



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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Dedication

In grateful recognition of all he has done – on the page, in the classroom, and in performance – to inspire students and colleagues toward a deeper understanding of the world's oral traditions, volume 18 of *Oral Tradition* is dedicated to

Robert Payson Creed

(wel-hwelc gecwæþ...)

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Editor's Column

Oral Tradition for 2003 presents something quite different from its usual contents. Over this and the next issue we will explore the “state of our art” across the multiple academic disciplines and hundreds of individual traditions, ancient through contemporary, that collectively constitute our field. That is, this and the next issue of *OT* will be devoted exclusively to sampling the heterogeneity of studies in oral tradition, to gaining some insight on the variety and limits of investigation and understanding as of the year 2003.

We start not just by admitting but by stipulating that “oral tradition” is in numerous practical ways anything but a unified field. Most obviously, it refers to all verbal art that comes into being and is transmitted without texts, and recent years have shown that it must also encompass myriad forms and genres that interact in many fascinating ways with texts, and now with electronic media. If “literature” names a hopelessly complex ecosystem of manifestly different species, then “oral tradition”—which dwarfs literature in amount and variety—presents an even greater ecological challenge.

Of course “oral tradition” should never have been so simplistically construed, but such has been the tyranny of print, text, and related media that verbal art outside their culturally sanctioned auspices did in fact suffer from this kind of marginalization. From one perspective this historical trajectory was entirely predictable. Cultures define themselves by defining competitive modes and ideas out of existence: just as regularly as mother-tongue learners of any given language eliminate certain sounds from their vocal repertoires even as they acquire the acoustic network to support their own particular language, so we textualists have narrowed our focus to textual works—complete with authors, situated inside a literary tradition, and available for individual and silent perusal via books stored in libraries. Ironically, the voices that made these texts possible, the non-textual verbal art that was both the precedent and the crucible for the book-bound strategies we so admire, was often labeled “primitive,” “unsophisticated,” or “simple”—or, more characteristically, simply ignored.

In the modern era, and never more than in today's world, we are coming to understand that “oral tradition” plays an enormous and necessary part in any concept of verbal art. Moreover, the stakes are high. If we fail to take sufficient account of these riches, we disenfranchise whole cultures, misconstrue the cognitive categories and social activities of others, and redefine the ancient and medieval worlds in our own necessarily graven

image. Hopefully, over the past seventeen years the pages of *Oral Tradition* have contributed to this ongoing reassessment and rebalancing, participating in helping to make us aware of some of the wonderful richness and complexity of “oral tradition” while offering both tradition-specific insights and comparative analogies that can be useful to a responsible citizen of the twenty-first century. That at least has been our goal.

Amid the hurly-burly of these nearly two decades’ worth of exchange, *OT* now seeks to “take the pulse” of the field, a composite field construed as broadly as possible. We do this without in any way suggesting that the measurement is or can be precise or exhaustive; indeed, such is the heterogeneity of our subject that any claim of this sort would be illusory at best. Instead, we aim at a random sampling of what the concept of “oral tradition” means to individual scholars and practitioners, and at what they see as the next challenge(s) in their particular corner of an ever-expanding world of investigation. Here, then, in the interest of divulging the rubric as well as the responses, is the main body of the letter inviting the very brief observations that constitute *OT* for 2003.

Since 1986 our journal *Oral Tradition* has tried to serve as a forum for the interdisciplinary exchange of ideas. Toward that end we are now planning a special issue devoted to two questions: (1) What is oral tradition (with specific reference to your special field)? and (2) What are the most interesting new directions in oral tradition studies (again in your field)?

We have set aside an entire annual volume for approximately 75-100 short responses from a wide variety of scholars in different areas and from institutions throughout the world, and we are committed to fostering continuation of the discussion on our web site, www.oraltradition.org, should there be interest in doing so. I invite you to have a look at that web site, which now houses E-companions to my *How to Read an Oral Poem* (with video, audio, textual, and bibliographic support), to Mark Bender’s *Plum and Bamboo: China’s Suzhou Chantefable Tradition*, and to Halil Bajgorić’s *The Wedding of Mustajbey’s Son Bećirbey* (with transcription, translation, and sound-file), as well as searchable indexes of *Oral Tradition* and the bibliography of oral-formulaic theory and research.

The core idea of this special issue is thus to present a collection of very brief comments on basic questions in our shared field. Collectively they should provide readers with a sense of the “state of the art” and perhaps with some useful analogies to use in their own work.

Approximately 95% of those invited agreed to take part, and they submitted their capsule answers to these questions over a period of about six months. Their contributions are published here (and in *OT* 18, ii) virtually in

the form they were received. Among our emphases in the present issue are performance, the Bible, African, Tibetan and Chinese, ancient Greek, Japanese, and Lithuanian, along with entries on Arabic, Basque, South Slavic, and Madagascar. The next issue will feature sections on the medieval world, the ballad, and Hispanic, along with responses on Finnish, the Phillipines, and Celtic. The more than eighty contributions over the two halves of the 2003 volume touch on many other fields as well.

We hope that the result is thought-provoking for our readership. The very nature of the exercise precludes expounding anything at length or saying anything “final,” of course, but that isn’t the point. This collection of perspectives draws whatever strength it may have from its diversity and suggestiveness, that is, from the extent to which its contents awaken ideas within readers’ own disciplines and conceptualizations of “oral tradition.” Think of these often telegraphic responses as an invitation to dialogue, comparison and contrast, and new directions that might translate fluently to your own field.

Finally, as the dedication page at the beginning of this issue indicates, the collection as a whole is offered as a *Festschrift* for Robert Payson Creed, who introduced me to Old English poetry and oral tradition. I remember vividly how he made both subjects vital and very much alive via his daily seminar performances of scenes from *Beowulf* in the original Anglo-Saxon. As one of Albert Lord’s early students, and as an accomplished scholar and thinker who has contributed essentially to our grasp of (as he himself put it) the “making of an Anglo-Saxon poem,” Bob has made a singular difference in many of his students’ lives. I present him this tribute on behalf of all of us. *Wes þu, Robert, hal!*

John Miles Foley, Editor

Center for Studies in Oral Tradition
21 Parker Hall
University of Missouri
Columbia, MO 65211 USA
Telephone: 573-882-9720
Fax: 573-446-2585
e-mail: oraltradition@missouri.edu

People's Poetry

Steve Zeitlin on “The People’s Poetry”

Felice Belle on “The Poem Performed”

The People's Poetry

Steve Zeitlin

In an unbroken continuum the oral tradition reaches down to our day This orality is the true, the pure lyric. It is not for the eye; it must be seen with the ear, heard in the heart, felt in the spirit.

Maurice Kenny, Mohawk poet

Here are the rougths and beards and space and ruggedness and nonchalance that the soul loves.

Walt Whitman

As the Director of City Lore, friends often ask me how much of my time is spent writing grants, and whether I resent having to spend so much time fundraising. I can never quite convey to them that raising the funds and implementing the projects are part of the same process. Grants are an opportunity to dream, to envision the possible, and sometimes, sometimes, summon the resources to construct those dreams in reality's hard ground.

The *People's Poetry Gathering* was one of those dreams. City Lore and Poets House began applying for funds in 1996 and 1997; we put together a team that included myself, Lee Briccetti, and Bob Holman as co-curators, along with an advisory team that included members from the folk, inner city, and literary worlds we were trying to bring together—Hal Cannon, creator of the Cowboy Poetry Gathering; Jerry Rothenberg, founder of ethnopoetics; and Ed Hirsch, now head of the Guggenheim Foundation (who holds a Ph.D. in folklore). We staged three biennial *Gatherings* in 1999, 2001, and 2003, on each occasion transforming Lower Manhattan into a poetry village for three days, with over a hundred events, ranging from then Poet Laureate Robert Pinsky's reading at St. Marks Church to Puerto Rican and Colombian *decimistas* improvising at the Nuyorican Poets Cafe. Key funders included the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund, The

Rockefeller Foundation, the New York State Council on the Arts, and the Folk Arts Program at the National Endowment for the Arts. We sought to bring together folk, ethnic, inner city, and literary poets, often for the first time. Poet Laureate Stanley Kunitz, Robert Bly, Marie Howe, and Galway Kinnell were among the renowned literary poets who not only read their work, but attended programs with and held both formal and informal discussions with logger and fishermen poets, African *jali* (“griot”) poets, Filipino *balagtasan* poets, and other masters of oral tradition. The *Gathering* combined readings with musical performances, including poetry rock concerts with singer-songwriters Patti Smith and Ani DiFranco, panel discussions, and offbeat happenings such as an evening of drinking songs and readings of Edgar Allen Poe in New York’s Marble Cemetery at midnight.

The goals we spelled out were largely realized: (a) *To preserve and rekindle a heritage of oral poetry that is endangered by numerous forces at work in contemporary life;* (b) *Raise public awareness of the rich, varied traditions of poetry recitation and traditional forms of poetry as a central form of artistry in communities across the country;* (c) *Build audiences for different genres of oral poetry, and, in so doing, for all poetry;* (d) *Validate local oral poets and reciters in their own communities, and work to strengthen the local poetry traditions;* and (e) *Bridge the gap, perceived or real, which often exists between academically-based poetry and popular recitation.*

Thinking back over the past three *Gatherings*, I recall picking up José João dos Santos, known as “Mestre Azulão” at the Newark Airport. Born in Sapé Paraiba in the Northeast of Brazil in 1932, he moved to Rio de Janeiro in ‘49 and is a master *repentista*, improviser—and I listened to him improvise verses in Portuguese about the New York City skyline, as seen from New Jersey. I remember his letter telling me that through the *Poetry Gathering* and the VHS tape we sent him afterwards, he was able to get himself reinstated to his paid post as the official poet of his town in the interior of the state of Rio de Janeiro. And I remember receiving his *cordel* pamphlet, a poem about the destruction of the World Trade Towers, with the traditional Brazilian woodcut on the cover depicting the destruction of the Towers.

I remember fondly bringing the poets from Eritrea, including Reesom Haile, who we were told was the “Poet Laureate of Eritrea.” We billed him as such, and he ended up becoming the official Poet Laureate of Eritrea when the consulate members, preparing to attend his reading at Arts International, received his bio from us and, perhaps bewildered, offered an official proclamation at the reading! In one remarkable interchange at the

Gathering's opening reception, a 16-year-old rapper named Yak showed poet Robert Bly a line from a Bly poem that he had carried around in his wallet since it had been assigned to him by an English teacher years earlier. Bly spoke with the young rapper extensively and attended the rapper's Braggin' Rights program.

As I look back over the three *Gatherings*, most exciting to me are our efforts to convey the beauty and power of oral traditions across languages—it is here that our project has the most potential to have a modest impact on the world's poetries and oral traditions, and where we hope to turn our energies in the years ahead. Many of the oral poetry traditions we featured have been passed down and endured for centuries, but have never been able to cross the language barrier into English—and many are threatened by the disappearance of the language on which they are borne. Looking back, I realize that we often speak of poems in other languages being translated into English, but for many oral traditions a literal, even poetic translation is not enough. Performance style needs to be “translated” as well. Audiences need to hear the poetry in the original language, and the translation must be part of the performance if the work is to be communicated across cultures, soul to soul.

Over the first three *Gatherings*, our efforts to convey poetry across languages included P'an Sori Korean singer, Chan Park, who was part of the 2001 *Gathering*. A professor at Ohio State, Chan Park is remarkable in that she is completely bilingual, and able to tell the audiences the plot of each of her story songs in English, giving an English equivalent of the stylized speaking (*aniri*) followed by her singing (*sori*), while accompanying herself on a barrel-shaped drum called *puk*.

Reesom Haile and other poets we brought from Eritrea in 2001 posed interesting language issues. Reeson Haile attended the *Gathering* with his fine translator, Charles Cantalupo. Haile and the other Eritrean poets wanted Charles to read their poems after they read them in Tigrinyan. Yet the poets spoke English and—precisely because of the mild accents that they were embarrassed about—their poems were far more powerful when they read Charles' translation in English than when Charles himself took to the podium between poems.

In addition to his improvisational skills, Azulão, the Brazilian singer/poet, is a master of the *cordel* tradition. He is among the poets from the Northeast of Brazil who publish their verses in pamphlet form, hanging their poems on clotheslines strung across the stalls. With their poetic wares displayed on strings, the poets chant their rhymes to a semicircle of local farmers and other *folheto*-pamphlet-buyers anxious to hear the exploits of their heroes recited in verse. (We used the image of the *cordel* pamphlets as

a visual theme for the Gathering, stretching “a clothesline of poems from round the world across the streets of Lower Manhattan.”) Azulão performed at the *Gathering* in 1999, joined by the anthropologist Candace Slater from U. C. Berkeley who conducted fieldwork in Brazil, introduced him to us, and wrote the classic work on the *cordel* poets, *Stories on a String: The Brazilian “Literatura de Cordel”* (1990). The visible affection between these two friends, joined by bonds of fieldwork, made her the perfect, seamless translator for his work. Even his improvisations worked in translation—as she expressively summarized each improvised section, sometimes pointing out the rhyme scheme, as he continued to play the same riff on his guitar.

Similar chemistry existed between the traditional Kazakh epic singer and charismatic storyteller Almasbek Almatov and his translator/folklorist Dr. Alma Kunanbaeva, whom we brought to the 2003 *Gathering* with the help of the Asia Society. Her translations and commentary were as passionate as his songs. “His song,” she exclaimed, “goes on for what would be a thousand pages, but it is always a man on a road, and on his journey he acquires great riches and many wives, but he leaves the world as naked as he came into it.”

Since the Gathering's inception, we have worked closely with Kewulay Kamara, a poet from the Koinadugu District of Sierra Leone. His family is part of the *finenu* caste, who are poets, emissaries, mediators, and masters of ceremony at important occasions. Joined by *jali* musicians from West Africa who are living in the New York area, Kewulay Kamara told traditional stories with musical accompaniment at the 1999 *Gathering*. We felt that the performance fell short for English-speaking audiences because of the way the music and storytelling blended, the musical sounds often rendering the spoken words incomprehensible. At the 2001 *Gathering*, when our theme was epics and ballads, we asked Kewulay to work with us on his performance of *Sundiata*. He began with John William Johnson's translation, *The Epic of Son-Jara: A West African Tradition* (1992). I had the chance to go over the story with him carefully, pointing out to him that English-speaking audiences could not comprehend a story in which the heroes had close to a dozen names apiece. Working with myself and others, he was able to hone a good translation into an effective performance.

Highlights of the 2003 *Gathering* included Benjamin Bagby, acclaimed chanter of medieval epics. Dressed in black on a spare stage, he takes on the role of chieftain's bard, re-creating the chilling tale of *Beowulf*. Improvising melodies on a six-string lyre, he has re-created the style of music and chant that may have been used by the original singers of tales. He chants in the original Anglo-Saxon, with translations made possible with

Power Point technology, used to present line-by-line translations on two screens on either side of the stage.

Welcome to our language.

Taste

The sauce. . .

Reesom Haile

In the years ahead, the *People's Poetry Gathering* and the *People's Poetry Project* plan to intensify our work with oral poets from different cultures in the U. S. and around the world, continuing to explore innovative ways and new technologies to convey performance across languages. From its inception, the *Gathering* has always sought to be not simply a poetry festival but a multifaceted program that spans the arts and humanities, and in which the fieldwork, documentation, and intercultural communication are as important as the event itself. In 2001 our humanities programs included an extended session on *Endangered Languages* with anthropologist Dennis Tedlock, as well as sessions on *Poetry across Languages*, featuring poets who translate their own work, poets whose work is translated by others, and other folklorists and presenters who work across languages in innovative ways.

In the years ahead we would like the *Poetry Gathering* to become the tip of the iceberg, the most visible component of the *People's Poetry Project* whose depth and strength is working to document and disseminate some of the world's endangered oral poetry traditions and spanning the chasm of language. The distance between nations can be spanned in a few hours on a plane, and in nanoseconds on the computer, but these very means of communication and globalization threaten the diversity of world languages, and, with them, the quintessence of language—poetry. These traditions are increasingly endangered as their vehicle of communication, the carrier of their art, the language on which their words are borne, has its wires cut, and the meanings of the very words that constitute their poems are forgotten or misunderstood.

I will speak of the native peoples who live in the south of Chile and the south of Argentina. These people are now in the process of fighting bitterly for their language, their land, and their forest. And this is very important because people speak of the disappearance of the species and the disappearance of the forest as if this was one thing; and they speak of the disappearance of the language as something else. But in these indigenous conceptions, these three things, the land itself, the forest, and

the language are one inseparable thing. They even say in Guaraní that language falls from the trees. So if you cut down the trees you are cutting the tongue of the earth, are cutting the rustling of the wind, you are cutting the voice of earth itself.

Cecilia Vicuña,
Endangered Languages panel at the 2001 People's Poetry Gathering

There are nine different words in Maya for the color blue in the comprehensive Porrúa Spanish-Maya Dictionary but just three Spanish translations, leaving six [blue] butterflies that can be seen only by the Maya, proving beyond doubt that when a language dies six butterflies disappear from the consciousness of the earth.

Earl Shorris (2000:43)

The *Ethnologue* (Grimes 1996) lists a little over 6,500 living languages. According to the Foundation for Endangered Languages, 52% are spoken by fewer than 10,000 people, while ten major languages are spoken by close to half of the world's people. Michael Krauss, director of the Alaska Native Language Center suggests that half of all the words on earth, some 3,000 languages, will fall silent in this century. Only official state languages are likely to survive. In the U.S. and Canada, 175 indigenous languages are still spoken, but not more than 20 can survive the century.

“This killing of a language happens exactly as one would expect,” writes Earl Shorris in *Harpers Magazine* (2000:38): “the weak must speak to the strong in the language of the strong . . . the Darwinian way of the world bears some responsibility, globalization does the rest: movies, television, Reeboks, and the Internet.” Linguists, according to Shorris, divide the world of languages into those spoken by children, by people of childbearing age, by those beyond childbearing age, and those spoken or remembered by only a few old people. Many of the world's languages fall into the latter categories.

Increasingly, English is the lingua franca, as Shorris notes, of science, the Internet, the movies, rock and roll, television, and sports. Yet our goal is not to put our fingers in the dike to stem the flood tide of globalization. Technology brings about the dissolution of cultural forms, but also plays a role in its preservation. We can't stop the onward rush of English—instead, we want to make sure that poets from many cultures can make their voices heard to English-speaking audiences (and thus, perhaps lamentably, to worldwide audiences), gaining the validation that being heard in English brings (for better or worse).

The *People's Poetry Project* aims to utilize its web site, www.peoplespoetry.org, to disseminate poems in endangered languages, and to use publications and presentations at the biennial *Poetry Gathering* in New York City to document and disseminate poetry in endangered languages. We define the concept of endangered languages broadly. Our efforts begin with languages with fewer than 10,000 speakers. But, as Kewulay Kamara notes, “most languages that are not official state languages anywhere or languages of commerce are endangered—in this respect most African languages and indigenous languages can be considered endangered. In the age of literacy, languages that are not written are in danger of disappearing”.¹ We are also working with unwritten languages, and non-state-sponsored languages, even if the dangers—as in Gaelic, Yiddish, or Basque—are no longer imminent.

The *People's Poetry Endangered Languages* initiative is especially timely. Although many of the world's nations have taken steps to preserve and present their own indigenous and traditional poetry forms, there are none that look at these traditions crossculturally. Unlike traditional music, which is documented and disseminated by a wide range of organizations ranging from the Smithsonian to the Center for Traditional Music and Dance to Rounder Records, there are no other groups documenting and working to preserve and present this country's and the world's diverse oral poetry traditions. Although a number of groups have been formed to preserve and advocate for endangered languages, we know of none specifically focused on the documenting and preserving the poetry of those languages. In the poetry world, organizations exist to present literary poets (Academy of American Poets, Dodge Poetry Festival), slam traditions (Slam Poetry International, Inc.), poetry outside the academy (Taos Poetry Circus), and diverse poetries and poetry traditions (the Bowery Poetry Club). What is most distinctive about the *Gathering* is our work across languages and on endangered languages. We hope to work closely with the Center for Studies in Oral Tradition at the University of Missouri-Columbia on this endeavor.

In Ancient Mayan literature, a series of works are portentously called the Histories of the Future. Through the *Gathering's* Endangered Languages initiative, we can work to make sure that despite the waves of tragedy that decimated Mayan culture and continue to erode so many languages and oral poetries, these “histories of the future” will be recalled, will have their place

¹ From an e-mail message sent to the author on 6/23/03.

in human history. The *People's Poetry Project* plans to make the conservation, publication, and presentation of oral poetries from the world's endangered languages a priority, and *that* shall be "the history of our future."

*City Lore (New York City),
Executive Director*

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The Poem Performed

Felice Belle

It is my inherent belief that poetry is written to be read aloud, not quarantined to the pages of books left on library shelves. A poem is fully experienced when given voice. I do not privilege the spoken word over the written word. If anything, the written word must hold more weight because without it there would be no words to speak.

I have heard professors and other poets comment that the quality of slam poetry is less than that of published poetry because the emphasis is on performance and not the work itself. However, if a particular poet has a dynamic stage presence or an exceptional style of delivery, that does not automatically discount the quality of his or her work. In fact, it is the unique and enviable ability of this poet to combine art and engaging performance.

The finest slam poems work on the page and on the stage. Just because poets are published does not mean that their work is more intelligent or better crafted than that of the average slam poet. There are bad published poets and bad slam poets. The true test is to compare quality academic poetry to quality slam poetry. When this is done, you will find a successful poem is a successful poem—whether it is performed or on paper.

Academia traditionally supports and promotes a small community of university-trained poets, while forums such as the Open Room at the Nuyorican Poets Café in New York City are open to all. The poets there speak to social issues including, but not limited to, sexism, racism, police brutality, exploitation, and oppression of the working class. These poets have a sense of urgency about their work and use the stage to speak for those who may lack a public voice. It is this relevance to lives of everyday people that makes the slam poet an integral part of the genre.

Slam poets have infiltrated MFA programs. They are teaching in universities. They are shaping the next great poetry movement. Those people whose last experience with poetry occurred begrudgingly in a high school English class are being drawn to the drama and passion that slam poets offer. My students are learning that poetry does not have to be dense and obscure; it can be accessible. It can be about their neighborhood and

their experience. The artificial divide between slam poets and poets in the academy is slowly and surely closing.

New York University

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Japanese

Elizabeth Oyler on “The *Heike* in Japan”

Shelley Fenno Quinn on “Japanese Noh and Heike *katari*”

Sybil A. Thornton on “Japanese Oral Tradition”

Alison Tokita on Performed Narratives and Music

Yamashita Hiroaki on “The Japanese *Tale of the Heike*”

The *Heike* in Japan

Elizabeth Oyler

Significant scholarship on oral tradition in Japan has focused on the composition and performance of the *Tale of the Heike*, the medieval narrative recounting the Gempei War (1180-85 CE), the watershed event marking the fall of the aristocracy and the rise of the warrior class. The *Heike* exists today in about one hundred variants, ranging in style from documentary (often Chinese-language) chronicle to lyrical vernacular tale. One of the most entrenched academic paradigms for considering the work divides the variants between “read” and “recited” lineages; “recited” texts are the basis for performance of the *Heike*. From at least the fourteenth century, the *Heike* was recited by blind men accompanying themselves on the *biwa* lute; a sighted tradition emerged during the seventeenth century. Both of these, as well as related peripheral traditions, continue in reduced form today.

Orality in the development of the *Heike* has been debated since the early twentieth century, motivated by the perceived need to establish a “national epic,” orally performed and therefore orally composed. This was a questionable paradigm from the start, given the high degree of literacy during the period when the *Heike* was first performed. Early studies were oriented toward finding an original text that would suggest oral roots. They were driven by the general assumption that shorter tales, composed by itinerant performers, were strung together into a longer work that was finally committed to paper. However, advanced philological research has led to the conclusion that a written, “read lineage” variant (ca. 1309) is the oldest extant text, emphasizing the early (and possibly originary) importance of written composition. Although the *Heike*’s composition is no longer considered in terms that juxtapose lettered aristocracy against unlettered peripatetic, a sense of polarization between written and oral ways of thinking is still one of the major paradigms requiring further articulation in *Heike* studies today.

Work in musicology has helped frame the issue of orality for *Heike* studies, particularly concerning composition. Hugh DeFeranti’s work on

Kyûshû traditions (1995) emphasizes the role of peripheral performance practice in shaping the *Heike*, while Steven Nelson (2001) stresses the formative importance of religious performance practice. Komoda Haruko (1993) posits a model for composition drawing on both forms. All reveal the centrality of musical form and formula for the creation and transmission of *Heike* narrative. Equally promising are new directions in performance and reception studies reflecting a nuanced understanding of the development of the *Heike* within what we have come to realize is an extremely complex medieval context. Hyôdô Hiromi (2002) demonstrates the importance of the unfinished nature of the performance “text” and the need for thinking about the *Heike* as performance. Alison Tokita (2003), investigating the movement in *Heike* narratives across a range of performance genres, elucidates the effect of oral performance on the creation and transmission of meaning for *Heike* narrative. My own work (1999) also takes this tack, but focuses on interactions with other narrative traditions. Narratological studies by Yamashita Hiroaki (1994) and Michael Watson (1995) shed light on narrative structure’s effect on reception. These scholars’ engagement with the diversity of medieval reality is an important step towards understanding the various roles played by the work in its contemporary and later contexts.

Washington University

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Japanese Noh and Heike *katari*

Shelley Fenno Quinn

Although literature specialists tend to classify Noh and Heike *katari* differently (Noh with a representational dimension that renders it more a hybrid), a student of oral tradition will find in them many common elements. Central to both is narrative recitation and a commitment to the expressive potential of the voice. Both show oral traditional characteristics, but early on, both also assigned a central role to libretti that performers work from. The co-presence of chanting and instrumentation is another defining characteristic. Heike *katari* have been traditionally performed by blind minstrels, who accompany their own solo recitations on the *biwa* (lute). Noh actors have performed to an instrumental ensemble of drums and flute. Both of these arts, which continue to be practiced today (Noh more widespread than Heike *katari*), rely on audience foreknowledge of traditional materials, making them both potential resources for examining how performances may be “re-keyed” over time to adjust to changing reception.

In Japan, the field in which the most work has been done on Noh and on Heike *katari* respectively is known as *kokubungaku*, “national literature.” *Kokubungaku* specialists, whose philological contributions have been invaluable, have tended to concentrate on the transmission of texts as such, and on the accurate exegesis of those texts. Since such textual study has its own rigors, perhaps it is not surprising that few specialists have ventured into comparative work. The idea that the examination of Noh, Heike *katari*, or related narrative arts in terms of their media and processes of performance might inform our understanding of these arts has gained momentum only in the last decade. One reflection of this trend is that at least two major *kokubungaku* journals in the last four years have devoted entire issues to the significance of music and the human voice across a range of religious and entertainment-oriented arenas for performance in traditional Japan.¹

¹ *Chûsei bungaku (Medieval Literature)* published an issue titled “Oto to koe no chûsei bungaku” (“Sound and Voice in Medieval Literature” [vol. 46, June 2001]). Also,

There has also emerged a more interdisciplinary group of scholars from *kokubungaku*, ethnomusicology, and folklore studies (*minzokugaku*) with interests in a comparative approach that takes the field of oral tradition studies into account. One major contribution to this approach is a two-volume collection of essays on “orally transmitted literature” (*kôshô bungaku*), published in 1997.² The opening essay of volume 1, by Hyôdô Hiromi, provides an overview of oral tradition studies, briefly introducing the findings of Milman Parry and Albert Lord, and touching even more lightly on contemporary work, such that of John Miles Foley. Each of the remaining essays in volume 1 introduces a traditional art of performance and its patterns of transmission, with an emphasis on its local contexts. To borrow Hyôdô’s term, all the better to understand “*ooraru na pafuoomansu*” (“oral performance”)!³

Ohio State University

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² “Kôshô bungaku” (“Orally Transmitted Literature”) 1 and 2; see also *Iwanami kôza Nihon bungakushi* (“Iwanami’s Collected Writings on the History of Japanese Literature”), vols. 16 and 17 (Tokyo: Iwanami, 1997).

³ “Oral performance.” See *Iwanami kôza Nihon bungakushi*, vol. 16, p. 32.

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Japanese Oral Tradition

Sybil A. Thornton

In Japan, the term “oral traditions” covers not only those songs, proverbs, and folktales usually considered the domain of anthropology and folklore studies, but also orally delivered or performed narratives, or *katarimono*, among them epics (*gunki monogatari*). Epics, especially the *Heike monogatari* (*Tale of the Taira House*; fourteenth c.), are still performed: epics are still read out loud or chanted to an audience using a manuscript or printed text as a libretto (as *kôdan*); there are at least three different existing traditions of the blind and sighted chanting *Heike* to the accompaniment of a lute (*heikyoku*). With these three existing traditions and over one hundred textual variants of the *Heike* alone, scholarly discussion is informed by a series of dyads—capital/provincial, guild/non-guild, elite/non-elite, reading/performance, learned/popular, text/variant, text/music, literature/religion, and blind/sighted. Studies in the “oral” focus either on historical research into medieval guild and non-guild performers, or on fieldwork with contemporary performers in different *heikyoku* traditions.

Under these conditions, there is very little left of a pure “oral tradition” to speak of, where narratives are composed, transmitted, and preserved only in performance. However, oral tradition does survive in manuscripts (or block-printed texts) in terms of “traditional narrative,” where narrative strategies are based on oral composition and formulaic diction. Although the orality of Japanese epics is now a given, it is difficult to calculate just how much of an effect the Parry-Lord oral-formulaic theory has had on Japanese scholarship, which has tended to concentrate on establishing manuscript genealogies or mining the texts for evidence of the religious practices and practitioners that might indicate who contributed to the texts or who used them. On the other hand, the effect of the oral-formulaic theory on western English-language scholarship is clear enough. In *heikyoku* studies, musicologists have noted the similarities of types of variation in text performance and variation in manuscript texts, the similarity of the variation of musical patterns and variations in diction, and the social contexts of the development of highly individualized traditions of

performance. In studies of the *Heike* and other epics, historians and literature specialists have identified themes and type-scenes in texts, noted the importance of such type-scenes and themes over diction (or even chirographic codes) in categorizing texts as oral-derived or not, and challenged the idea of the strict oral-written dichotomy. What is particularly interesting is the way that textual, historical, and musical studies have been brought together, because of the focus on the *Heike monogatari*, which should lead to a clearer understanding of the development of this narrative cycle and of other epic cycles as well. What I would like to see is closer work with scholars working in European languages.

Arizona State University

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Performed Narratives and Music in Japan

Alison Tokita

My field is performed narratives in Japan, especially genres with a strong musical component. In Japan, where literacy has been defined by the use of Chinese characters, writing in the vernacular using the phonetic kana scripts is closer to orality, and captures the sounds of the Japanese spoken language. With modernization much oral culture was lost, but collection of folklore from the early twentieth century was stimulated by the introduction of the Western discipline. Since the 1980s the oral-formulaic theory began to influence literary and other studies. Japanese translations of Lord's *The Singer of Tales* and Ong's *Orality and Literacy* have appeared in the late nineties.

The disjunction of modernity has led to the reification of the pre-modern, now commonly called the traditional. Traditional has become a synonym for Japanese, native, non-Western, and pre-modern. A keyword in the performing arts and literary traditions is "transmission" (*denshoo*), which is congruent with the concept of oral tradition. In the postwar period, this concept has given way in official discourse to the concept of "tradition" (*dentoo*), which smacks of invented traditions.

The report on Japanese studies in oral tradition by Hiroyuki Araki in 1992 is still relevant, positing two pioneer ethnologists, Yanagita Kunio and Orikuchi Shinobu, as the basic point of reference for Japanese researchers. A lot of work continues to be carried out by folklorists, musicologists, and literary scholars in documenting dying genres. Often these are recorded in electronic format and are published commercially with extensive Japanese notes. Orality studies have permeated all these disciplines. Notable output includes the four volumes (with English summaries) of *Kootoo Denshoo no hikaku kenkyuu (Studies of Oral Traditions)* (Kawada et al., 1984-88). A volume in English by Tokumaru, *The Oral and the Literate in Music* (1986), also dates from this time. Literary scholar Hyoodoo Hiromi uses a combination of fieldwork and literary and historical sources to reconstruct the formation of traditions such as the *Tale of the Heike* (see 2000a and 2002).

My own work has looked at the relevance of the oral-formulaic theory to musical narratives in which the musical component is complex and varied. There are broadly speaking three modes of delivery: the spoken, the musically simple (syllabic, narrow range), and the musically complex (melismatic, wide range). There is active interpolation of songs and other musical material into the narrative in many genres. The use of written texts as a basis for performance is widespread, but musical notation is minimal and the formulaic music continues to rely on oral transmission.

New directions in oral tradition studies in Japan

Younger scholars are examining folk traditions in the light of cultural studies. For example, Hyoodoo organized a panel in June 2003 for a meeting of the Kooshoo Bungei Gakkai (Society for Folk Narrative Research) on “The topos of the body,” bringing together the most recent local research in a cultural studies framework. This seems to be the most exciting academic society in this area.

Extensive fieldwork is the basis of research for many young scholars. Urban popular culture, such as *manzai* (see Tsurumi 1987) and *naniwa-bushi* (see Hyoodoo 2000b), is being collected and analyzed. A Museum of Laughter has been established in Osaka to document comic urban entertainments of the modern period. Studies of Okinawan traditions are lively, but Ainu studies lag well behind. In mainland Japan, oral traditions of pre-modern origin are dying out because the social structures that supported them have disappeared. Folksong, on the other hand, has managed to adapt from oral transmission to the modern entertainment model of concerts and the commercial recording (see Hughes 1991 and forthcoming).

Monash University

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¹ Articles pertaining to oral tradition cover such topics as popular music before the Meiji period (Gerald Groemer), folk music (David W. Hughes), the music of Ryukyu (Robin Thompson), the music of the Ainu (Chiba Nobuhiko), and popular music in modern Japan (Christine Yano and Hosokawa Shuhei).

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The Japanese *Tale of the Heike*

Yamashita Hiroaki

The *Tale of the Heike* (*Heike monogatari*) is one of Japan's largest warrior tales (*ikusa monogatari*). It exists today in numerous variants that narrate the epochal Gempei War (1180-85 CE) fought between the Minamoto (also called Genji) and Taira (also called Heike) clans. The variants are classified in two primary types, those praising the establishment of Minamoto Yoritomo's shôgunate and those narrating the fall of the Taira clan.

Many scholars have focused their attention on studying the numerous extant variant texts in search of a textual history. In particular, work has been dedicated to finding both the author's ideological position and the version closest to the original form. The question of orally recited texts has been the subject of research by a smaller number of scholars. They focus on written versions of the narrative that appeared around the middle of the fourteenth century and which were the basis for recitations by *biwa hôshi*, blind raconteurs who accompanied themselves on the biwa lute. Several scholars have focused on how to read these variants written for the *biwa hôshi* as narrative texts.

One fundamental problem faced by scholars examining orally recited texts is the nature of the extant works. Some researchers who have analyzed the surviving tradition of oral performances have doubts about analysis based on written texts, stressing the nontextual nature of performance. They argue that extant *Heike* texts do not constitute a record of oral performance. The relationship between oral performance and written text therefore continues to be a problematic subject of academic study. (For a comparison of views on orality and the *Heike* in Japanese, see the works of Hyôdô Hiromi [2000], Komoda Haruko, Matsuo Ashie [1996], and Yamashita Hiroaki [2000].)

One positive movement in scholarship is a focus on the relationships between individual *Heike* variants and their influence on other medieval and early modern narrative traditions. The individual recensions all narrate the same fundamental topic: the fall of the Taira clan and the establishment of

Yoritomo's shōgunate in Kamakura, far from the aristocratic capital. Their commonalities and differences point to the levels of significance of various concerns in the narration of this important historical moment. Moreover, the tale in turn gave birth to many other war tales and, importantly, other performing arts in addition to the variants of the *Heike* itself. Even today we can find oral legends associated with the historical sites where the Taira clan warriors were defeated in battle. The *Heike*, which became fixed in written form in the medieval period, thus provided an influence on oral traditions in areas where the narrative was collected. In this sense, it is a central focus for investigating the major problems connected with oral tradition, orality, literacy, and music in Japan.

Aichi Shukutoku University
Trans. by Elizabeth Oyler

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Bible

Richard Horsley on New Testament Studies

Martin S. Jaffee on “Oral Tradition and Rabbinic Studies”

Werner H. Kelber on Bible and New Testament Studies

Susan Niditch on “Oral Tradition and Biblical Scholarship”

Oral Tradition in New Testament Studies

Richard Horsley

New Testament studies, and Biblical studies more generally, is a conservative field when it comes to oral tradition. The field developed as part of Christian theology in order to interpret the Scripture, the sacred text that contains or mediates the holy word of God. Within this field of study, the term “oral tradition” has a very distinctive and confined reference to the transmission of the sayings of and stories about Jesus prior to the composition (simply presumed to be in writing) of the Gospels. Because the written text is deemed sacred, however, it may be understandable that oral tradition in the broader sense assumed in other fields poses a considerable threat to New Testament (Biblical) scholars. That in turn may explain why the limited work that has been done is heavily derivative from work in other fields.

Despite considerable resistance, recent research and explorations in several connections are conspiring to challenge standard assumptions and procedures in the field, bringing comparative work on oral tradition in the broader sense to bear on the “oral tradition” of Jesus in the distinctively New Testament studies sense. First, careful and extensive recent examinations of the evidence indicate clearly that literacy was extremely limited in Mediterranean antiquity. The exhaustive survey by Catherine Hezser (2001) makes it unavoidable that the Jews were not an exception. Obviously the field must come to grips with the dominant importance of oral communication in the formative period of what became New Testament literature.

Second, increasing awareness of work in other fields indicating that literacy and orality should not be understood in terms of a Great Divide, but rather were engaged in close interaction, is opening up recognition that even after a text was written, it was still “read” or “recited” orally to a whole community of people, not read silently by a solitary individual. It is much easier, moreover, to imagine the possible oral composition and regular performance of a “text” such the Gospel of Mark. Martin Jaffee’s recent analysis of the close interrelationship of oral recitation and interpretation and

written text in the Qumran community and among the rabbis will surely help show the way to New Testament scholars.

Third, the meticulous study of the multiple scrolls of the books of the Torah and Prophets (the Hebrew Scriptures) found among the Dead Sea Scrolls (by scholars such as Eugene Ulrich and Emanuel Tov) indicates not only that several textual traditions existed simultaneously in the same scribal community, but that those textual traditions were still developing, as scribes made interpretive changes as they inscribed new manuscripts. Such research makes questionable the standard older concept of an “original” text. And it suggests the likelihood that the text of the Gospel of Mark, for instance, also underwent a process of development.

Fourth, all of the previous developments should open at least some receptivity toward recent analyses of the differences between the scribal culture and tradition cultivated in Jerusalem and the popular culture and tradition cultivated in Judean and Galilean villages (what anthropologists would call “great tradition” and “little tradition”). The peasant villagers among whom the oral tradition (now in the broad as well as the distinctive sense) assumed communicative forms in speeches and story-cycles involved regional as well as class distinctions from the scribal culture that is contested in that oral tradition. This sensitivity to the popular Israelite tradition offers the possibility of revisiting the comparison made by earlier “form-criticism” between the “oral tradition” of Jesus teachings and stories and other folk-traditions.

Fifth, pulling together significant implications of the previous points, is the recent use of John Miles Foley’s combination of the performance theory of Richard Bauman (and others), the ethnopoetics of Dell Hymes and Dennis Tedlock, and his own theory of immanent art to explore the oral-derived speeches of Jesus in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke (often called “Q,” after the German *Quelle*) as performance. In contrast to previous “aphoristic” isolation of Jesus-sayings from all meaning-context, an informed historical imagination can, at least in minimal ways, imagine how these speeches focused on key concerns of a Jesus-movement were repeatedly performed by prophetic spokespersons for Jesus in the performance arenas indicated by key terms and phrases so that they resonated metonymically with local audiences against the Israelite popular tradition (Kelber 1994; Horsley and Draper 1999). Such analysis can thus also draw upon and make connections with the distinctive historical social

context of these speeches in Roman Galilee and Syria, thus bringing together what are usually separate tracks of “literary” and “social” analyses in the field.

University of Massachusetts - Boston

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Oral Tradition and Rabbinic Studies

Martin S. Jaffee

The literature of classical rabbinic Judaism is usually said to have been “redacted” from around 300 CE until about 700 CE in the Palestinian and Mesopotamian centers of rabbinic settlement. Rabbinic literature itself assumes that the traditions that stand behind the written texts were transmitted orally for at least several generations (and in some views, centuries) prior to the compilation of the written manuscripts that are known from the Middle Ages. The formulaic and stylistic traits of the rabbinic writings also suggest a firm basis in orally transmitted material in at least two senses. First, the strong mnemonic traits of the medieval manuscripts suggest that the documents preserved by them were formulated by people for whom oral textual performance was a common experience. Secondly, the written texts as we have them seem to have emerged in a milieu in which written versions of texts were shaped by prior orally-managed material, even as written texts then shaped the outlines of further oral performances based upon them as mnemonic aids. To sum up, oral tradition in the context of rabbinic studies is the complex of legal, theological, and exegetical material transmitted by rabbinic sages of antiquity in the context of oral-performative instruction and preserved in a host of manuscript exemplars that reflect in varying degrees the presence of oral-traditional stylistic traits.

The most important recent work in rabbinic oral traditional studies concerns the relationship of the surviving manuscript materials to their primary oral-traditional milieu, either in the original formation of the earliest rabbinic oral traditions in the first centuries CE or in the consolidation of the extant texts in the transition from Late Antiquity to the early Middle Ages. A comprehensive discussion of the history of ancient rabbinic oral tradition, and particularly, the ideological formulation of oral tradition as part of an oral revelation to Moses parallel to the Torah, has recently been offered by Martin S. Jaffee (2001). Important studies of the ways in which rabbinic compilations of biblical exegesis reflect and, in some senses, create an oral traditional milieu include Fraade (1991) and Nelson (1999). A fresh look at ways in which the oral transmission of the Mishnah, regarded as the

earliest rabbinic “redaction,” can be recovered from the extant discussions of later talmudic writings, is now available from Elizabeth Shanks Alexander (1998). The most important student of the oral background of the Babylonian Talmud in particular is Yaakov Elman, who has contributed several major articles to this issue (e.g., 1999).

Scholars of rabbinic Judaism are increasingly sensitive to the peculiar characteristics of rabbinic texts as an example of oral tradition deeply impacted by the technology of writing and the pressures of written culture. But the implications of this perception have yet to be fully explored in at least two domains of traditional scholarship in rabbinic literature. The first concerns the importance of the oral-traditional character of rabbinic textuality for the conduct of historical inquiry into the events “behind” rabbinic literature. Thanks to the crucial works of Jacob Neusner (1971) scholars have long known that rabbinic sources must be used carefully in the reconstruction of “history.” Neusner’s work on the “formal traits” and “mnemonic traits” of rabbinic texts remain crucial exercises in demonstrating how the needs of orally managed narrative dominate recountings of the past in rabbinic tradition. There remains the enormous task of comprehensively examining the various rabbinic narrative traditions to determine further ways in which the media of rabbinic tradition have shaped the message of rabbinic historiography. Secondly, and perhaps even more crucially, it is time to reexamine the entire corpus of rabbinic literature from the perspective of oral-performative theory in order to develop distinctions within and among the various rabbinic corpora with regard to the relative role of orally-managed material in the composition, editing, and transmission of the material. The studies of Nelson and Alexander mentioned above are moving in that direction, and it is to be hoped that scholars in the United States, Germany, and Israel, the main contemporary centers of rabbinic studies, will take up this rather daunting challenge.

University of Washington-Seattle

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Oral Tradition in Bible and New Testament Studies

Werner H. Kelber

Modern biblical scholarship is largely a child of the high tech of the fifteenth and sixteenth century. It developed its basic assumptions about and approaches to biblical texts in working with the print Bible, the first major, mechanically constructed book in early modernity. For this reason, the historical, critical scholarship of the Bible has risked laboring under a cultural anachronism, projecting modernity's communications culture upon the ancient media world.

However, despite its resolutely text-centered habits, historical criticism has by no means been unaware of orality's role in the formation of biblical texts. The impact of form criticism, the method devised to deal with oral tradition, on biblical scholarship of both the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament and the New Testament has been immense. Today, form criticism is besieged with multiple problems, the most significant of which is its complicity with post-Gutenberg assumptions about ancient dynamics of communication.

Not only are biblical texts by and large located in close affinity to speech, but the form critical project has turned out to be largely misconceived. Orality studies, therefore, challenge biblical scholarship to rethink fundamental concepts of the Western humanistic legacy such as text and intertextuality, reading, writing and composing, memory and imagination, speech and oral/scribal interfaces, author and tradition. And they invite us to be suspicious of imagining tradition exclusively in closed-space, text-to-text relations, and instead to grow accustomed to notions such as compositional dictation, memorial apperception, auditory reception, and the interfacing of memory and manuscript. Contemporary research in orality is, therefore, anything but a mere embellishment of textual studies. John Miles Foley's observation that "what we are wrestling with is an inadequate theory of verbal art" applies with particular force to biblical studies (1991:5).

In gospel studies, three areas deserve renewed scrutiny from the perspective of orality research: the search for the historical Jesus, the nature of pre-gospel tradition, and the interrelationship among the synoptic gospels.

The twentieth-century scholarly search for the historical Jesus has been heavily informed by the form critical retrieval of the original form of sayings. Often the simplest form was taken to be the original. Orality studies, however, discount the very notion of the original form. Rather, oral performance enacts multiple original speech acts, a situation that suggests a culture of speech quite different from that represented by the one, original form.

The oral tradition bridging the Jesus of history and the canonical gospels is often viewed in linear, directional, and sometimes evolutionary terms. And yet, speech is bound up with temporality, and inaccessible to and unimaginable in any diagrammatic fashion. Moreover, oral tradition is usually reconstructed on the basis of oral footprints in gospel texts, but whether this or that saying or story was an actual oral performance must remain uncertain.

The Two-Source Hypothesis, the classic explanatory model accounting for the interrelationship of the three synoptic gospels, has been traditionally formulated as a literary problem that is to be examined in literary terms and subject to a literary resolution, leaving no room for oral interfacing, the poetics of gospel narrativity, and memorial activities.

Few academic fields are, or will be, as deeply affected by orality studies as biblical, and especially New Testament, studies.

Rice University

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Oral Tradition and Biblical Scholarship

Susan Niditch

Interest in oral tradition and the border where oral meets written has been an integral part of modern biblical scholarship. The very foundation of “form-criticism” as practiced by Hermann Gunkel and more recently Claus Westermann involves the search for traditional oral forms as they may have been performed and received in actual life settings. Close work with the recurring patterns of biblical language and content has been influenced moreover by the studies of Albert Lord and Milman Parry, so that a number of analyses have explored the possibility that pieces of biblical literature are rooted in oral performance (Robert Culley, David Gunn). In recent years, the shift in orality studies, reflected in the work of John Miles Foley and the many articles that have appeared in *Oral Tradition*, has affected the way in which biblical scholars approach the topic of orality in ancient Israel. No longer are many scholars convinced that they can uncover original oral Ur-forms, nor that the most seemingly oral-traditional or formulaic pieces are earliest in date. I have argued that Israelite literature includes many oral “registers” reflecting various tastes, functions, and milieus. The most formulaic may be the latest in date, for an ongoing oral tradition of some kind is a constant in every culture. Similarly, scholars are increasingly sophisticated about the nature of “oral” and “written” and about the meaning and nature of literacy in traditional or ancient cultures.

Within a “great divide” conceptual framework, Biblical studies tended to suggest that early, simple oral works gave way to sophisticated written works produced by a literate elite. Scholars are now beginning to see that orality and literacy exist on a continuum and that there is an interplay between the two modalities, a feedback loop of sorts. More is to be learned about Israelite culture and the preserved corpus of ancient literature in the Bible by attention to this interplay, to the variety of oral traditional forms present, and to the way in which the written works of scripture are heavily informed by the assumptions of an essentially oral culture in style, content, and meaning.

Concern with oral tradition has great significance for the way we go about our studies as biblicists. My current work on a new commentary and translation of Judges is illustrative. First, in the very work of translation one tries to make choices that respect the aural qualities of the text, to convey as best one can word-play or re-use of a root. One draws attention to recurring formulaic patterns in language and content within notes, thereby allowing the modern reader to experience some of what Foley calls the “metonymic” or traditionally referential qualities of literature, and to the special economic way that meaning and message are produced in this literature.

Finally, attention to oral traditional considerations leads me away from “constructing” a text from the many manuscript versions available. I was taught as a graduate student to choose the shortest reading, the best reading, the implicitly “original” reading that has been corrupted. Attention to oral traditional considerations leads one instead to respect textual variation as evidence of the way in which qualities of the oral continue in written traditions. Various communities heard the text differently and indeed some like the Qumran community preserved written variants, longer and shorter, right within the same library.

Amherst College

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Performance

Elizabeth C. Fine on Performance Praxis

Thomas A. McKean on “Tradition as Communication”

Performance Praxis and Oral Tradition

Elizabeth C. Fine

Definitions of oral tradition among performance studies scholars in the National Communication Association are broad, as scholars use performance theory and practice to understand such oral traditions as personal, family, and folk narratives, and complex genres such as African American stepping, which involve oral narratives, songs, and synchronized percussive movement (Pollock 1999; Langellier and Petersen 2004; Fine 2003). While not all personal narratives have entered “tradition” by being transmitted through time from one generation to another, they usually enact cultural values and norms, and in that sense, could be called traditional. Using performance praxis to teach oral tradition provides a dynamic way to restore social contexts and aesthetic form to the incomplete printed records of oral traditions.

When oral traditions are stripped from their contexts and “collected” in books, most often their embodied aesthetic features of voice, body, and social interaction are lost. Most of the “great” oral traditions that students encounter, such as *Gilgamesh*, the *Iliad*, and the *Odyssey*, exist only in print (with the occasional film adaptation). Thus, before having students study printed oral traditions, they need to experience oral traditions as they emerge in real social settings.

I ask my students to perform an oral tradition to the class that they have told before. Most have no problem remembering a ghost story, a joke, a legend, or a family memorate. Instinctively, most students begin their performances with a metanarration that explains the social situation in which they heard the tale, or would tell it. Before performing the oral tradition, students learn how to use Dell Hymes’s ethnography of speaking model to describe the important features of the speech event and speech act (Hymes 1972). They also make a performance-centered text of their oral tradition and discuss those features of the performance that could not be translated into print (Fine 1994). This initial assignment allows students to experience living oral traditions transmitted by other students, gives them an analytical

method for examining oral traditions in social contexts, and introduces them to the difficulties of translating oral tradition into print.

In the second assignment, students work in small groups to generate and perform a shared social context for their individual performances of African American, Cherokee, and European American oral traditions from John Burrison's collection of Southern stories (Burrison 1991). Showing excerpts from the film *Songcatcher* (2000), about ballad collecting in Appalachia, provides vivid models of the emergent nature of oral traditions in social interactions.

Since the tales in Burrison's book were collected in interview situations rather than in everyday social contexts, the students must use their analyses of the possible overt and covert ends of the tales to construct hypothetical and believable interactions that call the tales into being, and weave them together into a plausible speech event. These group performances embody the theory of the performance approach in folkloristics as they illustrate how oral traditions are embedded in social contexts and serve social functions.

*Virginia Polytechnic Institute
and State University*

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Tradition as Communication

Thomas A. McKean

Tradition is communication, the passing on of (social) culture through shared practices and lore. It is an expression of an intense emotional bond between performer and source and, by extension, the cultural manifestations of that relationship at the intersections of memory, orality, and literacy.

The vertical, diachronic sweep of cultural knowledge passes on and preserves material over centuries, whereas horizontal, synchronic tradition in the small social unit exists in one person's memory, or in the passing on of knowledge, a technique, a song, or a custom. Although I agree with William Motherwell that "it is worthy of remark how excellently well tradition serves as a substitute for more efficient and less mutable channels of communicating the things of past ages," I am not particularly concerned with its antiquity, but with the tradition of today that remains, above all, an interpersonal, social, and usually verbal, art.

Oral tradition is a part of everyday life. It does not become mere "verbal tradition" over time, nor does oral re-creation necessarily break down to become mere memorization. The key is in how a tradition bearer regards her source. Most performers cite a source, oral or graphic, which is seen as authoritative. When one wishes to confer legitimacy on traditional knowledge, one has recourse to those from whom one learned it; there is a need for such higher authority. Today, when that source may be a person, a page, or a recording, it is the performer's *relationship* to it that defines traditionality. What matters is a sense of cultural authority, as important today as it was hundreds of years ago.

To accept the idea of an authority figure or version is not to say that a performer must look outside herself for an act to be considered traditional. When someone is part of a traditional framework of communication, her own cultural creations are, by definition, part of that tradition. Though the manifestation is new, the structure and its cultural foundation are not. If tradition is process rather than content, as I believe it is, the mechanics are essentially the same today as they were in preliterate times. In addition, a distinction between aural and visual memories can exist even without

writing; a single performer can employ both systems, or a combination of the two. A song can be remembered by actual or mental reference to writing or print, or perhaps the place in which it was learned, while another can be recalled as an aural map, evoking the singer from whom the song was learned or the sound of a particular performing environment.

Tradition always evolves, of course, but for some time has been negotiating the strange transition between domestic, private tradition and the public, commercialized, commodified tradition we take for granted today. Movement between private and public performance, along with developments in learning and propagation, creates new repertoires and environments for traditional acts without necessarily destroying pre-existing means, which undoubtedly continue to flourish where individual abilities and suitable social micro-environments exist. Such transitions take place on a myriad of individual and family levels, in many places and at many times, not to the whole of society at a single moment. Tradition, therefore, becomes ever more rich and complex. While much of its content changes, much of its method does not.

University of Aberdeen

Ancient Greek

Egbert J. Bakker on “Homer as an Oral Tradition”

Michael Barnes on Hellenistic Epic

David Bouvier on the Homeric Question

Casey Dué on “Ancient Greek Oral Genres”

Mark W. Edwards on “Homer and the Oral Tradition”

Margalit Finkelberg on Neoanalysis in Homeric Studies

Richard P. Martin on “The Grain of Greek Voices”

Gregory Nagy on “Oral Poetics and Homeric Poetry”

Steve Reece on “Homeric Studies”

M. D. Usher on “The Reception of Homer as Oral Poetry”

Homer as an Oral Tradition

Egbert J. Bakker

The Homerist's idea of an oral tradition is necessarily different from that of the students of a living oral tradition. Homer is a text and Homeric orality is a matter of philology. Homerists' notions of oral tradition will thus be mediated by textuality, and Homer's orality can only be accessed through those features that survive the song's transcription.

Regardless of the existence of written texts surrounding an epic tradition, the tradition is an *oral* one if it is *performed* periodically and in more than one locale. The tradition's expansion in place and survival in time, externally manifested in its transformation into writing, is manifested internally in the ideology of epic *kléos*, glory as conferred on a hero by poetry. The hero's *kléos* can become the song's *kléos* in a self-conscious awareness that is particularly clear in Homer. (This is not mere literary sophistication, but a tradition's consciousness of the possibilities of its own medium.)

Performance not only constitutes the dimension of the tradition's persistence through time; it also focuses the researcher's interest on the tradition's textual reflection. Performance is an essential bundling of hermeneutic features of an oral tradition that should inform our study of the tradition as text. As performance, the tradition is a matter of stylized, intensified speech, so that the study of pragmatics and spoken language can be brought to bear on the study of the tradition as text. Two features seem to me of particular importance here:

(1) The poem as cognitive flow. Any text, regardless of its degree of "writtleness," is linear and can be processed only in a cognitive flow through time. This processual character is clearest in speech, as it is produced and "decoded" on the spot by speaker and listener(s). This does not change when a speech has a more formal, elevated character, or when the production in performance is in fact the reproduction of a previous discourse. In either case, the processual features of spoken language will be

regularized and stylized. Such stylization is visible in an oral tradition's lines and/or in its metrical/formulaic segments.

(2) The performance as a deictic "now." The performer's cognitive processes, whether seen as speech or as inspired memory, are necessarily a matter of the performance's present. This reality is reflected in the deictic orientation (temporal, spatial) of the poem's performance: temporal deixis tends to be centered on the performer's "now." When the performer's cognitive processes constitute the verbalization of visual aggregates of information, the result is the experience of the epic reality "here and now," in the context of the performance; the Homeric tradition at any rate does not seem to create the illusion (frequent in written narrative) that the tale's reality is observed and experienced "on the spot," in the past of the epic action. The representation of reality, in other words, is theatrical, with the performer and his audience engaging in a pretended version of what Bühler (1990) called *demonstratio ad oculos*.

University of Texas at Austin

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Oral Tradition and Hellenistic Epic: New Directions in Apollonius of Rhodes

Michael Barnes

Any investigation of oral tradition in Hellenistic literature immediately runs up against two longstanding interpretive frameworks that have not only defined the nature of Greek literature during this period (roughly 323-30 BCE), but also seem *a priori* to cut off the possibility of oral traditional influence. The first is the idea of a radical separation: as refugees in northern Egypt, poets such as Callimachus, Apollonius of Rhodes, and Theocritus were cut off—temporally and culturally, as well as geographically—from the native springs that inspired the poets and other writers of archaic and classical Greece. These later authors, conscious of an epochal break between themselves and the great writers of the past, were still the heirs of a tradition, but by then a decidedly literary tradition, fixed in the texts on deposit in the Library of Alexandria.

The image of the Library leads us to the second paradigm: the daunting bookishness of Alexandrian poetry. Little need be said about the self-consciously sophisticated, highly allusive, and scholarly nature of Hellenistic poetry; one need only read a hymn of Callimachus or a few lines of Lycophron to understand its essentially textual nature. The combination of these fundamental and mutually reinforcing interpretive frameworks produced, in the title of Bing's important study (1988), a well-read Muse, under whose patronage "poetry . . . for the first time became grounded—institutionally—in the written word" (15).

This standard view has important consequences for our reading of the lone Alexandrian epicist whose work survives in full, Apollonius of Rhodes. The resurgence of scholarly interest in the *Argonautica* has largely overlooked any connections between that poem and oral tradition, preferring instead to explore the epic's exquisite webs of literary allusion; or matters of character, especially the elusive character of Jason; or the place of the *Argonautica* in contemporary Alexandrian poetic debate (a perilous subject). Recently, however, a few scholars, most notably Robert Albis and Martijn

Cuypers, have begun to look more carefully at the narrative dynamics of the epic, and in particular at the ways in which Apollonius is often at pains to create the illusion of a traditional oral performance.

Features imported from the world of performance—the hymnic openings to Books 1, 3, and 4, for example, but especially the narrator’s frequent interruptions of the narrative, whether to correct some aspect of the tale (e.g., 2.844-50), to implore the gods (e.g., 4.445-51, 1673-75) or defer to the Muses (e.g., 4.552-56, 1381-88), or even to mollify a potential religious offense caused by his verses (2.708-10, 4.982-92)—may be understood as evidence of an epic poet laboring to re-create the aura of oral performance and the intimacy between performing bard and audience. The occasional abrupt use of second-person addresses to an assumed audience, coupled with the studious use throughout of archaic epic vocabulary, likewise abets the literary construction of an oral performance arena. The fiction of oral performance created by these elements suggests that Apollonius was aware of the oral dimension of Homeric verse and perhaps even foregrounded imitations of it to compensate for the distance that writing was felt to create between poet and audience.

Others have begun to apply ideas about Homeric oral poetics to the *Argonautica*. Anatole Mori in these pages (2001) recently grounded a discussion of the political and the literary dimensions of Apollonius’ text (focusing on the figures of Arsinoë and Arete) and representations of public and private speech-acts within the nexus of Richard Martin’s work (1989) on oral *epos* and *muthos* in Homer. I am currently at work on an article on the presence of *sêmata*—a deeply resonant term in Homeric oral poetics, as John Miles Foley (1999:espec. chs. 1, 5, and 7) and others have demonstrated—in the *Argonautica*, looking especially their frequent connections to traditional epic *kleos* and the memorializing figure of the aition.

Yet for all these recent approaches, Martijn Cuypers has observed (1998) that “there is still much basic, micro-level research of the more laborious sort to be done” on the relationship of the *Argonautica* to oral traditional poetics. Cuypers, building on the work of Visser, Jahn, and Bakker, undertakes some of this micro-level research by examining Apollonius’ exploitation of “peripheral expressions” as a means of understanding his appropriation and modification of the Homeric formular tradition. Marco Fantuzzi has recently furthered our understanding of Apollonius and the oral nature of Homeric verse by investigating the similarities between the “way in which Apollonius conceived the internal formularity of his poem and the probable expectations and ‘desires’ of his contemporaries [esp. Zenodotus] regarding the ‘real’ formularity of Homer’s

oralization”?)—is also enormously promising.

Taken together, the broader, conceptual approaches and the bedrock micro-level research herald a significant new direction in Apollonian scholarship, one that focuses on the myriad intersections between the oral poetics of Apollonius’ principal model and Apollonius’ own literate strategies of appropriation, imitation, and experimentation.

University of Houston

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The Homeric Question: An Issue for the Ancients?

David Bouvier

What is oral tradition in ancient Greece?

In ancient Greece, the question of oral tradition is closely related to the famous Homeric Question. Even if many problems remain without answer, it is today a well recognized fact that the Homeric poems, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, derive from an oral tradition. However, it remains very remarkable how long it took to discover and prove that derivation. How can we explain this difficulty in recognizing an oral dimension in the Homeric poems? We could still argue that Occidental civilization is what Derrida calls a “civilization of the Book” and that for centuries a great poet has had to be a writer. This explanation is, however, insufficient. Greece itself bears major responsibility for the longstanding misapprehension.

Until the fourth century BCE, Greek civilization was *une civilisation de la parole*. In every activity and in every field, people were trained to repeat or reproduce speeches by others. Writers such as Herodotus or Plato exemplified these procedures of transmission, in which one remembered the words of another who himself quoted a speech originally made by someone else. Indeed, the symposium furnished a cultural occasion to perpetuate this activity of transmission and reproduction of speech. Furthermore, Greeks were perfectly conscious of the advantage of versification to aid memory. Aristotle even undertook to show how metrical poetry adapted itself progressively to the different genres of poetry. But in spite of all of this, Greece seemed to pay no attention to the enigma of Homeric poetry. Amazingly enough, they never recognized the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey* as the result of an oral tradition going back to a distant past and transforming previous mythological stories. Homer was for them a composer of fixed poems who lived after the Trojan war (Herodotus proposed to situate him four centuries before himself), and it was clear to everyone that rhapsodes perpetuated his poems with total fidelity. In effect, there was no Homeric Question in ancient Greece. This may not directly help us to answer the question posed above, but it does suggest that our inquiry must also consider how the Greeks themselves conceptualized orality and speech transmission

and examine why they remained indifferent to certain aspects of oral tradition.

What are the most interesting new directions in oral tradition studies?

Homeric studies are today confronted with a paradox. The Homeric poems we read are the result of a double transmission: a mainly oral transmission until the sixth century BCE and then, more and more, a written transmission leading to the modern editions. If documents and materials are lacking to compare different stages and variants of the oral evolution of the poems, we have many textual variants that can teach us a lot about both oral and written transmission. A deeper comprehension of oral composition in ancient Greece requires—somewhat paradoxically—a close examination of these textual variants. Consider an example: Plato quotes Homer many times and his quotations often differ from the Homeric vulgate. How should we interpret these differences? Most interesting are the instances that allow us to understand how Plato memorized Homer (when he was not reading a variant). Did he use the rhythmical structure of the hexameter or not? Let's go further. A fundamental moment in the transmission of traditional poetry is the evolution from an inventive memory to a fixed memory, that is, from an art of composition that reinvents the tradition to a memory that reproduces, with minor variations, a fixed poem. As long as Homeric poems are understood purely as written texts, the many textual variants can be evaluated only from a philological point of view. But it appears today that many of these discrepancies can be understood as rhapsodic variants from the period during which the Homeric poems were already fixed texts; they were orally performed by rhapsodes who reproduced the poem with small variations that did not affect the metrical structure. Any perspective that will help us to compare the fixed memory of the rhapsodes to the inventive memory of composing and performing singers will aid our research.

*Institut d'Archéologie et des Sciences de l'Antiquité
Université de Lausanne*

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Ancient Greek Oral Genres

Casey Dué

The study of ancient Greek oral epic traditions today revolves around a complex and hotly debated assemblage of interconnected genres, speech acts, and performative practices and rituals. Ultimately, however, such studies go back to the pathfinding comparative research of Milman Parry and Albert Lord into oral epic song-making. It wasn't until the 1930's, when Milman Parry and his assistant Albert Lord went to Yugoslavia to study the oral epic tradition that still flourished there, that the Homeric poems were understood to be not only traditional, but *oral*. In two trips to the former Yugoslavia in 1933-35, Parry and Lord collected 12,544 songs, stories, and conversations from 169 singers of the South Slavic epic song tradition. Their unparalleled fieldwork has been matched only by the work of Albert Lord himself, who took additional trips in the 1950s and 1960s. No two of the songs collected are exactly alike, nor do any two of the singers have exactly the same repertoire. The singers whom Parry and Lord recorded composed extremely long epic poems *in performance*. In order to do this, they drew on a vast storehouse of traditional themes and phrases that worked within the meter or rhythm of the poetry. They used these formulaic phrases, instead of what we know as words, to build each verse as they went along. Each song was a new composition, and no two songs that they recorded were ever exactly the same. The fieldwork of Parry and Lord and their application of that fieldwork to the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* revolutionized our understanding of Homer, and their work continues to drive Homeric studies today.

A groundbreaking new book by Aida Vidan, *Embroidered with Gold, Strung with Pearls: The Traditional Ballads of Bosnian Women* (2003), publishes and analyzes for the first time women's songs of the South Slavic tradition that were collected by Milman Parry and Albert Lord and which are now housed in the Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature. With few exceptions, to date only the men's heroic songs collected by Parry and Lord have been published and discussed. (Important exceptions are Bartók and Lord 1951 and Coote 1977 and 1992.) In fact, the vast majority of the songs in the Parry Collection are women's songs—of the 12,544 texts contained in the collection, approximately 11,250 are women's songs. Vidan's book

continues the work of Parry and Lord by introducing and publishing several of the women's songs collected in the very same areas in the former Yugoslavia in which Parry and Lord recorded the heroic songs that they compared to Homeric poetry.

Vidan's book sheds important light on the dynamics of the process by which women's song-making becomes incorporated into heroic narratives, and encourages us to explore the Homeric poems once again in light of comparative evidence. Are the voices of women in men's poetry representative of women's independent song traditions? What role, if any, did women's song traditions play in the shaping of ancient Greek epic traditions (and later, tragedy)? In recent years scholars have in fact begun to suggest that women's lament traditions may have played a crucial role in the development of Greek epic and tragedy, which was traditionally performed by men (see Dué 2002). Richard Martin (1989) has studied the many genres of stylized speech that have been incorporated into the genre of epic poetry, and he has shown that the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* include within the overall epic frame the conventions and allusive power of a number of other pre-existing verbal art forms, including prayer, supplication, boasting, and insulting, as well as lament. (See also Foley 2002:188-218 for a discussion of the "ecology" of genres within Serbian oral poetry, which, like ancient Greek epic, includes magical charms, lyric songs, and funeral laments, among others.) Sheila Murnaghan (1999) has noted that the majority of women's speech in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* is closely related to lament in both language and theme. Vidan's work gives further support to the thesis that women's lament traditions have not only been incorporated into Greek epic; they are in fact the very backbone of it. It is very likely that the laments of Greek epic, although performed by a male *aoidos*, would have evoked for ancient audiences the songs of their mothers and grandmothers, performed at funerals upon the death of family members and extended relatives. In this way epic subsumes a distinctly feminine mode of singing within its own mode of expression, the dactylic hexameter, no doubt transforming it but also maintaining many of its essential features.

University of Houston

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Homer and the Oral Tradition

Mark W. Edwards

(1) What is oral tradition (with specific reference to your special field)?

In the Homeric poems it is possible to identify:

(a) a tradition of epic poetry whose features include: set verbal expressions that fit into specific sections of a Homeric verse and probably developed to simplify non-written and extemporaneous composition; regular structures for composing repeated scenes, allowing the length of a given scene to vary to suit immediate circumstances while enabling singer and audience to keep track of the sequence of essential items included in the scene; and story patterns likewise showing regular structures and occurring repeatedly both in epic and in myth.

(b) numerous instances where the traditional forms of words, scenes, and story have not been employed in the usual ways, but have been adapted by the poet in order to produce some unexpected, special (and sometimes probably new) effect upon his audience. Because of the extensive size of the Homeric corpus one can see with reasonable certainty both the nature of the material made available to a poet by the oral tradition that he inherited, and the modifications an individual poet might make, according both to the immediate circumstances of a given performance and to his skill in introducing changes in this material in order to bring out a particular effect.

(2) What are the most interesting new directions in oral tradition studies (again in your field)?

By now the facts about the nature of the oral features identified above in Homer are well known and (on the whole) not controversial. At the time of this writing, the most controversial question is the relationship between our modern printed texts of Homer (which vary little from each other) and

what singers actually sang (and what was written down) between the time when the poems first took their monumental form (probably the eighth-seventh centuries BCE) and the appearance of the standardized written version (upon which ours is based) in the second century BCE. I have not myself taken a position on this issue.

In my own limited field, the oral techniques (and variations on them) mentioned above, the most interesting new direction is going beyond the accepted facts about the oral features and looking for the reasons for the development of these features and the results of their use both for the art of the performer and the reception by the listener. Work done recently in the fields of linguistics (grammar of speech) and cognitive science (on memorization, etc.) has already been applied to Homeric studies and is producing exciting new understanding.

Stanford University

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Neoanalysis and Oral Tradition in Homeric Studies

Margalit Finkelberg

By oral tradition I understand the transmission from one generation to another of verbal messages of any kind carried out without recourse to writing, whether because this medium is unavailable or by deliberate choice. The messages can be transmitted verbatim or re-created anew at the time of delivery. Oral tradition embraces a wide range of cultural phenomena, among them epic poetry extemporized at the time of performance as addressed in the Parry-Lord theory of oral composition. It is still uncertain whether or not the theory of oral composition can fully account for the poems of Homer as we have them.

As far as the study of Greek heroic tradition is concerned, the most interesting recent development as I see it is the combination of the methods of Neoanalysis with those of the theory of oral composition as it comes to light in some recent work.¹ In my opinion, this approach will eventually revolutionize our understanding of the character of relationship between Homer and Greek epic tradition, first and foremost the tradition represented by the poems of the Epic Cycle. Namely, by showing (a) that in everything concerning the general picture of the Trojan War the Homeric poems presuppose the tradition represented in the poems of the Cycle rather than vice versa and (b) that more often than not Homer worked by consciously reshaping the tradition he inherited and adapting it to his own agenda, the approach in question leads to the conclusion that, rather than being just two traditional poems among many, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* possessed a special status within the tradition to which they belonged.

Tel Aviv University

¹ See especially Slatkin 1991, Ballabriga 1998, Danek 1998, Malkin 1998, and Burgess 2001; cf. my reviews of Malkin 1998 and Burgess 2001 (Finkelberg 2002a and 2002b).

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The Grain of Greek Voices

Richard P. Martin

Oral tradition in Greece before the mid-fifth century BCE? Law, ritual, myth, education-through-dance (*khoreia*), invective, games, wisdom, praise, lament—almost every verbal institution imaginable employed stylized language, formulaic diction, characteristic rhythms, or time-honored performance habits. They were transmitted wholly, or partly, without writing. At the same time, such institutions—some reaching back millennia—were open to new interpretations and refashionings. As in many oral cultures, to innovate was in fact “traditional.” My working assumption is that all facets of early Greek social life need to be evaluated when one investigates a given “oral tradition.” But we have to avoid lumping all such institutions together, as if their shared “orality” were the primary point of interest. Affiliations and nuances of social context and contestation surrounded each and demand respect.

When the creative analyses of Milman Parry and Albert Lord turned attention first to the traditional nature—and by extrapolation to the “orality”—of Homeric poetry, they also opened new perspectives on the many other forms of Greek verbal culture. Reimagining not just the technical conventions but the social conditions under which Homeric poetry arose brought about a total re-examination of Greek culture. In this reappraisal, comparative evidence came to play a major role as a suggestive analogy and a useful heuristic device.

Interesting new directions? First, the expansion and refining of comparative studies. John Foley has led the way both by his writings (e.g., 2002) and by his establishment of effective clearinghouses for sharing work. Increasingly sophisticated folkloristics (see, e.g., Reynolds 1995, Honko 1998) open up new questions about performance *in context*. Second, an urge to explore the varied mutual relations of “performance” genres within the seventh-fifth centuries BCE. W. Robert Connor inspired a social-historical approach that took account of the poetics of specific social “genres.” His influence has been great on many younger scholars whose works incorporate “oralist” perspectives whether the subject is Greek lyric, proverb use,

Delphic oracles, or colonization stories. Recognizing “performance” as an overarching social-poetic concept is the deeper urge at work here, with profound effects on the field: it is hard to name a single American Hellenist untouched.¹ Finally, an evolutionary, multilevel perspective has begun to replace New Critical attitudes that prized texts as objects, technique as primary, and Homeric verse as a culmination. A guiding light is the work of Gregory Nagy, from his pathbreaking studies in cultural semantics (1979) to his magisterial *Pindar’s Homer* (1990). His more recent studies on the crystallization of the Homeric text from the eighth to the first centuries BCE illustrate how a New Diachrony (if one can call it that) is able not just to describe the system of Greek poetics but to motivate and track *changes* within it.² He has taken up the challenges adumbrated in Albert Lord’s later work (1991 and 1995), where “oral” and “written” are no longer divided by a deep gulf. The historically grounded, fine-grain analyses of the reception-history of Homer point to new vistas in the understanding of oral-derived and transitional texts.

Stanford University

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¹ See, e.g., Connor 2000 (a seminal article); for his influence, cf. Dougherty and Kurke 1993.

² See Nagy’s contribution to this collection.

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Oral Poetics and Homeric Poetry

Gregory Nagy

The concept of oral tradition, especially as we see it redefined in the work of Milman Parry (1971) and Albert Lord (espec. 1960/2000), has had a major impact on the understanding of Homer and Homeric poetry in the field of classics. Volume 1 of *Greek Literature* (Nagy 2001) features reprints of twenty studies illustrating this impact, along with an extensive introduction and bibliography. The introduction and bibliography are available gratis at <http://chs.harvard.edu/chspubs/ninevol/index.htm>. Nowadays, classicists who publish on Homer generally acknowledge the relevance of Parry's and Lord's work, though all too many publications still reveal a woefully superficial understanding of this work (for a list of ten common misunderstandings, see Nagy 1996:19-27).

A most pressing problem in the field of classics is that the concept of oral tradition tends to be applied—however superficially—only to Homer, while the rest of Greek literature continues to be studied without an awareness of any need for applying the same concept (for a corrective, see Lord 1991:espec. ch. 2).

Another problem is that some influential classicists, in their publications on Homer, have separated the work of Parry from that of Lord (Nagy 2003:ch. 3, with bibliography). A most prominent example is the introduction written by Adam Parry to the collected papers of his father (Parry 1971:ix-lxii). Since most of Milman Parry's work on Homer predated his study of living oral traditions in the former Yugoslavia, the separating of his work from Lord's leaves the relevance of oral traditions to Homeric studies seriously undervalued.

This problem folds into a larger problem. Those who have no direct knowledge of oral traditions generally assume that "orality," as distinct from "literacy," can be universally defined. And yet, the only universal distinction between oral and literary traditions is the historical anteriority of the first to the second. Beyond this obvious observation, it is pointless to attempt any universalizing definition of oral or even of written tradition. In

cultures that do not depend on the technology of writing, the concept of “orality” is meaningless (Lord 1995:105, n. 26).

An ongoing challenge in Homeric studies is the persistent assumption that oral traditions are inferior to literary traditions (for a critique of this assumption, see Mitchell and Nagy 2000:xiv).

For current research in Homeric poetry, a most interesting new direction in oral tradition studies centers on the interaction of genre and occasions of performance (Martin 1989, Bakker 1997). “In a living oral tradition, people are exposed to verbal art constantly, not just on specific entertainment occasions, which can happen every night in certain seasons. When they work, eat, drink, and do other social small-group activities, myth, song, and saying are always woven into their talk. Consequently, it is not inaccurate to describe them as bilingual, fluent in their natural language but also in the *Kunstsprache* of their local verbal art forms” (Martin 1993:227).

Harvard University

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Homeric Studies

Steve Reece

Homeric studies has from the beginning been at the center of the renaissance of the discipline of comparative oral traditions, contributing such seminal concepts as “oral-formulaic theory,” “extension and economy of the formulaic system,” “type-scene,” and “composition-in-performance,” and giving fresh nuance to such fundamental but already familiar concepts as “parataxis/hypotaxis,” “enjambement,” “ring composition,” “Kunst-sprache,” “allomorph,” “multiform,” “metonymy,” “diachrony/synchrony,” and “oral-dictation.” Homeric Studies continues to exert a powerful influence on the field; I limit my comments to three areas of recent and particular interest:

1) In my view the most productive critical approach being applied to Homer today is what I would call “neoanalysis with an oral twist.” This approach focuses on the relationship between the two “canonical” Homeric epics that have survived, the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, and their hypothetical earlier epic counterparts. The details of these earlier epic traditions are allusive, of course, because only their residue survives, embedded in fragments of a later “Epic Cycle,” in even later prose summaries of that Cycle, in the tales of various mythographers, and in more oblique references and allusions in tragedy, lyric, history, Hesiod and “Hesiodica,” other “Homerica,” and in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* themselves. The plastic arts too, especially early vase painting, provide a glimpse into the world of non-Homeric epic. From a strictly literary and analytical perspective, these non-Homeric traces of epic postdate the Homeric epics and are necessarily viewed as derivative of Homer; but from an oral and neoanalytic perspective, these traces of epic can be viewed as the residue of epic traditions that existed previous to or contemporaneous with Homer, allowing us at least a fleeting glimpse of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* valorizing or depreciating, toying with, and variously responding to other versions of the epic tales. In short, we can see Homer working within a living and changing epic tradition. Many recent articles on themes and episodes in Homer have adopted this approach, thereby mediating the viewpoints of the analyst and the oralist, often without

explicitly stating it as such, sometimes, perhaps, without even recognizing it. Recent specimens of this approach, with useful bibliography, are Burgess 1996 and Finkelberg 2000.

2) All at once about ten years ago a great amount of attention began to be paid to the book divisions in the Homeric epics; more specifically, to how the twenty-four book divisions in our inherited texts of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are related to the historical performance units of these songs. The debate remains unresolved. On one end are those who regard the book divisions as reflections of breaks in the historic performance of an eighth- or seventh-century BCE bard. On the other end are those who regard them as Alexandrian—a result of serendipity (the fact that there are 24 letters in the Ionian alphabet) and, to a lesser degree, of the physical features of text-making during the Hellenistic period (the typical length of a papyrus roll). Somewhere in between are those who trace the book divisions to the first writing down of the epics in connection with their performance at one of the Greater Panathenaic Festivals in Athens in the late sixth century. Whenever, and for whatever reason, they occurred, most of the book divisions seem to have been chosen judiciously, coinciding with breaks in the narrative. Yet some clash with scene divisions, cutting right through a narrative segment or even a type-scene (e.g., *Il.* 5-6, 6-7, 18-19, 20-21; *Od.* 2-3, 3-4, 6-7, 8-9, 12-13, 13-14, 20-21). Hence there has developed some consensus among Homeric scholars that in performance a division into three or four major “movements” is to be preferred to the twenty-four book units. As a practical matter, I encourage my students to read through the book divisions of Homer, just as I encourage them, in their reading of other oral narratives, to disregard the artificial divisions imposed by textualization (verse, section, chapter, book divisions)—in the New Testament Gospels, for example. Not only does this practice better replicate the original performance units, but it also allows the modern reader to detect patterns and themes in the epic that are obfuscated by overadherence to book divisions. A recent and excellent summary of the debate on book divisions, with full appreciation of its implications for oral poetics, is Jensen 1999.

3) A related question of intense interest in the past few years likewise has to do with the relationship between our inherited texts of Homer’s epics and the historical, live, oral performances of the epic by a Greek bard: namely, are our inherited texts more or less reliable records—though passed through countless hands over many generations—of what was once an oral-dictated text, that is, a scribal transcription of a performance orally delivered by a historical Homer in the eighth century BCE and thereafter for the most part, except for some surface corruption, fixed in its form? Or are our inherited texts the final product of a long evolution of a fluid oral and textual

transmission, attributable to a mythic figure, a symbol of oral tradition that we can call, for the sake of shorthand, “Homer,” but actually shaped by generations of mouths and hands, slowly crystallized, and not really fixed until the late Classical or even Hellenistic period? Albert Lord’s “oral-dictation” model was challenged early on by Geoffrey Kirk’s “evolutionary” model, and the debate has continued, with refinements and shifting terminology, to this day, its fierceness indicative of its importance in all matters having to do with the reception of these epics. For an up-to-date evaluation and comparison of the two models, see Reece forthcoming.

St. Olaf College

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The Reception of Homer as Oral Poetry

M. D. Usher

For me, one of the most interesting directions in oral tradition studies focuses on the reception of Homeric poetry as oral poetry in classical and later antiquity. The topics and materials for study here are wide-ranging. They include the internalization of Homeric poetics by lyric and elegiac poets; “rhapsodic” variation and conflation of lines in authors who quote Homer; the adaptation of Homeric tags in Cynic street sermons; the pastiche form known as the *cento*; even the re-use of Homeric poetry in magical incantations, to name just a few avenues of investigation.

The question that presents itself is twofold: to what degree were ancient readers and users of Homer influenced by oral habits of composition, and how can we know this? Any answer to this question must employ a basic technique of the oral-formulaic method, namely “how to work backwards” from the form of the texts we possess “so as to learn how they must have been made” (Parry, quoted in Lord 1960:3). And if, as one authority puts it, the linguistic analysis of formulas and themes in verbal art forms “can provide insight into the cognitive processes . . . of a prehistoric society and culture” (Watkins 1995:43), it is not unreasonable to suppose that we might be able to recover something of the cognitive processes of Homeric readers in a more historical age by a similar analysis of passages that are tinged by Homeric quotation.

Of particular interest are traces in later authors of the kind of associative thinking that is typical of oral poetic composition. The point of departure here is Marcel Jousse’s 1925 study of the mnemotechnics of an oral style, which demonstrated how oral habits of composition persist in literate traditions. Recent work on the cognitive psychology of memory by, e. g., Alan Baddeley (1990) and applied specifically to oral art forms by David Rubin (1995), Elizabeth Minchin (2001), and others has corroborated Jousse’s findings. John Foley’s reworking (1991) of literary *Rezeptionsästhetik* for the field of oral tradition studies—what Foley calls “traditional referentiality” or “immanent art”—is another foundational study, as it explains how oral poetic structures (and thus the orally-derived texts

that were read by ancient readers) convey meaning differently than literary ones. Matthew Clark's fascinating work (1997) on the "deep structure" of Homeric composition is also relevant. Especially important is his discovery (building on the ideas of Michael Nagler, Joseph Russo and others) that *non*-formulaic patterns of repetition—those that do not necessarily express, in Parry's definition, a given essential idea (for example the collocation and clustering of syntactically unrelated words and phrases)—also serve the Homeric poet as cues for composition.

The proposition that one will find oral residue in later authors is hardly controversial or surprising. If Homeric poetry is indeed a generative system, users of it are bound to show traces of its characteristic features. The majority of ancient Greek and Roman readers were, after all, reared on the recitation of Homer. But demonstrations of this proposition on a case-by-case basis promise to shed light on exactly how the oral/aural aspects of ancient reading affected ancient composition and this awareness, in turn, must affect our interpretations of ancient texts. Thus, in working backwards, we will have come full circle.

University of Vermont

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African

Ruth Finnegan on a Transdisciplinary Door to Multiplexity

H. C. Groenewald on “Zulu Oral Art”

Thomas Hale on the Context of Verbal Art

Beverly Stoeltje on Africa: Global and Local Import

“Oral Tradition”: Weasel Words or Transdisciplinary Door to Multiplexity?

Ruth Finnegan

“Oral tradition”—not a concept I’m really comfortable with, actually. It’s partly its sneaky connotations: “oral” as symbol of the primitive, the other, the marginal at the edge of the triumphant western dream; “tradition”/“traditional” too: opposed to modern/western/literate/individual/creative, implicitly highlighting transmission and the “old,” downplaying creativity, multiple agency, politics, inventiveness. Nowadays we query those once-obvious ethnocentric universalizing assumptions, of course, and instead explore the overlap and interpenetration of oral and written (their intermingling with other media too—music, dance, material displays, electronic options) and look not to essentialized divisions between “old” and “new” but to historical changes and multiplicities (to changing genres, to new media interacting with established themes, to contemporary forms not just “traditional” ones)—but the older connotations still keep sneaking through. “Oral tradition” isn’t very transparent as an analytical concept anyhow: “oral” with its ambiguity between “voiced” and (the potentially much wider) “non-written”; “tradition” as—what exactly? what’s ruled out? In the areas I’ve worked in (around issues to do with performance, oral/performed literature, narrative, popular culture—in Africa and comparatively) the term “oral tradition” hasn’t proved particularly illuminating as such and isn’t nowadays very widely used.

It has pragmatic uses, though. As in this journal, it has served to gather together questions of textuality, orality, voice, text, performance, verbal art in a way too often ignored elsewhere. It fills—and challenges—gaps left in the canons of many established academic disciplines. And its cross-cultural framework and synoptic wide-ranging vision, unfettered by discipline-imposed shibboleths, can take us constructively across language, text, literary analysis, genre, media studies, popular culture, performance, information technology, and

communication—in the process, paradoxically, transcending the separating marginalizations once implied in “oral tradition.”

Current growing points? Manifold, but linked above all, I’d say, to an increasing awareness of the multiplexities of human creativity. Not just the multiplicities of diverse viewpoints, genres, cultures, social situatedness, power relations, or historical specificities (all now rightly recognized themes in social and humanistic study), but more the move away from the narrowing ethnocentric models implied in the binarism of oral/literate into the amazing range of multifaceted spectrums that people actively and creatively draw on in their communication and expression. This brings insights into the many-sided interactions of co-participants/co-creators even within and during one “single” “performance”; into the multiplex processes humans are actively engaged in across the many dimensions of textualization, of exegesis, of “meta”-perspectives, of using language; and—currently closest to my own heart—into the multiple modes and media that are so often, in their multi-dimensional ways, bound in with that simple little term “oral.” When examining the actual practice and experience of a (so-called) “oral” performance, researchers now pay growing attention to how people are deploying not just “words” but a selection from that huge array of auditory, kinesic, visual, spatial, material, tactile, somatic, and olfactory resources that humans have creatively developed and put to their purposes. (For examples of this multiplexity, see the references below.)

The Open University

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Zulu Oral Art

H. C. Groenewald

Oral tradition? Verbal art? Traditional literature? Performance? The terms used for oral art in South Africa are almost just as varied as the art forms themselves. While these names represent the way academics view their subject matter, they also represent, to some degree, the state of the subject matter. The varied forms of oral tradition in South Africa span the whole spectrum from extinct and forgotten to emergent and unrecognized. The myriad of school textbooks for oral tradition present the subject with a bias toward genre and form, according to which Zulu oral tradition consists of wisdom lore (sayings, proverbs, riddles), poetry and song, and folktales. Contextualization does not occur often in these textbooks and does not serve as a criterion for setting up a typology for oral tradition. This is not entirely a bad idea since, on the one hand, some forms have become dormant so that there is no context to speak of, and on the other hand, certain forms can appear in almost any context. Yet context remains a powerful determinant for oral tradition. Taking context as the organizing principle, Zulu oral tradition appears as follows.

The names children get at birth or shortly thereafter speak volumes in African society. Names—also of animals—don't merely recall circumstances, they also serve as lifelong praise, encouragement, or even rebuke. Naming is one of the few ways a woman may rebuke a husband; likewise a husband may censure a wife through a child's name. The changed political context in South Africa has also been captured in the names of people. Concomitant with the infant phase are *imilolozelo* and *izilandelo*; the former refers to the lullabies a mother sings and the latter to word games children play. A mother may also compose a poem for her child that she uses to pacify her/him, but, more importantly, she may employ it to speak about her marital situation. Such praises are called *izangelo*. Herd boys in rural areas learn the conventions of praising as they complement the names of livestock with lines of praise. They may also amuse themselves with *imilozzi*, the formulas associated with a particular birdcall. Folktales (*izinganekwane*), often forced into the European

categories of myth, legend, and folktale in textbooks, were a popular evening pastime for children as mothers and grandmothers entertained and educated children while also weaving protest into the stories. Today, storytelling and publishing has become a profession for a few individuals.

While male initiation is not practiced in Zulu society, girls may celebrate *umemulo*, the coming of age ceremony. The ceremony generates much singing by groups of young men and girls, respectively. If the practice of using suitor's formulas (*izikhuzelo*) to win a girl over was a prominent feature of courtship in the past, wedding ceremonies remain a productive context for verbal art today. Songs and dancing praises (*izigiyo*) may in terms of their sheer quantity be the main forms of verbal art during these ceremonies, but *izithakazelo* (clan praises) may also take a central position because they perform a sacred role—to call on the ancestors to sanction the bringing of families together.

The adult phase, with its religious and political events as well as singing with modern musical instruments, has been the stimulus for new forms of verbal art in South Africa. Ceremonies during which different types of traditional healers graduate into their profession generate countless songs. Traditional healers also utter formulas as they divine with bones and by other means; they also utter praises for the bones. The Nazarite Church (*amaNazarethe*) is largely a Zulu phenomenon and can be described as a fusion of tradition and Christianity. The movement has generated its own style of singing as well as praising. The political context is probably the most vibrant as regards verbal art. Not a day passes without activists voicing their protests in political songs, sung mostly in Zulu. Political songs even echo through the halls of parliament. One of the most visible occasions for the practicing of praise poetry (*izibongo*) in Zulu is the annual Shaka Day celebrations, but this is by no means the only occasion where this most sophisticated form of Zulu verbal art is performed.

The appearance of the latest CD of Ladysmith Black Mambazo, who practice the *isicathamiya* music style, or of Phuzekhemisi (JZ Mnyandu), who practices the *maskandi* style employing praise poetry, often masks the fact that their songs still originate orally before being fixed on vinyl. Many other musical styles have followed and still follow the same pattern.

Apart from the discovery of new forms of oral tradition, scholarship has focused on issues of creative genius and the function of oral tradition. New developments in oral performance and new initiatives in research are inevitably linked to the democratization of South Africa. *Sangoma* (traditional healer) practices have always been vibrant with singing, healing rhetoric, praises, and suggestive names of medicines. Now these practices are finding their way into formerly “white” suburbs. Singing, whether in

various religious groups or in political and trade union forums, now obviously operates in a context of freedom. One result of this situation is that such performances have become increasingly commemorative and celebratory. The function of praise poetry has similarly expanded. The commercial music industry is creating new celebrities in music styles such as *maskandi*, *mbaqanga*, and *kwaito*, styles that have a traditional base, while the songs in these styles are often created orally. Despite prevailing poverty, numerous rites of passage take place all over South Africa. Rural people observe these rites not only to comply with belief and to solicit divine protection, but also to entertain themselves.

University of Johannesburg

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Oral Tradition in the Context of Verbal Art

Thomas Hale

The oral tradition is a field defined by what it is not—it is oral, not written. But the barrier between the two remains rather fluid and artificial. Certainly, there are contexts in which writing is excluded for historical or cultural reasons. But the examples of written influence on oral traditions and vice versa have led me to emphasize the larger picture of verbal art rather than focus entirely on the oral tradition.

For example, for a project on women's songs from the Sahel and Savanna region of West Africa, my co-principal investigator, Aissata Sidikou-Morton, and I, along with a team of 15 other researchers, are assembling a corpus of several hundred songs. The goal is to find out what women in these Islamic and patriarchal societies are saying in this medium.

Most of the songs are of oral origin. But there are traditions in Hassaniya Arabic from Mauretania and in Hausa from northern Nigeria where the barrier between written and oral is fuzzy. Sometimes a song starts out in oral form, is then written down, and is then reborn again later as a song, or vice versa. Songhay epics from Mali, Niger, and Benin were narrated originally in oral form, but we don't know to what extent the written chronicles from Timbuktu describing the same events helped to preserve the oral narrative tradition heard today. The long narrative by the fourteenth-century North African traveler Ibn Battuta started life as dictation to a scribe.

For me the itinerary of the text, written or oral, is more interesting than the form. Perhaps that is why I've been studying Middle Egyptian hieroglyphics for the last two years. The goal is to learn not only about the earliest African literature but also about the early songs sung by women in Africa.

New directions for the field depend on one's position. As someone coming from African literature, the most important products of the oral tradition have been the long narratives that we call epic. But we are learning that a shorter form such as the song constitutes a very powerful and often direct medium. It can serve as an outlet for people who do not otherwise

have a public voice. Song, of course, is a genre that is not new for people interested in the oral tradition, but it is novel for most of my more text-oriented colleagues in African literature.

The other new dimension is technical. We now are able to bring the page alive with visual and audio material. Two versions of *The Epic of Sundiata*—the film *Keita: L'Héritage du Griot*, which frames scenes from the story in a modern context, and the video or DVD dramatization of the same narrative in production by colleagues at Tufts University—will both help students to understand more clearly the vibrant nature of the oral tradition. The next step is to field record full versions of some of these epics and make them available with subtitles.

Pennsylvania State University

The Global and the Local with a Focus on Africa

Beverly Stoeltje

Among those characteristics shared by all human groups, language is ranked very high. When referring to the informal use of language, we often use the label “talk.” Through various genres and forms of talk, people share their interpretation of events and experiences, public and private. Each social/cultural group labels these varieties of talk with its own terms, but certainly narrative is one of the most prominent forms that occupies a position of great significance around the globe. By whatever individual names the forms are known, the full range of prose and poetry, when communicated primarily through oral performance for an audience familiar with the genre, constitutes a large body of oral tradition, whether the performance is in a face-to-face group, on the radio or television, recorded, or, today, posted on the internet as well. Of equal importance in the communicative repertoires of social life are events in which participants perform symbolic actions through the ritual genres, engaging in celebration, commemoration, transformation, dramatization, and other forms of enactment. In these culturally specific performances, groups of varying identities express their history, preoccupations, and aesthetics, including music, dance, drama, and culinary forms. Whether formal or informal, when the event is familiar because it is rooted in social life and people are free to make commentary, it may revitalize or criticize or reveal or transform the strengths and weaknesses within the group. These events also qualify as oral tradition because they provide the stage on which people can gather to enact the forms that express the shared and the familiar juxtaposed to the strange and exotic. Such performance events create, or sometimes destroy, social bonds because they reveal the significant features of the group and each person’s place within it through actions designed for participants to witness and interpret within the framework of knowledge familiar to them.

In studies of African oral traditions two topics have emerged as significant in recent years. The first concerns the interweaving of concepts and practices defined as traditional or indigenous with those originating in the paradigm of modernity, while the second identifies the relevance and the

power of gender and sexuality. Contemporary scholars, educators, and filmmakers have now recognized that African societies combine and interweave customary practices with innovations originating in the paradigm of modernity. It is not surprising, then, that systems of customary law coexist alongside the legal systems imported from the West and that of Islam, and individuals make use of the system best suited to their purposes. Equally familiar to fans in Africa and in the West, music from South Africa, Ghana, Morocco, and other locations integrates the rhythms and sounds from the African continent with those from other parts of the world.

More difficult to identify and comprehend are those situations in which gender and sexuality are central. Not limited to gender roles, concepts of female and male may serve as a metaphorical resource for categories of social organization not directly linked to gender. Closely linked to relations of power, whether or not they are apparent, expressions of gender and sexuality may be influential in social and political life, as when, for example, women collectively express political action with their bodies. In another development, over the past decade women's rights have been linked to human rights. An unfortunate schism has developed in some instances, placing those who argue for "customary practice" in opposition to the forces working for better conditions for women. The claims made under the guise of custom have often been shaped by years of contact with the West or with Islam, both of which have privileged males in African societies and ignored or denied the roles and powers of women. One of the most dynamic issues characterizing social life in contemporary African societies, this rupture distinguishing custom from modernity provides the focus for a wide range of political activity while at the same time other dynamics are integrating the traditional and the modern, as we see, for example, in the films of Sembene or television from South Africa.

Indiana University

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Tibetan and Chinese

Anne Klein on “Orality in Tibet”

Peace B. Lee on Chaoxianzu Oral Literature

Yang Enhong on “Tibetan Oral Epic”

Orality in Tibet

Anne Klein

Orality is a significant, multivalent element of Tibetan religious and cultural life. It is profoundly intertwined with the transmission of written texts, the performance of rituals, and esoteric learning.

Here I mention only three general categories from the very rich complex of oral practices. These pertain (1) to the teaching of texts, (2) to the pedagogical techniques of debate, and finally (3) to more esoteric understandings of what speech communicates in addition to literal meaning. Textual study is always accompanied by at least one, and often all three, of these oral processes, and by others as well.

1. Texts are not regarded self-explanatory units of information that can be digested outside the community of scholarly or ritual practices. The teacher's commentary is therefore a crucial element of textual reading. Oral scholarly traditions interpret, organize, compare, critique, expand upon, and make practical suggestions regarding the material in the text. Sometimes these oral discourses are themselves written down and become texts for further oral comment in a subsequent generation.

2. Tibetan pedagogy, as Georges Dreyfus has amply illustrated in his new book,¹ relies on a dialectic of commentary and debate. Debate itself involves a great deal of memorization and oral incantation of texts; debate is an interactive process in which students must defend philosophical positions in the in-your-face give and take of heated debates. These debates are the chief training ground for scholars in many Tibetan traditions; they are also a major spectator sport. Rhetorical strategies involve textual citation, the thrusting of unwanted consequences on the defender, and feinting through chess-like moves that suggest one line of thought when actually headed toward another.

¹ Despite the widely recognized significance of oral traditions in Tibet, relatively little has been written about them. However, a recent and very compelling analysis of oral debate, including its significance as a pedagogical tool and its juxtapositional logic, rhetoric, and dialects is the partly autobiographical account of Georges B. J. Dreyfus (2003), the first Westerner to become a Tibetan Geshe.

In all these ways, oral traditions are crucially involved in the training and performance of scholars. In some contexts however, spoken words transmit something other than erudite learning itself. We can consider two main examples of this phenomenon.

3. Certain sacred Sanskrit syllables, transcribed into Tibetan, are carriers of qualities important to scholars as well as practitioners. Debates, for example, typically begin with the incantation of the syllable *dhi*, considered the essential sound of Manjuśrī, personification of wisdom. In this way, the debater invokes the presence of divine wisdom before beginning to test the mettle of his own. Likewise, his study of the texts whose tenets he will probe dialectically would have been preceded by his receiving scriptural transmission, or *lung* on that text. *Lung* simply entails hearing the work read aloud by someone who has himself received *lung* on it. Such transmission is understood to facilitate connection to that text. Only afterward would the intellectual engagement begin.

Further, in the course of being consecrated into any tantric practice, one receives a consecrated *lung* of the *mantra*, literally “mind-protector,” which is understood to hold the central power of the practice itself. This must be received orally. Thus, the gate to textual learning opens through orality, texts are studied through oral performance, and the most esoteric of the practices they teach are essentialized in spoken sound.

In all these ways we might say that book learning, however elaborate, never becomes in Tibet a place apart from the living, spoken, and enchanting speech of those most closely allied with teaching and transmitting its texts.²

Rice University

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² For an introduction to epics and poetry, see Jackson 1996 and Samuel 1996. To my knowledge my work (Klein 1994) remains the most extensive overview of categories of orality in Tibet. Patrul 1994, full of teaching stories, lists, and advice for practitioners, is a famous example of a text that began as oral commentary.

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The Metamorphosing Field of Chaoxianzu Oral Literature

Peace B. Lee

The Chaoxianzu are ethnic Koreans who live in China as one of China's 55 ethnic minority groups.¹ Defining Chaoxianzu oral tradition is not a simple task. In characterizing oral literature, Chaoxianzu and Korean scholars place emphasis on the process and mechanics of oral transmission, with its vernacular origin, composition in performance, and artistic qualifications as important key features (Gang 2002, Gim 1999). However, oral performance practices in the field of oral traditions do not fully conform to that description. Chaoxianzu collector-scholars (such as Piao Changmo) are confronted with the dilemmas in which actual "oral" literary practices that exhibit influences from printed texts and/or other media conflict with academically construed oral literature.

In general, Chaoxianzu academic approaches to their oral traditions can be broadly categorized into three types. The first is the tradition of active collection and textualization of oral literatures by native investigators. Second are motif-indexes formulated by scholars (such as Jin Dongxun) and based on textualized oral literatures; these have supported various comparative studies between Chaoxianzu oral literatures and those of other Chinese ethnic groups. Third, in what is perhaps the most important category, Chaoxianzu scholars are experimenting with different approaches to develop a theoretical groundwork for their oral traditions. Chaoxianzu scholars are, from prior experience, aware of the danger in blindly following the theoretical approaches of the West, which cannot reflect the historical and social contexts of the indigenous traditions.

Within China, the scholarly study of Chaoxianzu oral literature is in a transitional phase, carefully testing and combining different theoretical and

¹ This article uses the romanization system current in South Korea, the Chinese Pinyin system (in the case of the Chinese word "Chaoxianzu"). In the case of some personal names, the individual author's own romanization preference is followed.

methodological approaches drawn from both domestic and Western origins. Scholars from different hemispheres have explored oral tradition-related fields during the past few decades. Jin Dongxun (Gim Donghun in Korean) and Piao Changmo (Bak Changmuk) have taken the lead in studying their own ethnic group's oral literature and culture. Piao Changmo's collection (Bak 1996) contains numerous stories that reflect Chaoxianzu characteristics and history. Park Heh-rah, a native South Korean scholar living in America, has examined the relationship between the nation-state narratives of the People's Republic of China and the Chaoxianzu narratives of their own history, and the influences of nation-state narratives on the subjectivism of Chaoxianzu (1996). Korean scholars of folklore and folklore-related fields, such as Im Jaehae and Gim In-hee, are helping to bridge the gap between the West and the Chaoxianzu oral literary field through analyzing Western approaches such as performance theory and actively engaging in fieldwork among Chinese minorities. Western scholars, such as Mark Bender, Vibeke Børdahl, and Louisa Schein have carried out fieldwork on local oral traditions in a number of areas in China. Although their research does not directly include Chaoxianzu oral traditions, their studies have contributed to facilitating a scholarly dialogue between China and the West.

As an "immigrant nationality," the Chaoxianzu are experiencing transformation at many levels of their society. Included in these changes is the shift in responsibility for acting as tradition-bearers from the immigrant generation to the younger generations of Chaoxianzu born in China. One of the many possible directions in the field of Chaoxianzu oral literature studies is to closely follow and examine the effects of social changes on Chaoxianzu oral literature. Other possible interesting future directions include an expansion of the above-mentioned comparative studies. Research in the images of "self" and "other" expressed in oral traditions within the Korean diaspora (including the unique perspective of North Korea) may provide a key to understanding and resolving the different political and historical agendas within Korean communities.

Ohio State University

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Tibetan Oral Epic

Yang Enhong

In the field of Tibetan oral epic studies there is concern over that fact that the tradition of *King Gesar*, which has been preserved among illiterate artists and audiences and handed down orally and aurally, has waned and could disappear from modern society. Like the Greek and Indian epics before it, *King Gesar* appears to be losing its status as a living oral tradition while being retained in written form. Oral tradition differs strongly from literary and artistic creation, serving as a dynamic repository for the wisdom belonging to an entire culture.

Because performers of *King Gesar* are gradually disappearing one by one, there is a pressing need for research among these singers. In Tibetan epic studies the types of areas being probed are as follows:

1. The best Tibetan *Gesar* performers, called divine singers, could recall the whole story, a feat requiring hundreds, even thousands, of hours. Because only a few singers are able to accomplish this feat, we would like to investigate this phenomenon from the perspectives of sociology, anthropology, oral-formulaic theory, and so on.

2. How could these singers learn such long versions of the story? Where and how did they acquire the whole story?

3. When the same episode is performed by a single artist, how does it change with respect to time, place, and various audiences?

*Institute of Ethnic Literature
Chinese Academy of Social Sciences*

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Lithuanian

Lina Bugiene on “Oral Tradition in Lithuania”

Jonas Zdanys on “Translating Lithuanian Poetry”

Oral Tradition in Lithuania

Lina Bugiene

Here in Lithuania, it would be difficult to separate the idea of what is oral tradition, which is most commonly understood as folklore (in the sense of German *Volkskunde*), from its studies and research. Throughout history the role of orally transmitted folklore in our country has been especially prominent. Folklore was regarded as a unique expression of the “national soul,” and allotted special importance during the national liberation movements that were taking place in Lithuania not only in the wake of German Romanticism at the end of the nineteenth century, but also in the second half of the twentieth century. The folk singing tradition was considered especially essential for (and by) the Lithuanians; for example, the national liberation movement “Sajudis” promoted the so-called “singing revolution,” which dovetailed with Gorbachov’s Perestroika.

That is why, probably, the scholarly ideas of what is (or should be considered) oral tradition stayed petrified along the lines inherited from Romanticism—much longer than they should have, anyway. The criteria of authenticity, archaism, and ethical and aesthetic values were crucial in determining whether a particular fragment of folklore was to receive scholarly attention, that is, whether it would be recorded, archived, studied, and published. Striving to search out and rescue the folk treasures, which were conceived as disappearing or dying out, was imperative for the major part of the fieldwork conducted up to the very end of the twentieth century—perhaps understandable for a people accustomed to being on the verge of extinction for centuries, but that’s another question. Moreover, this quest for archaism defined to a considerable extent the folk’s ideas about their own traditions, and the content of those traditions as well.

Yet from the 1990’s onward the situation has been visibly altering. First, the elderly people from the countryside are no longer considered the prime sources of oral folk tradition. Other social and age groups, different folklore “genres,” the role of folklore in everyday situations, and transformations and paraphrases of the tradition have also become the focus

of students and researchers, who in turn have been influenced by modern methodological and theoretical trends penetrating from abroad.

With society and people's lives becoming more "open," and with the spread of mass media, the conditions for the existence of folklore are changing rapidly, causing some traditional genres to sink into oblivion and others to change and adapt to the present situation. For example, the once-popular folk legends telling of supernatural beings such as devils, witches, mythical animals, and nature spirits are being replaced by stories about inhabiting ghosts, UFOs, or just some vague unidentified forces. In addition, all kinds of anti-legends and anti-proverbs are devised and gain popularity. Of course, all these changes did not occur during the last decade; they certainly took longer to "ferment." Yet with scholarly attention suddenly focused on them, it all looks like a breakthrough.

In short, the most monumental change in the field related to folklore in Lithuania could be defined as "modernization" of the core idea of folklore. This fundamental concept has ceased to be envisaged as something very ancient, inherited from our forefathers, and consequently perhaps a little boring for the young, and is turning into a living and evolving thing, created here and now.

Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore

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Translating Lithuanian Poetry

Jonas Zdanys

Translators of Lithuanian poetry hear the resonances of the ancient *dainos* as we work to re-create in the new language the music, images, and metaphorical themes of the old. The *dainos*—literally translated, “songs”—are the earliest incarnation of the Lithuanian lyric tradition, folk poetry of prehistoric origin that celebrates the drama and cycles of daily life. Filled with mythological elements and an integral part of Lithuania’s pagan mythology, dominant in that country until well into the sixteenth century, the *dainos* focus on family and community and endow the manifestations of nature—of which family and community are part—with an active divinity believed to influence all aspects of animal, plant, and human existence.

That oral tradition has been the shaping influence on the country’s written poetry. Though written poetry in Lithuania has had many articulations—encompassing symbolist, romantic, avant-garde, literary expressionist, formalist, and neo-romantic strands—at its core it echoes with the deepest yearnings and expressions of the *dainos*, sustaining a firm sense of organic unity with the world, deep feeling for the authority and consequence of the earth’s simple things, and marked spiritualization of depicted objects.

Translators of Lithuanian poetry face the question of how to work with those echoes, with the strong undercurrents of an ancient lyric structure and thematic impulse of the original text; how to convey what is a subtextual but powerful sense of culture and place; and how to make vivid in the new language the evocative mythologies of the old. Translators also face the fact that the voice of the *dainos*, though certainly given life by both women and men, is distinctly feminine in orientation.

These concerns are continuing sources of aesthetic experimentation and triggers of linguistic and literary revision by translators. They became especially clear for me as I worked on *Five Lithuanian Women Poets*, my translation of poems by Lithuania’s leading contemporary women poets. There were special pleasures in working on those poems and rendering them in English, especially because I had committed to make a space for the bold

maturity of voice and vision of those poets, to allow the confidence and verve of their most recent work to come through at their most urgent and immediate. While I have translated many individual women poets before, my work on the book was the first time I had taken on a focused project of such sort and scope. One of the principal matters I came to terms with in that effort was learning something of how that feminine voice might be rendered authentically through the vehicle of a male sensibility. I was challenged, there, by the tensions of differing worldviews and by a fundamental appreciation of how men and women poets and translators see and render the world differently—through variegated image and metaphorical run—even when working in the same language. Understanding elements of content and form and how they work separately and together in a poem was essential to re-creating those women’s voices. This was a challenge, too, because English is a language and a poetic tradition much farther removed from its oral roots than Lithuanian.

Capturing and sustaining the resonances of the *dainos* in my finished versions was a fundamental goal. This entailed understanding the role, both stated and implied, of the old and deep roots of modern Lithuanian poetry and working to incorporate the expectations and special flavors of that oral tradition into the new, translated text. The reward of fulfilling the task, I think, is a deep and satisfying understanding of how poetry shaped by an oral tradition rings, at its core, with a telling and definitive humanity. Questions about how to meet those challenges most fully, how to convey that sense of the deeply human, render the resonant feminine voice, and convey and invigorate the old mythologies remain, for all of us who translate Lithuanian poetry, the core of our continuing aesthetic and structural explorations in the work.

Connecticut Department of Higher Education

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For a rich selection of Lithuanian poetry in translation on the web, please visit www.efn.org/valdas/poezija.html. Systematic studies of Lithuania's oral tradition are undertaken by the Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore in Vilnius, especially by the Institute's Department of Folklore and its Department of Oral Folklore. The Institute may be accessed on the web at www.liti.lt/en/defaulten.htm.

Comparative

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The Perspective from Folklore Studies

Pertti Anttonen

Coming from the field of folklore studies, I understand by oral tradition the oral transmission and communication of knowledge, conceptions, beliefs, and ideas, and especially the formalization and formulation of these into reports, practices, and representations that foreground elements that favor their replication. The formalized verbal products of oral tradition range from lengthy epic poems, songs, chants, and narratives to proverbs, slogans, and idiomatic phrases, coinciding thus with the conventional categories of folklore. Yet, instead of confining the concept to the genres of folklore only, I would prefer seeing oral tradition as a conceptual entrance point into the observation, study, and theorization of the transmission and argumentation of ideas, beliefs, and practices, including the construction of various political mythologies in the organization and symbolic representation of social groups.

As formalized texts, oral tradition calls for the study of poetic patterning, structure, and intertextuality. As performance, oral tradition calls for the study of cognitive conceptualization and modeling, memorization, and variation. As argumentation, oral tradition calls for the study of social function, meaning, identity construction, construction of history and mythology, claims of ownership, and the politics of representation. As tradition, oral tradition calls for the study of transmission, replication and copying, and de- and recontextualization. I find all of these approaches fundamentally important and mutually complementary. If there is a new direction to be taken that would further complement them, I think it should concern the concept of tradition itself, which has tended to be used as an explanation, instead of being that which is explained. Although I understand that interest in oral tradition usually means interest in the specimens of oral tradition, the scholarly study of oral tradition cannot do without analytical

reflection on the theories of tradition and traditionality that are applied in the selection, construction, and representation of such specimens.

*University of Helsinki,
Institute for Cultural Research*

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Stumbling with/over Scripts: Vignettes

Daniel Avorgbedor

Isn't it doubly stimulating to read about "oral tradition" and "orality" by entrusting it to the print medium? Acts associated with media of communication surely reflect the ontological status of the *verbum*: plural voices, pluralistic voicing, and the inevitable symbiosis of routes and genres. Yes, this is the primary constitution of the "oral," no matter in which specific (?) discipline we locate or discourse it.

Ethnomusicology, my primary field of specialization, has long claimed "the study of music of oral tradition" for itself by ignoring "others." Well, as scholarship and the production of knowledge in various spheres of life have intensified and diversified, we are constantly reinventing ourselves, tongues, and the field of ethnomusicology. In my high school days, I learned the songs of the Beatles and Temptations mainly through their sheet music, the printed matter (and also through "afternoon jumps" or dance sessions). In actual fact, some girlfriends brought the scores to me to play on the piano for their enjoyment. In our field methods and techniques, we (that is, investigator, informant, objects/subjects of the study) probe and respond, employing the primordial oral means. A few of us are preoccupied with the study of "new art music" by Chinese, Japanese, Australian, Korean, African, and African-American composers; not so much because of the perforce and persistence of orality, but because the boundaries, materials, tools, and hypotheses of the contemporary ethnomusicologist are resilient and voluptuous. The glare and lure of the oral are now often overshadowed by the multivocal nature of the objects of study, and by the increased momentum of the production of knowledge (and quality, of course) on what were formerly assumed to be predominantly oral musical traditions.

O.K., let's agree for a while that the music culture of the Anlo-Ewe, for example, is predominantly oral. To what extent can we apply the old canons about oral traditions? My father was the "bookkeeper" for his performing and social groups. He had attended adult (night) education classes in his late youth and could read and write in his local language. He wrote and read records of defaulters, etc. Then there was his close friend,

simply known as “Teacher” because he had served as tutor for some of the “night” classes. But Teacher is a man of oral tradition, par excellence, and he worked hard to foster the cultivation of Anlo-Ewe music and dance. He also made important contributions by keeping song *incipits* (that is, writing down first lines of the group songs ever learned in the oral mode. Only on rare occasions he would bring out his scripts and quote a few headings, just to remind the song leader, during performances.

In my study of the proscribed performance genre known as *haló* (1994), the privileges of literacy were usually co-opted to challenge, chastise, demean, and outperform an opponent group. Such privileges were carefully encoded in scripted statements on company or group banners that were displayed as additional visual and “oral” stimulators. The tradition of *reading* readable banners and scripted satire continues to be a central feature of contemporary rural and urban Anlo-Ewe musical traditions (Avorgbedor 1998).

Of memory and continuities: Well, my grandfather was a town elder who kept vital town records. He did not read or write, but was able to do two things: *read* his old, key-wound clock through his visual identification and association with the chimes and the positions of the clock arms. He was able to read his own name off not just any envelope addressed to him but that one from his son, in particular. (His son, my uncle, has nice handwriting, and the high frequency of the communication between the two allowed his father to develop *automatic reading*.) So, when a seasonal ritual had to be performed for Mamaya, one of the town spirit guardians, my father brought from my grandfather’s vaults a half-worn-out manuscript in which my dad had recorded, in fountain pen and ink, details and procedures for the ritual. This one time my dad read out the manuscript to the gathering, who listened attentively. There were a few times he stumbled and fumbled, mainly because of the age of writing, and also due to the fact he was beginning to forget some of his night-class lessons or skills. Of course, this recourse to the readable carries many implications and reflects particular tendencies and needs associated with predominantly oral and postcolonial cultures in transition.

These events or anecdotes related here took place between 1955 and 1967. Today more Anlo-Ewe individuals can read and write, but the quality of their participation in the “music of oral tradition” has less to do with literacy levels than with new socioeconomic opportunities. The levels, frequency, and significance of the print medium or writing have not really changed much in regard to the constitution, identification, and experiences of the Anlo-Ewe “music and dance of oral tradition.” Such random notes and anecdotes do tell us not only about the conditions of the performative

(which is always being redefined), but also the actors, investigators, our audiences, and how we negotiate what is relevant or advantageous in our research enterprises in ethnomusicology and related disciplines, as far as “. . . of oral tradition” is concerned.

Ohio State University

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Some Reflections on the “Poetry Slam of Radivoje Ilić”: Thoughts on the Interplay of the Oral and Visual

Joel M. Halpern

As a retired academic anthropologist, I recently have spent much time trying to put together some archival fragments of my professional life. In this connection I came across some dozen photos taken in the village of Orašac, Serbia. My wife, Barbara Kerewsky Halpern, a linguistic and medical anthropologist, and I, a sociocultural anthropologist, have spent approximately fifty years studying this community, beginning in 1953.

Our last visit was about ten years ago. This particular series of photographs was taken in 1975, at which time we shared our researches with John Foley. The photographs were of a *guslar* or oral bard, Radivoje Ilić, in which he, by means of a series of graphic gestures, was proceeding to explain his role in conveying the traditions of the oral epics.

There is now a very considerable literature on this topic thanks to the generations-long efforts of Milman Parry and his successor at Harvard, Albert Lord. These names are well-known to the readers of this journal, not least through the publications of John Foley. There is thus little need for me to expand on their research here. But what struck me in reviewing these photos, now more than a quarter of a century old, is the way they pace the oral recitation—just as, in a similar way, the Poetry Slam photos on the Oral Tradition Web site (www.oraltradition.org) pace these more recent recitations.

To say that the spoken word goes with the visual image is merely to remark on what has been most obvious during the century that we have had motion pictures and, before that, still photographs (now approaching two centuries). But there is, of course, a grammar to the moving image and even to the analysis of the still photograph just as there is a linguistic order to the recitation, preserved in the edited texts. But going from these obvious coexistences to the complex ways in which oral tradition is communicated not only through the spoken word but through the visual image, the gesture, can be a most complex matter. Still photographs, of course, freeze the moment while film or video introduces movement. I would hope that in the

future we can place more emphasis on these interrelationships between the visual and the oral. In doing so we need, of course, to pay close attention to the audience as well as the performer. The audience is sometimes part of the performance, but they are also, especially with traditional oral bards, quiet and receptive and this can be seen on their faces.

A favorite photo of mine, derived from my fieldwork and which I placed on the cover of one of my books, depicts a grandson listening entranced to his grandfather, the *guslar*, reciting an oral epic. In my view, the two merge into one in this photo. Unfortunately, this once-key bond has now been severed in too many cultural settings. But hopefully the student of oral tradition can also become a kind of archeologist by reconstructing what once was with a composite strategy—not only by listening to old recordings but also by carefully examining those photos, drawings, and paintings that still exist. I hope that the interrelationship between them may interest future researchers.

University of Massachusetts-Amherst

Continual Morphing

Lee Haring

In the cultures of the Southwest Indian Ocean, oral tradition is carried on by all groups but acknowledged by only some. For example, in Mauritius, the Franco-Mauritians, descendants of colonists living unto themselves on the sugar estates, imagine themselves to have no identifiable oral tradition, attributing it instead to the descendants of African and Malagasy slaves (referred to in the census as the “General Population”). Traditions of these people, called Kreol, are part of a common stock shared among their counterparts in Seychelles, Réunion, Madagascar, and even the Comoros (see Haring 2002). Where cultural policy encourages the writing of oral narratives in Kreol, as in Seychelles, the boundary between oral and non-oral is really a territory where oral and written are fighting it out (as the Russian critic M. M. Bakhtin said in a different context). In those islands, oral tradition studies are dormant. The most interesting new direction is the growth of writing in Kreol (and Malagasy too, in Madagascar). Folktales in the islands characteristically are mixtures; nowadays, their overlapping channels of communication are mixtures too. So oral tradition studies will become, instead, studies of boundary-crossing, channel-switching, and code-switching, to descry the manufacturing of traditions.

Moving among these mixtures, the oral will still be privileged. “Readers always want—it’s a Romantic preoccupation, never existed before the nineteenth century—authenticity. They somehow believe that if someone signs a text, that text was secreted by that body” (Serge Gavronsky, interviewed in Wechsler 1998:83). Seekers of the oral have a similar belief. For them, orality is the mark of authenticity. They believe that if someone has spoken a text, it has Benjamin’s aura, the “presence in time and space,” the “unique existence” of the poem or epic (Benjamin 1968:220). Yet “oral” is a crude word for the channel through which communication occurs. Performance-oriented observers must attend not only to a physical medium, but also to psychological elements, such as rapport or self-presentation, to sociolinguistic rules restricting communication, and to the continual circulation of money, people, technology, information, ideologies, and

images around the world (see Appadurai 1990). The world we imagine ourselves to remember as “oral tradition” undergoes continual morphing.

Brooklyn College

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Frame Tales and Oral Tradition

Bonnie D. Irwin

Frame tales, medieval literary works in which characters become narrators by telling stories of their own, owe a great debt to oral tradition and transmission. Oral tradition provides much of the raw material for these texts, while at the same time providing medieval audiences and modern readers cues for understanding them. Frame tales depict oral storytelling events in such a way as to give modern scholars some hint of how they might have taken place. *The Thousand Nights and a Night* portrays an intimate storytelling event between husband and wife; the *Decameron* shows how people use stories to entertain and to forget life's tragedies, and the *Canterbury Tales* depicts how people tell stories to pass the time. Thus influence flows both ways, in and out of the frame, from and toward an understanding of medieval orality in Europe and western Asia.

In this context, oral narrative tradition means the process by which stories are composed and performed for an audience. In a frame tale, the writer creates an audience in the text, providing a bridge between actual oral storytelling traditions and a literate genre that aims to depict those traditions. Moreover, framing structures also underlie manuscript versions of epics and ballads, leading one to believe that composers of frame tales borrowed more than just the concept of storytelling traditions from the oral performance culture. Many of the stories these fictional characters choose to tell are traditional stories, appearing in many different cultures and contexts. Medieval oral performers themselves may have constructed frames to unify their performances. The stories, structures, and performance contexts in frame tales all emanate from medieval orality.

Because frame tales in their manuscript form are clearly the work of literate traditions as well, the achievement of oral tradition scholars most important to their study was the dismantling of the chimera of the "great divide" between orality and literacy. The idea of a free flow of influence between voice and text, performance and presentation, establishes a basis from which a modern audience can read and interpret frame tales. The energy created by the interchange among oralities and literacies may also

explain in part why frame tales were particularly popular in the medieval period and began to fade not long afterward. Frame tales thrived in this particular verbal environment, but later ceded their position to the novel as verbal artistry became more and more literary. Oral tradition studies enable scholars to escape the endless search for intertextual routes for the transmission of medieval tales and concentrate more on what those tales might mean. By focusing on performance and culture, we may approach frame tales and the tales interpolated within them in such a way as to understand what they might have meant to medieval audiences. Manuscripts provide us with the traces of the past; oral tradition studies bring those traces to life.

Eastern Illinois University

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Oral Poetry in the Foreign Language Classroom

Catharine Mason

So much of foreign language study has been based on a strictly semantic approach to language. A mastery of the basic building blocks of language—phonemes, words, phrases, clauses—is indeed dependent upon an understanding of dictionary definitions, grammar rules, and syntactic formulas. It is hardly my intention to argue that these lessons are not essential to foreign language study. Rather, I will seek to show that this semantic-oriented view and practice of language must be accompanied with a more pragmatic approach that includes performance criteria in verbal expression. Much of the theoretical, or rather methodological, groundwork for this approach has been laid down by Dell Hymes, especially in his seminal study of ethnopoetics entitled *In Vain I Tried to Tell You* (1981). Hymes's interpretation of performance competence allows us to better identify forms of expression as well as performers themselves whom a given community will consider competent. His notion of "breakthrough into performance" opens up the study of verbal art as a full-fledged event, as opposed to a series of sounds and phrases that are to be captured on a page that is studied as an end in itself. Finally, his method of verse analysis provides practical guidelines for making oral texts accessible to scholars of all sorts.

In my classroom we begin with an audio or an audio-visual text that has already been analyzed for its verse form and stylistic features. At the outset of an initial observation of the performance, we discuss sound patterns, rhythm, intonations, vocal textures, and any sign of meaning that may be gleaned from the musicality of the text. Unusual pronunciation patterns are explained in the oral reconstruction of the text, and we listen to/watch the performance again. This second listening allows for a certain satisfaction on the part of the students as they reinforce their initial "intuitions" and discover the learned forms (grammatical, phonetic, rhetorical, and others). Lastly, a written transcription of the text is provided and a more thorough stylistic analysis is undertaken. Reading the text

allows us to match up sounds that have been difficult to decipher with semantic references that students may or may not be familiar with.

If all goes well, the students are now in a position to encounter the performance as poetry. After a third and final observation of the performance, they often ask questions about the cultural dimensions of the poet's way of speaking and begin to get a feel for the performance arena as it is reconstructed in class discussion. They are asked to give their opinion on the text, to identify the aesthetic qualities of the performance. Simply put, why do they like it? And they always do!

The study of oral poetry is indeed very gratifying for both teacher and student. The poetic function, as a universal category, is accessible to interlocutors using a foreign language, and a study of this function facilitates immediate comprehension as well as a more profound appreciation of the culture with which the language is connected. The use of videotaped performance is not at all the same as a firsthand experience of such an event, but it provides an intimate and stimulating encounter with an individual who is both master of the language being studied and a creative speaker. The discovery of oral poetic form requires attentive observation that enhances comprehension and crosscultural efforts, two key objectives of foreign language study. Both teacher and student become audience members, and interpretation becomes a collaborative effort as opposed to a one-way form of instruction.

Université de Caen

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Oral History

Amy Shuman

Straddling the fields of oral literature and historical documentation, oral history focuses on ordinary and momentous social events. Oral historians confront issues concerning both the validity of oral transmission as history and the responsibility toward their informants. The field also encompasses advocacy-based approaches developed by organizations such as *The U.S. Work Progress Administration Federal Writers' Project*. Initiated in 1935, this project collected oral testimonies, life stories, and folklore of ordinary people.

Oral history projects often are designed to collect the stories not told in official historical documents, and the distinction between official and marginalized stories drives at least some of the work. Thus, some oral history studies have an explicit social change agenda. Oral historians rarely remain neutral regarding their relationships with the people they study and the possible uses of their work.

Michael Frisch (1990) proposes the idea of “shared authority” to address the question of the relationship between the historian and the person interviewed. Oral historians view the practice of making histories as a craft shaped by cultural and political conventions. Frisch describes a continuum with individual authorities at one end and communal collective memories at the other. Oral historians both document events and create records of how events are conceptualized, represented, and interpreted by the people who experience and observe them. They are committed to the complex, often seemingly contradictory nature of events on the ground (see, e.g., Portelli 1991).

As the field of narrative research has proliferated, infiltrating humanities and social science disciplines such as literature, rhetoric, women's studies, anthropology, and even medicine and law, problems in the world are increasingly described through the lens of personal trauma stories. The documentation of the stories of disenfranchised and traumatized groups and individuals results in the encounter between politics and history. At issue is whether the circulation of these stories assists the individuals

involved in healing, in changing their status, or in creating social change. If the increasing circulation of such narratives only confirms the marginal social status of the narrators rather than creating individual or social change, then all that has been accomplished is an act of display that further distresses the already tormented.

Some answers that oral history scholars suggest are “shared authority” (Frisch 1990); “reflexivity,” a merging of the subject and object of research (Myerhoff 1992); or “conversational narrative” jointly created by the interviewer and interviewee (Grele 1994). What differentiates oral history research from other narrative trauma research is that oral history often begins with the premise that the research itself presents a potential conflict over interpretation. While oral history is not the only field to acknowledge that research relations are social power relations, it addresses the crisis of interpretation rather than the crisis of representation. Oral historians, drawing on their advocacy-based research inheritance, continue to assess the human consequences of their work.

Ohio State University

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A Plea for an Interdisciplinary Approach to the Study of Arab Oral Tradition

Saad A. Sawayan

In reviewing the history of scholarship in the field of oral literature, we find that the theory of oral-formulaic composition and performance is one of its most outstanding landmarks. The application of this theory in its traditional conception as proposed by Milman Parry and enunciated by Albert Lord is rather sterile and restricted, however, in that it applies only to the poetic genre looked at strictly from a formal literary perspective. It is a surface-structure-oriented theory with very meager intellectual yield, not to mention being prone to gross misapplication. Examples of such limited approaches and misapplications are the works of James Monroe (1972) and Michael Zwettler (1978) on the tribal poetry of Pre-Islamic Arabia.

Jack Goody, Eric A. Havelock, Walter Ong, and others have tried to broaden the anthropological and psychological implications of the theory to include not only an oral mode of composition but also an oral mode of thinking and the processes of oral discourse in general. The discussions since then have shifted to focus on the oral stage versus the writing stage of Culture and what effects the introduction of script has on the individual and on the society as a whole. The emphasis now is on the examination of the structure and working of human memory and cognition and the means through which oral societies store, organize, and retrieve knowledge, pass on their traditions, and maintain cultural continuity through successive generations. What started as an insular theory of textual criticism is now turning into an interdisciplinary enterprise. The scholarship of oral literature has crossed academic boundaries to straddle many disciplines, ranging from aesthetics to linguistics to communication to psychology to anthropology to folklore, and many more. This broadening of the academic base has been very fruitful in bolstering the theories and methods of the field. Yet there is another direction that the field needs to reach out toward and investigate more thoroughly, namely the connectedness of literature to the rest of culture in oral societies.

It was Karl Polanyi (1944, 1959) who first pointed out that in pre-market societies, the economy is embedded in other social institutions and, hence, cannot be analyzed as a separate realm. Organizations carrying out production are dependent on and derived from other sets of social relations. Productive units are undifferentiated and tend to be multipurposed, so that economic behavior is not its sole or governing purpose but just one aspect of its total activity. Therefore, in studying traditional economies it is vital to examine the non-economic aspects, such as kinship system, ethnic composition, religious ideology, political organization, and other social forces.

This is what anthropologists call the holistic approach, which can be fruitfully applied in the study of small-scale traditional and so-called “primitive” societies. It is these kinds of societies where specialists in oral literature usually do their research. Specialists such as Havelock and Ong keep alluding constantly to the encyclopedic nature of oral literature, a fact realized by the ancient Arab philologists who called Pre-Islamic poetry “the register of the Arabs,” meaning that it contains information on their history, genealogy, world view, cultural values, and entire way of life. In other words, oral literature, like the economy, is embedded and enmeshed with the rest of culture in traditional societies. Therefore, literary criticism and exegesis turn out to be not just linguistic and literary, but mainly ethnographic. Literary studies and ethnographic studies merge and intersect in this case.

Studies by Wallace L. Chafe (1982) and David R. Olson (1977) have stressed that use of language associated with literacy is “autonomous” in that meaning is in the text: whatever is needed for comprehension is included in the words of the text, which can carry meaning all by themselves. In contrast, the use of language associated with orality is “nonautonomous” in that meaning is in the context, in the simultaneous transmission of information over paralinguistic, gestural, postural, tonal, and other channels, as well as the contribution of background information on the part of the hearer. This is because speakers and writers have different relations to their respective audiences, the former detached and the latter involved. The same thing can be said about oral literature. Just as we can hardly comprehend a conversation outside its situational context, so we cannot understand or appreciate an oral literary piece devoid of its cultural context. In studying the total cultural ambience of an oral literary text, we come to understand fully not only its content and meaning, denotative and connotative, but also its function, which is usually not strictly artistic and aesthetic, as is the case in the literary texts of script cultures. For example, a speech by Pericles is not intended to be strictly a literary piece; the aesthetic merits of the speech

are not meant to stand alone, but rather to enhance its public functions. A poem composed by a Bedouin chief is not just a poem. It would be considered frivolous and unbecoming for a respectable chief to compose a poem just for its own sake. It has to have a dignified purpose and serious intent—to defend a case, lay a claim, exhort to action, declare war, celebrate a victory, sue for peace, and so forth. Oral literature is, in a sense, like crude oil in that there are so many derivatives you can extract from it, but only if you have good refineries; in the present instances this means sound methodology and a sophisticated theoretical orientation. If you do not enjoy oral tradition as art, you can treat it, for example, as a linguistic corpus or, à la Jan Vansina (1965), as a historical document reflecting or refracting social facts.

There are good examples of the application of this holistic approach in the works of Lila Abu-Lughod (1986), Steven Caton (1990), Saad Sowayan (1992), and Marcel Kurpershoek (1994, 1995, 1999, 2002) on oral tribal poetry in the Arab World. In these works we find linguistic, aesthetic, ethnographic, psychological, sociological, and historical analyses blended together to illuminate the true significance of the poetic texts and to determine their proper place and function in the intricate web of the total culture. Such a multidimensional and eclectic approach is not meant to play down the aesthetic values of oral literature but rather to highlight them against the whole cultural milieu. The object is to look at oral literature from a wider perspective and to treat it with the seriousness it deserves as a potent social, political, and ideological force in traditional societies.

King Saud University, Riyadh

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“Oral Tradition” in a Technologically Advanced World

Timothy R. Tangherlini

In the field of folklore, the study of “oral tradition” cannot be an either/or proposition. Rather, the responsible study of oral tradition recognizes the interdependence of both of these concepts: while “oral” clearly modifies “tradition,” there is an equally important coloring of “oral” by “tradition.”

“Oral” indicates both speech and reception, and implies face-to-face interaction. With its coloration by “tradition,” “oral” also indicates a degree of informality. It does not refer to scripted expression, but rather unscripted expression, marked by improvisation and characterized by variation. Although it is tempting to use Woody Allen’s desultory characterization of “tradition” as “the illusion of permanence” (1997), it is more worthwhile to view tradition as process—a clear expression on the part of tradition participants of a “will to permanence.” Tradition exists wherever the members of a group intend, either explicitly or implicitly, for their oral expression(s) to persist. This acknowledgement of a “will to permanence” (rather than alleged permanence or age) shifts the focus onto the emergent nature of oral tradition in performance, and aligns well with significant advances in oral tradition studies (Lord 1960; Hymes 1975; Bauman 1977).

There are several key research areas that need to be explored in the coming years. One of the great advantages presaged by the information technology boom is an ever-increasing access to properly encoded digital archives and texts. Working in a digitized realm allows one to answer broad questions concerning such things as vocabulary, language usage, and repetition in a manner far more sophisticated than before. One can more fully engage a type of ethnophilology in which lost voices hidden in the archive or in early texts can be recovered, and one can ask questions that seemed impossible to answer or even pursue before. These textual and archival tools have great promise: they will help us identify the contours of oral tradition in older texts, they will help us discern previously unrecognized patterns in the archives, and they will help us shape new research questions. The digital archive will also move us away from a

primarily text-based environment to one that incorporates the aural and visual components of traditional performance by storing sound and video recordings.

We need to explore more fully the relationship between “oral tradition,” “place,” and historical processes. “Oral tradition” must be considered within the context of political developments—including colonialism, the postcolonial world, the impact of globalization, and the emergent hybridities that mark the traditions of diasporic populations. We must also explore the manner in which people use oral tradition to reshape their physical and social environments (Bhabha 1994; de Certeau 1985). Moving toward this new “historic-geographic” method is an important and necessary endeavor.

Finally, exciting developments in the field of neurology present an intriguing locus for the type of transdisciplinary work that will mark the future academy (Rubin 1995; Bookheimer 2002). How does storytelling map in the brain compared to conversation? Are there differences in the functional MRI of an epic singer and an audience member as they hear or remember a scene? Does a person who becomes an active tradition participant early on in life have a different method of physically storing “tradition” in the brain than other language functions?

University of California-Los Angeles

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Oral Tradition and Folkloristics

Ülo Valk

For a folklorist it is difficult to think about oral tradition other than through the perspectives provided by our discipline. It is oral communication that links people into those small groups who create and re-create folklore, while reading is a solitary activity. Walter Ong has shown how literacy has penetrated our oral discourses, but it is also possible to see elements of orality in written texts (1982). A folklore performance that has been transformed into an archival unit still remains a manifestation of oral tradition. The main problem in reading these texts lies in our ability to discern them as a part of the tradition, which remains invisible. Oral tradition always implies going beyond the borders of individual creation and single performances; it means relying upon the words that have already been spoken and on a dialogical relationship, as noted by Mikhail Bakhtin (1986). Our object of research is not the text as a singular unit but its relationships with the rich phenomena beyond its written form, such as the generic, situational, cultural, and performative contexts. If we are able to perceive and study these contexts, we can also comprehend the textual meanings that are not explicit at first glance. Text is a gateway into these realms, ruled by tradition.

There are certain key concepts in folkloristics that mark it as a distinctive, autonomous scholarly discourse, such as “tradition,” “group,” “variant,” “type,” and so on. I find it better not to fossilize them in international folkloristics as technical terms but to reconsider them time and again, that is, to maintain the discussion rather than establish normative definitions. One of the last great projects of the late Lauri Honko was to re-interpret the concept of “variant,” which led to shifts in theory, to “organic variation” as opposed to “phenomenological variation,” to mental text and textualization, to the corpuses of thick materials that are created through “collecting of the repertoires of one or several informants in one community” (2000:15-16). Such endeavors to revitalize traditional concepts are essential for world folkloristics.

“Genre” is another fundamental issue in folkloristics, both as a medium of oral communication and a key to understand its past and present forms. A crucial step has been made from genre as a tool of archival classification to understanding it as a form of artistic expression and of verbalization of a special worldview or a modality of verbal thinking. Just as “text” has led to discussing the matters of “textualization,” the same processual understanding leads us to see “genrification” as a certain kind of activity. There is a shift from taking “genre” as a noun towards understanding it as a verb.

Finally, I mention two more remarkable developments in folkloristics. Intertextual approaches are in full harmony with other attempts to escape the search for origins and basic structures as the building blocks of a stable but illusory knowledge in our field (Tarkka 1993). Intertextuality and the dialogical principle of Bakhtin open up undiscovered domains of meaning in oral traditions. Secondly, we need critical analyses of the history of folkloristics, such as those by Regina Bendix (1997) and Diarmuid Ó Giolláin (2000). Their works help us understand how the traditions of folkloristics have been created. Similarly to psychoanalysis, the process of deconstruction can be painful but it illuminates the past and liberates our minds in order to proceed.

University of Tartu, Estonia

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Basque *Bertsolaritza*

Linda White

What is oral tradition within Basque literature?

Prior to 1879, only 102 books were produced in Euskara and only four of those were literary (Lasagabaster 1990:2), as opposed to treatises on the language, sermons, and so forth, so in essence written Basque literature is a twentieth-century phenomenon. The forms of oral literature were abundant prior to the emergence of the written forms, and the art of the *bertsolari* (“Basque troubadour”) formed the basis for much of the early written poetry. *Bertso paperak* (“paper verses”) were printed with the name of the melody to which they should be sung, for example. The Spanish Constitution of 1978 gave Euskara and other minority languages of Spain equal status with Spanish within their respective regions. That development was a boon to the language as a whole and generated a renaissance in the oral art forms. The *bertsolaris* began competing in organized competitions that were televised and broadcast via radio, allowing superior competitors’ names to become household words and making the champions celebrities. This also prompted some to complain of a loss of cosiness and cohesiveness as compared to performances during the Franco era (Garzia, Sarasua, and Egaña 2001:147). The rebirth of the *pastorale*, the outdoor community theater productions of lyrics and dance passed on from generation to generation, has generated a desire for new story lines that reflect more current issues. Although modern life has necessitated a shortening of the theatrical presentation and several towns now cooperate to produce a *pastorale* event (whereas in the past a single town would traditionally host it and provide the cast and crew), it is also true that thousands may now attend a *pastorale* instead of the few hundred from neighboring villages who once formed the audience.

A burgeoning written literature makes apparent a greater gap between oral and written traditions, but within Basque culture the oral arts hold a much more enthusiastic place in the hearts and minds of the people, who have as yet failed to become avid readers of works in Euskara (Olaziregi 1998).

What are the most interesting new directions in oral tradition studies within Basque literature?

Aulestia's work went to great lengths to establish that *bertsolaris* were, in fact, not troubadours at all. While troubadours reconfigure lines acquired over the span of a career to tell an old and familiar tale, *bertsolaris* extemporize, creating new verses on the spur of the moment about topics assigned to them at the moment of creation. The last decade has been an interesting mix of historical approaches to discussions of *bertsolaritza*, such as works by Aristorena (1992) and Amuriza (1996), along with new entries in the critical field that tackle theoretical questions. In the latter category, Garzia, Sarasua, and Egaña (2001) move beyond discussions of the socio-cultural relevance of *bertsolaritza* and address the co-textual factors, that is, the relationship between the artist and the audience, with regard to shared and disparate elements of the performance and its reception. They represent a unique mix of the new technologies and the traditional art form, as Garzia hosted a television program that featured *bertsolaris* in performance and both Sarasua and Egaña are celebrated *bertsolaris* themselves. Their discussion of poetic strategies and memory/memorability move the Basque critics into a new arena.

University of Nevada, Reno

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About the Authors

Pertti Anttonen, Ph.D. from the University of Pennsylvania (1993), works as a Research Fellow at the Academy of Finland, which is affiliated with the Institute for Cultural Research at the University of Helsinki. He is currently finishing two books: one on the concepts of tradition and modernity, the other on oral tradition, modernity, and Finnish national heritage.

Daniel Avorgbedor is Associate Professor in the School of Music and in the Department of African American and African Studies at Ohio State University. His major research areas include urban ethnomusicology, continuities in the African Diaspora, musical traditions in contemporary African churches, and crosscultural aesthetics. He has published articles in *Ethnomusicology*, *Oral Tradition*, *World of Music*, *Cahiers de musiques traditionnelles*, and others.

Egbert J. Bakker is Professor of Classics at the University of Texas at Austin. His main interests are oral tradition, pragmatics, and narratology in ancient Greek literature. His books include *Poetry in Speech: Orality and Homeric Discourse* (1997) and the *Brill Companion to Herodotus* (co-ed., 2002).

Michael Barnes is Visiting Assistant Professor in the Honors College at the University of Houston. His research interests include the Greek epic tradition and Hellenistic poetry. His dissertation, "Inscribed *kleos*: Aetiological Contexts in Apollonius of Rhodes," focuses on the intersections of aetiology, poetic tradition, and contemporary sociopoetics in the *Argonautica*.

Felice Belle is a poet, playwright, and the former curator/host of the Friday Night Slam at the Nuyorican Poets Café in New York City. Her work has been published in *Roots and Culture*, *SLAM*, *Drumvoices Revue*, *Longshot*, and Def Jam's *Bum Rush the Page* (2001). She currently works as the director of Youth Speaks, New York City.

David Bouvier teaches Greek language and literature at the University of Lausanne and is a member of the Centre Louis Gernet, Paris. He works on Homeric poetry and intellectual relations in ancient Greece. His most recent book is *Le Sceptre et la lyre: L'Illiade ou les héros de la mémoire* (2002).

Lina Bugiene serves as a scientific researcher at the Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore, Vilnius. Her Ph.D. thesis, "Mythical Images of Water in Lithuanian Legends and Folk-Beliefs," was subsequently published in the "Folklore Studies" series (1999). Her current interests include different genres of folk narrative, folk beliefs, and popular religion.

Casey Dué is Assistant Professor of Classical Studies in the Department of Modern and Classical Languages at the University of Houston and Executive Editor for Publications at the Center for Hellenic Studies. Among her interests are ancient Greek oral traditions, Homeric poetry, Greek tragedy, and textual criticism. Recent publications include *Homeric Variations on a Lament by Briseis* (2002).

Mark W. Edwards is Emeritus Professor of Classics at Stanford University. His main research interest is ancient Greek epic, and he is the author of several books on Homer, including *Homer: Poet of the Iliad* (1987) and volume 5 of the Cambridge University Press commentary on the *Iliad* (1993).

Professor *Elizabeth C. Fine* is Chair of the Department of Interdisciplinary Studies at Virginia Tech. Among her books are *The Folklore Text* (1984) and *Soulstepping: African American Step Shows* (2003).

Margalit Finkelberg is Professor and Chair of Classics at Tel Aviv University. Her recent publications include articles in *Classical Philology*, the *Colby Quarterly*, and *Homer, the Bible, and Beyond: Literary and Religious Canons in the Ancient World* (2003).

Ruth Finnegan is Emeritus Professor, Faculty of Social Sciences, Open University, UK. Her research addresses the anthropology of communication and performance. She has published major works such as *The Hidden Musicians* (1989), *Oral Poetry* (2nd ed., 1992), *Oral Traditions and the Verbal Arts* (1992), and *Communicating: The Multiple Modes of Human Interconnection* (2002).

H. C. Groenewald is a senior lecturer in the Department of African Languages at the University of Johannesburg (formerly Rand Afrikaans University). His research interests include performance and Zulu drama. His recent publications include an article on Ndebele praise poetry in *Oral Tradition* and a study of Zulu theatre in the *South African Theatre Journal*.

Thomas A. Hale holds the Liberal Arts Professorship in African, French, and Comparative Literature at the Pennsylvania State University. He studies West African epic and *griots*, both of which are addressed in his *Griots and Griottes: Masters of Words and Music* (1998).

Among the most recent publications of *Joel M. Halpern*, Professor Emeritus of Anthropology (1992), University of Massachusetts, Amherst, are *A Serbian Village in Historical Perspective* (1986) with Barbara Kerewsky-Halpern and *The Far East Comes Near: Autobiographical Accounts of Southeast Asian Students in America* (co-ed., 1989).

Lee Haring is Professor Emeritus of English at Brooklyn College of the City University of New York. His research in island folklore of the Indian Ocean has appeared in *Verbal Arts in Madagascar: Performance in Historical Perspective* (1992), numerous journal articles, and a collection of translations entitled *Indian Ocean Folktales* (2002).

Richard Horsley is Distinguished Professor of Liberal Arts and the Study of Religion at the University of Massachusetts, Boston. His most recent book, *Hearing the Whole Story: The Politics of Plot in Mark's Gospel* (2001), treats oral tradition leading to oral-derived Gospel texts.

Professor of English at Eastern Illinois University, *Bonnie D. Irwin* has published scholarly and pedagogical essays on frame tales. She is currently writing a book-length study of the *1001 Nights* in American popular culture.

Martin S. Jaffee is Professor of Comparative Religion and Jewish Studies at the University of Washington in Seattle. His most recent work on oral tradition appears in *Torah in the Mouth: Writing and Oral Tradition in Palestinian Judaism, 200 BCE – 400 CE* (2001).

Werner H. Kelber is the Isla Carroll and Percy E. Turner Professor of Biblical Studies and Director of the Center for the Study of Cultures at Rice University. His signature work is *The Oral and the Written Gospel: The Hermeneutics of Speaking and Writing in the Synoptic Tradition, Mark, Paul, and Q* (1983; 2nd ed., 1997).

Professor of Asian Religions at Rice University, *Anne Klein* researches Indo-Tibetan Buddhist thought and practice as well as comparative and crosscultural work on women and Buddhism. The second edition of her *Knowledge and Liberation: Tibetan Buddhist Epistemology* (1986) was published in 1999.

Peace B. Lee is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of East Asian Languages and Literatures at Ohio State University. Her research focuses upon the cultures and oral traditions of ethnic minorities in northeast China. Her transcription and translation of “Seongju puri” is included in the forthcoming *Reader in Folk and Popular Literature in China*.

Richard P. Martin is the Antony and Isabelle Raubitschek Professor of Classics at Stanford University. His interests include early Greek poetry (especially Homer), Greek myth and religion, modern Greek studies, medieval Irish literature, and ethnopoetics. His latest book, *Rhapsoidia*, will appear in 2004.

Catharine Mason is Maître de Conférences (Associate Professor) in English at the Université de Caen. She explores diverse oral genres in various English-speaking cultures, including contemporary song. Her current research focuses on the stylistic features of Victoria Howard's Clackamas Chinookan narratives.

Thomas A. McKean, a Research Fellow at the Elphinstone Institute, University of Aberdeen, specializes in the Scots and Gaelic song traditions of Scotland. His publications include *Hebridean Song-Maker: Iain Macneacail of the Isle of Skye* (1997) and articles on various aspects of Scottish tradition.

Gregory Nagy's latest publications include *Plato's Rhapsody and Homer's Music: The Poetics of the Panathenaic Festival in Classical Athens* (2002) and the second edition of Albert Lord's *The Singer of Tales* (co-ed., 2000). Since 2000 he has been the Director of the Harvard Center for Hellenic Studies in Washington, D.C., as well as the Francis Jones Professor of Classical Greek Literature and Professor of Comparative Literature at Harvard.

Susan Niditch is Samuel Green Professor of Religion at Amherst College, where she has taught since 1978. A student of Albert Bates Lord and Frank Moore Cross, she explores ways in which the study of early and oral literatures deepens appreciation for ancient Israelite culture. Her most recent book is *Oral World and Written Word: Ancient Israelite Literature* (1996).

Elizabeth Oyler is Assistant Professor of Japanese at Washington University, St. Louis. Her specialty is medieval war tales and related narrative and performance genres. She is also a student of the performance art of *Heike biwa*.

Shelley Fenno Quinn is Associate Professor in the Department of East Asian Languages and Literatures, Ohio State University. She researches performance traditions of Japan, especially the Noh theatre. Among her publications is "Oral and Vocal Traditions of Japan" in *Teaching Oral Traditions* (1998).

Steve Reece is Associate Professor of Classics at Saint Olaf College. He has published widely in the areas of Homeric epic, comparative oral traditions, oral poetics, Greek lexicography, and New Testament studies, including *The Stranger's Welcome: Oral Theory and the Aesthetics of the Homeric Hospitality Scene* (1993).

Amy Shuman is Associate Professor of English and Anthropology at Ohio State University, where she also directs the Center for Folklore Studies. She is the author of *Storytelling Rights: The Uses of Oral and Written Texts by Urban Adolescents* (1986) and *Redeeming Narrative: Speaking from Experience* (forthcoming).

Saad Abdullah Sawayan is Professor of Anthropology and Folklore at King Saud University. He has published articles in Arabic and English on the oral literature and spoken language of the Arabian nomads. His major works in English are *Nabati Poetry: The Oral Poetry of Arabia* (1985) and *The Arabian Oral Historical Narrative: An Ethnographic and Linguistic Analysis* (1992).

Beverly Stoeltje is Associate Professor in the Department of Communication and Culture, Indiana University, Bloomington. She is author of *Beauty Queens on the Global Stage: Gender, Contests, and Power* (1995) and has published articles about Africa, power, law and culture, and American culture.

Professor Timothy R. Tangherlini holds a joint appointment in the Scandinavian Section and the Department of East Asian Languages and Cultures at UCLA. His current work focuses on storytelling and rural community organization in late nineteenth-century

Denmark and on critical approaches to Korean cultural geography. His publications include *Interpreting Legend* (1994) and *Talking Trauma* (1998).

Sybil A. Thornton, Associate Professor of History at Arizona State University, has published extensively on medieval Jishû (a Japanese Buddhist order), the epic, and Japanese cinema.

Alison Tokita is Associate Professor of Japanese Studies at Monash University, Melbourne. Her publications on Japanese narrative music include *Kiyomoto-bushi: Narrative Music of the Kabuki Theatre* (1999) and the forthcoming *Japanese Music: History, Performance and Research* (co-ed.).

Associate Professor of Classics at the University of Vermont, *M. D. Usher* is currently working on an opera libretto based on the *Iliad*, and on a Homeric reader from an oralist perspective. He has published books and articles on the Homeric Centos, Euripides, Plato, and Ezra Pound.

Ülo Valk is Professor of Estonian and Comparative Folklore at the University of Tartu. During 2003-04 he is a Fulbright scholar at the Center for Folklore and Ethnography at the University of Pennsylvania. His research interests include genre theory, demonology, and belief. His most recent book is *The Black Gentleman: Manifestations of the Devil in Estonian Folk Religion* (2001).

Linda White (Ph.D. in Basque Studies, 1996) is a researcher at the Center for Basque Studies at the University of Nevada, Reno. She co-authored the *Basque-English English-Basque Dictionary* as well as translated six books on the Basques; she has also published some thirty articles on various Basque topics.

Yamashita Hiroaki, Professor Emeritus from Nagoya University and currently Professor at Aichi Shukutoku University, has published several annotated editions of the *Tale of the Heike*, most recently the *Shin Nihon bukugaku taikei Heike*. He has authored and edited numerous volumes on the *Heike* and other war tales, including *Ikusa monogatari to Genji shôgun (War Tales and the Minamoto shôgun)* (2003).

Yang Enhong currently serves as Senior Researcher and Director of the Division of Tibetan Literature at the Institute of Ethnic Literature, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing. She has closely studied performances by singers of the epic *Gesar* and published many articles in this field. She is the author of *Investigations and Research into Singers of the Epic Gesar* (1995) and *Gesar: A Heroic Epic from Chinese Ethnic Minority Traditions* (1990).

Jonas Zdanys earned a Ph.D. in English literature from the State University of New York at Buffalo and has taught at Yale University and the State University of New York. He serves presently as Chief Academic Officer in the Connecticut Department of Higher Education. His poetry and translations of Lithuanian literature have filled some twenty volumes, including *Water Light* (1997) and *Lithuanian Crossing* (1999).

Steve Zeitlin (Ph.D. in Folklore, University of Pennsylvania) is the Founding Director of City Lore: The New York Center for Urban Folk Culture, and co-director of the People's Poetry Gathering. His research interests include poetry from the world's endangered languages and poetry competitions in the Americas. He has edited *Because God Loves Stories: An Anthology of Jewish Storytelling* (1997).