degree, since there is still a number of other parameters independent of the medium.

In the next two sections of this essay I interpret several passages from *Ulysses* and provide additional illustrations of various aspects of this model. In order to emphasize once more that the medium is not a paramount factor in determining the linguistic conception of a given discourse, I have selected two sets of examples that are characterized by an inverse relationship between medium and linguistic conception: Stephen's talk about *Hamlet* at the National Library, where he uses language of distance in an oral setting, and Martha Clifford's correspondence with Bloom, which is carried out in language of immediacy.

Distance in Speech: Stephen's *Hamlet*-Interpretation

At the National Library, Stephen becomes involved in a discussion about Shakespeare with the poet George Russel (A.E.), the essayist Magee (John Eglinton), and the librarians Lyster and Best. Initially, Stephen is one of several participants in a group exchange to which everyone in turn makes a relatively short and rather casual contribution. But soon Stephen is provoked to explain his own theory of *Hamlet*—father, son, and ghost. Immediately, the communicative conditions change. Stephen assumes the role of a lecturer and delivers his argument in a series of longer monologic statements; his formerly equal partners in conversation then become his audience.

The relationship between Stephen and his audience is an important factor in the shaping of the strategies of his discourse. The setting is semi-public: Stephen knows his listeners, but they are not his friends; they are above him in age and status, and they share neither his philosophical convictions nor his views on the function of literature.¹² These men will judge his theory from a critical distance, and, since his ideas are rather

¹² For a detailed analysis of the different characters, their respective attitudes, and their interaction in this episode, see Erzgräber 1987.

abstruse, Stephen's success also depends on a convincing or at least entertaining presentation.

The topic is fixed, and Stephen is in the spotlight. Two lines of interior monologue show that he feels pressured. Although he has to formulate it off the top of his head, he makes a concentrated effort to plan his speech:

Local colour. Work in all you know. Make them accomplices. (9.158)

Composition of place. Ignatius Loyola, make haste to help me! (9.163)¹³

Stephen starts out by depicting an Elizabethan performance of *Hamlet*. This introduction not only supplies the context for his argument, but also aims at involving his audience emotionally. He signals the beginning of his narrative by establishing eye-contact (9.154-57):

It is this hour of a day in mid June, Stephen said, begging with a swift glance their hearing. The flag is up on the playhouse by the bankside. The bear Sackerson growls in the pit near it, Paris garden. Canvasclimbers who sailed with Drake chew their sausages among the groundlings.

Stephen speaks in relatively short but complete sentences; only the "Paris garden" is thrown in as an afterthought. Throughout his presentation, details are not just mentioned but elaborated on with adjectives, appositions, or relative clauses. There is a progressive build-up of information, and as Stephen warms to his topic, his thoughts and his syntax become increasingly complex. Particularly when he is allowed to speak for longer stretches without interruption, he uses hypotactic constructions to integrate different aspects of the argument into his chain of reasoning.

On the other hand, Stephen's language in the extended monologic passages contrasts markedly with that of his interior monologues. In the latter his thoughts are represented as jumping from one association to the next; the sentences are short, mainly paratactic, and often truncated. Even without deeper analysis of the interior monologue it is obvious that Stephen is represented as formulating his thoughts—which are addressed to nobody but himself—in language of immediacy, whereas his theory about *Hamlet* is

¹³ Friedhelm Rathjen pointed out to me that these lines resemble stage directions and thus encourage a reading of Stephen's presentation as a performance or role-play (just as a reading of his own poems "in your flutiest voice" would be). Probably, using language of distance always involves a certain amount of role-playing, of fictionalizing one's own voice and language in a way similar to that suggested by Ong (1975).

delivered in language of distance. In the general discussion the participants also use a language of distance; however, they do so to a lesser degree than Stephen does in his own presentation. Moreover, their language is characterized by idiosyncratic differences.¹⁴

The communicative conditions within which Stephen explains his theory of *Hamlet* are marked by distance, and he is able to adjust his linguistic strategies accordingly. His speech, however, does not tend as far to the extreme end of the conceptual continuum as, for instance, the language of the *Ithaca* episode (nor is his interior monologue as immediate as Molly's stream-of-consciousness in *Penelope*). This "lesser distance" of his performance is related to the immediacy inherent in the oral setting. Since the occasion is only semi-formal and semi-public, his chosen degree of linguistic distance is sufficient and acceptable.

When Stephen is invited to present his ideas about Shakespeare's life and plays, he has to react spontaneously to the demands of his audience. Their presence limits his time for reflection: he has to think while he speaks, but he still has to make his argument explicit and concise. To control his audience's reactions, Stephen repeatedly uses rhetorical questions, which serve a "dialogic" purpose in the scholarly dispute. This seemingly oral device, however, is a consciously chosen stratagem and therefore also a mark of linguistic distance:

Is it possible that that player Shakespeare, a ghost by absence, and in the vesture of buried Denmark, a ghost by death, speaking his own words to his own son's name (had Hamnet Shakespeare lived he would have been prince Hamlet's twin), is it possible, I want to know, or probable that he did not draw or foresee the logical conclusion of those premises: you are the dispossessed son: I am the murdered father: your mother is the guilty queen, Ann Shakespeare, born Hathaway? (9.174-80)

¹⁴ I want to stress again that the terms "language of distance" and "language of immediacy" refer to the extreme poles of a conceptual continuum. This continuum is spatial rather than linear, since the linguistic conception is the result of a combination of many features of both communicative conditions and communicative strategies, some of which may be immediate and some distant. Koch and Oesterreicher (1985:21) define the continuum as "den Raum, in dem Nähe- und Distanzsprachliche Komponenten im Rahmen der einzelnen Parameter sich mischen und damit bestimmte Äußerungsformen konstituieren" ("that space in which the components of immediate and distant language blend within the framework of the individual parameters, thus constituting specific forms of discourse;" my translation). It is hence possible to evaluate different pieces of discourse comparatively and arrive at a *relative* gradation.

Stephen is not acting out a pre-written “lecture,” and when he is interrupted several times, he has to reorganize his approach (e.g., 9.846-49). Still, his Jesuit training enables him to master this challenging situation. And although he cannot convince John Eglinton of his theory (9.1064-66; cf. also 9.369-71), at least the two librarians seem to be quite impressed. Mr. Best’s question—“Are you going to write it?” (9.1068)—suggests that Stephen succeeds in presenting his ideas with a finality that comes close enough to literate standards.

Immediacy in Writing: Martha Clifford’s Letter

Martha Clifford’s letter to Leopold Bloom in *Lotus-Eaters*, on the other hand, resembles an informal oral conversation, although their correspondence at first glance appears to be based on communicative conditions of distance. Martha and Bloom have never met personally, but they came into contact through an advertisement Bloom had placed in the *Irish Times*: “Wanted, smart lady typist to aid gentleman in literary work” (8.326-27). Since then, they have only communicated in writing. Thus, apart from general “knowledge of the world,” they share virtually no information except for what has been conveyed in their previous letters, presumably three by each of them (17.1796-98).

Bloom, for his part, is quite happy with this arrangement. He prefers hiding behind the anonymity of the letters, just as he hides behind the pseudonym “Henry Flower” and behind a stylized handwriting that he has designed especially for this purpose (11.860). With these devices he constructs a feigned identity—“literary work” indeed—to act his part in the correspondence with Martha, while he himself remains at a safe distance, detached, a voyeur of letters and imagined scenes.

Martha, on the other hand, is unwilling to accept the role that he has, by extension, also assigned to her in this game of hide-and-seek. It appears to me, however, that Martha’s repeated insistence on a face-to-face meeting springs not only from her desire to advance the intimacy of their relationship, but also from her uneasiness with the medium of writing. Martha would prefer talking, and four times she demands of Bloom, “tell me” (5.245, 247, 251, 258)—“Then I will tell you all” (5.254). For she is able neither to fictionalize a reader for her letters (cf. Ong 1975) nor to structure her thoughts into a coherent exposition. The conceptual demands of writing are beyond her grasp—she is a typist, trained in copying, but not a skilled writer, unused even to composing private letters.

Martha also types her letters to Bloom (17.1841); however, she does so not in order to conceal her handwriting—as Bloom does, with an effort—but to write with more ease. Since she is trained in this technique, she is able to write faster than by hand. Yet the speed of expression in a medium is directly related to the factor of reflection versus spontaneity in linguistic conception. Since speaking is a much faster process than handwriting, with less time for deliberate planning, oral language tends to be immediate. Typing is a very fast mode of written composition, and while it allows for communicative strategies of distance such as planning and editing, it can also be fast enough to capture oral speed.¹⁵

Martha's letter also seems to have been "talked into her typewriter." There is no structuring of information except for the text's moving from previous letters to a future meeting and further letters. In between, Martha jumps from one thought to the next, juxtaposing rather than integrating her ideas. The language is repetitive and redundant: twice she threatens to "punish you" (5.244, 252) and four times she calls Bloom "naughty" (5.245, 247, 252, 255); the syntax is simple and mainly paratactic.

For reasons we can only speculate about, Martha has not even taken the time to proofread and edit her letter; it thus contains several mistakes. There are at least two typographical errors: "that other world" (5.245) and "if you do not wrote" (5.253). Yet her complaint that her "patience are exhausted" (5.254) is probably not a typo but rather a slip of concordance, owing to the homophony with the plural of *patient*—*patients* in oral speech. Her confession that "I have never felt myself so much drawn to a man as you. I feel so bad about" (5.249-50) falls short of the written standard because of its fragmentary nature, another typical feature of oral

¹⁵ Chafe (1982:36-37) points out that "handwriting characteristically takes place at slower than one-tenth the speed of speaking. Presumably, most of the differences between written and spoken language have resulted from the nature of handwriting rather than typing, but even typing takes place at, say, about one-third the speed of speaking, and that rate is for copying, not for the creation of new language. . . . It is also relevant that reading, the other end of the process, is faster."

Joyce was well aware of this affinity between typing and speech. Frank Budgen reports a conversation with him about other authors, who produced more books than he did: "'Yes,' said Joyce. 'But how do they do it? They talk them into a typewriter'" (Budgen 1972:22). Joyce went on to say that he felt himself quite capable of doing that, but did not consider it worth doing. The implicit criticism is directed not against typing as such, but—in my terminology—against the conceptual immediacy it injects into the process of writing, as lacking in complexity, elaboration, and planning, thus diminishing the status of the work as art.

formulation.¹⁶ The end of her letter shows “language in progress” with two periods in mid-sentence setting off afterthoughts—“oral postscripts”—from the originally conceived content (5.254-57):¹⁷

Goodbye now, naughty darling, I have such a bad headache. today. and
write *by return* to your longing
Martha

These mistakes and shortcomings corroborate the impression that Martha has “only” *trans-scribed* her thoughts as spontaneously as they crossed her mind.¹⁸ Typing thus allowed her to preserve her voice in writing.

Speed is obviously of great importance to Martha, a fact that is also indicated by her insistence on an answer “*by return*” (5.255-56). Through a fast exchange of letters—and local mail was fast in those days—it is possible to simulate a dialogue, although each individual letter is a monologic statement. But even within her letter, Martha enacts a sort of dialogue by alternating between statements, questions, and requests. This strategy is a result of the unfamiliarity of the two correspondents, who as

¹⁶ Possibly this construction also contains an apokoinu: “you I feel so bad about.” This particular form of ellipsis is typical of conceptually oral writing. It can also be found in letters by Joyce’s wife Nora Barnacle, which undoubtedly served as a model for this letter; see, e.g., Nora’s letter from August 1917 (Ellmann 1966:403): “If you telephone me tomorrow Monday ... *now I have got the telephon number is 33 telephone hour is from 8 to 12 if you like to phone me tomorrow I shall wait at the telephone at Eleven if you telephone well and good if not dosent matter*” (italics added).

¹⁷ In a private communication Thomas J. Rice suggested to me that the superfluous periods constitute a scriptural pun, playing on the idea that Martha has her period (“Has her roses probably” 5.285). However, in the Random House edition (Joyce 1922 [1961]:78) this passage reads: “Goodbye now, naughty darling. I have such a bad headache today and write *by return* to your longing / MARTHA.” This “more correct” version weakens but does not invalidate my argument. It reflects rather the editor’s attitudes towards literacy and literariness, yet it does so at the expense of Joyce’s method of characterizing his figures through their mistakes.

¹⁸ In German terminology it is possible to make a distinction between *Verschriftung* and *Verschriftlichung*, discussed in detail by Oesterreicher (1993). This distinction, however, can hardly be captured in translation: *Verschriftung* refers to writing as simply a *medial transcoding*, while *Verschriftlichung* implies a *conceptual transcoding* to suit the communicative conditions in writing. It should be noted, however, that even medial transcoding requires a minimum of conceptual effort. Martha’s letter has to be interpreted as a *Verschriftung* of her thoughts. Likewise, the letters of Joyce’s wife Nora may serve as important nonfictional examples of *Verschriftung*.

yet have nothing else to discuss but their correspondence. And although Martha is eager to obtain more information about Bloom, she is careful enough not to reveal too much about herself, at least not in writing. The amount of factual information conveyed is almost zero. Instead, Martha engages in metacommunication, referring to their last letters, soliciting more letters and perhaps a meeting. Thus her letter mainly serves a phatic function: it is a signal to ensure the continuation of the communication, just as eye-contact, a nod, or an affirmative “mmh” promote ongoingness in oral conversation.¹⁹

Martha's letter exhibits many features that are characteristic of oral conversation as opposed to expository prose writing. Yet we must assume that she uses language of immediacy not by choice but because her communicative competence is limited. First of all, she misinterprets the communicative conditions of the correspondence (although it must be conceded that these conditions are, at the least, ambiguous). Through their previous letters, which are not given in *Ulysses*, Bloom and Martha presumably have established a sort of contract that defines their correspondence as intimate and erotic. They have thus set up a communication of immediacy that nevertheless takes place within communicative conditions of distance. This discrepancy can only be reconciled through play, by feigning communicative immediacy; yet feigning immediacy requires strategies of distance (Goetsch 1985:213; also Oesterreicher 1997).

Such a level of double-play is certainly beyond Martha's grasp, for she seems hardly able to conduct a communication of distance—in either speech or writing. This ability is acquired by training—the higher the level of distance, the greater the amount of training needed. In a literate culture this training is based on the experience with written texts, in practicing both reading and writing them. The technology of writing has to be mastered as a manual craft, and graphic and orthographic rules have to be acquired. But most importantly, a writer needs to learn how to dominate written language as a discourse *sui generis*.²⁰

Apparently, Martha is lacking the routine necessary to master such communicative strategies of distance. It is therefore not surprising that she

¹⁹ On the six functions of language, see Jakobson 1960.

²⁰ Considering how little schooling was available to girls at the turn of the century (cf. Maddox 1988:21f.; Dillon 1982), the writings of Nora Barnacle or her fictional counterparts (such as Martha Clifford) should not simply be interpreted as signs of “female stupidity.”

is even less capable of negotiating the paradox of *immediacy in distance* with which she is confronted by the unique conditions of her correspondence with Bloom. The immediacy displayed by her letter is real and not feigned. Nevertheless, her communication proves successful enough, since Bloom answers her letter—"To keep it up" (11.872).

Fictionalizing Orality: Literate Strategies

In order to introduce and illustrate the concepts of *language of distance* and *language of immediacy*, I have so far treated Stephen's lecture and Martha's letter as if they were real events rather than fictional representations. Of course, the subtlety with which Joyce handles language invites such a procedure. Generations of readers have been impressed by the "authenticity" of his renditions of discourse, capturing even the finest nuances of speech behavior and thus endowing his characters with "linguistic fingerprints." On the other hand, Joyce was sensitive and skilled enough to vary the mode of discourse in accordance with the communicative situation portrayed in a particular scene, as the foregoing analyses show.²¹ Frank Budgen's praise, particularly of Joyce's "oral styles," can hardly be surpassed: "Some conversations ring so true that they might have been caught up from actual life by a sound-recording instrument" (1972:218).

Nevertheless, the difference between the fictional and the natural, the realistic and the real, cannot and must not be ignored, and Budgen's comparison also draws attention to this difference. It is well known that Joyce was a notorious note-taker, even in conversations, but he did not have a tape recorder that would have allowed him to produce absolutely faithful transcriptions.²² Yet it was not until this technology was available that linguists realized the full extent to which spoken utterances differed from written texts and could thus "hear" a difference between authentic and fictional orality. Christian Mair comments on this difference (1992:104):

²¹ Of course, in the experimental episodes the *representation of discourse* (characters' speech) is subjected to the particular stylistic intentions, with the result that the communicative conditions of the *discourse of representation* (narrative) dominate over those of the representation of discourse. Still, even in these situations certain degrees of variation between immediacy and distance are indicated.

²² On Joyce's method of note-taking, see Herring 1972 and 1977.

Anybody who has ever worked through transcripts of authentic conversation knows how tedious such reading is: texts are structurally and organisationally incoherent, highly repetitive and full of minor breakdowns ranging from embarrassed pauses to incomprehensible stretches due to several speakers talking simultaneously. In short: very different from the well planned economical point-counter-point of good fictional or dramatic dialogue in which even apparent redundancy will be interpreted as meaningful.

Again, it must be conceded that Joyce's literary dialogues often exhibit the same features that have been noted for linguistic transcriptions of spontaneous oral utterances. In *Ulysses*, the illusion is indeed so perfect that one easily overlooks the fact that it was created only by a combination (and often also manipulation) of selected features of nonstandard language, such as dialectal markers, unorthographic spellings (to represent phonetic variation), syntactic simplicity, and ellipses. In addition, voluntary suppression or deletion of contextual information as well as textual disorganization may enhance the impression of a spontaneous, processural, and provisional communication of immediacy.

This list of features is by no means exhaustive, nor is Joyce the only author who uses strategies of this type in order to fictionalize orality. They are regularly exploited to a greater or lesser degree in all modern literature to create the impression of immediacy. Yet, as Elinor Ochs points out (1979:78):

It is important to distinguish this use of unplanned discourse features from truly unplanned discourse. Simply displaying certain features is not sufficient for a discourse to be unplanned. The discourse must lack forethought and prior organization on the part of the communicator We can draw an analogy here between this behavior and that of the sober man pretending to be drunk.

In other words, to fictionalize language of immediacy requires compositional strategies of distance. Therefore, in its written form, literary orality can only feign to be spontaneous or processural, because it is—on principle—planned, final, and reified (Goetsch 1985:213, 208); it is what Ochs (1979:77) has called “planned unplanned discourse.”

Orality in literature thus confronts us with a double paradox. In the first place, we are to read something written as *if* it were spoken. But because the opposition between the graphic and the phonic medium is conflated by the projection into two-dimensional script, the conceptual demands of reading and writing dominate the representation of oral

language. Conventionally, graphic signals such as quotation marks or textualized *inquit*-formulas are used to indicate the beginning and end of fictional utterances. In addition, fictional discourse can be “styled” orally by adapting select features of language of immediacy. But such a procedure necessarily demands compositional strategies of distance, and this constitutes the second aspect of the paradox of orality in literature. Still another level of paradox is noted by Max Nanny (1988:217), who points out that “precisely at that moment when literacy became common property in the West and the book age reached its peak, the literary avant-garde returned to orality” (my translation).²³ In other words, only in a fully literate culture, one that had already developed a complete repertoire of linguistic strategies to suit the particular communicative conditions of writing, did writers become aware of these strategies as literate and begin to undercut them.

For a long time, literary language in post-Gutenbergian fiction, including both narrative language and character speech, reflected only the chosen medium and compositional situation of their authors, who were addressing written monologues to unknown readers (still the dominant paradigm for much of contemporary fiction). Yet, since at least the nineteenth century, there has been an increasing tendency towards an “oralization” of literary texts, beginning with the adaptation of oral features in characters’ speech.²⁴ This development was brought to a climax in modern literature, where not only are *representations of discourse* rendered as authentically as possible, but oral strategies are also exploited in the *discourse of representation*, the literary discourse as a whole.

In recasting literary discourse, modern authors actually draw on two very different types of orality that need to be distinguished. Nanny (1988:215) calls these two types “synchronic” and “diachronic” orality, referring to an everyday kind of conversational orality on the one hand and oral poetry of preliterate cultures on the other. The underlying difference

²³ “genau in dem Moment, da Schriftlichkeit im Westen Allgemeingut wurde und das Buchzeitalter seinen Höhepunkt erreichte, die Avantgarde der Literatur sich zur Mündlichkeit zurückwendete.”

²⁴ This tendency is already noticeable in some earlier authors, such as Lawrence Sterne, who plays with the conventions of oral and literate representation in his *Tristram Shandy*. Likewise, Henry Fielding employs dialect in *Tom Jones* to characterize Squire Western as vulgar. Dialect is of course one means of creating the impression of “spokenness” in literary or dramatic dialogue; it has been used at least since Shakespeare, although mainly for comic effects rather than mimetic representation.

between the two, however, is better captured by the concepts of immediacy and distance.

In the case of “synchronic orality” authors pretend they are addressing good friends, people with whom they share not just a general knowledge of the world but a world of experience, voluntarily suppressing contextual information that would normally be essential for a successful communication among strangers. Such an approach to telling a story goes far beyond the mere manipulation of lexicon or syntax in order to create the illusion of “spokenness” in character language or narrator language within the text. This kind of fictional orality simulates a fictional immediacy between author/text and reader, overriding the actual communicative conditions of distance that exist between them.

Secondly, modern authors also return to and imitate patterns of traditional oral art forms, such as the Homeric epics, on which Joyce framed his *Ulysses*. However, the composition of traditional oral poetry did not rest on linguistic strategies of immediacy but on linguistic strategies of distance. Since this language of distance ought not to be confounded with conceptually literate language, Koch and Oesterreicher have suggested the term *elaborate orality* when referring to traditional oral poetry (1985:30). Still, the fictionalization of narrative modes that imitate either form of orality, synchronic or diachronic, always requires conceptually literate strategies, artifice, and planning in order to override both literate and literary conventions.

We can conclude, therefore, that there actually exists a large variety of oral/literate phenomena on different levels of fictional discourse. In addition, the types of those oral/literate phenomena vary in different genres throughout literary history, depending on the degree of literacy of a given culture and its respective attitudes toward language in speech and writing. And, finally, there is a vast difference between fictional orality and natural oral phenomena with respect to both compositional linguistic strategies and textual function. All these diverse phenomena invite our attention, but they also require a carefully differentiated treatment, precisely because of their diversity.²⁵

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²⁵ This article grew out of a paper presented at the “California Joyce” conference at the University of California-Irvine, June 1993. I would like to thank Ursula Schaefer, Ellen Dunleavy, Monika Fludernik, Willi Erzgräber, Franz Bäuml, Wulf Oesterreicher, and Friedhelm Rathjen for reading different versions of the manuscript and making many valuable suggestions.

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E- Texts: The Orality and Literacy Issue Revisited

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Introduction

Research into computer-mediated communication (CMC) has begun to challenge much of the scholarship in the orality and literacy debate. My work in “virtual ethnography” is grounded in the ethnography of communication, and I have inevitably been faced with the need to theorize the nature of this new medium of communication. A virtual ethnography is one that treats the electronic personae and speech communities that develop through CMC exclusively or primarily as the determining factors of an ethnographic context. Consequently, a virtual ethnography is one that is conducted within the “consensual hallucination” of “Cyberspace” (Gibson 1984) rather than one that treats the keyboard, surrounding room, and “real world” environment of the stereotypical Internet communicator as the primary context (Mason 1996). However, in order to construct this ethnography, it is first necessary to describe the computer-mediated communication used on the Internet. This description in turn involves issues concerning the role of technology in communication and leads to debates that first emerged in Plato’s writings.

Simply put, computer-mediated communication is communication between two or more people via computer. The medium of transmission thus becomes the network between the computers that allows messages to be passed from one to the other. Instances of messages passed along this medium form the communicative acts with which I am concerned. My primary methodology is derived from Hymes’ articulation of ethnographies of communication (1962, 1972) and is called here an “ethnography of computer-mediated communication.” Such an approach is the main tool I use in conducting a virtual ethnography and can be seen as parallel to other

variations on Hymes' concept.¹ For the purposes of this paper, then, I wish to examine the scholarship on oral and literate communication in relation to communications theory. My intent is to examine how computer-mediated communication displays both oral and literate characteristics, thus exploding the reductionist arguments sometimes posited in oral/literate dichotomies. Ultimately what is at stake here is an issue in mentalities: does the medium of communication "restructure thought" (e.g., Ong 1992) or do choices in communication lead to epiphenomenal poles on a continuum (e.g., Tannen 1982c)?

Writing as Technology

Writing in *Empire and Communications*, Harold Innis claimed that all "written works, including this one, have dangerous implications to the vitality of an oral tradition and to the health of a civilization, particularly if they thwart the interest of a people in culture and, following Aristotle, the cathartic-effects of culture" (1986:iv). In this respect he is following a train of thought that stretches back some two and one-half thousand years to Plato, who comments in his *Phaedrus* about the dangers of writing. In brief, Plato uses Socrates as a mouthpiece to claim, first, that writing is inhuman in that it pretends to a reality that exists only in the human mind; second, that it is unresponsive, which is to say that one cannot ask a question of a text; third, that writing destroys memory and, by implication, other reasoning faculties; and, finally, that a written text cannot participate in a debate with an audience.² The essential point here is that literacy is

¹ See, for example, Keith Basso's programmatic essay "The Ethnography of Writing" (1986), John Szwed's "Ethnography of Literacy" (1981), or Deborah Tannen's call for ethnographies of silence (Tannen and Saville-Troike 1985). These works are starting to generate case studies such as Gerald Pocius' analysis of gravestone inscriptions (1991), René Galindo's study of an Amish newsletter (1994), and Mike Baynham's investigation of a literacy event (1987). I am not the first to suggest applying Hymes' work to computer networks: Nancy Baym's studies of a computer newsgroup for fans of television soap operas take precisely this approach (e.g., 1993, 1994, 1995a, 1995b). However, it should be noted that there are counter-views such as that of John Dorst, who states that performance in such a space is "not readily susceptible to the conventional methods of performance analysis and ethnography of speaking" (1990:183).

² This argument has become fundamental to literature on the relationship between orality and literacy. For discussion of Plato's views on orality and literacy, see Havelock 1963. The best available summary, and the one on which I draw here, can be found in Ong 1992:297-98.

seen as a technology that allows new forms of communication. For Innis, literacy encouraged “monopolies of knowledge” that allowed for the development of militaristic empires and also functioned in opposition to oral tradition (1986:5). Regardless of whether one agrees with his thesis, it highlights the power of communicative media and the possibilities for social and cultural changes inherent in any new media technology.³

This argument is extended by McLuhan to encompass the rise of printing (1963). The invention of the Gutenberg printing press allowed for a new speed and convenience in the copying and dissemination of written texts. In many ways McLuhan follows Innis, his mentor, in devaluing this form and looking to new forms of oral communication, such as the telephone, radio, and so on, as offering a potential reinvigoration of the oral tradition and thus reintroducing a more egalitarian, human world (McLuhan 1964). Walter Ong also foregrounds the importance of new communications media and sets up a taxonomy of primary and secondary orality (1982). Common throughout these inquiries is the viewing of writing and print as technologies of communication. Consequently, many of Plato’s arguments about the dangers of writing were rehashed with the advent of print (McLuhan 1963) and are now being reused to argue against new technologies such as the computer (Ong 1982:79-81; 1992:297). In this respect we can see that the emergence of computer networks as a communications medium functions to defamiliarize the written text. If, as Ong claims, writing has become so internalized that it no longer appears to be an external technology (1992:294), then the advent of these new media casts new light on the act of writing. Thus, it can be claimed that the investigation of orality and literacy threatens to deconstruct the text, a point Ong makes when he claims that “texts and anything considered by analogy

³ Consider, for example, the following comment by Jack Goody: “This attempt leads me to shift part of the emphasis put on the means and modes of production in explaining human history to the means and modes of communication” (1977:xi). Although scholars such as Raymond Williams (1968) have attempted to unify Marxist economic determinism with communications theory, most folklorists seem to be unaware of, or unconcerned about, the size of the issue at stake here. Ironically, although strictly deterministic models are somewhat passé in Marxist scholarship, pundits tend to quote McLuhan’s deterministic “the medium is the message” (1964) somewhat glibly. Heath makes the point that “existing scholarship makes it easy to interpret a picture which depicts societies existing along a continuum of development from an oral tradition to a literate one” (1982:92), which is, in a sense, a rebirth of cultural evolutionism. Some folklorists, such as David Buchan with his description of a “verbal” culture that has recently acquired literacy (1972), attempt close investigations, but these efforts appear to be the exception rather than the rule.

as a text, can never be found to have total internal consistency. But this is not surprising if one notes that texts are not purely 'natural' products, such as exhaled breath or sweat or spittle, but are technologically constructed systems. . . . As systems they cannot be self-contained. They are built by something outside them."⁴ Similarly, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett claims that "electronic communication broadly conceived marks the line between modern and postmodern communication" (1996:21).

For many, the advent of new communications technologies that re-emphasize orality are seen as re-democratizing communication. It is argued that if writing led to monopolies of communication, then the anarchic, egalitarian sprawl that is the Internet will lead to new forms of information equity and vastly extend participatory democracy. "[C]omputer-mediated communication . . . will do by way of electronic pathways what cement roads were unable to do, namely connect us rather than atomize us, put us at the controls of a 'vehicle' and yet not detach us from the rest of the world" (Jones 1995: 11). Furthermore, "with the development of the Internet, and with the increasing pervasiveness of communication between networked computers, we are in the middle of the most transforming technological event since the capture of fire" (Barlow et al. 1995:36).

Naturally there are counter-views such as those of Clifford Stoll (1995), who claims that computer-mediated communication is impersonal, disembodied, and lacking the warmth of face-to-face interaction, a point also made by writer Sven Bickerts: "In living my own life, what seems most important to me is focus, a lack of distraction—an environment that engenders a sustained and growing awareness of place, and face-to-face interaction with other people. . . . I see this whole breaking wave, this incursion of technology, as being in so many ways designed to pull me from that center of focus" (Barlow et al. 1995:37-38).

All of these arguments have in common a certain Manichean prophesying. When asking the questions "Can people find community online in the Internet?" and "Can relationships between people who never see, smell, or hear each other be supportive and intimate?" Milen Gulia and Barry Wellman note that "there have been few detailed ethnographic studies

⁴ 1995:9. Ong is discussing how postmodern deconstructionists are surprised by parallels to their work in orality and literacy studies. He is drawing on Gödel's famous theorem that no system can ever be self-contained. In as much as writing is a communication system, there are inevitably certain possibilities that are just not communicable in writing. Of course, the same is true for vocalizations. As Ong says, "articulated truth has no permanence. Full truth is deeper than articulation. We find it hard to recognize this obvious truth, so deeply has the fixity of the written word taken possession of our consciousness" (1992:295).

of virtual communities” (1998:170). This kind of study is precisely the focus of my research, and some general observations can be made here.

First, it is not necessarily the case that computer-mediated communication will be any more democratic than print. For example, Andrew Gillespie and Kevin Robins claim that “contrary to popular predictions of their decentralizing impact, digital communications contribute to new and more complex forms of corporate integration, reinforcing center-periphery problems on a global scale” (1989:7). To justify this statement, they draw on the work of Harold Innis and claim that computer-mediated communication is “inherently spatial” (9), a characteristic that therefore leads to a domination of regional areas by a core that controls the communication network. This assertion tends to be validated by research showing that women, ethnic minorities, and lower-income groups are vastly underrepresented on the Internet (Mele 1998). Yet it is undoubtedly the case that computer-mediated communication can lead to localized action and resistance, as Christopher Mele has shown in his description of the way in which a female African-American residence group used computer-mediated communication networks to resist the local government’s attempt to tear down their houses and relocate them (1998). In another context, Leslie Regan Shade has described how community-based computer networks could be used to promote a distinctively Canadian identity as long as inequalities in access are overcome (1994). Certainly computer-mediated communication has a bias—as does any medium—and the frontier mentality that seems to pervade the Internet appears to lend credence to the spatial orientation of computer network communication.⁵

Orality versus Literacy

Inevitably, scholars have attempted to determine the differences between oral and literate cultures, especially through the study of language. This search has taken place at the macro level with Walter Ong and Jack Goody, and at the micro level with Deborah Tannen as well as Ron and Suzanne Scollon. To anticipate, the microanalyses have been used to test various hypotheses formed by macroanalysis and, generally, these

⁵ As an example of this mentality, Howard Rheingold’s proselytizing book (1993) is subtitled *Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier*. Similarly, Clifford Stoll’s anti-Internet book, *Silicon Snake Oil* (1995), also draws on deliberately negative images from the American frontier. Both Stoll and Rheingold are long-time Internet users.

hypotheses have been found wanting. The primary hypothesis has been that written text is context-free whereas spoken utterances are context-dependent. Tannen summarizes the argument thus: "In oral tradition, it is not assumed that the expressions contain meaning in themselves, in a way that can be analyzed out. Rather words are a convenient tool to signal already shared social meaning" (1980:327). She points out that in an oral tradition the phrases "I could care less" and "I couldn't care less" are functionally identical and quotes Olson's dictum that in written texts "the meaning is in the text" whereas with spoken utterances the "meaning is in the context" (*idem*).

In addition, drawing on the work of Milman Parry (e.g., 1971) and Albert Lord (e.g., 1960), who determined the importance of formulae in oral composition, scholars such as Ong, Goody, and Havelock contended that the formula represented a different metalinguistic awareness that was peculiarly oral (cf. Tannen 1980:327). In fact, Ong appears to hold formulaic expressions as central in oral cultures: "Heavy patterning and communal fixed formulas in oral cultures serve some of the purposes of writing in chirographic cultures, but in doing so they of course determine the kind of thinking that can be done, the way experience is intellectually organized" (1982:36). For Ong, the formula serves as a repository of wisdom that can be articulated in the appropriate context.

The situation appears, however, to be more complex than the simple oral versus literate culture dichotomy. For example, in his analysis of Yoruba ritual language, F. Niyi Akinnaso discovered that "the distinction between ordinary social communication and ritual language in nonliterate societies is as important as that between oral and written language in any discussion of language evolution, especially in accounting for lexical and syntactico-semantic complexities" (1982:27). Thus, he claims that particular registers of language evolve according to "situationally specialized topics or communicative activities" (25). Ron and Suzanne Scollon problematize the oral/literate dichotomy in a similar manner in their fieldwork with Athabaskans at Fort Chipewyan (1979). They contend that it is the degree of interaction between the participants that determines how much use is made of immediate context; therefore, one can think of the participants employing various communicative strategies that are situationally defined, some of which may appear "literate" and others "oral."

The preceding conclusion is precisely that taken by the sociolinguist Deborah Tannen. She has specialized in close linguistic analyses of spoken and written texts in an attempt to tease out the features of orality and literacy. Her opinion is that "many features that have been associated

exclusively with literacy are rhetorical strategies found in spoken discourse” (1982a:37). Furthermore, the emphasis placed on different strategies varies by culture. For example, she describes an experiment in which she asked a number of Americans and a number of Greeks to describe a series of pictures. Tannen discovered that the “Greeks told ‘better stories’,” whereas the Americans tended to include as many details as possible (1982c:4). Her interpretation is that the Americans treated the exercise as one of rote memorization, minimizing interpersonal involvement, whereas the Greeks treated it as an exercise in recreating a story. Essentially, the American subjects treated the pictures as a decontextualized text and used many “literate” strategies in description, whereas the Greeks attempted to do precisely the opposite and contextualize the pictures.

Drawing on other examples, Tannen notes that most studies of “oral” language usage have been among American Blacks and linked with poor results on literacy tests (1982c:13).⁶ Also, where comparative studies of oral texts and spoken utterances have been conducted, the material chosen has often biased the results. In fact, in the research she has done she notes that “the speakers whose strategies are somehow more ‘oral’ are nonetheless highly literate people” (*idem*). Consequently, she proposes that we should replace the oral-literate divide with a continuum and states that “both oral and literate strategies can be seen in spoken discourse. Understanding this, let us not think of orality and literacy as an absolute split, and let us not fall into the trap of thinking of literacy, or written discourse, as decontextualized. Finally, the examples presented of conversational style make it clear that it is possible to be both highly oral and highly literate. Thus, let us not be lured into calling some folks oral and others literate” (1982a:47-48). Using this concept as a tool, Tannen is able to show how individual speakers can vary their communicative strategies for different effects and thereby show that “the difference between features of language which distinguish discourse types reflects not only—and not mainly—spoken vs. written mode, but rather genre and related register, growing out of communicative goals and content” (1982b:18). Such findings mirror Hymes’ description of the relationships between speakers,

⁶ In fact, most work in this field has drawn on Basil Bernstein’s notions of restricted and elaborated codes (1977). In essence, Bernstein noted that certain ethnic and class-based groups spoke in a “restricted” code that made abstract thought impossible, thus hindering these groups in social development. This observation inspired many to believe that teaching black children from inner-city ghettos “proper” English would facilitate their rise out of the ghetto. Although Bernstein’s work has been soundly disproven many times (e.g., Postman 1973), it possesses remarkable powers of recuperation.

listeners, goals, and contexts (e.g., 1972) and implicitly challenge the deterministic relationship between communication and medium first proposed by McLuhan (1964) and then elaborated by Ong and others.

Consequently, it seems useful to apply ethnographic methodology to the study of communicative events and to treat variations in language use and choice of medium as rule-governed activities. Although Hymes' original intent was to study the ethnography of speech, he quickly opened his ideas up to the whole of the communicative act and its various possibilities (1972). Thus an ethnography of speaking can be seen as a communicative ethnography that focuses on speech, and one can then elaborate upon this concept to include ethnographies of writing, literacy, silence, and, in this present case, computer-mediated communication.⁷ For the purposes of this essay I do not wish to venture much into the close linguistic analysis that an ethnography of CMC can provide; rather I am using it as an enabling step in order to ground my discussion of orality and literacy in respect to CMC.

There are other bodies of scholarship that critique orality and literacy dichotomies, such as the work done in the field of ethnopoetics by scholars such as Dennis Tedlock (1983) and Hymes (1981), who have investigated Native American narratives and discovered poetic structures within oral forms that appear remarkably literate. Also notable are John Miles Foley's attempts to unify Hymes' theories of the ethnography of communication with oral-formulaic theory (e.g., 1995). For example, Foley asserts that "the old model of Great Divide between orality and literacy has given way in most quarters. . . . One of the preconditions for this shift from a model of contrasts to one of spectra has been the exposure of writing and literacy as complex technologies" (79). His intent is to apply a version of Wolfgang Iser's phenomenological model of the reading process to both oral performances and written texts to create a unified field.

Computer-Mediated Communication

For the remainder of this paper I will investigate various communicative features of computer-mediated communication in order to demonstrate the ways in which this medium further problematizes simplistic oral and literate dichotomies. First, it needs to be stated that there are many types of computer-mediated communication available via the Internet. For example, hypertextual "web-browsers" such as *Netscape* and *Mosaic* allow

⁷ See note 1 above.

users to maintain public-access “home pages” containing full-color images, sounds, videos, and so on in a complex multimedia format. On the other hand, basic e-mail can transmit nothing but the characters found on a common typewriter keyboard. Thus it would be a mistake to treat all computer-mediated communication as homogeneous. For the purposes of this paper I plan to focus on “newsgroups” and e-mail mailing lists, which are versions of computer-mediated communication that allow nothing more complicated than basic e-mail. This is not to privilege or make any *a priori* assumptions about this form of computer-mediated communication, but is purely a contrivance to allow a more detailed examination of one particular form.

Perhaps the most important work concerning computer-mediated communication in the last fifteen years is a report by Kiesler, Siegal, and McGuire on the communicative features of the medium (1984). They concluded, essentially, that computer-mediated communication is deficient in paralinguistic features, and they presented five areas in which this was the case (1125-26). Such a shortfall was held to encourage certain forms of behavior. For example, they claimed that e-mail lacked social cues leading to more egalitarian communicative behavior, and that the computer screen lacked the ability to communicate emotion, leading to a perception that e-mail is more impersonal than other forms of communication. This slim report has engendered a huge field of research that has focused primarily on social-psychological analyses of behavior in computer-mediated communication within organizations. Although I believe that many of their findings are questionable and that they focus far too much on what computer-mediated communication supposedly lacks, they certainly articulated a commonly held metacommunicative belief about the medium, namely that it lacks “warmth” and is also conducive to misunderstandings, a belief well articulated by one of sociolinguist Denise Murray’s informants: “All the personality and humanity that show up in letters disappear on computer screens. . . . [A]ll the warmth and wisdom are translated into those frigid, uniform, green characters” (1985:203).

To combat this perception, Internet users have evolved a form of communication known as “netiquette.” Proper netiquette includes prescriptions such as ensuring that your message sticks to the topic of conversation, avoiding antagonism and the “flaming” of other users, and remaining aware that misunderstandings are easy and that humorous, sarcastic, or ironic content should therefore be flagged with “emoticons” such as “smileys” :-) or “bixies” <-_->. Some of these strategies are

illustrated in the following quote from Chuq Von Rospach of the Rand Corporation, which first started to codify netiquette (1990):⁸

A Primer on How to Work With the USENET Community
Chuq Von Rospach

Be Careful with Humor and Sarcasm

Without the voice inflections and body language of personal communications, it is easy for a remark meant to be funny to be misinterpreted. Subtle humor tends to get lost, so take steps to make sure that people realize you are trying to be funny. The net has developed a symbol called the smiley face. It looks like ":-)" and points out sections of articles with humorous intent. No matter how broad the humor or satire, it is safer to remind people that you are being funny.

Summary of Things to Remember

Never forget that the person on the other side is human
Be Careful What You Say About Others
Be brief
Your postings reflect upon you; be proud of them
Use descriptive titles
Think about your audience
Be careful with humor and sarcasm
Please rotate material with questionable content
Mark or rotate answers or spoilers
Spelling flames considered harmful

It is also noteworthy that users are able to identify and comment upon paralinguistic features in e-mail. For example, the use of capitalization is generally held to indicate shouting. In the following reply to a message on the Middlesbrough supporters' list,⁹ one of the readers comments on another's use of capitalization by shouting back:

⁸ I have attempted to render all e-mail examples as faithfully as possible by preserving the original spelling and formatting (as received by my computer, which has a basic 80-character-wide screen) and using a fixed-spaced font similar to ASCII. These measures are, however, essentially artful contrivances. Also, all possible identifying features have been removed from the e-mail.

⁹ My research has focused on two e-mail lists. The Middlesbrough supporters' list is a forum for supporters of an English soccer team named Middlesbrough (often simply known as The Boro). The other e-mail list is a forum for discussion of a fantasy world by the name of "Glorantha." Many of the quotes used herein will be taken from the Boro list.

```

From ***@university-college.oxford.ac.uk Thu, 23 Mar 1995 12:09:15

Subject: Re: ei ei eio (fwd)

> > > > I WAS AT THAT FA CUP MATCH AT HILLSBROUGH AS WELL AND I WAS ON TELLY 6 TIMES
> > IN
> > > THE HIGHLIGHTS THAT NIGHT. ONE WAS A SUPERB SLOW MOTION CELEBRATION AS WILKO
> > > SCORED THE WINNER RIGHT IN FRONT OF ME. I DISAGREE WITH THAT ZDS OPINION
> > > THOUGH.....THE ATMOSPHERE WAS ACE..CHELSEA FANS WERE WANKERS THOUGH.
> > >
> YEAH MATE I WAS AT THAT ONE AS WELL..CLASS PERFORMANCE, ESPECIALLY THE GOALS
> FROM WILLIE AND JOHNNIE!...WHEN THAT 95TH MINUTER WENT IN I THOUGHT SHIT CANT
> BELIEVE IT BUT TO SEE THE REF RULE IT OUT FOR NO REASON WAS GREAT. SUCH A GOOD
> DAY I DIDNT REALLY CARE THAT SHEFF UTD HAD WON TO SEND US DOWN.
>

HOW COME YOU ALWAYS WRITE IN CAPITALS? - IT'S LIKE YOU'RE ALWAYS SHOUTING

```

An alternative way to approach the communicative features of computer-mediated communication is to examine what it contains rather than what it lacks. Seana Kozar (1995) has demonstrated how Chinese Internet users have taken advantage of the ability to mix keyboard art (i.e. pictures made from combinations of letters) with text in producing Christmas cards; Sandra Katzman (1994) has suggested that “smileys” form an instance of “quirky rebuses,” thus highlighting the playful aspect of this communicative form; and Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1996) has shown how users can play with e-mail programs to produce recursive messages. Indeed, this concept of playfulness seems to have become central with current researchers. Thus Danet et al. claim (44) that “four interrelated, basic features of computers and computer-mediated communications foster playfulness: ephemerality, speed, interactivity, and freedom from the tyranny of materials.” Whereas earlier researchers were “concerned primarily with the instrumental, rather than affective or socio-emotional aspects of communication” (44), current work is focusing on the possibilities for play and performance via the Internet. As Kirshenblatt-Gimblett puts it (1996:60), “sites of conviviality, fantasy, and play are revelatory of the nature of electronic communication more generally and they are being studied increasingly in social, psychological, and cultural terms—in the medium itself.” It may well be the case that the standard explanation of communicative features in CMC as arising from a need to combat the lack of information is an insufficient conception and that a creative playfulness with language is just as important.

Danet and her colleagues also note that “linguistic features previously associated with oral communication are strikingly in evidence in this new

form of writing” (1998:47). For example, Denise Murray, who has studied the use of e-mail among office workers, noted that e-mail was generally informal, not structured into sentences, and often very context-dependent, thereby displaying features usually associated with written language (1991). Simeon Yates, in his linguistic analysis of a corpus of texts from a computer conferencing system (1994), noted that they contained an unpredictable mixture of “literate” and “oral” features. Taking such observations in stock, Danet et al. address the issue by focusing on the poetic function of computer-mediated communication (1998:47). Their comments are useful and point to a method by which it is possible to collapse the boundaries between oral utterances and written texts in general.

Applying Ong’s Oral Psychodynamics to CMC

In *Orality and Literacy* (1982), Walter Ong gives a list of the psychodynamic features of orality and indicates how they differ from literate forms. Space prevents a consideration of all of the features he proposes, so here I shall investigate just a few of them in reference to forms of computer-mediated communication.

“Oral utterances are additive” (37). By this statement Ong claims that oral utterances tend to use the conjunction “and” rather than subordinating conjunctions to produce additive lists. Complementarily, we may observe that the nature of most e-mail is such that it proves very easy to add texts together with “cut and paste” functions. The work of Simeon Yates has tended to show, in addition, that simple conjunctions are more prevalent in e-mail than in writing, but possibly less so than in speech (1994). The following example demonstrates various “oral” compositional features, such as the use of simple conjunctions, dialect, and context-dependency, as well as various paralinguistic features, such as the liberal use of capitalization for shouting, repeated exclamation marks, and chanting:

From pb27@leicester.ac.uk Thu, 4 May 1995 12:42:24

Subject: !!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

I'm not gonna even try to represent how I feel now in text cos it is not possible.

FANTASTIC...I'm still stunned. (and hungover)

Nightmare last night. Listened to the first half on the radio and then went to the pub. Watched it on text until 89 minutes when the group I was with decided we were moving on. Was a bag of nerves until midnight when I was put out of my misery by a group of pissed Boro.

To all those people that I have banned from singing Going Up throughout the season.....Sing yer hearts out for the lads!

Middlesbrough F.C. Division 1 Champions 1994/95. We love you.

Happiness.....YYYYYYYYEEEEEEEESSSSSS!!!!!!!!!! EIOEIOEIOEIO!!!

Now tranmere.

Steveget back to me ..we'll meet at Notts Station and take it from there. Will meet as many of you others at the ground at about 1/1.30...OK. All you boys going in the Tranmy end..try to meet us as well.

I wish this bloody hangover would go away. Right now it feels like Chris Eubank and Nigel Benn are staging their latest rematch in my head.

Championi Championi AWAY AWAY AWAY!

It's beautiful to be Boro.

“Oral utterances are aggregative” (38). If an oral culture must memorize its knowledge, then it makes sense to cluster various concepts together, leading to time-honored clichés such as “the sturdy oak” and “brave soldier.” A literate culture, Ong argues, is able to deconstruct these aggregations analytically. Certainly, such formulaic language appears to be lacking in e-mail but, as of yet, I am unaware of research on this topic. The example below, however, shows a poster on the newsgroup

“rec.sport.cricket” using as many clichés as possible to describe a good performance by an English batsman:¹⁰

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From: dauphin@aztec.co.za (Bob Dubery)
Newsgroups: rec.sport.cricket
Subject: Re: Atherton what a player
Date: 4 Dec 1995 18:34:47 GMT

In article <49v3c5sqh@oban.cc.ic.ac.uk>, Mr Shahryer Hussain <sh03@ic.ac.uk> says:
>
>I think whatever the results of the currentt est match, Mike Atherton has
>demonstrated clearly why he is the best opening bat in the world today. 173
>not out so far says it all. Batting out 5 sessions to save a test match. Beats
>the performances of the current Aussie opening batsmen, and they are the only
>ones who could come close, at the moment, in comparison to Athers.
>

Absolutely!

He (Atheron) is a Ulysses, a Churchill.

His innings was the stuff of Kipling or Homer.

He "kept his head whilst all around him others were losing their's".

He rode into the valley of death and came out the other side...

I could go on (and I'm an SA supporter!).

```

“Agonistically toned” (43). As has been noted previously, CMC has been characterized as lacking paralinguistic information, thus making it easier for misunderstandings to lead to angry exchanges. According to Ong, verbal dueling is an important part of an oral culture, and it certainly appears to be an important part of communication on the Internet, so much so that the emic term “flaming” has been coined to describe angry exchanges of e-mail. Perhaps, then, this prevalence of flaming is more a part of the way of life that has developed on the Internet than a result of the medium’s limitations. For example, one popular activity among online soccer fans is to post insulting messages anonymously to a mailing list belonging to opposing fans: a kind of verbal assault. I have seen this practice occur several times when supporters of rival soccer teams have found the address for the Middlesbrough supporters’ mailing list and posted various attacks. In the following example a Newcastle United supporter

¹⁰ In this example, unlike the others, I have preserved the original posting information so that the source can be checked; it was posted onto a news group rather than a private mailing list.

“breaks into” the Middlesbrough list, abuses it, and then unsubscribes immediately so that s/he could not be e-mailed back. However, as can be seen, the mailing list is not without its own resources. First the administrator instructs people not to respond and then, after contacting the abuser’s e-mail server, manages to force an apology:

From ***@tees.ac.uk Wed, 08 Nov 95 19:17:17

Subject: SAD BUGGERS!

I have now unscribbed from this list, as you are all a pack of sad men, who go around bugging each other. I support the toon army, who will win the treble this year, and Middlesbrough will win sod all!

Middlesbrough Are Shite!

Middlesbrough Are Shite!

Middlesbrough Are Shite!

From ***@hk.super.net Thu, 9 Nov 1995 09:34:42

Subject: Re: SAD BUGGERS!

>I have now unscribbed from this list, as you are all a pack of sad men,

>Chris

Ignore this individual..... I've Emailed his Postmaster....

From ***@tees.ac.uk Thu, 16 Nov 1995 12:26:46

Subject: Apology - sad buggers

Dear Members Of The Boro Mailing List

I wish to apologise for the offensive and inflammatory message that I posted to the boro mailing list, under someone elses e-mail address (xxx).

There was no excuse for this, and I now totally regret what I have done.

Your Sincerely,

These are just three examples of how certain issues in orality and literacy are problematized by CMC. Just as relevant for this medium is Ong's concept of the evanescence of speech. Speech is carried by sound and, as Ong states (1982:32): "Sound exists only when it is going out of existence. It is not simply perishable but essentially evanescent and it is sensed as evanescent. When I pronounce the word 'permanence,' by the time I get to the '-ence,' the 'perma-' is gone, and has to be gone." CMC in contexts such as mailing lists and USENET is also evanescent and, I believe, sensed as evanescent by users. With newsgroups, most messages are only maintained for a week and then deleted. Although most programs allow the user to edit and check the spelling of a message before posting, a great many messages are clearly neither edited nor spellchecked, as the examples above illustrate. On the other hand, "home pages" on the Wodd Wide Web are as permanent as any written record, and many discussion groups are archived so that their conversations can, in theory, be reviewed. Unfortunately, the sheer weight of available information lends the Internet a peculiar ahistoricity, as anyone can attest who has seen the same arguments rehashed at regular intervals on newsgroups in which the participants either do not know or do not care that the current debate may have only happened a few weeks or months ago. It would seem that the Internet forgets as easily as any oral culture, a situation that leads to the emergence of self-appointed "net.cops" and "gurus" who make it their job to police their mailing lists and point out such repetition as well as to maintain FAQs.¹¹ The dynamics of memory and forgetting on the Internet seems parallel to that hypothesized for oral cultures by Goody and others.¹²

Synthesis

This article has briefly reviewed certain issues arising from an inquiry into the relationship between orality and literacy. I have argued that reductionist dichotomies do not withstand scrutiny and have used some brief examples from computer-mediated communication to further illustrate this point in reference to the work of Deborah Tannen and others. It is more appropriate to assert that users possess varying degrees of

¹¹ An FAQ is a "Frequently Asked Questions" document that provides simple answers to the most commonly posed questions pertaining to its subject. Most newsgroups and e-mail lists have their own FAQs that can be e-mailed to new members.

¹² Goody 1977, 1986, 1987; Goody and Watt 1968.

communicative competence and that they make choices as to how to communicate (cf. Hymes 1962, 1972). Certain constellations of these choices tend to be associated with formal, "literate" communication and others with more informal, "oral" communication. For example, CMC can display a great degree of literacy when so required, as the example from the "Glorantha" mailing list below shows. This mailing list is sent out as a "digest" each time it accumulates over twenty kilobytes in messages or when one day elapses.

From: ***@delphi.com
 Date: Tue, 05 Dec 1995 11:01:23 -0500 (EST)
 Subject: The Moral Equivalent of War

Martin Crim and David Dunham are touching upon one of the basic problems of human interaction, best expressed by William James in that wonderful phrase "the moral equivalent of war." Liberal politicians are always trying to invoke that moral equivalent, because they imagine, at the least, that it would bring the kind of solidarity and all-for-oneness that they are looking for. The problem is that there is NO moral equivalent of war. Now role-players, like liberals, are looking for something non-violent that will engage their players as fully as the risk of life and limb. My guess is that the quest is equally futile.

Each mailing list comes with posting rules at its beginning and is manifestly intended to emulate a series of written discussions.¹³ Clearly, however, there is some sort of relationship between orality and literacy, and the medium of communication does have some effect on the message communicated and, by implication, the folklore transmitted (P. Smith 1987). The task of an ethnography of CMC is to begin exploration of this issue. My tentative proposal is simply that literacy stands in a hegemonic relationship with orality. Ong (1992:293) claims that "literacy is imperious. It tends to arrogate to itself supreme power by taking itself as

¹³ This topic is a very complex topic indeed. This particular mailing list focuses on a fantasy world that was designed by a mythologist and has a role-playing game attached to it. The posters to this list tend to be advocates of Joseph Campbell's mythological theories; several of them are qualified anthropologists and tend to engage in full-scale textual poaching from folklore, mythology, and anthropology texts. They will then use these texts to engage in debate and occasional storytelling, during which they will attempt to emulate oral techniques using computer-mediated communication in a literate frame. As an example of the complex interweaving between oral and literate communication, I know of nothing more complex. Ironically, one degree of status on this list is the ability to receive messages immediately, rather than in digest form, so that some digests may contain records of already completed debates between "star" posters.

normative for human expression and thought. . . . The term ‘illiterate’ itself suggests that persons belonging to the class it designates are deviants, defined by something they lack, namely literacy.” This would seem to be a classic description of a successfully maintained hegemonic relationship. Marxist linguists such as Neil Postman have considered the ability of language codes to reproduce power relationships (1973). For example, William O’Barr has looked at the way in which Legal English is systematically used in courtrooms to reinforce the superiority of the judicial system and its practitioners, all of whom control this abstruse code of English over those unfortunate enough to get caught up in it (1982).

I believe it is possible to extend this argument to consider the status of written communication versus oral. In so doing, Innis’ characterization of the imperialistic nature of writing becomes merged with hegemony theory, for writing is seen as a medium encouraging the centralization of power. Furthermore, the ability to write becomes crucial to one’s status in a society—illiteracy becomes quickly identified with stupidity. Yet Bengt Holbek (1989:193) notes that “it would be a mistake to think of the illiterate in negative terms, as people who have not received certain kinds of training They should be thought of in positive terms instead, as those who interpret this technique [writing], which is familiar to us, in analogy to other techniques which are familiar to them.” Where, however, scholars such as Ong and Innis have seen the domination of orality by literacy, hegemony theory demands that where there is power there is protest; in a sense the hegemonic voice or medium creates/needs the space or medium for an oppositional voice. I think it is possible to see the intermingling of oral and literate voices in narratives as examples of the dynamics of hegemonic relationships playing themselves out. CMC further illuminates this process.

Ultimately, communication such as e-mail is a text, but it appears to be one that is unabashedly oral. In a disembodied, depersonalized medium in which users change gender and virtual community at will, in which one has only a few typewriter characters with which to communicate, we see literacy being subverted. Punctuation marks become faces; capital letters are shouting; lines, sentences, and paragraphs become optional. With hypertextual links on the World Wide Web, the concept of a single, fixed text is exploded as readers “hot-link” themselves around the electronic world, bouncing from idea to idea. This is not to assert that CMC is somehow inherently counter-hegemonic, merely that it can be used in an oppositional way. Possibly, as some pundits say, computer network communication marks the death of print-literacy. Even if this is the case, print-literacy will not give up without a fight. Regardless, I think it is

crucial for academics to become involved in the discussion, and one tool that we can develop to do so is a systematic, rigorous methodology with which to conduct ethnographies of computer-mediated communication.

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Suzhou *Tanci* Storytelling in China: Contexts of Performance

Mark Bender

Introduction

Suzhou *tanci*, or Suzhou chantefable, is a style of Chinese professional storytelling that combines singing, instrumental music, and a complex mixture of narrative registers and dialogue.¹ Popular in towns and cities in Wu-dialect-speaking regions of the prosperous lower Yangzi (Yangtze) delta, the art is associated with the ancient city of Suzhou (Soochow).² Capital of the kingdom of Wu in the sixth century, the city afterward became a center of commerce and culture in the late imperial period, or fourteenth to nineteenth centuries A.D. (Marme 1993:17; Santangelo 1993:81-83). Suzhou was once noted for its great number of successful candidates in the imperial examinations, its colorful literati, flourishing entertainment quarters, and an endless landscape of temples, gardens, and canals lined with whitewashed cottages. The city's opulence faded by the late nineteenth century with the rise of the nearby megalopolis, Shanghai.

Today the lower Yangzi delta is deeply involved in the most recent wave of cultural changes set in motion by the PRC government. In the wake of the massive, often tumultuous programs of social experimentation in the 1949-76 period have come the new challenges of "modernization" and opening to the outside, centering on a state-led plan that entails far-reaching capitalistic market reforms reaching every aspect of society.

¹ English equivalents for Suzhou *tanci* are many. Among them are Schmidt's (1986) literal rendering, "plucking rhymes" and "strum lyric" (see Mair 1989 and 1997), Tsao's (1988) "southern singing narrative," and Stevens' (1974) and Hodes' (1991) "story-singing." If an English equivalent is desirable, I prefer Hanan's (1973:209) use of the term "chantefable," in the sense that both singing and speaking are used to relate a narrative. See Mair (1997) for more on the history of prosimetric literature in China.

² According to Ramsey (1987:87) there are nearly 80 million speakers of Wu dialects. Of these, Ye (1988:2) claims there are approximately 1,820,000 speakers of Suzhou dialect.

As for Suzhou, tourism is presently an important part of its economy, and portions of the city have been set aside for experimentation with modern, Singapore-style apartment complexes.

This paper is a survey of the contexts in which Suzhou *tanci* is presently performed and re-formed throughout the lower Yangzi delta.³ In emphasizing shifting performance contexts, emergent aspects of form, performance, and reception will be made apparent (cf. Bauman 1977:37), suggesting ways in which Suzhou *tanci* is in several senses a continuing source of meaning for local audiences and an index of social, economic, and political change. Beginning with a survey of the conventions of Suzhou *tanci*, the focus of the paper will shift to form, presentation, patronage, repertoire, performers, loci of performance, and audiences. These sections provide several layers of context for the final section, which describes the process of a representative *tanci* performance in one of Suzhou's most popular story houses.

Suzhou *Tanci*: Aspects of the Art

Basic Conceptualizations

Suzhou *tanci* belongs to a family of related styles of local dialect storytelling that have at one time or another had some degree of currency in the Yangzi delta.⁴ These include styles that are today identified locally as

³ The approach to context and performance in this paper has been strongly influenced by the works of Richard Bauman (1977; 1986) and other theorists of the so-called "performance" or "contextual" school of folkloristics (Fine 1989) as well as Foley (1995). In this discussion of Suzhou *tanci*, I have drawn on both Chinese and English sources, though I have attempted to keep the former to a minimum in the interest of appeal to a wider audience. For more extensive bibliographies of Chinese sources, see Zhou and Suzhou 1988; Tsao 1988; Wu et al. 1996; Børdahl 1999.

⁴ Zhou and Suzhou 1988 and the more comprehensive Wu et al. 1996 offer the most comprehensive introductions to Suzhou *pingtan* in Chinese. The texts cover history, artistic aspects, repertoire (with extensive listings), aspects of performance, and traditional criticism. See also Chen 1958:133-218. Though brief, Tsao (1988:1-18) is a good general description of Suzhou *tanci* in English, albeit much of the information is derived from earlier Chinese and English sources, particularly Chen 1958 and Hrdlickova 1965. See Blader 1983 for information on the other major form of Suzhou storytelling, *pinghua* (described below). In her dissertation, Hodes (1991:3-7) makes some useful observations on contemporary storytelling in Suzhou. Vibeke Børdahl's excellent study of Yangzhou storytelling (1996) is a thorough examination of a related storytelling context, although

Suzhou *tanci*, Yangzhou *tanci* (an alternate name is Yangzhou *xianci*), and Hangzhou *nanci*.⁵ Of these styles of storytelling that combine speech and instrumentally accompanied song, Suzhou *tanci* is by far the most vital, with Yangzhou *tanci* trailing a distant second in popularity. Like Suzhou *tanci*, some of these styles have related genres in written vernacular fiction.⁶

The Suzhou chantefable tradition is often associated with another style of storytelling called Suzhou *pinghua* (which Blader [1983] terms “straight storytelling”). *Pinghua* performances, given in the same contexts as *tanci*, usually feature one performer, concern exploits of heroes, and do not include instrumental music or any but incidental singing. The two arts are often referred to by the syncretic term, Suzhou *pingtan*.

there is some variation between the traditions, especially in terms of language dialect and performer jargon. In the present section I have by necessity covered some of the same ground as these sources. My approach, however, brings the dimension of extensive fieldwork that included the viewing of over one hundred Suzhou *tanci* and *pinghua* performances, visiting sixteen story houses in Jiangsu and Zhejiang provinces, interviewing (formally and informally) over two dozen performers, and traveling for several weeks with nine storytellers from the Suzhou troupe who were performing a middle-length *tanci* story. Some of the observations I made on context and performance conventions in my thesis, “Suzhou *Tanci*: Keys to Performance” (1989b), were revised in my 1995 doctoral dissertation, “*Zaisheng Yuan* and *Meng Lijun*: Performance, Context, and Form of Two *Tanci*.” The main interviewees were the storytellers Gong Huasheng (and his partner Cai Xiaojuan), Yuan Xiaoliang, and Wang Jin. Scholars included Sun Jingyao of the Comparative Literature Center at Suzhou University (who accompanied me during much of my fieldwork); Zhou Liang, of the local cultural bureau of Suzhou; and Wu Zongxi (Zuo Xian), of the Shanghai Municipal Cultural Bureau. I was graciously awarded a fieldwork grant by the Committee on Scholarly Communication with the People’s Republic of China, the U.S. Information Agency, and the Department of Education.

⁵ These and other terms in this paper are given here in standard Chinese, although all have different pronunciations in Suzhou dialect. See Tsao 1988, Ye 1988, and Bender 1995 for excerpts of *tanci* performances in Suzhou dialect. Historically, the term *nanci* (“southern lyrics”) has been used as a term to describe all of these stylistically similar storytelling styles (Chen 1958:182-83). For a history and description of Hangzhou storytelling, see Yang 1989 and Simmons 1992. While some commentators (Zheng Z. 1938:348, for instance) include Cantonese *muk’yu* (*muyü*, “wooden fish”) traditions in studies of *tanci*, I feel that the traditions in the Yangzi delta are distinct enough to be easily differentiated from these other traditions in terms of form, audience, performers, and contexts of performance. See Zheng S. 1992 for a description of the oral and written traditions of *muk’yu*.

⁶ See Hodes 1991 for a study of a late imperial written version of a well-known Suzhou *tanci* story.

The essence of the *pingtan* storytelling styles is described in formulaic terms by storytellers themselves.⁷ During an interview in Shanghai in 1992, Yao Yinmei, the innovative 85-year-old performer of the *tanci* story *Tixiao yinyuan* (*Fate in Laughter and Tears*),⁸ explained to me that *tanci* involves four aspects: speaking (*shuo*), humor (*xue*), instrumental playing (*tan*), and singing (*chang*). He further observed that it is called *xiaoshu* or “small story” because it involves smaller, more intimate settings than *pinghua*, or “big story” (*dashu*), which depicts battles and martial heroes.⁹ These examples can only hint at the wealth of emic terminology concerning Suzhou storytelling.

Constellations of Performance

Documented changes in the manner in which *tanci* stories are presented have occurred over the last hundred or so years. Most male storytellers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries performed solo (*dandang*), playing the *sanxian*-banjo, though some male performers also had another male (often a brother) to accompany them on the *pipa*-lute. Such duos are termed *shuangdang*. By the 1920s (there seems to be no exact record of the first instance), some male storytellers began performing with their wives or daughters, who took the role of assistant on the *pipa*.¹⁰ Today most *tanci* storytellers perform as duos: usually a male

⁷ Chen 1958, Zuo 1981, Blader 1983, Tsao 1988, and other sources have noted these commonly expressed descriptive categories (see Yao 1986). See Bender 1989a for a discussion of the traditional aesthetics of Suzhou storytelling as formulated by performers in the late imperial period.

⁸ Yao's orally performed version is one of the most famous *tanci* adaptations of Zhang Henshui's famous novel, serialized 1927-30 (see Zhang H. 1985).

⁹ See Gu 1991 for a biography of Yao. For more detailed comments on the act of performance, see Yao 1986.

¹⁰ Though increasingly common in the 1930s, the practice of mixed-gender performances was not accepted by the Guangyu Guild until the 1940s and was never wholly legitimate in some people's eyes until after 1949. Gong Huasheng claims that a relative of his was the first to introduce this innovation in the twenties. Yao Yinmei (as noted above) also believes that the custom started then, with the increase in women's freedom after the 1911 revolution. Even today mixed-gender pairs are encouraged to marry, and long-term affairs between unmarried performers working together are not unknown. (Pairs with such a relation are known among performers as *matou fuqi*—literally, “husband and wife of the river ports.” The term *matou* figuratively means a

lead (*shangshou*, literally “upper-hand”) and a female assistant (*xiashou*, or “lower-hand”) (Chen 1958:172). Pairs of men, once the rule seventy years ago, are uncommon today, though pairs of women are on the increase, largely due to a lack of younger male performers.¹¹ A few men and women perform solo, and in some situations three storytellers (*sange dang*) or even more may perform together.

Both the solo and duo *tanci* forms have strengths and weaknesses.¹² In *dandang*, the single performer is in complete control of the story and, in the words of performer Yuan Xiaoliang, “can take it anywhere he likes.” However, the musical appeal of *shuangdang tanci*, with the mixture of the *sanxian*-banjo and *pipa*-lute music, is greater than that of the *sanxian*-banjo alone.¹³ *Shuangdang* performers must work together, the *shangshou* literally “leading the way” and the *xiashou* following his or her cues. Thus the *shuangdang* performers are more reliant on written scripts (despite the ability to improvise when necessary) than *dandang* performers, since it is easy to “get lost” if cues are not met. *Shuangdang* performers speak of “tossing” (*diu*) the story back and forth between them, and in rehearsal they emphasize the lyrical passages and those points where the roles of character and narrator are exchanged between them.¹⁴

storytelling venue.)

¹¹ In a mixed-gender pair a woman is almost never the lead, except when the positions are momentarily switched for effect. I was told by several performers that men were simply unwilling to be the *xiashou* for women. In special performances, however, a younger man may accompany a woman on the *sanxian* as she sings a *kaipian* (“opening ballad”).

¹² I am particularly indebted to Gong Huasheng, Cai Xiaojuan, Yuan Xiaoliang, and Wang Jin for many of the following remarks. Cai’s remarks on the role of the *xiashou* (assistant) in performance were especially enlightening. For a written source on *shuangdang*, see the 1986 article by the well-known *tanci* performer Zhang Jianting in which he stresses the difficulties in finding a suitable partner; see also Zuo 1981:34.

¹³ Yuan Xiaoliang feels that many audience members find the music of the single *sanxian* to be dull.

¹⁴ I was able to observe Yuan and Wang rehearse on a number of occasions. Such rehearsals were usually done in very low voices, with the pair seated very close to each other.



Audience in an old folks' center in Wuxi, a special performance context.



Well-known “amateur” performers Dong Yaokun and wife, Ni Huaiyu, performing an excerpt from the story *Jade Dragonfly* at the old folks' center in Wuxi on Old Folks' Day (Autumn, 1991). This is an example of the duo (*shuangdang*) constellation.



An old curmudgeon and a spunky maidservant spar in a scene from *Jade Dragonfly*. Performers often gesture and sometimes stand, but will never touch each other in the course of a performance.



Acting in character, Ni Huaiyu (daughter of the accomplished *Pearl Pagoda* performer, Ni Qingping) holds her hand to her hip in a conventional posture denoting a maidservant.



The brilliant Li Renzhen, winner of several national storytelling awards. A performer of Yangzhou chantefable, Ms. Li spends several months a year performing solo in the areas around Yangzhou, which lies north of the Yangzi River from Suzhou. When performing the speaking roles, the *pipa*-lute is often laid on the table in front of the storyteller, a different configuration from duo storytelling. This was a private performance given in 1991 for the interviewer.

In *shuangdang* it is usually the lead who does most of the narration, though the narrator's role may sometimes be taken up by the *xiashou*, who customarily plays female roles and roles of minor characters. According to performer Cai Xiaojuan, a good *xiashou* should be poised, attentive, and, if necessary, able to help out the lead if he or she gets lost or confused.¹⁵

¹⁵ I was told many stories about performers becoming confused or forgetting cues. Experienced *tanci* storytellers—especially those who work well together—can often cover (*mibu*) these mistakes, though it may take considerable imagination. Factors contributing to this confusion would include familiarity with the story, state of mind, and health. Even though a contemporary performer is very likely working from a written script, such aids have never been allowed onstage. Thus, performers who “get lost” must be resourceful to avoid embarrassment.

Story Length

The duo form is most often the vehicle for performing the popular full-length *tanci* (*changpian tanci*)—the stories told daily in story houses. In the past, most full-length *tanci* took up to three months to tell, with two episodes constituting a two-hour set told each day. Since the late 1970s, the length has been cut to two weeks, though occasionally performances may run up to a month. In the post-1949 period, when official governing bodies called for increased experimentation in form, a new style called *zhongpian tanci* (middle-length *tanci*) was developed. Performances of these stories last about three hours. Each middle-length group is called a *sange dang* (three-person group). The form is attributed to an earlier leader of the Suzhou Pingtan Troupe, Pan Boying. Stories may be written just for this form or adapted from full-length stories. Middle-length stories are performed by up to three trios of storytellers, usually in the context of a theater or as a special performance in a story house.¹⁶ A short form (*duanpian*) that lasts less than an hour has also been popular since 1949. It is featured at contests and special performances and may include any number of performers.

Registers of Performance

Tanci performances involve shifting among a number of language and kinesic registers.¹⁷ These include narration, dialogue between characters, and singing. Performances of traditional stories set in feudal times are given in an obsolescent form of Suzhou dialect called “old style,” or *jiupai* (Ye 1988:78). Speeches of certain elite characters, such as

¹⁶ One of the better known *zhongpian tanci* is *Jen qing jia yi* (*True Love, False Meaning*) written by Xu Mengdan in the early 1980s (1998). Set in contemporary times, the story involves a love affair between an honest worker, temporarily blinded while stopping a thief, and twin sisters, one nice and the other nasty. In the spring of 1992, I toured throughout the Jiangnan region with nine storytellers in the Suzhou Pingtan Troupe as they performed a *zhongpian* called *Yang Naiwu yu Xiao Baicai Xin Bian* (*A New Version of the Yang Naiwu and Little Cabbage Story*), written by Gong Huasheng. Performances, which lasted three hours, were given in story houses, opera houses, and cultural arts theaters. Three performers were on stage for each of the three parts of the story.

¹⁷ See Zuo 1981 for a discussion of these registers. Interpretations of the registers vary somewhat among Suzhou storytellers, and Yangzhou storytellers have a different (though in some cases similar) jargon for identifying them (Børdahl 1996).

scholars, officials, and upper-class women are presented in a form of old Mandarin known as *Zhongzhouyun*, common as a sort of official's lingua franca in the Yangzi delta since the tenth century. Borrowed from Kunju opera (a local predecessor of Peking opera), *Zhongzhouyun* is also the medium for many song lyrics. Stories set in modern times use contemporary Suzhou dialect and do not normally include *Zhongzhouyun*.

There are a number of divisions in speaking style recognized by the performers. These categories are basically divided into *biao*, the narrative voices of the narrators, and *bai*, the dialogue of the characters. One of the most engaging aspects of some Suzhou *tanci* performances is the deployment of certain conventional registers to allow the audience private entry into a character's thoughts. In many cases a character may say only a few words, but the implied thoughts are many, and often in ironic counterpoint to what is actually said. In some instances, when the "inner" registers are used, only the character's thoughts are given. In other instances, through the use of the narrative *biao*, both the thoughts of the characters and comments (often interpretive and or evaluative) are related by the narrator. Among the devices most effective for stirring audience emotion are the "silent" songs sung by characters in expressing inner grief or sorrow, often during a crisis in the story. In some instances, a sort of antiphonal inner-dialogue may be presented. The "spoken" or "sung" thoughts of two characters are presented in turns, sometimes interspaced by short lines of audible dialogue. This movement between what is thought and what is spoken also proves very useful in situations involving trickery and deceit, in cases when information—which the audience may already know—is being hidden from another character. In some instances, performers may devote whole episodes to such determinations in order to fill the time.¹⁸ Interesting twists and turns in action are enhanced by the manipulation of the characters' access to knowledge. A brief example from the story *Meng Lijun* can only hint at the complexity of such situations.¹⁹

¹⁸ Storytellers must be very time-conscious, since they work within a strict two-hour frame.

¹⁹ The story of *Meng Lijun* was created by a female author, Chen Duansheng, in the eighteenth century. Originally a lengthy prosimetric written work, the story was adapted into Suzhou *tanci* in the 1940s by Qin Jiwen and again in the 1960s by Pan Boying. Pan's version was revived and embellished by Gong Huasheng in the late 1970s. The present excerpt is from a performance by Yuan Xiaoliang and Wang Jin at the Guangyu Story House, Suzhou, on December 9, 1991. In the story, a maiden genius, *Meng Lijun*, runs away from a marriage with an evil young man. Her maidservant and friend, *Su Yingxue*, is forced to marry in her stead. *Su* stabs the groom with a pair of scissors and jumps out a window into a lake. She is later rescued by the wife of a prime

Here, Meng Lijun, disguised as a groom, ponders how to deal with “his” suspicious bride, “his” former maidservant Su Yingxue, now masquerading as a prime minister’s daughter and slowly catching on to who her groom really is:

(Wang Jin, the assistant storyteller, adopts the role of Su Yingxue, singing in a narrative *biao* mode used while in character)

In a moment,
As things quiet down inside the “green window,”
I want you to remove your shoes,
To reveal the tiny embroidered slippers.
This strategy is called, “First show you courtesy,
Then slowly get even with you.”

(Wang shifts to narrator singing mode)

She lowers her head, acting very shy.
Now Maiden Su is a good actor.

(shifts to narrative *biao* mode used while in character)

Today your acting ability is good, but I absolutely cannot lose to you.
So, thinking thus far, she makes up her mind to sweet-talk her. She takes
a sideways glance and, her lips slightly parted, emits a tiny giggle, “*ge le*.”
But today that doesn’t matter!

(shift to lead Yuan Xiaoliang, the lead performer, who speaks as Meng Lijun in an “inner voice” mode)

Looking at it this way, a while later I will be able to reveal myself to you.

(shift to assistant Wang Jin as Su Yingxue, in an “inner voice” mode)

You think that this is so easy to resolve? Just wait, and I’ll give you a
taste of my own stuff. I will make you squirm.

minister in the imperial capital. Meanwhile, Meng Lijun, disguised as a young scholar, sits for the imperial examinations, placing first. Soon afterward, “he” is engaged to the daughter of a high minister. On the wedding night, both parties suspect they may know the true identity of their new “spouse.” This scene is part of the process of revelation and discovery that occurs in the wedding suite, as Meng and Su confront each other on much different terms than when they last met. See Bender 1995:281-339 for a complete transcript.

(shift to lead Yuan Xiaoliang in narrator *biao* mode)

The two persons then looked repeatedly at each other, their mutual perceptions wholly opposite. They ate awhile. When they had pretty much finished eating the “Meal of Harmony,” maids young and old came from the sides and the bowls and chopsticks on the table were all picked up and put away. . . .

Though fewer than in Chinese opera, specific gestures are associated with each character role-type. Lower-class characters may speak Suzhou dialect and, in some cases, dialects from other areas. In late imperial stories set before the 1912 Revolution (such as *Yang Naiwu yu Xiao Baicai*), eunuchs speak Mandarin, which some performers refer to by the current term *Putonghua* (“the common language”). In stories set after 1912, storytellers often wear formal western dress when performing, and the characters they portray speak in either modern Suzhou dialect, Standard Mandarin, or in special cases other regional dialects. In performing his version of *Tixiao yinyuan*, for example, Yao Yinmei employed eighteen different Chinese dialects. In late imperial and modern stories, foreigners speak in heavily accented Standard Mandarin.

Singing and Music

According to veteran performer Huang Yi'an, the music of *tanci* was once known simply as *tanci diao* (1992:pers. comm.). There are about twenty popular *liupai*, or schools of music/singing, all named after their originators, a few who can be traced to the latter nineteenth century. One of the best known is the Jiang *diao*, created by Jiang Yuequan in the 1930s. There are also many *diao* (tunes) developed by lesser known performers, sometimes within a particular geographical area. The most influential tunes among young performers today are the Yu *diao*, which is a basic tune presently taught for female singing roles in the Pingtan School, and the above-mentioned Jiang *diao*, commonly used for male singing roles.²⁰

Line lengths of lyrics vary, and singing passages may be performed in either the Suzhou dialect or *Zhongzhouyun*, depending on the story context. The “opening ballads” that precede the main story, known as *kaipian*, tend to have a somewhat stricter form and “tighter” lyrics than sung passages in the main stories. Tsao states that “in performance the

²⁰ See Tsao 1988 for the most intensive study of Suzhou *tanci* music to date.

7-syllable line-stanzas are usually sung in divisions of 2+5 or 4+3” (1988:12).

Besides the *diao*, there are also a number of special, conventionalized “minor” tunes known as *xiaoqu* or *xiaodiao*. These have names such as *meipo diao* (go-between tune), *mihun diao* (dazed spirit tune), or *luanjiti* (wild cock crowing) and are used in scenes that employ stereotyped character roles and may be used to excite audiences by a display of singing prowess. Thus, *meipo diao* is used in scenes involving matchmakers, *mihun diao* is employed when a character has fainted or been knocked unconscious, and *luanjiti* appears in swift descriptions of miscellaneous things (as in a market) or in the songs of verbose lower characters (often accompanied by very fast-paced vocalization and played on the *sanxian*-banjo). One of these *xiaodiao* is called *shange diao* (hill song, or folksong tune). This tune can be introduced in concert with minor characters, such as boat people, to pass time. The *ling-ling diao* is used with very evil characters, and is sometimes employed to take up time due to its casual pace. Certain melodies, such as the *nuomiqiang* (sticky-rice melody), can add variation to tunes and help create special effects. Flourishes in singing are known as *huaqiang* and are added to performances as storytellers mature.²¹

Types of Episode

The most common of the performance contexts, which will be elaborated upon below, is that of the story house. Performances in these halls usually last for two hours, beginning with an opening ballad. The actual story is divided into two sections, with a break about halfway through (there is no strictly set moment).

Episodes of *pingtan* stories are described as being either *guanzi shu* (crisis episodes) or *nongtang shu* (elaboration episodes).²² *Guanzi shu* are episodes in which there is a great deal of rising action and excitement.

²¹ Most of the information on the lesser known tunes and melodies was supplied to me in interviews with Yuan Xiaoliang in June, 1992. Certainly there is much more to be documented about these aspects of *tanci* music. See Zhou 1988:20 for comments on some of these phenomena, which he terms *paiziqu* (standard tunes).

²² Wu et al. 1996:34-35; Zhou and Suzhou 1988:136-37; Tsao 1988:11. Børdahl (1996:449) translates *guanzi* as “crisis,” which I follow here. This is a typical instance where Yangzhou and Suzhou storytelling share terminology.

Performers speak of *shangle da guanzi*—the development of a big crisis.²³ Since *tanci* performances move in a wavelike action over the two-week engagement, a typical story will have many small and large *guanzi*, or crises. Interwoven amidst the *guanzi shu*, the *nongtang shu* are characterized by detail and numerous inserted narratives (and often humor), rather than by action. The first episode of an engagement is usually a *nongtang shu*, in which scenes are set and characters introduced. An especially well crafted *nongtang shu* is sometimes termed a *penjing shu*, or “bonsai episode” (Gong 1982; Fang 1986:32-33), reflecting the idea that while some *nongtang shu* include many elements that function on one level to pass time, others may be true masterpieces of entertainment.²⁴ The division between *nongtang shu* and *guanzi shu* is not always clear-cut, and particular episodes of a given story may have elements of both. Also, the first episode of the day may be a *nongtang shu*, yet the second may involve a *guanzi*.²⁵

Overall, the frame of a Suzhou *tanci* episode allows for the insertion of meta-narratives (personal anecdotes, anecdotes of other people, legends, historical references, and so on), songs, jokes, and the introduction of minor characters who are used to maintain interest and pass the time, though not necessarily to move the story forward. In many cases, such insertions are planned beforehand, but storytellers sometimes feel the need to improvise. Stuck in a situation in which he or she “has no story” (*meiyou shu*)—that is, if the action is related too quickly and the lead runs out of planned material—the performers must call on all resources to fill in the time or risk grave censure by the patrons. Thus songs can be lengthened—even improvised—jokes cracked (sometimes at the assistant’s expense) or a short narrative told, whether it quite fits or not. Introducing a minor character or two, usually a couple involved in something ridiculous or even off-color, is also a way of passing time. In some cases, performers may be known for the unique diversions that make up certain of these episodes (usually in the

²³ Some of these very commonly heard observations on *guanzi* made here were expressed by Gong Huasheng and Yuan Xiaoliang in various interviews, 1991-92.

²⁴ In efforts to make *tanci* appeal to younger audiences, it has been suggested that *nongtang shu* be “eliminated.” *Pingtán* researcher Fu Jurong feels that to do so would be to eliminate the real essence of *pingtan*, since some of the most interesting aspects of the art appear in such episodes (1992: pers. comm.).

²⁵ See Zhou 1988:57-64 for a detailed discussion of *guanzi* and the structure of *tanci* episodes.

nongtangshu). One device, attributed to more than one performer, is a review of the five-thousand-year history of China in only one minute.

In some instances, performers may feel that they *lack* time and, in order to advance the plot to a certain stage that day, must delete or abridge some part of the performance. In such situations, a song may be left unsung, or trivial dialogue left unspoken. Though built of traditional and sometimes rigid conventions, the “open” frame of Suzhou *tanci* performances allows complex interaction and manipulation of frames and registers, giving performers various means for enlivening their performances.²⁶

Repertoire

Stories are called *shu* (literally “books,” though the term seems to mean “stories”). The designation is sometimes applied to episodes usually known as *hui*. Zhou lists 68 titles of *tanci* stories that have been performed in the last 150 years (1988:150-52). Following categories devised in the fifties, the list is divided into three categories: *chuantong shu* (traditional stories), defined as any story performed before 1949; *erlei shu* (second category stories), stories on traditional themes created or performed after 1949; and *xiandai tici* (contemporary subjects), or works dealing with contemporary society. Stories in the first category, dating from at least as early as the mid-nineteenth century, include *Zhenzhu ta* (Pearl Pagoda), *Yu qingting* (Jade Dragonfly), *Baishe zhuan* (Legend of the White Snake), *Miaojin feng* (Engraved Gold Phoenix), *Wopao* (Japanese Cloak), *San xiao yinyuan* (Three Smiles), *Luo jin shan* (Dropped Gold Fan), *Shuang zhu feng* (Matching Pearl Phoenixes), and *Shuang jin ding* (Pair of Gold Vessels). Stories made popular in the earlier half of the twentieth century include *Yang Naiwu yu Xiao Baicai* (Yang Naiwu and Little Cabbage), *Ti xiao yinyuan* (Fate in Laughter and Tears), *Xixiang ji* (The Story of the West Wing), and in the late 1940s *Zaisheng yuan* (Love Reincarnate).

Second category stories include *Meng Lijun* and *Qin Xianglian* (both named after the lead character), *Mei hua meng* (Plum Blossom Dream), *Liang Shanbo yu Zhu Yingtai* (Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai), *Pipa ji* (The Story of the Lute), *Hudie bei* (Butterfly Quilt), *Fei Long Zhuan* (The Legend of Flying Dragon), and *Xiao Meng Lijun* (Little Meng Lijun). Many other stories were adapted from older stories or written from scratch

²⁶ See Bender 1999 for a discussion of how the shifts between various elements of performance arouse and hold audience attention.

on traditional themes and performed throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Some, such as *Xiao Meng Lijun*, do not appear in Zhou's bibliography.²⁷ Stories in the third category, usually comparatively short, include *Jiu long kou* (Nine Dragon Mouth), *Xiao Dangui zhi si* (The Death of Xiao Dangui), and *Hongsede zhongzi* (The Red Sprouts).²⁸ Such stories, dating from the 1950s and 1970s, often have an explicit political dimension. *Xiao Dangui zhi si*, for instance, concerns an undercover Red agent in the thirties who at one point must masquerade as a traditional opera singer. Most *tanci* stories in the first and second categories follow the "talented scholar meets beautiful young lady" (*caizi jiaren*) love-story theme common in Chinese fiction. Others, such as *Tixiao yinyuan* (adapted from Zhang Henshui's serialized novel), have more modern settings or depart variously from traditional themes. Since the mid-1990s, stories set in urban Shanghai in the 1930s and 1940s have become popular.

There are hundreds of the short ballads (*kaipian*) that are sung before the beginning of the main narrative in story houses or in a variety of situations discussed below. *Kaipian* exist either as lyrical ballads complete in themselves or as excerpts from longer stories.²⁹ An example of the first type is "Du Shiniang," dating from the 1930s, which concerns a courtesan by that name in the collections known as the *Sanyan*, edited by Feng Monglong in the late Ming dynasty.³⁰ Another famous *kaipian* is "Who on earth has no mother?" (*Shijie, nage meiyou niangqin?*), based on a scene in performer Jiang Yuequan's version of *Jade Dragonfly*, which he performed from the thirties until the early sixties.

²⁷ I had the pleasure of recording and interviewing the young performers Lu Shixiao and Yan Wenwu at Wuxi and Suzhou while they performed *Xiao Meng Lijun* in 1991 and 1992.

²⁸ *Jiu long ko* is a term from traditional opera associated with an area of the stage where high-ranking characters make an entrance. See Zhou and Suzhou 1988 and Wu et al. 1996 for synopses of a number of traditional and modern *pingtan* stories.

²⁹ Ma Rufei, a famous innovator on the story *Pearl Pagoda*, compiled a collection of over three hundred *kaipian* (termed *nanci* in that text) in the late nineteenth century (Chen 1958:200-05). Many collections of *kaipian* were published in the twentieth century, particularly during the thirties. Thirty *kaipian*, popular in recent years, are included in *Pingtian zhishi shouche* (Zhou and Suzhou 1988). Mao 1991 includes the texts of 157 *kaipian* popular since 1949.

³⁰ Tsao 1988 includes transcriptions of several *kaipian*, including "Du Shiniang." Also, see Pian 1986 for a transcription/translation of the *kaipian*, "Birthday Wishes from the Eight Immortals" (*Ba xian shang shou*).

Patronage

As early as the reign of emperor Qianlong in the Qing dynasty (1736-96), storytellers in Suzhou were organized into guilds.³¹ The most famous of these was the *Guangyu gongsuo* (Brilliant Abundance Guild), started in 1776 by the famous performer Wang Zhoushi.³² The function of the guilds was to give the profession an official status and to protect the economic situation of its members by attempting to exert control over regional teahouses and later over story houses.³³ The organization also worked as a kind of cooperative for member performers, who until the 1940s were all male. After a court battle with the conservative Guangyu she over mixed-gender performances, the *Puyushe* (Universal Abundance Guild), which ran a school for performers of both sexes, was chartered in 1935 (Yi 1988:218). After 1949, the old guilds were disbanded and performers (including the many who were not guild members) were reorganized into *pingtan* troupes or more general performing arts troupes. The Shanghai Municipal *Pingtan* Troupe (*Shanghai shi pingtan tuan*) was established in 1951, followed by the Suzhou Municipal *Pingtan* Troupe (*Suzhou shi pingtan tuan*) organized in 1951-52. Troupes were established at provincial, county, and municipal levels throughout the Wu-speaking areas of the Lower Yangzi delta (Zhou and Suzhou 1988:293-337). In Jiangsu province, *pingtan* is overseen on the provincial level by the cultural bureau in Nanjing and locally by the Suzhou City Cultural Bureau. Presently, troupes help members arrange performance engagements, distribute earnings, provide retirement benefits, organize meetings and events, and act as an in-house vehicle for government propaganda. Though post-1949 troupes once supplied members with regular salaries and other benefits, by the late 1980s and early 1990s troupes were working out their

³¹ See Chen 1958:173-74.

³² Chen 1958:180-81; Zhou 1983:44-45; Hrdlickova 1965; Tsao 1988. The name *Guangyu gongsuo* was later changed to *Guangyu she* in 1912. A ceremony commemorating the one hundred fiftieth anniversary of its establishment was held in 1926 (Chen 1958:181). A stone column commemorating the event stands in the courtyard of the Suzhou Kunju Opera Museum.

³³ See Santangelo 1993:93-95 for information on the historical presence of various professional guilds in Suzhou.

own economic systems and doing away with the “iron rice-bowl” of previous decades.³⁴

As of early 1992, the Suzhou troupe consisted of over sixty members, about half of them in retirement. Fifteen percent of an active performer's earnings was garnered by the troupe (though the figure was lowered to ten percent in July, 1992) and used towards retirement benefits (for those already retired!) and other expenses. Performers and troupe representatives attempt to negotiate for daily minimum salaries with individual story houses, with performers receiving a cut of ticket sales (usually twenty percent) above that amount.³⁵ Thus there is incentive for the performers to do well, as the daily minimum was about 35 *yuan* for the better pairs of performers. In general, however, performers do not regard their salaries as high, especially when travel and food expenses are taken into account.³⁶ Occasionally story houses provide meals; lodging, though often poor, is free. Some storytellers can earn extra money by performing ballads in high-class restaurants and resorts that have sprung up in the economic boom of the 1990s.

Since neither of the Suzhou troupe's two story houses could survive on proceeds from *pingtan* performances alone, videos are shown daily, largely to audiences of idle young males. The guesthouse behind the Guangyu Story House is also a source of income. Plans were in the works in mid-1992 to expand the troupe's money-making activities. Thus, the troupe is primarily self-supporting, though local government funding and funding from private interests, such as factories, is sometimes obtained when sponsorship for special activities is needed (for instance, the Fortieth

³⁴ Information in these paragraphs on the economic and administrative aspects of the story houses and troupes was supplied largely by Gong Huasheng and Cai Xiaojuan in interviews held in early 1992. Gong noted that numerous changes in systems of the various *pingtan* troupes (there are differences in administration) were expected in coming years. Wu Zongxi (1999:pers. comm.) relates that the biggest change has been that storytellers now keep most of their earnings.

³⁵ Some houses routinely underreport the number of tickets sold each day, thus affecting a performer's wages. According to Yuan Xiaoliang, this practice is known as *qiepiao* (slicing off tickets). While on stage, some performers actually count audience members if they suspect they are being cheated (Yuan claims it takes him only a minute to count, adding up the heads five at a time).

³⁶ In early 1992 a radio show in Shanghai reported on the poor living conditions and low salaries of performers. Some commentators, however, felt that thirty-five *yuan* a day was quite a decent wage. By the late 1990s, some performers have done quite well financially, though some smaller troupes have been forced to disband due to poor business.

Anniversary of the Suzhou *Pingtán* Troupe held in late 1991). Besides a troupe leader, there are several vice-leaders, a Party secretary, an accountant, and several office staff, nearly all of whom (including the Party secretary) were once active storytellers themselves. Most of the lobby and maintenance help are middle-aged females.³⁷

Performers

Performers once came to the trade of storytelling as a result of family tradition, out of personal interest, or from economic necessity.³⁸ Better performers were members of the guilds, enjoying the title of *xiansheng* (“master”—a term more dignified than that of *shifu*, or “craftsman”), and some made considerable amounts of money.³⁹ However, the profession has long been associated with the *jianghu* (itinerant entertainer) trades of fortunetelling, quack medicine, animal shows, gymnastics, martial arts, and other performances given in marketplaces and temple fairs by persons of sometimes dubious repute.⁴⁰ After 1949, the status of performers of traditional arts was officially raised from one of debasement to one of respected artists.

In the past, a prospective student—often only a youngster—would hold a special *bai shi* (literally, “reverencing a master”) ceremony to officially apprentice with a master. The student had to proffer a fee and sometimes lived in the master’s home as a sort of servant.⁴¹ A young storyteller might take several masters, some officially and some unofficially. Whatever the case, there was great competition to find

³⁷ Gong Huasheng noted in an interview in the fall of 1991 that many story houses had problems finding younger staff members because of low pay.

³⁸ See Hrdlickova 1965 and Tsao 1988:16-18.

³⁹ The term *xiansheng* was once reserved for males, though in some contexts today, including that of professional storytelling, the term may be applied to females.

⁴⁰ In the Confucian view, entertainers were not among the four classes of respectable occupations, which in order of merit were the gentry-officials, farmers, craftsmen, and merchants (Grasso et al. 1991:10-15).

⁴¹ The life stories of several *pingtan* performers appear in *Pingtán yishujia pingzhuan lu* (Shanghai quyī 1991) and in numerous volumes of the Suzhou storytelling journal *Pingtán yishu* (Jiangsu 1982-98). These accounts often have descriptions of how performers apprenticed with a series of masters.

reputable masters and improve one's art and income. If one could not afford a master, the only alternative was to *toushu* (steal stories). According to this practice, a youngster would listen outside (or if lucky, inside) a story house and remember the story, practicing it later on his or her own.⁴²

After the establishment of official schools in the 1950s, the old master/apprentice relationship was modified, though not wholly abandoned. The *bai shi* ceremony ended by the 1960s when the whole *pingtan* world was turned upside down by the Cultural Revolution (1966-76). As early as the Anti-Rightist Movement in 1957, some performers had been singled out as reactionary and imprisoned.⁴³ *Pingtan* performances on revolutionary themes, sometimes with large groups of performers on stage at once, were typical of the Cultural Revolution. Performers who were still considered politically fit to teach were addressed by students as "aunt" or "uncle," rather than as "master."

In the early 1980s, on a wave of enthusiasm over the revival of *pingtan*, the Suzhou Pingtan School reopened. A new building was constructed in 1986 with encouragement from elderly economist Chen Yun, a powerful figure in the Chinese Communist Party and a well-known *tanci* aficionado. In the present regimen, students are trained for three years in the classroom, learning the rudiments of singing, playing the *pipa*-lute and *sanxian*-banjo, and speaking. Students memorize scripts, then perform portions of them in class during tests. Music is taught using a combination of basic Western music theory and traditional methods. The curriculum includes a number of courses on subjects such as Chinese literature, history, and politics, leading to a *zhongzhuan* (junior college) diploma. After completing coursework, students are assigned to apprentice with an established master for three to six months, usually "receiving" the master's story. During the apprenticeship the student sits in on each performance, then is gradually asked to take part.

In the advent of this apprenticeship, the student participates in a *bai shi* ceremony sponsored by the school. In the early and mid-1980s, this was often a group event involving several students and masters. However, in

⁴² This was how Suzhou troupe leader Gong Huasheng learned his art. As a child, his partner and wife, Cai Xiaojuan, was sent to story houses to steal stories for her uncle (he would have been driven away if recognized), who then wrote down the contents. Cai's memory was so sharp that she began to join her uncle on stage at age nine.

⁴³ For example, one well-known *pinghua* performer was capped a "rightist" and sent to Qinghai for several years of education through labor. Several performers in Suzhou have told me of being held in makeshift prisons for several years.

recent years the tendency has been towards individual ceremonies, since some students must now find their own masters. The school typically helps defray some of the costs for the *bai shi* banquet. Performers wishing to take another master later in their careers, either to improve artistically or to increase social connections, are responsible for paying for the ceremony, which may cost hundreds or even thousands of *yuan*, depending on the requirements of the master.⁴⁴

In 1992, only one performer in the Suzhou troupe aged thirty or younger was trained in a traditional manner outside the Pingtan School.⁴⁵ Due to a decline in interest in the popular performing arts among young people, few students in the late 1980s and 1990s have been recruited to the *pingtan* school from Suzhou. Almost all come from small towns and rural areas in the Wu dialect area, and nearly all require preliminary training in the standard Suzhou dialect of speech.⁴⁶ Reasons why students audition for the school include a general interest in performing, the promise of a *zhongzhuan* diploma, and the possibility of an urban residency permit. Students sign a contract under which they agree to return to their own local troupes (if their area has one), though such agreements are not always honored. Few younger students have a good understanding of professional storytelling before enrollment, and many now change professions after graduation, despite the fact that some troupes have residency requirements of up to six years that can be broken only by payments of sums of up to several thousand *yuan*.

Amateur or “avocational” storytellers (*piaoyou*) regularly perform at factories and old folks’ homes, and sometimes hold gatherings in story houses (cf. Mark 1990). A number of very active amateurs hold regular meetings in the cities of Suzhou, Shanghai, Wuxi, and Changzhou. Some

⁴⁴ In the summer of 1992, I was invited to attend a *bai shi* ceremony (this rendering is a common shortened form of the term *bai laoshi*) in which a young woman in the Suzhou troupe, Zhou Xiaojun, took the famous Shanghai troupe *tanci* performer Yu Hongxian as a second master. In doing so she changed her name to Zhou Hong. At nearly the same time, I witnessed Jin Lisheng of the Suzhou troupe take Yang Zijiang as a master in order to receive a famous story from him.

⁴⁵ This was Yuan Xiaoliang; see Bender 1993 for detailed information on his training.

⁴⁶ A typical student, whom I interviewed at the school in late 1991, is Tao Qing, aged nineteen. I later visited her home in a small village ten miles outside of Wuxi. Her father is a farmer and her mother works in a local office. The village is well-to-do, though it did not have a story house until 1992. Older people in her family were interested in *tanci*, but she knew little about it before enrolling in the school.

of the oldest and most beautifully crafted musical instruments are in the hands of amateurs.⁴⁷

Performance Situations

Before 1949 Suzhou *tanci* was performed in a number of contexts, some of which are similar to current situations (Zuo 1981:112-21; Zhou 1988:160-69). The oldest locations for performances were in marketplaces or temple fairs. Open air performances in such contexts (often by less accomplished storytellers) continued into the mid-twentieth century.

By the late nineteenth century, many storytellers worked on a commission basis in *chaguan* (teahouses) that offered a variety of entertainments. In the early decades of this century, *shuchang* (story houses), establishments that existed primarily for the telling of stories, became common.⁴⁸

Another performance context was the *tanghui*, in which storytellers were invited to perform for a specified period of time (ranging from one day to several weeks) in a private home or other institution.⁴⁹ *Huishu* (sometimes *shuhui*) were gatherings held at the end of the year in which, over a period of days, a number of storytellers told their best episodes. Since many storytellers moved around most of the year, these events gave them a chance to view each other's performances and size up new talents

⁴⁷ For information on avocational groups before 1949, see Ni 1988.

⁴⁸ There were several types of *shuchang* (story houses), and the term was sometimes used interchangeably with *chaguan* (or teahouse) (Zhou 1988:162). In some *shuchang*, stories were told along with opening ballads (*kaipian*). In others, women sang songs and ballads, there being no actual storytelling. These *shuchang* featuring only singing were sometimes described by the term *qingchang* (pure singing). In the late Qing fictional narrative *Jiu wei gui* (The Nine-Tailed Turtle), the narrator relates his visit to such a *shuchang* in Suzhou, describing how patrons wrote their requests on slips of paper (*tiaozi*) to be given by waiters to the performers, some of whom were prostitutes. Today, notes are sometimes used by audience members to request favorite *kaipian*, though an improperly made request can be considered insulting to performers. See Feng 1988 for an overview of *shuchang* in the last one hundred years. Ni 1986 details the development of story houses in Shanghai.

⁴⁹ A Mr. Yang, the third-generation manager of the only story house in the town of Puyuan, Zhejiang province, told me that during the 1930s Japanese soldiers sometimes came to the story house to recruit *tanci* storytellers for *tanghui* performances.

who might qualify for guild membership.⁵⁰ In the 1930s and 1940s, radio broadcasts of *pingtan* became popular, creating a vehicle for the rapid popularization of *tanci* among a vast audience of Wu-dialect speakers. Innovative talents like Jiang Yuequan used the Shanghai airwaves to introduce new styles of singing and music to urban audiences, swiftly gaining fame via the new medium.⁵¹

Throughout the 1990s, the contexts of Suzhou *tanci* have expanded, despite the perceived decline of interest in the art. Traditional story house performances, described in detail below, are given on a daily basis in dozens of story houses in the Wu-speaking area.⁵² Depending on their fame, troupe standing, and connections, storytellers may also have opportunities to perform at *zhaodai yanqu*, special performances given at receptions for businesses, banquets, and local government functions. These occasions are similar to the old *tanghui* performances, though storytellers demand to be treated with respect and will usually not perform while guests are actually eating, as was once the custom. Some tourist spots, such as Suzhou Street in the Summer Palace in Beijing and the Wangshi Yuan (Master of Nets Garden) in Suzhou, regularly feature performances of the short opening ballads called *kaipian*. Select performers in the Suzhou and Shanghai troupes and accomplished amateurs are sometimes invited by various organizations to sing *kaipian* and relate episodes of famous stories.⁵³

⁵⁰ The term *huishu* can act as a noun or a verb (for example, “We will *huishu* at the Suzhou Story House this weekend”), while a similar term *shuhui* seems only to act as a noun and is less often heard than *huishu*. Hrdlickova (1965:238-39) briefly discusses *huishu* and similar events in other Chinese narrative traditions.

⁵¹ Li 1998:127-29.

⁵² The exact number of houses is not constant. Many have closed in recent years due to lack of business, but new ones occasionally still open. In 1992 one trend was for modern housing developments to include a storytelling place for older residents. Zhou and Suzhou 1988 includes a list of over two hundred story houses operating in the late 1980s, the largest percentage being in Shanghai and surrounding suburbs. See Yamaguchi 1992 for a short introduction to several story houses in Suzhou and Shanghai.

⁵³ For instance, in November of 1991 Gong Huasheng and Cai Xiaojuan of the Suzhou *Pingtan* Troupe performed an episode of *Meng Lijun* in the Suzhou Opera Museum to an audience of “outstanding” elderly people on Old Folks’ Day. Amateur performers Dong Yaokun and his wife Ni Huaiyu (daughter of *Pearl Pagoda* performer Ni Pingqing) make feature performances about eighty times a year in factories and other local settings (1991:pers. comm.).

Huishu, now sponsored by various troupes and nominally overseen by local cultural bureaus, are still situations in which professional or amateur storytellers gather to compete and show off their skills in performing their favorite set pieces. They are held at the end of the year and in early spring, often for a variety of occasions.⁵⁴ Special *huishu* may also be held to honor performers, particularly older ones.⁵⁵ Contests such as the Suzhou *Pingtán* Troupe Great Prize Contest, in which younger professionals tell abridged 20-minute episodes, have been held sporadically since the early 1980s.⁵⁶ Radio shows, featuring taped performances of accomplished storytellers, are aired in Shanghai, Suzhou, and Wuxi. Only retired performers allow entire stories (lasting two or more weeks) to be taped, though shorter selections (such as contest performances) by younger performers are broadcast regularly.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Both professional and amateur performances were held in the spring of 1992 on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of Mao Zedong's famous talks on art and literature, originally given at the communist base in Yan'an in the early forties. It is interesting to note that the subject matter at most of the *tanci* performances was traditional stories. Efforts by cultural bureau workers to organize events with a more political content met with resistance (by non-participation) from most storytellers. Those who did participate took advantage of the lack of competition to win prizes they normally could not—or at least that is the opinion of some who chose not to participate.

⁵⁵ In the spring of 1992, a number of elder *tanci* performers gathered to perform at a story house in Changshu (the event was officially termed a *shuhui*, though sometimes referred to as a *huishu* event) to celebrate the eightieth birthday of Huang Yi'an. Among the oldest living *tanci* performers, the retired Huang is noted for his skill at seal-cutting and calligraphy, and is the originator of the modern Suzhou *tanci* version of *Story of the Western Wing* (*Xixiang ji*), made famous by his student, Yang Zhenxiong. Huang performed for over a half hour at the event.

⁵⁶ In late 1991 the Suzhou *Pingtán* Troupe Great Prize Contest was held, featuring younger professionals. Stories that won had some political overtones and themes were from either the pre-1911 or the post-1911 period. Though audiences generally prefer the older stories, themes set in the thirties and forties (or more recently) are more suitable as “politically correct” offerings to the judges, who include troupe leaders, officials from the cultural bureau, and representatives from the *Pingtán* School. One of the winning numbers was a selection from a KMT-Red intrigue set in the thirties.

⁵⁷ Working performers do not want their entire stories aired because they fear attendance will suffer at story houses. On the other hand, younger performers relish the exposure gained from the airing of selections of their stories and specialty pieces.



This is a special performance for a group of amateur Japanese folklorists held in the Suzhou Kunju Opera Museum (Spring, 1992). The storytelling performance was part of a traditional variety show, which included classical Chinese music, local *kunju* opera, and other performances. Yuan Xiaoliang, although sitting in the lead's chair, is acting as an assistant for a more senior female performer, Zhao Huilan, as she sings an opening ballad about the star-crossed lovers Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai.

In recent years, *Pingtán* performances have been aired regularly on Shanghai television stations, though rarely in Suzhou (Li 1998:130-31). At least two television dramas featuring *tanci* artists were filmed in the 1980s. The first *pingtan* music video was issued in 1992.⁵⁸ Tape-recordings, CD's, and videos of well-known performers are available at music counters in stores in Suzhou, Shanghai, and other regional cities.

⁵⁸ The tape features Qin Jianguo, a 35-year-old performer in the Shanghai troupe, singing a selection from *Jade Dragonfly*, surrounded by a chorus of lovely women playing *pipa*. The music is electronically enhanced, and an initial showing at a *pingtan* hobbyist club in Suzhou in early 1992 was not met with enthusiasm.

Story Houses

The sixteen story houses in the Jiangnan region that I visited during my fieldwork differed in terms of age, size, upkeep, structure, management, reputation, and audience. Possibly the oldest one in continuous use is the Puyuan Story house (*Puyuan shuchang*), located in the small town of Puyuan in northern Zhejiang Province. Under the fourth generation of management by the Yang family, it is over ninety years old. In Suzhou there are presently five story houses, down from over a dozen in the early 1980s. The Guangyu Story House (*Guangyu shuting*) is one of two run by the Suzhou *Pingtian* Troupe, the other being the Peaceful Story House (*Heping shuchang*) in the eastern side of the city.⁵⁹ The largest such establishment within the city limits is the Suzhou Story House (*Suzhou shuchang*). A small, plain story house exists in the Cultural Palace in the Nanmen district.



Typical audience members in the Guangyu Story House,
one of the nicer Suzhou story houses.

⁵⁹ In 1989 the Guangyu Story House changed its name from *Guangyu shuchang* (Guangyu Story House) to *Guangyu shuting* (Guangyu Story Concert Hall). I have used “story house” to translate both *ting* and *chang* because both terms refer to exactly the same sort of venues. Other more wordy names of story houses I have translated below as “hall” or “center,” though they also mean “story house.”



Yuan Xiaoliang (left) and Wang Jin performing *Meng Lijun* in a story house located in a public park in the Nanmen district of Suzhou.

The only story house on the cultural bureau register is the Official's Hat Story Hall (*Shaomao tingshu chang*), located near the Guanqianjie district in a Qing dynasty mansion that was once the local headquarters for Taiping rebel commanders.⁶⁰ This edifice, shaped roughly like an ancient official's hat, has an arching tile roof supported by carved mahogany beams. It became a story house only in recent decades and doubles as a meeting place for older performers who gather early in the morning to drink tea and chat. Most storytellers who perform there are young unestablished performers, older ones nearing retirement, or *getihu* (privately employed) performers from rural areas. The admission price is the lowest in Suzhou, and for that reason few ambitious performers wish to appear there. Most audience members are older males of mixed urban backgrounds. *Tanci* performances, featuring retired or amateur performers, are also held regularly in several cultural centers throughout the city.

⁶⁰ The Taiping Rebellion, which began in rural areas of south China, raged throughout the country in the third quarter of the nineteenth century. This massive uprising of peasants was fomented by a visionary leader who followed a doctrine that combined elements of traditional Chinese thought with Christianity. The Taipings sought to bring down the Manchu imperial government and replace it with their own "heavenly kingdom of great peace" (Grasso et al. 1991:45-52).

Suzhou's best story house, the Guangyu Story House, is located on a side street in the old quarters of the city near the bustling Guanqian Street. Nearby is a square with several movie theaters, famous restaurants, a large department store, and the Suzhou Story House. A Ming dynasty temple, Xuan Miao Guan, is a short walk away. Located in an older building, in 1992 the Guangyu Story House stood directly across from a grain store. Outside the house are signs advertising the daily videotaped films and the featured *pingtan* performers. Inside is a small lobby in which guests purchase tickets (one *yuan* each), buy seeds and other small snacks, and receive a glass holding a serving of dry green tea leaves (hot water is supplied in thermos bottles on tiny tables between seats). On the walls of the lobby are samples of calligraphy from powerful *tanci* supporters in the central government, such as the late Chen Yun and Hu Qiaomu, alongside ancient carved inscriptions.

The storytelling room holds approximately 120 guests. The seating area consists of a long narrow rectangle in which padded chairs are arranged with two narrow aisles running from back to front. The stage is approximately two and one-half feet high and about twelve feet across. A screen decorated with images of court ladies stands in back of the storytellers' table and chairs. There is a microphone in front of each chair and loudspeakers on each side of the stage, and performers enter from a small anteroom on stage left. There is air-conditioning in summer, and thus smoking is not allowed, a source of displeasure to some guests. Though the majority of listeners are men, more women attend the Guangyu than any other story house in Suzhou. They number sometimes as high as eighteen or twenty (or about one-sixth of the audience).⁶¹ Upstairs are the offices of the Suzhou Pingtan Troupe, quarters for the visiting performers (a small bedroom with cooking facilities), and a small, troupe-run hotel.

The most prestigious story house in the Jiangnan region is the Xiangyin Storytelling Center (*Xiangyin shuyuan*), run by the Shanghai Municipal Pingtan Troupe in downtown Shanghai.⁶² Audiences consist of a high proportion of "hardcore" fans, overseas Chinese, and performers from other professions (such as film actors) who wish to observe *pingtan* to improve their own skills. There is usually a high percentage of women in

⁶¹ Audience members are called *tingzhongmen* (listeners) rather than *guanzhongmen* (viewers), suggesting that the oral dimensions of *pingtan* performance are more basic than the visual dimensions.

⁶² See Yamaguchi 1992 for an alternate description. The house is an area subject to urban renewal, so its future location is in question.

the audience. It is a difficult house for performers to gain booking in because of the high standards of the enthusiastic crowd; thus younger performers seldom appear there.

Xiangyin has the most unusual schedule of any story house today. Two pairs of *tanci* performers are booked for a period of about three months. Each pair performs one hour per day, repeating the same episode each day for a week at a time. Due to the prestige of the house, which seats only eighty persons, and in an effort to allow more persons a chance to enjoy the art, audience members must make advance reservations and can attend no more than one performance per week.⁶³ Like the Guangyu Story House in Suzhou, Xiangyin has air-conditioning and does not allow smoking—additional benefits for performers tired of the hot, humid summers and the smoke-clouded rooms of the average story house.

A story house in the village of Changqiao near Suzhou is typical of rural establishments of that sort. The house itself is located in the village cultural bureau. Tickets are taken at a table by the door in a large anteroom, where tea for the guests is boiled behind a low cement wall. Cardplayers fill the tables in this area. The story room holds nearly two hundred guests, with the overflow sitting on benches and stools in the rear. The stage is a low, wide, wooden platform, behind which hangs a large, faded landscape painting. Unlike some rural story houses, there are microphones and speakers. The audience members are usually all male, ranging in age from late twenties to extreme old age, with most being around fifty. They are mostly farmers and factory workers, some of them out of work. On rainy days, which performers love, the place is filled with farmers who do not wish to work the fields.⁶⁴

Audiences

Audiences for live *tanci* vary according to the performance situation. Attendance depends on a combination of factors, including site, weather and season, day of the week, time of the performances, rural or urban setting, reputation and competence of the performers, ticket price, availability of

⁶³ Since audience members can attend only once each week, they fill their afternoons with other diversions, including opera performances, visits to parks, and films.

⁶⁴ According to Yuan Xiaoliang, performers prefer rain in the countryside—"when it rains, it rains money"—since audiences are larger. In cities, however, rain means smaller audiences and less income.



The entrance to the Official's Hat Story Hall. During the mid-nineteenth century, the compound was the headquarters of local Taiping rebels. A narrow passageway leads back to the actual storytelling room and courtyard. Handwritten signs by the entrance ways are typical of many story houses.



Fledgling storytellers Lu Shixiao (left) and Yan Wenwu performing *Little Meng Lijun* in the Official's Hat Story Hall, the only Suzhou story house on the historic register. The performance lasts for two weeks, two hours a day. The audience sits very close to the stage in this traditional story house context.



Lu and Yan backstage in the storyteller's quarters. This was the site of several interviews with the team. Several months after this engagement, they found new storytelling partners.

competing attractions (including other *tanci* performances), comfort level of the story house or theater, and, in some cases, advertising or dialect region.⁶⁵

Daily audiences in urban story houses often consist of a mixture of middle-aged to elderly male and female guests.⁶⁶ Except for the Xiangyin Storytelling Center, where often half the audience is female, the ratio is seldom less than five to one in favor of males. The usual reason given for this imbalance is that “women have more housework.” Of the half dozen middle-aged women with whom I spoke in the Guangyu Story House

⁶⁵ While touring parts of Jiangsu and Zhejiang with nine *tanci* storytellers from the Suzhou troupe in the spring of 1992, I realized that audiences in marginal or non-Wu-speaking areas simply could not follow the story. Thus dialect is a tremendous limitation on appreciation of the *pingtan* arts in the national context.

⁶⁶ See Mullen 1992 for folkloristic profiles of the elderly and the relation of folklore to personal identity among older people.

audience during one two-week engagement and at performances of other stories in the Official's Hat Story Hall (where most guests were between the ages of forty and sixty-five), all reported that regular attendance at such events was a pastime they had adopted after retirement. One woman stated that she had had little interest in storytelling before, but that now it gave her something to do each day. Some older women said they had enjoyed it as children, and several younger women said older relatives introduced them to it. Most of the men I talked with also became interested in *pingtan* when taken to performances as children. A few older people occasionally bring grandchildren to listen.

Sunday afternoon sessions, which usually draw the largest crowds, are sometimes attended by teenage girls and boys, though usually only at the best story houses in Suzhou. Most houses have regulars who come each day, rain or shine. They know each other and in some houses, such as the one in the Cultural Palace in south Suzhou and the Official's Hat Story Hall, guests gather each morning to play cards and chat.⁶⁷ Some listeners carry books and magazines to performances, but they usually do not read while a performer is present. While Suzhou audiences consist mostly of retired office and shop personnel, factory workers, and teachers (sometimes university-level), others occasionally attend. Some audiences also include young traveling businessmen and a few persons with obvious emotional or mental problems. A main requirement of any audience member is sufficient free time to attend afternoon performances. Another is enough income to afford daily performances that, in early 1992 in Suzhou, cost from a low of four *mao* to a high of one *yuan*.

Though audiences are usually of average or above-average education, many performers (and *pingtan* scholars and audience members) speak of a decline not only in the quality of performers, but in the attention of audiences as well. Many performers claim that fewer and fewer people come to listen to "art" (*yishu*), and more and more come just to hear the story. Thus storytellers in the late 1980s and early 1990s have been faced with a situation in which the older, well-known stories are regarded as boring by many of their listeners. This situation has forced the development of new stories, drawn usually from vernacular literature or simply invented, following traditional themes. Another audience complaint

⁶⁷ Storytellers perform only in the afternoons in Suzhou. Cardplaying and chatting may continue in rooms adjacent to the story room during performances in the Official's Hat Story Hall and in the Cultural Center. No such activities take place in the Guangyu Story House or the Suzhou Story House.

is that the pace of the stories is too slow, that more action—and less of the detail that has traditionally been so characteristic of *tanci*—is desired.

These attitudes favoring freshness in repertoire and speed in narrative development have probably been influenced by the quickening pace of life in modern China and the different sense of performance time introduced by television, videos, and movies. Also, the lengthy interruptions in performance in the years since the Anti-Rightist Movement of the late 1950s and the Cultural Revolution disrupted the natural training of audience members and performers alike. Another factor affecting lack of audience interest is the set of transparent restrictions still in force on what performers can say. Controversial performers were silenced as early as the late 1950s. In the early 1980s, Yang Zijiang, a former capitalist turned *pinghua* storyteller, was forbidden to perform for several years after his story about the Emperor Qianlong—laden with remarks on the contemporary political situation—drew huge crowds in Wuxi. References to politics and sex have been continually repressed by cultural bureaus at all levels, creating a situation in which performers and audience members alike participate in the monitoring of what is said during a performance.⁶⁸

Performers feel that rural audience members do not like excessive singing and that they prefer more humor and action than urban audiences. During my recording of a version of *Meng Lijun* at the rural Changqiao story house, the *xiashou* (assistant performer), Wang Jin, had to leave early one day in order to participate in a pop song contest in Suzhou, forty minutes away by bus. Alone on the *shutai* (storytelling stage), the lead performer (*shangshou*), Yuan Xiaoliang, turned the table around lengthwise (as in solo *tanci* or *pinghua*) and laid his *sanxian* banjo before him, never touching it for the entire forty-minute episode. He felt that he could not inflict unappreciated singing on the audience because the performance was already compromised by Wang's early departure. Accordingly, he dropped all the songs from the episode and put on an especially energetic performance, larded with numerous jokes. He later explained that this strategy to please the audience was wholly intentional.

The widest audiences for *tanci* performances are among radio and television listeners. Former storyteller Zhou Jie'an, the radio show host in Shanghai, estimates his regular audience to be in the millions and claims to receive numerous requests each week to play tapes of particular *tanci* performances. Though it can be assumed that most of the radio audience consists of older persons, it is not unusual to see young and middle-aged

⁶⁸ Sex and politics are topics very susceptible to jokes and intrinsically interesting to audiences. Historically this material has been very useful to some storytellers.

shop clerks in Suzhou listening to *tanci*. Because of the afternoon hours, it is impossible for most employed persons to attend daily story house performances. Radio, of course, is free, and can be enjoyed at home, since the visual element is not as crucial in *tanci* as in opera. It is said that in some Suzhou neighborhoods one can ride down a street on bicycle and hear a whole performance on the radios playing through the open windows. This is not far from the truth. Moreover, between 1995 and 1997, a Shanghai-based television show called “Weekly Story House” (*Xinqi shuchang*) featured 75 storytellers performing parts from 45 full-length stories (Li 1998:130-31).

Devoted *tanci* fans have organized into at least two organizations in Shanghai and Suzhou. These fans or “story aficionados” (*shumi*), among whom are a few former professional storytellers, regard Suzhou *tanci* as a major interest in their lives. Though many of them do not regularly visit story houses, performers are aware of the more ardent among them. When such a fan attends three performances in a row, performers feel very much appreciated.⁶⁹ Such fans are said to attend for the appreciation of the “art,” not just to listen to the story. Shanghai is home to many *tanci* fans, and a number of performers I interviewed felt that Shanghai audiences in general understand more about *tanci* than those in other places and are more “warmly enthusiastic” (*requing*), especially to well established performers, than audiences elsewhere.⁷⁰ Many fans have huge collections of taped performances, both audiotape and, increasingly, videotape.⁷¹ Some collect photographs and signatures of *tanci* celebrities and sometimes send gifts of calligraphy (usually wishes of success) and even food to favorite performers. At a meeting of *pingtan* fans held in a Shanghai recreation hall in April of 1992, participants joined in contests to guess the names of performers, tunes, and stories from brief selections played on a tape-recorder. Guest appearances were made by two well-known older storytellers, and short performances were given by two younger ones. About one thousand photographs of events and performers were on display in the lobby.

⁶⁹ Yuan Xiaoliang has commented to me that the presence of these *neihang* (experts) can stimulate the storytellers to do a better than average job, and that he sometimes feels he performs “just for them.”

⁷⁰ Of course, fans in other cities may not agree with this assessment.

⁷¹ The best known fan in Suzhou is probably Yin Dequan, who has over three hundred audiotapes of *tanci* performances (1991). Mao Ruisheng (1991) has privately published a bibliography of his collection of tape-recordings of 115 performers.

A Performance at the Guangyu Story House

In December of 1991, I taped a two-week storytelling engagement at the Guangyu Story house. The performers were Yuan Xiaoliang (male) and Wang Jin (female), young storytellers in the Suzhou troupe who were performing for the first time at the Guangyu. The story they told was *Meng Lijun*, mentioned above, about a young woman in the Yuan dynasty (1271-1368) who escapes an undesired marriage by dressing as a young man and who later becomes prime minister of China. The following description is based largely on performances that took place during the engagement (particularly on December ninth), though I attended many performances there before and after.

Audience members gather in the story house from about one o'clock in the afternoon. These so-called "guests" (*keren*) buy tickets at the window in the anteroom (specific seats can be requested, if available). At the door to the story room, a middle-aged woman gives each guest a glass with a pinch of green tea leaves in the bottom. Music, sometimes Chinese opera, sometimes pop, is played over the loudspeakers beginning about 1:15. Guests chat with friends or sit alone on the padded seats. Small tables, on which staff place thermos bottles, stand among rows of seats. According to common practice, the glasses are first filled halfway with hot water; then the tea is allowed to steep until all the dry leaves settle to the bottom. The glass is then filled to the top and left to continue steeping.⁷²

At about 1:30 a young male worker comes out onto the stage (*shutai*) to check the microphones.⁷³ He also fills the performers' teapot and glasses with hot water.⁷⁴ Before the crowd arrives, some performers place their

⁷² Between sips the tea is placed on the table, though in some houses the glasses are placed in wooden trays or in wire holders on the backs of chairs. Many guests drink tea constantly throughout the performances, sometimes pouring each other tea. In a few teahouses (such as at Puyuan in northern Zhejiang), which retain older traditions, workers still fill the patrons' glasses from kettles. The tea served is usually of average quality, though it may be somewhat better in the finer houses.

⁷³ The *shutai* is a small platform built on the back wall of the room in which stories are told (in some places, such as the Suzhou Story House, an actual stage is present). About two feet high (sometimes a bit more), the platform holds the performers, a small table, chairs, and instruments. A painting or ornamented screen, sometimes hung or placed behind the performers, adds atmosphere.

⁷⁴ Many storytellers do not drink tea when performing, feeling that it constricts their throats.

own instruments on the performing table and rest a second pair of instruments against the sides of their chairs; in some cases, workers handle this duty.⁷⁵

At 1:45, a buzzer sounds backstage and the storytellers enter from stage right and take their seats—the lead on stage left, and the assistant on stage right.⁷⁶ They settle themselves in their chairs, briefly adjust the microphones (conscientious performers will have done this earlier in the afternoon), and check to be certain that the second set of instruments is leaning steadily and is properly within reach. They will often place their feet correctly upon the footblocks and pick up the instruments on the table, briefly tuning them (too much time spent on tuning, however, is considered distracting by some guests).

The assistant will then greet the audience and engage in mild patter, sometimes announcing coming attractions (such as the singing of a famous *kaipian* ballad) or apologizing for some shortcoming in the performers' behavior (such as ending one minute too early the day before, or having a noticeable cold, or leaving the engagement before the contract expires). Or he/she may simply state the name of the *kaipian* that will open the performance. This number is sung by either the lead or the assistant, though both play their instruments.⁷⁷ During the *kaipian*, the performers often make minor adjustments to their instruments.

After the singing, which may last up to fifteen minutes, the performers pause for a few moments, breaking contact with the audience.

⁷⁵ Yuan Xiaoliang always stole out on stage about a half hour before the performance to make sure the instruments were properly aligned. He told of incidents in which workers placed instruments out of reach or upside down. Such misplacements could be embarrassing at the start of a performance. He also takes care in adjusting the microphones, particularly on the first day in a story house.

⁷⁶ It is interesting that the presence of the male on the left and the female on the right seems very common crossculturally. American news teams observe the same convention. It was also traditional in parts of America for gravediggers to place the wife to the right of the husband.

⁷⁷ Some performers like to vary the style of *kaipian*. For instance, instead of a song, a story shorter than the main narrative and told in only fifteen-minute segments a day may be performed over the two-week engagement. Singing is usually a part of such a form. In some cases, performers may even share the singing of a *kaipian*, each one doing half. Yuan Xiaoliang and Wang Jin often sing parts of three or four *kaipian* each day, drawing on a range of famous episodes from full-length *tanci* and traditional *kaipian*. Urban audiences like the fact that the pair have a large repertoire of *kaipian* tunes; thus their performances of *kaipian* are unusually varied.

They sip water, arrange their fans and handkerchiefs on the table, or continue to fine-tune their instruments. According to Yuan Xiaoliang, this pause is intentional, allowing both the audience and the performers to compose themselves and shift mentally to the main story. During this time, some performers also count the number of guests. Yuan does so in groups of five, the process taking less than a minute.⁷⁸ Over the two-week period, audience attendance is an index of how well the performers are doing.⁷⁹

After the pause, the lead lightly raps a tiny woodblock known as the *xingmu* on the table. This act announces the beginning of the main story and focuses audience attention on the performer.⁸⁰ He then takes up the main narrative by addressing the audience, often accompanying the initial words with hand gestures. A formulaic recapitulation of the story as told thus far is given first. The lead narrates the action, often accompanied by hand gestures and manipulations of the eyes and face. As the occasion warrants, the performer assumes the roles of various characters, using stylized voice registers, movements, and, when needed, a fan or handkerchief. The narration may shift occasionally to the assistant, who does his or her part in characterization. In some episodes, depending on the attitudes and skills of the performers, the assistant may take up a large percentage of the narration and character utterances.

When singing roles are performed, the storytellers gracefully pick up their instruments just before a speaking role ends and smoothly shift into song. Performers not engaged in a speaking or singing role are expected to appear passively attentive, sitting poised and motionless. Slouching or a distracted gaze reflects badly on both performers.⁸¹ Occasional sips of

⁷⁸ As noted, some houses are said to report fewer customers than actually attend, in hopes of paying the performers less. Thus, wise performers count the audience.

⁷⁹ Performers may become quite disheartened if they see the audience gradually slipping away, feeling—as one put it—that they are having their skin slowly peeled off.

⁸⁰ This tiny “awakening” block is held on the sides between the tips of index and ring fingers, with the middle finger on top. The tiny blocks used by Suzhou *pingtan* performers are much smaller than those I observed being used by performers of Kunming *pingshu* storytelling (Bender 1996:29).

⁸¹ During my stay in Suzhou an assistant storyteller performing in one of the better story houses became the object of dissatisfaction among audience members and staff alike. Her “crimes” included slouching, not putting enough energy into singing, and constantly “pulling a long face.” There is also the story of an older male performer whose very young—and very bored—assistant would count the rafters of an older story house as the master narrated. After several days of this, the old man suddenly shifted into character and

water, a wipe across the brow with a handkerchief, or a low cough are overlooked by both audience and fellow performer. If the cigarette smoke is too thick, a performer may, while in character, waft the fumes away with a fan.⁸² A similar strategy is used for flies if simply ignoring them fails.

Some performers (especially older ones) not trained in the standard regimen of the Pingtan School may display idiosyncratic movements, which sometimes promote rather than distract from audience interest. For instance, one older storyteller who performed in the Guangyu Story House in early 1992 dangled both his hands in front of his chest as he spoke, rather than resting his left hand on the table.⁸³

Generally, the first segment of the performance is longer than the second. Many performers take a break after sixty or seventy minutes. During this ten-minute intermission storytellers leave the stage.⁸⁴ Many or most audience members go to the restroom, exchanging opinions about the performance on the way.

Backstage the performers rest, consult script books if necessary, and discuss how the story is developing and what might be added, cut, or retained in the next segment. (How much time remains is an important factor in these decisions.) Returning onstage, the performers quiet the

surprised the assistant, who was playing the role of a maiden, by asking how old she was. Taken off guard, the assistant blurted out something like “sixty-seven,” a response that brought down the house and put an end to the rafter counting. Stories of snoozing or arrogant assistants being prodded off stage by the lead’s *sanxian*-banjo are also told. It is general practice to put off pre-performance tiffs until after the show, though this is not always possible for hotheaded performers. Veiled insults may be directed at the other performer while both are in character, with comments about body shape and temper. In some cases the audience picks up on these intentional affronts, which can add to the amusement (at least on the audience’s part). Skillful intended victims can sometimes sense such attacks in the making and ward them off verbally.

⁸² This is a favorite technique of Yangzhou *tanci* performer Li Renzhen, who spends months every year performing by herself in the northern Jiangsu countryside and small towns. Though some performers smoke, many complain of throat problems that result from voice strain aggravated by the dense smoke. In winter, when the story house doors and windows are shut, smoke is at its densest.

⁸³ A well-known, elderly Shanghai performer is rumored to have fed bits of apple to caged crickets and discreetly picked his nose on stage during the last years of his career.

⁸⁴ Some rural story houses do not have a backstage area. Performers thus remain on stage and whisper briefly about the story. In such situations, there is no opportunity to consult a script book if something is forgotten. The break may be a few minutes shorter than usual, since the performers feel awkward “just sitting there.” As in the city, rural audiences usually leave *en masse* for the restroom areas during break.

audience with a few bars of a tune as they judge the number of people who remain. The lead may then again rap his small wooden block lightly on the table, and the story begins once more. The audience members, as in the first half, display a mixture of attentiveness and seeming obliviousness. A few older guests near the stage may even appear to be napping. Some audience members stare fixedly at the performers, sometimes smiling, even laughing, at the jokes and growing teary-eyed as the story turns sentimental. A few may mouth the words of lines they anticipate. Contact between audience and performers is very important to storytellers, and is facilitated by the close proximity of the two parties. According to storyteller Cai Xiaojuan, a major drawback of performing in large auditoriums is the lack of audience feedback due to distance and stage lights. With no awareness of immediate response, performers feel out of touch.

Twenty minutes before the performance ends, two or three middle-aged women begin collecting the thermos bottles and then the glasses, placing the latter in large tin buckets. Though anticipated by the performers, this activity can still be distracting to them. As the performance nears its end, some audience members begin to stir, assembling their bags, canes, private tea cups or jars, umbrellas, and wraps. The storytellers are expected to perform up to the the last minute, but not to exceed the prescribed time (in rural areas, however, a few minutes over is sometimes expected).

As the lead winds up the episode, some people are already out of their seats heading for the door. The performers, especially the lead, usually wait on the platform for a few moments to receive comments (constructive criticism and sometimes praise) from the regulars (*laotingke*). Depending on the house, the performers either leave their instruments on the table or take them away. Then they retreat backstage or, depending on the location of their quarters, wend their way among the slow-moving audience towards the front exit. At the Guangyu Story House, videos follow the *pingtan* performance, so the workers must immediately clear the stage of the storytelling equipment and set up a film screen.

After a storytelling performance, the performers change clothes and remove make-up. If they are on good terms with each other, they may discuss the performance and relax together. After dinner is a time for washing clothes and attending to other chores.⁸⁵ To pass idle time, performers can watch videos shown by the house for free, attend movies,

⁸⁵ In my observations women do more of these “household” tasks than men, though there are certainly exceptions.

shop, read, knit, exercise, or engage in whatever leisure activity is available to them.

The next morning the storytellers arise somewhere between five and ten o'clock, depending on personal preference. Some performers exercise regularly, *qigong* exercises being popular among middle-aged performers.⁸⁶ After breakfast, they rest or practice basic storytelling skills, and eat lunch by about 11:30. Around noontime they may begin to rehearse, with the length of the rehearsal period varying according to how familiar they are with the story, individual interest, ability, and a sense of how well they must perform that day to sustain audience interest.⁸⁷

In the rehearsals I witnessed by Yuan Xiaoliang and Wang Jin, there was emphasis on reviewing song lyrics (sometimes actually sung with instrumental accompaniment, but more often just murmuring the lines) and on crucial moments when the story is tossed from one performer to another. The performers then tuned their instruments, put on make-up, and donned their performing garb. Yuan wears the same long gown for the entire two weeks of each session—the audience would consider him pretentious if he were to change it. Wang, however, changes her clothing each day, wardrobe being a heavy expense for female performers.

Summary

This overview of Suzhou chantefable storytelling has described recent contexts of that art in Suzhou, Shanghai, Wuxi, and smaller places in the Wu-dialect areas of the Yangzi delta. The focus on context has revealed that forces at work within the society, even those seemingly far removed from the act of storytelling, can influence locus of performance, content and form of performances, nature of audiences, and availability of performers. Persistent anxieties among performers and aficionados alike

⁸⁶ *Qigong* is a sort of exercise popular in many areas of China that combines yogic breathing and martial arts movements. *Tanci* performer Jin Lisheng claims that *qigong* exercises help in his storytelling. Li Renzhen, a Yangzhou *tanci* performer, does an extensive daily routine of sword-dancing and *qigong* exercises.

⁸⁷ Experienced performers know that they cannot give one hundred percent each time; it would be too tiring. Thus on certain days they will make greater efforts (*maili*) than on others. The first day and the following Sunday of an engagement are especially important; on those days the crowds are customarily larger, so a good performance then will attract larger audiences during the week. Also, on some days the intrinsic interest of the story will hold audiences as much as the ability of the performers.

revolve around fears of changes in government patronage and the threatening popularity of other entertainment media. If story houses cannot continue to find alternate means of support (the showing of videos, running hostels, private patronage, and so on) and should recruitment of young performers and audience members fail, it is difficult to foresee in what contexts the art can survive in the coming decades, especially the full-length stories. Though a number of story houses have closed and many younger storytellers have found other professions, new story houses open with regularity in places such as housing projects with many elderly residents, and a few in hotels in smaller cities. With government support the Suzhou Pingtan Storytelling School continues to produce students, recently enrolling considerable numbers of young people.⁸⁸ Moreover, some storytellers continue to find markets in the new leisure entertainment world of restaurants, amusement centers, and resorts. Thus, though some fear the *pingtan* storytelling arts will die—and along with them icons of regional tradition—it would seem more optimistic to ask in what contexts and forms the arts will emerge in the process of China's modernization.⁸⁹

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⁸⁸ According to figures (Cao 1998:81) I received just before publication of this article, there was a total of 325 active, troupe-affiliated, *pingtan* storytellers (233 of whom were *tanci* performers) in Jiangsu and Zhejiang provinces and the Shanghai municipality. There was also a total of 156 story houses, of which there were 102 in Jiangsu province, 5 in Zhejiang province, and 48 in the Shanghai area. Of the *tanci* stories being told, 17 were traditional ones like *Pearl Pagoda* or *Jade Dragonfly*; 18 were “second category” stories on traditional themes from the 1950s like *Meng Lijun*; 73 were newly written stories on historical themes; and 6 new stories were on urban life in the 1920s-1940s.

⁸⁹ Henry Glassie (1982) has noted the persistence of performance traditions in the face of assumptions of extinction.

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Translation and Orality in the Old English *Orosius*

Deborah VanderBilt

The focus of oral studies in Anglo-Saxon literature has been primarily on poetic texts; the poetry's oral-formulaic language and its way of transforming narratives according to its own traditional idiom have made it a fascinating area of study. Within this field, however, critical analysis has deepened from early, often rote applications of the Parry-Lord theory toward more precise consideration of the "tradition-dependent" features of oral-traditional texts in Old English, features that may or may not find parallels in texts from other oral cultures.¹ Additionally, the direction of oral studies of the past two decades in medieval literature generally as well as in Anglo-Saxon literature in particular has included issues of audience, reception, and transmission—what we might characterize as the dynamics of orality, that is, how orality operates as one of the "socially conditioned and socially functional modes of approach to the transmission of knowledge" (Bäuml 1980:246). A recent, broad-ranging collection of essays on medieval literature subtitled *Orality and Textuality in the Middle Ages* reflects emphasis on the fact that orality and literacy always involve social, and in the latter case technological, constructions that support the mode(s) of communication at each extreme of the oral/literate dichotomy and all along the spectrum in between.²

Franz Bäuml's definition, cited above, recognizes that orality affects all communication in an oral culture. In Anglo-Saxon England, the poetic idiom of Old English was a specialized form of language that arose within that oral culture before the advent of literacy, but the use of the idiom is only one manifestation of general assumptions operating within Anglo-Saxon culture, assumptions that mark all aspects of the vernacular language and that continue to mark it even after the ascendancy of writing

¹ The phrase is from Foley 1980; see further Foley 1990: espec. ch. 1.

² Doane and Pasternack 1991. See especially the essays by Ursula Schaefer and John Miles Foley.

and literacy.³ Given the characteristics of the poetic idiom, such as its highly structured language, the anonymity of most of its poets, and opening formulas repeated among many poems, those assumptions must include, for example, that one valued function of language is the communal expression of traditional thought and that authority comes from aligning oneself with a tradition.⁴ Such assumptions, quite explicit in Old English poetry, have ramifications for other forms of language within the community, including prose genres. The idiom itself may be unique to poetry, but the emphasis and value placed on traditional thought are not.

To test these theories in prose works, Anglo-Saxon prose translations of Latin texts are particularly useful. Translations necessarily involve confrontation between language systems; in working from Latin to Old English, Anglo-Saxon translators were faced with the task of rendering a language with a long textual history into a language with a relatively recent emergence from its oral environment. In translation, the text becomes a “bilingual” document, marked by an interaction of both language systems, the Latin and the vernacular, the textual and the oral. One of the most interesting prose translations in this regard is the Old English *Orosius*. This text is a ninth-century translation of Paulus Orosius’ *Historiarum Adversum Paganos Libri VII* (*Seven Books of History Against the Pagans*), a Latin history written at the request of Augustine to demonstrate how rather than ruining living conditions in the world, as contemporary writers had charged, Christianity had actually improved them.⁵ In fact, the Old English *Orosius* belongs to a group of works from the Alfredian period that share a relatively free style of translation. The Old English *Orosius* is so different

³ Patrick Wormald (1977) has documented the limited extent of full literacy in Anglo-Saxon England, and demonstrated the importance of recognizing the much larger group who could utilize the technology that literacy made available without being literate themselves.

⁴ For discussion exploring assumptions basic to oral cultures generally, see especially Ong 1982:36-57.

⁵ Citations in the text from the Latin and Old English versions of the *History Against the Pagans* are from Zangemeister 1882 and Bately 1980; translations are from Raymond 1936 and Giles 1969, respectively. If no citation is given, the translation is my own.

from its source that Janet Bately suggests “transformation” as a more appropriate term than “translation.”⁶

The translation’s departure from the source text stems in part, I will argue, from the influence of orality on the Old English *Orosius*. This is made most explicit in the interplay of the translator’s voice with three other voices in the text, that of the author Orosius and those of Ohthere and Wulfstan, whose narratives appear in Book One. The vernacular version demonstrates that an oral community’s implicit assumptions about language continue to have an influence even when that language has begun to evolve into a written language, and that this influence is exerted even in a hyperliterary context such as a translation.

A clear pattern can be distinguished in how the translator deals with the narrative voice of the author Orosius. The *History* is heavily condensed in the Old English version. Omissions are largely comprised of the trimming of episodes into extremely short epitomes of the *History*’s already pithy narrative. In addition, however, nearly all of the sections in which Orosius engages in rhetorical argument or polemic are cut. In removing this material—the prologue to Book One, the prefaces of Books Three and Four, and the epilogue to the work—the translator effects a crucial change in the voice of the text. In these sections, Orosius had established his authority in various ways, most importantly noting in the general preface his commission from Augustine and his own pious intentions for setting the historical record straight.⁷ Because this material is omitted, the rhetorical voice of Orosius is limited in the Old English work to a space within the narrative itself, and it loses the “enclosing” function formerly granted by the

⁶ Bately (1984) examines the *Orosius*, the *Boethius*, the *Paris Psalter*, and the *Soliloquies of Augustine*. She dates the composition of the Old English *Orosius* to about 890-99 (1980:xciii); all extant manuscripts are later. There are two complete (the Lauderdale or Tollemache manuscript, British Library, Additional 47967; and British Library, Cotton Tiberius B.i.) and two fragments, the Bodley and Vatican fragments. The Tollemache manuscript is dated to the early tenth century; all others date to the eleventh (1980:xxiii-xxvi).

⁷ The Latin text also relies on chapter headings and book divisions as formatting techniques. The two major manuscripts of the Old English *Orosius* do have chapter headings (the fragments do not include them, since they are from later sections of the work), but Bately believes these were added by someone other (and later) than the author: the headings show little knowledge of what is in the chapters; they are “unselective, mechanical, and unhelpful” (1980:lxxx). The headings also have “variant usages” in vocabulary from the Old English *Orosius* (lxxxii). Book divisions are similar in both manuscripts and concur with divisions in the *History*.

prologue and epilogue. The voice of Orosius is more closely contained within the text and loses much of its context.

Secondly, the voice of Orosius within the narrative is manipulated by the translator. Although often the author of the Old English version retains the voice of Orosius by using a tag phrase, such as “cwæð Orosius” (“Orosius said”), especially in passages in which Orosius addresses the Romans by name,⁸ the translator uses tag phrases for two other purposes as well. He revises Orosius’ commentary in such a way that it becomes more his own than the Latin author’s and at times adds passages that are completely his own creation.⁹ One notable example of original elaboration is found in I.16, where Orosius comments on the contrast between the Amazons’ destruction of Rome and the recent invasion of Rome by the Goths, who in spite of their power over the city asked only for a place to settle. He castigates the Romans for the blindness that keeps them from seeing that “beneficio Christianae religionis—quae cognatam per omnes populos fidem iungit—eos viros sine proelio sibi esse subiectos” (68) (“it was through the mediation of the Christian religion, which unites all peoples in the recognition of a common faith, that those barbarians became subject to the Romans without a conflict” [65]). The Old English *Orosius* contains only the briefest mention of the Amazons and Goths, choosing instead to elaborate on the idea of unity through the Christian religion, describing exactly how things are better under the aegis of Christianity (I.10, 31; 73):

. . . hie nellað geþencean oþpe ne cunnon, hwær hit gewurde ær þæm cristendome, þæt ænegu þeod oþre hiere willum friþes bæde, buton hiere þearf wære, oþpe hwær ænegu þeod æt oþerre mehte frið begietan, oððe mid golde, oððe mid seolfre, oþpe mid ænige feo, buton he him underþiedd wære. Ac sippan Crist geboren wæs, þe ealles middangeardes is sibb 7 frið,

⁸ See, for example, II.8, III.S, IV.7, and V.1. The use of the tag often shows consideration of how an audience would respond to its use. For example, when translating Orosius’ description of the contemporary situation, the translator is careful to add such a tag, apparently to explain his retention of the present tense: “7 Onorius to þæm wæstdæle 7 nugiet hæfð, cwæð Orosius ... “ (VI.37, 155) (“... and Honorius [succeeded] to the western part, and even yet holds it,” said Orosius”[196]). However, the translator is not completely consistent in his references to the Latin author. For example, in I.3, the translator writes, “Scortlice ic hæbbe nu gesæd ymb þa þrie dælas ealles þises middangeardes ... “ (9) (“I have already spoken shortly about the three parts of this midearth” [31]), recreating Orosius’ “ego” with “ic.”

⁹ I use the masculine pronoun because there is a high probability the translator was male; in other cases, I use inclusive language.

nales þæt an þæt men hie mehten aliesan mid feo of þeowdome, ac eac
þeoda him betweonum buton þeowdome gesibbsume wæron.

They will not think nor know that, before Christianity, no country, of its own will, asked peace of another, unless it were in need; nor where any country could obtain peace from another by gold, or by silver, or by any fee, without being enslaved. But since Christ was born, who is the peace and freedom of the whole world, men may not only free themselves from slavery by money, but countries also are peaceable without enslaving each other.

This passage does not correspond to anything in the Latin work, and yet the paragraph containing this passage specifically begins with “cwæð Orosius” (30).¹⁰

Often, what lies behind such revision is the fact that the translator has had to effect a modification of the polemical tenor. The focus of the two works is different: the translator has substituted his own view of history for that of Orosius. The *History* is a polemic against anti-Christian sentiment in the fifth century, directed at a very specific time and audience. It purports to show first that disasters and evil have always been a part of history, even under the old gods, and secondly that a frank comparison reveals that history is becoming less malignant under Christianity; the climax of the work is the sack of Rome, which Orosius attempts to put in the best possible light. For the author of the Old English *Orosius*, this historical event has become simply one among many of the world’s incidents, since his audience has little emotional investment in the fall of Rome. Bately notes that the translator’s main theme is crafted out of the *History*’s secondary one, namely that the coming of Christ has brought salvation into the world and that it has had material effects on governments and on nature. Christ’s birth, important to *History*’s scheme but not its polemical center, has become the focal point for the Old English *Orosius* (1984:18-19).¹¹

¹⁰ For other notable examples of the independence of the Old English *Orosius* from the *History*, see I.10, III.1, and IV.13.

¹¹ Possibly, Bately suggests, the translator was following the guidelines set up by Ælfred in the Prefatory Letter to the *Cura Pastoralis*. Here, Ælfred notes the necessity of instilling wisdom OE *wisdom*, which Ælfred distinguishes from *lar*) in the youth of his day. In the Old English *Orosius*, Bately argues, the wisdom of the book would be found in the overall scheme of the providence of God revealed in history (1984:18-19). Cf. Kretzchmar (1987), who believes the Old English *Orosius* has a more practical agenda than its source.

A second explanation for radical revision is that the translator views Orosius as an *auctor* and thus feels it is appropriate to attribute new material to him. This is clear from the way in which the translator, in addition to his own commentary, also adds information from other sources to his text. The list from which material is taken is impressive—Livy, Sallust, Pliny the Elder, Valerius Maximus, Servius, Jerome, Bede, et al. (Bately 1980: lxi). This list does not necessarily mean the translator was well-read; he may have appropriated them through a commentary.¹² But no matter how they made their way into the translation, once there they are mingled with the various sources originally compiled by Orosius himself to write the history, because they are made “silently,” without attribution (certainly the norm in the Middle Ages). In the present text, then, all the strands—Orosius’ Latin text, the other sources, and the translator’s own commentary—come together under that label that confers *auctoritas* onto Orosius. This difference is distinctly marked at the beginning of the history. Instead of the preface in which Orosius had felt it necessary to cite his own claim to authority—commission from Augustine (“Praeceptis tuis parui, beatissime pater Augustine” [1] (“I have obeyed your instructions, most blessed father Augustine”) [29])—the Old English *Orosius* begins with the first chapter of Book One of the Latin text (I.1,8):

Ure ieldran ealne þisne ymbhwyrft þises middangeardes, cwæð Orosius,
swa swa Oceanus utan ymbligeþ, þone mon garsæcg hateð, on þreo
todædon.

Our elders, said Orosius, divided into three parts all the circle of this
middle-earth surrounded by Oceanus, which is called *garsæcg*.

¹² Bately notes that “the author of the [Old English *Orosius*] need not have been familiar with all these works . . . at first hand. Some may have been present in the manuscript of [the *History*] used by him . . . Others may have been derived from a Latin-Latin or Latin-OE glossary, from oral communications, or from a (Latin?) commentary” (1980: lxi-lxii). The author of the Old English *Orosius* updates geographical information, for example, especially in Book One when his knowledge of European and British geography exceeds that of Orosius, and he adds many passages explaining terms, persons, and events that would have been unfamiliar to his audience. For example, Hercules is explained to be an “ent” (a giant) in 111.9, a triumph is defined (with some confusion in details) in II.4, and the significance of the open doors of Janus’ temple during wartime is supplied in III.5. Also, many changes are expansions using information available in other accounts. It is in this respect that Bately believes there is the strongest evidence that the translator used a gloss or commentary and was not himself familiar with all the original sources, since often the added information is confused, wrong, or shows a misunderstanding of the Latin. For an extended study, see Bately 1971.

Orosius has replaced Augustine; for the translator, Orosius is as far back as the *auctoritas* need go.¹³

When considering the changes made by the translator of the *History Against the Pagans*, one immediately recognizes the Latinate conception of *auctoritas* that allows the translator to add words in the name of the author (and in this case remove them as well). Fred Robinson notes that “the luxuriant pseudepigraphy of pious intent circulating in the medieval world implies a less anxious attitude toward a writer’s appropriation of an authoritative voice to enumerate godly verities” (1980:23). Additionally, the concept of *auctoritas* does not necessarily find its central locus at the level of the word; it inheres just as much in the literate technologies that make up the context of the word—writing, books, and the Latin language. Jesse Gellrich has written insightfully on how medieval attitudes toward texts include “powerful commitments to the idea of the Book, its grounding in fixed meanings validated in a definite origin—the Bible, nature, tradition, God” (1985:27). Adding or removing words does not affect this more inclusive view by which the translator defines the text of Orosius the *auctor*. Certainly, medieval literature is full of examples of writing put under the name of an authority greater than the writer himself or herself.¹⁴

Auctoritas does not, however, provide a complete explanation. There is evidence that a wholly separate definition of authority may be in play within the text, an authority based on vernacular, oral assumptions, not Latinate, textual ones. In some additions he makes, the translator’s voice reveals its link to certain vernacular traditions familiar from poetry. These allusions are not as specific as the use of formulas. Certainly, outside of poetry, the appearance of formulas would not be expected, as formulas are best thought of not as repetitions of stock phrases, but rather as the solution to “the equation of [a poet’s] metrical idea plus traditional vocabulary” (Foley 1976:212). Type-scenes, defined by Fry as “recurring stereotyped presentation[s] of conventional details used to describe . . . certain narrative event[s], requiring neither verbatim repetition nor a specific formula content” (1968:53) may be a closer analogue to what occurs in the prose work.

¹³ Although this initial reference to Augustine is omitted, the Old English *Orosius* does include a reference to Augustine in III.3; however, without the initial explanation of the commission from Augustine, the reference is rather nonsensical.

¹⁴ For a full examination of the ramifications of the concepts of *auctor* and *auctoritas* for the medieval period, see Minnis 1988.

Useful in this context is John Miles Foley's examination of metonymy to explain how an oral poet can bring the entire tradition to bear on the performance of an oral work by means of the traditional language used in any and every part of it. When an oral poet uses metonymy or "traditional referentiality," Foley explains (1991:7), "each element in the phraseology or narrative thematics stands not simply for that singular instance but for the plurality and multiformity that are beyond the reach of textualization." In several instances in the Old English *Orosius*, such metonymy is at work, but in a slightly different way. In these places, a word or phrase in the Latin text triggers a familiar pattern in the translator's knowledge of traditional idiom within the vernacular language system, and in the translation the pattern is played out at length. The first, from the *History* II.6, occurs with a reference to transience. After describing the destruction of Babylon, Orosius writes (97-98; 82):

Exaggerare hoc loco mutabilium rerum instabiles status non opus est: quidquid enim est opere et manu factum, labi et consumi vetustate, Babylon capta confirmat; cuius ut primum imperium ac potentissimum exstitit ita et primum cessit, ut veluti quodam iure succedentis aetatis debita posteris traderetur hereditas, ipsis quoque eandem tradendi formulam servaturis.

It is unnecessary to add here further instances of the unstable conditions that have followed the changing events of history; for whatever has been built up by the hand of man falls and comes to an end through the passage of time. This truth is illustrated by the capture of Babylon. Her empire began to decline just as it had reached the height of its power, so that, in accordance with a certain law of succession which runs through the ages, posterity might receive the inheritance due to it—posterity which was fated to hand on the inheritance according to the same law.

In this example, it is the mention of the transience of human affairs that seems to have determined the form the passage takes in Old English. The translator's passage reads (II.4, 43-44; 86):

Nu seo burg swelc is, þe ær wæs ealra weorca fæstast ⁊ wunderlecast ⁊ mæraest, gelice ⁊ heo wære to bisene asteald eallum middangearde, ⁊ eac swelce heo self sprecende sie to eallum moncynne ⁊ cweþe: "Nu ic þiss gehroren eam ⁊ aweg gewiten, hwæt, ge magan on me ongietan ⁊ oncnawan þæt ge nanuht mid eow nabbað fæstes ne stronges þætte þurhwunigean mæge."

Now the city, which was formerly the strongest, most wonderful and greatest of all works, is as if it were set for a sign to all the world; and as if

it spoke to all mankind and said: "Now I am thus fallen and gone away: Lo!
in me ye may learn and know, that ye have nothing with you so fast and
strong, that it can abide forever!"

The use of the dramatic speaker to verbalize the theme of absence and the image of a "fallen city" in place of the Latin's empire in decline are new in the Old English version. Both elements have parallels in Old English poetry, especially in the poems *The Ruin* and *Advent Lyric I*. (The appearance of the evocative *hwæt* ("lo!") in the *burg*'s speech is especially interesting, since it is one of the traditional ways to open a poem or mark a point of special interest within it.¹⁵) Both poems use the image of buildings in ruins as a symbol of the fleeting quality of time on earth; for example, a passage from the beginning of *The Ruin* reads as follows (Krapp and Dobbie 1936:227, lines 3-9):

Hrofas sind gehrorene, hreorge torras,
hrungeat berofen, brim on lime,
scearde scurbeorge scorene, gedrorene,
ældo undereotone. Eorðgrap hafað
waldend wyrhtan forweorone, geleorene,
heardgripe hrusan, oþ hund cnea
werpeoda gewitan.

The roofs are fallen, towers in ruins, the ringed gate despoiled, rime on the mortar, the storm-shielding roof gashed, scored, collapsed, eaten away by age. An earth-grip holds the noble builders, decayed and gone, the powerful grip of the earth, while a hundred generations of people have departed.

Through its speech, the city of Babylon in the Old English *Orosius* becomes a symbol similar to the ruins in this poem, a physical reminder of transience; the city is utilized in a manner similar to the speaker in the Lament of the Sole Survivor in *Beowulf*, as Janet Thormann has described it: "the Lament is the materialization of voice as sound, sound constituting

¹⁵ *Beowulf*, *Exodus*, *Andreas*, *Dream of the Rood*, and *Juliana* are examples of poems that begin with this formulaic opening. The manuscript copyist has recognized the importance of the word *hwæt* as well; in the Tollemache manuscript the "h" of *hwæt* is written larger than any other letter on the page (Campbell 1953:folio 26r). For an extended analysis of the significance of the use of *hwæt* in Anglo-Saxon poetry, see Foley 1991:214-23.

itself as the signifier of absence” (1992:547).¹⁶ The Old English translation provides a focus on Babylon both as a physical ruin that one observes and a voice to which one listens.

A second example of the influence of a type-scene is the description of the bravery of Alexander as he defends himself alone in an enemy city (181-82; 138): wounded by an arrow, he keeps his back against a wall, and

contrarios facilius eo usque sustinuit, donec ad periculum eius clamoremque hostium perfractis muris exercitus omnis inrumperet. In eo proelio sagitta sub mamma traiectus, fixo genu eatenus pugnauit, donec eum a quo vulneratus esset occideret.

There he held his assailants easily in check until his entire army entered the city through a breach in the wall. This action endangered Alexander and at the same time caused the enemy to shout with dismay. During the fighting, Alexander was struck in the chest by an arrow, but resting on one knee he fought on until he had killed the man who had wounded him.

The Old English version broadens the focus to include praise for the soldiers, who have become “thanes” (73; 117):

Nyte we nu hwæðer sie swiþor to wundrianne, þe þæt, hu he ana wið ealle þa burgware hiene awerede, þe eft þa him fultum com, hu he þurh þæt folc geþrang þæt he ðone ilcan of slog þe hiene ær þurhsceat, þe eft þara þegna angin þa hie untweogendlice wend on þæt heora hlaford wære on heora feonda gewealde, oððe oððe dead, þæt hie swa þeah noldon þæs weallgebrecas geswican, þæt hie heora hlaford ne gewræcen, þeh þe hie hiene meðigne on cneowum sittende metten.

Now we do not know which is more to be wondered at, how he alone defended himself against all the townspeople, or again, when help came to him, how he so pressed through the people, that he killed the same man, who before shot him through; or again, the undertaking of the thanes, when they undoubtedly thought that their lord was in the power of their enemies either alive or dead, that they, nevertheless, did not refrain from breaking the wall, that they might revenge their lord, whom they found weary, and resting on his knees.

¹⁶ Compare Downes 1995:142 on the theme of absence in Old English literature: “Rhetorical topoi of absence such as the barrow and the ruin become *legisimilar* means of establishing the truth about things absent, although at the same time they appear to refer to the trace of that absence visible in the everyday landscape.”

This attention to the thanes is in conformity with other Old English literature concerned with martial themes; the loyal comitatus is a necessary part of the praiseworthiness of a lord. In *Beowulf*, for example, the descriptions of the success of the kings Beow and Hroðgar include mention of their retinue of loyal followers; describing Hroðgar, the poet observes (Klaeber 1950:11. 64-67):

þa wæs Hroðgare heresped gyfen
wiges weorðmynd, þæt him his winemagas
geome hyrdon, oðð þæt seo geogoð geweax
magodriht micel.

Then was Hroðgar given battle-success, honor in battle, so that his friendly kinsmen eagerly followed him, until the group of young warriors grew large.

In a case of an unsuccessful battle, Wiglaf's rebuke of Beowulf's retainers at the end of the poem highlights their desertion of Beowulf by mentioning the very symbol of the lord-thane relationship—the armor they presently wear (11. 2864-72):

þæt, la, mæg secgan se ðe wyle soð specan
þæt se mondryhten, se eow ða maðmas geaf
eoredgeatwe, þe ge þær on standað,—
þonne he on ealubence oft gesealde
healsittendum helm ond byrnan,
þeoden his þegnum, swylce he þrydlicost
ower feor oððe neah findan meahte—,
þæt he genunga guðgewædu
wraðe forwurpe, ða hyne wig beget.

Indeed, that man who wishes to speak the truth may say that the lord who gave you treasure, the war-gear in which you there stand—as he often did give to those sitting on ale-benches in the hall, helmet and coat of mail, the Lord to his thanes, whatever he could find, far or near, most splendid for you—that he utterly threw away the war-armor when battle grievously befell him.

As these kings are in part defined by their thanes' behavior, so the translator of the Old English *Orosius* makes the loyalty of the thanes to Alexander as significant an element of Alexander's success as his own bravery. Ursula Schaefer's observation about formulaicness proper holds true for the use of traditional idiom in the Old English *Orosius* as well (1989:202): "Formulaicness in everyday speech as well as in poetic diction thus has a

norm-confirming function by evoking a certain norm as unquestioned reference. “

These two passages are examples of a traditional reading or reception of the source text. As the translator reads the *History*, certain situations fit a conceptual “grid” with which he is already familiar through his everyday use of the vernacular and his familiarity with its traditions. These scenes spark the appearance of a traditional idiom in his representation of the material. The Latin source is thus transformed into a vernacular text that includes elements of expression from an oral or traditional context; these changes occur as assumptions associated with the vernacular become explicit in translation.¹⁷ A beset hero, described in Latin, may not need the loyalty of followers as a proof of his worthiness; when the hero is described in Old English, that element is felt to be necessary for the portrait to be complete.¹⁸

¹⁷ Two minor examples specifically relate to the translator’s assumption about the function of *leoð* (“song”). In a passage from Book Two, describing the acts of the Fabii, Orosius mentions that the gate through which the Fabii passed and the river in which they drowned still bear “evil names” (II.4, 80) (“infarnibus vocabulis” [94]) to commemorate the loss to Rome occasioned by their death. The translator, while mentioning the commemorative names of the river and gate, adds that “nu giet todrege hit is on leoðum sungen hwelcne demm hie Romanum gefeollan” (II.4, 42) (“Now, to this very day, it is sung in verse, what a loss their fall was to the Romans” [84]). When in the same chapter Orosius says he can describe the state of the whole world with a certain poetic line written about one city (and then goes on to quote the *Aeneid* 2.368-69), the Old English version reads, “Næs na on Romanum anum, ac swa hit an scopleoðum sungen is þæt gind ealne middangeard wære caru ⁊ gewin ⁊ ege” (42) (“It was not among the Romans alone, but likewise the same is sung in songs that over the whole world there was grief and strife and dread”). On one hand, this is an apparent mistranslation: the translator mistakes Orosius’ ability to describe the whole world with this verse for the idea that this verse is sung about the condition of the whole world. On the other hand, the mistranslation reveals interesting aspects of the translator’s concept of verse. He expects a quoted verse to be a performed song, he assumes that many songs are sung on the same subject, and he expects that such songs are continuously performed through time. The Latin work contains bits of text quoted from other texts; the Old English work makes reference to a world of performed songs, dispersed among communities. It is a revealing “mistranslation.”

¹⁸ In poetry, examples of the appearance of elements to complete a theme, even when at times they work against the literal meaning of the text, are numerous. Three early examinations can be found in Greenfield 1955, Crowne 1960, and Renoir 1962. Elements of “performance” in composition have been documented even in the context of manuscript transmission in, among other studies, Doane 1991 and O’Brien O’Keeffe 1990 in Old English and Machan 1991 in Middle English, which argues for the dynamics of orality to be “better recognized and utilized in editorial procedure” in medieval texts (244).

The translator recognizes Orosius as an *auctor* yet gives his own voice creative room; underlying this “performance” is the influence of an authority different from *auctoritas*, an authority rooted in orality and associated with the vernacular in which the translator does his work. In an oral society, the high status accorded to speakers of tradition reflects their crucial role. The present speaker of the community’s traditions and its narratives is constrained by the tradition and yet determines it at the same time. Without written record, an objective, permanent source to be consulted does not exist; each speaker is the embodiment of the tradition as he or she tells the story or sings the song. The oral-based concept of authority stems from the necessity for each speaker to bring the past into the present, to ensure its ongoing life. Ward Parks describes the oral narrator thus: “standing at the hinge between one performance and another, mediating the interaction of the performative and interperformative axes, he must orient himself diachronically and synchronically at once” (1992:458). This authority of “presence”—the authority of the one who is speaking—is brought into play by the translator; although of course the translation of the *History* is not a traditional narrative, nevertheless the translator’s position is similar. The translator is “speaking” the text to a vernacular audience, and does so in his own voice as the one responsible at this moment for this narrative. The complex attitudes that empower the speaker of tradition in an oral society exert a force even in the context of translation, providing the translator with the means to confront the *auctoritas* of the book, the Latin language, and textuality itself.

The oral-based conception of authority helps to explain the translator’s own additions and revisions of the Latin text; however, it is even more explicitly demonstrated in the inclusion within Book One of the stories of Ohthere and Wulfstan. These latter passages are the reports given by two travelers about journeys they had undertaken in northern Scandinavia. Ohthere was probably a Norwegian, and Wulfstan an Anglo-Saxon or perhaps Frisian (Bately 1980:lxix). Ohthere is specifically said to have reported his travels to King Ælfred: the narrative begins “Ohthere sæde his hlaforde, Ælfrede cyninge, þæt he ealra Norðmonna norpmest bude” (I.1, 13) (“Ohthere told his lord, King Alfred, that he dwelt northmost of all Northmen” [39-40]). Wulfstan’s narrative is added on to Ohthere’s without a specific context being noted. Janet Bately believes these are transcriptions of actual oral statements (in the vernacular) of two men, based on the fact that the style of each passage differs both from the other and from the style of the Old English *Orosius* in general

(1980:lxii).¹⁹ In addition, Wulfstan's narrative is told at times in the first person: "Burgenda land wæs *us* on brecbord," Wulfstan says, and "Weonodland wæs *us* ealne weg on steorbord oð Wislemuðan" (16, my emphasis) ("[W]e had, on our left, the land of the Burgundians ... we had Weonodland, on the right, all the way to the mouth of the Vistula" [50-51]). The reports fill approximately four folios;²⁰ they begin without special introduction, with the abrupt statement quoted above, "Ohthere sæde his hlaforde, Ælfrede cyninge," etc. The "o" of "Ohthere," the first word of the passage, is not capitalized or given any other special treatment in the Tollemache manuscript. They also end without special notation; Wulfstan's comment about a tribe among the Estonians that has the ability to freeze water and beer in summer or winter is followed abruptly by a reversion to the geographical description of Europe: "Nu wille we [Orosius] secgan be suðan Donua þære ea ymbe Creca land" (I.1, 18) ("Now will we speak about Greece, on the south of the river Danube" [56]). The reports are thus given no more but no less attention than any other part of the history.²¹

This is surprising, because this passage contains material that comes from an environment totally alien to the rest of the work. Although the subject of Book One of the Old English *Orosius* is the geography of Europe, and the narratives of these two travelers contain much geographical information, the relating of that information is permeated with a personal tone that is to be expected from the kind of narratives they are, but which is completely absent from the rest of the work. For example, distances are not related in miles, as they are in most of the Latin version's and the translation's descriptions ("Brittannia þæt igland, hit is norðeastlang, ⁊ hit is eahta hund mila lang ⁊ twa hund mila brad" (I.1, 19) ["The island Britain—it extends a long way northeast; it is eight hundred miles long, and

¹⁹ Bately argues that the names in the text often show variations in spelling that could only be based on aural reception (1980:cxiv). For a detailed study, see Bately 1966; for contrasting views, see Kirkman 1930 and Tristram 1982.

²⁰ The Ohthere and Wulfstan passages are found on folio 8r and 8v of the Tollemache manuscript; Bately supplies the remainder from folios 10v to 13r in the Cotton manuscript, since this section of the Tollemache manuscript has been removed and now contains only a sixteenth-century transcription of the manuscript (1980:cxviii).

²¹ The end of the Ohthere passage is marked, as often in this manuscript, with an elevated dot, and a small space has been left open before the first word of the next sentence. The Wulfstan passage in the Cotton manuscript also shows little or no distinction. The *wynn* in the first letter of *Wulfstan* is capitalized and filled in, but similar treatment has been given to the words *Seo* and *Pa* on the same page, and two other smaller-case letters have been filled in (Bately 1980, facsimile facing p. 16).

two hundred miles broad" (58)]; rather, distances are put in much more subjective terms: Ohthere "siglde ða east be lande swa swa he meahte on feower dagum gesiglan" (I.1, 19) ("sailed east along the land as far as he could sail in four days") and at one point he says he was "swa feor norþ swa þa hwælhuntan firrest faraþ" (14) ("as far north as the whale-hunters go at their farthest"). The availability of information is tied to the journey; when Ohthere says he has no information about the land of the Beormas (the Finnish *permi*, traveling merchants from Outer Karelia), it is because he did not dare sail up the river into their land "for unfriþe" (14), because of fear of hostility or, as Christine Fell has suggested, because there was no formal trade agreement between the two peoples (1984:63). The passages are full of digression and are governed by the interests of the journeyers and what they believed would interest their audience, as when Wulfstan notes where walrus can be found, or mentions that "ne bið ðær nænig ealo gebrowen mid Estum, ac þær bið medo enoh" (17) ("There is no ale brewed by the Esthonians [*sic*], but there is mead enough" [54]).

This kind of narrative, immediate and closely tied to personal experience, presents an interesting comparison with the narrative that makes up the bulk of the Old English work. Although the style of both is paratactic, the additive quality of the latter stems from the pared-down nature of the style in which it has been edited. Attempting to cover twenty-five hundred years of history in six books, the Old English *Orosius* is brisk, streamlined, and necessarily more or less superficial; it presents a number of similar beads on a string, events leveled to plot. The Ohthere and Wulfstan passages, on the other hand, are inherently paratactic because they are oral narratives; to continue the metaphor, the narrative is comprised of dissimilar beads strung together (a list of the uses for walrus hides appears next to a description of Ohthere's personal wealth, which is next to a geographical description of Norway), but the disjunctive style maintains a coherence based on the presence of the single speaker, the coherence of the "performance" of the narrative as speech act.

The presence of these narratives in the Old English *Orosius* and the way in which they are included bring several aspects of the influence of orality within a prose context into clear focus. First, in translating a text into the vernacular, a writer apparently felt more freedom with regard to his source than a scribe copying from Latin to Latin; no comparable additions occur in the Latin manuscripts of the *History*.²² It is also significant that

²² Although Zangemeister argues that the Old English *Orosius* was based on an inferior copy of the *History* that was already full of errors (1882:xxiii), he did not find any manuscripts of the *History* that contain the kind of "interpolation" present in the Old

the inclusion of these stories is not seen as disruptive by the author or by the copyist. They allow what is extremely disjunctive to a modern reader—the intrusion of a different voice, different time-frame, different style—to exist in the text without remark. This situation argues for a flexibility in the translator's and the audience's conception of text; the passages are recognized by the reading or listening audience as material acceptable for inclusion within the Old English *Orosius*.

Finally, there is behind the insertion of these materials an implied appeal to an oral authority, the authority of the speaker. The source of the geographical additions and the reports of Ohthere and Wulfstan have, as far as we can tell, no other claim to authority than that the travelers are contemporary witnesses to matters that form the subject of this part of the text: European geography.²³ Of course, for Ohthere, we cannot exclude the possibility that part of the authority of his narrative may come from the explicit connection to Ælfred. Interestingly, it is in the sections translated from Latin in the Old English *Orosius* that the concept of *auctoritas* effects a merging of various authorities (source text, commentaries, and so on) into one whole—they are undifferentiated in the Old English text. The vernacular, in marked contrast, acknowledges individuation—Ohthere and Wulfstan are named and speak in the text. The translator can and chooses to blend his voice with that of the Latin author; however, he chooses not to use this editing maneuver with the two voyagers.²⁴

Why not? It is a significant deviation from his usual method that the translator does not adapt Ohthere and Wulfstan's narratives as material for inclusion under the tag "cwæð Orosius." Apparently, their narratives (and they *are* narratives, as opposed to the descriptive sections of geographical information that surround them) are recognized as closely related to the

English text.

²³ This absence is unusual in the Old English *Orosius*. Bately notes that "almost all his modifications, apart from those concerning continental Europe, have the support of extant Latin texts" (1972:59). She believes that there was some written or oral source for information about Europe as well, perhaps reports similar to those of Ohthere and Wulfstan.

²⁴ In fact, the translator blends his voice with the Latin author immediately after this passage in I.i, when additional descriptions of Europe are offered. In addition, the translator does sometimes seem to intrude upon the narratives of the two travelers to add certain explanatory "notes." For example, when Ohthere is said to have passed "Gotland ⁊ Sillende ⁊ iglanda fela" ("Jutland, Zealand, and many islands" [49]), the text reads, "on þæm landum eardodon Engle, ær hi hider on land coman" (1.1, 16) ("The Angles dwelt in these lands, before they came into this country" [49]); this may be an editorial comment.

experience of the speakers and thus to their own voices. Clearly, although they are not felt to have the authority of an Orosius (their information is not subsumed under his name, but neither is his information subsumed under theirs), their inclusion in the Old English *Orosius* suggests that their narratives differ only in the kind of authority they represent, not the degree. They have an importance and are perceived, in their speaking roles, as an “other” that is not to be merged with the translator’s own function in the text. The vernacular, then, here preserves a differentiation that the Latin, with its overwhelming force, does not. It is as if the status of the Latin text pulls the lesser elements around it into itself and effects a monolithic whole. We have seen that the translator even puts his own comments under the mantle of the Latin author. But Ohthere and Wulfstan resist this centripetal force and do not require such mechanisms for authority.

Since there is no systematic theory of narrative or history in Anglo-Saxon England, we must look at its practice. The Old English *Orosius* is not usually dealing directly with events, of course, but rather with the presentation of events from the past contained within another text. And, as we have seen, the confrontation with such a text is an event in itself, because of the differing sets of cultural attitudes that collide when a Latin text is translated into a vernacular language that is not far from its original oral environment. Translating into the vernacular draws into the text elements foreign to the literate tradition of the Latin text, including, among other things, places of active interrelation between translator and author, narrative elements from the oral milieu of the vernacular community, and a tolerance for the resulting disjunction. The differences between oral and textual traditions are clarified when one examines the way authority is represented and the way it is utilized in the two texts. Although the *auctoritas* of the Latin text determined many of the parameters of the resultant vernacular text, the translator changes the text in significant ways, both as one who reads the Latin text with a “vernacular” conceptual grid and as one who draws on an authority of presence—a term of empowerment characterizing, in this case, the Anglo-Saxon literate who is given the task of “speaking” the Latin text for a contemporary audience. It is a double representation of authority seen quite clearly in the opening lines of the Old English *Orosius*: “Ure ieldran ealne þisne ymbhwyrft þises middangeardes, cwæp Orosius, swa swa Oceanus utan ymbligeð, þone mon garsæcg hateð, on þreo todældon” (1.1, 8) (“Our elders, said Orosius, divided into three parts all the circle of this middle-earth surrounded by Oceanus, which is called *garsæcg*”). *Oceanus* and *garsæcg* (Latin and Old English for “sea”) coexist in the text, each with a tradition—one written, one oral—validating

its presence. The Old English *Orosius* presents a fascinating and complex example of literature at an intersection of the oral and the textual.

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Oral English in South African Theater of the 1980s

Yvonne Banning

In this paper I examine the role of theater in promoting a new non-racial democracy in South Africa during the 1980s.¹ Theater performances are seen as mediations between oral and literate English, enacted in the dramatic relations of the fictional world on the stage and in the theatrical relationship between performers and their audiences in the social space of the theater. Studies of two South African plays, *Sophiatown* and *Asinamali*, demonstrate how these connections are embodied in the presentation of the plays; I also show how they direct an audience's perceptions of their social world towards creative alternatives to that world.²

South African theater in the 1980s displayed a marked vitality and purposefulness. These qualities suggest that local political and socio-economic conditions at that time created a climate in which cultural activities were central in the shaping of what contemporary political oratory now proclaims to be "the new South Africa." Certainly the recent impetus in political and business circles towards negotiating a future fundamentally different from South Africa's colonial history is matched by the energy with which ordinary people have been engaging themselves in cultural action as a means of identifying themselves within or against this vision of a restructured South African future.

Culture tends now to be popularly perceived less as a received tradition of particular beliefs and behaviors and more as a course of action. It is something you do, rather than something you inherit like a family

¹ This article derives from sections of Banning 1989.

² Quotations from *Sophiatown* refer to the published edition of the script (Junction Avenue Theatre Company 1988). Quotations from *Asinamali* derive from the published version of the text (Ngema 1986) and, where specified, from an earlier unpublished manuscript predating the first performance. This latter version is lodged in the Market Theatre archives and is used with the kind permission of the Market Theatre.

heirloom. This new emphasis on enacting culture gives the performing arts a socially acknowledged value they have rarely, if ever, possessed before. This was nowhere more evident than in the inauguration of the new State President in May 1994. Both the performance of the praise-poets in the formal proceedings and the simultaneous day-long televised concert testified to the potency of the performing arts in generating and celebrating a collective vision of national unity that made the day an unforgettable experience for South Africans.

During the eighties cultural action invariably expressed political resistance: where political action was brutally repressed and silenced, cultural action became the only means of manifesting the “will of the people.” Cultural performance and political action were often indistinguishable: funerals looked more like ritual theater and sounded like political rallies; theaters resounded with the insistent stamp of the *toyitoyi*,³ the harmonies of the protest song, the passionate political rhetoric that could be expressed nowhere else. In the streets, the drama of the social conflict unfolded with increasing intensity; vivid images and actions captured by the world’s press and mass media represented the political turmoil in ever more dramatic terms. Political events were framed by these representational images in newspapers and on television, creating a cultural aesthetic born out of the violence and conflict of a social order in collapse. South Africans were learning that the common feature of life and art was collective action.

The 1990s heralded the long-awaited release of Nelson Mandela, the first South African democratic elections, and the beginning of the national Reconstruction and Development Programme. A new and hopeful discourse of united, collective South African identity was heard—we could become a “rainbow nation;” “*Simunye* (“we are one”),” it declared.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was constituted to address the wrongs of the past—to hear public evidence of the terrible hidden sufferings of ordinary South Africans, to offer symbolic redress for the savage injustices that had been visited on them, and to determine who should receive amnesty in exchange for full disclosure of the concealed stories of crimes committed in the name of apartheid. The testimony of witnesses before the Commission provided moving and painful accounts of the experiences of family members of the victims. The proceedings of the TRC were disseminated through the media, as photographs, reports, and

³ The *toyitoyi* is a popular dance form used in mass protests. It is based on the military march, involves jumps and stamps from foot to foot, and is always accompanied by song.

video recordings of the Commission's hearings made every South African a spectator in a real-life drama that played to capacity audiences. It became clear that the dream of South African unity could not overcome the divisions of the past so easily. Difference, we slowly came to understand, was the single principle out of which unity might grow, if we could learn to *celebrate* our diversity. Where apartheid had recognized and used racial difference as a means of division and control, a new recognition of multiple differences might lead to a richer understanding of democracy. "Collective" no longer implied simply political solidarity; it could encompass all the varieties of relationships among multiply-cultured, multilingual individuals. The greater the number of participants, the greater the collective expression of South Africanness.

In theaters, cultural diversity is now being enacted with the same passion that drove the collective protest theater of the 1980s. New voices are emerging in small, often informal venues, telling the histories and experiences of individuals in forms that are as diverse as the performers themselves. Along with political and social change, profound cultural change is also taking place, bringing with it the beginning of new perceptions of participatory and collective identity.

Dramatic and Theatrical Relationships

Of all the performing arts, theater is arguably the form most suited to expressing this urge towards collective, participatory action. It is eminently a syncretic form, forging its meanings from immediate visible and audible signs, interacting directly in the here and the now. Its subjects are the relationships among people and its mode is to create fictional (dramatic) relationships in a theatrical (social) context. The social relations between audience and performers, as well as among audience members, inescapably invite all participants to register the effects of the dramatic and the theatrical on each other, as part of the experience of performance.

A theater performance thus constructs multiple sets of relationships that are concurrently experiences. The actors present themselves in three overlapping roles to an audience: as actors (people doing work, as particular personalities); as characters (fictional representations of individual people); and as symbolic representations of a specific point of view (authoritative

role). They may also represent the “voice” of the audience, in the sense that they are acting on behalf of the audience.⁴

Other relationships that occur during a performance include that between the world as we “know” it (reality) and the world as it might or could be (alternative “dramatic reality”), and between individual dramatic characters contending with specific problems in a particular historical and geographic context and their symbolic representation of general experiential “truths.” Each of these relationships depends on a fundamental exchange within each participant during a performance of dramatic, theatrical, and more broadly social perspectives, each illuminating the others. Essentially, a theatrical performance constitutes an experiential process of learning—one of recognizing familiar perceptions of reality and of becoming conscious that reality itself, like dramatic reality, is a linguistic and behavioral construct. We “know” reality only through the words we have to describe it and by the relational terms we apply to it.

All the participants in a performance in a sense bear witness to the “truth” of the dramatic experience they themselves construct. For what all participants see, hear, and understand during a performance confirms their knowledge and experience of the “real” world, because it is precisely this knowledge and experience that invests the dramatic world with its “truth.” At the same time, the presentation of the dramatic world can transform their understanding of the terms and conditions of the “real” world by inviting conscious perceptions of the ways in which the dramatic world is both like and unlike the real world. This connection between the real world and the dramatic world is perhaps the most important of these relationships; it is in this arena that the functional social value of theater activity is located.

Orality and Literacy in the Theater

One of the major connecting systems that fuses dramatic and lived reality in a performance is language. Both within and outside the theater, language is a powerful determinant of social identity, for it is in language, and primarily in spoken language, that all the complex terms of personal identity are negotiated and articulated. In the theater, spoken language is a primary determinant of the relations between audience and performer, through its capacity to enlarge or diminish symbolic distance between them. Where cognitive aspects of language are foregrounded, the emotional

⁴ There is always some form of social contract existing between performers and audience, whereby an audience agrees to allow the actors to act on their behalf.

distance between audience and performer is greater; where the expressive function of oral speech is foregrounded, empathetic exchange reduces the metaphoric distance between audience and actor, as well as actor and character. Between these two extremes, though, dramatic dialogue may be said to exert considerable influence on the kind and quality of the theatrical relationships established during a performance.

A theater performance makes demands on both oral and literate cognition. Although orality is the major medium of transmission, literate responsiveness is implied in the formalizing aspects of drama, on which dramatic structures depend to make performance recognizably different from behavior. Orality provides the spectator with the means of entering into dramatic reality and thus engaging an empathetic ally with the sensorily apprehended experience of immediate events. Literacy invokes a different kind of cognitive action, involving the processing of such sensory experience into formalized, abstracted spatio-temporal patterns that permit contemplation of the representativeness of the dramatic action. This double perspective enables an audience to expand the frame of reference beyond the immediate context of the dramatic experience in the moment. It also opens the spectator to the possibilities of recognizing dramatic structures as organizations of experience,⁵ thereby drawing the spectator irresistibly toward a critical consciousness of the ways in which personal social experiences are constructed and organized by the often hidden or mystified political structures in which our personal experiences are located.

Orality and English

Under South African conditions during the eighties—with a seemingly continuous State of Emergency and an accompanying stifling of the written word—the pressure on spoken English to express literate cultural consciousness produced a situation in which South African English appeared to be gathering a new energy and flexibility of usage from second-language English speakers.

As resistance politics in South Africa moved inexorably into open and increasingly violent conflict between the state and the disenfranchised, the theater played an increasingly important role in expressing the collective

⁵ This concept is adapted from Raymond Williams' concept of "structures of feeling" (1987:18): "The effect of a whole lived experience . . . is as firm and definite as 'structure,' yet it is based in the deepest and often least tangible elements of our experience."

experience of the oppressed. It sustained a fragile link across the widening gulf between segments of a racially polarized population. English usage in the theater became particularly ambiguous and anomalous, as the tensions between its contradictory functions manifested themselves.

The historical association of English with education in South Africa is too extended to examine here,⁶ but the legacy of this association has firmly entrenched English as the major language of both cultural dominance and cultural resistance among second-language English speakers quite as much as among native English speakers. Ndebele's incisive analysis (1987) of the effects of English's cultural colonizing of indigenous languages convincingly counters the notion cherished by South African first-language English speakers that English usage and a liberal democratic ideology necessarily go hand in hand.⁷ As yet, though, there has been little sustained pressure to resist the ideological imperatives inscribed in English usage by actively promoting other South African languages as alternatives to English. This may just be a matter of time, though. For in other postcolonial African states such as Kenya, there has been a strongly articulated rejection of colonial language usage in favor of local languages. Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, for example, has declared (1986:27): "African literature can only be written in African languages, that is, the languages of the African peasantry and working class." The dominance of English in South African literary expression has not as yet been challenged in this way.

In theater performances, however, there is evidence of a different and pragmatic solution to the question of English's hegemonic dominance in a multilingual environment. For the languages used in theater performance depend primarily on the languages of its audience. Where literature seeks a wider, less localized readership, a theater performance is most successful when it most specifically addresses its audience in terms most immediate to them. Universality is less serviceable than the particularity of representing circumstances that illuminate an audience's precise sense of their own experiences. For this reason, in South Africa the fact of English's dominance as an "official" language, as well as the tendency for theatergoing to be largely a leisure activity of the middle (and thus educated) class, is reflected in the predominance of English in theater performances. But the language preferences and competence of its audiences can be more readily accommodated because the language in

⁶ A very thorough account of this is given in Lanham and McDonald 1979.

⁷ See, for example, Butler 1985.

theater is primarily a spoken register. So many contemporary plays exhibit an English usage in which other languages comfortably find a place.

Language purity is a concept alien to spoken usage, which relies on functionality rather than the aesthetic considerations associated with literary, textual registers. Hence, current English usage in the theater displays an easy blending of vocabulary, grammatical structure, and idiom derived from non-English popular usage. This functionality is creating a situation in which English appears to be rediscovering its own orality by creating valuable connections among previously segregated language users. Where English South African literature has tended to founder under the sheer immutability of historical standards and traditions of usage, theater performance can far more readily capture contemporary consciousness spontaneously. The ephemerality, changeability, and apparent informality of the spoken word, as compared with the fixity and inviolability of written words, make public theatrical performance eminently suitable as a means of freeing expression from prescriptive criteria. The exchange between expressive and critical discourses in performance is less critically weighted than in literature: innovations in linguistic forms of expression can occur more readily because judgments are likely to be made on social rather than aesthetic appropriateness.

Indeed, idiolectal eccentricity is highly valued in the theater. Paul Slabolepszy's dialogue in *Saturday Night at the Palace*, for example, drew praise from critics for its "authenticity." Analysis reveals, in fact, that it is a highly *theatrical* register that bears little resemblance to any existing social register. Elements from a variety of social sources are used in novel combinations that make the dialogue seem familiar to a wide range of English users. It has thus been categorized as quintessentially South African—an effect of its theatrical constructedness. Pinter's dialogue tends to function in the same way, with similar dramatic effect.⁸ Hence, for contemporary cultural workers considerably more freedom is offered by theatrical enactments; aesthetic or political constraints generally occur only after the performance. This situation may well explain the emergence of theater in the eighties as a highly popular cultural form of expression for African users of English.

⁸ Deirdre Burton (1980) offers a detailed comparison of Pinter's dialogue with social forms of utterance.

Second-Language English in the Theater

Since the beginning of the eighties, South African theater has shown a marked increase in work produced by multilingual companies from workshop processes. Concomitantly, the increasing proportion of second-language English speakers in audiences, for instance at the Market Theatre in Johannesburg, has been noted by the management of that theater complex with some satisfaction (though there are no statistics currently available to support this perception).⁹ The 1988 Amstelfest attracted good audiences too, as does the annual National Arts Festival in Grahamstown, where performances present a wide variety of English and South African languages.

The pressure for linguistic and social contact, so effectively countered in the political arena, appears to be finding an outlet in oral cultural areas, particularly in theater. Speakers of African languages are presenting more work in English, using the opportunity to introduce other (especially English) speakers to their experiences of South African conditions, and simultaneously popularizing new theatrical forms and varieties of English usage in the process. The success of productions such as *Bopha*, *Asinamali*, *Woza Albert*, *Sophiatown*, and *Sarafina*, both domestically as well as abroad, lends support to the view that native English speakers both in and beyond South Africa are as eager to learn about this alternative English usage, its speakers, and the environment from which it derives as African languages speakers are to articulate their consciousness in the new South African English. Thus, for both native English speakers and second-language English speakers in South Africa, the freedom of linguistic association that English usage in the theater provides may well be a small but hopeful sign of the possibility of a viable and inclusive (as against sectarian) new South African consciousness.

Within the theater, speakers of African languages are bringing their own language forms to bear on the "standard" forms of English cultural usage. These vary widely according to the needs of the performers themselves or of the dramatic presentation of the thematic action. For example, in Fatima Dike's play *The First South African* (initially presented in 1977), the dialogue has a strongly "translated" feel to it. The English here accurately registers the formality of second-language English in its

⁹ This report derives from informal talks with members of the Market Theatre's publicity team and Mannie Manim's personal assistant, Regina Sebright. A list of the productions presented at the Market Theatre since its inception (Schwartz 1988) confirms the increasing number of productions created by second-language speakers.

vocabulary, which is sometimes colloquially archaic, and in its phrase structures, which are generally longer and less contextually allusive than those of idiomatic English conversation. This rendering of the carefulness of English usage embodies the lack of spontaneity that characterizes the utterances of speakers more familiar with written than oral forms of English. Much of the speech in the play is faintly anachronistic; the awkwardness here, for example, contributes to the thematic dislocations that the drama enacts (Dike 1979:17):

- Austin: Oh, you know your rights as a man when your girlfriend is involved, but when your morals as a man are involved you do as you like.
- Freda: And remember who you're talking to, this is not one of your friends.
- Rooi: Mama, tate, if you want me to be a sissy, say so.
- Austin: We don't say be a sissy. We expect all that is good and beautiful to come from you.
- Rooi: Mama, tate, I still say if that boy calls me a white man I'll beat him up and he can do what he likes. After all, I'm not the first person in this location to go to jail.
- Freda: But you'll be the first one in this family.
- Austin: Hayi ke mfo wam ugqibile, you have made yourself clear.
- Freda: Not in my house. If Zwelinzima feels that his balls are big enough, he must go. After all the council has hostels and bachelor quarters. He must go and rule himself in his own place, not here.

Compare the literary derivation of this dialogue with the orally derived dialogue of the family scenes in *Sophiatown* (first presented in 1986), where the grammatical structures are closer to idiomatic spoken English in their brevity and contextual allusiveness (Junction Avenue Theatre Company 1988:63):

- Lulu: What's going on?
- Mamariti: Hey, Lulu, tell that madman from Drum to stop die geraas.
- Lulu: Jakes, it's five o'clock in the morning.
- Jakes: You tell your mother I pay good rent. This is my bedroom. You see the chalkline on the floor?
- Lulu: So?
- Jakes: Well, I work in my bedroom, so leave me alone!
- Mamariti: (offstage): Luister! You bloody keep quiet—or out!
- Jakes: Jesus, Ma, you're like the Boere. You want me on the streets. I'm working, I pay rent, this is my space, pitiful as it is, and history is being made right now—and you want silence!

(THERE IS A KNOCKING AT THE DOOR)

Jakes: Jesus Christ! What now? Surely not today?

(ENTER FAHFEE CARRYING A SUITCASE)

Fahfee: They got me. They knocked down my shack before my eyes.

Specific differences in expression between the two scenes involve the use of different languages for degrees of emotional intensity: Mamariti uses a mixture of English and Afrikaans, where Austin uses Xhosa, followed by direct translation into English; Jakes uses solely English. There are also differences in grammatical organization: “He must go and rule himself in his own place, not here” uses sequential positive and negative contrast, whereas “You bloody keep quiet—or out” performs the same function using two positive commands. There is a metaphorical dimension in each example that invests the particular action with symbolic value, though again this occurs via different linguistic means with correspondingly different effects. In Dike’s play (“If Zwelinzima feels that his balls are big enough . . .”) the metaphor serves to confirm general social experience; in *Sophiatown* (“history is being made right now—and you want silence”) it serves to invest individual action with the significance of collective action, so that Mamariti is intended to register her demands for peace as opposing the course of history and collective action.

These linguistic differences point to cultural and historical differences between the dramatic worlds constructed in each play and, by extension, differences in the social and political conditions of each play’s genesis. The chronological time (nine years) between the two, as well as the movement from semi-urban to fully urbanized black experience, is inscribed in the language of the plays, as are the ideological perceptions of each family in relation to the oppressive structures that legislate conditions in their respective homes.

In *The First South African* the destruction of Rooi’s sanity remains a personal familial tragedy. There appears to be no way of resisting or countering the effects of imposed racial classifications. Rooi, like the others in the play, must live as best he can within the conditions created by the Population Registration Act, which makes “boys” out of men and where the white man is “my baas.” There is no relief and no hope; no weapons for defense or attack. In *Sophiatown*, on the other hand, the household is aware of a number of oppositional strategies and plans to use them in contending with the threat to Sophiatown’s survival. Plans for alternative schools established in the shebeens and for collective public defiance point

to a different consciousness.¹⁰ That such resistance was doomed to failure we know from the historical facts of Sophiatown's destruction, but the play enacts a resistance consciousness not evident in the earlier play. *Sophiatown* speaks with the voice of the eighties when Fahfee declares that "they can't stop us forever" (73) and Jakes asserts more directly the means of resistance at the end of the play: "Memory is a weapon" (74). It is a weapon, one might add, forged from an oral history.

Oral Themes and Perspectives: Two Case Studies

Sophiatown: Orality as alternative history

Sophiatown was first performed in 1986. It exhibits an intense concern with "the recovery of discarded areas, or the redress of selective and reductive interpretation" of the past (Williams 1987:16) and the implications of such reshaping of history for the present. Hence, like *Asinamali*, *Sophiatown* very consciously engages in "an adequate recognition of the indissoluble connections between material production, political and cultural institutions and activity, and consciousness" (80). The historical context of this play is immediately established by Jakes in his role as narrator of Sophiatown's history. Theatrically he functions as a historical mediator between the audience and the fragile construction of the mythical oral history of Sophiatown. His spoken narratives reverberate with all the techniques associated with orality: the rolling lists of names and places that conjure up a richly textured physical context; repetitions, mnemonics, and the identification of the narrator's persona with a communal "we;" and the association of identity with occupation (1-2):

Sophiatown, Softown, Koffifi, Kasbah, Sophia . . . Place of Can Themba's Place of Truth. Place of the G-men and Father Huddleston's mission. Place of Balansky's and the Odin Cinema. And let's never forget Kort Boy and the Manhattan Brothers, and Dolly Rathebe singing her heart out—here in Sophia . . . it was grand because it was Softown. Freehold! It was ours! Not mine exactly, but it was ours. . . . Boxing was my beat, but I wanted to cover the Softown lifestyle. Anything could happen here, and if it did, I wanted to be there.

¹⁰ Shebeens are unlicensed drinking places in townships where illegal and homebrewed liquor was once sold. Shebeens are now legally permitted to sell liquor.

Sophiatown is preeminently a play about English and its uses. The dramatic action is predominantly linguistic action. Words are weapons against other words: official decrees can be defied only by speaking against them. For want of any other means of defense, words have to oppose the physical force with which official (written) decrees are executed. Spoken words are the only defense against “these Boers [who] are trying to take over the country with their lorries, their guns and their bulldozers” (50). English stands as the last possession of a people dispossessed of their homes, their freehold rights to the land, their history, and indeed their “lifestyle.” If, as Jakes claims, “English is the language that unifies us” (52), the relations within such unity remain desperately unequal, for the price of unity appears to be hegemonic absorption and submission to the ideological imperatives of English, and thus (white) Western dominance.

The struggle between these contending histories inevitably takes place within English itself, for the price of defying the ideologies inscribed in English is voluntarily to sever connections with the “Softown lifestyle.” For this lifestyle incorporates the European cultural history and values provided by English: “Here we listen to Bach and Beethoven. We listen to great American Jazz. We read great Russian novels. We are a brand new generation” (53). English is the language that brings *Sophiatown* into a larger, more literate community than South Africa. Locally, English words are racially inscribed; they are “sweet white words” (29). But in a wider cultural frame of reference, they become for *Sophiatown* a measure of cultural greatness: they can tell “all sorts of truths” (29) because they can tell both Shakespeare’s truths and Lulu’s. Literate English is the cultural “Softown lifestyle”: “Can Themba, Nat Nakasa, Lewis Nkosi, Bloke Modisane wrote their best, here in *Sophiatown*” (1)—and they wrote in English. So English is the means to gain recognition, to escape entrapment in “the Boers’s dream of a whites only world” (2) and find a place in a world that offers “freedom meeting . . . fantasy . . . access. White bohemians and black intellectuals” (2). English is also inscribed in the history of the *Sophiatown* people through their education in English. As Jakes puts it, “if there was one thing we got from our church schools, it was a love of English” (52).

English usage is thus not only critical as a weapon of resistance; it actually constitutes the disputed territory. Its use is both the vehicle for articulating the meaning of the Softown lifestyle and one of the identifying features of that lifestyle. In the difference between *Sophiatown* as a “native location” and a “freehold suburb,” English is the provider of the terminology and a measure of that difference. In this play the hegemonic influences of English’s history in South Africa are so deeply embedded that

the struggle to escape its ideological stranglehold has to be fought with the words that English provides.

The cultural dominance of English is inscribed in the ideological base of the whole play. The argument over Lulu's education provides a platform for two explicit and opposing ideological stances about language. Implicitly, powerful connections are made between language, education, and identity. All three generations in the family, Mamariti, Jakes, and Lulu, reject Ruth's proposition that "you're not illiterate if you can speak Zulu and Xhosa and Sotho" (52). The alliance between English and literacy has become a tenet of faith for them. Ruth, the sole white, native English-speaker in the play, argues for the equality of languages in South Africa, but her arguments lack specificity and conviction. They convince an audience as little as they do the characters because of her vague generalizations: "You don't want to lose your own language. . . . I just think it's a terrible thing to lose a language" (52). Jakes' counter-argument—"But you're still Jewish and you can't speak Hebrew, right? That proves my point" (52)—comes closer to rendering the ambivalences inherent in the use of English as a marker of identity in South Africa.

During the action of the play the audience is exposed to the tensions existing between Ruth's and Jakes' respective viewpoints. An audience in the nineties is invited to see their own perspectives and preoccupations in the dramatic creation of Sophiatown in the fifties and to recognize the Sophiatown perceptions as those of the eighties. History, as Jakes observes, is "right now" (63).

Characters in the play are linguistically distinguished by the ways in which they use English. Relative social status is signified by the speaker's relation to English and its usage. Those characters—Jakes, Fahfee, Ruth, and Lulu—who have the fullest range of different registers have the greatest effective power in the structure of the household. Those who have only a tentative ability to speak English and whose repertoire of registers is restricted—Mamariti, Princess, and particularly Charlie—have least control over even the most immediate conditions of their lives. Furthermore, the kind of English in which the characters are most competent determines the areas in which they can exercise their power. Jakes, for instance, can claim the authority of the written word over the spoken, for he is the one who creates public identities for Ruth and the others through his articles in *Drum* magazine. He is the mediator between the characters in the dramatic work and the audience in the theatrical world.

A clear linguistic hierarchy that privileges the written word above the spoken word is established in the play. And within this literate dominance there are refinements of status. In the written word category, the "special

notice" (the public decree announcing imminent eviction) is paramount; its power to determine the social, economic, and political conditions of people's lives is unchallengeable. In a descending scale of value, Jakes' articles for *Drum* come next. At this level, factual reporting is valued less than writing stories, which "don't have to be true" (39). Boxing reports are "banging out a living" (2), while "dealing with socialites" (38) will make Jake "the talk of Softown," and will give him his "big break."

The printed word has more prestige than the more informal handwritten one. Lulu's account of her family for her school essay, which contradicts Jakes' account of the same people, focuses on those aspects of their actions that are not otherwise acknowledged; Mingus steals goods from the railways and Mamariti is "just a cheeky old woman, breaking the law, working on her beer, and planning for a future which never comes" (30). Fiction is more potent than truth, it appears, for Ruth criticizes Lulu's essay for being only one of "all sorts of truths" (31). The whole play in a sense promotes its own mythologizing fictions and enacts them, in the same way that the special notice enacts the apartheid myths that sustain the dominant ideology. As Lulu declares, "Everything in this house it's just fiction, fiction, fiction" (32). But the fictions of written language are ultimately stronger than the mythologizing power of the spoken word. The potency of the opening speech referred to earlier is finally diminished by Jakes' urgent sense that such orality is more effective when transformed into a written record. "Memory is a weapon" (74) for him, but as a journalist it is a more effective weapon when it is written down.

This hierarchy of literacy over orality sets up a conflict between the dramatic and theatrical elements in the play. Theatricality is always expressed in orality; yet the dramatic techniques that make Jakes, a journalist, the custodian and constructor of a mythical, alternative past also deny the theatrical medium its defining characteristic. Ironically, the dramatic action embodies the defeat of spoken language by the force of governmental decree. Theatrically the success of the play depends on the degree to which the spoken language of the play is "memorable." Only if the oral features of its performance are richly realized can the alternative ideology of the drama be registered.

To a certain extent the imbalance between theatrical orality and dramatic literacy is redressed in Fahfee's role as the bringer of the "news of the day." For him "words on paper [are] useless" (65). Words, like the guns that oppose them, must be active. Like Mingus, who is illiterate, Fahfee functions in an oral world of doing and speaking. Theatrically he enacts the values proposed by the dramatic world. History is alive as long as the anger, despair, and faith of the people are expressed. Unlike Jakes,

the lines between official and people's history are clearly drawn for him. People's history is oral, whereas official history traps the lived experience of the present in the immobility and intransigence of literacy.

So we see that throughout the play the written word is privileged over the spoken word and this privileging is thematically embedded in the dramatic action. Written language skills, particularly in English, are valued and shown to be effective in social action, where oral skills are not. Congress's call for action against forced removals fails, partly because it cannot organize its "call" into printed instructions. Mingus' exercise of social power as a member of the Americans gang is limited by his illiteracy, for he too sees authority as vested in the written word. Where matters of significance have to be dealt with, he insists on having them written down, even though he must enlist Jakes' aid to do so. Because Mingus' sexual and personal identity is tied to his public identity as a gangster, his literary incompetence makes Jakes appear a serious rival for power both in the public world and in his private relations. Hence his jealousy of Jakes over his relations with Ruth and his sneers at Jakes' literacy: "You bloody situations, you're full of words" (65). Mingus adopts a strategy for diminishing the power of literacy by translating it into orality. As Lulu confides to Ruth, "Do you know, Mingus and the Americans stop the intellectuals, they make them recite Shakespeare?" (30). Mingus can appropriate the power and mystery invested in the written word in this way. The literary myth of Shakespeare is more potent than the myths he can construct out of orality.

English is thus a central site for the ideological struggle, the war waged between Sophiatown and Yeoville, a war fought with the weapons of oral and literate English. But the weapons are unequal. Written words are supported by the force of "guns and tanks" (65), spoken words by "blood" (36). Even Jakes' typewriter, symbol of power in the household, cannot withstand the anonymous and reductive power of the printed words or the State's decrees.

Asinamali: Oral history in the making

Whereas *Sophiatown* is concerned with the effects on the present of recovering and articulating the silences of history, *Asinamali* engages itself predominantly with the present as the history of the future. Its characters recount their personal stories, describing the events that have brought them as prisoners to Durban Central Prison. Bongani is a migrant laborer who has killed his girlfriend; Thami is a farm laborer who was seduced by his white employer's wife and convicted under the "Immorality" Act; Bhoyi is

an activist friend of Msize Dube, a popular leader of the Lamontville “*asinamali* campaign;” Solomzi is a victim of Bra Toni, a confidence trickster whom he admires; and Bheki finds himself convicted of “political” crimes and sentenced to seven years after a police raid on the house of his common law wife.

The play invites its audiences into a dramatic world where survival is a question of evading for as long as possible the legal system and its representatives who make criminals of us all. Inevitably, though, the state and its machinery impinge on all the characters and point down an inevitable path through the law courts and the prison system. As the prison officer sings (193),

buti omuhle sewuzawufela ejele
sewuzafela ejele butu omuhle
Mina nawe siboshwa sofela la

A handsome guy will die in jail.
Go on, you’ll die in jail. Me and you,
prisoner, we’ll die here.

The language usage in the play—its multilingualism as well as the inconsistencies in its functional use of English—are indicative of more fundamental ambivalences in the theatrical relationship between audience members and performers. Theatrical questions frame themselves in insistently sociolinguistic terms: how the characters present themselves to their audiences; on whose behalf they speak; to whom they speak; and in what relation audiences are invited to place themselves regarding the performers as well as the characters. The ambiguities of “we,” “them,” and “you” as they are used in the dialogue render precisely the ambiguities with which current perceptions of being South African are invested.

The dialogue is characterized by clear distinctions among the three languages used. English predominates, with a strong (though variable) proportion of Zulu and relatively little Afrikaans. Blending is not a feature of the language deployment, and the usage in each language appears to conform to current “standard” South African speech. Unlike, for instance, *Saturday Night at the Palace*, the English usage here does not feature extreme vernacular variations; nor, as in *Sophiatown*, is the English marked as that of second-language speakers. There are few distinctions between the language of the narrative sequences and that of the scenes, and likewise few idiolectal variations among the speech styles of individual characters (with the exception of Bongani, who stutters).

Narrative utterances are characterized by short sentences, simple statements relating to action, and emotional distance from the events described. The tone is reminiscent of the carefully structured narrative progression to be found in the textbooks of alternative or “people’s education” courses. For instance, Bheki’s personal testimony begins in this way (182):

I come from Zululand. I got a place to stay in Lamontville township near the white city of Durban. During that time this man, Msize Dube, a very strong leader and a powerful voice for our people, was killed. They killed him. The government spies killed him. The reason for his death was that he maintained that we have no money. A-SI-NA-MA-LI! So we cannot afford to pay the government’s high rent increase. People took up this call: “AAASSSIINNNAAMMMMAALLLIII!” and the police went to work. Many of us died and many of us went to jail, and it is still happening outside.

This speech suggests that one of the play’s functions is to serve as an oral history for the people encompassed by the “we” of the narration.

Personal testimony is providing popular historians with the material of popular history, and in this sense *Asinamali* does offer itself partly as a sociohistorical document.¹¹ As the popular history projects, it is concerned with developing a broader sense of community among geographically separated people who share similar experiences of sociopolitical conditions, and it does so by acting as the transmitter of information about regional conditions in other, similar township communities. Like the teachers in people’s education, the actors assume roles as local representatives. A certain authority is vested in them as providers of information, though this authority derives from and represents the consent of the group to construct particular perceptions of themselves. Bheki here speaks with the voice of “one who knows Lamontville.” His personal “I” is rapidly subsumed in a communal “we.”

The “simplicity” of the language here, where idiosyncrasies of utterance are avoided, focuses theatrical attention on dramatic events rather than on dramatic character, towards narrative rather than expressive purpose. Theater’s participation in the making of cultural history is thus foregrounded. For an audience each character speaks as the representative voice of a particular community, and each character’s representativeness is

¹¹ Callinicos’ popular history books (1982 and 1987) and the National Education Crisis Committee’s *What is History?* (NECC 1987) offer examples of the use of oral testimony in popular history.

confirmed by those in the audience whose experience this mirrors. For those to whom the conditions are unfamiliar, the actors acquire a different kind of authority: they speak with the authority of “those who know to those who do not.” For these audience members the “we” is excluding and places them in another implied category of “you.” Thus it is possible for the performer to sustain different and conflicting relationships simultaneously within a single audience.

Whereas *Sophiatown*’s theatrical method was to draw an audience towards identifying (temporarily at least) with a particular group, or with an individual character within that group, *Asinamali*’s method is initially to invite an audience to survey and “place” each group represented by each of the actors—a distinction between a psychological and a sociological approach, with all the implications of theatrical genre that these approaches entail.

There is another reflective role played by the actors in *Asinamali* as well: for the duration of the play they serve as representatives of the audience itself, so that whatever the schisms operating within the audience, they are forged into a small identifiable community themselves. This mirroring effect is achieved by using actors as listeners to the stories of each of the other characters. Their role here is to serve as “crowd crystal” (Canetti 1962:192), to speak as the voice of the audience. A good example of this function is the following excerpt, where Bheki is the storyteller. The other characters interject questions to elicit further information; they make comments about the events, comments that serve to provide the norms that the audience may be expected to hold; and they deliver bursts of exuberant emotional response that direct and focus the audience’s own responses.

A noticeable technique here, too, is the delighted pre-empting of the storyteller’s next words, a practice that serves to confirm for the audience what has been said before. Teachers will be familiar with this response when a class is eager to show that they have remembered previous information, and its use here strengthens the educative function of the play (198):¹²

Bheki:	And then I came back to Durban.
Bongani:	Lamontville.
Bheki:	No, by then I had a place to stay.
Bhoyi:	[Kanti ubuhlalephi wena mfowethu?]

¹² Dialogue within square brackets occurred in the original production and in the unpublished manuscript but has been deleted from the published text.

- Where did you stay?
 Bheki: E (at) Durban Station!
 All: Durban Station!
 [Bheki: For four months.
 All: Four months!]
 Bheki: Everyday I pretended as if I've missed the train, and whenever a white railway policeman came by, I would grab my suitcase, look at my watch, which was not working either,
 [All: (Laughter)]
 Bheki: shake my head and mumble some words in Zulu.
 All: In Zulu!
 [Bongani: Ubengathi usela ushiywe yistimela kanjalo.
 (As if you've missed the train.)
 Bheki: Ja mfowethu! (Yes, my brother!)
 Every morning I would go to the toilet, wash my face, and then go look for work.]
 Bhoyi: What about your luggage?
 Bheki: [It was under the chairs in the waiting room. Phela kwase kuwumunzi warni ke loyo (because that has turned out to be my house).] And for four months I would go up and down [the street] looking for work. Standing in those long lines with my pass book in my hand and ten times a day I would get the same answer—
 All: [No vacancy!!] No jobs available.

The scenes are not distinguished sharply from the narrative monologues by different theatrical or linguistic techniques. They emerge from the narrative and become an extension of it. In the court room scene, the “pipi office” scene, and the “shoebox” scene, for example, actions are conveyed visually rather than described in words, so that the language no longer has to carry the narrative line. Freed from this responsibility, the language function shifts to non-narrative “embellishment”: character types, the technical versatility of the actors, and, most noticeably, the play of linguistic wit develop around the narrative line. It is the performance qualities of the verbal exchanges that command attention here. The assistance of all the prisoners in enacting each other's stories produces a high theatricality that defies the spatio-temporal logic of nondramatic reality. This theatricality is expressed in the extreme range of contrasts in the physical sound patterns of the actors' speech; intonation patterns extend their range towards the melodic patterns of music; syllabic contrasts in length are increased; vowel shapes are held and energy levels swiftly juxtapositioned. The interruption of sound by long silences also occurs noticeably in performance at these points.

The effect is one of bravura playing by the actors, which finds its greatest force and economy when scenes are enacted by a single actor, as, for instance, in Bheki's whispered confidences through the keyhole to Sergeant Nel (194):¹³

Hey, Sergeant! Sergeant! My Basie! Hey Sergeant! Sergeant Nel! My Basie! Hey Sergeant! Dankie baba! Hey you know what? This place would be shit without you, baba. We like you baba. We really do baba, cause you are the best white man in the whole world. You're the only one who puts salt in our porridge, ja. But Sergeant, that new constable from the depot Constable Schoeman, [yisifebe nja] he's a bitch. He kick me like a dog this morning. He kick Bhoyi too. [He was kicking him with those big black boots and you know what. Bhoyi had been shining those boots for him this morning. I hate him. You know what—we all hate him, baba.] He kick Thami. He kick everybody. I want to report him to you. [You must watch him. He is going to cause trouble. Hey! Sergeant, come closer now. Hey! Sergeant, you see those cells behind you. Women. Women's section. Always when he does night shift he goes there and takes out a girl and then late late we hear him come with that girl. We've been watching. Bhoyi's girlfriend is in that cell too—he took her the other night. Bhoyi protested and that's why he kicked him so hard this morning. We hate him, hey! Sergeant, you must watch him. He is going to cause trouble. But don't tell him we told you, baba. Good night Sergeant!]

Part of the effectiveness of this dramatic monologue lies in the enormous physical energy generated by the stage whisper in which this scene is played. For physical energy is theatrically the material means of embodying emotional intensity. The constraints of the dramatic situation (Bheki wants not to be heard by anyone other than Sergeant Nel)—as well as the physical demand on the actor's energy to be heard clearly in the auditorium—create a strong theatrical counter-tension that is exhibited linguistically in greatly increased articulatory and breath energy. Consonantal prominence is balanced by greater length and openness in the vowels, emphasizing the physical sound systems of spoken language and enhancing the emotional context of this speech.

At one point, some two-thirds of the way through the monologue, the utterances are recorded in the manuscript in this way: "Always when he does night shift he goes there and takes out a girl and then late late we hear

¹³ Bracketed text does not appear in the published version. There is an interesting divergence between the performance manuscript and the published text in this monologue, as the published text deletes altogether the section in which Bheki reports the constable's sexual misconduct with the women prisoners.

him come with that girl.” On paper this reads as continuous, rhythmically even, and primarily narrative in function. In performance, however, the actor interrupted the flow frequently with a variety of pauses; replaced the rhythmic regularity with constant variations through lengthening and shortening syllabic vowels; and on the phrase “late late” he carried the speech into the melodic range of song, repeating “late” five times in a falling, diminuendo inflection, so that the speech generated powerful emotional meaning and redirected its purpose toward expressing collective outrage at a personal level.

Such emphasis on the physical qualities of sound in language is characteristic of storytelling in oral cultures. As more than one critic has remarked, both the theatrical and the linguistic structures of this play are informed by the traditions of the storyteller. All the features by which Walter J. Ong identifies oral as against literate thought, such as “the intimate linkage between rhythmic oral patterns, the breathing process, gesture and the bilateral symmetry of the human body” (1982:470-71), were manifest in the performances of *Asinamali*. Ong discerns the difference between orality and literacy as primarily a difference in the function of language. As he puts it (32), “among oral peoples generally language is a mode of action and not simply a countersign of thought.”

Yet it would be naive to categorize *Asinamali* as simply an example of “traditional black cultural form.” *Asinamali* cannot evade the pressures of the literacy-based culture in which it has been made, nor the processes of rehearsal out of which it emerged. Both have served to exert a stabilizing influence on the dynamics of its orality.

But the continuous present in which the spoken word occurs can operate only in performance. The evidence that these records provide point to—but do not substitute for—the evanescence of language’s special relationship to time. As Ong has remarked (32), “sound exists only when it is going out of existence.” While this may be true during performance, a production is also stabilized by the relative fixity of the structures and systems in which it is constructed, marketed, and presented. The continuous repetition of rehearsal, the gradual substitution of formal dialogue for improvised exchange among the actors, the conscious selections of particular theatrical effects that determine and fix relationships within the drama and between audience and performers are all indicators of the interaction between oral and literate modes in this play. Ong describes such interactions as a general condition in a literate society (179):

It is the oral word that first illuminates consciousness with articulate language, that first divides subject and predicate and then relates them to one

another, and that ties human beings to one another. Writing introduces division and alienation, but a higher unity as well. It intensifies the sense of self and fosters more conscious interaction between persons. Writing is consciousness-raising.

Perhaps the most telling indicator of *Asinamali*'s inability to evade the effects of literacy is its insertion into the commercial, competitive market of popular theatrical entertainment, and its successes there. This complex reception precludes any attempt to assign it reductive labels such as "traditional," "ethnic," or "typically Black" to isolate it from other kinds of theater of that time or from its own contemporaneity. *Asinamali* is most particularly of its time and of urban South Africa. This has become increasingly apparent. The vehement outburst against "the bloody fucking pass laws" and the enactment of the burning of an informer may now be viewed (with some relief) as belonging emphatically to the past, but our consciousness of them as recent history informs our sense of the ways in which our here and now is different. That it may not seem so very different now is partly an effect of the theatrical intersection of orality and literacy that infuses the play with its remarkably vivid performance values.

Conclusion

From these case studies it is possible to assert that South African theater during the latter half of the 1980s located itself firmly in the movement towards a "new South Africa" based on the principles of a nonracial democracy. In its vigorous dramatic investigation of historical and contemporary themes, much of its work generated sharper perceptions and understanding of the conditions of inequality that have and still do oppress the majority of South Africans, and aimed at finding creative solutions to redress them. In its theatrical methods and relationships, too, it can be seen to be actively acknowledging the current complexity and diversity of intercultural relations among South Africans and to be energetically engaging itself with celebrating these openly and consciously, both in its internal practices and in its relations between performers and audiences. Hence the value of the local theater productions is inestimable, not only for the international reputation they are forging through their touring productions to other countries but primarily for the ways in which they can and are speaking out of the silence so long imposed by the historical practices of apartheid. South African is speaking to South African, and this cultural contact corresponds to similar initiatives in political and economic fields.

The voice of the silenced has never more urgently needed to be heard. The silenced and the dispossessed need to articulate, for themselves and for other South Africans, the experiences that, made accessible to all South Africans, may serve as a means of gathering speakers and listeners together in a communal identity that is most thoroughly and characteristically South African.

South African theater, then, has a very particular and essential place in the construction of our new nation. Based on the evidence of current work, the theater is ready, able, and eager to play its part in seeking creative directions towards the future and revealing in the present all the as yet unsynthesized strands that constitute "the South African experience." Let me close with the words of Garcia Lorca:

A nation which does not help and does not encourage its theatre is, if not dead, dying, just as the theatre which does not feel the social pulse, the historical pulse, the drama of its people, has no right to call itself a theatre.¹⁴

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A Comparative Study of the Singing Styles of Mongolian and Tibetan *Geser/Gesar* Artists

Yang Enhong

The epic *King Geser* has been in wide circulation in Chinese Inner Mongolian and Tibetan areas thanks to its continuous singing by generations of local artists. Because artists have brought their individual cultural contexts into it, the epic exhibits distinctive ethnic qualities in different places. Variations are most apparent in singing styles, learning styles, and religious associations. This article compares the singing styles of Mongolian and Tibetan artists and also explores the morphology of the epic and the cultural causes of that morphology.

In recent years we have conducted extensive surveys of Mongolian and Tibetan epic singers within the Chinese border and have successfully identified most of them. The survey found 56 Mongolian and 134 Tibetan artists who were actively performing in the 1980s and 1990s. Each of the 56 Mongolian performers could sing one or more chapters of epic: 13 reside in Qinghai, 28 in Xinjiang, ten in Inner Mongolia, three in Liaoning, and two in Gansu province. Of the 134 Tibetan artists, 45 reside in Tibet, 73 in Qinghai, four in Gansu, six in Sichuan, and six in Yunan province.

Famous Mongolian Singers (*Geserqi*)

Pajai was born in 1902 and died in 1962. He lived in Zhalut, Inner Mongolia. His performances of *The Story of Geser* (60,000 lines, published by the Beijing Nationalities Publishing House, 1989), adapted from the Beijing Wood Engraved Version of *Geser*, reveal strong ethnic and individual characteristics and provide a great cultural heritage for posterity.

Tshanbulaorbu, born in 1924 and died in 1994, lived in BaiLin, Inner Mongolia. His recorded *Geser*, which has over 3 million words and lasts 81 hours, is intriguing, touching, and typical of the BaiLin district.

Sulufenga, born in 1923 and also a native of BaiLin, Inner Mongolia, can sing three chapters of *The Story of Geser*. His recorded performance was edited for internal circulation by the Geser Office of Inner Mongolia.

Blobsang, born in 1944 in Chayouzhongqi, can perform many chapters of *The Story of Geser*. His singing was recorded and partially edited for internal circulation by the Geser Office of Inner Mongolia.

Wuzer (1906-84) lived in DuLan county, Qinghai province. He could sing six volumes of *Geser*; his performance of the first volume was printed by the Geser Office of Inner Mongolia in 1984.

Xuyaktu was born in 1933 in Kelutqi, Qinghai province. He can sing four volumes of *Geser*, and his performances were recorded and printed by the Geser Office of Inner Mongolia.

Norbu was born in 1931 in Niluke county, Xinjiang. He proved himself able to sing four volumes of *Geser*; his performances were recorded and printed by the Geser Office of Inner Mongolia.

Zhaodorji, born in Hejing county, Xinjiang, could sing five volumes of *Geser*; his performances were also recorded and printed by the Geser Office of Inner Mongolia.

Jiazhune was born in Hebukser Mongolian Autonomous county, Xinjiang. His performance of nine chapters of *Geser* was included in its entirety in the Complete Geser Readers of the Tacheng district.¹

Famous Tibetan Artists (*sgrungmkhan*):

Grags pa, one of the greatest Tibetan singing artists, was born in 1906 and died in 1986. He lived in Dbalvbar county, Chab mdo district, Tibet. Considered by many to be divinely inspired, he showed himself able to sing 34 large volumes and 12 smaller volumes of *Gesar*. His performances, recorded by Tibetan University, last 998 hours, consist of 26 volumes, and have all been transcribed, with five volumes published. The Nationality Publishing House has decided to print all 26 volumes of his performance.

Bsam grub was born in 1922 in Stengchen county, North Tibet. Also considered to be a divinely inspired singer, he knew 18 large volumes, 18 middle-sized volumes, and 18 smaller volumes of *Gesar*. He has recorded 52 volumes, a total of 2312 hours of performance.

¹ The part of this paper on Mongolian artists is based on Gereljab 1994. Geser is the form of the hero's name in Mongolian epic, Gesar in Tibetan epic.

A dar (1911-90) lived in Nagchu county, Tibet. As a divinely gifted artist and sorcerer (one who can draw out sickness from a patient by means of an auspicious scarf), he recorded seven volumes of his performances and was well known in his region.

Kha tsha pra pa nyang dbang rgyamtsho was born in 1913 and died in 1992. He spent his life in Chab mdo ri bo che county, Tibet. As a *bra-sgrung* artist, he copied 11 volumes from a bronze mirror.² One of them, entitled *Tidkar*, has been published by the Tibetan People's Publishing House.

Tshe ring dbang vdus was born in 1929 in Amdo, Tibet. He claims that he can perform 148 volumes of the epic under divine inspiration. He has recorded his performances in the Geser Research Institute in Qinghai, where he is an associate professor. He has completed nine volumes, 620 hours of recording, and has published two volumes.

Guy sman was born in 1957 in Sog county, Nag chu district, Tibet. She can sing 74 volumes of the epic. She is now a middle-level staff member of the Tibetan Social Sciences Academy, where she is recording her performances. She has completed 23 volumes and 859 hours of recording.

Nyag ri was born in 1938 in Sgar sde county, Mgolog, Qinghai province. He is regarded both as a living Buddha and as a divinely inspired artist. He can sing 20 volumes of the epic and is very well-known locally.

Gu ru rgyalmtshan was born in 1967 in Sgar sde county, Mgolog, Qinghai province. As a *gter sgrung* artist (one who draws out Gesar epic from either the material or spiritual world by means of special Tibetan sayings), he claims that he can write 120 volumes of the epic. Now a staff member of the People's Arts House in Mgolog, he has transcribed 11 volumes.

Tshe dbang vgyur med (1915-93) lived in Spra chen county, Nagchu district, Tibet. He could sing 23 volumes of *Gesar* and recorded 13 volumes of the epic.

Tshe ring dgra vdus was born in 1969 in Shan rtsa county, Nagchu district, Tibet. He claims that he can sing 34 volumes of the epic and has recorded three volumes.

Rig vdzin rdo rje was born in 1925 in Gsertha county, Sichuan province. He can sing 29 volumes of the epic and has recorded one volume.

² *Bra-sgrung* artists are said to be able to "see" Gesar epic by looking into a bronze mirror. Such individuals may also tell fortunes via this method.

These Mongolian and Tibetan artists lived in wide stretches of land and have sung epics that shared similar plots and the same protagonist—King Geser. However, ethnic and geographical variations have resulted in rather salient differences in their pre-performance rituals, melodies, language, accompaniment, and costumes.

Pre-performance Rituals

The Mongolian Ordos version of *Geser* contains a chapter entitled “Offer Incense.” According to this source, the performance must be preceded by such rituals as offering incense, lighting the offer lamp, and paying respects, all of which are meant to secure happiness and protection against evil. But such rituals are no longer common in the daily lives of Mongolian artists.

In most Tibetan areas, “Offer Incense” is a required ritual. Singers place their offerings within incense burners in the courtyard or in front of their houses; these consist of grains and drops of water on piles of cypress branches and leaves, as well as Chinese mugwort, Chinese photinia, and other plants, all of which they then burn.

There is a popular saying among Mongolians: any story is easier to tell than *Geser*. This is because they believe Geser to be a god, and therefore sublime and not to be spoken of casually. The Mongolian artist Blobsang has said that *Geser* is sacred and that only a highly skilled and devoted person can sing it. This particular epic is usually sung in areas where disasters have taken place with the aim of summoning Geser to lend his help and protection. During festivals, Geser epic can also be sung to bring about happiness and confer blessings. Outside of these specific performance contexts Blobsang tells only assorted anecdotes related to the epic. When he does sing the epic, he must sit straight, covering his legs with his Mongolian robe, and must not cross his legs, smoke, or drink alcohol. Usually, he dares not even mention the name of Geser lest the King overhear him and grow angry.

Mongolian artist Sulufenga recalled how he first heard *Geser*: when he was 16 years of age, there was a plague that killed many cows and sheep in his hometown, BaiLin. The residents invited to their village the verbal

artist Purung, who impressed Sulufenga to such an extent that he then took up the *huqin* and learned to sing the epic.³

Every Mongolian artist says a silent prayer in order to receive King Geser's permission for his performance. In the prayer, they announce the volumes or chapters they wish to perform and ask Geser to pardon them if they sing anything incorrectly.

Some artists practice certain unique rituals: Sulufenga says that before he sings of Geser's expeditions he calculates the timing and the direction of these expeditions. Only when the direction of the traditional Eight Diagrams matches the direction of the expedition will he begin singing. If the two directions do not match, he will have to change the expedition in order for Geser to achieve victories. His calculation follows certain prompts, such as "Calculations on the chart of Eight Diagrams tell the precise direction of Geser's expedition; the Heavenly, Stems, Earthly, Branches must coordinate well." Allegedly, anyone who is able to memorize these lines can discover the right timing and directions.

Prior to their performance, Tibetan artists must sit for a while in order to relax and concentrate; this preliminary enables them to play their roles and begin singing. Some Tibetan artists pour a glass of wine, dip their ring finger into it, and then flick drops of wine toward the sky, earth, and human realm in order to win protection from these three levels. They then sip a bit of wine and begin to sing. Most of the artists living in Mgolog, in Qinghai province, and the Nagchu district in Tibet observe this ritual.

Many performers count beads, close their eyes, and sit for a while before praying. There are two kinds of prayers: one is meditation, in which the performer seeks the Buddha and King Gesar to bless his performance; the other requires the performer to say aloud the prayers that serve as the prelude for the singing of epic. As the Gesar epic began to circulate and be recorded, pre-performance rituals blended into the performance itself and have consequently become part of written versions. In current notebooks, hand-copied versions, and wood-engraved versions, many chapters and volumes begin with prayers that pay respect to the gods and seek their protection and blessing. Such prayers previously served as preparations for the performance and were standard rituals unrelated to the epic. Since prayers gradually appeared at the beginning of epic performances, they in time became the opening of the poem itself.

³ *Huqin* is a general term applied to certain two-stringed instruments played with a bow during traditional performances. The *choor* (mentioned below) is similar to a *huqin* but is further defined by the decorative horse head adorning it.

The Language of Singing

In provinces and regions inhabited by Mongolians, including Xinjiang, Qinghai, Gansu, Inner Mongolia, Hebei, Liaoning, Jilin, and Heilongjiang, *Geser* epic has circulated in both oral and written versions. Comparatively speaking, the written version is more widespread, but oral circulation is currently the more favored medium in Xinjiang, Qinghai, and Inner Mongolia, with each region supporting a distinct, identifiable local version. Because each region has its own dialect, *Geser* has a variety of sources in addition to the general tradition; consequently, each version has developed different language characteristics. The Xinjiang and Inner Mongolian versions are based on the Beijing Wood Engraved Version of *Geser* and hence share structural similarities. But the Xinjiang version has also been influenced by the local epic *Jiנגgar* and other indigenous epics, thereby giving it strong Xinjiang characteristics, such as the Vilad dialect. The Inner Mongolian version has also been affected by indigenous epics and therefore bears strong Mongolian features, including the eastern dialect. The Qinghai version has taken its influence directly from the Tibetan *Gesar* and is thus closer to the oral version of the Tibetan epic. The regions of Qinghai shared by Tibetans and Mongolians have likewise made the language of *Geser* performances different from those of Xinjiang and Inner Mongolia. Some artists even perform a bilingual *Geser* by singing a section in Tibetan and then paraphrasing the same section in Mongolian.⁴

The Mongolian versions of *Geser* show a great deal of poetic variation; some sections have the same rhyme scheme while others differ. In ancient times, the epic used to be strictly poetic and included no spoken narrations, but due to the influence of storytelling from the Han nationality, spoken narrations began to appear in the epic (Yun 1997). Over time, the epic also incorporated many spoken expressions from the vernacular, thus making it more vivid and easily understandable. Its narratives and dialogues have adopted many idioms, slang expressions, words of praise, and rhetorical devices such as metaphor, exaggeration, and personification, all of which give the epic distinctive ethnic qualities.

The Tibetan version of *Cesar* is in wide circulation in the Gansu, Qinghai, Sichuan, and Yunnan provinces where Tibetans live, as well as in Tibet itself, and it flourishes especially in the pastoral areas where the Amdo dialect and the Kham dialect are spoken. In the tradition of Tibetan

⁴ The bilingual Tibetan-Mongolian version of *Geser* is very similar to that which is in wide circulation among the Tu nationality in Qinghai. These indigenous people use two languages in their performance, singing in Tibetan and then elaborating in the Tu dialect.

storytelling, this version consists of both prose and verse. The prose narrates the plot while the verse serves as the medium for dialogues and expresses emotional content. Generally speaking, the verse sections are proportionally larger than the prose. When the artists do relate prose narratives, their voices rise and fall, they often vary their speed of delivery, and the narration gives the impression of rhyme. The words are taken from the popular *glu* folk songs or the free style of folk songs. The prose consists of many sections, each having numerous lines of seven or eight syllables. The Tibetan style of *Gesar* is vivid in language and expression as well as in its collection of words of praise and idioms.

Method of Singing and Musical Accompaniment

High standards are required of the Mongolian artists who narrate and sing: they perform not only *Geser*, but also *Jianggar*, *Holbo*, and other stories of praise; some artists even tell stories from literary sources, such as “The Marsh Rebels” and “The Story of the Three Kingdoms” (which originated among the Han nationality). Unlike their Tibetan counterparts, they do not specialize in *Geser*: their performance of that epic is always related to other folk performances. The Mongolian artists play a musical instrument such as a *huqin* or *choor* while singing a story. In the past, a *choor* was used only in singing epics and a *huqin* in telling stories or *ülger*, *Holbo*, and narrative poems. Under the Han influence of storytelling, however, the Geserqi have replaced the *huqin* with the *choor* (Yun 1997). Today the *choor* is used only in singing words of praise and in stage performance, whereas the *huqin* has become the portable musical instrument of the storyteller and the Geserqi. The reliance of the artists on the *huqin* is made explicit in a song by Pajai:

My beloved huqin,
As your elder brother I am old.
But I will never forget you;
For my life,
You will tell the words of my heart.

The artists singing *Geser* in Xinjiang and Qinghai generally do not employ any musical instruments. Their singing is similar to that of Tibetan artists, but their melodies have more Mongolian traits.

Likewise, the singing of *Gesar* in Tibetan areas is usually not accompanied by music. The melody of *Gesar* sung in the Tibetan Amdo

region is close to that of the local *glu* folk songs. In Kham, it is closely related to that of the regional folk music; Tibetan melodies “have common characteristics: they are simple, unsophisticated, highly narrative, and conducive to chanting” (Bkra shis dar rgyas 1988).

There are various melodies called *rda* in the epic sung by Tibetans. In the Tibetan region of Yulshul, Qinghai province, there is a rich variety of melodies that can be classified as choral melodies, person-specific melodies, and person-specific divertimenti. Artist Tshe ring dbang vdus even prepared a special melody for each of the 18 large volumes and 28 middle-sized volumes. In the Kham area, the mastery of many different melodies marks a high competence level, and people in Yulshul dislike an artist who “sings all the stories to the same melody,” as they say. Artist Mtharphyin in Vjomdav county could sing to 41 different tunes. The melodies in remote areas are more monotonous than in areas served by modern transportation and in touch with cultural life, such as Yulshul and Sdege. Thus we can chart the growth of the Gesar melodies geographically from the simple to the sophisticated.

Costumes and Tools

Tibetan artists wear very particular costumes and use specific tools while singing.⁵ In our fieldwork, we always observed the artists wearing traditional garments while in performance. But some singers recalled seeing their forebears wearing specially tailored sorcerer’s attire, an indication that they were acting both as artists singing *Gesar* and as sorcerers communicating to the gods. The garments in question are customarily made of red silk, with lions embroidered on the sleeves and dragons and large birds on the front and back. The late artist Tshe dbang vgyur med, of Nagchu, once saw the artist Pradpavbo, of Amdo stod ma, wearing this variety of garment when singing *Gesar*.

The most important tool for a Tibetan artist singing *Gesar* is the *sgrung-zhav* (artist’s hat), which provides the wearer access to a magic power. Before he or she starts, an artist holds the hat in the left hand, stretches out the right hand, and points around the hat in order to tell the origin, shape, and symbolic meanings of the hat (the practice is referred to as Paying Praise to the Hat). Only afterward will he or she begin singing.

⁵ Mongolian artists wear very simple costumes and use simple tools. Usually they wear ethnic robes and play the *huqin* as they sing.

The use of the hat is quite common among Tibetan artists. We find varying practices in three different areas:

1. The hats worn by Tibetan artists Bsam grub and Yong grub are square and tall in shape. They are about one foot in length and have a pointed top and two animal ears hanging from the sides with colored cloth on the front and back; on top stand peacock or other feathers. A ring of small shells adheres to the side. In the middle of the front are a bronze mirror and three wisdom eyes, on either side of which are miniature bows and arrows. The hats are generally made of gold or silver threads. When worn on the head they are square in shape, but they can be folded and are quite portable.

2. The hats found in the Bdechen district of Tibet and in the province of Yunnan are largely similar to those discussed above, but with different decorations. The front is embroidered with the sun, moon, and other patterns, while on the top stand flags of feathers similar to those worn in “The Story of the Three Kingdoms” from the Han tradition.

3. The Tibetan female artist Gyu sman inherited her hat from her father, a very influential monk artist in Nagchu. The hat, made from white woolen fabric, is not tall but very wide with a large animal ear on either side. It is decorated not only with the sun, the moon, and a mirror, but also with turquoise and other jewels.

Even a piece of paper can become a performance tool. Young artist Grags pa seng ge says that when he holds a piece of paper in his hand and looks into it, the epic appears in his head and smooths his performance. Since Grags pa seng ge is illiterate, the paper provides him no *aide-memoire*; indeed, a blank sheet or a newspaper will serve the purpose. It seems that the mere presence of the prop helps him to concentrate on the story of Gesar.

Another Tibetan artist, Kha tsha pra pa nyag dbang rgya mtsho, uses many tools before beginning a song. First, he must set up a sacred altar, stand a bronze mirror in a bronze plate containing barley, place a crystal in front of the mirror, light incense on the side, place a butter lamp in front of the plate and two tall bronze glasses on each side of the plate, position seven small bronze cups in front of the butter lamp, and wrap the altar with a *Kha btags* (a white piece of silk used as a traditional offering, especially to Buddha).

To sum up, the Mongolian and Tibetan artists use different performance rituals, languages, melodies, costumes, and tools because they belong to different nationalities and geographical areas. The Tibetans also demonstrate differences among themselves, owing to the variety of their ancient ethnic cultural traditions (Yang 1995:72-83).

The Geserqi have learned the epic from older generations, whereas *Geser sgrungmkhan* claim that their epic is a result of divine acquisition rather than learning. These Geserqi have completed apprenticeships, most of them having learned from famous storytellers at a young age. They respect their teachers and are proud to have been students of famous artists.

From an early age, the well-known Mongolian artist Pajai learned from the celebrated storyteller Chudbang (1856-1928). Pajai's grandfather was also an avid storyteller and used to carry the young Pajai in his arms to visit Chudbang, who lived nearby. After a good drink, they would tell some folk tales; Chudbang was a versatile artist and could sing not only folk tales, but also *Holbo*, the story of Geser, and ancient Han Chinese stories including "The Story of the Three Kingdoms" and "The Marsh Rebels." Under his instruction, Pajai became a singing artist. Chudbang himself learned from artist Dge vdun, who was adept at singing "The Story of the Suppressing Mangus," and he had benefited greatly from his master.

Artist Tshanbulaorbu learned from the epic artist Togtohv. The latter was disabled and never left home, but there was always an endless line of visitors waiting to hear his performance. He was very learned and could sing "The Story of Three Kingdoms," "The Marsh Rebels," and *Geser*. He kept many handwritten notebooks at home and recalled that his teacher used to sing from them. The 120-volume books were taller than the master when he sat with legs crossed on his bed; the books now exist only in Tshanbulaorbu's memory.

Batunasun, father of the Mongolian artist Baotor, was a scholar of the Mongolian and Manchurian languages. The father often read *Geser* to his son and encouraged him to do research into the epic and to make extensive contacts with folk artists. Xinjiang artist Norbu was born into an artist family; his father was literate in Mongolian. His family owned a large collection of Geser notebooks and his father brought him up as a singer. Artist Sulufenga began learning the epic only after he saw a performance by the master artist Purung. While Sulufenga was between the ages of 5 and 14, the singer Blobsang was a lama in his hometown of Siziwangqi; this singer often paid master artists with his own food as tuition for lessons.

Mongolian artists take learning seriously and pay great respect to their teachers. In the presence of a teacher, a student must first have the teacher's permission before performing. In a Geser symposium held in 1985 in Chifeng, a number of Mongolian bards were invited to give performances. The organizers arranged for Blobsang to sing ahead of Sulufenga; Blobsang found this sequence to be inappropriate. Even though the elder man had never taught him directly, he was over sixty years of age

and therefore commanded a certain respect by convention. Only after asking Sulufenga's permission did he begin to sing.

Among the Tibetan singers, those who can sing multiple volumes of epic often claim to be *vbabsgrung* (divine artists). They all report that they had strange dreams in childhood and then automatically learned the epic and started a singing life. Because most of them are illiterate and cannot understand the complex physiological nature of dreams, they believe in the ancient explanation of dream-stories as divinely inspired. They believe that the gods have ordered them to sing stories and hence they call themselves divine artists.

According to the survey, there are 26 Tibetan divine artists, mostly living in Nagchu and Chab mdo in Tibet and in the Mgolog and Yulshul districts of Qinghai. They share the following characteristics:

1. They have an extraordinary memory; most of them, though illiterate, can sing one or two dozen, even several dozens or hundreds of volumes. By a conservative estimate, an average volume has five thousand lines; 20 volumes thus would contain 100,000 lines or a total of one to two million words if the prose is also taken into account. All of this material is memorized. The recording of Grags pa lasted 998 hours, that of Gyu sman 859 hours. Bsam grub has completed a recording of 2,312 hours and Tshe ring dbang vdus one of 620 hours. Thus we can say that the artists constitute a living library of the epic.

2. They all had dreams at a young age, after which they began singing the epic—Grags pa at 9, Gyu sman at 16, Bsamgrub at 15, Tshe dbang vgyur med at 13, and Tshe ring dbang vdus at 13. The plots of the dreams were often different. Some (for example, Tshe dbang vgyur med) dreamed of certain scenes of the epic as if they were present and ongoing. Other artists (Grags pa and Gyu sman) dreamed that God or a hero of the epic ordered them to spread Gesar's story by singing the epic. Still other artists (an illiterate, Bsarh grub, for instance) claimed to have read many handwritten volumes of the epic and learned to sing the epic this way, while some (Tshe ring dbang vdus) had a series of dreams from which they learned the epic.

3. Some of the singers were born into artistic families with fathers or grandfathers who knew the epic; most of them lived in areas where Gesar was well-known. As a rule, they were immersed in the families and the areas before taking their place as a new generation of artists.

4. They all had particular kinds of social experiences. Such artists used to have a very low social status, and most of them were forced to wander around the plateau, earning a living by singing the epic. As they traveled along, they were also able to enrich their performances by

interacting with other artists. The singers mentioned above are typical examples (Yang 1995:84-105).

Regarding their artistic development, Mongolian and Tibetan artists apply different standards to their art and have different cultural backgrounds. Most Mongolian singers are scholars, whereas Tibetan artists are shaman-sorcerers who are customarily more religious and mystical than their Mongolian counterparts. Mongolian artists have all learned from teachers and often sing not only epics but also other stories from literary sources; they are therefore not perceived as mystical by other people. Furthermore, although Buddhism has been in circulation for centuries in their country, Mongolians are usually not as dedicated to the religion as the Tibetans. This religious difference is reflected in their folk art. For example, we have heard several folk songs that satirize or criticize the evils of lamas. Chudbang, who was Pajai's teacher, created a doggerel entitled "Miseries of A Horse" that exposed the pretension of supposedly ascetic lamas who actually led a life of luxury and decadence.

The Tibetans, who are true believers in Buddhism, follow a different path. In their religious history there was a transition from indigenous to foreign religions. In order to maintain a following, foreign religions contended and mixed with their indigenous precursors. The families of artists who have lived for generations in this rather closed area are deeply and naturally religious: they embody not only Buddhism, but also indigenous religions, as evidenced by their costumes and tools.

We can study the status quo of the Tibetan singers in order to learn about their history. Many sorcerers were also artists; the ancient sorcerers used to be present on both religious occasions to act as messengers of God and on festive occasions to serve as carriers and propagators of ethnic culture and tradition. Social division of labor and the sophistication of the newer religion have deterred sorcerers from acting as folk singers. That is, ancient folk singers and sorcerers were once closely related; today very few sorcerers are also artists. On the other hand, however, many singers still propitiate God during summoning ceremonies in order to enhance the performance effect of the epic. This is the reason why the epic performance still retains many rituals, costumes, tools, and the mystical atmosphere of an indigenous religion.

The Mongolian and Tibetan versions of Geser stem from the same origin. They have, however, diverged in both style and performance over the course of their development. Distinctive cultural regulations are, the cause of the differentiation. For instance, a rich tradition in epic, a ready population of audiences, the considerable popularity of the artists, and a characteristic combination of prose and verse provide the foundation of the

Mongolian version. On the other hand, geographical closure, popular dedication to Buddhism and the indigenous religion, and the tradition of oral learning serve as the determining basis of the Tibetan version of Gesar.

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Cultural Assimilation in *Njáls saga*

Craig R. Davis

Introduction

Lars Lönnroth has recently described the social context of the Icelandic family saga as follows: thirteenth-century Iceland comprised two

overlapping and peacefully coexisting cultures jointly promoted by the Church and the secular chieftains, one dominated by native oral tradition, the runic alphabet, Old Norse feud stories, Eddic and skaldic poetry, the other dominated by the Latin alphabet, clerical education, and foreign literary genres (1991:10).

Both “literary production systems” contributed to the writing of sagas:

For even though the plots and narrative language of the Icelandic sagas usually come from the first and indigenous culture, the actual writing, the chronology, the encyclopaedic background of knowledge, the literary composition, and the entire production of codices on a large scale presuppose the diligent work of clerics belonging to the second culture (10).

Lönnroth thus envisions two distinct, but productively interacting, literary “systems” cultivated within the larger framework of Icelandic political and ecclesiastical life.

Carol Clover, in her summary of the question over a decade ago, described more precisely the new “syncretic form” produced by this interaction (1985:294). The Icelandic family saga derived from prose oral tales or *þættir*—Lönnroth’s “Old Norse feud stories”—that were elaborated in the process of being written down into the constituent episodes of longer narratives that themselves had been only “immanent” or potential in native oral tradition, that is, generally understood by experts in that tradition but never actually performed in their entirety (Lindow 1995, Foley 1991). The elaboration of these episodic oral narratives in writing produced a new “long prose” form, and consequently a new *literary* tradition, where competition between the two systems could be played out in a more

disciplined and structured form. Such competition, we may imagine, had already occurred to some considerable extent in the successive and multifarious oral performances of vernacular verse and prose. After all, even oral storytellers had been at least nominal Christians for over two hundred years; some very successful performers were themselves priests of the Church, like Ingimundr in *Sturlunga saga* (Bauman 1986:135). These performers of native tradition, whether cleric or layman, cultivated a distinctive value system of secular manly honor—"the *drengskapr* complex" (140-46)—that nonetheless may have accommodated some sharp, and not perhaps always entirely consistent, penetrations of Christian ethics and ideology (Andersson 1970). But the sometimes comfortable, sometimes anxious process of assimilation between secular and clerical culture—the not unfriendly competition between the two systems—was accelerated and finally resolved as churchmen were involved more closely in the literal production of saga texts. In fact, it is in the writing of the family sagas themselves that medieval Icelandic culture achieved its most fully integrated, comprehensive, and definitive expression. The family sagas are an ideological workshop, the primary site in the imaginative life of the country, the place where the last nails of cultural assimilation were neatly and irretrievably driven home.

My ambition in this essay is to explore more deeply the final fraught stages in the dynamic assimilation between Lönnroth's two systems of medieval Icelandic literary culture, between the one system dominated by the most prestigious narrative complex in clerical education and ideology—the Bible and its dependent *vitae sanctorum*—and the other system first generated within the matrix of pre-Christian Norse mythology. More specifically, I intend to argue that the most potent, but subtle and ramifying, issue at the heart of the greatest of the Icelandic family sagas, *Njáls saga*, is that between two competing systems of eventuality, two opposed formulations of what Joseph Harris has called the "plot of history" (1986:202, 213; 1974:264). For all the accommodation between the two systems prior to the composition of *Njáls saga*—whether oral or literary, whether in verse or in prose—there remained in this work one last barrier to full assimilation: the recalcitrant "deep structure" of traditional Norse plots.

This adaptation of Chomsky's linguistic term is useful in describing the basic plot-system or pattern of events that was characteristic of traditional narratives in the late pagan period. A new system of narrative eventuality was introduced to the culture during the conversion of Iceland to Christianity at the end of the tenth century, perhaps much earlier, in fact, since some of the founding families were already Christian by the time they arrived. The biblical pattern, with its providential plot of history, with its

sequence of sin and salvation, of preparation and fulfillment, of progressive dispensations of grace, is neatly formulated in Paul's Epistle to the Romans: *Scimus autem quoniam diligentibus Deum omnia cooperantur in bonum* ("And we know that to them that love God, all things work together for good. . .") (Vulgate/Douay-Rheims, 8:28). The heroes of this narrative register are the patriarchs, prophets, martyrs, and other saints whose lives anticipate or recall that of Christ; they are understood to approximate an *imitatio Christi*. The late pagan pattern is perhaps most succinctly summarized in the famous old chestnut from *Hávamál* (stanza 77):

*Deyr fé, deyið fræmðr,
deyr siðlfr it sama;
ek veit einn, at aldri deyr:
dómr um dauðan hvern*

Animals die; loved ones die;
Oneself dies the same.
I know one thing that does not die:
The reputation of the dead.

This formula encapsulates the defensive fatalism implicit in traditional Norse plot-structures, that tradition's characterization of the way things work out in this world, a process of negative and ultimately disastrous eventuality that may be resisted and delayed but must also finally be confronted with the stoic courage and grim dignity that will at least secure the respect of posterity. This is the pattern of sacred history preserved in *Völuspá*, *Snorra Edda*, and other works.

Many saga characters—the two Þórólfs of *Egils saga*, Arnkell *goði* in *Eyrbyggja saga*, Gísli Súrsson in *Gísla saga*, and Gunnarr of Hlíðarendi in *Njáls saga*, to name only a few—act out this traditional plot of history. These figures exemplify the value-system of unflinching manly fortitude in the face of overwhelming odds that is encoded in this narrative structure. The saga-writers sometimes even invest their heroes' deaths with an aura of uncanny force or heroic apotheosis. Gísli, for instance, is said to have

lét líf sitt með svá mörgum ok stórum sárum, at furða þótti í vera. Svá hafa þeir sagt, at hann hopaði aldri, ok eigi sá þeir, at högg hans væri minna it síðasta en it fyrsta.

died of so many great wounds that there seemed to be something strange about it. His attackers said that he never gave ground, and they could not see that his last blow was weaker than his first (*Gísla saga* 1943: 115; trans. Johnston 1963:58).

After death, Gunnarr is seen by moonlight in his grave mound, exultantly chanting a verse in his own honor (Sveinsson 1954:193). Such mystification is the reflex of a sacred tradition of heroic demise: the strangeness of Gísli's ferocious invincibility and the spookiness of Gunnar's defiant apparition invest their example with a special—and traditional—potency in the reader's sensibility.

To summarize the principle in operation here: the process of events in secular legend reflects the pattern of eventuality in the *Heilsgeschichte* or “sacred history” of the culture. In the late pagan universe, temporal security is precariously wrested from aboriginal chaos and inevitably collapses back into it, as seen most clearly in the rise and fall of the Æsir against the monsters of chaos. This process of chaos, creation, and catastrophe is the precise inverse of the biblical creation *ex nihilo*, fall, and redemption. Both plot-systems exerted a pervasive influence upon the structure of stories composed under their narrative hegemony. The implicit truth or validity of those secondary narratives—their historicity as understood by their contemporary audiences—is confirmed by the closeness with which they approximate the temporal structure of events in narratives of superior cultural authority. As Marshall Sahlins argues with regard to the various Polynesian heroic traditions, what constitutes a significant account of the past is very differently formulated in the narrative systems of distinct island groups: “different cultures, different historicities,” he concludes (1985:x). Actual historical events are assimilated to the “underlying recurrent structures” in the tradition of their narration (72); the presence and recognition of those structures are a large part of what makes the stories “true” to the participants in that tradition. Clover comments on the historicity of the early sagas in just these terms: they “sprang from historical reality but . . . once set in oral motion, they were slowly but surely rationalized, localized, contemporized, and above all ‘traditionalized’ (repatterned according to the narrative ‘laws’ of that society)” (1985:284-85). These traditional plot structures implicitly define the way things can happen in their world, but can themselves be subjected, and progressively acculturated, to competing traditions of eventuality. And the process of “traditionalization” is not confined merely to the performance of oral narratives, of course; it continues in literary traditions as well.

As I suggested earlier, we may assume that the oral feud stories of founding Icelandic families had come to reflect in some cases considerable influence from Christian patterns of narrative organization before they were construed during the process of literary composition into the longer sagas that they had only implied or adumbrated. But they were not as yet fully

assimilated to a biblical world-view or Christian value-system, certainly not in the deep structure of their plots. Many of these still retained the intimately shaping imprint of the late pagan system in which these stories had first been generated. The new Christian plot of history, the biblical pattern of eventuality, though introduced to native hagiography and the stories of some founding ancestors, was not deeply or securely internalized in saga prose until the mid- to later thirteenth century, in *Laxdæla saga* and, more especially, in *Njáls saga*, where the resolution of the conflict between the two systems of eventuality constitutes the underlying cultural work of the saga form.

Laxdæla saga

The impressive, if rather bald and peremptory, conversion narrative of Guðrun Ósvífs-daughter with which *Laxdæla* concludes anticipates a deeper and more complex integration of Christian conversion paradigms in the plotting of *Njáls saga*. Nonetheless, the author of *Njála* seems to have learned some of his strategy of narrative organization from the earlier saga's depiction of Guðrún's four marriages, each different but all ending in the divorce or death of her husband in ugly or regrettable circumstances (Conroy 1980:117). The technique of sequenced structural redundancy in these marriages, anticipated by Guðrún's four dreams as a young woman and Gestr Oddleifsson's foreboding interpretations of them, prepares us for the final overturning of the established pattern in her concluding "marriage" to God as Iceland's first nun and anchoress, founder of the most distinguished monastery on the island. God, one might say, turns out to be the only "man" good enough for Guðrún, the only one to whom her marriage can be termed an unmitigated success. From the repentance of this "chief of sinners" springs the religious life in Iceland; from her troubled marriages descend the many distinguished churchmen who furthered the progress of grace in the land. From a repeated pattern of failure emerges the redemptive plot of history implicit in the concluding episode of *Laxdæla*.

I will try to show how the author of *Njáls saga* adapted this pattern of sequenced but finally overturned redundancy in his own work and why it is especially effective there. But before I do so, I would like to point out one other thing that he learned from the author of *Laxdæla*: that is, how to stage a martyr's death for a secular hero, a death not actively fierce like that of the Þórólfs, or Gísli or Gunnarr, or Óæinn or Þórr, but passive and principled, like that of Christ or one of the martyrs who imitate him.

Kjartan Ólafsson, after manfully defending himself against the Ósvífssons, finally provokes his cousin and foster brother Bolli into drawing his sword. He then throws down his own (Sveinsson 1934:154; trans. Magnusson and Páilsson 1969: 175):

Víst ætlar þú nú, frændi, níðingsverk at gera, en miklu þykki mér betra at þiggja banaorð af þér, frændi, en veita þér pat.

It is an ignoble deed, kinsman, that you are about to do; but I would much rather accept death at your hands, cousin, than give you death at mine.

The saga-writer suggests some very uncharitable and un-Christlike motives on the part of Kjartan here. Perhaps Kjartan's only way of besting Bolli and regaining the superiority he had once enjoyed before their going to Norway is to entice Bolli into shaming himself irrevocably by killing a close kinsman. But whatever ambiguous motivation we are to see on the part of Kjartan in this scene, he does in fact impress by his willingness to sacrifice his own life rather than kill his cousin, though he surely could.

This formula is adapted in *Njáls saga* in the death of Höskuldr Hvítanessgoði, who echoes Kjartan in saying that he would *hálfu heldr þola dauða* ("much rather endure death") at the hands of the Njálssons than *gera þeim nökkut mein* ("do them any harm") himself (Sveinsson 1954:278; trans. Magnusson and Pálsson 1960:230). Höskuldr, in fact, dies praying that God will forgive his foster brothers. His death in turn becomes the model, the type, of which the even more potent "martyrdom" of Njáll is the antitype or fulfillment. The deaths of Kjartan, Höskuldr, and Njáll reconcile in a compact narrative event competing values of ultimate heroism in the two narrative systems Lönnroth has described, each episode evincing a progressively different balance between pagan and Christian virtues. The component of conspicuous good will toward enemies rises sharply from Kjartan to Njáll.

Christian teaching, of course, rejected the *lex talionis* of the ancient Germanic blood-feud, an institution that clearly comes in *Njáls saga* to be associated with the negative fatalism of the old world order: the system of reciprocal kindred violence is shown persistently and perversely to overwhelm the best efforts of good people to find a settlement that will satisfy both parties in a conflict (Byock 1982, 1995). The saga-writer would agree with C. R. Hallpike, who concludes with regard to the hill-clans of Papua New Guinea that "the organization of some societies makes a high level of conflict both permanent and inescapable" (1977:vii). Families can exercise only hortatory constraints on the external violence of their

individual members, but retaliation for such violence can fall upon any appropriately ranked member of the offending kindred; hence a minimum of social control is joined with a maximum potential for renewing and extending hostilities (211). The kindly Njáll is trapped in a system where he can exercise only minimal control over his own sons, but one in which he is nonetheless fully responsible for their behavior. Njál's social identity, whatever his personal feelings, includes the behavior of his sons. We might compare an Ibo proverb that is used in a novel by Chinua Achebe: "When a mad man walks naked it is his kinsmen who feel shame not himself" (1966: 132).

In any case, in Norse tradition this inexorable tendency toward violence in the saga replicates on a social level the inevitability of catastrophe on a cosmic one. Like Guðrun's four marriages in *Laxdæla*, the three episodes of *Njáls saga* that focus on the characters of Hrútr, Gunnarr, and Njáll, respectively, each establish and then intensify the traditional process of eventuality. This sequential redundancy confirms and clarifies the basic pattern: the efforts of better and better men to avoid conflict ironically produce increasingly violent consequences, more slowly perhaps, but with greater devastation once the techniques of legal control snap. Like opposing continental plates that produce more violent earthquakes the longer the pressure between them builds, it seems as if the longer that the friction between families is suppressed under the old system of suit and arbitration at the Althing,¹ the more violent the eruption when that system fails. As Gunnarr says to Skarpheðinn at a horse-fight: *hér mun verða urn seinna, þó at allt komi til eins* ("with me, the process [of violence] will be slower, even if the outcome is the same") (Sveinsson 1954:150; trans. Magnusson and Pálsson 1960:143).

"Hrúts saga" (chapters 1-24)

Let us consider the career of the first of the parallel protagonists, Hrútr (Sveinsson 1954:6; trans. Magnusson and Pálsson 1960:39):

*vænn maðr, mikill ok sterkr, vígr vel ok hógværr í skapi, manna vitrastr,
harðráðr við óvini sína, en tillagagóðr inna stærri mála.*

¹ The Althing was an island-wide judicial and legislative assembly held annually in June in the southeast of Iceland at Thingvellir.

a handsome man . . . tall, strong, and skilled in arms, even-tempered and very shrewd, ruthless with his enemies and always reliable in matters of importance.

Piqued in his sexual vanity, the normally fair Hrútr puts his wife Unnr in an impossible position when he challenges her publicly to declare the reason for her unhappiness in their marriage. His dysfunction is physiologically unlikely though poetically apt. He is not impotent, but rather dramatically the reverse: he suffers from a kind of acute priapism, the result of a curse laid upon him by the queen dowager of Norway when he lied to her about having another woman back in Iceland. In fact, Hrút's gigolo-like servicing of the queen in order to gain his Norwegian inheritance is not itself the finest example of the inherent quality of his character.

In his marriage, Hrútr leaves his wife no remedy short of clandestine divorce and unfairly refuses to return at least her share of the marriage settlement when sued by Unn's father for the whole estate. Hrútr is understandably irked by Mörd's grasping demand, but his reputation for even temper is distinctly tarnished when he challenges the older man to single combat. Such dueling is understood in the saga as an archaic, only quasi-legal expedient, an otherwise deplorable mechanism to avert feud when due process has failed to yield a legal resolution of the conflict. The honor Hrútr defensively asserts in one system of value—manly vigor—thus has to be paid for by a loss in a competing system of value—demonstrated respect for community norms of fairness. Yet, in other situations, especially in handling the various marital disasters of his niece Hallgerðr, the saga-writer troubles to show Hrútr a man of superior character, judgment, and equanimity.

Further violence in "Hrúts saga" is averted when Mörd'r backs down, but Hrút's uncharacteristic belligerence in this one situation leaves a painful imbalance in the relationship between the two families and has an ill effect upon the character of the heretofore very sympathetic Unnr. She seems "curiously demoralized" by her divorce (Magnusson and Pálsson 1960:12) and neurotically tries to recover her self-esteem by a prodigal lifestyle. Unnr soon squanders her inheritance from Mörd'r, almost it seems to force the issue of her uncollected dowry with her kinsmen. And, in fact, the instability left by Hrút's extralegal action against Mörd'r is resolved—again, with only poetic justice—when he himself is forced to endure a reciprocal humiliation at the hand of Unn's kinsman, Gunnarr. Hrútr now has to turn over the whole marriage portion, including his own contribution, in order to avoid a duel. Hrútr escapes with his life in this paradigmatic defeat to

his honor, but his unjust treatment of Unnr and her family devolves into even uglier conflicts in the following episode involving Gunnarr.

“*Gunnars saga*” (chapters 19-81)

“*Gunnars saga*” is interlaced with that of *Hrútr*, and this character supplants *Hrútr* as the protagonist of the larger saga for its duration. Compared with *Hrútr*, *Gunnarr* is not only a superior warrior and athlete—*hefir svá verit sagt, at engi væri hans jafningi* (“it has been said that there has never been his equal”)—but he is also described as [m]anna kurteisast . . . *harðgörr í öllu, fémildr ok stilltr vel, vinfastr ok vinavandr* (“extremely well-bred, fearless, generous, and even-tempered, faithful to his friends but careful in his choice of them”) (Sveinsson 1954:53; trans. Magnusson and Pálsson 1960:73). He finally succumbs when his masculine (*drengiligr*) vanity comes violently into conflict with his cherished self-regard as a *jafnaðarmaðr* (“man of justice”), a good, honest, law-abiding citizen of the commonwealth. After remarking *Ekki skulu vit vera orðsjúkir* (“We must not be over-sensitive”) when he learns of *Skamkel*’s slander (Sveinsson 1954:136; trans. Magnusson and Pálsson 1960:133), *Gunnarr* goes on a vicious killing spree after which he reflects bitterly (Sveinsson 1954:136, 138-39; trans. Magnusson and Pálsson 1960:133, 135):

Hvat ek veit . . . hvárt ek mun því óvaskari maðr en aðrir menn sem mér þykkir meira fyrir en öðrum mönnum at vega menn.

But I wish I knew . . . whether I am any the less manly than other men, for being so much more reluctant to kill than other men are.

This with the blood of six neighbors dripping from his halberd.

Gunnarr has now irreparably damaged his own rather self-righteous self-image. He is, in fact, more reluctant than other men to kill and proud of his scruples. But *Gunnarr* is hesitant to kill only so long as he is sure his patience is properly appreciated and he can be confident that his neighbors understand and admire his restraint; he had to be constantly assured of *Njál*’s esteem during the killing-match between their wives, *Hallgerðr* and *Bergþóra*. *Njáll* inspired *Gunnarr* to a higher standard. When *Gunnarr* has to endure some continued disrespect on the part of a different family, however, his deeper vanity bursts forth with the inappropriate violence of prolonged suppression. Even *Njáll* equivocates about the justifiability of

his behavior (Sveinsson 1954: 139; trans. Magnusson and Pálsson 1960: 135):

Mikit hefir þú at gört, ok hefir þú verit mjök at þreyttr . . . Mun þetta upphaf vígaferla þinna.

You have taken drastic action, [b]ut you had great provocation . . . But this will be the start of your career of killing.

Njáll then goes on to predict the conditions that will precipitate Gunnar's death, including his breaking of a just settlement between good men. Gunnarr responds with some reproach—*Öðrum ætlaða ek, at þat skyldi hættara verða en mér* ("I would have thought others were more likely to do that than I") (Sveinsson 1954: 139; trans. Magnusson and Pálsson 1960:135). But in the end, Gunnarr is shown to prefer his independent identity as master of Hlíðarendi to all other values, even to the only temporary discomfiture of partial outlawry to which he had earlier agreed. This pride is the real reason, of course, that the slopes of his farm suddenly look more lovely to him than they ever have before. Hlíðarendi is the only place on earth where Gunnar's own worth is clear, where he is recognized as *ágætastr maðr um allt land* ("the most outstanding man in the land") (Sveinsson 1954:174; trans. Magnusson and Pálsson 1960:160). He would rather die than relinquish that status, and his enemies give him the opportunity to do so—in the finest Norse tradition. Gunnarr dies alone, without flinching, against overwhelming odds. His story epitomizes the deep pattern of traditional Norse narrative.

Long before this eventuality, Gunnarr concludes the frustrating interview with his mentor just mentioned by abruptly asking Njáll whether he knows what will be the cause of his own death. We might imagine some sudden access of irritation on Gunnar's part toward his superior, know-it-all friend who has not at all reassured him in the way he had hoped. The question certainly seems impertinent, if not downright rude, coming from the *manna kurteisast* ("most courteous of men"). In any case, Njal's response, that he does know and, when pressed, that it will be something that *allir munu sízt ætla* ("everyone would least expect") (Sveinsson 1954:139; trans. Magnusson and Pálsson 1960:136), is borne out in the next constituent "saga," that of Njáll himself.

“Njáls saga” (chapters 20-132)

Njáll

var lögmaðr svá mikill, at engi fannsk hans jafningi, vitr var hann ok forspár, heilráðr ok gáðgjarn, ok varð allt at ráði, þat er hann réð mönnum, hógværr ok drenglyndr, langsynn ok langminnigr; hann leysti hvers manns vandræði, er á hans fund kom.

was so skilled in law that no one was considered his equal. He was a wise and prescient man. His advice was sound and benevolent, and always turned out well for those who followed it. He was a gentle man of great integrity; he remembered the past and discerned the future, and solved the problems of any man who came to him for help (Sveinsson 1954:57; trans. Magnusson and Pálsson 1960:74).

If Hrútr was normally a fair and law-abiding man, and Gunnarr a generous and courteous one (a real gentleman), then Njáll is a truly gentle man, and one in whom the saga-writer invests a remarkable degree of perspicacity, benevolence, and influence. He is endowed with a superior awareness and subtle initiative in predicting and manipulating the course of events. Nonetheless, Njal's control of events finally fails, just as had Hrút's and Gunnar's: he is burned alive with all his family for the killing of his foster-son, Höskuldr, a crime in which he had no part, for which he had arranged an unheard-of triple compensation, and which he had publicly deplored in the most extreme terms possible (Sveinsson 1954:309; trans. Magnusson and Pálsson 1960:252):

Ek vil yðr kunnigt gera, at ek unna meira Höskuldi en sonum mínum, ok er ek spurða, at hann var veginn, þótti mér slökkt it sætasta ljós augna minna, ok heldr vilda ek misst hafa allra sona minna ok lifði hann.

I want you all to know that I loved [Höskuldr] more dearly than my own sons; and when I learnt that he had been killed, it was as if the sweetest light of my eyes had been extinguished. I would rather have lost all my sons, to have [Höskuldr] still alive.

The burning of Njáll for the slaying of his beloved foster son is indeed the very last thing anyone would have expected for this wise and gentle hero. How does it happen? What does Njáll do wrong? The saga-writer has so convinced us of his hero's grasp of events that he now forces us to contemplate the cause of his failure: what subtle weakness of character, hidden infirmity of judgment, or fatal confluence of circumstances drags

this truly superior character to an even more catastrophic demise than those of his antecedents?

To take these questions in reverse order, we might first simply remind ourselves that Njáll has a family. Despite his good will to men, Njáll cannot escape, within a society organized around kindred affiliation, a personal responsibility for the actions of his kinsmen, especially his own sons. Their behavior, as I noted above, is part of his identity. The different competing attitudes within this family are the tribal equivalent of psychological ambivalence. Njáll is the guilty conscience of his family group. In a very real sense, then, Njáll feels categorically responsible for the sins of his sons and, like them, must suffer the consequences of their violence, whether or not he personally approves of it: "When a mad man walks naked it is his kinsmen who feel shame." Njál's public grief over the loss of Höskuldr may mitigate the situation, but it does not erase his liability for it.

Next, after contriving with great difficulty the monumental compensation for Höskuldr, Njáll places a silk gown on the pile of money as a final gesture of good will. This completely gratuitous present has the unintended effect of irritating the otherwise genial Flosi, who very much wants to settle his claim peacefully. The gown provokes Flosi into stupidly and uncharacteristically insulting the very man among his opponents who has always shown him the most sympathy and respect: he calls him *karl inn skegglaus* ("Old Beardless") (Sveinsson 1954:113; trans. Magnusson and Pálsson 1960:114; *et passim*). This insult in turn incites Skarpheðin's outrageous reply: that Flosi is the mistress of the Svínafell troll every ninth night. After this, Flosi's attitude hardens into an unrelieved determination not to rest until all his enemies are dead. The incident of the silk gown seems mere perverse misfortune and certainly no moral failing, even a venial one, on Njál's part. But it is still a mistake of judgment, if an absurd, meaningless, and finally inexplicable one. For once, Njál's insight into character and events fails him: his gesture produces the opposite effect from the one he intends. The tension between the two parties has now become so great, the rupture into violence so long delayed by increasingly desperate expedients, that even the most trivial, unexpected act, even one intended to smooth over any remaining hard feelings, is enough to precipitate the violent collapse of relations.

The pointlessness of the disruption over the silk cloak reveals that this is no moral weakness on Njál's part, but rather the sheer perversity of history, the pattern of negative eventuality that has already characterized the careers of Hrútr and Gunnarr. *Something* will always go wrong. Njáll now comes to realize that the outcome he has tried so hard to forestall is truly

inevitable: *Nú kemr þat fram, sem mér sagði lengi hugr um, at oss mundi þungt falla þessi mál* (“I have long had the feeling that this case would go badly for us . . . and so it has turned out”) (Sveinsson 1954:314; trans. Magnusson and Pálsson 1960:256). Even the most benign and perspicacious of characters, like even the strongest and wisest of gods and heroes, cannot escape the structural incorrigibility of fate. But the question still remains for the Christian audience of the saga, or that dimension of its narrative sensibility that had cause to expect some moral explanation of eventuality: are we to understand that Njáll has done anything wrong, morally wrong, to contribute to the process of fate? Is he guilty of any act or attitude that might explain his failure, that we might recognize as functionally equivalent to Hrút’s unfairness or Gunnar’s pride?

We can begin by noting that even the scrupulous Njáll—who may as a counselor-at-law have plotted deception to help his clients but has never before told a lie himself—does prevaricate a bit when he is driven to a final crisis between his family honor and his Christian pacifism. He prevails upon his sons to leave their position outside Bergþórshváll (in which all, including their enemies, agree they cannot be overcome) with a clearly specious argument (Sveinsson 1954:326; trans. Magnusson and Pálsson 1960:263-64):

vil ek, at menn gangi inn, því at illa sóttisk þeim Gunnarr at Hlíðarenda, ok var hann einn fyrir. Eru hér hús rammlig, sem þar váru, ok munu þeir eigi sótt geta.

I want everyone to go inside, for they found it hard to overcome [Gunnarr of Hlíðarenda], even though he was only one against many. This house is just as strongly built as his was, and they will never be able to overcome us.

First, Gunnar’s house was not all that strongly built, since his enemies managed to overcome him by merely prying off its roof. Second, as Skarpheðinn immediately points out, these enemies (unlike Gunnar’s) are willing to burn them alive inside. This is one piece of advice from Njáll that does not at all turn out well for those who follow it; his assurance that they will be safe inside is almost immediately belied. Yet after Njáll’s maddening acquiescence throughout the saga in his sons’ various and increasingly irresponsible hostilities, he finally decides to claim his paternal authority over them (Sveinsson 1954:326; trans. Magnusson and Pálsson 1960:264):

Nú mun sem optar, at þér munuð bera mik ráðum, synir mínir, ok virða mik engis. En þá er þér váruð yngri, þá gerðuð þér ekki svá, okfór yðr þá betr.

Now you are going to override my advice and show me disrespect, my sons—and not for the first time. But when you were younger you did not do so, and things went better for you then.

Just as Njáll had once given bad legal advice to his clients in order to create gridlock at the Althing and thus a chieftainship for Höskuldr, so now he gives bad advice to his sons in order to precipitate what we uncomfortably come to realize must be a fully intended result: their, and his own, destruction. Why does he do this?

Njáll has already declared, as we have seen, that he would rather all his natural sons had been killed, if only Höskuldr were still alive. After all, the Njálssons really are guilty of the enormity for which they are being prosecuted, and Skarpheðinn, in particular, with his sardonic grin and insulting tongue, has contributed substantially to the failure of the planned settlement. But one of the reasons for Njál's regret over Höskuldr, we are led to imagine, is that he has long since understood that his sons will end up dying for their crime anyway: *þeir megu aldri sækja oss at landslögum* (“[t]hey will never have any legal grounds for prosecuting us”), Skarpheðinn says after he provokes Flosi to cancel the settlement at the Althing. Njáll replies: *Þat mun þá fram koma . . . er öllum mun verst gegna* (“Then it will end in disaster for everyone”) (Sveinsson 1954:314-15; trans. Magnusson and Pálsson 1960:256). Has Njáll just seen to the inevitable end of the story and given up trying to postpone it any longer?

Njál's motivation in provoking the burning seems far more complicated than an exhausted fatalism. In the end, he seems most concerned not for his sons' lives, nor even for their honor, but for their salvation: not only will they heap more mortal sins upon themselves if they remain outside to fight, but, if they survive, they will prosecute the vendetta, as Skarpheðinn promises, until their attackers are all dead. And these enemies, like themselves, are Christian men, an ugly irony that even Flosi acknowledges (Sveinsson 1954:328; trans. Magnusson and Pálsson 1960:265). So Njál's bad advice, his one fib about the good sense of going inside, is designed to instigate a surreptitiously benign result: he hopes to contrive his sons' salvation in a kind of “baptism by fire” before they can do any more damage to their enemies—or to their own souls. When the house begins to burn, he reassures its occupants (Sveinsson 1954:328-29; trans. Magnusson and Pálsson 1960:266):

Verðið vel við ok mælið eigi æðru, því at él eitt mun vera, en þó skyldi langt til annars slíks. Trúið þér ok því, at guð er miskunnsamr, ok mun hann oss eigi bæoi láta brenna þessa heims ok annars.

Be of good heart and speak no words of fear, for this is just a passing storm and it will be long before another like it comes. Put your faith in the mercy of God, for He will not let us burn both in this world and the next.

But even this spiritual hope does not relieve Njáll of his secular responsibility: he is not his own man. He motivates his reluctant daughter-in-law to leave by approving her promise to urge her kinsmen to seek vengeance: *Vel mun þér fara, því at þú ert góð kona* (“You will do well, because you are a good woman”) (Sveinsson 1954:329; trans. Magnusson and Pálsson 1960:266). This we must see as more than a ploy, since Pórhalla is shown to keep her word; the burning is itself a crime, after all. Second, and more tellingly, Njáll rejects Flosi’s Christian distinction between personal and familial responsibility. When offered *útganga* (“free passage out”), he replies: *ek em maðr gamall ok lítt til búinn at hefna sona minna, en ek vil eigi lifa við skömm* (“I am an old man now and ill-equipped to avenge my sons; and I do not want to live in shame”) (Sveinsson 1954:330; trans. Magnusson and Pálsson 1960:267). This remark makes it sound as if Njáll would seek to avenge his sons if he were younger, but I read it as another misleading prevarication on his part, a half-truth. Njáll dearly deplores the endless violence of the old system, but he cannot reject his identity as the father of his sons. He would be shamed if he let them lie unavenged, but he is already impossibly humiliated by their crime against Höskuldr. He is, as I suggested before, the guilty conscience of his family. He wants to die now. He deserves to die. He accepts responsibility for the sins of his sons. This acceptance is Njál’s fatal vulnerability, the quality that finally drags him to his death.

“Flosa saga ok Kára”

In the saga of Flosi and Kiri that follows the burning, characters of lesser moral stature than their predecessors nonetheless manage to overturn the pattern of events we have so clearly come to expect from the three earlier episodes (Harris 1986:212). Flosi is said to have had *flestir hlutir höfðingligast* (“nearly all the qualities of a true chieftain”) (Sveinsson 1954:419; trans. Magnusson and Pálsson 1960:326), but himself acknowledges that the burning was *stór ábyrgð fyrir guði* (“a grave

responsibility before God”) (Sveinsson 1954:328; trans. Magnusson and Pálsson 1960:265) and certainly nothing to boast about (Sveinsson 1954:336; trans. Magnusson and Pálsson 1960:342). Under the terms of his settlement after the burning, Flosi undergoes a pilgrimage to Rome and receives absolution from the hands of the Pope, as his opponent Kári later does. The dispensation of divine grace in human affairs through God’s vicar on earth reverses the prior train of events that had overwhelmed even the saintly Njáll. The two pilgrimages to Rome result in a mutual forgiveness that has the effect of internalizing, even “institutionalizing,” the redemptive paradigm of Christian sacred history in secular saga narrative. To recall: on his return from Rome, Kári shipwrecks in a snowstorm close to Svínafell, Flosi’s farm. Kári decides to *reyna þegnskap Flosa* (“put Flosi’s nobility to the test”). Flosi

kenndi þegar Kára ok spratt upp í moti honum ok minntisk við hann ok setti hann í hásceti hjá sér. Hann bauð Kára þar at vera urn vetrinn; Kári þá þat. Sættusk þeir þá heilum sáttum. Gipti Flosi þá Kára Hildigunni, bróðurdóttur sína, er Höskuldr Hvítanessgoði hafði átta.

recognized [Kári] at once and jumped up to welcome him, embraced him, and placed him on the high-seat beside him. He invited [Kári] to stay for the winter, and [Kári] accepted. They made a full reconciliation, and Flosi gave to [Kári] in marriage his niece [Hildigunnr], the widow of [Höskuldr Hvítanessgoði] (Sveinsson 1954:463; trans. Magnusson and Pálsson 1960:354).

Flosi and Kári are reconciled in more than merely political terms, and the moral principle of Christian forgiveness makes possible a deeper, social reconciliation symbolized in the marriage of formerly bitter enemies and the utter end of the feud.

Conclusion

The political confrontation between the proponents of the native and the newer views of history is dramatized in chapters 100-105 of the saga, but the more profound struggle between paganism and Christianity takes place in the plot of the larger saga itself. The real crisis and resolution of cultural conflict in *Njála* occurs not in the Althing of 999, though it is prepared for there; it occurs in the burning itself. Njáll is both a martyr for the new faith he loves and a hero of the old world whose inescapable violence he abhors, but whose system of cultural identity and heroic dignity

he is incapable of rejecting. In that old system, he really is responsible for his sons' crimes; he really does have to evince unflinching courage in the face of insuperable odds. His burning recapitulates in Christianized, social form the final, fated conflagration of the gods at Ragnarök. The victory of Christianity in the saga occurs at the very moment when Njál's active submission to the burning transforms inevitable defeat, the defining principle of the old world order, into spiritual redemption, the defining principle of the new: *guð . . . mun . . . oss eigi bæði láta brenna þessa heims ok annars* ("God . . . will not let us burn both in this world and the next"). In a pattern of supplantation reminiscent of biblical typology, the burning of Bergþórshváll recalls and supersedes Gunnarr's heroic last stand at Hlíðarendi, just as Gunnarr's nobility of spirit supersedes Hrútr's merely admirable courage and justice. Christian beatitude transcends but does not destroy pagan posthumous honor; God's blessing supplants but does not diminish the *dómr um dauðan hvern* ("the reputation of the dead") (Hávamál, stanza 77); our sympathy for Kári's impressive vendetta against the burners is subsumed in our relief at his final reconciliation with Flosi. Just as the vicarious atonement satisfies the demands of both law and grace, so the Burning of Njáll fulfills and transcends the revenge imperative. Vengeance for Höskuldr Hvítanessgoði is exacted from the family of his slayers, but Njál's personal innocence and quiet willingness to lead his sons in death patently renders him a Christological victim, a beardless lamb of God whose example serves to cleanse the sins of his kin, a martyr whose death inspires the admiration of his enemies and ultimately, in the case of Flosi, their redemption.

The "martyrdom" of King Brian marks an analogous moment on a larger political level in the late Norse world of the saga: the Battle of Clontarf closes the reign of the old gods, variously intimated by mysterious portents and epiphanies throughout the North Atlantic. The Norns weave the grim fate of men on their bloody loom for the last time. From now on we are in a world where the blood of a martyred king can heal wounds and his severed head miraculously restore itself to his body in visible validation of the sanctity of his sacrifice, and of the institutions he represents and epitomizes. This is the same sanctity attributed to Njál's beatified corpse. After several centuries of elaboration, the author of *Njála* finally managed to find the formula whereby the old pagan plot of history, with its heroic last stand against superior forces of chaos, could be transformed into the triumph of divine grace in human affairs.

Njála thus dramatizes and completes the victory of a Christian plot of history in native narrative culture, a fact that gives that work much of its peculiar power and resonance, and one reason, I would suggest, why the

saga form evolved into a different kind of narrative after *Njáls saga*'s success. E. Paul Durrenberger argues that it is no accident that *Njáls saga*—so neatly structured—was written after the country had come under the authority of the Norwegian crown in 1264: “It is a summary of the categories and themes of the past, more or less independent of the present . . .” (1992: 106-7). After *Njála*, *saga* narrative becomes less publicly historical and more explicitly moral or psychological, even quasi-allegorical in places, where creatures and characters, like Glámr in *Grettis saga* for instance, take on symbolic dimensions that suggest interior states of the protagonist (Hume 1974:470; Mitchell 1991:30). With *Njála*, the oral-derived literary family saga had achieved its “manifest destiny” or logical fulfillment in a more thoroughly integrated Christian culture in medieval Iceland; it had acculturated in its deepest structure to a biblical process of eventuality. Lönnroth's “two cultures” had become one.

So it is not at all true that *Njáls saga* is “independent of the present.” *Njála* became the classic text of Icelandic national culture, its *Iliad* or *Aeneid* or *Mahābhārata*. *Njála* achieved a definitive formulation of how Icelanders would perceive, and continue to perceive, the principles of historical process that the competing traditions of their cultural heritage left for them after they had become Norwegian subjects. This saga is the place in the new culture where that reconciliation most deeply and intimately occurs: it is the site of cultural formation. *Njáls saga* not only derives from the conscious life of the culture, it is “constitutive of” that life. To borrow the terms of Gabrielle M. Spiegel (1990:85), the saga performs an “elaborate, ideological mystification” as it instantiates a redemptive plot of history after the double pilgrimage and submission of Flosi and Kári to the judgment of the Pope in the final episode. The native system of government is demonstrated as admirable but obsolete, as categorically ineffective in securing a benign result in the affairs of men. The Roman Church is now shown to be the most potent institution in the culture, the only one capable of inspiring an end to the old destructive cycle of reciprocal kin-violence. Recognition of the Pope's spiritual authority produces a hypostatized, concluding moment of reconciliation, a happily-ever-after ending, chastened by the terse, sober note on Flosi's merely ordinary Christian death.

The saga-writer has projected into his imaginative reconstruction of the commonwealth the violence he implicitly associates not only with the pagan ethos of kindred chauvinism and the revenge imperative, but also with the way things categorically happen in an unsanctified world, a world that on a social level is governed by the well-intentioned but ultimately ineffectual mechanisms of the Althing. The saga-writer exorcizes in his story

the violence of his nation's history, one in which Church and monarchy are now charged with the maintenance of social order, however unsuccessfully that ideal order was to be achieved in fact. Indeed, the new coercive authority of the Norwegian crown is still such a highly sensitive political point that the saga-writer sharply occludes it behind his demonstration of the Church's spiritual potency. Nonetheless, the intimacy between the allied institutions of Church and monarchy is encoded in the depiction of King Brian's martyrdom, the dramatization of the divine right of kings being discreetly transferred from the Norwegian to the Irish crown. *Njál's saga* thus implicitly confirms the new institutional *status quo* in Iceland; it works to reconcile its audience to the new coalition of ecclesiastical and royal authority. In fact, the saga-writer found in *Njála* a formula that would continue for centuries to satisfy the ideological needs of the institutions governing the imaginative life of the nation. The productive tension between Church and chieftaincies in the old commonwealth, between secular and clerical culture, was over. And in terms of merely literary history, vernacular narrative after *Njála* found other tasks to perform, tasks of less obviously political and national significance, and of more interior, subjective, moral import. The fires of social violence that once publicly burned Bergórshváll will burn now in the eyes of the revenant Glámr, which are, of course, the violent eyes of the outlaw Grettir himself, glaring back at him when he finds himself alone in the night.

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The Creation of the Ancient Greek Epic Cycle

Ingrid Holmberg

In a certain sense, all texts can be considered as parts of a single text which has been in writing since the beginning of time. Without being unaware of the difference between relations established *in presentia* (intratextual relations), and those established *in absentia* (intertextual relations), we must also not underestimate the presence of other texts within the text.

(Todorov 1977:244)

Todorov's description of textual interdependence represents a fictional construct or web of narrative that certain critics attempt to identify and analyze.¹ In a sense, this type of critic involves herself or himself in a constant pursuit of the lost paradise of a pure and unified text. Ancient Greek literature, however, provides us with access to a narrative tradition that approximates this single text: the oral tradition of which the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are the most prominent remains. We also possess in much more fragmentary form other narratives that belonged to the oral epic tradition; these comprise the epic cycle. In this paper I will examine the fall from narrative grace that the creation of the fixed texts of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* imposed upon the unified and universalizing oral tradition of the epic cycle.

The significance and function of the ancient Greek epic oral tradition has been recognized since the work of Milman Parry and Albert Lord.² Their research and the research of their followers has revealed that the Greek epic oral tradition formed a huge, interconnected, and variegated web of legendary and mythical narratives that comprised the *corpus* of the epic cycle, part of which were the stories of Achilles and Odysseus that eventually became the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. Oral traditional narrative in

¹ This article builds upon material that appeared in Holmberg 1998.

² See espec. Parry 1971, Lord 1960, and the overview in Foley 1988.

composition is characterized by its fluidity, its lack of boundaries and closure, and its inherent capacity for spontaneous shortening and lengthening in every compositional production. Its nature defies the notions of beginning and closure, authorial identity and control, and exclusivity of narrative with which modern readers are familiar. The events that became the focus of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, therefore, were always already part of a universalizing mythical/legendary narrative that surrounded them with events occurring both before and after the discrete narratives concerning Achilles and Odysseus (Severyns 1928:261). At some point in time, for reasons that remain shrouded in history, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* emerged from this fluid narrative as narratives both relatively fixed and “charismatic.”³

We can only imagine the effect of the emergence of these two monumental epics upon the living oral tradition, whether that emergence was immediate or arose in an evolutionary manner.⁴ The reality for modern scholars is that the rest of that huge web of interrelated, interdependent narrative assumed a secondary status in comparison with the Homeric epics, and consequently has survived only in the most unsatisfactory fragmentary or epitomized form. Hence, scholarly questions about the oral tradition focus almost exclusively upon the monumental epics, with only a few scholars devoting more than an aside or a footnote to the epic cycle. What I would like to do in this paper is observe the oral tradition from another point of view, from the point of view of the rest of the epic cycle, and consider not the “Homeric” question, but the “cyclic” question. What happened to the epic cycle? What relationship did it have with the charismatic Homeric epics? And not least importantly, what meaning did this relationship have for subsequent literature?⁵

The dearth of material that can be called directly representative of the epic cycle illustrates the disrepute and belatedness into which the cycle had fallen even in antiquity. We have minimal sources for the epic cycle excluding the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*: fragmentary references and quotations in the scholia to ancient manuscripts, most prominently the *Iliad* and the

³ I borrow the term “charismatic” from Terry Castle, who defines a “charismatic text” as encoding “talismanic mythic material” to articulate “underlying cultural fantasies,” as gratifying “pervasive cultural wishes,” and as having “an unusually powerful effect on a large reading public” (1986:133-34). See also Holmberg 1998:22.

⁴ As Nagy has recently maintained (1990:52-81; 1996a)

⁵ Burkert (1987:43-44) hints at a perspective that examines the totality of the Greek oral epic tradition and the subsequent hegemony of the Homeric epics, although he chooses instead to focus on the reception of the Homeric epics.

Odyssey; references and quotations in ancient authors such as Athenaeus, Plutarch, and Pausanias, among others; an incomplete set of epitomes by Proclus attached to two manuscripts of the *Iliad*; and the summary of the cycle by Proclus called the *Chrestomathy* and preserved in Photius' *Biblioteca* (319A17), itself in turn a summary of literature and genres from the ninth century AD (Lesky 1957:79; Allen 1924:51-53).⁶ Although Proclus' *Chrestomathy* is considered to be the most complete and coherent of the sources, there are interrelated problems concerning the identity and date of Proclus and his access to reliable sources for the cycle.

The Proclus who compiled the *Chrestomathy* was either a grammarian of the Antonine age or a Neoplatonist of the same name who died in 485 AD (Huxley 1969:123-24; Severyns 1928:245). An important statement by Photius in his introduction to the *Chrestomathy* asserts Proclus said that the poems of the epic cycle were preserved and pursued seriously by many, thereby implying that Proclus had access to original texts rather than abridged accounts by mythographers.⁷ Therefore, if one believes Photius, an attribution of Proclus' date depends in part on when Proclus could have had access to original texts of the epics. Severyns cites Philoponus, who says that the epic cycle was not read in the time of Peisander (222-35 AD) and that it had disappeared completely by the time of Philoponus himself in the sixth century (1928:75-76). Proclus, therefore, might be the second-century grammarian. Allen claims that many other equally ancient texts survived until the fifth century (including the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, one presumes). In addition, the Neoplatonic Proclus wrote about Homer, and there is ample evidence of an interest by Neoplatonists in Homerica (Allen 1924:51, 53, 56-60). Therefore, our Proclus might be the Neoplatonist. The question of Proclus' identity and date is perhaps not so important for a literary consideration of the epic cycle as for a determination of whether or not his epitome is an accurate representation of its shape and contents. How closely and accurately do the summaries represent the sequence of events of the narratives? Fortunately, there does seem to be a fairly good general correspondence between the

⁶ See Holmberg 1998:20.

⁷ See Allen 1912:97: "He [Proclus] says that the poems of the epic cycle are saved and zealously pursued by many not so much on account of their excellence as on account of the sequence of the events in them." Lesky, however, claims that Proclus did not have the poems but got the plots from mythographers (1957:81).

summaries in the *Chrestomathy* and the fragments available in other sources.⁸

Since antiquity, references to the epic cycle have subordinated it to the Homeric epics in several ways. The first is authorship. Although the cyclic narratives are sometimes attributed to Homer, the *Chrestomathy* and the majority of sources establish a tradition of assigning to the narratives several different authors who are often affiliated with Homer as his disciples or as continuers of his tradition.⁹ The authors of the cyclic poems were also assumed to have been younger than Homer, and therefore the texts are generally dated post-700 BCE, if not post-536 BCE (the alleged Peisistratean Recension).¹⁰ An important consideration in evaluating these types of statements is that while the whole epic cycle including the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* drew on very ancient traditional material—and therefore attempting a chronology must prove fruitless—the epic cycle was probably fixed and written down later than the two large poems were fixed and/or written down.¹¹ The chronological posteriority of the establishment of fixed narratives of the cycles yields the assumption that these narratives were in fact *created* as dependent upon the Homeric epics.

Second, these narratives were considered aesthetically inferior to the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. This aesthetic judgment was in place by the time of Aristotle, who states that the *Kypria* and the *Little Iliad* are much more episodic than the unified *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, and therefore inferior to them (*Poetics* 1459b).¹² A scholion to *Odyssey* 7.115 complains that epithets in

⁸ See Burgess 1996:81 for Proclus' general validity on the internal contents of the narratives, if not on the divisions into books.

⁹ See Davies 1986:100 for a discussion of the attribution of authors to the minor epics. Pindar fr. 265 (Sn.) states that Homer gave Stasinos the *Kypria* as a dowry (Loeb fr. 2 = Allen testimonia 117). Unless otherwise indicated, all Loeb references are from Evelyn-White 1914 and all Allen references are from Allen 1912. Nagy (1990:19, n. 9) points out that attribution to a specific author becomes more "exclusive" as time progresses.

¹⁰ The Alexandrian scholars repeatedly refer to the cyclic sources as "neoterói" or "younger," although this is not an unproblematic connection. See Davies 1986:109.

¹¹ See Huxley 1969:123-24, 141; Allen 1924:64-65. See also Davies 1989a:3-5 for a discussion of the dates of the written versions of the cycle and for his preference for relatively later dates (i.e., late sixth century) for many of them.

¹² Huxley 1969:124; Lesky 1957:83. Even modern scholars fall prey to this literary aesthetic prejudice. E.g., Davies 1989a:iv: "Why, for instance, publish literal translations of those tiny portions of confessedly second-rate epics that happen to have survived?"

the epic cycle do not match the excellence of those in Homer, and merely function to fill out a verse conveniently.¹³ Hellenistic Alexandrian scholars, unaware of the oral tradition of archaic Greek poetry, read the texts of the epic cycle as later than the *Iliad*, which as written texts they probably were, without taking into account the larger, co-extensive oral epic tradition of which the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were part. These influential scholars began the practice of interpreting the cyclic narratives as later compositions that provided further story lines for unexplained or allusive references in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, and that could not have influenced the Homeric poet. The Alexandrians explained Homer by means of Homer and, as Severyns notes, were largely responsible for discrediting the epic cycle.¹⁴ Proclus himself, the summarizer of the epic cycle, apparently said that the poems of the cycle were preserved and studied not so much for their artistic nature as for the sequence of events.¹⁵

In addition and perhaps as a result of the first two considerations, the epic cycle has been understood as narratives providing introductions and sequels to the primary, original texts of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Proclus' summaries, preserved by Photius, frequently begin the minor epics with verbal indications that these mini-narratives are intended to follow or add on to the prior mini-narrative.¹⁶ A scholion to Clement of Alexandria's *Protrepticus*. 2.30 describes the narratives of the *Chrestomathy* as the antecedents and "sequel" of the *Iliad* (Lesky 1957:79). In the early twentieth century, an important Homeric critic defined the epic cycle as merely prequels and sequels to the Homeric poems: "the effect of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* was still so strong that sequels or introductions met with a public" (Allen 1924:69). Returning to Castle's notion of charismatic texts, which the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* certainly are, we can observe that from a modern perspective these epics would indeed provide fertile ground for the

¹³ Cf. Severyns 1928:156: "The epithets are not thrown in casually in the manner of the epic cycle, but the individuality of each tree is observed through each epithet."

¹⁴ See Severyns 1928:159, 247—although it should be noted that the most influential Homeric scholar, Aristarchus, despite his derogatory attitude toward the cycle, always included in his scholia and commentary the tradition he denied, thereby preserving it for posterity. His predecessor Zenodotus was not so fastidious, and whatever he rejected was in general excised completely from his commentary. Both Severyns and Davies (1986:93; 1989a:2) note that beginning with the Alexandrians the term "cyclic" became identified with the inferior status of cyclic poetry.

¹⁵ See Holmberg 1998:20-21.

¹⁶ E.g., *Kypria* Loeb fr. 1 = Allen 102.9.

creation of narrative sequels. From the perspective of the Greek oral epic tradition, however, the narratives of the epic cycle were not created *after* the Homeric epics, but had existed in time concurrently *with* those two narratives. The epic cycle achieved its form as prequels and sequels to the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* only after those epics became fixed texts.

The concentration of attention upon the Homeric epics and the opinion of the epic cycle as degraded in comparison with these epics unfortunately created our lack of direct contact with much of the epic cycle. But the obscurity of the epic cycle may in fact have preserved, albeit in the distanced form of Proclus' summaries, aspects of the oral tradition obviated by the fixation of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.¹⁷ The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* have been transmitted to us as unified and exclusive narratives; the epic cycle, even in Proclus, is disunified, repetitive, variable, and inclusive.¹⁸ These later qualities have been thought of as characterizing a group of poems deemed inferior to the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. Yet these very qualities are representative of the model of the oral tradition from which the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* emerged.¹⁹ Ironically, what many consider to be *exempla* of the Greek oral tradition may have blinded us to closer representatives of that tradition, and ultimately may have established a set of aesthetic judgments that disparages these representatives. A discrete summary of the extant remains of the Trojan cycle, focusing especially upon apparent "problems" or "inconsistencies" in that narrative tradition, reveals that these problems and inconsistencies derive from the oral tradition and should be understood as such rather than as aesthetic weaknesses.

The full mythic narrative of Proclus' *Chrestomathy* ranges from the marriage of heaven and earth to the death of Odysseus. It includes the various subnarratives or narrative cycles that form the central core of much ancient Greek literature, such as the war of the Titans, the story of Oedipus, a *Thebaid* (the story of the struggle over the rulership of Thebes by Oedipus's sons) and an *Epigoni* (the renewal of that conflict by the next generation of warriors). The Trojan Cycle is part of this large narrative and

¹⁷ Although Latacz (1996:75) notes that what remains of the epic cycle is a "post-Homeric version of the Troy saga," he also admits that even this version may contain pre-Homeric elements of that tradition (76). See also Burgess (1996:78-79), who argues strongly for the independence of the cycle, as well as Kullmann (1984:321-22) and Huxley (1969: 126) on the epic cycle's proximity to the oral tradition.

¹⁸ Nagy (1990:73) comments upon the process of "Homeric streamlining."

¹⁹ See Holmberg 1998:23.

begins immediately following the *Epigoni* with the *Kypria* in 11 books.²⁰ One source attributes the *Kypria* to Stasinos, although the accompanying comment notes attributions to Homer himself, and even recounts the tale that Homer gave the *Kypria* to Stasinos as a dowry.²¹ The name of the *Kypria* remains a mystery to scholars: the name may refer to Cyprus as its place of composition, although this would be unusual for an epic, or more likely it may refer to the role of Aphrodite, “the Cyprian goddess,” in setting events in motion (Huxley 1969:128-29; Davies 1989a:33). The text of the *Kypria* that Proclus preserves in many instances seems to presuppose the *Iliad*, although I would argue that it is impossible to distinguish because the tradition is shared by both narratives.

The beginnings of both the *Kypria* and the *Iliad* demonstrate the difficulty of determining the interrelationship of these narratives and complicate the notion that the *Kypria* is the “prequel” to the *Iliad*.²² In Proclus’ *Kypria*, the plot is explained by Zeus’ planning (*bouleuetai*) with Themis to bring about the Trojan war.²³ The opening lines of the *Iliad* refer to the plan (*boulê*) of Zeus being fulfilled. These lines are provided with a scholion that quotes lines in verse (Proclus’ epitome is in prose) from the *Kypria* containing the same phrase for the plan of Zeus as the *Iliad* does, and outlining Zeus’ plan to relieve Earth from the burden of mankind’s population by causing the Theban and Trojan wars.²⁴ The severity of Zeus’s punishment stems from the lack of divine reverence among mankind. The evidence of the direct quote from the *Kypria* itself and the connection that the scholion to the *Iliad* makes between the plan of Zeus in the *Iliad* and the plan articulated in the *Kypria* indicate that the plan of Zeus in the *Iliad* at least in part refers to the plan of Zeus for the diminishment of mankind. Nevertheless, the Iliadic passage has since the

²⁰ All the epics or parts of epics surrounding the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are much shorter than the two “monumental” poems.

²¹ Loeb fr. 2 = Allen 117; see Davies 1989a:33.

²² For a detailed analysis of the *Kypria*’s relationship to the *Iliad*, see Burgess 1996.

²³ Loeb fr. 1 = Allen 102 ff. The Alexandrian scholars Aristophanes and Aristarchus substitute Thetis for Themis here, obviously assimilating this planning session with the plans of Zeus and Thetis for Achilles in *Iliad* 1 (Severyns 1928:247). If, as the various commentaries and *Kypria* claim, the purpose of the wars is to punish mankind for its lack of reverence, Themis, the goddess of holy law, would be the likely candidate as Zeus’ assistant.

²⁴ Loeb fr. 3 = Allen fr. 1.

Hellenistic age been interpreted as referring primarily to Zeus' plan for Achilles, in other words as separate from the rest of the Trojan cycle; accordingly, the plan of Zeus in the *Kypria* has been read as dependent upon, and as an imitation of, the beginning of the *Iliad*. Thus begins the construction of the *Kypria* as a prequel to the *Iliad*.

My own emphasis on the independence of the *Kypria* does not preclude other interpretive options or seek to denigrate the artistic quality and unity of the *Iliad*. The reference to the *boulê* of Zeus in the *Iliad* may be an acknowledgment of the common store of myth shared by the *Kypria* and *Iliad* and thus not part of a prequel paradigm in which the *Kypria* expands on the *Iliad*, or it may simply stand on its own within the *Iliad*. Given the self-consciousness of the poet of the *Iliad*, there is also the distinct likelihood that the *boulê* of Zeus at *Iliad* 1.5 refers both to the plan in the *Kypria* and to Zeus' plan for Achilles in the *Iliad*.²⁵ My point is that once the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* achieved a fixed status and became exemplars of the epic genre, other narratives of the epic cycle were forced into a less prominent position, eventually being read as simply extensions of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, when all the narratives including the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* had previously existed on a relatively equal footing. The *Kypria*, along with the other Trojan epics, finds itself literally and figuratively relegated to the ranks of explanation, footnote, and prequel to the text of the Homeric poems.²⁶

Proclus' epitome goes on to relate the quarrel between Hera, Athena, and Aphrodite at the wedding of Peleus and Thetis, the judgment of Paris, Paris' seizure of Helen, the Greek decision to attack Troy, and the Greek preparations. Interestingly, the two Homeric heroes are both depicted as hiding in order to escape conscription, events scrupulously avoided by the Homeric poet. Odysseus pretends to be mad, but his ruse is detected by Palamedes, a revelation later punished by Palamedes' drowning at the hands of Odysseus, according to one variant.²⁷ Achilles' feminine disguise is not referred to by Proclus but is related in a scholion to the *Iliad* dubiously

²⁵ Proclus' *Kypria* ends with Zeus' plan (*Dios boulê*) to relieve the Trojans through Achilles' withdrawal. This *boulê* seems to resonate with the Iliadic *boulê* as a means of connecting the narratives, but see Burgess (1996:82-86), who reads this *boulê* as part of an independent *Kypria* that also included episodes associated with the *Iliad*.

²⁶ See Holmberg 1998:23-24.

²⁷ Proclus only mentions Palamedes' death, while Pausanias cites the *Kypria* as relating his drowning at the hands of Diomedes and Odysseus (Loeb fr. 19 = Allen fr. 21).

assigned to the *Kypria*.²⁸ Peleus hides Achilles in disguise as a girl on Scyros, where he meets Deidamia and sires Neoptolemus. In the *Little Iliad*, however, Proclus does relate Achilles' marriage to Deidamia on Scyros after Achilles has wounded Telephus and the Greeks have been scattered by a storm on their first attempt to sail to Troy.²⁹ Without attempting to unravel the complexities of Achilles' visits to Scyros and the chronologies necessary for Neoptolemus' conception if he is to be old enough to fight at Troy, suffice it to say that both the *Kypria* and the *Little Iliad* seem to have included at least one trip by Achilles to Scyros.³⁰ The reference by the two cyclic epics illustrates an important feature shared among the cyclic epics but not with the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*: these minor epics frequently have overlapping narratives and repeat versions of the same episodes, particularly at their beginnings and endings. Although this feature is often interpreted as a sign of their disorganization and inadequacy, the permeability of boundaries, especially beginnings and endings, is also a trademark of the flexibility of an oral tradition, where the poetic composer can begin and end his narrations wherever he and his audience wish. Citing this fragment and others in an important recent article, Burgess argues that the *Kypria* in fact included events relating to the whole Trojan war, introducing "the possibility that the original *Kypria* covered the whole Trojan war" (1996:91).³¹

Proclus says that the *Iliad* follows the *Kypria* and that the *Iliad* is in turn followed by the *Aethiopis* of Arctinus of Miletus.³² The *Aethiopis* is preserved by Proclus and in two fragments, one of which may be spurious. As with the *Kypria*, the *Aethiopis* was probably written down, although not composed, expressly to complement and expand upon the *Iliad* (Severyns 1928:313-14, 318). The narrative of the *Aethiopis*, in fact, appears from the type of stories it relates to be one of the most ancient of the cyclic epics:

²⁸ Scholion to *Iliad* 19.326 = Davies 1988: *incertum fragmentum* 4; see Severyns 1928:289-91.

²⁹ Loeb fr. 5 = Allen fr. 4.

³⁰ Severyns (1928:338) suggests that Achilles was hidden on Scyros as a boy, as in the uncertain Kyprian fragment, that he returned to Scyros as a man according to the *Little Iliad*, and that Proclus incorporates both by having Achilles actually marry Deidamia on this second visit, even though Neoptolemus was previously conceived.

³¹ Davies (1989b:98) refers to the *Kypria* as a "hold-all for the complete story of the Trojan war."

³² Loeb fr. 1 = Allen 105.20-22.

its main incidents are the conflicts between Achilles and two Trojan allies, Penthesilea and Memnon. Proclus' summary tells us that the *Aethiopis* begins with the Amazon Penthesilea coming to the aid of the Trojans and eventually being slain by Achilles. A scholion at the end of the *Iliad* introduces the arrival of the Amazon immediately following the burial of Hector, and has been cited as a possible beginning of the *Aethiopis* rather than as a gloss on the ending of the *Iliad*, although there is no internal evidence for the former conjecture.³³ Achilles then kills Thersites (the object of the Greeks' scorn in *Iliad* 2) for accusing him of being in love with the Amazon. It is unclear from Proclus' summary whether there was any basis for Thersites' allegation against Achilles, although in later literary sources and artistic representations Achilles conceives a love for Penthesilea as she dies from the wound he inflicts (Davies 1989a:54). Memnon, son of Eos, kills Antilochus the great friend of Achilles;³⁴ Achilles kills Memnon, who is granted immortality; and Achilles, himself killed by the combination of Paris and Apollo, is also granted immortality.

Achilles' contest with Memnon seems to parallel significantly Achilles' encounter with Hector in the *Iliad*. The two accounts differ, however, in ways that illuminate the agenda of the Iliadic author. The most prominent of these is the immortality available to both Memnon and Achilles from their divine mothers: in the *Aethiopis*, Memnon receives immortality from Eos, and Achilles is transported by his mother Thetis to the White Island. Although I would hesitate to suggest that the Memnon/Achilles scenario is the early paradigm of the Hector/Achilles antagonism, it does seem likely that the Homeric poet may have had the Memnon/Achilles story in mind and sought to distinguish and deepen his own narrative by denying his hero the salvation of immortality. The Homeric poet therefore distinguishes his poem from the cyclic tradition of Achilles' immortality—in addition to the idea of immortality in general as a possibility for mortals that runs through the cycle—by an explicit denial of these variants.³⁵

Proclus' *Aethiopis* ends with the quarrel between Ajax and Odysseus over the arms of Achilles; a scholion to Pindar's *Isth.* 3.53, the only fragment definitely connected with the *Aethiopis*, says that the *Aethiopis* relates Ajax's suicide. Severyns (1928:324-25) gives credence to this

³³ Scholion *Iliad* 24.804; Loeb fr. 2 = Allen fr. 1. See Davies 1989a:61 for a short discussion.

³⁴ See *Iliad* 23 for Memnon as a young clever charioteer.

³⁵ See Holmberg 1998:25.

fragment, asserting that the author of the *Aethiopis* would not have ended his narrative without including the suicide. The *Little Iliad* begins with this same dispute over the arms and Ajax's suicide; therefore it apparently renews part of the *Aethiopis*. In the anterior, less well differentiated form of the cycle, it is possible that there were two versions of Ajax's suicide in both the *Aethiopis* and the *Little Iliad*, but that Proclus eliminated one in the interests of a smoother overall summary.³⁶ This repetition again betrays the flexibility of the narratives of the epic cycle before they achieved their status as prequels and sequels. In addition, Kopff argues (1983:59, 61) that the *Aethiopis* may also have included Priam's supplication of Achilles, which we have in *Iliad* 24, and that *Iliad* 24 may have conversely included the death of Penthesilea (an *Amazonia*) featured in the *Aethiopis*. This theory, if valid, would be yet another example of the permeability of the early epic oral tradition before complete fixation. Like the *Kypria*, the *Aethiopis* may have covered more narrative ground than the summary we currently have and may have included what we now take to be exclusively Iliadic episodes.

Proclus attributes the *Little Iliad* in four books to Lesches of Mitylene; this narrative intervenes between two poems by Arctinus of Miletus, the *Aethiopis* treated above and the *Iliou Persis* ("Sack of Troy"), which will be discussed below. The *Little Iliad* appears to share many incidents and episodes with both the *Aethiopis* and the *Iliou Persis*; this coincidence has led a number of scholars to conclude that the *Aethiopis*, the *Little Iliad*, and the *Iliou Persis* were originally one undifferentiated poem called the *Little Iliad*. This theory would explain why so much of the *Little Iliad* seems to replicate episodes from the other narratives. The argument against this theory, as Davies puts it (1989a:7, 63), is that Proclus does divide up the epics carefully by the number of books assigned to each, and that he would not do so unless they were distinct works).³⁷ On the contrary, the intervention of Lesches' *Little Iliad* between two poems ascribed to Arctinus in combination with these overlappings has led other scholars to speculate that Lesches composed the *Little Iliad* to fill in the narrative gap left by Arctinus between his poems,³⁸ Similarly, the poets of the epic cycle were said to have filled in gaps left by the magisterial Homer and, like the other epic poets and in contrast to Homer, the author of the *Little Iliad* is

³⁶ See Davies 1989a:60.

³⁷ See also Huxley 1969:147.

³⁸ See Severyns (1928:356-57), who argues, however, for unarticulated borders between the works; Allen 1924:74.

often disparaged when compared to Arctinus and Homer.³⁹ Severyns repeatedly explains passages in the *Little Iliad* that differ from the *Aethiopis* and the *Iliou Persis* as hapless innovations rather than alternative traditions, and he finds Lesches' style "romanesque" (1928:331, 333, 352).⁴⁰

The first incident in Proclus' *Little Iliad* relates the judgment over the arms of Achilles in detail. Odysseus is judged victorious either by his fellow Greeks, by a jury of captured Trojan men, or by the eavesdropped conversation of young Trojan women.⁴¹ As is well known from Sophocles' *Ajax*, that great hero goes mad and kills the Greek herd and himself. Then follows the completion of a series of contingencies that will assure the fall of Troy.⁴² First, Odysseus seizes the Trojan seer Helenus, who prophesies that the Greeks can take Troy only with the aid of the archer Philoctetes, who was left behind by the Greeks on the island of Lemnos.⁴³ Philoctetes then kills Paris, an important step in overcoming the Trojan resistance. Second, Odysseus fetches Achilles' son Neoptolemus from Scyros. Epeius builds the Trojan horse, perhaps under Odysseus' guidance, and Odysseus himself makes at least one undercover entry into Troy before he enters the city as the leader of the men inside the Trojan horse. Odysseus, disguised as a beggar, meets with Helen (a scene narrated by her in *Odyssey* 4), and, either on this same mission or on a separate one, Diomedes and Odysseus steal the Palladium out of the city, the most important condition for the fall of Troy.⁴⁴ The *Iliou Persis* informs us that

³⁹ See Nagy 1990:76 for an alternative interpretation that valorizes Lesches.

⁴⁰ See Holmberg 1998:26.

⁴¹ Loeb fr. 3 = Allen fr. 2 scholion to Aristophanes' *Knights* for Trojan women; *Odyssey* 11.547 for male Trojans, which Severyns believes refers to an older and aesthetically preferable tradition found in the *Aethiopis* (1928:331). In contrast, Davies 1989a:60 feels that the tradition found in Pindar *Nem.* 8.26 ff. of the Greek men judging the decision might be the oldest because it is the simplest, but that the Trojan prisoners as judges might have been the version in the *Aethiopis*.

⁴² Severyns (1928:333) feels that this tripartite overdetermination represents Lesches' excessive reliance on ancient legends, when instead he should have chosen one episode as a focus for the purpose of narrative aesthetics: "La *Petite Iliade* montre le genre épique en pleine décadence, épuisé d'avoir déjà fourni une trop longue carrière."

⁴³ See Proclus' *Kypria*.

⁴⁴ Loeb fr. 1 = Allen 106-7 divides Odysseus' entry into Troy into two distinct visits; Apollodorus V. 13 describes it as one visit. Severyns (1928:351) argues that the *Little Iliad* innovates by dividing Odysseus' entry into Troy into two episodes, one derived from Helen's Odyssean rendering, the other from the story of the Palladium from the *Iliou*

in fact the Palladium stolen by Odysseus was a copy, and that Aeneas, a remaining member of the Trojan royal family, had hidden it and subsequently escaped with it.⁴⁵ Proclus' *Chrestomathy* ends at the point at which the Trojans take the fatal horse into their city, yet fragmentary evidence suggests that the epic may have in some versions continued and overlapped with the *Iliou Persis*. Loeb fr. 14 (=Allen 19A) narrates the fall of Troy by marking the degradation and destruction of Hector's family: Neoptolemus seizes Andromache and kills Astyanax.

Proclus attributes the *Iliou Persis* in two books to Arctinus of Miletus, the alleged author of the *Aethiopis*. Proclus' summary begins with a debate among the Trojans about taking the Trojan horse into the city, an event already related in the *Little Iliad*. Again, like the *Little Iliad*, the *Iliou Persis* addresses the fate of Aeneas: the eventual founder of Rome withdraws with his family to Mt. Ida outside Troy following the portentous death of Laocoon and his sons. The Greeks instigate their final attack from the horse, and Proclus' version becomes simply a litany of who kills whom. We read that Neoptolemus kills Priam on an altar, contrary to the artistic representation of the *Little Iliad* by Polygnotus described by Pausanias in which Priam dies at the threshold of his house;⁴⁶ Menelaus takes Helen; the Greeks sacrifice Polyxena at the tomb of Achilles; Odysseus rather than Neoptolemus kills Astyanax; and Neoptolemus takes Andromache. Ajax Ilian's attempt to tear Cassandra by force away from Athena's image in her temple seems to be the cause for Athena's hostility to the Greeks upon the occasion of their victory, and indeed Proclus' epitome of the *Iliou Persis* ends with Athena's plans to destroy the Greeks.

The *Nostoi* ("Returns") of Agias of Troezen in five books picks up the story from the destruction of Troy and describes the returns of the Greek heroes with the exception of Odysseus, who merits his own monumental epic. The plurality of stories within this narrative creates, even in Proclus' summary, an impression of an extremely episodic and disunified plot. Many of the episodes closely parallel descriptions of events in the *Odyssey*, although this does not definitively prove that one was dependent on the other. The anger of Athena, established in the *Iliou*

Persis.

⁴⁵ *Iliou Persis* Loeb fr. 2 = Davies 1988:65-66 *fragmentum dubium*. Davies (1989a:79) is highly skeptical of this latter story from Dionysius Halicarnassus and suspects it of lateness because of its convenient connection with the Roman and Vergilian myth of Aeneas.

⁴⁶ *Iliou Persis* Loeb fr. 1 = Allen 107-8 and *Little Iliad* Loeb fr. 12 = Allen fr. 16.

Persis, begins to take its toll when the goddess causes a quarrel between Agamemnon and Menelaus; the former decides to remain in Troy in order to appease Athena, while the latter sets out on his journey home. Agamemnon eventually returns home, only to be killed by Aegisthus and Clytemnestra. The death of Agamemnon provides yet another example of the fluidity of the oral epic tradition. The first mention of Agamemnon's murder in the *Odyssey* names only Aegisthus as the killer. The later references in the first Nekuia in Book 11 and in the second Nekuia in Book 24 add Clytemnestra, and the queen's involvement becomes an important dramatic focus in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*. Severyns insists that Clytemnestra's stronger role in *Odyssey* 11 and 24 is the result of the influence of the *Nostoi* upon the rhapsodes who recited the *Odyssey* (1928:402-5).⁴⁷ This may be the case; on the other hand, we may be seeing yet again the result of the breadth and possibility available within a flexible, intertextual, and constantly evolving narrative.

Chronologically, the *Odyssey* follows the *Returns*, and is in turn followed and concluded by the *Telegony* of Eugammon of Cyrene in two books. The *Telegony*, the final book of the epic cycle preserved by Proclus, is a very strange and even less well known part of the epic cycle; it suffers the humiliation of being described by Severyns as a "misérable poème," a harsh judgment but one that to a certain extent encapsulates the attitude toward sequels in general.⁴⁸ A study of the *Telegony's* farfetched plot would certainly have contributed strongly to Aristotle and Aristarchus' opinions that the epic cycle was far inferior to Homer's finely crafted epics.

The *Telegony* begins with the burial of the suitors after their slaughter by Odysseus, repeating the same event from *Odyssey* 24.417 ff. Not surprisingly, Odysseus immediately sails off from Ithaca again on an errand, but returns to complete the sacrifices to Poseidon ordered by Teiresias in *Odyssey* 11.⁴⁹ He then travels to Thesphrotis where he marries

⁴⁷ Conversely, Severyns (1928:399) argues that the mention in Pausanias of a Nekuia which was part of the *Nostoi* (Loeb fr. 6 = Allen fr. 3) is a remembrance and nod to the Homeric Nekuia. See Davies 1989a:84 on the likelihood of a Nekuia in the *Nostoi*.

⁴⁸ See Severyns 1928:409: "Eugammon de Cyrène a fait tomber l'épopée plus bas encore que Leschès, dont il exagère les défauts jusqu'à l'invraisemblance. Une oeuvre comme la Télégonie marque la fin du genre épique, annonce un genre nouveau, celui du roman en prose." The somewhat more moderate Lesky calls this the "most surprising part" of the epic cycle, combining old tradition with new invention (1957:83).

⁴⁹ Davies 1989a:91 suggests that the text be emended here to say that Odysseus sails not back to Ithaca, but to Epirus to perform these sacrifices and then on to Thesphrotis. This would bring Proclus' summary into accord with Apollodorus' epitome

the queen Callidice, but eventually he returns yet again to Ithaca. On Ithaca, Odysseus is killed by Telegonus, his own son by Circe.⁵⁰ At *Odyssey* 11.134, Teiresias had prophesied that Odysseus would die *ex alos*, which can mean either because of or on the sea, or away from the sea, that is, on land. A scholion to that line often thought to represent events in the *Telegony* attempts to iron out this problem by recalling that Telegonus killed his father with a dart from a fish, therefore Odysseus died because of or from the sea.⁵¹ Following the mistaken patricide, Telegonus accompanied by Penelope and Telemachus takes his father's body back to Circe, where Circe makes them all immortal and they intermarry (Circe to Telemachus; Penelope to Telegonus).⁵² The events depicted in the *Telegony*, however, like events of several of these other minor epics, are also assigned to other narratives: the scholar Eustathius attributes these intermarriages, and presumably the rest of the story too, to a version of the *Nostoi* rather than the *Telegony*.⁵³ More than the other parts of the epic cycle, this continuation of the story of Odysseus seems to represent a desire on the part of the audience (the not yet paying public) to hear more about its favorite characters and for the story not to end.⁵⁴ The narrative of the *Odyssey*, too, is particularly accommodating to continuation by incorporating multiple opportunities for extension, including the prophecy of Teiresias in *Odyssey* 11 and the mystery and ambiguity of Odysseus' future and death. The *Telegony's* fantastic aspects perhaps indicate an effort on the part of the composer(s) to outdo the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*; incapable of rivaling the poetic composition of those two epics, the composer of the *Telegony* chose to emphasize more and more outrageous plot inventions.

Some, if not all, of the perceived inadequacies and inconsistencies of the epic cycle can be attributed to the mode of composition in an oral tradition. Both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* and the rest of the epic cycle were

7.34 and avoid repeated sailings back and forth from Ithaca.

⁵⁰ There is also a tradition in Eustathius that Telegonus is the son of Calypso and Odysseus (Loeb fr. 2 = Allen fr. 1).

⁵¹ See Severyns 1928:413. Davies (1989a:93) cites Apollodorus who says that Telegonus wielded a spear "barbed with the spine of a sting-ray."

⁵² For Davies, "this is a second-rate Greek epic's equivalent of 'they all lived happily ever after'" (1989a:94).

⁵³ *Nostoi* Loeb fr. 4 = Allen fr. 9.

⁵⁴ See Severyns 1928:411 for comments on this aspect of the *Nostoi*.

part of the oral tradition in which narratives were composed or recomposed by an individual bard according to the contingencies of the occasion and of his audience. The *Odyssey* provides us with several examples of this type of narrative composition. We see the bard Demodocus in *Odyssey* 8 respond to requests from his audience. He first sings about a quarrel between Achilles and Odysseus, an episode that may have connections to some episode in the epic cycle; then, upon a request from his host for a happier song, he sings the adulterous liaison between Aphrodite and Ares, who are captured by the huge net of Aphrodite's husband Hephaistos; lastly, at the request of Odysseus, he sings about the Trojan horse and Odysseus' cleverness. Demodocus' short renderings in no way rival the complexity or length of the composition of the Homeric poet in whose work they are embedded. The episodic nature of Demodocus' narratives, which present a small part of the whole mythic construct, highlights the uniqueness of the size of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.⁵⁵ One might even see here the Homeric poet's triumph over the epic cycle embedded in his narrative—rather than a representative of Homer himself, as so many have suggested. The Homeric poet's closest competitor is the hero Odysseus, whose four books of wanderings perhaps approximate the excessive inventiveness of the epic cycle. But Odysseus' later stories may be more informative about the method of a bardic composer, even though he is not actually a bard. When Odysseus arrives on Ithaca, he tells three similar tales to three different audiences: the disguised Athena, the swineherd Eumaios, and Penelope. The tales seem to be broadly analogous to Odysseus' actual travels, but he cunningly adjusts each tale ever so slightly in order for it to be persuasive for the particular audience. In Demodocus, we see an oral tradition that allows a poet to pick up a thread at any point within the broad field of narrative available to him; these episodes are not named nor do they have an author. From Odysseus' later tales we see both conservation and innovation of narrative.

In the oral tradition, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*—as defined texts with beginnings, endings, and an author—did not exist, even if the stories or versions of the stories that they tell were in circulation. It is the fixation of the texts of the Homeric epics that begins the process of definition, and that has significant consequences for the epic cycle and the development of Western literature. From literary references and artistic sources, it is clear that the narratives of the Trojan war, without special emphasis on the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, were recognized from the eighth century onward in

⁵⁵ See Foley 1991:7, 10; Nagy 1996a:79-80 for the "metonymy" of oral tradition.

Greece.⁵⁶ By the end of the sixth century, however, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* seem to have achieved special status, whether fixed by writing or transmission through memorization or by repetitive recomposition by rhapsodes.⁵⁷ Whenever it is that one determines the fixation of the epics to have occurred, the survival of both the two large epics and the epic cycle in the fixed forms that we have them is directly dependent upon preservation in writing at some point, a phenomenon that in itself reflects literary historical judgments about the value and excellence of the narratives. It is tempting to attribute the popularity and survival of the Homeric epics to the aesthetic quality of these narratives in comparison to the rest of the cycle, as is often done, but latter-day aesthetic criteria exclude other possibilities that are not available for modern scholars to explore, such as political and historical exigencies in the archaic Greek world.⁵⁸ It seems that once the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* became charismatic texts, the other loosely connected narratives of the epic cycle were arranged and organized in relation to those narratives as sequels and prequels, with fixed limits and authors.⁵⁹ The

⁵⁶ Scaife (1995:164-65) argues from artistic evidence that the epic cycle was received even more favorably in the period from the eighth century to the sixth century; Burkert too notes from a literary perspective that “it was not necessarily our *Iliad* that was at the center of interest” (1987:45-46). He later concurs with Scaife on the artistic evidence that “it was not the unique text of the *Iliad* as the one great classic that made its impression on seventh-century art, but a more variegated complex of Trojan themes” (46).

⁵⁷ Nagy (1990:70) reasserts his argument that the Homeric epics achieved their prominence through an impetus towards “pan-Hellenism”; Nagy (1995:165) attributes to Alexandrian scholars the written preservation of the Homeric epics, although he posits an earlier fixation of a text without absolute reliance on writing around the time of the alleged Peisistratean Recension. (Nagy 1996a:100-10 reiterates many of these same arguments.) Burkert 1987:48-49 assigns the establishment of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* as a “frozen classic” to the end of the sixth century.

⁵⁸ It is virtually impossible to ascertain why the narratives of Achilles and Odysseus, out of the whole corpus, became focal narratives. Along with others, Latacz is still wedded to the idea that the success of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* is due to their “originality of perspective” (1996:75). See Nagy 1996a:22 for the dubiousness of the aesthetic theory of why the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* came to dominate the scene of early epic.

⁵⁹ Scholars have recently recognized that the shared tradition between the epic cycle and the Homeric epics complicates any attempts to establish a chronology for these narratives. While some may suggest that the narratives of the cyclic epics might precede the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* (Davies 1986:96; Burgess 1996:78-79), most agree that the cyclic epics in written form postdate, and were in some aspects influenced by, the written Homeric epics (Davies 1989a:5; Latacz 1996:61,75-78; Nagy 1990:73). Davies would therefore date the final version of the cyclic epics shortly before 500 BC, an assignment that

episodes and narratives of the epic cycle, loosely affiliated as they had been, now became secondary to the Homeric works. Yet for both the epic cycle and the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, the construction of distinction and exclusion was and is as much a fiction as the purported authors assigned to each.⁶⁰

An equally important aspect of the secondariness assigned to the epic cycle is the aesthetic judgment imposed upon it in contrast with the Homeric epics. The production of the two great epics engendered a lack of appreciation for the multiplicity of narrative and enforced a linear way of looking at the creation of narrative, opening the way for the possibility of both prequels and sequels.⁶¹ As I have suggested, a fruitful approach to the supposed inadequacies of the epic cycle might be to understand them as remnants of the living oral tradition, and to accept the inherent multiplicity, rather than to insist upon determining the one true version. In this sense the unity, perfection, and exclusion of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* created, along with the prequel and sequel, a lack of appreciation for the multiplicity of the oral tradition. Jasper Griffin (1977) argues that Homer excludes so much from the epic cycle because it is fantastic, bizarre, and inappropriate for the modest and discreet Homeric poet.⁶² I speculate that the Homeric poet does not omit events from the epic cycle out of a dislike for bizarreness or some false modesty (one need only look at the episodes in Odysseus' wanderings for bizarreness, or the song by Demodocus about Ares and Aphrodite for sexual frankness), but rather specifically in order to establish his own narratives as unique and individual, as not part of an amorphous tradition, and as supremely exclusive.⁶³

seems reasonable given the increased fixation of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* by the second half of the sixth century.

⁶⁰ Miller discusses the fictionality imposed by the beginnings and endings of novels: "The aporia of ending arises from the fact that it is impossible ever to tell whether a given narrative is complete. If the ending is thought of as tying up in a careful knot, this knot could always be untied again by the narrator or by further events, disentangled or explicated again . . . no novel can be unequivocally finished, or for that matter unequivocally unfinished" (1978-79:5, 7). See also Holmberg 1998:28.

⁶¹ See Nagy 1996b:9 for the multiplicity of oral epic, and Scaife 1995:170-74 for the emergence of an Aristotelian aesthetics that preferred the unity of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* to examples of the epic cycle such as the *Kypria*.

⁶² "In the Cycle both heroism and realism are rejected in favour of an over-heated taste for sadistically coloured scenes; more striking, even more perverse effects are once again what is desired" (Griffin 1977:45; see also 40, 43).

⁶³ See Holmberg 1998:29.

The oral tradition of the epic cycle as I have presented it constitutes what may essentially be read as one large, universalizing text, as described by Todorov in the prologue to this piece. Jonathan Culler also proposes for all texts a unity that the oral tradition of the epic cycle exhibits: “literary works are to be considered not as autonomous entities, ‘organic wholes,’ but as intertextual constructs: sequences which have meaning in relation to other texts which they take up, cite, parody, refute, or generally transform. A text can be read only in relation to other texts, and it is made possible by the codes which animate the discursive space of a culture” (1981:38).⁶⁴ Unlike literature following the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, the stories of the epic cycle did not exist as “autonomous entities” but as intertextual constructs. The establishment of the primary texts of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* began the process of asserting narrative closure (and opening) against a tradition that seems to have been based upon unselfconscious and overt intertextuality. The creation of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* inaugurated the autonomous text, to which other texts then must relate as either prequels or sequels.⁶⁵

The creation of the fixed texts of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* marks, from our perspective, both the height of the oral tradition and the end of that very tradition. The rest of the oral tradition, which I am identifying as the broad spectrum of the epic cycle, declined into obscurity and obsolescence. The unified, interdependent web of narrative associated with the oral tradition would seem to disappear from sight, taking with it forever the dream of such a text. But survival for both the epic cycle and its web of narrative, if in a different form, might be intimated in Burkert’s article “The Making of Homer in the Sixth Century B.C.” (1987). In this piece, he suggests that alongside the epic tradition represented by the Homeric poems there arose a separate, choral tradition in lyric form of which the recently discovered fragments of Stesichorus are examples. The fragments

⁶⁴ “Intertextuality thus becomes less a name for a work’s relations to particular prior texts than a designation of its participation in the discursive space of a culture: the relationship between a text and the various languages or signifying practices of a culture and its relation to those texts which articulate for it the possibilities of culture. The study of intertextuality is thus not the investigation of sources and influences as traditionally conceived; it casts its net wider to include anonymous discursive practices, codes whose origins are lost, that make possible the signifying practices of later texts” (Culler 1981: 103).

⁶⁵ My argument does not intend to deny conscious use of intertextuality by authors, or unconscious intertextuality in all types of texts. The creation of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* changed the face of narrative in that texts either did not reveal or were not aware of intertextuality, or else recognition of intertextuality became a conscious literary device rather than a mode of composition.

of Stesichorus indicate that many if not all of the subjects of these narratives derive from both Homer and the epic cycle. Burkert posits that the Stesichorean tradition, choral in presentation, had to depend upon a fixed text for its survival, and furthermore, that this more stable tradition threatened to supplant the Homeric epics themselves. The protectors of the Homeric epics reacted to the stability of the Stesichorean tradition and the assault on their own hegemony by fixing their own narratives either through writing or simply through less innovation (51-56). The fixation of the Homeric texts was so efficient that the Homeric epics came to dominate the choral narratives of Stesichorus.

What if we take this process back a step? Burgess (1996) and Kopff (1983) have suggested that at least two of the named narratives in the epic cycle, the *Kypria* and the *Aethiopis*, may have originally been more extensive narratives that included Iliadic material, if not the whole narrative of the *Iliad*. We have evidence that Stesichorus wrote long choral pieces with titles such as *Iliou Persis*, the *Nostoi*, *Helen*, *Wooden Horse*, and the *Oresteia*; this is the material we are familiar with from the cycle. One could imagine the beginning of the fixation of the Homeric texts forcing the hitherto variegated and multiform epic cycle to mutate into another type of tradition, the Stesichorean choral tradition, thereby preserving its own narratives. The written Stesichorean tradition, as Burkert suggests, then influences the further stabilization of the Homeric tradition. But the fixation of the Homeric tradition is also its demise: the extreme fixation adopted by the practitioners “froze” the epics into an approximation of the narratives we have inherited. But this is not the end of the process, as Burkert himself intimates (1987:53ff.). The now more flexible Stesichorean tradition, faced with the ever-increasing hegemony of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, mutates further into other forms of lyric and eventually tragedy. Even though we see a change in genre, the narratives of the oral tradition and the epic cycle remain intact, leaving behind another kind of universalizing, unified text—paradise regained.

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