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

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Editor's Column

With the first issue of volume 19 we return to *Oral Tradition's* most customary (even archetypal) format: a collection of six medium-sized essays on a variety of areas spanning both geographical and historical space. Volume 18, which comprised two anthologies of brief reports on the world's oral traditions and related phenomena, aspired to bring before our readership some reflection of the enormous diversity of the subject to which this journal has attended for nearly twenty years. Those two issues—with their total of more than 80 contributions of approximately 500 words each on the questions of “What is oral tradition in your field?” and “What are the most interesting new directions in your field?”—have drawn significant attention from individual scholars and the *Chronicle of Higher Education* (February 27, 2004). Now we resume what has become our conventional style, but perhaps with an increased awareness of the remarkably diverse background against which studies in oral tradition must be understood.

The present issue begins in the medieval Germanic world with the 2003 Lord and Parry Lecture, Joseph Harris' meditation on myth and literary history, with specific reference to the Old Norse Master-builder tale and the Langobardic story of Lamicho the Barker. In a cognate vein, Lori Ann Garner then explores the little-studied Anglo-Saxon magical charms from the perspective of performance, elucidating the source of their word-power as ritual. From a different corner of the early Germanic tradition, Edward Haymes considers the special, genre-dependent status of the poems constituting the *Poetic Edda*, suggesting that they employ a particular type of oral composition and transmission.

Isidore Okpewho continues the colloquy with an examination of Okabou Ojolo's one-time performance of the *Ozidi Saga* from the Niger Delta as a continuous oral narrative, showing how the bard “was able to hold the plot of the tale together, despite the potentially destabilizing influence of contingent factors.” From contemporary Nigeria we journey back two millennia to the Middle East with Holly Hearon's very welcome overview of the broad spectrum of historical studies of orality and the New Testament, including attention to the most recent investigations, which tend to stress the productive interactions between oral traditions and texts. Finally, Kristin Kuutma illustrates the complex collaborative framework within which the Seto singer Anne Vabarna created the epic known as *Peko* in 1927, arguing

that “it constitutes an ethnographic representation of Seto culture in traditional poetic form.”

On the horizon are an issue treating the modern Gaelic, ancient Greek, Balochi, and South Slavic traditions as well as contemporary folklore, the medieval mystic Margery Kempe, and American jazz (19, ii) and, further in the future, a special issue on the well preserved and thriving oral traditions of the Basque country. Prior contents are now listed in a searchable database at www.oraltradition.org/otjournal/search.asp. As always, we welcome your reactions, your advice, and especially your manuscripts.

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Myth and Literary History: Two Germanic Examples

Joseph Harris

The Albert Lord and Milman Parry Lecture for 2003

Under the care of its founder, John Miles Foley, the Center for Studies in Oral Tradition, together with its journal *Oral Tradition*, has become the preeminent institution in its field in America; and as the field itself widens, the Center's importance in the study of the humanities can only grow. The annual Lord and Parry Lecture Series is one aspect of that widening outreach, and I feel very honored to be able to follow distinguished and provocative humanists in the series and to follow, though more distantly, Lord and Parry themselves. The topic agreed on for my contribution was the slippery subject of myth, my current preoccupation, not only because of some detailed research projects in hand, but more urgently as a new undergraduate seminar on the general topic looms on my immediate horizon. There's nothing like that kind of undergraduate teaching to force one to return to basic ideas. Bless them, undergraduates won't let a body hide behind philology! I realize that myth fits only problematically into the format of the Lord and Parry lectures and into the mandate of the journal *Oral Tradition*; in fact as far as my skimming eye could discover, no article in *Oral Tradition's* eighteen luminous years has confessed in its title to a principle concern with myth—admittedly this impression was not the product of meticulous research.

In any case, the Center and the journal usually deal concretely (even if also theoretically) with the form, content, and performance of oral literature or else with its cultural matrix, especially in oralities and literacies. These topics been among *my* main interests too ever since my understanding of literature was destabilized and refashioned by my teacher Albert Lord about 1963. Less famously, however, Lord had a keen interest in myth as well. In 1968-69, the year I worked for him as head teaching fellow in the General Education course known as Hum 9, we tried, between sit-ins or microphone take-overs by the SDS and tear-gas attacks by the authorities, to teach some formalist approaches to myth, such as that of Lord Raglan's famous hero pattern. That's when it became clear to me that Mr. Lord (to use the form of

address current at Harvard at that time) was a crypto-ritualist like Vladimir Propp, whom we also endeavored to interpret that year to restless student hordes who quite unreasonably could not understand why American lives should be sacrificed in an imperial adventure. (Thank goodness there's nothing like that going on today: the times, they have a-changed.)

The myth-ritual approach perhaps appealed to Mr. Lord, as it still does to me, because it ties myth, which constantly threatens to grade off into formlessness, to a ritual that can be apprehended and described in formalist and performative terms. Insofar as a myth can be the words spoken at a ritual, Jane Harrison's "things said over things done," the concept is doubly opened to structural or formal approaches, first by being a definite, particular utterance and second by being grounded in actions that presumably find echoes in the utterance. The myth-ritual school, which we still find full of vigor in the exciting scholarship of Walter Burkert (e.g., 1966, 1983, 1987, and 1996) and, somewhat attenuated, in some of my own recent work (1999, forthcoming a), brings the study of myth into the same perceptual orbit we move in as students of oral literature. Meanwhile, the concept of myth itself as generally and more widely understood simply *will not* be pinioned either to a certain utterance or to certain actions, with the result that students of particular myths have to jettison a huge semantic penumbra around the word "myth" in order to arrive at their formal clarities. In my own field of competence, early Germanic mythology, the ritual connection is more often than not purely hypothetical and often impossible even to imagine. More generally the myth-ritual approach could be criticized in a metaphor: the concrete form offered by ritual is a would-be anchor for a cloud.

Myth as cloud perhaps suggests the difficulties for an earth-bound analyst; but in order to avoid the trap of formalism, normally my favorite trap, while still integrating myth into the field of vision implied by my hosts, especially by the journal, I want to try to investigate where, if anywhere, myth fits into literary history. To a small extent this is a wish to dialogue with an elegant article by Walter Haug, "Mythos und Literatur" (1989). Haug, however, writes out of a confident structuralist essentialism, whereas to me a couple of decades later both categories are constructed products of their use. A related difference of approach is that Haug, starting from a comparison made by Dumézil, takes his exemplary stories as given, tidy wholes while my detailed engagement with Germanic myths, all of which show a cultural gap between recording and effective life as myth, makes it difficult for me to move beyond the discovery phase. Thus Haug can contrast myth and *literature* while for me it is *literary history* as part of the construction of both categories that forms the subject. In this very broad

sense, I take literary history to be the overall goal of a journal like *Oral Tradition*. But to avoid another trap associated with myth, the lapse into abstraction or pure wool-gathering, I would like to offer two myth-complexes as models to think with. The first of these, the Masterbuilder tale, is a very old interest of mine, recently renewed when I wrote an encyclopedia article that managed also to bring some new material to bear (Harris 1976 and 2003).

The Masterbuilder Tale

The story of the building of Asgard (*Ásgarðr*), the stronghold of the Norse gods, is told in chapter 42 of Snorri Sturluson's handbook of myths, *Gylfaginning*, the first part of his *Prose Edda*.¹ It is only in the interest of time that I refrain from quoting and summarize instead. One of the first events in the history of the *Æsir*, the Norse gods, was the arrival of an unknown workman who offered to construct a fortress that would be secure against the giants. The builder demanded as his price the goddess Freyja and also the sun and moon. The gods in counsel agreed, but set a deadline of the first day of summer for the finished construction and stipulated that the builder receive help from no man—a stipulation modified to allow help from the builder's stallion Svaðilfari. Mighty oaths were sworn. The stallion hauled huge stones by night, and the work proceeded rapidly. As the deadline approached it became clear what a mistake the gods had made; they blamed the decision on Loki and forced him to find a way to cheat the builder. That night a strange mare appeared on the scene and seduced the stallion away from his work and, chasing the stallion, the builder as well. The next day the builder saw that he would now fail to meet the deadline and flew into a rage, revealing himself as a giant. The gods now broke their oaths and summoned Thor, who raised his hammer and paid the builder his wages with death. Later Loki gave birth to a foal that became Odin's famous steed, Sleipnir.

Suspense, deception, Terminator-like action, extreme sexuality—this story has it all. No wonder every reader of the *Edda* remembers it. The passage brings together many strands of Snorri's version of Old Norse mythology, but its centerpiece is a narrative that obviously renders a multiform of a widely attested type of *legend*. The number and variations of this tale complex make an historical-geographic understanding no simple

¹ Faulkes 1988:34-36, 1987:35-36.

task even though excellent folklorists have studied it.² It is possible to generalize, however, that the core narrative tells how a supernatural being enters into a contract with a building-sponsor to complete a construction task within a short time in return for a ruinously precious reward; when the work is almost finished, the supernatural is cheated of his reward. The limited time for the task is in effect a deadline, and the bargain releases the contractor from the necessity to pay if the building is incomplete at the deadline. The payment demanded varies enormously, but characteristically it includes a human life or soul or simply possession of a human being. The motifs employed for cheating the builder and for the conclusion of the tale vary widely. Frequently the cock is made to crow, signaling too early the end of the (last) night of construction, or the devil or giant is delayed in some other way. Usually the work itself is left unfinished in some (relatively small) way; sometimes the last load of stones is still to be seen on the hillside. Finally, the frustrated builder frequently leaves the scene in a fit of anger (especially the devil, a manikin, or a fairy), sometimes trying to destroy the building as he goes; when the builder is a giant, he will frequently be a casualty of the story.

A distinctive form of this folktale developed in Scandinavia, in which the deadline is modified by a naming motif, probably borrowed from the wondertale Type 500 (Rumpelstilzchen). In the narrative fusion, the original building deadline survives but is ignored, and further pressure is put upon the human building-sponsor who usually discovers the name accidentally, for example hearing it sung in a lullaby. The giant, addressed by name at the last minute, frequently falls to his death. In retaining the giant as builder, Scandinavia seems to represent an older layer of the tale complex, but the dead-naming motif is clearly a relatively modern innovation.

Snorri's myth, written about 1223, is considerably older than any of the folktales. Dates are of course of little significance for such oral materials, but Snorri's tale clearly represents a stage before the naming motif overspread Scandinavia, probably in the late middle ages. In most features Snorri's myth agrees with the folktales, often strikingly so, but scholars concur that Snorri made a number of adaptations in order to account for other myth fragments or sources; most obviously he adapted the end of the narrative to fit his major source, the eddic poem *Völuspá*, stanzas 25-26, which he quotes to conclude the chapter. The overriding problem posed by the folktale analogues boils down to the status of chapter 42 as myth. Snorri knew at least one oral version of the tale, but was the tale as he knew it from

² References in Harris 1976 and 2003, but among older studies Boberg 1955 deserves special notice.

oral tradition in the thirteenth century a “myth” or a “legend”? If it was a genuine myth, how are we to understand that the same narrative is spread all over Europe as a legend? How did the heathen sacred narrative manage to persist orally in Christian Iceland over two hundred years after the conversion; why is there no other certain trace of the myth in all the numerous remnants of Norse mythology; and why, in that mythology, is there no other case of a myth that so closely coincides with a complete secular folktale? In 1933 Jan de Vries summarized this gap in our understanding (76): “As to the transition between myth and folk-tale, we grope in the dark.”

De Vries’s study is most important for definitively decoupling Snorri’s story from its apparent moorings in *Völuspá*. Snorri is obviously trying to explain these cryptic stanzas by his chapter 42, and “explanation” for a creative mythologist like Snorri took narrative, not critical, form: instead of trying tentatively to tease out the implications of verses that were as dark for him as for us, he brought to bear an external narrative that to some extent already fit the circumstances of the pagan poem and could be adapted at will. When I entered the fray in 1976, I fully accepted de Vries’s argument for the independence of *Völuspá* 25-26 and tried to settle the genre question and the literary-historical question of Snorri’s methods and motivation through the introduction of a new analogue, a local legend in historicized saga form attached to some remarkable construction works in southwest Iceland, principally the path across the lava-field Berserkjahraun on Snæfellsnes peninsula, as told in the early thirteenth-century *Heiðarvíga saga* and in the slightly later *Eyrbyggja saga*.³

Later I was made aware of a more modern variant of this legend,⁴ which, because the affinity has not been noticed in print, I will pause briefly to introduce. The tale is attached to a lava-field south of Reykjavík on the south side of the Reykjanes peninsula near Grindavík and appears in the folklore collection of Jón Árnason (1954-58, IV:133-34; my translation):

Ögmundur hét maður. Hann var berserkur, illur viðskiptis og flakkaði um land og gjörði mörgum mönnum óskunda. Hann kom að Krýsuvík og bað dóttur bónda. Bóndi þorði ekki að neita og lofaði honum dóttur sinni ef hann legði veg yfir hraunið. Hann gekk að því og fór til, byrjaði að

³ Full references in Harris 1976; supplementary references in 2003.

⁴ Personal communication from Dr. Gerard Breen (9/19/97). My thanks to Dr. Breen for this and further helpful communications about the Masterbuilder tale over the years.

vestan, en bóndi stóð við hraunbrúnina að austan. Ögmundur hamaðist og hjó rösklega veginn yfir hraunið, en þegar hann kom austur yfir og var búinn dasaðist hann. Þá hjó bóndi hann banahögg og dysjaði hann þar. Grjóthrúga er þar við götuna sem kallað er leið Ögmundar, en stendur á kletti. Vegurinn gegnum hraunið er djúpur og mjór og víða brotinn eða höggvinn gegnum stór björg (hraunstykki), en víða þrepóttur í botninn. . . . Síðan hefir hraunið heitið Ögmundarhraun.

There was a man named Ögmundur; he was a berserk, difficult to deal with, and roamed around the countryside doing injury to many a man. He came to Krísuvík and demanded the farmer's daughter. The farmer did not dare to say no and promised him his daughter if he would construct a trail over the lava-field. He agreed and went there, beginning on the west side, but the farmer took a position at the edge of the lava on the east side. Ögmundur went into a berserk rage and rapidly hewed out a path over the lava-field; but when he arrived on the east side and was finished, he was exhausted. Then the farmer struck him a death-blow and buried him there. There is heap of stones standing on a crag there beside the path, which is called "Ögmundur's Way." The path through the lava-field is deep and narrow and in many places broken or hacked through great boulders (i.e., of lava), but in many other places on a terraced base. . . . Afterward the lava-field bore Ögmundur's name.

Though a close relationship to the version located on Snæfellsnes (where there are two berserk builders) and by extension to that story's European roots is obvious, it would be difficult and unnecessary to apply this much later (attested) tale to the assessment of Snorri's myth.

The sagas' tale of the berserk builders is, I argued in 1976, a second early Icelandic outlier of the Masterbuilder complex. The story would almost certainly have been known to Snorri and can be considered *the* form of the Masterbuilder legend known to him—a contention supported by Snorri's biography and even by some verbal similarities between the sagas' versions and Snorri's. The latter parts of my article sought a *motive* for Snorri's adaptation of this local legend as his written myth and found it in the intricate euhemeristic thought of twelfth- to thirteenth-century learning.

The one time I presented an oral paper based on this research—it was about 1974—at least one audience member seemed disposed to punch me out. We don't lightly give up the honorific title "myth" for a story as good as this one. But my paper was just a few years ahead of a substantial wave of work on Snorri's relation to learned sources, and in retrospect I seem to be in good company with Germanic mythologists going back at least to Eugen Mogk in the '20's and forward to the contemporary Margaret Clunies Ross. For the recent encyclopedia article I reviewed all the literature I could

find on the Masterbuilder tale after 1976; and there seems to have been only one attempt explicitly to reestablish the pre-de Vries traditional view (Dronke 1979; cf. Harris 2003). Though my argument may sound radical at first hearing, *and*—in this summary form, dogmatic—for which excuse me—I believe we can take it as sufficiently established among scholars to serve as our first example.

Lamicho the Barker

Our second example, which I've only *begun* working on, is one of the few Langobardic myths to have survived. Preserved in Paulus Diaconus's *Historia Langobardorum*, broken off at the author's death in 799, it tells a foundation story linked to one of the prehistoric royal dynasties, set sometime during a vague period of some hundreds of years before the Langobards entered history when they settled in Pannonia about 546 or more definitively with their invasion of Italy in 568 (Paulus 1978:61-63; Paul 1974:26-30). Here is our story: Agelmund, son of Agio ("edge," i.e. sword) and grandson of the real dynasty founder, the seeress Gambara, was the first Langobard to hold the title of king. In his time a certain prostitute had given birth to seven boys at once and disposed of them in a fishpond. King Agelmund happened to ride by and stopped to watch the infants struggling; for unstated reasons he "turned them hither and thither with [his] spear" (like "turning" salad?), and one caught hold of the spear with his hand (Paul 1974:26). Now the king was moved and pronounced that this one would be a great man; he had the baby saved, nursed, and brought up as his foster son. The foundling was given a name variously spelled in the many manuscripts, but probably best regarded as Lamicho. Paulus reports that he was so named from *lama*, supposedly Langobardic for fishpond—an etymology now universally rejected. Lamicho grows into a warrior and succeeds his foster father as king. Before his own death two adventures are told of Lamicho. In the first he acts as heroic representative of the tribe in defeating the Amazon champion in an aquatic fight, insuring the Langobards the right to cross a river into some vaguely eastern territory. There, after a peaceful sojourn, they fall victim to a surprise night attack by a people the manuscripts call variously the Bulgares or Vulgares. In that attack king Agelmund is killed and his only daughter is abducted. The Langobards now choose Lamicho as their king and begin a war of reprisal. In the first battle of that war the Langobards flee back to their camp but are rallied and led to victory by the heroic rhetoric of Lamicho and by his battle leadership.

The infant-exposure story, our main interest, has a distant analogue elsewhere in Langobard pseudo-history unknown to the Carolingian historian. Recall that in the Anglo-Saxon tradition represented by *Widsith* “Scaef ruled the Langobards”; recall too that the mysterious arrival of Scyld Scefing in *Beowulf* is elsewhere attributed to his father the “Sheaf.” Scyld and Scaef together constitute a fascinating subject that has recently been thoroughly canvassed by Bruce Alexander (2002), who greatly “expands the analogues” (so his subtitle) but only to texts that explicitly name Scyld or Scaef. Touching Lamicho, however, the most important scholarship belongs to a line of Viennese scholars and to a brilliant, but mind-glazing, paper by Kemp Malone.⁵ This is unfortunately not the moment for a close or critical account, but I draw together the most important strands. A pervasive symbolism around the totem of the dog haunts Langobardic prehistory. Malone convincingly etymologizes Lamicho as “little barker” and makes a strong argument that his Anglo-Saxon name appears in *Widsith* as Hungar, i.e. Hundgar, “dog-spear”; in earlier mythic episodes in Paulus the Langobards terrorize their neighbors by spreading the word that they had dog-headed warriors, like the bear- and wolf-warriors well known in Old Norse; Paulus’s “prostitute” (*meretrix*) has been explained by Much (followed by Höfler and others) as going back to a word for bitch; cf. Lat. *lupa*, “she-wolf” and “prostitute.” The Langobards’ original ethnic name, Winnili, has been connected with “savage dogs” by Much, who most importantly demonstrated that the Hundings of eddic legend are our Winnili-Langobards. This means that the Hunding-Wulfing feud preserved in Norse sources looms as a background to Langobardic story, and Malone draws the ultimate consequences of the background by explaining the whole story of Lamicho as the Hunding *version* of that feud. Malone had an astounding gift for combinations, but I feel that the hound-symbolism of the Langobards, as Höfler called it, is something we can hold on to. To some extent this was sensed already by Jacob Grimm (1970:395 and 482, passages present already in the first edition of 1848) who compared the story of Lamicho to the German legends of the origins of a noble family, the Welfs/Welfen (better known in English through the Italian form as Guelphs). The legend has the same multiple birth with unnatural connotations, but the man who happens along to rescue the eleven babes (the twelfth having been kept by the mother) is their father or at least the husband of their mother. (Similarly the sources are split over whether Agelmund is the father or foster father of Lamicho.) The rescued babes of the German legend received the

⁵ Much 1919, 1924, 1925; Malone 1959a, 1959b; Höfler 1940, 1962; cf. Markey 1983.

name “whelps,” and the dog-sympathy descended with the family over centuries.

So much for the intra-Germanic connections and scholarship. Parallel but as yet unconnected runs an Indo-European branch of scholarship in a current article by Calvert Watkins (forthcoming) that I will now mutilate by summarizing. The oldest myth of the set he compares, Hittite from about 1600 BCE, is the story of the Queen of Kaniš, who produced thirty boys in one birth. Ashamed, she disposed of the boys in a river, but unlike Lamicho’s “cruel” mother, she provided them with a floating vessel, thoughtfully caulked with excrement.⁶ The waifs were rescued at the coast and brought up by the gods. Later the Queen littered again with thirty girls; these she chose to bring up in the central Anatolian city of Neša. Now grown up, the young men journey up country, chance to hear of the girls, and realize that the purpose of their journey is to seek out their mother. The Queen did not recognize her sons and so gave their sisters to them as wives. Only the youngest lad warns against the sin . . . and there the text breaks off. Watkins compares two other very early texts, one Greek, one Rig-Vedic; both have unnatural multiple births but otherwise present only a part of the total pattern of the Hittite text. Watkins also thickens the brew by introducing for each myth evidence of a related ritual, the Indic ritual being the famous *aśvamedha* or Horse Sacrifice. I think there may be a Langobardic analogue to the ritual as well, but for this occasion we will keep to the high ground by observing only the pervasive affinities between the tales told by Paulus and the Hittite text. They could be listed as: (1) unnatural multiple birth (2) with animal affinities; (3) disposal of the litter by water; (4) rescue by a person or persons with noble credentials (i.e., not shepherds, a water-drawer, or the like); (5) nourishment and rearing (briefly mentioned); and finally (6) *culling* of the one future leader out of the mass. Culling is obviously what happens in the Lamicho story (and in the Welf legend); in the Hittite the one young husband who resisted incest is likely to have become the hero, just as in Watkins’ Greek parallel, where forty-nine of the fifty daughters of Danaos murder their sinfully endogamous husbands, but one is spared; he becomes king.

But the Hittite baby-boat cries out for comparison with the many more familiar exposed infant tales, including those of Sargon (about 1300 BCE), Moses (first millenium BCE), Cyrus (fifth century BCE), and, in the

⁶ Otten (the most complete translated source) gives *Kot* (“dung”) (1973:7); Hoffner (1990:62) translates “dung”; but a personal communication from Dr. Patrick Taylor, based on the Chicago Hittite Dictionary, casts doubt on this interpretation of the word at issue.

Mahabharata, Karna (perhaps 400 BCE). Many scholars have studied this constellation of tales, but the best known are probably those who have made their results easiest for general readers by providing a single explanation, that is, Otto Rank (1959) and Lord Raglan (1936), with respectively their psychological and ritual “keys to all mythology.” The best study I have found, however, is a fine dissertation on the Sargon birth legend by Brian Lewis (1980), who, among other things, gives careful summaries of no fewer than 72 stories that are at least arguably related to the tale of Sargon, including both the Hittite myth I have summarized and another a bit closer to the Sargon-Moses form, and even Paulus’s Lamicho tale. Lewis studies the material according to strict geographical-historical principles; as a result we have a comprehensive and responsible set of charts and analyses in terms of archetype and subtypes—a result that is nevertheless a little disappointing for the student of myth greedy for a global vision. Lewis’ collection does make it possible to compare the multiple-birth group—which he does not comment on as such—with the rest and with Watkins’ rather different reconstructive exercise.

We learn quickly, then, that these two—the Queen of Kaniš and Lamicho—are the *only* multiple-birth legends synopsized by Lewis; but we can certainly add German legends of the Welf type.⁷ Watkins’ one-line Vedic text may imply incest as the origin of its birth of twenty, but we can’t say much more than that. And for the present I want to ignore the question of whether *twins*, such as Romulus and Remus, constitute a multiple birth. To finish off this summary treatment of Lamicho, however—remember it’s only an *example* in our larger discussion, a myth to think with—let me draw together my provisional opinions about the Langobardic tale.

When the tribe lived in the old Bardengau on the lower Elbe and, as the Hundings in East Holtstein, in contact with Inguaeonic folk groups and the sea, it shared with them the fertility myth of the sea-borne foundling Sceaf. As they moved east and south their contacts with the Swebian tribal network increased; Woden worship and the myth depicting his role in their new name, Langobards, may have accrued from the central or south German neighbors. The prototype of the Lamicho-Welf story displaced the old fertility god in the more warlike time and place. The Queen of Kaniš supplies a clue to this prototype, but the broader tale type as interpreted by Lewis carries with it a frequent trait of animal sympathy. For example, many of Lewis’ tales involve nurturing by animals; and in the second Hittite example the mother *is* an animal. In any case, the resulting myth was

⁷ Grimm and Grimm 1981; see espec. numbers 393, 411, 521, 540, 549, 577, 584, and the valuable notes by the translator/editor Donald Ward.

thoroughly embedded in the old hound symbolism of the tribe, a symbolism that survived into late medieval folklore attached to certain noble families of central and southern Germany and in Lombardy in the family of Cangrande di Verona, the *canis magnus* (Höfler 1940). And it peeps through in Paulus' Latin, as we have seen. A speculation on why this foundling foundational myth was adopted (apparently at the price of the loss of the Scaef myth) might link it with the institution of kingship. Before Agelmund, the Langobards, like other early Germanic tribes, were ruled by numerous leaders, called *duces* in the Latin sources. The institution of the single *rex* was due to the pressures of war (and foreign influence) during the migration period, but the king was chosen by the assembly from among the most able *duces*. A myth in which the king is *culled* from among less virtuous brethren might suit such an ideology very well.

Myth and Literary History

So much for our two examples. Considered in relation to literary history and to myth as a category, these two stories might appear to be symmetrical opposites. The building of Asgard is presented as a myth in the sense of a story about gods, but is revealed as literature based on legend. Ibsen worked a similar transformation on the folktale in his play *The Masterbuilder* (*Byggmester Solness*), and Wagner transformed Snorri's myth in ways that uncannily recapitulate in reverse Snorri's own revision of the legend. The story may have trickled down Northrop Frye's literary *scala* to the ironic level *if* we are justified in reading an episode of Lars Gustafsson's *A Tiler's Afternoon* as deflating the mythic flatulence of Ibsen: when far below the vicar calls his name, the aged worker—a masterbuilder figure for our less than heroic age—does *not* fall from the steeple he is repairing; later he confides that he is never afraid even if so high he can hear the angels fart. These modern instances, though less than perfect parallels, are not so far from the conscious manipulation of tradition we seem to find in Snorri. In any case, the loss of the Asgard story as real myth is plainly a gain for literary history since we get a glimpse into Snorri's methods and motives.

To judge only by the analogues in the Grimms' *Deutsche Sagen* (1981), the Lamicho story was simply the earliest appearance of a family-origin legend that we find several times in German folklore, presented with urbane skepticism by Paulus. Yet the respected Karl Helm (1953:78-81) and other students of Germanic religion regarded it as a myth if restored to its proper pre-Christian milieu; and Karl Hauck (1955) mounts a powerful argument for considering it and other early Germanic tribal histories and

genealogies as part of the *religious* apparatus of the tribal state. If this is true, and I think it is, Lamicho's story is an example of a real myth turned into an historical legend by a writer. What's a modern student to believe?

The stories we've been following are not generically fixed by essential qualities but have their qualities assigned to them by context, custom, and desire. A startling example of this phenomenon is Margaret Mills' report (1982) on a women's cult in modern Iran where a version of the story we know as the folktale Cinderella had literally become a sacred text. This would not disturb G. S. Kirk (1984), who defines myth as *any traditional story*, including legends and wondertales; I regard this definition as so *open* as to obliterate important, if not transcendent, distinctions, but it is also too *narrow* in limiting the idea too strictly to story. And here we return to the problem with formalism. Consider William Bascom's "Forms of Folklore" (1984), one of the most useful essays for a teacher. As an initial move Bascom sets up an analytic ideal, a sort of hypothesis, in which myth, legend, and folktale are three "genres" distinguished by non-formal criteria such as belief, time of action, and attitude toward the story (sacred or secular). The gist of the essay is a tour of native cultures to compare their segmentation of the world of oral literature with this Western model. But Bascom begins unacceptably by characterizing all three as *prose* narratives. This is a confusion of what French structuralists call *discours*, discourse or vehicle, with *histoire* or story. But the question at stake is not about the vehicle—a ballet, a cartoon, a Little Golden Book—but a question about the kind of story. A formal approach would not necessarily make that mistake, but I'm still not satisfied that myth is best understood merely as a category of story.

We expect more of something we honor with the name "myth" than can be delivered by a definition that begins and ends with "story." The history of the word—how Plato used it, how Aristotle used it—is irrelevant to this exercise. Think instead in the here and now of all the non-narrative, even non-verbal senses of the word. I used to be secretly annoyed with a beloved colleague who taught a course called "The Myth of America"—admittedly the annoyance was not unrelated to its popularity. But that usage is legitimate; even myth as lie, that is, someone else's belief, is a legitimate contemporary use. The word legitimately takes in ideology, worldview, reputation, or such an eschatological complex as Ragnarök, and this range of usage, with more or less religious tinge, constitutes the unusual power we associate with the word. We need an understanding that stretches to include all this as well as narrative. We need, to use an obvious distinction memorably captured by Rogerson (1984 [1978-79]), an understanding of the relationship of "myth" to "myths." I propose to

understand “myths” as the narrative way that “myth” is usually communicated, especially in pre-modern cultural settings, and I believe this is not far from the relationship of syntagmatic to paradigmatic in Lévi-Strauss’s structuralism: the binaries making up the analysis are an attempt to understand myth on the basis of its expression in myths.

Finally, literary history: it must be obvious by now why literary history, or even the para-literary history we need for non-written literature,⁸ has difficulty accommodating “myth.” To deal only in “myths,” sacred stories, their form, intertextuality, and diachronic development, would be to treat the material as literature and not fully as itself. To deal with “myth” would deny formalism and the basis of literary history itself.

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⁸ The notion of “para-literary history” is discussed in Harris forthcoming b.

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Anglo-Saxon Charms in Performance

Lori Ann Garner

Providing explicit ritual instructions alongside verbal incantations, the Old English healing charms offer us a relatively rare glimpse of poetry in performance in the Anglo-Saxon world. The well-studied verse incantations as well as the lesser known non-metrical remedies functioned as part of rituals performed to cure disease, improve crops, and even return lost or stolen property. Lea Olsan has noted that “unlike epic poetry, riddles, or lyrics, charms are performed toward specific practical ends” and “their mode of operation is performative” (1999:401). Scribes often underscored the importance of performance by stating explicitly that an incantation be spoken (*cweðan*) or sung (*singan*). As John Niles reminds us, the modern usage of the term “charm” is perhaps too limited for conveying the importance of performance in these solemn rites of healing. The native term *gealdor* (or *galdor*),¹ with its broader semantic range, more explicitly denotes performance, deriving from the verb *galan*, which means “to sing,” “to enchant,” “to cry out aloud” (Niles 1999:27).

Because they are so deeply rooted in their performance context, the Old English charms require us to move beyond conventional text-based literary analysis and classification to apply performance-based approaches that allow us to examine the charms on their own terms. Taken collectively, the charms blur distinctions between the oral and the literate, the Christian and the Germanic, the metrical and the non-metrical, the poetic and the practical, even the sensical and non-sensical. In performance, the charm’s function as healing remedy becomes all-encompassing, and once-familiar dichotomies quickly break down, revealing insightful intersections between categories that might at first seem mutually exclusive. In many significant ways, awareness of performance contexts allows us to transcend potentially

¹ *Gealdor* acquires a number of different meanings in the poetic canon: enchantment, spell, incantation, song (Bessinger 1960:25). Niles points out that the verb *galan* could refer to inarticulate sounds as well as human speech or song (212).

reductive binaries and thus enhance our understanding of these complex texts. What follows is an exploration of several such binaries: living ritual/static text, poetry/science, verbal/nonverbal, “pagan”/Christian. In each case metrical charms will be examined alongside non-metrical analogues to gain a more complete understanding of the tradition as a whole.

Living Ritual/Static Text

The first and perhaps greatest challenge confronting any modern reader of the charms involves bridging the gap between their original performance context and their current manuscript form, a difficult task when dealing with any oral-derived text, but especially so in this case. The body of texts known collectively as “charms” are actually scattered across at least twenty-three manuscripts (Storms 1948:25-26) and are anything but uniform in the way they have been preserved in writing. A relatively small number, such as the “Æcerbot” (“Land-remedy” charm), include detailed directions for ceremonial ritual and corresponding incantations in what appear to be full form (Dobbie 1942:116-18).²

Typically, however, the performance cues are more cryptic. For instance, some of the charms, such as the so-called “Journey Charm,” include lengthy incantations with no directions for performance or even a title indicating a clear purpose (Dobbie 1942:126-28).³ Others include elaborate ritual instructions with no verbal element, such as a remedy to cure *wens* (tumors or cysts) that requires a woman to draw cups of water from a spring running east and pour the cups into other vessels in order to bring about a cure (more below). Still others have neither clear performance instructions nor decipherable incantations. A charm marked in its manuscript as a remedy “Wið þeofentum” (“Against theft”), for example, includes no directions but only a brief incantation that is dismissed by many as “gibberish” or “nonsense”⁴ (Storms 1948:303):⁵

² This remedy is found in MS BM Cotton Caligula A VII, ff. 176a-78a.

³ This remedy is found in MS CCC 41 Cambridge pp. 350-53. See further Stuart 1981.

⁴ Grattan and Singer, for instance, title the charm “Gibberish Against Theft” (1952:179). Storms includes this charm among those he labels “gibberish or jingle” charms (1948:297).

⁵ This remedy is found in Harley 585, f. 178a, b.

Luben luben niga efið niga efið fel ceid fel delf fel cumer orcggaei ceufor
dard giug farig pidig delou delupih.

Despite its lack of any discernible meaning at a lexical level, however, this chant has a meaning that would have been very powerful within its original performance context.⁶ In its function as remedy, it does not differ radically from other charms that happen to have been copied with more elaborate explanations or instructions. Recorded with and without ritual instructions, with and without incantations, with and without clear lexical meaning, the body of charms as a whole cannot be fully realized on the printed page, but depend on performance context.

The issues involved here are quite similar to concerns that those working with living oral traditions from various genres must face today. Lauri Honko has explained that Gopala Naika, who performed the *Siri Epic* of the Tulu region in India for a team of folklore scholars from Finland, “had considerable difficulty in visualizing how the Siri epic could ever be put into a book form” because “the performative and allusive elements abolished in the process seemed so essential to him” (Honko 1998a:163). The multiplicity of answers that scholars—even those operating within a single genre in a single tradition—have had for this dilemma teach us that myriad textual renderings can suggest differences far greater than exist in performance.

The Zuni story of the world’s beginning, for instance, has been transcribed and translated in multiple ways (ways that move beyond differences in individual performance styles and settings): Frank Cushing chose to tell the tale in rather romanticized prose (1901); Ruth Bunzel provides a dual language Zuni/English edition (1932/1992); Matilda Cox Stevenson presents the story in the format of a dramatic play (1904); Dennis Tedlock transcribes the narrative as poetry with paralinguistic aspects of performance indicated through manipulation of typography and parenthetical descriptions (1972/1999).⁷ If a single tradition can be represented in such different ways even in our modern society of standardized texts, we should certainly not be surprised to find extreme diversity during this period of what Katherine O’Brien O’Keeffe has termed “transitional literacy” (1990) in Anglo-Saxon England. The manuscript’s subordinate role to the larger

⁶ On the significance and transmission of such “gibberish” charms and insightful parallels in the South Slavic tradition, see Foley 1980a:80-83.

⁷ See further Tedlock 1981.

living tradition requires us to shift our defaults from print to performance and accept the genre in its many manifestations throughout the surviving texts.

Below is an examination of two Anglo-Saxon remedies from Harley 585 (otherwise known as the *Lacnunga*). The first, a charm against black blains (skin swellings or sores), creates potential confusion by its brevity, while the second, an aid for women before and after childbirth, raises questions because it includes more than one would expect in a single charm. Both cases provide examples of “the illusion of completeness and independence” that John Miles Foley attributes to “our automatic assumptions, the unconsciously applied logic for all of our reading” (2002:60). Rather than viewing the texts in isolation, we will examine each in the context of the wider healing tradition.

Like many Old English spells, the charm against black blains includes ritual directions accompanied by an incantation in what seems to be abbreviated form. The charm describes a poultice to be made after saying “tigað” nine times (Grattan and Singer 1952:160-61)⁸:

þis gebed man sceal singan on ða blacan blegene IX siðum: **tigað**. Wyrce
ðonne godne cliðan: genim anes æges gewyrðe greates sealtes

One must sing this prayer over black blains nine times: **tigað**. Then work
a good poultice: Take the measure of one egg of coarse salt

A charm recorded for black blains in another manuscript⁹ indicates that “tigað” is merely the first word of a much longer incantation (Storms 1948:302):

Tigað. Tigað. Tigað. calicet ac locluel sedes adclocles arcre encrcere ernem
Nonabaioth arcum cunat arcum arcua fligata soh wiþni necutes cuterii rafaf þegal
uflen binchni. arta. arta. arta. tuxuncula. tuxuncula. tuxuncula.¹⁰

⁸ Harley 585, f. 165b

⁹ MS Bodley Junius 163 f. 227

¹⁰ Cf. also MS Gonville & Caius College, Cambridge, 379, f. 49a (Storms 1948:302):

Thigat. Thigat. Thigat. calicet. Archlo. cluel. Sedes. Achodes. Arde. et hercleno.
Abaioth. ArcocugtiA. Arcu. ArcuA. fulgura. sophuinit. ni. cofuedi. necutes cuteri.
nicuram. Thefalnegal. Uflem. archa. cunhunelaja.

This abbreviation is very similar to commands to recite the “Pater noster”—the first words and working title of the longer prayer—that are very common throughout the charms, as illustrated by the “Æcerbot.” This field remedy requires the *pater noster* at several points alongside other metrical and non-metrical incantations. At no point is the prayer written out in its entirety:

- ... and paternoster swa oft swa þæt oðer (13)
- ... and swa oft Pater Noster (23)
- ... and pater noster III (42)
- ... and pater noster þriwa (82)

- ... and Our Father as often as the other [incantation]
- ... and as often Our Father
- ... and Our Father three times¹¹

For the audience already familiar with the full form of the prayer, two words in print could easily stand in for the whole to be recited in performance. Just as familiar to Anglo-Saxon healers, it seems, were other incantations, such as “tigað.” Rather than a transcript of performance, the manuscripts offer us only a shorthand form of the more elaborate living rituals they represent.

Another kind of gap left in the transmission from performance to print involves the connections between a series of acts related to pregnancy and childbirth in Harley 585 (f. 185 a, b). The first ritual for “se wifman, se hire cild afedan ne mæg” (“the woman who is not able to nourish her child”; l. 1) requires a woman to step over a grave and recite the following incantation three times (Dobbie 1942:123-24, ll. 4-6):

þis me to bote	þære laþan lætbyrde,
þis me to bote	þære swæran swærbyrde,
þis me to bote	þære laðan lambyrde.

Again, what appears nonsense to literate eyes is important enough in its context to transmit and record in multiple places. The differences reveal very similar sound patterns despite extreme differences in orthography. On the transmission of sound patterns, see further Foley 1980a and 1980b.

¹¹ On the Pater Noster as a protecting charm in Irish tradition, see Wright 1993:236-41.

This as a help for me against the hateful late birth, this as a help to me against the grievous difficult birth, this as a help to me against the hateful lame birth.

The second, for a woman *mid bearne* (“with child”; l. 7), involves an incantation to be recited in the presence of the woman’s *hlaforde* (“lord”), and the third an incantation to be recited at church “þonne seo modor gefele þæt þæt bearn si cwic” (“when the mother feels that the child is alive”; l. 12). The fourth requires a woman to wrap part of a child’s grave in wool to be sold to a merchant, thereby sending away *sorge corn*, “seeds of grief” (l. 20). And the final section, for “se wifman, se ne mæge bearn afedan” (“the woman who is not able to nourish her child”; l. 21), includes a fairly elaborate sequence (ll. 21-31) in which a woman drinks milk from a cow *anes bleos* (“of one color”), mixes it with water from a running stream before drinking, recites a verse incantation, and then takes food at a house other than her own.

Godfrid Storms interprets the text as a series of acts, all to be performed by an individual woman at various stages of a single pregnancy (1948:198-99). More sensitive to performance contexts, L. M. C. Weston (1985) has argued that what is generally edited as a single charm is actually a catalog of charms to aid various problems related to pregnancy and childbirth: to protect against a miscarriage, to guard against stillbirth or “lame-birth,” to help a mother carry her child to term, or to help a nursing mother increase her milk supply.¹² When we look at the text as an aid to performance rather than an ultimate product in itself, the debate becomes more a problem of editing than of performance, where completeness of any kind is illusory.

If we expand our analysis of the childbirth charms to include those in other manuscripts and without incantations, the dichotomy between performance and print is broken down even further. In a non-metrical charm for a woman *bearn eacenu* (“big with child”) the mother does not *recite* incantations; instead she binds to her foot a wax tablet with an inscription recounting the pregnancies of Mary, who gave birth to Christ, and of Elisabeth, who gave birth to John the Baptist (Storms 1948:283; emphasis mine):¹³

¹² Catalogs of this sort are not at all unprecedented in Anglo-Saxon poetry. Such collections of proverbs are found in two manuscript texts now known as *Maxims I* (*Exeter Book* manuscript) and *Maxims II* (MS Cotton Tiberius). See further Howe 1985.

¹³ This charm appears in MS Junius 85, p. 17.

Maria virgo peperit Christum Elisabet sterelis peperit Iohannem baptistam.
 . . . **Writ dis** on wexe de næfre ne com to nanen wyrce, and bind under
 hire swidran fot.

The virgin Mary gave birth to Christ. Barren Elisabeth gave birth to John
 the Baptist. . . . **Write this** on wax that has not been used for any other
 purpose, and bind it under her right foot.

Written inscriptions and poetic incantations are equally valid rituals enabling the performer to tap into healing power. The interplay among various verbal and nonverbal elements is thus essential to understanding of the charms as a genre, as inconsistent as these reflections may be in their current forms.

Poetry (Superstition)/Science

A second challenge to our understanding of the charms involves the contemporary distinctions sharply contrasting the categories of poetry and science, with the poetic aspects of the charms often relegated to the realm of “superstition” rather than medicine. Titles of books collecting and analyzing the charms illustrate how easy our print culture makes it for us to separate components that would be inseparable in performance: *Anglo-Saxon Medicine* (Cameron 1993), *Anglo-Saxon Magic* (Storms 1948), *The Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems* (Dobbie 1942), and the well-known *Leechdoms, Wortcunning, and Starcraft* (Cockayne 1864-66)—all of which include a number of the same remedies—are just a few of the works whose titles suggest the rigid boundaries of classification. To come closer to understanding these texts in their performance contexts, we must return to the charms’ curative function and place science and so-called superstition on more equal terms.

M. L. Cameron (1993) convincingly argues that although the charms have been dismissed by many as superstitious rituals void of any medical merit, the remedies often do include elements with curative functions that modern medicine recognizes even today. Onions, saliva, and garlic used extensively in the charms have all been shown to have important antibiotic properties (119). A charm for an enlarged spleen helps illustrate the healing power of iron, a common component in Anglo-Saxon healing rituals (Cockayne 1864-66, ii:256).¹⁴

¹⁴ This remedy appears in MS Regius 12 D xvii.

acele ðu wealhat isen þonne hit furþum sie of fyre atogen, on wine oððe
on ecede sele þæt drincan.

Cool a very hot iron when it is just taken from the fire in wine or in
vinegar; give it to drink.

Cameron explains that an enlarged spleen often results from an iron deficiency caused by such illnesses as malaria (1993:18). Plunging hot iron into wine or vinegar would—in addition to any ritual function—create an iron acetate and thus provide much-needed iron for patients whose diets were often lacking in this essential nutrient.¹⁵ In many ways, this picture runs counter to much scholarship surrounding the Old English charms. Storms, for instance (1948:76), attributes the “magic power of iron” and its vital role in Anglo-Saxon remedies to its relative scarcity and to connections with mythic smiths such as Wayland rather than considering any additional medical properties iron might have had.

The tendency to dismiss the possibility of actual curative power is even greater in scholarship addressing the so-called metrical charms. The metrical portion of a charm “Wið færstice” (“Against a Sudden Stitch”) has received much attention for its poetic value, but the portions that do not lend themselves to literary analysis have led some to challenge the text’s unity.¹⁶ Among the elements problematic for the poem’s textual unity are instructions on either side of the twenty-six-line alliterative incantation (Dobbie 1942:122-23):¹⁷

Wið færstice feferfuiġe and seo reade netele, ðe ðurh ærn inwyxð, and
wegbrade; wyll in buteran. . . [incantation] Nim þonne þæt seax, ado on
wætan.

Against a sudden stitch, feverfew and the red nettle, that grows through a
house, and plantain; boil in butter. . . [incantation] Take then the knife;
plunge it into the liquid.

¹⁵ On Anglo-Saxon diet and disease, see Cameron 1993:5-18.

¹⁶ Howell Chickering’s analysis (1972) of the metrical charm, for instance, recommends separating the first eighteen lines, which he considers “a masterpiece” (95), from the remainder of the remedy on the grounds that “as modern readers we bring only an aesthetic appreciation to the charm, not a real belief” and thus “can only perceive the literary force of its verbal magic” (104).

¹⁷ MS Harley 585.

The role of the knife dipped into a liquid is reduced to one of “sympathetic magic” by Chickering (96-97),¹⁸ and Grendon asserts that the knife was “apparently to be used on some dummy representing evil spirits” (1909:207). Cameron explains, however, that all three herbs mentioned in the first line have been recommended for muscular and joint pains “when applied as a salve to the aching parts” and assumes that the knife would have been used in applying such a salve (1993:143-44). Examination of this charm in the context of other non-metrical charms suggests that even the seemingly “superstitious” incantation may have had practical value and should not be relegated to a purely literary realm.

Cameron notes that prior to watches and clocks, the recitation of prayers or other incantations could serve the function of a time-keeping device. For example, a remedy for a carbuncle (a painful infection of the skin) asks the healer to recite the “Our Father” three and nine times respectively at different stages of a potion’s preparation (Cockayne 1864-66, ii:358; Cameron 1993:38-39):

. . . þonne hit wealle, sing iii pater noster ofer, do eft of, sing þonne viiii
siþum pater noster on. . . .

. . . sing three paternosters when it boils, remove again, then sing the
paternoster nine times over it. . . .

The incantation in “Wið færstice” also follows instructions to boil a potion and could likewise serve as a timekeeping method. Additionally, the incantations are believed to have instilled confidence in patients and to have established the authority of the physician—again, not an entirely foreign concept even by modern standards.¹⁹ The poetic merits noted by Chickering

¹⁸ Chickering (1972) does allow for the possibility that if the knife were used to apply the liquid that the heat would have had medicinal value, but because “we are not told what else is done with the mixture and the knife” he recommends that we limit our analysis to the literary portion, in essence taking the poem out of context. Hauer (1978) argues for the poem’s unity on thematic grounds, again taking the metrical portion out of its performance context. Weston suggests that we look at the text as a whole as “practical poetry” but still views the remedy as “non-physical” (1985:186).

¹⁹ Cameron notes (1993:157) that “today the physician imparts confidence in his ability to heal by his white coat, his professional detachment, the atmosphere of his consulting room and the framed diplomas on its walls. These are as much a non-rational part of the healing process as was the intoning of charms.”

and countless others need not be separated from the charm's curative function.

Poetic and curative functions are perhaps even more intertwined in the metrical Old English bee charm. Poetic incantations and practical ritual actions here complement and reinforce one another (Dobbie 1942:125).²⁰

Wið ymbe nim eorþan, oferweorp mid þinre swiþran
 handa under þinum swiþran fet, and cwet:
 Fo ic under fot, funde ic hit.
 Hwæt, eorðe mæg wið ealra wihta gehwilce. . . .

And wiððon forweorp ofer greot, þonne hi swirman, and cweð:
 Sitte ge, sigewif, sigað to eorþan!
 Næfre ge wilde to wuda fleogan.
 Beo ge swa gemindige mines godes. . . .

Take earth; throw it with your right hand under your right foot, and say, "I catch it under my foot; I find it. Lo! Earth has power against every creature. . . ."

And throw dirt over bees when they swarm and say, "settle, victorious woman, sink to the earth, never fly wild to the wood. Be as mindful of my well-being. . . ."

Marie Nelson has argued that the methods used here are probably "as likely to prevent swarming as those [methods] used by modern beekeepers" (1984:58). Annie Betts of *Bee World* offers a beekeeping perspective, explaining that throwing gravel over bees has been used as an effective way to prevent swarming by many cultures throughout history (1922:140). Again, we should be careful not to dismiss the incantation as mere superstition. The physical act of throwing dirt under the foot parallels the verbal act of saying "I catch it under my foot"; the physical act of throwing dirt over the bees parallels the verbal act of commanding the *sigewif* to sink to the earth. This verbal reinforcement of an effective physical act would likely aid in the ritual's transmission. John Miles Foley and Barbara Kerewsky Halpern have observed that orality often "works as a vital means of preservation and transmission" (1978:903) in healing charms. As with "Wið færstice," the verbal and nonverbal elements must be seen as a consistent whole. Through the mutual reinforcement of physical and verbal elements, the charm provides what modern science would accept as a valid

²⁰ MS 41 Corpus Christi College, Cambridge. See Nelson 1984 on the structural parallels between the physical and verbal acts involved in this charm.

means of controlling bees while at the same time providing a way of reestablishing order in the natural world through the poetic incantation.

In her recent translation of the *Old English Herbarium*, Anne Van Arsdall further demonstrates that Anglo-Saxon healers were aware of genuine curative functions. Rather than translating Latin remedies blindly, these medic-scribes translated with an eye toward healing herbs native to England—in much the same way that Latin poetic texts were often translated into traditional Anglo-Saxon idiom (2002:75ff.).²¹ Further, compilations varied from one manuscript to the next with substitutions of herbs depending on availability, indicating that each medic could vary a given remedy to fit the specific circumstances. Such patterns are similar to those we see in the transmission of oral traditions more widely: scribes are not confined to a fixed text; any given remedy can exist in multi-forms; and, most importantly, illustrations and instructions often appear incomplete because, as Van Arsdall reminds us, healers familiar with the traditions would “not require detailed instructions” (85). Any given remedy is complete only in performance.

By recognizing parallels between the charms and features of oral traditions more widely, we can better appreciate connections between metrical and non-metrical charms as well as between verbal and nonverbal portions of a single charm. We should thus be very careful not to dismiss the incantations of Old English charms (even those that may appear to be gibberish or nonsense) as superstition, peripheral to the healing process. Rather, a performance-centered approach requires us to appreciate them as essential elements in the performance and transmission of these healing remedies. As Niles succinctly states, “healers were singers, it seems” (1999:27).

Verbal/Nonverbal

Where science dismisses the poetic elements as superstition, literary scholarship tends to disregard any remedies that are *not* poetic. The metrical charms have been well-studied, but parallels across the wider tradition have not been as amply noted. Thus, a third set of dichotomies that a performance-centered approach can help unravel involves the traditional

²¹ On “indexed translation” see Foley’s discussion of *Andreas* (1995:181-207). See also Garner 2001 on the adaptation of *Judith* from its Latin source for an Anglo-Saxon audience. On native ingredients in Anglo-Saxon remedies, see further Voigts 1979.

hierarchy implicit in the study of the charms: metrical over non-metrical, verbal over nonverbal—distinctions that are far more ours than the Anglo-Saxons’.

The publication of *The Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems* was arguably the most significant event influencing scholarship on Old English charms. In this volume, Elliot Van Kirk Dobbie included twelve charms selected on the basis of the “sufficient regularity to warrant their inclusion in an edition of Anglo-Saxon poetry” (1942:cxx), twelve charms that have come to be highly privileged in Old English scholarship.²² While Dobbie certainly cannot have been expected to include all charms in this anthology of Anglo-Saxon poetry, the inadvertent consequences of his choices for inclusion can scarcely be overestimated; the vast majority of scholarship analyzing specific charms focuses on those classified as metrical, the non-metrical charms generally being considered only in exclusively historical or medical terms.

Scattered throughout five separate manuscripts,²³ these twelve charms do not, however, seem to have held any special status during the Anglo-Saxon period. The placement of the charms in a range of manuscripts suggests that the charms now classed as metrical were not valued solely on the basis of their alliterative meter nor were they viewed as the exclusive domain of medical instructions. (In fact, several of the metrical charms, which we tend to think of as most important, were inscribed in the margins of manuscripts.) The scribes apparently did not feel any need to group the “metrical” charms in one place within the body of medical texts or to isolate them from the larger body of metrical works.²⁴ Turning our attention to performance contexts and considering these charms alongside other remedies without metrical incantations—perhaps even without incantations at all—can lead to a more complete understanding both of the metrical charms themselves and the larger tradition of Anglo-Saxon healing

²² On methods of classification in other major collections, see Garner 2000:30-41.

²³ Four are inscribed in the margins of the Corpus Christi College Cambridge MS 41: Charms 8 (“For a Swarm of Bees”), 9 (“For Theft of Cattle”), 10 (“For Loss of Cattle”), and 11 (“A Journey Charm”). For further information on this manuscript, see Olsan 1999 and Dobbie 1942:cxxxi. Other metrical charms are to be found in MS Cotton Caligula A.Vii. British Museum, the Manuscript of the Saxon *Heliand* (Dobbie 1, “For Unfruitful Land”) and Royal MS 4A.xiv (Dobbie 12, “Against a Wen”).

²⁴ For a thorough discussion of meaning we can glean from manuscripts regarding Old English poetry, see O’Keeffe 1990.

remedies. Two pairs of charms are examined below to illustrate these possibilities.

Juxtaposition of two separate charms for the same purpose—one a metrical incantation lacking ritual instructions, the other a ritual ceremony without any instructions for incantation—illustrates the dual ways that the charms function to translate the supernatural realm into the human and thus gain power over afflictions. A charm in Harley 585 (189a), mentioned earlier, says that to cure a *wen*, a woman must go to a spring and fill a cup with water, empty the water into another vessel, then fill and empty it again until three vessels are filled (Grendon 1909:215):

Gif wænnas eglia mæn æt þære heortan, gange mædenman to wylle þe rihte east yrne, and gehlade ane cuppan fulle forð mid ðam streame, and singe þæron Credan and Paternoster; and geote þonne on oþer fæt, and hlade eft oþre, and singe eft Credan and Paternoster, and do swa, þæt þu hæbbe þreo. Do swa nygon dagas; sona him bið sel.

If wens afflict one at the heart, let a maiden go to a spring which runs east and draw one cup full, moving forth with the stream, and sing on it the Creed and a Paternoster and then pour it into another vessel and afterwards draw again, and sing again the Creed and a Paternoster, and do so, until you have three. Do so for nine days; soon it will be well for that one.

The process of pouring the water from one vessel to another, diminishing the water in the original vessel to nothing with each repetition, parallels the verbal simile in the metrical charm for the same purpose in which the *wen* is told to “weorne alswa weter on anbre” (“to shrink as water in a pail”) (Dobbie 1942:128):²⁵

Wenne, wenne, wenchichenne,
her ne scealt þu timbrien, ne nenne tun habben,
ac þu scealt north eonene to þan nihgan berhge,
þer þu hauest, ermig, enne broþer.
He þe sceal legge leaf et heafde.
Under fot wolues, under ueþer earnes,
under earnes clea, a þu geweornie.
Clinge þu alswa col on heorþe,
scing þu alswa scerne awage,
and **weorne** **alswa weter on anbre. . . .**

Wen, wen, little wen, here you must not build, nor have any dwelling, but you must go north to the nearby hill where you have, miserable, one

²⁵ This remedy appears in Royal MS 4A.xiv.

brother. He must lay a leaf at your head. Under the foot of a wolf, under the wing of the eagle, under the claw of the eagle, ever may you diminish. Shriveled as a coal on the hearth, shrink as muck in the wall, and **diminish as water in a pail**. . . .

As they present themselves in the surviving texts, the two charms appear to offer two equally valid means of tapping into the same source of power, one a verbal description and the other a dramatic enactment symbolizing the desired reduction. To use J. L. Austin's speech-act theory, the first is a "performative sentence" (1962:6-7) that, in the proper context, is understood by speaker and audience to function in the same way as corresponding ritual acts.

Similar connections can be seen between the well-known, metrical "Nine Herbs Charm" and a non-metrical charm protecting travelers. The non-metrical charm opens thus (Grendon 1909:191):²⁶

Wip miclum gonge ofer land, þylæs he toerige: mucgwyrnt nime him in hand, oþþe do on his sco. . . .

Against much traveling over land, lest he tire: let him take mugwort in his hand, or put it in his shoe. . . .

This charm has several parallels with the opening stanza of the metrical "Nine Herbs Charm" (Dobbie 119):²⁷

Gemyne ðu, mucgwyrnt . . .
 þu miht wip III and wið XXX,
 þu miht wip attre and wið onflyge,
 þu miht wip þam laþan ðe geond lond færð.

Remember, Mugwort . . . you have power against three and against thirty; you have power against poison and against infection; you have power against the hateful things that go throughout the land.

The phrase "Wip miclum gonge ofer land" in the non-metrical charm parallels the final lines addressed to Mugwort in the metrical charm: "wið

²⁶ The remainder of the charm includes the following incantation to be recited over the herb: "Tollam te artemesia ne lassus sim in via" ("I will pick you up, Artemisia, so that I not tire along the way"), MS Regius 12D xvii, 57a.

²⁷ MS Harley 585 ff. 160a-63a.

onflyge, þam laþan ðe geond lond færð.”²⁸ In the non-metrical charm, the phrase comprises part of the ritual instructions requiring the traveler to pick the herb mugwort. In the metrical charm, the phrase forms part of an incantation spoken directly to the herb itself. The physical ritual and the verbal ritual again tap into the same power, multiforms of the same protective charm. Viewing the two together reinforces the connection between the herb mugwort and travelers. Additionally, the juxtaposition of the two suggests that the opening phrase “Wiþ miclum gonge ofer land” of the non-metrical charm would likely have indexed a wide range of specific dangers that travelers face, such as the *attre* and *onflyge* (poison and infection) referred to specifically in the “Nine Herbs Charm.” This kind of metonymic meaning is typical of oral traditional art,²⁹ which relies on audience awareness of traditional associations to convey meaning.

Such patterns can also be understood in terms of the parataxis or adding style long recognized as a meaningful characteristic of Anglo-Saxon poetry. Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur, for instance, offers an extended discussion of the tendency in Old English poetry toward “a double or multiple statement of the same concept of idea in different words. . .” (1959:40). Lines 350-53 from *Beowulf* serve as an example. In this passage four noun phrases all refer to Hrothgar and thus evoke different aspects of his role as leader:

. . . “Ic þæs wine Deniga,
freaan Scyldinga frinan wille,
beaga bryttan, swa þu bena eart,
þeoden mærne ymb þinne sið. . . .”

“As you desire, I wish to ask the friend of the Danes, the prince of the Scyldings, the giver of rings, the renowned ruler, about your journey. . . .”

More recently Fred C. Robinson has described the style of *Beowulf* and the wider body of Old English poetry as “appositive” (1985). The constructions in this style, which generally lack explicit logical connections between apposed elements, Robinson observes, are “especially rich in implicit meaning” (4). Such implicit connections created through indexed associations are natural to an oral traditional style of composition, an art that

²⁸ Cf. also “The Journey Charm”: “wið eal þæt lað þe in to land fare” (“against everything hateful that goes into the land”; l. 5).

²⁹ See Foley 1991:10.

depends on an audience to complete the meaning-making process. Composition and reception both require active participation. If we expand the concept of apposition or variation to include nonverbal as well as verbal ways of creating meaning and embodying the charms' power, then the charms with and without incantations, with and without a recognizable meter, need not be seen as wholly separate elements in the healing tradition. We must attune ourselves more sensitively to traditional associations in order to participate in the meaning-making process.

“Pagan”/Christian

A fourth binary rendered meaningless in performance concerns the distinction between Christian and Germanic elements in the remedies. As Olsan reminds us, the tradition of the charms “both absorbed Christian motifs and rituals and became a part of Christian practices” (1999:403, n. 5). The field remedy charm, for instance, involves incantations that appeal to Christian figures including Christ and the Virgin Mary and requires the names of the four gospel authors to be written on sticks. Yet the ritual also includes an incantation, “Erce, erce, erce, eorþan modor” (“mother of earth”), with *Erce* generally understood as an ancient Celtic deity.³⁰ A performance-centered approach allows us to accept the charm in all its seeming ambiguity and to recognize the genuine syncretism of traditions inherent in the remedy.

Likewise the Nine Herbs Charm (discussed above) includes explicitly Germanic and Christian references in its incantation. The power of the Nine Herbs is attributed ultimately to the Germanic god Woden (Dobbie 1942:120):³¹

ða genam Woden VIII wuldortanas
 sloh ða þa næddran, þæt heo on VIII tofleah

 Nu magon þas VIII wyrta wið nygon wuldorgeflogenum. . . .

³⁰ See Duckert 1972. See also Dobbie 1942:208 on Erce as “a Germanic goddess of fertility.” Niles has suggested the possibility that the phrase may be a corruption of “Ecce, ecce, ecce, eorðe modor,” which would render the line “Hearken, hearken, hearken, mother earth” (1980:55). Regardless of its specific origins, the line offers strong evidence of syncretism.

³¹ MS Harley 585 ff. 160a-63a.

For Woden took nine glory-twigs and slew the nine snakes so that they flew into nine pieces. . . . Now these nine herbs have power against nine who have fled from glory. . . . (lines 32-33; 45)

Later in the same incantation we are told that “Crist stod ofer adle ængan cundes” (“Christ stood over diseases of every kind”; line 58).

This type of syncretism is evidenced throughout living oral traditions. Larry Evers and Felipe Molina explain, for example, that over the past four and one-half centuries since their conquest by the Christian Spanish, the Yaqui—a Native American tribe living in what is now Arizona—have developed a verbal art that absorbs Christian beliefs into traditional Yaqui culture (1987:40):

It includes not only the formal Latin prayers, litanies, and sermons . . . but a large body of apocryphal Biblical narratives as well. In these stories the pantheon of the Jesuits walk the Río Yaqui country. The stories demonstrate dramatically how Yaquis have made the Catholicism given them into something distinctly their own. Stories tell how *Dios*, God the Father, created the cow, the horse and tobacco; how *eva*, Eve, organized the first pahko; how *jesucristo*, Jesus Christ, himself, roamed through Yaqui lands creating mountains and pointing out medicinal herbs to the Yaqui people.

Likewise, in the Mande *Epic of Son-Jara*, told by Fa-Digi Sisoko and translated by John William Johnson (1992), the Mande hero’s genealogy is intertwined with that of Islamic leaders. In fact, the hero’s ultimate power derives largely *from* the combination of native occult practices within Islamic tradition. Like these living traditions, the Old English charms as a genre seem to have been flexible enough to accommodate the shifting cultural forces and to translate powers from multiple traditions into potential healing power.

The syncretism we see in the field remedy and the “Nine Herbs Charm” is not limited to the verbal realm. Rather these metrical charms reflect a larger pattern deeply embedded in the tradition as a whole. For instance, many charms against influence of elves—a concept that predates Christianity (Jolly 1996:133-38)—include explicitly Christian elements in the healing ritual. A charm in Harley 585 (xxix II) against *ælfside* (“elf-influence”) requires the healer to write on a Eucharist dish a Latin biblical story of Jesus teaching in Galilee (Grattan and Singer 1952:108). The syncretism we saw in the oral and poetic incantation is here manifested in a physical act of writing and the use of Christian implements (Jolly 1996:140-41).

A recipe for a salve against *ælfcynne* even more explicitly expresses a belief in elves and other *nihtgengan* (“night-goers”) as supernatural beings coexisting with humans. And, again, the healing ritual incorporates distinctly Christian elements. After mixing the ingredients, the healer is told to set the salve under the altar, sing nine masses over them as they boil in butter (again, a possible time-keeping mechanism), add holy salt (*haliges sealtas*), strain them through a cloth, and throw the herbs into running water. The final instructions require the sign of the cross to be made over the man being treated with the salve (Storms 1948:245).³² Christianity did not supplant belief in other supernatural influences. Rather, Christian ritual provided an additional means of coping with afflictions attributed to elves and other such beings. At a very deep level, the Anglo-Saxon world-view synthesizes Christian and native belief structures. The metrical and non-metrical charms alike reflect the syncretism inherent in the healing tradition. In poetic incantations, in ritual actions, in written inscriptions, Christian and Germanic elements are inseparable components of healing rituals.

Conclusion

Traditional Anglo-Saxon wisdom tells us that “Lef mon læces behofað” (“A sick man needs a leech”; Dobbie 1942:157). Expressing a need for healing remedies in alliterative verse, this maxim embodies the dualities inherent in the charms’ performance. Science and superstition, physical and verbal, poetry and prose, Christian and Germanic are all inseparable in performance. As the charms for black blains and childbirth help illustrate, viewing any single remedy in isolation provides an incomplete view of the healing tradition. The myriad forms in which the charms were recorded attest to their ultimate oral provenance and the complexities of ritual that no text is adequate to convey. Charms such as those against swarming bees, a sudden stitch, and a swollen spleen all help elucidate the connections between medicine and what modern science often dismisses as superstition. Examination of metrical and non-metrical charms for the same purpose—such as the pair of charms against wens examined above—diminishes apparent gaps between poetry and prose, between spoken word and ritual action. And the coexistence of Christian and Germanic elements in “The Nine Herbs Charm,” the “Æcerbot,” and the elf charms reflects the deeply rooted syncretism of beliefs in the Anglo-Saxon

³² MS Regius 12 D xvii, f. 123ab.

oral tradition. As healing rituals, the body of texts that we know collectively as “charms” depended on performance context for healing power, and it is only by an awareness of performance that we can understand these often cryptic texts with anything like the competence of their original audiences.³³

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³³ This article is an expanded version of a paper presented at the International Medieval Congress in Kalamazoo, Michigan. I am grateful to the session organizers, John Miles Foley and Mark C. Amodio, for their helpful insights during the preparation of this paper.

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The Germanic *Heldenlied* and the Poetic *Edda*: Speculations on Preliterary History

Edward R. Haymes

One of the proudest inventions of German scholarship in the nineteenth century was the *Heldenlied*, the heroic song, which was seen by scholars as the main conduit of Germanic heroic legend from the Period of Migrations to the time of their being written down in the Middle Ages. The concept stems indirectly from the suggestions of several eighteenth-century Homeric scholars that since the Homeric poems were much too long to have been memorized and performed in oral tradition, they must have existed as shorter, episodic songs. Friedrich August Wolf's well-known *Prolegomena ad Homerum* (1795) collected evidence for the idea that writing was not used for poetry until long after Homer's time. He argued for a thorough recension of the poem under (or perhaps by) Pisistratus in the sixth century BCE as the first comprehensive written Homer. These ideas were almost immediately applied to the Middle High German *Nibelungenlied* by Karl Lachmann (1816), who was trained as a classical philologist and indeed continued to contribute in that area at the same time that he was one of the most influential members of the generation that founded the new discipline of *Germanistik*. On the basis of rough spots and contradictions (not only Homer nods!) Lachmann thought he could recognize twenty separate *Lieder* in the Middle High German epic. At the same time that Lachmann was deconstructing the German medieval epic, Elias Lönnrot was assembling the Finnish epic he called *Kalevala* from shorter songs in conscious imitation of the Homer (or Pisistratus) described by Wolf.

The *Liedertheorie* advanced by Wolf and Lachmann was revised by Andreas Heusler in the early years of the twentieth century. Heusler (1905) used the songs of the *Poetic Edda* as his models and decided that the way from song to epic was not by stringing the songs together with clumsily

composed bridge passages, but by a process of expansion (*Aufschwellung*).¹ The individual song contained within it the entire story (*Fabel*) and the epic poet simply expanded material contained within the song to produce his work. The relationship between *Lied* and *Epos* was, Heusler argued, like that between an acorn and a tree, not the relationship between individual pearls and a necklace.

A by-product of these theoretical musings is the concept of the Germanic *Heldenlied*, which was essentially a product of cogitation at the writing desk. Few of its spiritual fathers ever heard an oral heroic song or epic of any kind, and they worked out the form mainly from a conviction of what the transmission of heroic legend would have had to be, rather than from a consideration of the surviving evidence. Preliterate poetry, they argued, must have been composed just like literate poetry, that is, by a poet who composed by “writing” on the tablet of his memory, very much as the literate poets of the nineteenth century wrote on paper. The theory came first and the evidence was adjusted to fit. The fact that there is not a single Germanic *Heldenlied* of the type described by Lachmann or Heusler surviving from anywhere outside of Iceland never seems to have bothered them.² Heusler used the heroic poems of the Icelandic *Poetic Edda* as his models for the *Heldenlied*, the assumption being that the Icelanders had maintained the form and content of Old Germanic heroic poetry until they were written down in the late thirteenth century. In the summation of his theory in *Die altgermanische Dichtung* Heusler characterizes the genre in his typical style (1923:147):

Auch das Heldenlied ist ein größeres Werk, etwa zwischen 80 und einigen 200 Langzeilen; vorbedacht und auswendig gelernt, für Einzelvortrag bestimmt. Es gehört zu den objektiven Gattungen, ohne ausgesprochene Beziehung auf die Gegenwart. Sein Inhalt ist eine heroische Fabel aus zeitlosem Einst; eine einkreisige Geschichte von straffem Umriß, sparsam mit Auftritten und Menschen. Die Darstellung ist episch-dramatisch zu nennen: Erzählung aus Dichters Munde wechselt mit handelnden Reden der Gestalten (Ansprachen, Zwiesprachen, auch kurzen Monologen). Summarischer Bericht tritt zurück hinter geschauten Szenen, die sich

¹ Heusler assumed that the *Aufschwellung* would take place in the literary process of epic composition. Ironically it is within purely oral composition that we find true *Aufschwellung* as described by Heusler. See Lord 1956 for an egregious example.

² The Old High German *Hildebrandslied* comes closest, but it shows evidence of being the product of an epic rather than a *Lied* tradition. See Haymes 1976 for a discussion of this point.

ruckweise folgen (“springender Stil”). Zustandsmalerei, beschauliche Rede, lyrischer Erguß halten sich in engsten Grenzen.

The *Heldenlied* is also a larger work, between approximately 80 and some 200 long lines; composed in advance and memorized, designed for individual performance. It belongs to the objective genres without a specific reference to the present. Its content is a heroic story out of the timeless “Once;” a story with but one cycle with a tight structure, economical with characters and scenes. The narration must be called epic-dramatic: narration from the poet’s mouth alternating with active speech of the characters (speeches, dialogues, also short monologues). Summarizing narration is reduced in favor of observed scenes, which follow each other without transition (“springing style”). Painting of conditions, descriptive speech, lyrical outbursts are kept in tight rein.

Heusler cites the poems of the *Edda* as the best examples of this genre. Most Nordists since Heusler have seen the Eddic poems as specifically Norse, if not purely Icelandic poetry (e.g., von See 1978), but that has not kept Germanists from continuing to use them as models for the *Heldenlied*. Heusler disparaged the earlier theory as “romantic” without seeming to realize that his own theory, based on the idea of a single creative genius for each song, was just as romantic, finding its roots in the “genius” idea of art rather than the collectivist notions of the early nineteenth century.

Alongside the Old Norse/Icelandic poetry of the *Edda* we find the far more numerous verses referred to as “skaldic” poetry (Frank 1978; von See 1980; Kristjánsson 1997). “Skaldic poetry” is a modern term based on the Old Norse term *skáld*, which was used in medieval texts (and modern Icelandic) simply to mean poet. These poems seem to have originated as praise poetry at the courts of Norwegian nobles and kings, perhaps as early as the ninth century. The earliest poet mentioned (who suspiciously bears the same name as the Norse god of poetry) is Bragi the Old, who is supposed to have been at the court of Harold Fairhair (reigned c. 870-930). The poems are in complex metrical forms that require exact placement of words and are thus not as susceptible to change in oral transmission as other poetries.³ The skaldic strophes are found today embedded in the sagas of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries where they function as source confirmation, a kind of footnote system to corroborate the truth of the prose narration. In addition to the complex meter, the poets used an equally complex system of figurative language built around *kennings*—metaphors in which one concept

³ Roberta Frank provides an excellent introduction to the art of the skalds together with analysis and metrical description of typical examples of their work in her study *Old Norse Court Poetry* (1978).

was allowed to stand for another, such as “battle-tree” for “warrior.” The kennings of skaldic poetry do not usually enrich the picture of the person or thing depicted, but rather function to hide the meaning from the uninitiated. Skaldic poetry differs from other traditional forms of poetry in that the names of the poets are usually transmitted along with the poems. The poems are neither truly lyric nor narrative, but imply a narration through their allusive style. The kind of poetry represented by the skaldic verses has not received a great deal of attention from followers of oral theory. We will return to this issue later.

Those few *Germanisten* who had heard of oral epics assumed that they had nothing in common with the Germanic form (Schneider 1936). The Swiss folklorist John Meier sketched in 1909 most of the characteristics of oral epic later described by Parry and Lord without having any visible impact on the theories of Germanic transmission taught in universities through most of the twentieth century. Although expert in the area of “folk epic,” Meier himself seems to have accepted without question the traditional description of the Germanic *Heldenlied* for early Germanic poetry.

German scholars generally cite the *terminus technicus* “oral poetry” in English in order to emphasize its status as an alien concept. The cosmopolitan younger colleagues use this alien status positively, in order to emphasize its esoteric glamor. The more conservative colleagues use the foreign language to keep the results of this area of research as far as possible from the *gesicherten* results of solid German philology. Both groups tend to use the term “oral-formulaic poetry” in a relatively undifferentiated and uncritical fashion. Some of the stereotypes of this usage are in serious need of correction.

Some of these stereotypes have to be attributed to Parry and Lord themselves. As pioneers in their field they can perhaps be forgiven a somewhat overstated presentation of their results in contrast to what had gone before. *The Singer of Tales* (Lord 1960) remains an exciting book today at least partly because of this missionary zeal on the part of its author. Both Parry and Lord subscribed to what Ruth Finnegan (1977) has called the “Great Divide” theory in which there was total and absolute difference in thinking, world view, and poetry between preliterate and literate communities. Lord equated this division with the acceptance of a fixed text. In the South Slavic oral epic tradition he studied, Lord believed that the appearance of written and printed texts of songs led to their memorization and thus to the death of the tradition that had produced them. In Lord’s thinking, any poetry that had a fixed text was written poetry, even if it arose and was passed on without the use of writing. He went so far as to speak of

“written composition without writing” on several occasions (e.g., Stolz and Shannon 1976:176).

In spite of this somewhat absurd formulation, Lord’s division of poetry into two types—that which is composed during performance and that which is memorized—may help us to understand some divisions within the dark ages of preliterate Germanic narrative poetry. Lord believed that the two types would be mutually exclusive, since they require very different disciplines. He paid little attention to the memorization of texts, because he saw this mainly as a threat to his object of research, the living oral epic tradition in which poems were recomposed in every performance. Since the appearance of *The Singer of Tales*, several scholars have shown that oral traditions can have relatively or almost totally fixed texts, if there is reason to do so.⁴ There is no question that the model proposed by Parry and Lord has considerable validity in many different traditions around the world, including some that were long thought to be “memorized.” A recent study by the psychologist David Rubin (1995) applies the results of psychological studies of memory to the field of oral epic, ballads, and counting-out rhymes, finding considerable support for the Parry-Lord model; but he also observes that shorter poems with multiple constraints can maintain a remarkably fixed “text” in oral transmission. We should keep in mind that the division is not as sharp as Lord would have had us believe, since there are elements of memorization in almost all oral epics and there are probably changes based on traditional diction within memorized transmission, but the two types represent the ends of a scale that stretches from Avdo Medjedović, the most extreme example of Lord’s improvising poet, to the poets of Somali oral poetry described below, the best documented case of memorized orality in the modern world (Lord 1956; Andrzejewski and Lewis 1964).

There are thus many different kinds of oral poetry in the world and the kind described by Parry and Lord is only one of them.⁵ Their description only applies to a relatively broad epic poetry that is composed in performance. Only this kind of poetry produces the “oral-formulaic” style observed by Parry and Lord because it is the only kind that really needs it. The notion that we can determine which written works of the past were “oral dictated” texts and which ones merely used the register of oral composition for a written text in imitation of the oral style should now belong to the past,

⁴ See Finnegan 1977; Opland 1980; and Andrzejewski and Lewis 1964.

⁵ This journal has documented the wide range of oral poetries in the world. The broad range of the field and the varied approaches to oral composition and performance are explored from many angles in Foley 2002.

but it should be clear that one cannot imitate a poetry that is not there. If there is no original, that is, no oral epic in formulaic language, there can be no imitation in written form (see Haymes 1980).

Ruth Finnegan's surveys (1977, 1988) of differing oral poetries offer a welcome complement to the somewhat narrow focus of the original Parry and Lord studies. Along the range of differing oral poetries described by Finnegan, the poetry of the Somali stands out in comparison to the oral poetry depicted by Lord.⁶ The Somali poets reportedly compose their poems in private and then present them after they have been memorized. The poetry is so complicated in regard to word sequence, alliteration, and meter that only very tiny changes in wording are possible. Composition during presentation would be impossible here. Unfortunately the authors of the study never carried out the kinds of experiments Parry and Lord made to study the actual stability of the verse in transmission, but their description of the poetry is particularly interesting (Andrzejewski and Lewis 1964:44-46):

For the Somalis, listening to poetry is thus not only an artistic pleasure, but provides them with the fascinating intellectual exercise of decoding the veiled speech of the poet's message. Sometimes, however, vagueness and obscurity reaches such a pitch that the average listener would be quite perplexed were it not for the fact that there is a tacit poetic convention to help him:

. . . .

A poem passes from mouth to mouth. Between a young Somali who listens today to a poem composed fifty years ago, five hundred miles away, and its first audience there is a long chain of reciters who passed it one to another. It is only natural that in this process of transmission some distortion occurs, but comparisons of different versions of the same poem usually shows a surprisingly high degree of fidelity to the original. This is due to a large extent to the formal rigidity of Somali poetry: if one word is substituted for another, for instance, it must still keep to the rules of alliteration, thus limiting very considerably the number of possible changes. The general trend of the poem, on the other hand, inhibits the omission or transposition of lines.

One would think one was reading a description of Old Norse skaldic poetry here. The method of composition is reminiscent of the famous passage in *Egilssaga* (Nordal 1933:177-92) in which the skald Egil Skallagrímsson composes his "Head Ransom" in private overnight so that he can perform it for the king the next day and save his life. The transmission of the Somali poetry takes place just as Nordists since the Middle Ages have imagined the

⁶ For a detailed investigation of Somali poetry, see Andrzejewski and Lewis 1964.

transmission of skaldic poetry. And finally the “fascinating intellectual exercise of decoding the veiled speech of the poet’s message” could just as well apply to the reception of skaldic poetry, a form that also lives from “veiled speech” in the form of arcane kennings that can only be deciphered by those who know the tradition.

The development of skaldic poetry, which is usually dated back to the ninth century, demanded a new discipline of memory. Like the poetry of the Somali the skaldic stanzas were complicated enough to demand almost perfect memorization. The transmission of these poems from the moment of their composition until their transcription in the thirteenth century did not always take place without errors, but the idea of a fixed text now had a place in the conception of an almost totally oral tradition of poetry. The fixed text was not only present but necessary for this poetry, and a new discipline of memorization had to be developed.

It must be conceded that writing of a sort did exist among the Germanic peoples from shortly before or shortly after the beginning of the Christian era on. This writing consisted of runes largely used for magical purposes. We find runic inscriptions on artifacts of importance beginning in the second or third centuries of our era. We find later runic inscriptions that can be read as lines of verse, but there is little indication that runes were widely used to preserve skaldic poetry. Joseph Harris (1996) has suggested that runes may have strengthened the concept of a fixed text at some point, noting references to words as objects in the poetry and the fact that Egil Skallagrímsson is depicted as being as skillful with runes as with verses. In one scene Egil inscribes an insulting verse in runes on a *niðstöng* or insult pole, but the saga portrays him as making the inscription *after* speaking the verses. In any case, the vast majority of references to poetic preservation and transmission in the sagas refer to memorization, and only a tiny minority refer to any kind of runic inscription. We may wish to question the accuracy of the sagas in reporting detail from periods of as much as three or more centuries before they were committed to writing, but the unanimity of description in those sagas does suggest that the generations alive at the time of the first saga-writing knew a largely oral transmission of skaldic poetry.

The application of the oral theory to Old Norse poetry has been up to now less than satisfying.⁷ Two articles by Lars Lönnroth (1971, 1981) attempt to find traces of oral-formulaic language in Eddic poetry. He

⁷ For a more extensive survey of scholarship involving the oral theory and Old Norse poetry see “A Survey of Oral-Formulaic Criticism of Eddic Poetry” (Acker 1998:85-110).

recognizes in these articles that the oral-formulaic theory can have only limited usefulness in describing the composition and oral transmission of these poems. Like most scholars he is more interested in formulas as such than in the composition and transmission of the poetry. His discussion (1981) of the heaven-and-earth formula addresses the history of Germanic and Christian concepts in Old Norse poetry, but it is only slightly interesting as an example of an oral formula. Joseph Harris (1983) investigates the two versions of *Helgakviða Hundingsbana* in the light of oral transmission and decides that they are at least partially to be understood as the results of a written attempt to harmonize two oral versions. For him HH I is a skaldic revision of material that is present in an older form in HH II. In a more recent article (1996) he investigates the interaction between skaldic poetry and runes and finds that the fixed form of the runic inscriptions might have influenced the development of a fixed form in the orally transmitted poetry. Both Lönnroth and Harris (along with the handful of other researchers who have dealt with this question) recognize the inadequacy of the oral poetry theory in its traditional form for dealing with the special situation we find in the Old Norse poetries.

On the other hand, the common Germanic narrative poetry was, unless we are seriously misled, of the kind described by Parry and Lord, that is, “oral [epic] poetry” that was composed to some extent anew in each performance.⁸ This form of epic left its traces most clearly in Old English and Old Saxon narrative poetry, little of which is based on traditional subject matter. In spite of the new material provided by Biblical narratives and saints’ lives, we still find the formulaic language, the loose construction of the verses, and a widespread use of typical scenes and “themes,” many of which betray their source in oral heroic epic.⁹ All of these elements can be most efficiently explained as the use of a traditional poetic technique, a poetic register adapted from the oral epic by the first writers of narrative poetry in these languages. None of the surviving texts (including those on traditional subjects such as *Beowulf*) is an “oral” text in the purest sense; all were—as far as we can determine—conceived and executed as written poetry. If these poets were not using the techniques of an actual oral epic

⁸ The most recent objections to this theory (Andersson 1988; Schröder 1991; and Ebenbauer 2001) do not get beyond a reaffirmation of Heusler’s notion of the *Heldenlied*. All three articles are something of a *derrière garde* operation, but they represent a position that is still strong in medieval Germanistics.

⁹ One of the best explorations of the use of traditional themes derived from an oral epic is in an article (Andersson 1988) designed to prove the irrelevance of oral theory to the study of Germanic epic.

poetry, then we would have to imagine someone inventing a narrative style and language that looks very much like our idea of an oral epic, and that without reference to *The Singer of Tales*! One would also have to imagine that these same inventors made up numerous narrative patterns (Lord's "themes") that would be at home in heroic poetry, but have to be adjusted (not always successfully) for use in Biblical and hagiographic poetry.

The poems of the *Edda* are quite different. The similarities between the language and metrics of the Eddic poetry and the South Germanic tradition certainly point toward a common source just as the commonalities of vocabulary, grammar, and structure point toward a lost Germanic common language. The presence of continental legends in some of the Eddic poems strengthens this impression. These poems treat stories that are mentioned in Old English and Old High German poetry and are treated with Heusler's *epische Breite* (epic breadth) in Middle High German epic. There are, however, enough significant differences between the poems of the *Edda* and the South German poetry in matters of both style and form to suggest a relatively sharp break between the two traditions.

The poems that are generally called Eddic—the poems in the *Codex Regius* and those poems that are traditionally associated with them—do not form a uniform genre (Harris 1985). In order to make the following discussion as simple as possible, I shall be considering only the narrative poems of what is generally held to be the oldest layer in the collection such as the Sigurðr and Atli poems, in other words those that are closest to the epic in style and language. The prophetic songs, the large collection of wisdom-strophes, the riddle and flyting poems among the mythological poems, as well as the clearly late additions such as *Grípispá* or *Helreið Brynhildar*, are later stations on the line whose beginning I would like to sketch here (cf. Fidjestøl 1999).

The difference between the poems of the *Edda* and the common South Germanic form goes far beyond the difference between Old Icelandic and Old English as languages. For our concern here we need to consider the marks of oral composition first. The question of the oral formula plays an important role here, even though the formula concept itself has become problematic over the years. Germanistics has used a conception of the formula that arose independently of the oral-formulaic school and is perhaps best expressed in the attempt at a definition by de Boor (1925:379):

[die Formel ist] die von der Allgemeinheit anerkannte und übernommene und dadurch traditionell gewordene Prägung eines Gedankens oder Begriffes, die in derselben oder annähernd der gleichen Fassung in verschiedenen Zusammenhängen jederzeit wiederkehren kann.

[the formula is] the formulation of a thought or concept, which has been recognized and adopted by the general public and thus become traditional, and which can occur at any time in the same—or almost the same—form in differing contexts.

Alliterating pair formulas like “Haus und Hof” (“house and courtyard”) or “Land und Leute” (“land and people”) are among those singled out for special attention. This notion was shared by *Germanistik* and Homeric studies. Writing in Europe at about the same time as de Boor, Parry may have set the oral poetry theory off a bit in the wrong direction by his insistence on using the traditionally defined formula as the backbone of his oral theory. His definition of the formula is couched in somewhat similar terms as de Boor’s with the addition of a metrical component: “The formula in the Homeric poems may be defined as *a group of words which is regularly employed under the same metrical conditions to express a given essential idea*” (Parry 1971:272, emphasis in original). Later studies have indicated that the basis of oral composition in performance may be more profitably sought in the metrical-syntactical patterns underlying the verse than in repeated phrases as such. Indeed, many repeated phrases seem to be more a product of such a metrically bound language than formulas in any traditional sense. Whether oral epic is produced by putting together fixed formulas as the version of the theory put forward for Old English poetry by Francis P. Magoun (1953) and generally by Lord (1960) suggests or whether the repeated phrases are simply the product of metrically shaped syntactical patterns being filled again and again by the same limited linguistic material, the fact remains that poetry whose language is derived from improvisatory oral epic has a much higher level of repeated phrases than does poetry composed individually line by line, whether this poetry is composed orally or on paper (Haymes 1980).

The *Atlakviða* is fairly certainly one of the older poems in the *Poetic Edda*.¹⁰ It is composed in a somewhat old-fashioned style and narrates its story without the help of prose insertions or other aids (if one ignores the notation at the end that the story is told *gleggra* (“more clearly”) in the *Atlamál*). This poem would have to stand closest to the traditional Germanic heroic song if there are any such songs in the *Edda* at all. It differs,

¹⁰ Quotes come from the edition by Neckel and Kuhn 1962. The parallel lines discussed below and in the appendix were sought with the help of Kellogg 1988. Alois Wolf (1999) has shown that even this poem is shot through with relatively “late” features. He also shows extensive evidence of skaldic influence in the surviving poem, further strengthening the argument made in this paper.

however, from the common South Germanic style specifically in those areas that should indicate oral epic composition. Differing studies (using differing criteria) have established that the Old English poetry that has been subjected to formulaic analysis has a formulaic density of some 20 to 30 percent (summarized in Foley 1988). The *Atlakviða* for its part shows a “formulaic” density of less than 10 percent and only 1.4 percent of the poem consists of lines that are repeated elsewhere in the Eddic corpus. Let us look a little closer at the repetitions involved. The percentage quoted above refers to some 25 verses that are repeated elsewhere in the Eddic corpus. Of these 25, however, 21 are repeated only in the *Atlakviða* itself. That means that only four verses of the poem belong to the tradition of Eddic language outside our poem. There are a couple of common formulas such as *sverði hvosso* (“with a sharp sword”; 19, 1b) or *þioðkonunga* (“of people’s kings”; 43, 5b) but these are very rare. The formulaic systems that, according to Donald K. Fry (1967), are the key to Old English formulaic verse are also almost wholly lacking. We do find the common *inquit*-formula *þa kvað Gunnarr* (“then Gunnar said that”; 23, 1a and 25, 1a) twice in the poem, which has 19 parallels elsewhere in the Eddic corpus. But both instances of this formula stand outside the strophic structure of the *Atlakviða* and must be read as a fifth line of the strophe, in other words as extrametrical and therefore possibly a later addition. These fifth lines are also filled out with the common heroic formulas *gumna drótinn* (“lord of men”; 23, 1b) and *geir-Niflunga* (“spear-Nibelung”; 25, 1b), which have no exact but many approximate parallels in the corpus.

The repeated lines are concentrated in the mirror-image depictions of the scenes in which the cook Hjalli is killed so that his heart can be substituted for Högni’s, and then—after Gunnar has recognized that the trembling heart could never have come from his brother—the action is repeated with Högni. This is clearly a repetition for rhetorical and poetic purposes, not a use of traditional building blocks. The other passages involving repeated verses also demonstrate that the repetitions are part of a conscious poetic construction. The whole-line expression “*mar inom mélgreyppa Myrcvið inn ókunna*” (“the horse with foaming-bridle [through] Mirkwood the unknown”) is used to describe Knéfröðr’s journey from Hunmörc to the Rhine in strophe 3 and later the return journey with Gunnar and Högni in strophe 13. Three further pairs of verses connect the two journeys. None of these repetitions can be considered formulaic in the sense of epic composition during performance, nor can they even be considered traditional formulas in the sense of the definition by de Boor cited above. They are clearly expressive poetic devices used to mark off parts of a poem and to connect related scenes.

If the Eddic poems are not the products of epic improvisation as described by Parry and Lord, then they must have been memorized and passed on with little or no change between performances. This means that both major verse forms we know from the earliest period in Old Norse/Old Icelandic literature were dependent on (more or less) verbatim memorization. They were “written poetry without writing,” to use Lord’s problematic term. Proceeding from this observation it is not a great leap to imagine the skalds as poets of the Eddic poems in their current form. Felix Genzmer suggested a long time ago (1926) that the early skald Þorbjörn Hornklofi might have been the poet of the *Atlakviða* (cf. Wolf 1999). In an earlier article (1919), Genzmer described the use of Eddic forms in skaldic poetry to generate what he called *eddische Preislieder*. Harris (1983) describes the commonalities between skaldic poetry and the Eddic poem he is discussing. As late as the early thirteenth century we have a named poet, Gunnlaugr Leifsson, composing a translation of the “Prophecies of Merlin” in the most conservative of the Eddic meters, the *fornyrðislag* (Kristjánsson 1997:332). The fact that the skalds made extensive use of Eddic meters and that Eddic poetry often shows similarities to skaldic poetry indicates strongly that the border between them was unclear and more importantly that the same poets and singers were involved with both genres. All of this suggests strongly that the skalds themselves are responsible for the shape of the poems at the time of their transcription in the thirteenth century.

We do need to ask why the skalds would compose such poetry. The Eddic poems were apparently never admired the same way skaldic poetry was. They were transmitted anonymously while most skaldic strophes have poets’ names attached to them, whether correct or not. It must remain a conjecture, but there are two plausible reasons for the skalds to have composed these poems. In the first place, the skalds needed a version of the heroic and mythical legends that they could present in their repertoire. Lord’s observation that memorized and improvised epic could not coexist in one performer is probably just as true for preliterate poetry as it is for the oral and written poetry of the *guslari*. Poets and singers who were used to memorizing their own and others’ verses would have been more comfortable with heroic and mythological songs with fixed texts. Secondly, the skalds needed a living knowledge of these songs among their audience if the fine points of their special language were to be understood. If Gisli Súrsson refers to Guðrún Gjukadóttir in strophe 12 of the *Gisla Saga*, then he has to assume that everyone who will hear his verse will also know some version of a *Sigurðarkviða*. Since we hear nothing about a special guild of heroic singers, it is highly probable that skaldic and Eddic poetry were passed on by the same singers. If we ask how such a poetry—based on the traditional

Germanic materials, but making use of certain compositional tools of the skalds—might look, then we would have to say that the results would appear very much like the narrative poems of the Codex Regius.

There are other characteristics these poems share with skaldic verse. The most striking formal difference between the Eddic poems and the South Germanic epic lies in the use of a strophe for the Norse poetry. This strophe binds together sequences of what are essentially the alliterative long lines of the southern tradition in strophes of at least four lines. The loose forward motion of the older epic is replaced by the four-square shape of the Eddic strophe. These strophes package the song in units that can be memorized more easily. Although the strophes of Eddic poetry are generally simpler than those common in skaldic poetry, we do find examples of skaldic poets using the Eddic meters for specific skaldic purposes.¹¹ In other words, the line dividing Eddic and skaldic verse could be crossed in both directions.

Throughout this paper I have tried to avoid the question of dating. I cited Genzmer's thesis that the ninth-century *skáld* Þorbjörn Hornklofi was the poet of the *Atlakviða* only to show the nearness of the Eddic to the skaldic style, not to place the composition in the murky past. I think the observations here are correct whether the change to the "Eddic" form took place in the ninth century or the twelfth. There is evidence of both early and late in the development of skaldic and Eddic forms, so we will always be left in the dark about whether the history of these forms is as the sagas tell us or whether the poems were largely composed late in order to fill in the blanks in the Icelanders' knowledge of their past. There may well be an element of truth in both concepts—probably no poem of the collection we call the *Poetic Edda* is very old in the form we have it, but many contain elements that *are* quite old. The composition and recomposition of the poems we know as Eddic probably went on throughout the preliterate period in Iceland. We know that the stories they preserved were somehow transmitted from the period of Migrations in the fourth, fifth, and sixth centuries to their being written down in Iceland in the thirteenth century. We have no idea when these poems achieved their "final" form, but the few Icelandic texts of the thirteenth century that make any mention of these poems assume them to be fixed entities. Both the *Snorra Edda* and the *Völsungasaga* quote from the Eddic texts in a form that is only slightly different from the texts we find in the Codex Regius. In fact, the best examples of variant texts are found within the Codex Regius collection itself: the two Helgi poems, the two Sigurd poems, and the two Atli poems are in each case variant poems on the

¹¹ Probably the best known example is the *Eiríksmál*, one of Genzmer's Eddic praise-songs.

same old story, each showing the way different poets handled the material (see Harris 1983; Andersson 1983).

If the poems of the *Poetic Edda* came into being as the recomposition of traditional materials by the skalds, then they certainly cannot be used as examples of the common Germanic *Heldenlied*. The tradition represented by the poems of the Edda are a new departure that tell us no more about their oral epic ancestors than, let us say, Middle High German heroic epic. That the ethos and plot of the *Atlakviða* look more ancient than the second half of the *Nibelungenlied* cannot be denied, but these characteristics can be seen just as easily as the result of a Norse (or more probably specifically Icelandic) recomposition than as an especially archaic form of the legend. The poems of the *Edda* do not belong to the type of oral epic described by Lord in his *Singer of Tales*, but observations derived from that study, from the study of Somali oral poetry, and from other studies of oral traditions may still help us to understand the history of both the Norse and the South Germanic epic traditions. The failure of the oral-formulaic method to describe the poems of the Edda shows that they belong to a different kind of oral poetry than that described by Lord. When we contrast this with the indications that the South Germanic heroic tradition as seen in the language of Old English and Old Saxon poetry do belong to that kind of poetry, it is apparent that the two traditions used different kinds of oral composition and transmission and that we cannot use the Norse poems as evidence for a description of the South Germanic tradition. In other words, I think we can now respond with a resounding “yes” to Werner Schröder’s (1991) rhetorical question “Ist das germanische Heldenlied ein Phantom?”¹²

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¹² A version of this article oriented toward Old Norse scholarship appeared in German as “Heldenlied und Eddalied” in *Erzählen im mittelalterlichen Skandinavien* (2000:9-20). I am indebted to Bruce Beatie, Robert Kellogg, Vésteinn Ólason, and Ármann Jakobsson for critical reading and suggestions.

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Appendix

The following is a list of all half-lines repeated in the *Atlakviða* along with those few that recur elsewhere in the *Edda* corpus. All quotes, line numbers, and abbreviations are those used in Neckel and Kuhn (1962).

Verses (= half-lines) that are repeated outside the *Atlakviða*:

6, 6 á Gnitaheiði: Grp. 11, 4.
 38, 8 oc buri svása: Hm. 10, 2
 39, 3 hringom rauðom: hringa rauða Rgn 15, 7; Gðr. II 25, 5
 43, 6 þioðkónunga: Hm. 4, 2; Ghv. 14; þioðkónungar Sg. 35, 6; 39, 10
 24, 1 Hló þá Högni Am. 65, 5

Verses that are repeated within the *Atlakviða*:

2, 3 vín í valhöllu : Akv. 14, 11
 3, 3-4 mar inom mélgreypa, Myrcvið inn ókunna;
 Akv. 13, 3-4 mar ina mélgreypa, Myrcvið inn ókunna
 4, 7 dafar darraða; Akv. 14, 9
 5, 3 af geiri gjallanda: Akv. 14, 15 með geiri gjallanda
 11, 2 arfi Niflunga; Akv. 27, 8
 13, 3-4 cf. 3, 3-4
 14, 9 cf. 4, 7
 14, 11 cf. 2, 3
 23, 3 hér hefi ec hiarta; Akv. 25, 3
 23, 4 Hialla ins blauða; Akv. 25, 6
 23, 6 Högna ins fræcan; Akv. 25, 4
 23, 8 er á bióði liggr; Akv. 25, 8
 23, 10 er í briósti lá; Akv. 25, 10 þá er í briósti lá
 25, 3 cf. 23, 3
 25, 4 cf. 23, 6
 25, 6 cf. 23, 4
 25, 8 cf. 23, 8
 25, 10 cf. 23, 10
 27, 8 cf. 11, 2

Formulaic systems:

23, 1 þá qvað þat Gunnar: cf. 25, 1 Mærr qvað þat Gunnar

þá qvað þat	Heimdallr Þrk. 15, 1
	Þórr Þrk. 17, 1
	Loki Þrk. 18, 1
	Prymr Þrk. 22, 1; 25, 1; 30, 1
	Sigrún HH. 54, 5
	Brynhildr Br. 10; 1, Gðr. I 23, 1; 25, 1
	Guðrún Br. 11, 1
	Herborg Gðr. I 6, 1
	Gullrönd Gðr. I 12, 1; 17, 1; 24, 1
	Hamðir Ghv. 4, 1; 8, 1
	Menja Grt. 4, 5 (18)

23, 1b gumna drótinn
 hafra drótinn Hym 20, 2; 31, 2
 ðursa drótinn Þrk. 6, 2; 11, 2
 Niára drótinn Vkv. 6, 2; 13, 2; 30, 8
 skatna drótinn Grp. 5, 2
 seggia drótinn Br. 6, 6
 Gotna drótinn Grp. 35, 6 (10)

24, 1 Hló þá Högni
 Hló þá Brynhildr Br. 10, 1; Sg. 30, 1
 Atla Gðr. III, 10, 1¹³
 Högni Am. 65, 5
 Jörmunrekr Hm. 20, 1 (5)

¹³ This is not, strictly speaking, a syntactic parallel. *Atla* is a dative object of the verb, rather than its subject as in all other examples. The subject occurs in the following half line “hugr í briósti.”

Performance and Plot in *The Ozidi Saga*

Isidore Okpewho

*The Ozidi Saga*¹ tells the story of a culture hero (Ozidi) of the Ijo of the Niger Delta in southern Nigeria. In the traditional context in which the career of the hero was recalled—an annual festival of seven days' duration, involving a variety of symbolic rituals as well as singing and dancing—the re-enactment took the form primarily of dramatization of key moments or episodes in the myth; the full story was never told in a coherent sequence from a canonical beginning to a canonical end. In this way there was ample room for the ritual officiant, dressed in white apparel and holding objects traditionally identified with the hero, to engage in song and dance sequences involving the participation of his acolytes and members of the attending crowd. The celebrated Nigerian poet-playwright John Pepper Clark[-Bekederemo], who first drew our attention to this exciting tradition (1963) and later published a text of the full story he had collected (1977/1991), has also recorded a 16mm film of a festival honoring the Ozidi tradition in Tarakiri Orua, recognized as its home of origin.²

In the film, the emphasis of the performance is on a sequence of *dromena* charting the representative moments in Ozidi's career. The story published by Clark-Bekederemo, however, comes from a command

¹ The full title reads as follows: *The Ozidi Saga: Collected and Translated from the Oral Ijo Version of Okabou Ojobolo*. The book was originally published in 1977 at Ibadan, Nigeria in a joint imprint by Oxford University Press and Ibadan University Press. J. P. Clark, as he was then known, was the collector, translator, and editor. In 1991 Howard University Press, Washington, DC republished the book, with the editor's last name as Clark-Bekederemo and "With a Critical Introduction by Isidore Okpewho." Page references in this essay are to this latter edition.

² *Tides of the Delta*, directed by Frank Speed under the auspices of the Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan, Nigeria, is available as a 16mm film at the James Coleman African Studies Center at the University of California, Los Angeles, among other places.

performance hosted by an Ijo matron, Madam Yabuku Inekorogha, in the university city of Ibadan, about three hundred miles away from Tarakiri Orua. Deferring to the tradition, the narrator Okabou Ojobolo, aided by an orchestra of musicians and cheer-leaders, told the story in a total of seven days and before an audience made up partly of Ijo residents in Ibadan but largely of non-Ijo Nigerians and a few of Clark-Bekederemo's expatriate colleagues from Ibadan University. Although some key rituals of the traditional festival program were incorporated in Okabou's performance, the emphasis here was clearly on the *legomena* (as well as histrionic acts used to graphic effect), giving as full an account of the myth as the narrator could muster. Never having done such a thing before, Okabou was clearly under an unaccustomed stress to register a credible performance, a task made particularly challenging by the Ijo audience who, moved by patriotic pride to empathize with a cherished tradition of their native land, nonetheless spared no pains in forcing Okabou to live up to his charge as guardian of the tradition.

This paper seeks to examine the fate of the narrative precisely under these conditions. Since the Ijo audience obviously knew the tale or at least the basic outlines of it, I am interested in discovering how the somewhat beleaguered narrator was able to hold his own in that daunting atmosphere and still succeed in conjuring, as John Foley would say, the "inherently meaningful" codes of an immanent tradition (1991:8), thus achieving an account of truly classic proportions. Put differently, how was the bard able to hold the plot of the tale together, despite the potentially destabilizing influence of contingent factors?

The Pattern of Confrontations

The Ozidi Saga essentially narrates the successive fights, fourteen in all, between the hero Ozidi and some powerful figures that constitute a menace to life and leadership in his society. To understand the format of these fights, I will first summarize the story.

The kingship of the city-state of Orua falls on the last of its seven wards. The title devolves on a family whose eldest member is a retarded man, Temugedege. Embarrassed at the thought of an idiot becoming king of Orua, some of its most powerful generals plot a coup d'état. Temugedege's younger brother, Ozidi, the supreme commander of Orua's forces, leads a party to a neighboring community to procure a human head for the coronation rites. Along the way, Ozidi is ambushed by his men, led by Ofé the Short, and bludgeoned to death with a club. His head, severed from his

body, is brought home by Ofe and dumped at Temugedege's feet in mockery of the latter's ambitions.

Ozidi's wife, Orea, is totally distraught at the sight of her husband's severed head; but her mother Oreame, a woman of unequaled mystical powers, quietly buries her son-in-law and flies to her hometown with Orea. Before his death, Ozidi has impregnated his wife, who a few months afterward bears a son, later called Ozidi after his father. Oreame loses no time in mystically fortifying the boy for his career of revenge: first instilling in him a spirit for facing all imaginable dangers, then summoning the wizard Bouakarakarabiri to brew a potion for Ozidi from a grim medley of flora and fauna.

Oreame slaps the mixture down Ozidi's bowels, from where it will be summoned for every fight. Having mystically prepared the boy for a life that will be fraught with preternatural dangers, Oreame flies off again with Ozidi and his mother Orea, back to Orua. Taking residence in his paternal homestead, he is introduced to his idiot uncle Temugedege with due traditional protocol. Then Oreame equips Ozidi with his final resources: she summons from the earth first a duet of musicians as "bodyguards," then a blacksmith who molds Ozidi an extraordinary, seven-pronged sword needed for clinching every victory. This, too, Oreame slaps down Ozidi's bowels.

Fully set for action, Ozidi does not take long to attract the powerful figures who now rule supreme in the land. The clash with his father's assassins was, in fact, presaged by an incident that occurred while the blacksmith was molding Ozidi's sword. As the boy wielded the blade just to test its strength, it broke into pieces that hurtled off furiously and killed a son of each of the principal assassins, Ofe and Azezabife. The final provocation came when Ozidi, lying in feigned sleep across a market road in order to pick up random gossip about how his father died, heard the wives of these assassins bragging about their men's killing of the late Ozidi. Rising from the ground, the boy sliced the two women into neat pieces that skittered off, dripping with blood, to report to their horrified husbands that their old enemy's son was in town!

So the assassins prepare to fight, though it is clear from their exertions that they have no illusions about the terrors ahead. One by one they all fall to the hero, each in a struggle in which all resources, natural and supernatural, are called into play. For each of these men has something extraordinary about and in him that tests the resources with which Ozidi has been equipped. In the end, however, he proves more than a match for all opponents—first the assassins, then an array of monstrous figures who find their reputation as supreme terror threatened by the upstart stranger.

The schema on the next page presents the sequence followed by Okabou in narrating Ozidi's story. No single encounter contains all the stages represented in the outline. But the persistence with which the narrator follows the basic progression of moves shows that his mind has intuited a loose formula³ that enables him to maneuver the details of his fabulation through the challenging interests of his audience(s), the pressures of the seven-day format enjoined by tradition, and the limitations of his all too human memory.

The first stage in any fight episode is the introduction of the enemy. There are variations in the entry of the opponent into the conflict. Some characters come in bragging who they are, with a stridency aimed at terrifying Ozidi and Oreame. This style of entry is adopted by a few of the assassins, chiefly Azezabife, Agbogidi, and Ogueren: the sudden reappearance of their old victim in the person of his son come to exact justice evidently throws them into a nervous self-assertion. Of the three, Azezabife reveals the strongest tremor of fear, no doubt because he has felt the earliest intimations of the impending doom in the death of his wife and son from the boy hero's sword. Another mode of introduction is by way of a dramatic presentation of the opponent's physical appearance. This mode of entry evokes as much tension as the bragging; in describing the character, the narrator tries to impress us with the scale of danger facing the hero and his grandmother. In this category we find the lieutenants of the head assassin Ofe: Badoba, Ebeya, and Fingrifin (also called Sigrisi). The description here can be particularly affecting. Badoba, who appears shortly after Ozidi has disposed of Ogueren, a giant with 20 hands and 20 feet, is portrayed as a figure of such stupendous proportions that one spectator seeks comparison of Badoba and Ogueren, forcing the narrator to make a face-saving explanation (1977/1991:147). Ebeya is "a sturdy and great champion. When Ebeya appeared on the field, when he stepped out in all his paraphernalia, it took the breath away" (162). To demonstrate Ebeya's dead seriousness as a warrior, Okabou pits him right away in combat with Ozidi, even before the hero and his mentor Oreame know anything about him (163). As for Fingrifin the Net Man, we hear of "his body all iron and nothing but iron, hard with shell and plate so he was, a man impossible to dent" (182). Not only is he hard to crack, he is also magically endowed:

³ Although I am dealing here with the pattern of progressive moves in the development of the Ozidi story, this paper will not discuss the evidence of "formulas" and "themes" in the Parry-Lord tradition. I have treated such *internal* structural qualities of the Ozidi and other African epics elsewhere (Okpewho 1979a:154-201); here, I am concerned more with *external* factors than I was in that earlier study.

Ozidi's Confrontations

<i>Ozidi's foe introduced</i>	<i>Ozidi/Oreame provoke fight</i>	<i>Foe challenges Ozidi</i>	<i>Danger signs for Oreame</i>	<i>Danger signs for foe</i>	<i>Actual fighting</i>	<i>Ozidi in trouble</i>	<i>Ozidi re-covers</i>	<i>Ozidi kills foe</i>	<i>Harrying of Temuge dege</i>	<i>Ozidi cools off</i>
Agbogidi (65)		67		66-65	68-69			69	72-73	73
Azezabife (70)		70-71		74, 87	79-96	79, 91, 94	82-93, 95	96-97	[92]	100
Ogueren (100)		100		102-103, 116-117	105-126	105, 121	125	126	127-128	128
Akpobrisi (131)		135			137-140	137-138	138	140		142
Badoba (147)		148			151-152			152	158-159	159
Ebeya (162)		163		167-168	163-169	163-164	168	168-169		169
Fingrifin (182)	182-183			185	187-189	184	187	189		190
Ofe (169, 190)	173-190			174, 190, 193	175-176, 194-201			201		207
Scrotum King (210)		210	220	212-213	218-229	219	222	229		230
Tebesonoma (236)		237, 240	241-243		246-267	244-245	246	267		[274]
Odogu (232, 275)	232, 275		281-282		279-285, 296-306	279-284	284	306	316-317	319
Tebekawene (320, 326)		321	334		338	336	337	338		340
Azemaroti (343)		345		351	351-370			370	372-375	375
Smallpox King (375)		375-376			377-386	377	385	386		388

he simply picks an herb from a nearby bush and blows it into the air, and the hero and his team follow him at once to his home (184).

Two characters from the post-revenge fights—Azemaroti (aided by his mother, Azema) and Odogu—may be fitted into this mode, but there is something elliptical in their introductions. Although Okabou gives us a horrid picture of them, Azemaroti and Azema, unlike most other opponents, pretend at first to be gracious hosts to Ozidi and Oreame (344-49). In Odogu's case, we are prepared for his tough encounter with Ozidi by the news that both men received their powers from the same source, the wizard Bouakarakarabiri (232). But Odogu is not at home when Ozidi calls. Ozidi carries on an ill-starred romance with Odogu's wife that is interrupted by his return, so the narration of their fight is deferred to the next night (275).

A third mode of introduction is by a signature tune, sometimes sung by the character himself announcing his presence. This mode is the most aesthetically effective, for it offers a lyrical relief from the dominant narrative voice of the performance. Indeed, practically every major character in the story, even the idiot Temugedege, has some sort of signature tune in the panegyric mode, indicating that the narrator is using material inscribed in the folk tradition. Thus Agbogidi is greeted as an imperceptible man-killer (67)⁴; Badoba is addressed as “the owner of fights” (150); Akpobrisi “goes to war naked” (136); Tebesonoma is an indefatigable fighter (236); Odogu is touted as “the one and invincible” (278); the Smallpox King, who comes attended by a well-manned frigate, is heralded by a paddling song (376); and so on. The recognition accorded these figures by the folk tradition is evidently intended to warn us that they are not push-overs; Ozidi will be tested to the full.

After the introduction comes the challenge to fight, proffered by either the Ozidi-Oreame team or their opponents. The schema shows that by far the majority of the challenges are made by the opponents. True, as aggrieved persons determined to avenge the hero's father, and given the superabundance of resources available to them, Ozidi and Oreame are driven by an ungovernable urge to fight, sometimes euphemistically expressed as a desire to go out and “play.” But the burden of provocation is put mostly on their opponents, no doubt as a way of presenting the Ozidi family as having no hand in the collapse of the social order.

So Okabou makes Ozidi's first five opponents (assassins) guilty of drawing him out to a fight. In other cases, the hero and his grandmother

⁴ Agbogidi is described as “death not touching hands, not touching legs,” in other words, as death that kills without its victim feeling anything happening.

bear the burden of provocation, but these may be defended. Fingrifin is easily recognized by Oreame as one of the culprits (“another one of the champions” [182]), the first person she and Ozidi encounter in their anger over the way Ofe gave them the slip and deferred their fight with him. Fingrifin, in turn, is incensed because Oreame, anxious to round up as many of the assassins’ accomplices as possible, persistently teases him to reveal the details of the assassination; when she discovers how much he knows and to what extent he may be involved, she throws in words of abuse, which infuriate the Iron Man who then imprisons them with a spell and takes them off to his house.

In Ofe’s case, it is clear the revenge is incomplete as long as he is at large. Okabou succeeds in portraying him as a man driven by a troubling sense of guilt and fear of the team now come to avenge his old victim: he continually pushes his lieutenants to take turns in facing Ozidi before he does, at one point causing one of them (Badoba) to complain about the way Ofe has created the whole problem (146). Ofe continues to postpone his fate, even disappearing under the earth for seven days; but the avengers finally draw him out to face the inevitable justice.

Having disposed of the assassins, Ozidi and Oreame emerge as the supreme powers in the society. They therefore incur the resentment of other forces, of a far less human order, who have long claimed such a position and will not brook competition. One by one they come out of their enclaves to test the claims of the team whose reputation has reached them from citizens of Orua fleeing into the bush. Of the six fights that define their post-revenge career, Ozidi and Oreame are responsible for provoking two: with Odogu and Azemaroti. The contest with these characters seems inevitable. They come supported by their mothers and so are locked within the same mystical equation as the hero; in Odogu’s case, we are actually told (232) that he and his mother Agonodi have acquired their powers from the same wizard (Bouakarakarabiri) who fitted out Oreame and Ozidi. Interestingly, although the latter can no longer stem their bellicose will, they provoke Odogu and his mother not by outright challenge but indirectly, as with Fingrifin.

The provocation is dressed in the imagery of sexual lust on these three occasions. To Fingrifin, Ozidi and Oreame appear as a breathtakingly sexy couple who lure his attention. By the time we get to Odogu, Ozidi the strongman has clearly matured in sexual appeal if not activity. This time he is out strolling with his musical attendants, when he chances upon his enemy’s wife and enters into a romance with her; it is interrupted when Odogu returns, but resumed later when the hero has disposed of another opponent, Tebesonoma. In Azemaroti’s case, Ozidi and Oreame are again dressed as a sexy couple who, while out for a walk, are offered hospitality

by Azemaroti and his mother Azema; Oreame's charm captivates Azemaroti but draws his mother's envy. Given the mystical value the Ijo attribute to a mother's backing of her son's wrestling matches (Okpewho 1983:107-8), these mother-son teams are set to settle once and for all the issue of superiority in the confrontational culture of the story. So, although they provoke their opponents by their appearance, Ozidi and Oreame are simply catalysts in a clash that was meant to be.

The next stage in the schema is the warning signs, the uneasy instincts felt by either side about impending dangers. Okabou has an interesting formula for presenting these signs: usually, the character encounters a stumbling block or a failure in some scheme. Oreame is frequently represented as consulting the oracles for a client just when Ozidi, out to play with his attendants, meets a prospective opponent; as the opponent proceeds to deal with the unprotected company, Oreame's oracular symbols go into disarray as a warning that her grandson is in trouble. The opponents themselves experience an interesting array of presentiments. Agbogidi, Azezabife, Ogueren, and Ofe have trouble donning war gear that has served them well before; the Scrotum King continually stumbles along, and has trouble steadying the pipe in his mouth; Ebeya and Azema-Azenaroti are overcome by sweat and must plunge into a stream for a hapless swim. These warning signs appear in eleven of the story's fourteen fights. Characteristically, in the hero's fights with the assassins and their accomplices—from Agbogidi to Ofe—it is the enemy who, being the "guilty" parties in the matter, feel the full weight of conscience and so are in disarray. On the other hand, in the post-revenge fights the warning signs are more on the side of Oreame as Ozidi's champion. Evidently this is because, at this point, the hero's career has taken a turn from the initial program of revenge for which he had some justification.

We should be careful, however, in pressing our ethical reading of this later career. It may be more meaningful to argue that in their fights with the assassins the avengers are mentally prepared and know quite well what to expect, though on a few occasions Oreame may not yet have procured the items necessary for meeting the challenge. In the post-revenge fights, as the one with Azema-Azemaroti amply reveals, Oreame and Ozidi hardly know what to expect, and so are caught thoroughly unawares.

The next four stages of the schema entail the actual fighting and killing episodes of the story. The confrontations vary in length, for a variety of reasons. For instance, in ten out of the fourteen fights the hero is shown to be in a lot of trouble at the onset until Oreame comes to his aid, either by procuring an antidote that resuscitates him from coma or even death or by summoning resources that neutralize the opponent's superior control of

events. Ozidi's fight with Azezabife offers a good example. The latter is so terrifying that Oreame flies up to God (Tamarau) to defend the family's mission of revenge, and is consequently reassured, though she gets no actual aid (82-83). Later on, Azezabife releases such a powerful whirlwind that "Ozidi passed out for him to pummel" (67); but Oreame soon swoops in, stills the whirlwind with her fan, and whips the unconscious hero back to life; the hornblower sounds the call to action, and Ozidi's bowels resound with the tumult that usually summons his killing rage. But Azeza continues to fight with mounting fury until he cuts off Ozidi's head, an event the audience greets with an "ululation" (94). Matters have clearly come to a head! Oreame whips Ozidi's head back into place and parries magic with Azezabife, until she is able to procure the taboo objects that finally set the Half Man up for Ozidi to cut down (95-96).

Other fights are long for other reasons. Take the fight with Ogueren (105-26), Ozidi's most physically imposing and intimidating opponent: a giant of twenty arms, twenty legs, and other horrendous organs; a warrior whose sword is as enormous as Ozidi's and just as unwieldy (111). Although Oreame consults the oracles and discovers Ogueren's taboos (109-10), when she uses them against Ogueren they fail (114). That it takes the avengers so long to finish Ogueren (22 pages) may be due partly to Ogueren's long established iconic place in the mythology of the region (Okpewho 1998:19-23) and partly to the physical impediments of his size in this story, as well as to the audience's response to the narrator's representation of him. The fight with Ofe (175-201, intermittently) is arguably the longest Ozidi has with the assassins, partly because Ofe is the leader of the pack but especially because of his trickster-like tactics, transforming himself into various forms in order to avoid defeat. Of the post-revenge fights, as we have observed, Odogu's is the longest, partly because of the audience's reactions to the salacious details of Ozidi's romance with Odogu's wife and partly because of the mystical complications in a match between two mother-son teams fitted out by the same wizard. The fight with the Scrotum King (218-29) owes its length just as much to the audience, whose laughter continually pushes the performer to exploit the comic potential of the giant's ponderous movements.

The final stages of this sequence involve Ozidi's killing of his opponent and dumping of the victim's head in the shrine-house, thus increasing his own powers. Next follows a victory lap, in which the power-hungry hero scours the family's premises and harries the idiot king, his uncle, who pleads that the people get rid of the boy so the old man can have peace. The harrying of Temugedege does not occur in every stage, but is

nonetheless a notable feature of the plot.⁵ Finally, in practically every episode Ozidi stashes away his sword after the victory lap, and cools off. The respite is brief, for he is invariably rendered restless by inaction, so that he goes out for a “play” that comes either as a disguised search for more fights, or (as in the post-revenge fights) as a baiting that draws fresh challenges to his supremacy.

The Episodic Structure

Does the above scheme constitute a stable story-line? Sadly, there is no record of other performances of the story by Okabou. But given the seven-day format traditionally enjoined on the narration, and given the basic similarities between the encounters, there is ample potential for a switching of episodes. We could even say that, in performances of this kind, episodic looseness may be a strength rather than a weakness to the extent that the narrator is beholden as much to his audience as to the tradition he serves. The appeal of episodes like the fight with the Scrotum King shows that beyond the sober dictates of ritual—which we may ignore in this instance, since Okabou performed the tale outside of the traditional religious setting—the narrator is primarily an entertainer. As such, he is free to order his material in a way that affords the maximum delight to his audience, so long as he does not engage in blatant violations of cultural codes, especially as regards the initial and terminal moves that frame the story.⁶

Okabou has also been sensible in respecting the seven-day format of narration, which helps safeguard the episodic structure of the tale. Although

⁵ That Ozidi harries the old man even before his main fights begin—after slashing the wives of Ofe and Azezabife to bits (63, 72)—demonstrates the *kunstsprache* of the oral narrative formula: his killing of the women is marked with the same triumphalism as his killing of his opponents. Here, as later, Temugedege calls for the removal of the boy from the community.

⁶ I have discussed narrative episodocity in Okpewho 1979a:217-20; 1983:180, 186. Compare Fleuckiger who, in discussing the epic traditions of Middle India, argues the episodic selectivity of performers against collectors’ emphasis on the linear movement of tales: “The *performed* epic in India is sung in episodes, with the assumption that audience members frame the performance both within the larger epic story (oral tradition) as well as within the folklore repertoire of which it is a part. . . there may be episodes that exist only in the oral tradition, and not in performance at all” (1999:133-34). See also Blackburn and Fleuckiger 1989:11, Foley 1991:10-13, and Nagy 1996:77-78.

he is far away from Orua and therefore free from much of the ritual protocol traditionally attending the re-enactment of the Ozidi myth, he has kept his eye on the movement of time and tried to observe the methodical breaks between fight episodes, letting us know at the end of each encounter that the story as far as he knows it is over!

Okabou does not always employ the peroration; sometimes he is forced by circumstances to postpone it until the next evening. The formula first occurs at the end of the killing of the wives of Ofe and Azezabife in Night One (57), but is given in its more elaborate form at the start of Night Two (60).⁷ It is again observed strictly on Night Three, concluding the fight with Badoba (155); Night Four, after the fight with Ofe (203); and Night Seven, with the disposal of the Smallpox King (388-89). On other nights, however, the termination comes unceremoniously, or is staggered. The peroration formula does not occur on Night Two, nor Night Five; instead, the performance on these nights concludes with a song or songs that technically serve as a termination code. The next evening, however, Okabou begins his performance with rhetorical courtesies in which he recapitulates the *terminus ad quem* of the night before; thus the narration of Night Two is formally perorated at the start of Night Three, while Night Five is perorated after Okabou's self-introduction on Night Six (273).

Two things happen on Nights Six and Seven that suggest a conflict between termination by episode and by time. At the end of Ozidi's fight with Odogu on Night Six, there is some foot-dragging by Okabou (318-20) that indicates that if he had a choice he would terminate the night's performance with that episode. But he seems to have been pressured by a spectator to carry on (320). We are then introduced to the next episode, the fight with the head-walking monster Tebekawene. Shortly thereafter (321), Okabou again indicates his intention to cut the narration and continue the next day, but for some reason—was he possibly given signals?—he carries on with the Tebekawene episode until a song (by his orchestra) celebrating Tebekawene's threat to bear off the hero to his home brings the night's performance to an end (323). The episode is continued on Night Seven, but ends rather early, prompting one spectator to observe that "it wasn't much of a performance this time!" (338). In a brief patriotic moment, some spectators identify their clans of origin. At the end of it all, Okabou utters the usual peroration (339) before proceeding with the next episode, the fight with the mother-son team of Azema and Azemaroti. The actual fighting is

⁷ Clark-Bekederemo tells us (59, n. 62) that the peroration is in accord with Ijo rhetorical practice.

one of the longer ones (351-70); here again, as in the fight with Odogu, we are dealing with the mystical charge in a contest of charms between supporting mothers. But this is the seventh night of the performance, when the entire program must end. Hence the terminal episode, the fight with the Smallpox King, is brief (377-86).

The conflict between termination by time and termination by episode is due largely to the sheer logistical difficulty of a performance involving the active participation of the audience, and of disposing fourteen episodes across a seven-night format. But every episode is treated with due integrity; so it is conceivable, as Okabou's introduction of the fight with Azemaroti hints, that there are occasions when the performer may abstract one episode or the other for a brief command performance. The peroration formula serves as a mechanism for insuring that each episode stands by itself, and even that episodes may be switched between one another, within the overall structure of the tale.⁸

The episodicity of the Ozidi story is also facilitated by the prominence given to songs in the performance. Indeed, the performance is so visibly framed and punctuated by songs that there is a sense in which one could say, adjusting an old line of contention (Lord 1960:68, Wilgus 1973:241-52) ever so slightly, that "the song's the thing." The orchestra that accompanies the storyteller plays more than a subsidiary role. Fully conscious of their appeal as entertainment, the group relishes every opportunity to regale the audience with songs, inserting these in so many refrains that they need to be "called" to a halt, in several Caller-Group interventions, to allow the narrative to

⁸ See Clark-Bekederemo's comment on the tradition of performing the story by episodes (1977/1991:390, n. 10). "I will," Richard Bauman has aptly observed, "take episodes to be major segments of the narrative constituted by time junctures. That is, whereas the flow of the narrative discourse is continuous, the events of the plot may be reported discontinuously, set off from each other by intervals of elapsed time that go unreported in the narrative" (1986:90-91). Although we are not specifically told this, Clark-Bekederemo seems to have aided the narrator's recapitulation of the previous night's *terminus* by playing him back some of the relevant portions of the recording. Cf. Charles Bird on Mande singers' recapitulations after rest (1972:283). That Milman Parry could not see through his project of investigating "the singer's rests" in South Slavic narratives is most regrettable: see his abstract for the project (1971:420) and his notes toward assessing the implications of these performance conditions on the Homeric texts (451-61). Citing discussions of this subject by various scholars (including Albert Lord), Foley offers a carefully argued and persuasive analysis (1990:284-88) of a relevant passage taken from a narrative in the Parry Collection of South Slavic oral epic.

continue.⁹ Perhaps, in many of these instances, the orchestra is trying to give the overtaxed narrator some ventilative breaks or an opportunity to tie the threads of the narrative together. But one effect of the frequency of songs is to create some stress between story and song and, on occasion, to force some dislocation of the narrative logic.¹⁰

A prominent role of these interspersed songs is to frame the narrative by providing convenient points for beginning and ending successive fight episodes as well as each night's performance. There are relatively few songs on the first night, evidently because the performance is trying to find its proper momentum and key for the performer-audience relationship; the night ends with a song which runs to nine choruses (58). Night Two begins with a Caller-Group interaction that sets the tempo and (perhaps along with a replay of some of the tape) helps the narrator find the point where he left off the previous night; Night Two ends with some singing. From Night Three onwards, the opening gambits include a song or songs. Almost invariably, each night also ends with music and singing: there is an ample flourish of songs at the end of Night Four, no doubt celebrating the fall of the last and leader of the assassins, Ofe the Short (202-5). Within each fight episode songs are performed at significant moments. Prominent among them are songs of the kind Hymes has called "manifestations of identity and particular power" (1981:127), here used as signature tunes for introducing various characters in the story: for instance, the hero's opponents enter the fray with songs announcing their reputation (67, 150, 236, etc.), and the witch Oreame

⁹ In many instances, Clark-Bekederemo indicates how many choruses of a song are performed (e.g., 9, 25, 67, 108, 129, 143). At other times, he simply tells us that a song is repeated "several times" (e.g., 171, 199, 239, 296, 325, 382). But sometimes he suppresses the frequency of repetitions, and simply uses dots (e.g., 278) to leave things to our imagination! On the role of songs in encapsulating the subjects of episodes in these epic narratives, see Okpewho 1979a:84. Bird (1972:289-90) sees Mande epics as "consisting of a series of songs tied together by narrative links," and proceeds to enumerate the eight songs that define the key segments of the *Kambili* epic (Bird et al. 1974).

¹⁰ On page 195, the orchestra performs the song of the *seven* virgins or "water maids," which is really the traditional tune that accompanies the leading of seven young girls to the beach at the start of each festival day (in Orua). We may excuse the use of the figure seven in the ensuing scene—Oreame recommends that the fight with Ofe be suspended for *seven* days, during which she consults *seven* oracles to discover the secrets of Ofe's strength—as having been associatively forced on the narrator's mind by the song. But how do we explain Oreame's later demanding the same song of the hardly musical Ozidi (196): what purpose would the song serve in the fight between the two combatants?

frequently flies to Ozidi's rescue to the accompaniment of songs bearing witness to her powers (73, 165, 284, 339, etc.). Other songs underline certain issues germane to the story—such as the relationship between killing and the shrine-house (101), or the counterpoint between town and bush herbs (123)—or else herald Ozidi's final slaughter of his enemy (168, 267, 385, etc.) and harrowing of his idiot uncle (84, 128, etc.).

Thematically, therefore, many of these songs are relevant to the development of the plot. But in many other instances, the songs are hardly related to the moments at which they occur, and so perform little more than interludic functions. For instance, when Ozidi and Oreame go looking for Tebesonoma's sister, Oreame transforms herself into a fetching beauty because her real features terrify those who look upon her; her new aspect draws greetings and admiration. At this point, the orchestra interjects a song ("Ayanma, our father...") with no obvious connection to the scene, and carries on until a Caller-Group intervention restores the integrity of the plot (248-49). The potential for disruption is more evident in an earlier episode. As he approaches to take on Ozidi, the Scrotum King relishes the thought of carving up the hero and roasting him for lunch, puffing on his pipe with premature delight. Here the chorus performs a song that laments the passing first of Ozidi (no doubt, the hero's father) and then of Atazi, legendary narrator of the Ozidi story. When Okabou resumes his narration it is Atazi's name, rather than Ozidi's, that comes to his lips before he is corrected (211)!

With so much potential for disalignment, it is a wonder that the story manages to hang together. But how well does it? Is every episode really where it belongs in the discernible build-up to the terminal episode, the conflict with the Smallpox King? Sometimes, indeed, we wonder at the position accorded one or another episode within the montage. Take Ofe, Tebesonoma, Odogu, and Azemaroti, four figures who give Ozidi the more protracted fights of his career. As suggested above, the position awarded Ofe is defensible: as the leader of the assassins, he should take the field with the avenging hero only after his lieutenants have had their turns. As regards Tebesonoma, the space given to his fight with Ozidi may be justified by the mystical significance of the number of his heads (seven) in Ijo cosmology (Okpewho 1983:280, n. 62).

But what about the positions given to Azemaroti and Odogu? From the Tebesonoma episode onwards, the narrator seems to relish the sexual appeal of the Ozidi-Oreame team as a love couple. Part of the appeal has been encouraged by the growing interaction between Okabou and his audience, but part too is due to the hero's increasing maturation and growing desire for a woman of his own, encouraged perhaps by his encounter with Tebesonoma's sister. Certainly, by the time he has disposed of Azemaroti,

Ozidi can no longer contain this desire, and complains to Oreame that it is not “normal for me to remain without a wife.” Whereupon Oreame strikes the ground with her fan, and out comes a sexy-looking partner for the hero (371-72).

One wonders about the development of Ozidi’s sexual instincts. His romance with Odogu’s wife is broached before his fight with Tebesonoma, but receives full treatment after he has disposed of the monster. Why does Okabou wait for two more fights—first with Tebekawene, where the sexual interest is silent, then with Azemaroti, where it is fully exploited in Oreame’s disguise as an alluring beauty—before filling the hero with a restless sexuality? Would it not have been more effective to make Odogu the last figure Ozidi faces before Smallpox? If we see the sexual awakening of Ozidi as the final point of his maturation, the peak of power and self-assurance that invites the vengeful envy of Smallpox, why is the fight with Odogu not the penultimate contest? For it is in that fight that Ozidi stands the greatest danger—in nearly divulging to Odogu’s wife the secret of his powers—of being destroyed; here, indeed, the integrity of the myth is most severely tested. Could the narrator have been so goaded by the palpable appetites of his audience that he has sacrificed the logic of climactic progression to the more immediate pressure to develop each episode for its integral appeal?¹¹ Or was there greater logic in letting the stifled sexuality of the hero build up to a point where he could take it no more?

Unifying Links

These are no idle concerns. However loose the episodic structure of a story, and however much they are forced by contextual factors to juggle its details, there is little doubt that narrators, like the culture that sustains the narrative tradition, assume a unity to the hero’s career that is continually celebrated, whether in festivals held in the homeland or in command performances before audiences in foreign settings. A fundamental motif on which the entire Ozidi myth is built is restitution. Ozidi senior is killed and his body dishonored by fellow generals who are opposed to his idiot brother

¹¹ Compare Daniel Crowley on Bahamian narrative performances: “The rapport between audience and narrator is so close in some of the stories in the present collection that the narrator is able to ignore the logic of the development of the narrative in favor of exploiting the situations provided by the narrative. If the audience is fond of the style of a particular narrator, they much prefer to see him perform than to hear the story out in all its detail” (1966:141).

being crowned king of Orua. According to Ijo custom, it is the responsibility of surviving relatives of the victim to seek due redress for the dishonor and perform the rites that should restore to the deceased his proper place in the company of the ancestors.

This, says Clark-Bekederemo (liii), is the duty assumed by the hero of our story. Indeed, so persistently do the avengers (Ozidi and Oreame) affirm this duty to justify their acts that, we may assume, the motif of justice will resound throughout the story regardless of the order the narrator gives his episodes. Thus, as Azezabife advances to fight Ozidi, the latter only needs to be reminded by Oreame that the opponent is one of his father's assassins for his bowels to start raging (76). As the fight with Azeza continues to tax the avengers' resources, Oreame is forced to fly to heaven to be reassured by the creator (Tamarau or Woyinghi) that justice is on their side (82-83). Thus emboldened, and spurred on by cheers from his team, Ozidi rises to proclaim himself and his mission: "I am Ozidi! I am Ozidi! I am Ozidi! . . . Rest is all I seek for my father. Justice for my father is all I seek" (84). In his fight with Ogueren, Ozidi is roused to fury by Oreame's words, "O Ozidi, demand the inquest of your father!" (120). As they grapple with the elusive Ofe, Oreame goads Ozidi's memory of Ofe's principal role in his father's death: "It's Ofe who is reputed to have carried my father's head. This day I too shall hurl down here your head" (173).

This theme of restitution is extremely prominent in the contest between Ozidi and his final opponent, Smallpox. As the hero labors under the overwhelming pock-shots, the frustrated Oreame exclaims, "Oh, is it this my only child! After doing justice by his father, is it this wicked evil disease will come and kill my child!" (379). In time, however, Ozidi and Oreame rise to the challenge and destroy Smallpox and his retinue of ailments with the same bravura that saw them through earlier predicaments. His duty done, Ozidi picks up his wife for a final victory lap devoid of the gore-blinded menace of earlier episodes, then surrenders his avenging sword to be put away for good by Oreame. "Those who killed my father," he says, "I have now taken them all, my mother...!" (397). Yet so deep is the impress of the idea of restitution and justice on the narrator's mind that he seeks it even in the motives of Ozidi's opponents. Each of them is, of course, determined to halt the upstart's ambition to "become a hero in this city" and wreck the opponent's "title claims" (100). As the assassins fall one after another, the program of nipping the upstart in the bud is taken up by the post-revenge monsters from the forest, several of them presenting themselves not as rivals to Ozidi's claims but as self-appointed defenders of a once-proud city now all but annihilated by the hero and his grandmother.

The case is graphically, if comically, put by the bumbling Scrotum King (225):

“For oppressing all Ado¹² I thought to kill him, to go there and capture him to kill, and yet you are knocking my pipe off my hand. When I smoke my pipe in my house, I usually smoke it without disturbance Am I the one in the wrong in this fight? Have I the guilty hands in this fight? Do you then approve of his sack of Ado?”

Although he has private designs for Odogu, Tebesonoma prefers to postpone them until he has disposed of Ozidi and Oreame, who he hears “have killed so many that they have become such a problem in Ado” (237). Smallpox is incensed because he has been told, “out there, there lives a man so powerful that he has executed everybody in town . . . completely laid waste what was once a proud capital city, and now it is said he lives there alone with his mother” (375-76).

The passages cited above belong, admittedly, to the larger formulaic design of the story, and may be judged just as amenable to an episodic as to a unitary conception. But there are certain details of a largely syntagmatic order that help Okabou to achieve a consistency in his presentation of characters and events and so preserve the linear logic of a unified plot. Here I am referring to cases of back-referencing that, for a story of this scope performed over an extended period, argue a considerable presence of mind on the part of the narrator. Some of these are simple enough. Take the scene in which Oreame has a hard time finding the proper taboos to Azezabife’s power, especially because the assassins, forewarned by Ozidi’s murder of their wives, have consulted thoroughly about the hero and prepared themselves to meet his challenge (71). In the actual fighting between Ozidi and Azezabife, we are told thrice that it was the latter who struck the first of the cudgel blows that killed the hero’s father (82, 89, 94).

¹² “Ado” is the ancient kingdom and city-state of Benin, which flourished from about the tenth to the nineteenth century and exerted a strong military and other influence over most of the southwestern and delta parts of what is today Nigeria. During the period of the kingdom’s social and political turmoil, in the sixteenth to the nineteenth century, life became so insecure that many groups fled Benin city to settle in faraway places, carrying with them memories of Benin in a variety of oral traditions. Okabou follows many storytellers like him in invoking the name “Ado” as the site of the story he is telling, often drawing corrections from Ijo members of his audience asserting the native Ijo homeland Orua as the proper site of the story. See Okpewho 1998:1-26 for a detailed discussion of the place of Benin in the mythology of the old Benin “empire.”

The detail that Ofe is the bearer of the victim's head (10) is recalled at least four times during his protracted battle with Ozidi (137, 145, 170, 172).

Certain references are, however, widely enough separated to argue a credible sense of unified focus. For instance, in fitting the boy-hero with charms needed to ensure his invincibility, Bouakarakarabiri slaps seven potfuls of potions and other items down his bowels (Night One, 31). Much later, when, during his prolonged fight with Ofe, Ozidi complains of hunger and Oreame conjures up an abundance of food, we are told "he hardly ate much of the food before his belly filled up. So many were the pots in his stomach" (Night Four, 159-60). Or take the striking resemblance between the hero and his father (13), which is remarked even by his witless uncle, Temugedege (41). In assuming his father's name as well as his physical looks, it seems logical that Ozidi would also inherit his father's inner qualities. Hence, in the equally prolonged fight between Ozidi and Odogu we hear a statement that recalls a much earlier scene in which Ozidi senior is invincible to no other weapon than cudgels (Night One, 7-8): "Remember, to kill the man, you had to hit him with sticks" (Night Six, 301). Further, Oreame's boast in the fight with Ogueren, namely that she is invincible to anyone's charms (Night Three, 101), re-echoes three times in the fight with Odogu (Night Six, 308, 312, 314), and is invoked by a frantic Ozidi when he discovers that in his blind fury he has struck down both his grandmother and Azemaroti's mother (Night Six, 356).

In his linear propulsion of the story, the narrator receives some help from his accompanists. There are numerous Caller-Group interjections ("O STORY!" "YES!" etc.) throughout the performance. Sometimes it is not clear whether these exchanges come from members of the orchestra or from the audience. Whatever their sources, they seem to have been provided by those sufficiently privy to the details of the story and perhaps the history of the performance.

Such interventions serve a variety of purposes. Many acknowledge or advert to the affective force of certain moments in the story, as in that tragic scene when Orea (Ozidi's real mother) wails "over the head of her husband on her lap" (12), or in that tragicomic romance between Ozidi and Odogu's wife where the woman, in the crude grip of a warrior unschooled in any social graces, cries out to her husband for rescue (288)! Sometimes, too, the Caller-Group exchanges are used for restoring order to the narration following the audience's reactions—with laughter, exclamation, ululation, etc.—to an affective detail: e.g., when the audience laughs at Agbogidi's catching a cold at the mere sight of Ozidi's "man-breaking sword" (68), or when a ululation from the audience greets Ozidi's cutting down his grandmother and Odogu's mother in one fell swoop (307). At numerous

points also, the intervention is used to regain the thread of fabulation after an interval of song by the orchestra (69, 103, 128, 144, 150, 158, 199, 248, 295, 325, 365, etc.).

The Caller-Group exchanges are equally important in aiding the plot development. The exchanges may often be intended to impress upon everyone—not least the collector of the story—that “the best is yet to come”! But when they tell us that the story grows “wide open” (115, 150, etc.), they advert not only to imminent moments but even more to the progressive growth of the story. True, events gather pace as we move from the beginning toward the end of the story, and the narrator increases the scale of monstrosities threatening the hero. But, more importantly, the closer we scrutinize the fabric of the tale, the more we can trace some basic strands of development, especially in the personality of the hero.

The idea of *development* in Ozidi’s personality may seem paradoxical, since he continues to be called a “boy” throughout the story and to be so dependent on Oreame that he is frequently driven to tears as he calls upon her aid. Such instances may be defended by the manifest aims of heroic representation. As I have suggested elsewhere (Okpewho 1979a:103, 259 n.), by keeping the physical stature of the hero at a reduced level, the narrator may be aiming to magnify the dangers the hero faces and so make his victory over them all the more impressive. Despite this manipulation of his image, Ozidi does manifest some growth. We see this first in his confrontation with the Scrotum King, the first of his post-revenge opponents. It seems that, having avenged his father and so discharged his obligations to his family, Ozidi is now set to begin realizing himself as a person in his own right. So much is at least suggested in the physical growth credited to him as he prepares to fight the Scrotum King: “If you saw the previously slender youth, he was now a sturdy and huge man. He had grown quite into a man” (222).

From this point on, Ozidi’s potential as a human being, with certain emotions and some sense of self, begins to emerge. This is evident in the misguided romance with Odogu’s wife, where the hero is revealed as a sexual innocent hopelessly enthralled by the woman’s beauty (232-33):

“Can a woman possess such a figure! You people, look how perfect she is. Yes, yes, yes! All this time one simply wasn’t given any eyes. Oh, how terrible! Was one to remain forever frigid and unmoved?”

The woman is equally infatuated with Ozidi, and soon after he is firmly ensconced on her lap. He does not know how to proceed (“Now how shall we do it?”); in the midst of his fumbling, the hornblower sounds notice of

Odogu's arrival, and the romance is hurriedly aborted, the lovers promising to continue their affair the next day.

The encounter is brief, but the experience of a fixation other than warfare is enough to open the hero's eyes to a hitherto unknown world and bring the warmth of human sensations to a frigid killing machine. This is what gives the next episode, the fight with Tebesonoma, its peculiar interest. Tebesonoma calls a truce in the midst of their contest, asking Ozidi to go to the next town and kill off his (Tebesonoma's) sister before returning to their fight; his excuse is that he is unwilling to leave her and her baby to suffer unprotected in the world. When Ozidi and Oreame finally meet the woman (Egberigbelea) and her child, Ozidi is simply "horrified" (256) by the thought of killing innocent folk, at one point contesting—thanks to a spectator's dramatic input—Oreame's order to finish off the woman (256-57). When he can no longer fight the killing urge, he laments the "terrible world" that has left him to accomplish "nothing but waste, waste" (257). He spares some thought for the woman's homestead as he prepares to take her life—"Come out or I'll wreck whatever there's in your house" (257-58)—and allows her to sing a parting dirge before his sword descends on her neck (258-59).

Ozidi remains bellicose. But now the killing urge is being steadily counterpoised by some humane will, and he begins to assert his interests against the control of his grandmother. Having disposed of Tebesonoma, he returns to the scene of his aborted romance with a woman he is now determined to marry. When his hornblower reminds him of Oreame's warning against his affair with Odogu's wife, he brushes him aside—"Man, be off with you Isn't she already going senile? Do let's go in"—and strides confidently toward his quarry (275-76). The ensuing fight with Odogu proves so tough that Oreame comes to the rescue and whisks away Ozidi and his entire company, including Odogu's wife! When Oreame chides him for disobeying her and causing the outbreak of trouble, he retorts, "If it has to break, let it break" (286). Carnal knowledge breeds a growing sense of self. When Ozidi accidentally knocks out Oreame in the fury of the resumed fighting, he suddenly achieves a clarity of vision he hardly showed when she was very much in charge. The following dispute between Ozidi and his frustrated attendants gains insight from the audience's input (310):

"Isn't there ever a time you can control yourself when possessed? Must you go on raging and raging like a storm?"

Spectator: Look, is that now against the code of conduct?

As it is, had you got to us, you could also have murdered us."

All he could say was that he didn't know himself.

“Do you think I could go and strike my own mother down? I didn’t know what I was doing.”

Ozidi has surely gained in self-awareness and confidence. His next battle is with the head-walking ogre, Tebekawene. While his men are frightened of this figure, Ozidi strides boldly on in total disregard of the terror. “If a man has his head to the ground like that,” he tells them, “it should be easy to split him from trunk to skull. Yes, why then do you speak in fear? I don’t like how you easily get scared. Those legs suspended wide apart in the air, one splitting blow and that should be the end of them.” His men urge retreat, but he is adamant: “Retreat? For him that was impossible” (322). In previous encounters, Ozidi invariably took fright at the approach of these monstrous figures, and rose to assert himself only when Oreame whipped up his spirits with her fan. Now, he appears to be in greater control and to show more confident leadership of his men. When the sky is rocked by thunder and his men worry that there is no house in which to take shelter should they be drenched by rain, Ozidi replies, “There may be no house but the rain won’t melt you. So move on, just push on” (328).

By the time he fights Azemaroti, Ozidi is at the height of his self-awareness as a man. While Oreame fastens to herself all formidable war-gear, Ozidi carefully adorns himself (and evidently his attendants as well) with apparel that announces him as a man of the world (341):

Ozidi with his figure showed to advantage. His vest fitted him to perfection. As for his calves, they were this big. Flat was his belly, and his blackness was all sparkling and pure. And so they all had a bath, dressed themselves, and combed out their hair. There was not an item that Ozidi forgot. In his hand was a handkerchief.

Protracted and exhausting though the fight with Azemaroti and his mother turns out to be, Ozidi does not once cry frantically to Oreame for help, as in his earlier encounters.

Ozidi finally achieves full manhood in his culture by taking a wife, but not without difficulties. Settling into married life can hardly be easy, for in a town whose human population has been pretty much put to rout by the hero’s career of blood, there is no *human* woman left for him to court. When Oreame tries to assuage his restlessness by urging that they go to her hometown to seek “fun,” Ozidi asks, “Yes, but is it normal for me to remain without a wife?” (371). Whereupon she strikes the earth with her fan and conjures him an exceptional beauty. The sex-starved hero loses no time with niceties: “he ejaculated and went directly into her” (372). Although the

martial urge has not quite left him, it is clear his killing days are very nearly over.

This brings us to Ozidi's dastardly, unnatural act in "killing" his uncle, Temugedege. If there is one act that merits the label "excess" that Clark-Bekederemo attaches to all of Ozidi's post-revenge career—a charge I have contested elsewhere (Okpewho 1979a:3-7, 1983:170-74)—it is this one. However, before rushing to condemn the killing of Temugedege, let us consider one aspect of the cultural backgrounds of the Ozidi story that this episode may be straining to echo. As was already suggested, the story may be read as evoking power conflicts in old Benin that forced many communities to migrate in search of a less troubled life elsewhere. In his psychoanalytic study of the old Benin monarchy, Peter Ekeh (1978), contesting both Freud and Fromm, argues the "conscious institutionalization" of revolt in the transfer of power from the aging king to his much younger heir. While the king schemed anxiously to destroy the prince so as to hang on to power, the prince took care to remind the king, by sending him the symbolic gift of a tuft of grey hairs, that it was time for him to quit the scene because he no longer had the potency needed to insure the vitality of the institution.

We may now appreciate the tensions between Ozidi and the incumbent king, his uncle Temugedege who, following tradition, stands *in loco patris* to the hero (40-41, 373). While the hero harrows the idiot king's abode in the shrubbery after his every triumph, a preliminary notice of ejection, the old man frantically appeals to the citizens of Orua to terminate the troublesome young man's life so that he, the king, can live in peace.¹³ The king's impotence is hinted at directly—"I have fathered no child . . . I have found no woman to sleep with"—and metonymically, by his having a soft spot on his head, rather like an infant (375). Ozidi's crumpling of the old man's head may thus be seen as a dramatic transformation of the old Benin symbol of presentation of grey hairs, whereby the prince served notice to the incumbent king that his ruling days were over.

Whether or not Clark-Bekederemo is right about the visitation from Smallpox serving as a purificatory experience (xl) for his "excesses,"

¹³ Most of the harrowing scenes occur in Ozidi's contests with the assassins, perhaps because it is in this segment of the story that its more direct political signification lies. In the other two places where the harrowing occurs, the contests with Odogu and Azemaroti, is there something in the mystical mother-son combinations that hints at political implications in the image of controlling females among the Ijo, a traditionally matrilineal culture? For an analysis of gender and power relations in Ijo myth and society, see Okpewho 1983:137-48.

including the killing of Temugedege, we have a clear case here of an antecedent culture fossilized within a later outlook. It is equally clear that the logic of Ozidi's triumph over the controlling forces in Orua is that he will reign supreme. In preparation for his role as king, it is necessary for Ozidi to divest himself of the more mechanical, preternatural qualities of heroism defined by an uncritical attachment to the witch Oreambe. The progressive humanization of Ozidi, culminating in his marriage (despite the odd circumstances), is evidently the allowance made within the formal movement of the story for a transformation of the hero from the fantastic world of brute force to the real world of responsible leadership.¹⁴

Texture, Text, and Context

In humanizing Ozidi, the storyteller is aided in no small measure by the interventions of the audience. Here we should acknowledge yet again the role of contextual factors not as irrelevant contingencies, as formalist and structuralist ideologies would urge, but as dynamic aids in the realization of narrative form. While the narrator, bearing more than a fair share of the emotive charge of the Ozidi story, endeavors to exploit fully its romantic potential, the audience tends to check his flights of fancy and keep him on the ground of rational, palpable reality. Two examples of the audience's role in this humanistic program will do. First, amid the prolonged but doomed romance between Ozidi and Odogu's wife, one spectator is driven to observe, "All this labor to lay a woman!" (294). This comes at the point where the woman has asked Ozidi to tell her the secret of his powers and Ozidi, drawing from his shrine the all-conquering sword, is torn between his tender feelings for her and the mechanical urges of a sword in hand. It is a charged moment in every sense—mystically, emotionally, dramatically—but the spectator's reading of the tension puts the emphasis squarely on its emotional (carnal) interest.

The second example comes from the last scene of the story. Having disposed of Smallpox and his gang, the hero hands his sword over to

¹⁴ Elsewhere, I have pursued the analysis of narrative "development" in *The Ozidi Saga* by the formular approach (Okpewho 1979a:154-59, 173-79). For other perspectives on expansion and development, see Harold Scheub's concept of the "expansible image" in Xhosa *intsomi* (1970, 1972:124-34, 1975, and 1977:61-76). The concept has been influential in the work of Scheub's former students, especially Cosentino (1982:34-55), Cancel (1989:33-54), and Sekoni (1990). For my critique of Scheub's structural approach to these image patterns, see Okpewho 1979b.

Oreama to be put away for good, vowing to seek no more fights. In the happy prospect that society will now be spared the terrors of the hero's killing rage, a member of the narrator's orchestra comments, "Where there's no love the bowels show no love" (387-88). This statement could be read as an attempt to justify the bloody career of Ozidi: things could have taken a different course in Orua, had the hero any choice but to parley with his society in the only language it understood. More importantly, the statement seems to lend a touch of earthly wisdom to a tale that is otherwise short on proverbs and to ground the extraordinary career of the hero within the scheme of human expectations. It is therefore no surprise that the scene concludes with Ozidi "bending forward and catching a handful of earth," a symbolic gesture whereby he proceeds to renounce all further fighting (388).

Several interventions from the audience give notice not so much of a cohesive as of a variegated social outlook, in the sense that each commentator tries to offer a preferred path to representation of the Ozidi story, sometimes in conflict with the path chosen by the narrator. If we look closely at these spectators' comments, we find an amazing multivocality that may be deconstructed along lines of gender and ideology, among others. For instance, amid their interminable sword-play, Ozidi and Odogu are so exhausted that, though they are still standing on their feet, they can hardly lift their arms to parry any further; yet their mothers keep urging them on. A spectator laments, "Look at them playing with children born with such labour!" (303). Clark-Bekederemo does not identify these interpolators by name, but such a statement is more likely to have been made by a woman than a man, and if she were to tell the story herself she might be less attracted to details of blood-letting than a male like Okabou has been.

Or take that scene where Oreama and Ozidi stride confidently into the domain of Azema and Azemaroti. A spectator, cherishing the prospect of confrontation, exclaims, "Power!" (343). As his next statement indicates, the narrator is really playing down the menace intended by Ozidi and Oreama, who have come disguised as lovers out on a stroll. But our spectator obviously wants to witness the dominance of the Ozidi-Oreama party—a reflection, perhaps, of the climate of civil strife then prevailing in western Nigeria (Ibadan, the site of this performance, was the regional capital). Although these comments help to guide the tale toward a more temporal, realistic outlook, it is obvious that they suggest multiple strategies for achieving such a goal.

What we have here, therefore, is a tale of two structures. On the one hand, there is a *microstructure* that not only facilitates the organization of the plot into seven parts, however random the disposition of episodes, but especially accommodates the multivocal inputs from the audience. The

microstructure is especially hospitable to the unstable composition of the audience across the seven nights of the performance. As with any program of free association held over an extended period, such a performance could hardly hope to count on a stable and homogeneous attendance. Even if we agree that one set of attendants makes a homogeneous input into the plot development of the tale in a given day, they may not all be there the next day; some will likely be replaced by others with different orientations and outlooks. The change in composition will inevitably engender occasional intellectual stresses between the narrator and the new set of spectators, causing adjustments to be made so that the performance for that day is realized with some level of success. In assuming responsibility for their task “the performers of tradition,” as Hymes has properly observed, “are [more often] masters of adaptation to situation” (1981:86).

On the other hand, there is a *macrostructure* that sustains the overall logical, ethical, and other design to which the society subscribes whether individually or collectively, whether consciously or unconsciously. True, if we were to ask a random sample of citizens in Orua what the Ozidi story meant for them, we would very likely find some who made the might of Ozidi the pivot of their response, others the grotesque features of Ozidi’s opponents, others the unrivaled magic of Oreame, while for certain others the story made sense not so much in defining a proud heritage as in distinguishing the obsessions of the past from the needs of the present. Despite these divergences, there remains an immanent backcloth of culturally determined signs from which the story is perceived or told, however much it has to adjust itself to suit the dialogic imperatives of performance on any range of occasions.

The relation of smaller to larger units of discourse is, of course, a longstanding concern in humanistic scholarship. Mikhail Bakhtin has drawn useful parallels between “the work in all its wholeness and indivisibility” and “the diversity of the elements that constitute it” (1981:255). Kenneth Pike has offered an equally useful chart, in our study of linguistic and cultural behavior, between an *emic* approach from a situation-specific perspective and an *etic* approach from the perspective of larger behavioral laws (1967). And Foley has, in several publications (1991, 1995, 1999), quite lucidly explored the relations between the essential building blocks of narratives (*formulas* and *themes*) to the larger referential systems that define various European oral traditions.¹⁵ My recognition of the relation of

¹⁵ On the relation between microstructure and macrostructure in oral traditional performance, see also Bauman 1986:90-94, 112-13 and Foley 1991:13. Bauman calls episodes “macrounits of narrative plot” (94), while I have treated them here as part of its

microstructure to macrostructure in *The Ozidi Saga* borrows from this tradition of thought a mechanism for appreciating the place of Okabou's nonce performance act within the larger, immanent tradition to which members of his audience responded; for the stresses between the two are responsible, to a considerable degree, for the dynamism revealed by Okabou's text.

Specifically, my analysis has tried to show the level of complexity involved in an event when so many people participate in it not as sworn members of a cult but on the basis of free association, and when, as the performance progresses day after day, their individual outlooks steadily assert themselves in the form of interpolations that affect not simply the texture of individual episodes but indeed the general drift of the plot. Is there a chance that a nonce act such as Okabou's could collapse under the weight of these interventions? The people who make those comments during his performance are by no means trying to bring him down—far from it. In their patriotic joy at participating in the re-enactment of a national heritage, they are more likely anxious to project not only its multivalent potential but especially the dialogic texture of their verbal arts, a quality shared by other cultures and traditions, as we see, for instance, in studies by Dennis Tedlock of Zuni (1983, 1999) and by Charles Briggs of Mexicano performances (1988).¹⁶

Whatever insights are yielded by the dialogic texture of Okabou's performance must be credited largely to the good sense shown by Clark-Bekederemo in prompting the event. There was, for instance, much wisdom in siting the performance in Madam Yabuku's private residence. Since the Ijo matron was a regular client of the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation station at Ibadan, which she frequently obliged with song and dance groups sponsored by her, Okabou's performance might possibly have taken place at

microstructure. The difference here lies mainly in the vastly larger scope of *The Ozidi Saga* in comparison to the conversational yarns Bauman collected in Texas.

¹⁶ Compare the Herskovits' experience with a Dahomean narrator who was somewhat out of sorts when, in the presence of the recording American scholars, he could not get from his native fellows the sort of responsorial rapport he received in normal storytelling sessions (Herskovits 1958:52). Robert Cancel cites an analogous experience from the Tabwa of Zambia: "One parent, a ward councillor, tried to keep the audience, his family, from singing along with the storyteller, thinking that they were somehow interfering with the purpose of the researcher's recording. The frustration of the storytellers and audience, almost literally forced to sit on their hands, was relieved only after I assured the anxious father that I *wanted* the audience to respond as they normally did" (1989:59). Cf. also Giray (1996:33) on the Jula of Burkina Faso.

the NBC studios there. The choice of Madam Yabuku's residence had at least two advantages. First, NBC would probably not have been able to accommodate a program lasting seven whole days; other options might have vied for the time, and Okabou would have had to abbreviate his material rather drastically. Second, a closed studio would have offered less room than an open residence for the free flow and random attendance of spectators and perhaps their free expression of views. An audience of such a performance would have been entirely out of the traditional dialogic loop, being too limited in the extent to which they could respond to the immanent codes of their tradition: "the rules, frame, all that constitutes the infelicitous context," Foley has said, "will prove impertinent and misleading as the . . . audience tries to fashion coherency on the basis of disparate codes" (1995:48).

Another benefit of having the performance at Madam Yabuku's place was that it enabled Okabou to hold dialogue with other contingencies than the attending audience. From Madam Yabuku's yard, he could more readily conjure contextual factors like telephone poles and local markets (75, 77, 263, 299, 331, etc.)—which enter into his conceptions of size (as of the monsters facing Ozidi) and distance (as of the ground covered by their paces)—than he could have done from a closed room in a radio station. In appropriating these elements into his tale, Okabou has practically erased the line that Henry Glassie sees between "the eye of the beholder" and "the mind of the creator" in determining what counts as *context* in performance studies (1982:33).¹⁷ Above all, the open air theater-in-the-round offered Okabou the imaginative scope for achieving a text of truly classic status. Performing his tale far from the traditional festival arena back in Tarakiri Orua, which might have placed a different set of constraints—e.g., concentrating more on the *dromena* than the *legomena* of the Ozidi myth—he has nonetheless found in Clark-Bekederemo's recording project the recipe Bauman theorizes for Homer's success: "when the epic singers were freed from the usual contextual factors that constrained their performance, and placed in contexts whose very purpose was to allow them to display their talents, they took advantage of the situation to exercise their full virtuosity in the production of long, elaborate texts" (1986:106).

¹⁷ Focused discussions of the concept of *context* are numerous. Following early positions stated in Georges 1969, Ben-Amos 1971, Wilgus 1973, and Joyner 1975, *Western Folklore* proceeded to entertain several contributions on the topic, such as Jones 1979a and 1979b, Ben-Amos 1979, Georges 1980 and 1986, Zan 1982, and Bronner 1988. See also Young 1985 and Ben-Amos 1993. Okpewho 1990 highlights the influence of the audience on the performance of *The Ozidi Saga*.

As for the audience, Clark-Bekederemo identifies only three among them by name: “Professor A. Brown, then Professor and Dean of Medicine at the University of Ibadan,” and the film-maker “Frank Speed” of the Institute of African Studies at the university (269), as well as the hostess Madam Yabuku (xxxvii). Otherwise, he speaks only of “some other friends and colleagues” from the university and other non-Ijo in the audience who were obviously not as active as the Ijo in making the occasional interjections but who must have reacted just as visibly to emotional moments in the performance. Although the bulk of the tale had resonance primarily for the native Ijo audience, certain elements in it—like English loan-words on which Okabou was frequently corrected, or images like “the white man’s [second world] war” (227), etc.—had the non-Ijo audience in mind and so made some contribution to expanding the scope of the story’s horizon in one crucial way: balancing the limited patriotic expectations of the native Ijo with the larger cosmopolitan experience of the non-Ijo audience. It is no wonder that the text of the story turned out to be so large.¹⁸

By insisting on going through the entire seven-day format enjoined by the tradition, Clark-Bekederemo thus enabled the coalescence of multidirectional tendencies in a narrative that was seldom performed in its entirety. The narrator’s occasional attentions to the tape recorder (especially 177, 234, 257, 342, 362) certainly indicate that he was not accustomed to the size of the program imposed upon him. But the effort has served him well both in fleshing out, with help from various contextual factors, the formal outlines of a cherished legacy and in lending it the stamp of his own individual genius. This article has tried to show evidence of that genius in the formal control Okabou exercised over an unwieldy and potentially fragile narrative mass.

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¹⁸ Dennis Tedlock clinches this point very well in assessing the conscience of Zuni informants who, in their narratives, conjure a larger cultural universe than their more familiar constituencies: “. . . however much the mythographer may try to normalize a performance by gathering a native audience and by building rapport at the level of personal interaction, the presence of a tape-recorder and the eventual goal of publication raise larger questions of what might be called interethnic rapport. The problem of the mythographer is not merely to present and interpret Zuni myths as if they were objects from a distant place and time and the mythographer were a set of narrow, one-way conduits, but as events taking place among contemporaries along a frontier that has a long history of crossings” (1983:292).

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The Implications of “Orality” for Studies of the Biblical Text

Holly E. Hearon

Efforts to examine the oral aspect of biblical texts date to the early part of the twentieth century. Since then, the tide of studies has flowed and ebbed. A swirl of activity during the 1950's and 60's slowed to a drizzle in the 70's and early 80's. This drought was broken with the appearance in 1983 of the ground-breaking study by Werner Kelber, *The Oral and the Written Gospel*, which marked the beginning of biblical scholars' growing awareness of and engagement with the works of Eric Havelock, Milman Parry, Albert Lord, Ruth Finnegan, Jack Goody, and Walter Ong—and in subsequent years, it should be added, the works of John Miles Foley. Since then the flow of studies has steadily increased, surpassing the efforts of any previous decade. Needless to say, it is hoped that the twenty-first century will prove as fruitful as the late twentieth century for studies of the oral aspects of biblical texts.

My goal in this article is to highlight some of the ways in which the application of studies in oral tradition to biblical texts has begun to foment a shift in thinking among biblical scholars by encouraging us to look at the biblical texts in relation to their oral-aural contexts and by considering how these oral-aural texts functioned in the ancient world. Because these studies have taken us in many different directions, my paper is structured as a series of “sound bytes” loosely grafted together. My intent is to be suggestive rather than comprehensive, to describe some of the places we have been and some of the places we have yet to go. Before I begin, let me offer three caveats. First, most of my comments will be directed towards studies of the Second Testament, as this is the locus of my own research. Nonetheless, a number of issues that I raise find resonance in both Testaments. Second, while I will cite some studies, many more will be referenced only by allusion; if the study that has been central to your work, or perhaps is your work, is omitted, I beg your pardon. Finally, while I have endeavored to

represent a spectrum of perspectives in my comments, my bias will no doubt be evident to those who have ears to hear. In this respect I do not beg your pardon, but your indulgence.

Written Remains

I begin with the written remains, because, in the end, that is what we have: written remains of texts that look nothing at all like what we are used to seeing when we encounter a written page or printed text. These written remains are not divided into chapters or paragraphs, they exhibit no punctuation and provide no spaces between words. The sheer visual impact of letter after letter without interruption is overwhelming. Yet it is the visual impact of the page that orients us towards their function. Because the structure of the text cannot be discerned from the construction of the physical page, we must discover it another way. As Paul Achtemeier (1990) has proposed, and Bernard Brandon Scott and Margaret Dean (1996) have demonstrated, one of the ways in which the structure of these texts is revealed is through sound. It is little wonder, then, that reading aloud was, if not the exclusive practice in the ancient Mediterranean world, at least the normative practice. This reality invites us not only to see, but also to hear our “written remains” and to experience them in relation to aural rather than visual cues by letting our ear be guided from sound to sound rather than our eye from chirograph to chirograph. As Scott and Dean have proposed, these cues can add to our understanding of how the rhetorical structure of the texts is shaped, for example, through patterns of repetition constructed around sound.

Attentiveness to the primarily aural nature of our “written remains” signals to us their close relationship with oral text. Since these “written remains” were largely dictated, the “remains” are, in fact, texts that began in oral expression and were “actualized” in performance through the re-oralization of the words. To view them wholly as written texts, then, is to miss an important dimension of their function and to misconstrue how they were experienced in the ancient Mediterranean world.

The Oral and the Written “Text”

Over the past 60 years biblical scholars have developed a much greater appreciation of the close relationship between oral and written text, a

conversation stimulated in no small part by Werner Kelber.¹ The individual who has articulated, perhaps most clearly, the close relationship between oral and written text is Vernon Robbins. Robbins sees this close relationship arising from what he describes as the “rhetorical culture” of the ancient world, a culture based in the art of recitation (1993:116). According to Robbins “rhetorical culture” uses both written and oral language, as well as written and oral sources and traditions, interactively. There is, indeed, an *expectation* that oral traditions will appear in written texts and written traditions will be heard in oral texts. The distinction between the two in terms of content and structure, therefore, is blurred; nor can any clear sequence of, for example, first oral, then written be discerned. In “rhetorical culture” the oral and the written text are bound together in a dynamic relationship.

The impact of this insight for studies of biblical texts is profound. It disrupts any notion of a clear distinction between an “oral phase” and a “written” phase in the transmission of the biblical text and opens up at least the possibility of written texts—such as Q, if indeed “Q” was a written text—that existed but are long since lost to us. This, however, is “old news.” The other possibility is potentially more disruptive to the canons of biblical scholarship—that is the possibility that the relationship between the Gospels rests in performance rather than written texts. This possibility has found confirmation in a presentation by James Dunn in 2000 to the Society of Biblical Literature. Dunn undertook a close examination of the differences between versions of stories found in Mark, Matthew, and Luke. He noted that many of the differences are “so inconsequential” that it is difficult to argue why they would have been made. Redaction criticism has long focused on the “consequential” changes made to each text by their respective authors, but the inconsequential changes have slipped by unnoticed. Dunn argued that a plausible explanation for these differences is that “Matthew and Luke knew their own (oral) versions of the story and drew on them primarily or as well. . . . Alternatively it could be that they followed Mark in oral mode . . . as a storyteller would” (2000:302). The possibility that the similarities between the Gospels rest not on literary dependence but on shared tradition transmitted as oral text offers a small but significant shift in balance. The two-source hypothesis has tended to keep us focused on the “written” dimension of rhetorical culture; Dunn’s proposal brings into sharp focus the “oral-aural” dimension.

¹ See especially Kelber 1983, 1987, 1994a and b, and 1999.

The Aural Function of Text

Vernon Robbins has identified the oral-aural dimension of our “written remains” as closely related to their function in rhetorical culture as ideological rationale “generated through rhetorical elaboration in support of particular social postures” (1993:140; see also Horsley and Draper 1999:ch. 7). Texts are partisan. They are embedded in and responding to particular social and historical contexts in ways that are value-laden. This requires us to do more than establish the words of our texts, as Richard Horsley and Jonathon Draper remind us. It also requires us to establish the function of the communication in the historical social context and to see, if not a direct relationship, then a dynamic relationship between words and context. Attention to the oral-aural function of the text can offer insight into both the context that is referenced and how that context is reimagined through the text. If the spoken word is intended to lend support to particular “social postures” it must, at one and the same time, reflect the context in a way that hearers will recognize and with which they will identify, and engage the hearers to a degree sufficient to create in them the capacity to entertain new social boundaries (Robbins 1993:146, Horsley and Draper 1999:295). Our “oral and aural written remains,” then, belong to an act of social construction, an act that is undertaken through performance.

Performance

The oral-aural nature of our “written remains” underscores their existence in performance—they must be understood in terms of the interaction between a performer and an audience, and the tangled web of discourse and experience that binds them together in a particular place and time (Horsley and Draper 1999:ch. 7). Margaret Mills cautions us that it is necessary to have specific ethnographic information before we make assertions about an audience, and performer (1990:235). For biblical scholars, this task is complicated exponentially because we can only glimpse performer, audience, and context through reconstructions based on fragments of literary and material remains. It is, nonetheless, an important part of the task. To understand a word as “spoken” is to recognize that it references an immediate social context, described by the location of a performer and audience in a specific place and time. To complicate things further, this performance context is not stable. It shifts as the performer, audience, and occasion shift: who is present with whom and under what

circumstances. There is, then, no fixed relationship between content and setting, performer and audience (Long 1976b:40). They are variable, and each new performance context requires a re-examination of how these elements are engaged.

Yet another dimension of the performance context is the act of performance itself. Anne Wire has observed that “writing . . . limits a story by recording only words, whereas storytelling depends for effective communication as much on the speaker’s tone, volume, pace, gestures and embodiment of direct discourse as on the words spoken” (2002:4). This is another dynamic that is difficult for us to recover, but is important for us to imagine. Whit Shiner, for example, has culled ancient texts for indications of performance strategies—modulation of voice, use of gesture, and the crafted interaction between performer and audience. The impact of performance strategy on the spoken word shapes its capacity to affectively move an audience and cannot be separated from our understanding and analysis of “text.”

The variable elements that compose a performance context also point to the possibility that each new performance context will call for a new formulation of the “text” to accommodate the shift in performer, audience, and context (Loubser 1993:35, Dewey 1994:157-58). The hearers, too, will lend shape to the text by interjecting comments while the performer, in turn, will be forced to adapt the text to the shifting demands of the audience (Long 1976a:190-91; Dewey 1994:151). The “actualization” of our “written remains” in performance, then, introduces to them an element of instability. New variables will be created, in addition, by the way in which each text is “framed” by the surrounding material. All of this serves to undermine past (and present) efforts at identifying an “original text” no matter how stable the tradition may be. Yet, in the words of Robert Coote (1976:60-61): “if the tradition of [a text’s] transmission accepted and produced reformulations and preserved its multiforms, why should greater importance be imputed to the hypothetical original than the ancients thought it had?”

Transmission of the Text

The existence of multiforms brings us to the question of textual transmission. The implications of this question range far beyond technology to reconstructions of communication practice. They also touch on our understanding of the nature and organization of early Christian communities.

There are three primary theories of transmission that have been put forward over the years: (1) transmission as a dynamic, open process

(Bultmann,); (2) transmission as a rigidly controlled process reaching back to eyewitnesses (Gerhardsson and Reisenfeld); (3) transmission as an informal, controlled process (Bailey). There is not time to lift up all the arguments associated with each proposal; let me instead raise some of the issues prompted by these proposals in recent years. The primary tension that dominates discussions about transmission of the tradition concerns the role of the community versus the role of the individual. Each side in these conversations, it should be mentioned, represents an attempt to understand the process of transmission in historical social context.

Among the most recent proponents of the “eyewitness” model is Samuel Byrskog. One of the things that sets Byrskog apart from earlier proponents of this model is his use of studies in memory. Drawing on the work of Maurice Halbwachs, he states that “groups and cultures do not remember and recall; individuals do” (2000:225). For Byrskog, then, tradition can ultimately be traced through those individuals who are the bearers of tradition for the community (so also Nielsen 1954:30). The importance of this trajectory is that it provides continuity between the past and the present: “The deepest continuity with the past was not in memory as such but in mimesis, not in passive remembrance, but in imitation” (197) and “What we have is ‘memorative literature,’ written from memory to memory” (127). While acknowledging that the performance of tradition generates “multivocal and contestive interpretations in diverse contexts” (139, here following the work of Mills), Byrskog ultimately wants to argue for a line of tradition that is transmitted from its source (Jesus) through eyewitnesses (Peter) to text (Mark).

In contrast, Horsley and Draper argue that since composition cannot be differentiated from performance, transmission reflects a “collective cultural enterprise” embedded in “communal memory” (1997:7). Proponents of this view, among them Werner Kelber, emphasize the variety of ways in which the community exerts control over the shape of memory. Øivind Andersen, for example, while recognizing the importance of the role played by those who are designated as “bearers of the tradition” notes that, even so, memory is dependent upon the collective (1991:21): “while one member may serve as ‘memory’ the memory functions only if it has meaning for the body.” William S. Taylor, speaking to the role of the individual, adds that memory is a “product of the habits of thinking, attitudes of mind, and emotional patterns created in the individual by the society of which he is a part. They clearly reflect the cultural setting to which he belongs” (1959:472).

I have polemicized this perhaps more than is necessary, but with a purpose. It comes down to a matter of control over the sanctity of the

tradition. On the one hand are those who argue that the “tradition”—however defined—was carefully preserved and transmitted, beginning with eyewitnesses who handed the tradition on to authorized individuals and thus preserved it from corruption. On the other hand are those who emphasize the role of the community in giving shape to tradition, as it was contested between and within groups who were negotiating both meaning and structure, in part, through the use of tradition.

What is worth noting is that in both lines of argument, the role of memory is beginning to take a central role. In each case, memory is seen as a means of constructing a bridge between past events and present experience, but how that bridge is constructed differs widely. I suspect that its construction is closely tied to how it is experienced by the present interpreters. While the appeal to memory does not bring resolution to the “divide” between these two approaches, it does demonstrate one way in which the conversation is being refined as we move away from envisioning “text” and “tradition” as objects that can be neatly packaged and handed on and become increasingly sensitive to the complex web of forces that give them shape.

More Polemic

One of the things that is appealing about speaking in terms of “rhetorical culture” is that it neatly sidesteps the need to engage the question of whether there is, in the context of rhetorical culture, any necessary distinction between oral and written text. For some, the answer is “no”; the distinction is viewed as unhelpful because it creates an unnecessary divide and ultimately proves unproductive since what is left to us are the written remains of rhetorical culture. For others, the answer is “yes.” For them the distinctions between oral and written point to a differential in terms of access and power.

Studies of literacy in the ancient Mediterranean world place the number of people who could read and/or write at somewhere around 5%, with a somewhat higher percentage projected for urban males (Rohrbaugh 1993:115, Bar-Ilan 1992:56; Harris 1986:267 suggests 15% for urban males). Since those who did not read or write could hire a scribe, production did not belong to the literate alone, but it did belong to those who could afford to pay a scribe, and who, it must be assumed, had access to someone who could subsequently perform the written text through recitation. Not to underestimate the powers of patronage, this number must have remained small. When we speak of the close relationship between oral and written

texts, therefore, we need to recognize that the “written texts” were relatively few—those responsible for the creation of these written texts made up less than a handful of the population, and of this group the vast majority were male. Thus it is important to raise the question of whose voice is represented in our “written remains.” Joanna Dewey, for example, has observed that few stories about women appear in our texts and that their role tends to be minimized. She notes that studies of European tales and their shifts from oral to written text reveals a substantial reduction in the number of stories that feature women and, in addition, that women assume more passive roles within the stories (1996:72). She proposes that as traditions move from oral to written text in the “rhetorical culture” of the ancient Mediterranean world a similar shift may have occurred (*ibid.*:74).

Other distinctions between written and oral text have been noted as well. For example, written texts are “fixed” in a way that oral text is not. As Werner Kelber has observed (1983:176), however much the written text may be modified in performance, there remains a fixed original against which any subsequent version may be checked. This existence of the text in time and space outside of performance lends the text a kind of permanence that is not shared by oral text. In addition, written texts allow people who have never met to have access to the same narrative (see Hollander 2000:356). In this respect, the text takes on a life of its own and has the capacity to assume an authority that is not tied directly to interaction between a performer and audience. In contrast, oral text is, by definition, dependent upon the presence of a narrator and an audience in the same physical space for voice and capacity to influence (Long 1976a:188). These differences should encourage us to guard against blurring the lines between oral and written text to the point where all distinction is lost.

Conclusions

What began some sixty plus years ago as an exploration of oral tradition in the biblical text has brought us to a point where we now see our “written remains” as evidence of an oral-aural culture in which written and oral texts and traditions were bound together in a dynamic relationship. This offers us opportunities to see and hear our written texts in new ways: as patterns of sound bent on the task of persuasion in particular social historical contexts where performer and audience entered the world of the text in order to give “meaning and power to a way of life, to a cosmos become real in performance,” to borrow the words of Joanna Dewey (1994:152). It also presses us to become even more attentive to the ways in which written and

oral text differ—a challenge placed before us still by Werner Kelber. The same traditions may appear in both; both may employ written and oral language; and because both are performed orally, both will be heard. Yet differences remain, not least of which are those related to power and access. To hear those other voices, we need to continue our search for oral texts and traditions in our “written remains,” and to construct performance contexts that are not bound by the frame prescribed by biblical texts (see, e.g., Hearon 2004). This may, perhaps, bring us closer to the polemical context in which all of these texts were heard.²

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Creating a Seto Epic

Kristin Kuutma

The creation of the Seto epic known as *Peko*, composed by the Seto singer Anne Vabarna in 1927 (Hagu and Suhonen 1995) represented a complicated collaborative interaction between folklorists documenting Seto tradition and a singer/poet constructing personal and communal identities. The resulting text emerged as a negotiation between invented symbolic representation and the establishment of a personal voice through a combination of creativity and traditional repertoire. In this study I explore the collaborative framework in which this text was produced, probing the circumstances and individual relations as well as representational agencies involved. The analysis applies an interdisciplinary anthropological and folkloristic approach, informed by hybridity and the blurring of disciplinary boundaries in historicizing inquiries into cultural documentation and textual practices.

Arguing that the epic under discussion has become an ambivalent symbolic text in cultural representation,¹ my investigation into its historical establishment proceeds from the standpoint that it constitutes an ethnographic representation of Seto culture in traditional poetic form. Anthropological inquiry has recently addressed discursive aspects of cultural representation as textual practice, and by the Foucauldian deconstruction of “regimes of truth” has transformed the tradition-researcher into an object of analysis and evaluation as an author, an institutional being in a concrete historical context, while contesting the authority emergent in textual representation (see, e.g., Clifford and Marcus 1986, Clifford 1988a, Geertz 1988). In comparison to the revisionist historiography of anthropology, folklorists problematize their methodology less frequently, leaving the scholar in the field transparent and essentializing traditional collective heritage, reflected in individual repertoire at the expense of the performing or interacting subjectivities. Oral poetry, however, appears as a social phenomenon in performance or ethno poetic studies and in epic scholarship; especially research concerning the Finnish epic *Kalevala* has included

¹ For a brief outline of the key elements of the discourses and practices of modern representation see Rabinow 1986.

explorations of ambivalent textual practices (e.g., DuBois 1995, 2000). The social role of epics finds marked investigation in identity discourse, as is illustrated in several contributions to *Oral Tradition*, particularly those by Lauri Harvilahti (1996) and Lauri Honko (1996). In his latest research into the creation and performance of oral epics, Lauri Honko (1998) united folkloristic, textual and anthropological studies, but in his focus on the “textualization” process the social framework and intercommunication between the singer and the ethnographer remained largely disregarded.

The current study aims at historicizing inquiries into cultural documentation and textual practices. My analysis is dynamically informed by Stephen Greenblatt’s sensitivity to the “poetics of culture” (1995), observable in written documents (including poetic compositions) of the period and ascertainable in research aimed at cultural reconstruction, and by James Clifford’s approach to “ethnographic authority” (1988b), which draws attention to the disempowering effect of anthropological representation. I thus propose a rereading of texts and documents to study cultural and social, aesthetic and political contingencies and constraints in the production of a cultural text, and its emergence as a representation. My perspective explores the emergent interaction of the documenting scribe or scholar, the narrator and the narrative presented in the text, and the text’s larger social context. In studying textual representation, the departure point for analysis recognizes the issues of authenticity, traditionalization of personal repertoire, the orality/literacy interface in traditional cultural expression, and the transition of an oral repertoire into a text designed as a cultural representation. Particular discursive background in this context is provided by a historiography of folklore studies by Regina Bendix (1997), in which she argues for a reflexive study of the role and subjectivity of cultural scholars. The contested transparency of signs and interpretive procedures extends to antithetical agendas and subjectivities of folklorists and performers as they emerge in the practices of gender construction that are conceptualized from conflicting perspectives (cf. Kodish 1987, Mills 1993).

The current research explores the creation of *Peko*, first by observing the individuals instrumental in the emergence of the epic project, focusing on two outside folklorists, Armas Otto Väisänen of Finland and Paulopriit Voolaine of Estonia, and their interaction with the Seto folk singer and poet Anne Vabarna. The scholarly and cultural agendas negotiated and the enacted personal relations investigated concurrently reflect the context and practices of folklore studies of the time. The inquiry into the institutionalization of representative tradition-experts is expanded by an analysis of the epic poem Anne Vabarna composed, the way her singer’s subjectivity emerged in it, and how she expressed her personal as well as communal experience in her repertoire. The textual elements of this oral-derived epic are observed for their emblematic qualities in reflecting the

creative process of oral tradition. Vabarna's poetic composition presents an epic unity previously unknown in Seto culture, and yet the singer—as a competent tradition-expert—performed the commissioned poem as a traditionalized narrative drawing on her repertoire. In Estonian folklore scholarship, *Peko* and Anne Vabarna in Seto tradition have been discussed by Paul Hagu (see 1995, 1999a, 1999c). I suggest a different reading of the creative framework and the product by exploring the process behind the creation of an intended Seto representative text, while examining the contingent interactions in their sociocultural contexts to dispute the marginality accorded to the collaborative effort and the hybrid text it produced. My analysis reveals the existence of a multifaceted ethnographic “voice” that broadened a personal repertoire to encompass an entire people, a process that entailed an intended ethnographic representation and expression of identity.

The Seto are a tiny ethnic group of Finno-Ugric origin in the border zone between Estonia and Russia, inhabiting the present-day southeastern corner of Estonia and the northwestern Pskov region in Russia.² Their cultural expression is defined by a complex interplay of continuous social and political marginalization on the one hand, and an active idealization of Seto cultural heritage on the other. They maintain distinct features of local vernacular deviating considerably from standard Estonian, adhere to distinct traditional customs, invest the local community with substantial authority, and follow the Russian Orthodox faith (in contrast to the predominant Protestant Lutheranism among neighboring Estonians). Historically the Seto have preserved their identity between two contrasting worlds: retaining linguistic affinities (and shared folkloric features) with the Estonians to the west, who rejected them based on their religion and cultural difference, while harboring religious affinities with the Russians to the east, who in turn denounced the Seto as “half-believers” based on their language and idiosyncrasies in their religious practices.

However, by the end of the nineteenth century Estonian nationalist intellectuals in search of pristine cultural treasures had discovered the Seto region, a folklore reservoir of presumably ancient Finno-Ugric lore, and saw in it an Estonian ancestral heritage that was declared lost in the rest of Estonian culture due to economic transformations, modernization, and urbanization. The Seto lived as an agrarian community with relatively conservative economic practices, where habitual and ritual singing, especially by women, accompanied daily chores and defined customary rites in patriarchal farming households. In the same period, Estonians were

² I adhere to terms “Seto” and “Setomaa,” corresponding to the vernacular reference and preferred in native writing today, in contrast to Estonianized “Setu” and “Setumaa” that remain unchanged in quotations. Aspects of Seto history are discussed in Raun 1991, Hagu 1999b, and Richter 1979.

undergoing an emancipating national “awakening” process, opposed to the Baltic German intellectual and czarist Russian administrative predominance. The conscious constitution of Estonian national culture entailed the establishment of extensive folklore collections and active folklore collecting activities, which emerged through the inspiration and example of similar efforts in neighboring Finland.

In Finland, social trends in the late nineteenth century rekindled interest in myth and Finno-Ugric affinities with an agenda of reclaiming cultural affiliations, preferably in opposition to dominant hegemonies. This renewed interest in cultural heritage led to a further quest for genuine folk poetry, particularly poems of narrative nature, that inspired the Estonian folklorist Jakob Hurt to compile an anthology of lyrical narrative songs of the Seto.³ Hurt made several trips to Setomaa (the Seto region), and edited a monumental three-volume collection of traditional poetry, *Setukeste laulud* (*Songs of the Seto*), published in Helsinki in 1904-07. From Helsinki came also the first researcher to do systematic fieldwork in Setomaa, the Finnish folklorist and ethnomusicologist Armas Otto Väisänen, who during his trips in 1912-23 wrote down verbal folklore as well as acoustically recorded Seto music on phonograph.⁴ Eventually, as a result of his dedicated interest in preserving Seto folklore, communicative skills in the field, and use of advanced recording equipment, Väisänen played a pivotal role in the process of institutionalizing Seto cultural heritage.

The Contested Identification of Tradition-experts

Taking his lead from Hurt’s collection and following the folkloristic idealization of folk poetry, Väisänen entered the field and defined his search via established preconceptions about the nature of competent singers (preferably elderly women) and a measure of exemplary songs (preferably of extensive length). In his fieldnotes, Väisänen defined the Seto region as rich but relatively unified in its poetic expression, concluding that he need not visit every village and should focus his search on the *lauluimä* (“mother of song”), a concept outlined by Hurt (Väisänen 1992:10). Such star performers would represent repositories of a past glory, an ancient tradition in rapid decay, which a collector had to salvage for posterity before it vanished. In his article describing the area and its tradition, A. O. Väisänen suggested an imminent demise when he described “vielä elossaolewien

³ Pastor Hurt arranged the most extensive folklore collection campaigns in Estonia starting from the 1880s (cf. Hurt 1903, Mirov 1989).

⁴ On Väisänen see Leisiö 1992, Väisänen 1970.

laluemojen kymmenlukuisesta joukosta” (“ten last mothers of song still alive”; 1992:154). In so doing, he defined a recording practice that would exclude men (who attracted his attention only as instrumental musicians) and categorized women as the primary performers. Through the choices he made he assisted in establishing star-performer reputations for particular singers, a mode of individual recognition unprecedented in the immediate Seto community. His activities promoting Seto tradition consequently created renowned singers of local, national, and international celebrity.

Singing was an overall cultural expression for Seto women of the time: it was an integral part of ritual ceremony (e.g., weddings and burials), a daily accompaniment of work (e.g., work songs for churning, milling, and reaping), and a source of entertainment at seasonal festivities or in communal recreation (e.g., swinging songs or party songs). A woman with a noticeable gift for wording poetry for singing was called *sõnoline*⁵ (cf. Leisiö 1992:21). Naturally, not everyone was equally talented poetically or musically, but every young girl was expected to acquire some mastery of singing and poetic creation. Singing was valued relatively highly by the community: mothers aspired to teach their daughters to sing in order to enhance their chances of making a better match in marriage. Since singing was a relatively common practice, though greatly valued by the community, and because it was so widespread, it could not render a person unique or exceptional in the Seto community. Such an appraisal emerged through the process of folklore collecting.

A focused and determined folklore preservation campaign started in Setomaa particularly after the region became part of the new Republic of Estonia in 1918. With the rise of a new style of organizational activity, concentrated sociopolitical undertakings aimed at edifying and “civilizing” the largely illiterate, socially and economically backward Seto people. These efforts served the ambivalent purpose of claiming the territory of Setomaa for Estonia by officially Estonianizing its public sphere, while at the same time the cultural activists idealized Seto cultural expression for its singular, pristine qualities. The latter development shifted Seto singing practices from their traditional contexts into focused performances for folklore recordings and performances on public, national, and international stages in an alien representational context unfamiliar to the community. One event transported from Estonian national culture was the song festival, which celebrated and displayed Seto singing traditions for public enjoyment and enlightenment.⁶ This process involved selection of lead-singers by some

⁵ A person who has lot of *sõna*, literally “word.” However, in the Seto tradition a verse line perceived as one poetic unit was also referred to by singers as *sõna*. Therefore it carries the meaning of having, that is to say knowing or creating, a lot of verse lines.

⁶ Described in Seto 1922:139–57; Kodotulõ’ 1924:209–21.

outside official; dignified “star performers” were greatly honored and rewarded, leaving a mark on the Seto singing community.

On the other hand, these developments triggered a growing interest in Estonian academic and cultural circles, most notably among folklorists and linguists. Within the framework of culturally edifying aspirations, such projects provided the Seto with written language and publications in their vernacular, wherein the preservation of indigenous cultural expression combined with conceiving of an epic to be “discovered” among the people of Seto.

The Idea of an Epic Envisioned

In the historical context of constructing Estonian national culture, the discourse on national epic and its aesthetic as well as cultural-political significance had been paramount and instrumental in cultural developments for nearly one hundred years. The idea of an epic had enjoyed a persistent presence among the Estonian cultural elite since the 1800s. The Estonian epic *Kalevipoeg* had been compiled and edited by Friedrich Reinhold Kreutzwald and was first published in 1857–61 as a serial in six volumes (see Kreutzwald 1961 and 1963). Soon after its appearance, and departing from the immediate and unavoidable comparison with the Finnish epic *Kalevala*, Estonian folklorists started finding fault with Kreutzwald’s work, regardless of its popular success and acceptance by the general public.⁷ Based particularly on the late-nineteenth century folklore research carried out in Finland as well as in Estonia, *Kalevipoeg* was found inadequate and unrepresentative in comparison with “real” folklore. Its style and themes lacked the ingenuity of a true folklore creation, while Kreutzwald’s role as author was pronounced too significant, especially in comparison with the established ideal represented by Lönnrot’s *Kalevala*. Heated debates in scholarly publications, accompanied by the ongoing collection of folklore, inspired some folklorists and literary scholars (with poetic aspirations) to attempt to “create” a folklore epic themselves, one which—informed by the abundant collections of folk poetry in the archives—would better lend itself to national use. However, the topic and main themes of a “respectable” epic proved to be a problem in the case of Estonian folk poetry. The vast majority of songs had been recorded from women, and their repertoire was considered more lyrical, and therefore inadequate for presenting the heroic or mythic deeds (as in the *Kalevala*’s case) of folk heroes of yore. This

⁷ For the discourse on Estonian and Finnish epics, see, e.g., Laugaste 1990; Mirov 1996; Anttonen and Kuusi 1999. The contested narrators and bards in these epics are compared in DuBois 2000.

“desire for an epic” (*eepose-igatsus*), so dubbed by Estonian folklorist Ruth Mirov (1996a), gave inspiration to several folklorists and creative authors for imagining an epic to be found among archived folk poetry, and led to concrete attempts to create one. By the early twentieth century, the extensive collections of traditional poetry and burgeoning professional folkloristics, supplemented by national creative writing of the day, contributed to the persistent obsession with epic narrative poetry, including the emerging project of composing a Seto epic.

The National Romanticist ideological context of the inspirational contingencies of an epic eventually motivated an enthusiastic young folklorist, Paulopriit Voolaine, to envision the promotional role of an epic composition in the cultural advancement of the Seto, drawing an inspirational parallel from the historical developments of Estonian (and Finnish) culture-building efforts. The imagined epic among the Seto had, however, already entered the discourse with the endeavors of A. O. Väisänen. In his descriptive analysis of Seto culture, published in 1921,⁸ Väisänen applied epic as a yardstick with which to measure the true merit of folklore in a culture, relying on the established epic canon and the preconceived singer of epic poetry (Väisänen 1992:152):

Aineksia on kokonaiselle hääepokselle [...]. Eikä ainoastaan hääepokselle, vaan elämäneepokselle. Mitään Kalewalaan werrattawaa ei setukaisrunoudesta Lönnrotin työllä tosin saa. Tästä runoudesta näet puuttuivat partasuut urohot sywine syntyineen, puuttuivat ainekset Sammon nouantaan werrattawalle keskeiselle ja eeposta koossapitäwälle mainetyölle. Se on ennen kaikkea tunteen runoutta, jossa puhuu naisen mielikuwitus.

We have material for a whole wedding epic [...]. There is material not only for a wedding epic, but also for a whole life epic. However, the Seto poetry would not form through the application of Lönnrot’s method into anything comparable to *Kalevala*. In this poetry the ancient bearded, old male sages are absent, nor is there any material concerning a great feat that could form the core and cement of an epic, like the retrieval of the Sampo. There is instead primarily emotional lyrical poetry, which reflects a female imagination.

⁸ Article “*Setunmaa*” on Seto culture, traditions, lifestyle, and expressive heritage in ten installments in the periodical *Helsingin Sanomat*. See Väisänen 1992.

Seto Legends in Voolaine's Editorial Activities and Creative Writing

Paulopriit Voolaine (1899–1985)⁹ hailed from Rāpina parish in the Lutheran Estonian region adjacent to Setomaa. He studied folklore and dialects of Estonian and Balto-Finnic languages at the University of Tartu without, however, finishing his degree. Voolaine became an active member of various academic and social organizations and combined his fieldwork and folklore-collecting activities with sociopolitical agendas of cultural edification, the enhancement of temperance, and the promotion of Finno-Ugric affinities. He made an early mark in the academic world of the twenties by becoming an editor of (and the major contributor to) two Seto language readers, but eventually published popularizing articles to promote the folklore collected, without providing substantial studies of that material. He deposited in the Eesti Rahvaluule Arhiiv [Estonian Folklore Archives] more than 5,000 pages of recorded folklore; to the Emakeele Selts [Mother Tongue Society] he donated 400 pages of text in dialect together with thousands of notations of dialect words; to the Estonian National Museum he handed over hundreds of photos and artifacts and fifteen hundred pages of ethnographic descriptions of material culture (Hagu 1995:16). Voolaine also attempted creative writing, which met with little public success, and despite his energetic cultural activities he remained relatively marginal on the academic scene, being mainly appreciated and recognized for his collecting work in the southeastern corner of Estonia.

Voolaine noted in his memoirs that he got “ensnared in the magic of Seto folklore” in early childhood, meeting itinerant farmhands and pottery peddlers of Seto origin (Pino 1987:192–93). He documented his first Seto songs during the 1922 song festival, and his publication *Seto lugõmik. I osa* [Seto reader, volume 1] came into print in April/May 1923,¹⁰ with Voolaine as its acting editor, main translator, and frequent contributor. The second volume, entitled *Kodotulõ'. Seto lugõmiku II osa* [Lights from home. Seto reader, volume 2] appeared in April of 1925 (see Seto 1922; Kodotulõ' 1924). The contents of the first reader fell into the sections *Leelo* (“Songs”), *Muistitsõ' jutu'* (“Ancient tales”), *Vägimeehe'* (“Giants”), *Jutustusõ'* (“Stories”), and *Mitmõsugust* (“Miscellaneous”). In the *Vägimeehe'* section several folk heroes are introduced: a narrative on the giant of Petseri,¹¹

⁹ Personal information on Voolaine is based on Pino 1986 and 1987.

¹⁰ In both readers, the title page shows the previous year, respectively 1922 and 1924.

¹¹ Petseri (in Russian Pechory; in German Pleskau) was an administrative, economic, and spiritual center of the Seto region. The reader included a description of Petseri Monastery, an important site in the Seto epic project.

“*Petseri vägiméés*” by the folklorist J. V. Eisen; “*Kalõvipoig ja tä lóó kirjäpandja*” about the giant Kalevipoeg and how Kreutzwald compiled the Estonian national epic; a longer account of the contents of *Kalevipoeg*; and an introduction of Suur Tõll, the folk giant from the Island of Saaremaa on the west coast of Estonia. Among various short story translations from Estonian literary classics is included a story titled “*Saladuslik nõvvpidämine Peko üle*” (“A Secret Meeting about Peko”), where the folk deity/icon of fertility is introduced as the god Peko. Evident in these readers is a general agenda to provide the Seto with either a tangible or mythological history.

Voolaine was an ardent romantic, an idealistic activist, and a champion of conscious cultural identity, mostly inspired by the ideals of the Finno-Ugric movement.¹² His cultural and political agendas found expression in creative poems in the Seto language: *Seto laul* (“Seto song”; Seto 1922:9), and a four-page composition, *Rahva vabadusõ éést* (“For the freedom of the nation”; 175), recounting the course of the recent War of Independence in Estonia, composed in a style reminiscent of folk poetry. In addition, he translated into Seto the Estonian national anthem, with a few other patriotic poems (179). Into the second reader, Voolaine included the section *Luulõ* (“Poetry”), and an anthology of poetry and prose pieces from Estonian literary classics, translated into Seto mainly by the editor, with surveys of seminal poets in Estonian history and leading contemporaries in Estonian cultural life (Kodotulõ’ 1924:47–70). Inspired by traditional Seto poetic compositions, he also penned a lengthy poem titled “*Palakõsõ’ jutlast ‘Kuningas Seto’: Rahvajutta alosõl leelotanu’ Voolaise Paulopriit*” (“Pieces from the Tale ‘King Seto’: Based on Folktales, Sung by Voolaine’s Paulopriit”; 101–22). The main hero, the King of the Seto, had similar features to folk legends (cf. a concurrent feature in the compilation technique of *Kalevipoeg*), and reflected themes from the first reader.

In conclusion, Voolaine’s editorial activities and creative writing circled around the combined role of poetry and tradition in the establishment of national and cultural identity. His aspirations were strong enough to publish his epic poem about King Seto under the section *Ancient Tales*, thus considering that composition more important as a narrative. On the other hand, he sought legitimization for his effort with an introductory remark that his creation was based on folk tales. Yet in poetic form his composition does not correspond fully to the poetic structure of the Seto *leelo* (“poem”),

¹² Among the Seto, his promotional activities included visiting households and organizing public meetings to give talks about the importance of education, Estonian literature, Finno-Ugric peoples, and the devastating effect of alcohol consumption. In 1928–29 he was officially hired by the Society of Border Regions as an instructor in Seto Sunday-schools (Pino 1987:194).

while his lexicon, grammar, and formulae deviate from the standard of the tradition and lack coherent rhythm. However, by envisioning the idea of a Seto epic, and making creative efforts in compiling the imagined cultural landmark, Paulopriit Voolaine appeared as a folklore enthusiast whose ideas combined well-meaning aspirations to preserve cultural tradition with an acceptance of the creative role of an individual in such a pursuit.

In Search of a Singer for a Seto Epic

The interaction among the individuals involved that eventually led to the creation of the Seto epic *Peko* was recorded in travelogues, journal articles, and poetry or memoirs that reflect complex communication and intricate collaboration between the tradition-researcher and the tradition-bearer, with varying objectives and contested agendas. Although the prime focus for folklorists in the field was to seek out informants as passive reservoirs of tradition, the collaboration that resulted reveals both parties as subjective with particular intents, disputed marginalities, and conflicting representational concepts.

Anne Vabarna (1877–1964)¹³ was born and raised in the village of Võporsova in the northern part of the Seto region, then Pskov province. In accordance with customary practice in the Seto peasant community of the time, her father married off Anne (Anna)¹⁴ at the age of nineteen to a farmer in the neighboring village of Ton'a, where Anne bore nine children and lived until her death at age eighty-six. By that time, Anne Vabarna, an illiterate peasant woman but an intelligent and competent expert in Seto tradition and traditional expressive poetry, renowned as a singer: she had toured widely in Estonia, performing in major music halls in Tartu and Tallinn as well as in Helsinki, Finland. In later years, she also made a concert tour to Moscow, the capital of the Soviet Union. Anne earned the honorary title of *lauluimä* (“mother of song”). In the course of forty years, six thousand pages of manuscript folklore material—the majority of which is poetry—were recorded from her and deposited in the Estonian Folklore Archives (Pino 1997a:5). Recently, folklorists have estimated that her creation approximates 100,000 verse lines. Other folklore items documented from Anne included information about beliefs and rituals, folkprayers, proverbs, sayings, riddles, and about a hundred folktales. Poems recorded from Anne

¹³ This account of Vabarna’s life story is mainly based on Pino 1997 and Hagu 1995.

¹⁴ The Seto baptized in the Russian Orthodox church were given Russian names, which they substituted in daily communication with Seto versions. Here the former are added in brackets.

include wedding songs, bridal laments, burial laments, lyrical songs, game songs, children's songs, and longer narrative poems about legendary figures. A vast portion of Anne's poetry embodies compositions of epic nature and praise songs for specific occasions.

Seto folklorist Veera Pino has listed Anne's longer compositions as songs on mythological figures (Peko); on the natural environment with each about a thousand lines: trees (*Kõivolaul* [Birch tree song], *Tammõlaul* [Oak tree song], *Pedäjälaul* [Pine tree song], *Kuusõlaul* [Spruce song], *Kadajalaul* [Juniper song], *Mõisa uibo ja talu uibo* [Manor apple and Farm apple song]); bodies of water (*Viilaul* [Water song]); celestial bodies; wind (*Tuulõlaul* [Wind song]); fire (*Tulõlaul* [Fire song]); change of seasons (*Keväjälaul* [Spring song]); and poems about people: the historical character Ivan the Terrible, *Ivvan Hirmus*, praise songs for presidents, government ministers, generals, university professors, directors of institutions, doctors who cared for her at hospitals, folklore collectors, and so forth, with a total of 20,000 verse lines (see Pino 1997b:5 and Hagu 2000a:371). Her lengthiest recorded poetic work contains a Seto wedding epic *Suurõ' saja'* ("The Great Wedding") of 5,595 verse lines, with an attachment of *Koolulaul* ("Death Song/Suitors from the Netherworld") of 1,662 lines; a novel in verse *Ale* of 11,000 lines; the second part of *Pekolaul* ("Song on Peko") of 4,318 lines; and finally, the 7,929-line epic *Peko*, performed by Anne Vabarna in 1927 but published only seventy years later (see Hagu and Suhonen 1995).

Anne matured as a singer in the traditional expressive environment of the Seto village community. Regarding her lineage, especially the female family members who were considered the major voice in poetic tradition in Estonia, Anne recalled her mother, who died when Anne was only ten, as a good singer (cf. Pino 1997a:5). Other influential family members were her father's talented sister and also his second wife, who, though thirty years her husband's junior, took good care of the large family and reportedly had talent in poetic expression. Thus singing was a common daily practice, a communicational means that combined poetry and music into ritual and entertaining expression, which Anne heard and employed in her communal surroundings.

The community of folklorists "discovered" her as a talented and highly skilled tradition expert in the summer of 1923, when A. O. Väisänen visited Anne to record local knowledge on birthing traditions from an expert midwife (Hagu 1999a:14). Vabarna, however, took the initiative to establish herself as a singer, and she asked the folklorist to take down her poetry instead. She demonstrated her excellent mastery of Seto poetic form in rendering traditional themes as well as immediate personal experiences through shorter lyric poems and extended epic compositions on wedding traditions, describing the proposal ritual and the four-day wedding ceremony

at both the bride's and the groom's household (titled *Suurõ' saja'* ["The Great Wedding"]), with more than five thousand verse lines. Anne explained her mettle in poetic form by recollecting how she had performed in a group for Väisänen a decade earlier,¹⁵ but felt hurt for not being recognized as a "star-performer" at the Seto Song Festival the previous year. Väisänen's visible activities as a collector of folklore had defined also the lead-singer performers chosen by the organizers for that event. Consequently, the outsider activities and the contingent rewarding of recognition inspired the talented and confident singer to embark on creating her "singer subjectivity" as an identity marker.¹⁶ Anne was successful in convincing Väisänen, who in turn exposed his "discovery" to the reading audience in both Estonia and Finland.

On the other hand, Väisänen was also the first to talk about an epic in the Seto tradition, and to associate the epic discourse with the singer Anne Vabarna. After recording her performance of a lengthy Seto wedding cycle as a contingent narrative, he introduced it in an article in *Päevaleht*, an Estonian daily paper, in 1923 as "Uus Eesti eepos Setomaalt" ("New Estonian Epic from Setomaa"; Hagu 2000b:186–89).

Paulopriit Voolaine met Anne Vabarna at the Seto Song Festival in the summer of 1924, where she participated as an established "mother of song," and launched a constructive relationship with Vabarna providing a narrative poem in traditional form recounting the festival, which Voolaine published as an appendix to his article about that event in his Seto reader *Kodotulõ'* (Voolaine 1924b:209–12; Pino 1997b:5). The same volume contained substantial articles on the Seto singers and their repertoire, music, and musicians (including Anne Vabarna) in the Seto language by A. O. Väisänen (1924).

The Performer of Tradition as a Creative Poet

Anne Vabarna was a talented creator of traditional verse who was likewise conscious of the role of an audience and cared about the dissemination of her poems. However, she did not consider her immediate Seto community her only audience, but included folklorists as an important means for reaching the wider world. Her creative subjectivity sought

¹⁵ The folklorists' concept of expert singers had neglected Anne among the generation of women around 30 to 50, who were usually married and, due to social restrictions prevailing in cross-gender communication, reluctant to communicate with Väisänen.

¹⁶ For discussion on gender relations of folklorists in the field and the interaction in the construction of singer subjectivities, see Babcock 1987, and espec. Kodish 1987.

exposure through folklore collecting practices. Besides those who visited her in person, the illiterate singer ingeniously communicated her creative talent with the help of her children, who had enough schooling to write down her songs.¹⁷ Notebooks filled with Anne's compositions were sent to major collectors. Collecting folklore through correspondence was already a regular practice in many parts of nineteenth-century Europe: the aim of this practice was to preserve it from impending demise due to modernization. The major objective was fulfilled by accumulating extensive amounts of material and, given the scarcity of expert scholars, the work was organized with the assistance of activists and correspondents. For example, from 1923 through 1936, Anne Vabarna sent to one collector sixteen thick notebooks containing her songs, tales, religious poems, ritual descriptions, proverbs, and riddles—all-in-all 3,000 pages, written down by her sons Ivo (Ivan), Timmo, Mihkel (Mihal), or her youngest daughter Manni. Such an arrangement of recording presentations of traditional poetry evolved through the collaborative effort between the singer and folklore collector. When Paulopriit Voolaine took interest in Anne Vabarna as an informant of the Seto tradition, Anne was quite "skilled" in communicating with outsiders as well as relatively accustomed to working with collectors and presenting her heritage through creative performance.

Anne Vabarna had defined herself as a singer with a rich repertoire, conscious of her role and able to perform the "established tradition" as well as her own compositions, inspired by the occasion or her creative impulse. In her performance practice, she also evaluated the expectations of the outsider—the collector—who determined the fate of her creation. Vabarna recognized the validating effect that print offered: a much wider audience and appreciation could be attained if her poems were disseminated through modern print media. Singing also entailed a prospective financial income, which for her emerged as a preferred precondition, since the gentlemen from the cities appeared to be willing to pay money for something that came so naturally to her and which contrasted starkly to the hard daily farm labor.

When Paulopriit Voolaine embarked on fieldwork to collect Seto lore in late 1926 and early 1927, he was to a certain extent on the lookout for a singer for his epic project. Among other Seto singers, he visited Anne Vabarna and recorded her and her whole family, including her youngest children (Pino 1997b:5). His work there indicates a positive communicative atmosphere in the negotiated interaction between the visitor and the household. Exposure to Vabarna's creative talent strongly impressed Voolaine, who likewise harbored poetic aspirations: he had published by that time a number of poems, both in standard Estonian and in Seto. Sensitive to poetic talent, he treated Vabarna as a fellow artist and a creative poet, in

¹⁷ Only her eldest daughters never attended school and remained illiterate.

contrast to the common expectations that folklore informants merely recalled the past or recollected words heard in distant youth. Such an unusual approach could be explained by Voolaine's own relative marginality. His indoctrination into academic folklore remained ambivalent—until the end of his life, he was valued as a productive, indefatigable collector of folklore material, but not entirely accepted as a scholar. He was considered too eccentric, not focused enough on facts but prone to follow his own imagination; for him fantasy and invention proved as valid as tradition, while in his ideal the two had to mingle. Apparently Vabarna attracted him as a poet, and she in turn was evidently responsive to such interest. Voolaine and Vabarna's collaborative aspirations coincided when they discussed Anne's creative style, her repertoire, her preferences, and also her plans for the future (see Pino 1997b:5). Among these exchanges, Voolaine suggested that Anne should compose an epic poem in which she could sing about the legendary god/King of the Seto, Peko. This idea was inspired by Anne Vabarna's impressive poetic talent and competence in the Seto tradition, as well as by the romanticized ideal of an epic as cultural symbol.

Anne Vabarna Becomes an Epic Singer

Before Voolaine's inspirational commission, Anne had composed and recorded several epic poems of impressive length. In addition to the wedding epic and her initial documented poetic narrative on the suitors from the Netherworld as recited to Väisänen, she sent a poem of more than two thousand lines¹⁸ to the collector Samuel Sommer in 1925, telling about a young Seto man who was a successful farmer, built a church, buried his parents, and married an orphan girl. Eventually all these themes found their way into the epic Voolaine commissioned her to sing.

In the course of time, the tradition-expert established herself through her relations with the tradition-researcher as a folksinger of substantial expertise in traditional poetic expression and as an impressive creative talent. Anne Vabarna had gradually gained confidence and a certain perspective on how to promote herself as a singer and a performer. When these objectives met with Voolaine's desire for an epic, their mutual collaboration received serious impetus, and soon after Voolaine returned from his trip to Tartu, he sent Anne a letter in which he proposed a topic for an epic (see Pino 1997b:5). There is no information available as to what extent Voolaine had already discussed the proposed topic with Anne Vabarna during his visit, but there must have been reciprocal agreement on what Anne would enjoy singing about. On the other hand, Voolaine was

¹⁸ I owe this reference to Andreas Kalkun.

seeking a composition with epic characteristics, that is with certain compositional and thematic constraints. But taking into account that no compositions documented from Seto singers earlier had met the perceived criteria, he proposed to provide Anne help in developing thematic guidelines. Unfortunately, the letter Voolaine wrote has not survived, but he later commented that he had proposed a content for the poem in brief (1928: 7). It seems likely that his Seto readers provided inspiration and had a certain impact on Vabarna's and Voolaine's future collaboration. Disseminating these publications was complicated because they aimed at a printed reader for a people whose adult generation was largely illiterate or had no capacity to read their vernacular, since the czarist period schooling took place exclusively in Russian. Thus Voolaine could have carried his readers with him and left a copy with Anne Vabarna's family, perhaps reading passages to her, or letting Anne's children read. The poetic works (including Voolaine's poem *Kuningas Seto*) may have worked for Anne the same way as did songs that she heard performed by other singers: the Seto tradition required careful attention be paid to the words sung, with an expectation to respond to what had been uttered. A singer judged the artistic talent of her "rival" in a dialogic response, perhaps in this case, just by being dissatisfied with Voolaine's poetic qualities in rendering a story. A good singer was entitled to perform her own version of the story, especially if it was claimed to be traditional, telling about the history of the Seto.¹⁹

The composition of the epic proceeded relatively quickly after Vabarna received the letter with topic suggestions or plot guidelines in February, so that by May the written manuscript of *Pekolanõ* was sent to the Academic Mother Tongue Society where it was passed on to Voolaine (Hagu 1995:36). Vabarna dictated or recited the epic to her 19-year-old son Ivo (Ivan), who wrote it down in a notebook of 388 pages (preserved in the Manuscript Deposit at the Estonian Folklore Archives).²⁰ Anne Vabarna apparently used the native compositional methods of an illiterate singer rooted in her tradition, but having the task of covering a longer plot may also account for the time it took to be created. On the other hand, due to the lack of documentary information on the actual process, it is impossible to

¹⁹ For a study on an interplay of printed text and oral performance in connection with the *Kalevala*, for example, see DuBois 1996.

²⁰ However, it is not certain whether this is the original transcript. Vabarna's composition may have first been taken down as notes, probably on loose sheets of paper or in another notebook, from where her children (there seem to be several handwriting styles in the notebook) clean-copied it into the notebook. That scenario would also explain the lines being filled exactly from cover to cover.

distinguish the composition process from that of transcribing.²¹ Voolaine has provided a brief reference to the compositional process by merely remarking that there were several obstacles before the poem could be finished (1928:7).

Their collaboration seemed to work well, and in that same year Voolaine gave Vabarna another topic to sing about, addressing issues important to him and carrying significance for the singer. Inspired by the temperance movement, the next epic-length poem Anne composed was called *Ale*, a story about the disastrous deeds of *viinakurat* (“the vodka devil”). After Vabarna had completed composing *Peko* and the narrative poem *Ale*, Voolaine suggested she resume singing about Peko. He proposed that the singer could continue telling about the giant Peko’s deeds as the leader of his people (Voolaine 1930:378):

[K]uidas vägimees Peko valitseb rahvast, mõistab kohut ja võtab üldse osa rahva elust-olust, kusjuures lauluema põimigu oma lugulaulusse Seto muinasjutte ja mitmesuguseid rahvalaule (näit. “Ilo laul”, “Ilmatütar” j.t.). Sedakorda sündmustiku kava talle ei antud.

How Peko rules over his people, gives them judgment and takes part in the life of the people in general, whereas the mother of song should intertwine her narrative poem with Seto folktales and different folksongs (e.g. “*Ilo laul*,” “*Ilmatütar*,” and so on). This time no plot guidelines were offered to her.

On the other hand, this suggestion shows which themes and issues Voolaine regarded as important, but were apparently found lacking in the epic *Peko*. It is not clear, though, whether these were his own ideas or based on comments and criticism by other folklorists after he had published an introductory article about Vabarna’s composition in the journal *Eesti Kirjandus (Estonian Literature)*, where he also recounted the epic (Voolaine 1928). It does, however, simultaneously testify to the first *Peko* being nevertheless Vabarna’s composition, reflecting *her* agendas and *her* artistic and traditional judgment. The second part of Anne’s *Peko laul* (“Song of Peko”) reached Voolaine in written form by Christmas, 1929.

In 1927, as the combined effect of Vabarna’s 50th birthday being marked in periodicals, of articles written by Armas Otto Väisänen, and of a general interest in the Seto *lauluimä* both among academics and laymen, and also thanks to Voolaine’s introductory article about *Peko*, Vabarna’s name

²¹ I rely here on presentations by Veera Pino, a native folklorist and family member who interviewed Vabarna, and on personal communications with Õie Sarv, the singer’s great-granddaughter and granddaughter of Mat’o (Matrjona) Suuvere, Vabarna’s favorite singing companion throughout her life.

became known to the wider Estonian reading public. On the other hand, her fame also drew the attention of cultural performance organizers, whose interest in “authentic” performers had gradually grown. In 1928, Vabarna gave her first public performance outside the Seto region, and in 1931 she was invited to Helsinki to perform at the Congress of Finno-Ugric Cultures, launching her on a career that won her recognition and respect by the outsider Estonian and international community. Anne Vabarna had established herself as *the* major Seto *lauluimä*; henceforth for years to come she would be the one sought out by musicologists, folklorists, and cultural workers to represent the Seto tradition. Today the published *Peko*, both as Anne’s composition and an expressive marker of cultural identity, functions as a powerful symbolic representation of Seto culture.²²

The Epic Composed by Anne Vabarna

Having previously discussed the individuals involved in establishing Anne Vabarna as a singer and in envisioning an epic of the Seto, we now turn to the epic that she composed. Our aim is to present the agendas the singer expressed in her poetry and negotiated in the framework of Voolaine’s proposed guidelines, and to analyze the emergent reflection of the singer’s subjectivity through the expressed personal and communal sociocultural experience. In her creative poetry she constructs her image of Seto community through family and gender relations, religious experience, and reflections on historical experience.

Considering the lack of information on the prescribed plot of the prospective epic on the one hand, and the singer’s tendency for “poetic license” on the other, it nevertheless remains a fact that her composition attends to an assignment and bears marks of outside influence. But that description could arguably apply to any documentation of folklore, especially if one is discussing such an extended narrative as an epic. A folklore performance does not arise in a vacuum, and outside influence is particularly apparent in the context of documentation.²³ The current premise in observing Vabarna’s composition of *Peko* assumes that she performed her narrative as a singer who habitually drew from and was inspired by performances she had heard before. Moreover, hers was an epic composition performed outside of any ritual context (which would require adherence to repeated tradition), and therefore its main objective was to

²² See Kuutma 2002 for further discussion on *Peko*’s reception.

²³ Cf. discussion on the situatedness of narratives and their documentation in Mills 1991.

render a cohesive narrative, reaffirming a common experience and reenacting a common history in order to provide and confirm a communal identity. Thus, the narrative poem *Peko* is discussed here as a composition initiated and inspired by previous renditions, including lengthy narrative songs by peer singers and also poems and narratives presented by Voolaine. On that ground, it may be argued that even though her composition was intentionally unique, in Anne's perception it fell into the context of her heritage repertoire and was linked to a contingent narrative.

Vabarna was aware of her identity as a singer and her empowering goal involved in putting forward a history of the Seto people, both for them and about them, when she rendered the first few lines introducing her task: "Anne Vabarna nakab innemustist kõwwa seto pekolaist laulma" ("Anne Vabarna begins to sing [about] the ancient mighty [man of] the Peko-clan of the Seto").²⁴ Her notification that she would be telling an ancient story linked her endeavor to the projects carried out by folklorists in Setomaa who customarily emphasized the role of "antiquity": the songs preferred for recording had to be "of old," whereas the folklorists frequently presented questions and requests for topics or songs to be performed, following particular agendas set by earlier collecting ventures. Vabarna's creative talent welcomed an outside impetus, and the outside world provided for her a meaningful audience. This audience appeared interested in her songs, they could make her known as a singer in the outside world, and they might also provide compensation. Additionally, they would be the audience whose expectations Anne learned to take into account and address in her poems. Thus, she frames her narrative goals in the initial passage of her epic (Hagu and Suhonen 1995:93):²⁵

*No heidä ma ette Essu risti, otsa pääle uma risti:
kagoh minno jummal jõvvutõllõ', armas Essu avitõllõ',
sedä kirja kirotõlla', sedä laulu laaditõlla'. 5*

*No naka ma koolnut kul'atamma, lesätäjät leelotamma,
kiä om jo ammu ar koolnu, ommõ mustõ mulda lännü.
Eesti taha riiki ilotõlla', taha laulo laaditõlla'.
Peko- olli õks tuu -lanõ pikk miis, väega kõva vägimiis,
olli tä mi usulinõ, olli selge setokõnõ, 15
selle taha timmä ilotõlla', taha naane nal'atõlla'.*

²⁴ These lines occur in the manuscript deposited at the Estonian Folklore Archives (ARS 1.1./384), but have been omitted by the editors of the recent publication (Hagu and Suhonen 1995).

²⁵ Numbers in the right margin indicate verse lines from Hagu and Suhonen 1995, where a printed line usually includes two verse lines (thus the length of the epic would be about sixteen thousand single lines).

I'll first make a sign of cross for Jesus, our sign upon my forehead:
 may God grant me power, may Jesus give me strength
 to write this book, to compose this song. 5
 I start to tell about the deceased, sing about the departed
 who died a long time ago, who went beneath the black soil.
 I want to praise the state of Estonia, wish to compose a song.
 Peko was a man of height, a giant of great strength,
 he believed in the same God, he was certainly a Seto, 15
 that's why I want to praise him, this woman wants to rejoice.²⁶

Hence Vabarna was ready to tell stories she knew and was familiar with in the context of her traditional heritage, because events, experience, and relationships reflecting her traditional surroundings recurred from poem to poem. But she nevertheless wanted to render them in her “own words,” while simultaneously taking into her creative work certain inspirations offered by outsiders. The singer intentionally situates her narrative in the framework of communal and personal experience (cf. example passages given below).²⁷ As a result, her epic narrative is disruptively unique and traditional at the same time: it is a story that has never been told before in that same format, and still its overall imagery and aesthetic and thematic structure derive organically from the Seto poetic tradition and rely on traditional referentiality.²⁸ Her poem emerges firmly rooted in the common song lore and the recognized tradition.

The epic narrates the life of Peko, a mighty and gigantic Seto farmer, and the fate of his household: mother and father, wife and sons, with various courting, wedding, and funeral rituals occurring. Lengthy elaborations on the deeds of the family members are enhanced by descriptions of daily peasant life. A magic club with the power to enhance the crop or to kill enemies in battle assists the hero, and Jesus crowns Peko the King of the Field so that the Seto people may prosper. When the giant dies, a monastery is built on top of his secret sand cave, and all his predictions for the future come true. The latter third of the narrative gives accounts of Seto life in legendary times, through the experience of an orphan maiden and also Jesus, who established the regulations and rites that ordain the Seto communal existence; in this way traditional themes and songs on biblical legends are combined. Summing up a moral she detects in these songs, Anne gives her message:

²⁶ All translations in this article, the passages from *Peko* included, are mine.

²⁷ Cf. the discussion of poetic form and personal meaning, as well as the role of reality and “fiction” for the narrator in Hymes 1981.

²⁸ On the relation of traditional poetics and traditional meaning, see Foley 1991.

*Essut lasku-i minnenä meelest, lasku-i süvveh süüamest
 s'oo õks et hüü tegemäst, vaesõ meele meelütämäst:
 üte saimi voori ütsä võrra, mi mitmõ külä võrra.
 S'oo olli küll armas Essukõnõ, ol' helde Maarja heide.* 7895

Do not forget Jesus, nor let him leave the depth of your heart
 for he did a deed of charity, made the mind of the poor happy:
 we got a load of nine times, more than the share of many villages.
 That was the deed of sweet Jesus, the act of benevolent Mary. 7895

And in her next verse, Anne returns without any transition to Peko:

*S'oo ol' õks taa muistinõ laul, innemuistinõ ilo. 7896
 Pekat õks ma ammuki laulnu, vägimiist veerätänü,
 Petseri kui olnu piiri pääl, alõva aia all,
 elänü kui, kulla, tuuh kolgah, mar'a, mastõra ligi.*

Thus went this old song, a poem from the ancient times. 7896
 I might have sung of Peko ages ago, told the story of the giant,
 had I lived close to Petseri's border, by the gate of that township,
 had I resided in that land, there by the beloved monastery.

The singer notes that she would have sung about Peko a long time ago if she had lived closer to Petseri, to the monastery, where she could have visited the church and Peko's coffin more often. The singer wants to praise Peko while she is alive and able to sing, so that the fine gentlemen may remember her name:

*[K]iäki olõ-i tulnu tuust ilmast, tands'nu maalõ taivast.
 Sääl lasta-i hingel heļotõlla, vaga vaimul vallatõlla,
 must lasõ-i muld moodotõlla, verrev liiv leelotõlla.
 Muld ütles: "Murõh otsah!", turbas ütles: "Tohi-i laulda!" 7975
 Selle lasi ma leelo liinu pite, hiiiril herrile kaia':
 mino naakõ' nimme nimitsemmä, Anne nimme arotamma-
 n'oo' omma õks kõik laulu Ton'ast tuudu', Annel vällä arvadu'!*

[N]o one has come back from that world, danced down on earth from heaven.
 There the souls cannot sound, the devout spirits make merry,
 the black soil will not let you move, the red sand not let you sing.
 The soil says: "Agony is over!", the turf says: "Do not sing!" 7975
 Therefore I let my song go to town, for the smart masters to see:
 may you start to call my name, announce the name of Anne-
 from Ton'a these songs were taken, where Anne pronounced them all!

Historical and Mythological Background of Peko

In general, the idea of the figure of Peko and his proposed leadership of the Seto people as their king originated with Paulopriit Voolaine, who based his suggestion on folklore legends. For the 1922 *Seto lugõmik* he had translated a description of the Giant of Petseri by folklorist Mathias Johann Eisen, recounting Peko's strength and the fearsome deeds of his sword against enemies who wanted to surrender the Petseri settlement, and the peaceful times under his rule in Setomaa, including also a legend of how the Giant of Petseri lies asleep in his cave until this day (Eisen 1922). Those legends have a historical background in the Petseri Monastery (the Pechory Monastery of the Dormition [*Uspenski*]). The first church of the monastery, built on sand caves where the founding Russian Orthodox monks resided and performed their rites, was consecrated to the Virgin Mary, to the Dormition of the Mother of God, in 1473.²⁹ The prototype of the giant is considered to be Father Superior Cornelius (Kornily), under whose rule (1529-70) the monastery prospered and became fortified; Kornily was killed during the pogroms against the clergy initiated by Ivan the Terrible under the German offensive against the Russians (cf. Selart 1998, Seto 1922: 121–25). Some folk legends then tell of the giant who built the church, whereas other variants maintain that the remorseful Czar was the one who ordered the church to be built on top of the giant's coffin, while the sand caves are related to the catacombs under the monastery.

The character whom Voolaine composed in his poem telling about “kuulus Petsere kuningas, kangõ Setokaise Seto” (“the famous King of Petseri, the strong Seto of the Seto-clan”) in the second Seto reader *Kodotulõ* (1924a:101) was entirely inspired by the legend accounts of Eisen. In the poem entitled *Kuningas Seto* (“King Seto”), fourteen hundred verse lines in length, the giant was proposed to be the King of the Seto people, one of the Seto tribe; the fragmentary narrative included passages about the king's son who played *kannel*³⁰ and courted a maiden from the mythical Mororiik (Grassland), about King Seto's sleep in the cave, and about his grandchildren, whose courting and love stories derive from Seto narrative poems that had been published already by Hurt (1904) and

²⁹ Hence the name Petseri, which in Russian is Pechory < *pešchera*, “caves.” The Petseri (Pechory) Monastery established a northwestern stronghold of Russian Orthodoxy that grew into a significant religious center. The monastery's churches contain characteristic symbols of faith, including icons of the Dormition of the Mother of God, the relics of St. Kornily, and his ancient icon (Russian 1982, Hörn 1995).

³⁰ A stringed instrument, similar to a zither.

reprinted in the first reader *Seto lugõmik*.³¹ On the other hand, Voolaine makes an attempt to include in his composition the romantic pseudo-pantheon of gods and mythical beings created by the early Estophile intellectuals at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

In his search for a mythological background to the narrative in making, Voolaine took a step further when he proposed the name and identity of a fertility deity to Anne Vabarna. In the introduction to the published epic *Peko*, Paul Hagu suggests that Voolaine mentioned the name Peko to Vabarna (1995:25). In the Folklore Archives were accounts of fertility rituals connected with grain crops among the Seto referring back to no later than the third quarter of the nineteenth century, but the phenomenon had quickly caught the interest of folklorists, emerging as a particularly engaging topic at the beginning of the twentieth century along with the rising interest in beliefs of pre-Christian origin (cf. Hagu 1987).³² Even if these archival references focused only on a small group of villages, where the rites were held secretly (denounced by church officials) and the descriptions of the material image of the deity or its character remain vague, discussions about such ancient traits in Seto beliefs and rituals were picked up by periodicals. It is from such sources as these that the didactic story published in the first Seto reader (compiled and edited by Voolaine) may derive. It tells about the people in village Mikitamäe and the closest adjacent villages arranging a prayer ritual to appease “umma põlluviljo jumalat Pekot” (“their field crop god Peko”), in order to alleviate the devastating draught (Raid 1922:115).

It is possible that the name Peko was not familiar to Vabarna, though, since she lived in a different location and such Peko-rituals were not practiced in her neighborhood. Anne incorporated Peko and his fate into her own religious system, that of a devout Orthodox Christian who was simultaneously deeply invested in the Seto traditional practices and worldview. In her narrative, ancient beliefs and customs are interwoven into the fabric of Christian legends. Anne sings about mythological rites and magic when she creates an amalgamating parallel between an apple tree and

³¹ From Hurt’s *Setukeste laulud* originated: *Leelo toomine* (“Bringing of Song”); *Ilo laul* (“The Song of Merrymaking”); *Ilmatütar* (“The Daughter of the Air”); *Kalmuneijo* (“Maiden of the Grave”) (Seto 1922:11–20).

³² At the time there was a movement in Estonia to reinvent an “Estonian” religion in order to provide an alternative to the German-based Lutheran Protestantism within the framework of establishing independent national identity. That agenda was simultaneously combined with the Finno-Ugric movement, where one searched for any traces of archaic background that would create a link with the ancient Balto-Finnic heritage. Likewise, more recent interpretations of the epic tend to overemphasize the “pagan cluster” around Peko (e.g., cf. Hagu 1995), an emphasis that does not seem to concur with Vabarna’s perception.

an orphan maiden, or when Peko's wife Nabra invokes rain or forces it to fade by singing:

*Esi tä laul' sääntsit sõnno, vihma sõnno veerätelli:
 "Veerä' õks no meele, vihmakõnõ, saa' üles, saokõnõ!
 Naka' õks sa, vihma, sadamahe, mamma, maalõ tulõmahe -
 tahtva' vihma mi vilä', tahtva' kastõt mi kaara',
 omma' kuivala kuionu', omma' pääväl pälgähüniü'!* 1315
*Kui veerät meile, vihmakõnõ, saat üles, saokõnõ,
 annasi' merele linige, kalarannalõ kapuda'!*

These were the words she sang, used the words of rain spell:
 "Oh dear rain, roll down to our place, oh dear water, gather up in clouds!
 Rain, may you begin to fall, sweet drops, come down on the soil—
 our crop needs rain, our oats wish for water,
 they all have withered in the drought, bleached in the sun! 1315
 If you, dear rain, roll to our place, you, dear clouds, gather up,
 I will give a headcloth as a gift to the sea, a pair of socks to the fishing
 shore!"

A similar atmosphere is created when Peko's mother makes magic clothes for him to wear in battle, or when she interprets her dreams about her own death and Peko's prospective bride. Likewise, the image of the magic club with mythic power to enhance crop growth or to kill enemies derives from Seto traditions concerning magic and rituals, handed down by the hero's father:

*Kesvä- saava' kui -pää' kehväkese', kaara kõrrõ' kasinakõsõ',
 sis näüädä' keppi kesvile, kallist nuia kaarolõ,* 1585
*küll sis kesvä' kergähüse', kaara' nuia kargasõ',
 kesvä-saava' -pää' kui kinda', kaaraterä' kui kapuda'!
 Rügä nakas hõste rühk'mähe, tõug hõste tõsõmahe,
 vilja saasõ kõigilõ viländ, saasõ vatska vaesillõ.
 [...]
 Peko, keerä' sõa keskehe, suurõ vainu vaihõllõ,
 Peko, õks sa hinnäst mõrostõllõ', kulla süänd kohrutõllõ',
 kiioraga naka' keerätämmä, tammõnuial tapmahe!* 1605
*Vineläisi õks sis tapat kui vihma, leedulaisi kui liiva,
 purutat sa maalõ poolakõisi, leotat lätläisi.
 Sis sa minno meeleh pia', ese hinge ülendelle'!
 Jummal anna' sul julgut järge joosta', kangut kaala rako'!*

If your barley grows up weak, if the oats look too weary,
 go show that club to your barley, that good weapon to your oats, 1585
 then your barley will reach high, your oats will become thick,
 the heads of barley will be like mittens, the heads of oats like woollen
 socks!
 The rye will reach up high, the crop will prosper,

enough of grain will grow for all, enough of bread to feed the poor.

[...]

Peko, go right to the middle of that battle, stand in the center of the hatred,
Peko, try and make your spirit strong, raise your golden heart,

go and wave that weapon, go and kill with that club! 1605

You will kill Russians like rain, slay Lithuanians like sand,
smash Poles to the ground, soak Latvians to their bones.

Then you will remember me, bless the spirit of your father!

God will grant you courage to chase, severity to cut their necks!

On the other hand, Vabarna inserts folk variants of Biblical legends about the persecution and death of Jesus in her narrative traditional poetry:

*Essut nää' piidsaga pessivä', uma roosaga ropsõva',
kulla veivä' korgõ mäe otsa, kinä suurõ kingo pääle,
risti säivä' pääle ripakõlla. Sääl nää' huksi' hüä hinge, 5615
vaga vere vaivssiva', suurõl-panni' -riidel risti pääle.
Vana- kuts' ar -jummal korgõhõ, puja pand' hinge paradiisi.*

They beat Jesus with a whip, whipped him with their rods,
took the dear one to a high mountain top, to a splendid open space,
stuck him on a cross to hang. Thus they put a good soul to death, 5615

spilled the blood of a devout one, nailed to the cross on Good Friday.

Old God called him high above, placed his son's soul in paradise.

Additionally, the images created by the singer in the traditional frame of poetic narrative may find parallels in the Christian tradition. For example, when Peko plants his magic club on top of his cave, it grows into an oak tree, which eventually remains in the yard of the monastery but retains magic power of healing:³³

*Juurtõ kasus pääle kallis tamm, peris Peko kepikesest. 4875
Kel nakasõ' hamba' halutamma, varba' valli nägemähe,
tammõ võtkõ' koobõt tassakõtsi, kuurt külest koobitsõgõ',
sis naka-i teil hamba' halutamma, varba' valli nägemähe!
Kuulkõ', mu sõna kullõja', mino takah tagomatsõ:
mastõr teke' s'oo maa pääle, kulla kooba kottallõ, 4885
siia teke' kinä' ti kerigo', altre lavva' alostagõ!*

From the roots will rise an oak tree, right from the stick of Peko. 4875

Whoever will suffer from a toothache, and the toes begin to hurt,
go and scrape the oakbark gently, scratch from the treebark softly,
then your toothache will fade, your toe-ache will disappear!

Listen to me, listeners of my words, the ones coming after me:

³³ Peko's oak tree is believed to be an actual tree in Petseri Monastery to which the Seto attribute magic powers.

make a monastery on this land, on the site of my dear cave, 4885
 build a nice church here, set up an altar table here!

This tree-imagery can be compared to the Russian Orthodox symbol of the Tree of Life in the form of the cross or the form of the church building (cf. Hubbs 1988:102). Another instance of similar ambiguity can be traced in Vabarna's reference to the significance of the mention of Peko's name by his people, while other names cited are Essu (the Seto version of Jesus), Maarja (the Seto version of Mary), and Anne, the singer of the poem. These references connect to pre-Christian word-magic, but such practices concern simultaneously the Orthodox tradition of mentioning the names of particular saints in the act of blessing (e.g. of water, see Kirkinen 1967:118). In the rendition that communicates Anne's worldview, the characters Peko, Essu, and Maarja appear and function in her narrative while presenting a co-existence in place and time. In Vabarna's composition, folk belief and Christianity are transformed into a synergistic whole, reflecting popular interpretations of official religious concepts.

Folk Belief and the Russian Orthodox Church

The geographical location of the Seto places them between two different worlds. To the west reside Estonians with their cultural differences, albeit presenting a strong language affinity. To the east stretch the Russian domains, with a sharp distinction in language but a strong spiritual bond. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the major cultural distinction between the Estonians and the Seto was determined by historical circumstances: the former adhered to the Lutheran church while the latter followed the Russian Orthodox faith. The Seto recognized their difference by calling themselves *maarahvas* ("country folk")³⁴ but proudly declaring that they "bow to the Russian god," as documented by Kreutzwald, the first major Estonian folklorist to study Seto folklore (Hörn 1995:184). The Russians, however, expressed their disapproval by calling the Seto *poluvertsy* ("half-believers"). Such marginal positioning between the culturally and spiritually divergent Estonians and Russians was emphasized further by a third aspect: the fusion of popular belief and the official church doctrine in Seto life, a fact noticed by scholars in other religious cultures in which the vernacular of the people and the language of ceremonial worship differ markedly.

³⁴ The same vernacular ethnonym was used by Estonians, before the coinage *eestirahvas*>*eestlane* ("Estonian").

In this respect, the spiritual world of the Seto can be paralleled to that of the Orthodox Karelians, another Balto-Finnic ethnic group in the border area of northwestern Russia and eastern Finland whose traditional practices and artistic expressions present significant parallels. In her discussion of the folk interpretation of Orthodox religion in Karelia, Laura Stark has examined the process of syncretism, seen as a fusion of elements that the church defines as “magical” and “religious.” It works in fostering reciprocal and community relations, in promoting community identity (e.g., celebration of village patron saints), in venerating visual representations of sacred agents—who also enjoy intimate and practical relationships of exchange—, in localizing sacred symbols and agents, and finally in maintaining a plurality of religious symbols (Stark 1996). These features find analogy with the Seto, where the interface between Orthodoxy and popular religion can be characterized as showing a noticeable integration within the institutionalized framework.³⁵ Both among Karelians and Seto, folk religion was “a product of centuries of dialogue with an Orthodox Church that gave local communities the space and freedom to interpret and appropriate Christian teachings” (Stark 2000:57) in concurrence with their daily reality.

Folk religious beliefs in the Orthodox framework are distinguished by the veneration of Christian saints, treated as cohabitants in the human world who form a link with the otherworldly; devotion to the Mother of God as the most caring and powerful protector; and the tangible transformational power of visual images, particularly icons. These aspects are parallel to the institutional Orthodoxy’s teaching of the profound link between the heavenly and earthly church, made through the intercession of the Mother of God and the saints for the living before God, the assertion of the miracle-working power of icons, and the recognition of the Virgin Mary’s icons as a special source of grace. In folk religious discourse, the sacred agents are attributed human-like emotions and morally prescribed activities (cf. Stark 2000). Similarly, in the Seto legend poems, Jesus, Mary, and God appear as analogous characters in the human world. Another aspect parallel to Karelian Orthodox culture is that of sacred centers (holy sites and particularly monasteries) that were powerful places of moral purity and magic symbolism with mythic beginnings related to the presence of Jesus or holy saints. Similar documentations from Setomaa render accounts in different genres of folklore about how God, the Virgin Mary, and the saints walked in the Seto district, leaving behind their traces; in Miikse stands Jaanikivi (John’s rock), on which John the Baptist sat and gave it healing power; in Pelsi the Seto venerate Annekivi (Anne’s rock) for St. Anne, Mother of the Birth-giver; to the icon of Migula (St. Nicholas) at the Petseri

³⁵ Similar features have been studied with the focus on Russian folk belief (e.g., Hubbs 1988).

Monastery, the Seto bring bread as a gift and smear the lips of the icon with honey and butter (Hagu 1999b:87). Anchored in an ancient, mythical past, these monastic sites and sacred centers provided in their permanence a focus around which to organize collective memory and identity.

From Mythological Past to Historical Present via Personal and Communal Experience

By proposing to Anne Vabarna that she sing about the ancient leader of the Seto people, who had supposedly determined the fate of the Seto land and defined laws and regulations governing the Seto way of life, Voolaine set her the task of creating a mythological time in order to fashion a historical time for the Seto. For Vabarna to carry out such a project, she had to imagine and define her own perception of that mythic time, which in her mind apparently coincided with the historical one. Creating a narrative about the life and heroic deeds of Peko the giant king apparently was not a monolithic enterprise for her; rather she used the narrative as a framework or meaningful poetic grid onto which she could map a multi-layered representation, her epic description of the Seto experience. Her poem presented a versatile interpretation of that experience as an intricate combination on the communal and the personal levels: first, through the description of her immediate daily farm life, including the emergent ties and gender relations; second, through the reflection of her religious experience; and third, by commenting on the historical experience of her community.

Family Relations and Gender Experience

Vabarna created a description of a Seto life-cycle, at the same time providing a detailed ethnography of Seto family life, their living surroundings, and their rites and customs. Her narrative concurrently highlights familial relationships between various generations, parents and children, but particularly between mother and son, correlating that tie with the absence of parental care in the character of an orphan maiden, the subsequent daughter-in-law. The singer's narrative begins with an emotional description of a painful delivery and the sacred guardians watching over the mother and the newborn:

*Kõik anni' teno jumalallõ, Marijallõ kitetülle–
 Essu päst' timä pääkese, Maarja hellä hiusõkõsõ:
 kässi võti' nää' pääle kärmähe, peo pääle pehmehe,
 Essu mõsk' livvah lillelitseh, kuldakausih kullatsõh.
 Essu and' latsõ Maarja kätte, käänd' käeräti pääle,
 Maarja and' pardsi paaba kätte, vaor' vanalõ naaselõ.*

Everyone thanked God, praised good Mary–
 Jesus let his head appear, Mary guarded his soft hair:
 they took him quickly in their hands, gently in their palms,
 Jesus washed him in the bowl of blossoms, in the vessel of gold.
 Jesus handed the baby to Mary, wrapped him in a towel, 75
 Mary passed the duck to the old woman, to the care of the midwife.

Vabarna's portrayal is a powerful depiction of a Seto woman's experience, on which is also built the reflection of the general communal experience, particularly that of the recent, memorable past. It was obviously most meaningful for the singer to tell the story of the Seto giant Peko permeated by the life experience of Seto women and men, based on her own observation and practice, and rendered via the traditional means of expression.

In her epic composition, Vabarna responded in compliance with her traditional expertise to the preceding occasions of poetic presentation, that is the poems and writings by Voolaine and, most importantly, the themes proposed in that notorious letter. Produced in written form, all of it had to be read out loud to the illiterate Anne, an interaction that afforded her the framework to create a dialogue with the prescribed narrative. In the engendered epic, she took *her* turn retelling that story the way *she* envisaged it. The main axis around which Vabarna's narrative revolves consists of birth, courting, wedding, and death. These are the themes forming an intricate part of a traditional Seto singer's repertoire, themes that have been customarily expressed in poetic form and often as part of ritual practice. Thus, in the first third of the poem, the narrative describes in great detail the birth of the giant baby and the name-giving ritual (278 lines), as well as the mother's dream of a daughter-in-law (196), while the longest sections tell about the wedding (486) and the mother's illness and subsequent death (584 lines). The following example is a passage from the mother's speech on her deathbed, indicating the subsequent women's rites:

Ime lausi meelestäni, kosti sõna kuumal suul: 2195
 “No teele ai pikä jutu, kõrra aigo kõnõli,
 vaim jo ütél:” Olõ’ vaikel!” , hingle ütél:” Teku-i hellü!”
 Ammugi minno kutsutas korgõhõ, taivahe tahetas.
 Mullõ toogõ’ tarrõ koolurõiva’ , surmarätt suu mano–
 kirstu om veereh villarüüd, kadso rõiva’ kaasõ all, 2205
 kõik omma’ kerrä keridõ’ , omma’ määsä mähidõ’ .
 Sääl om mul linanõ linik, uhkõ hamõh oplanõ,
 koolu- om sääl -kiri kirä pääl, liivapuukva’ poolõ pääl!”

Mother uttered thus, spoke a word from her hot mouth: 2195
 “I have told you now a long story, talked for quite a while,

the spirit is saying: “Be quiet!”, the angel talking: “Make no sound!”
 They have called for me for long, waited for me in heaven.
 Bring the death robe inside, put the death cloth near my mouth—
 woollen coats lie in the chest, linen clothes hide under the lid, 2205
 all rolled up and bundled up, wrapped into a ball.
 There you’ll find my linen headcloth, see the fancy flaxen shirt,
 patterns of death well woven in, letters of sand stitched onto them!”

A description of the father’s death is relatively shorter, comprising only 118 lines. Later on follows a longer account of the wedding of Peko’s son and the maiden Anne, Jesus and Mary’s foster child (510 lines). These events represent the transitional nexus in Seto life, providing a connection to the past and determining the future. The bellicose motifs have not inspired the singer to an equivalent extent: preparations by Peko’s mother and wife to dispatch the giant to war are given in 416 lines,³⁶ while the actual battle scenes cover only 202 lines. The warfare itself is recounted in a matter-of-fact format, in contrast to the poetic detail of familial and woman’s experience, showing an attempt to include scenes that seem necessary to provide a logical narrative progress, but which do not inspire creative elaboration or abundant detail. Still, those martial segments of Anne’s poem likewise derive the basics of her imagery and core formulae from the traditional song lore, which aptly proposes a female angle on and interpretation of the agonies of battle.

Peko kiird’ sōa keskehe, läts sisse setokõnõ.
Mõni ol’l jo siseh upikõlla, mõni käve käpikõlla, 2735
pal’lo nakse’ Pekot pallõmma, kulla setot kumardamma:
“Kagoh sinno ammu siiä oodi, oodi sisse setokõist—
pal’lo tahtva’ rikko mi riiki, seto poissa purutõlla!”
Peko sis kai, ütél’ kats, seto kuul’d, tek’k kolm.
Peko keerät’ kiiorallõ, taat’ tammõ-tä-nuialõ: 2745
“Olõ’ sa kipõ, tammõkiior, olõ’ nopõ, tammõnui!”
Kiior ütél: “No keerädä’!”, nui ütél: “No nokuda’!”
Peko keerot’ kiioraga, nakas’ nuial nuhklõmma—
kualõ kopsas’, tuu kuuli, sai külge, sattõ maalõ.
Nii pal’lo tap’p’ tammõnuial, keerät’ maalõ kiioral, 2755
suvõl kui linnas’ librikit, käve tarõh kärpsit.
Lei tä maalõ kui liiva, puut’ maalõ kui putsu.

Peko hurried into the midst of battle, the Seto entered the war.
 Some of the fighters were struck down, some roamed on all fours, 2735
 many started to beg Peko, bow to the dear Seto:
 “We have waited long for you, waited for the Seto to join in—

³⁶ Equivalent familial relations inspire the traditional poem *Venna sõjalugu* (“The Brother’s Tale of War”), where the main protagonist is the sister or the bride (cf. Mirov 1996b:839).

hordes want to strike our state, break down Seto lads!”
 Peko looked and spoke two words, the Seto heard and did three
 deeds.
 Peko swirled his weapon, struck with the oak club: 2745
 “Be painful, oak weapon, be fast, oak club!”
 The weapon responded: “Let me fly!”, the club said: “Let me fall!”
 Peko swung the weapon, started to strike with the club—
 on whom it landed, that one died; whom it struck, that one fell.
 He killed so many with his oak club, swung to the ground
 with his weapon 2755
 as many as moths in summer, flies flying in the house.
 He struck them to the ground like sand, cut them down like crumbs.

Regardless of the distinct individuality of her poem, it stands firmly embedded in traditional poetic expression. Within its characteristic structure and form, the idiosyncratic storylines are embellished and elaborated with thematic and formulaic features derived from Seto traditional song lore. In her rendition of the course of time, Vabarna depicts the daily work and toil of Seto farm life. The Seto life-cycle is reflected through giving birth, finding a spouse, and then departing from this world; the composed passages use the ritual poetry performed in connection with birthing rites and at various stages of the wedding ritual, as well as elements of death laments. On her deathbed, Peko’s mother passes on traditional instructions to her daughter-in-law that contain elements from poems of lamentation:

*Kuulõ’ , kul’la tütrekene, meelihüä miniakõnõ:
 sullõ jätä kar’a kasumahe, kirä häste kiirdümähe,
 Pekolõ jätä tõu tõsõmahe, pujalõ vilä vinnümähe!* 1995
*Õga vii-i liiva viläõnnõ, panõ-i kalmo kar’aõnnõ—
 ime, panõ õks ma rüppü rüäõnnõ, üskä üsädse õnnõ!
 Sis mullõ käüge’ kääpälle, mullõ liitkõ’ liivakollõ!
 Käsi- mullõ hot’ -kivil keerätäge’ , umah kambrõh kallutagõ’ ,
 siski jätku-i kandjat kaemalda, liiva mano liitmalda—* 2005
*õga olõ-i mul, imel, tütrit, linnul linahiussit,
 kiä ikk imme ilosahe, risti man ripakilla!*

Listen, dear daughter, my gentle-minded daughter-in-law:
 I leave the cattle in your care, the piebald flock to prosper,
 To Peko I give the fields, to my son the crops to grow! 1995
 I won’t take grain-luck to my grave, carry cattle-luck into the sand—
 mother will place rye-luck in your hands, child-luck in your lap!
 Do then come and see my grave, remember me on the sandy barrow!
 Turn your millstone for me, recall me in your rooms,
 do come and see the childbearer, call upon the sandy barrow— 2005
 I am a mother with no daughters, the birdie has no flaxen hair,
 who could loudly lament their mother, and be bent over the grave
 cross!

In these descriptions, Anne's communal observation and participation are overshadowed by the powerful combination of her own life-encounters. Her creation derives from her personal experience as a mother, a midwife, a bride, a ritual wedding singer, a grieving daughter, and a bereaved woman. The recurring female figures in her narrative are an orphan girl and a young maiden of marriageable age, or a mother and a middle-aged or elderly woman. Anne's fondness for the theme of the orphan has close links to the tradition (e.g., the depiction of a young maiden living under an apple tree), but may well be based on her own personal experience, which can be likewise said of the elaborate description of the mother's sickness and departure.

Religious Experience

On the other hand, these elements are closely related and intertwined with Anne Vabarna's spiritual perceptions, reflecting her religious experience. In her world, the daily companions of human beings, whose presence is particularly noteworthy and expected at the transitional points of existence, are Jesus (Essu) and Mary (Maarja). Anne perceives them as living companions, whose daily life is comparable to that of ordinary Seto farmers—they have a household to attend to, fields of rye or oats and herds of cattle, so that helping hands are needed in order to carry out the daily chores. But in that respect, her composition is far from exceptional: it is characteristic of Seto tradition to see divine figures and Orthodox saints humanized, as daily partners whose presence is desired and sought after. Her religious characters have powerful ties to the general portrayal of familial relations, particularly so in the parallel images of the mother and Peko, Maarja and Peko, or Maarja and Essu, which all draw upon the mother-and-son relationship entangled in a multiple identification in which the heavenly and the earthly merge.³⁷

In her depiction of Jesus and Mary, Vabarna appears to be carefully didactic: her whole narrative of Peko is meant to present an honorable guideline for life. A decent, respectable, and orderly life has to follow the rules and regulations set by Jesus and Mary:

³⁷ In Russian Orthodox hymns Mary is called the bride as well as the birth-giver of Christ. The church is understood as analogous with the maternal body; cf. the union of mother and child, male and female (see Hubbs 1988:102–3).

Senni Timonen, in her study of Orthodox Karelian women's epic with Marian themes (1994), has also emphasized the Virgin Mary's appearance in those works of folklore in person, transcending time and space with a special place in the world of women. This presence is rendered in an intimate tone, with a sense of proximity and a viable personal relationship.

Peko elle üte Essu pääle, luuf' üte Looja pääle, 2285
Essu näid opas' oigõhõ, Maarja kõigildõ kõnõli,
Peko käve Essu käsko piti, juusk' Maarja juhatust piti—
nii käve' vana-täl-vanõba', käve' ese ni ime.

Peko lived a life in Jesus, trusted the one and only Lord, 2285
 Jesus gave them proper guidance, Mary rendered words of wisdom,
 Peko took his orders from Jesus, ran at the request of Mary—
 so had lived his ancient fathers, done the same both his parents.

Actually, in Anne's perception that depiction has a dual character: she does not make a clear difference between Jesus and Mary, and in her narrative they merge. For her, the gender of such transcendent figures appears to be fluid, and their institutionalized roles alter in the singer's interpretation; they simultaneously represent divinity and human origin. In her world, Essu (Jesus) and Maarja (Mary) may merge into one person:

Essu jal lausi, esi ütël', kallis Maarja kadsatõlli:
"No saat sa kolga kunigast, perüs riigi peremehest! [...]"
 [...] 3585
Essu lausi meelestäni, Maarja meele poolõstani:
"No kuulõ', Peko, pikk miis, väega hüü vägimiis! [...]"

Jesus thus spoke and said again, dear Mary then told:
 "Well, you are now the king of this land, the true lord of this state! [...]"
 [...] 3585
 Jesus uttered thus, Mary spoke her mind:
 "Now listen, Peko, tall man, great good giant! [...]"

At the same time they may also form a household, living as husband and wife, having daughters and sons or fostering children. In a typical invocation Anne uses throughout her epic, Essu and Maarja appear as the transcendent father and mother figures of all Seto people: "*Essu, mi ese, Pühä Maarja, mi maama*" ("Jesus our father, Holy Mary our mother").

Such an approach to the theological canon is not unique to Anne or the Seto tradition, but coincides with the general syncretic approach observable in folk belief, quite characteristic in areas of Greek Orthodox denomination, where the official ceremonial language of worship does not concur with the vernacular, allowing the traditional poetry to interpret Christian narratives within their general traditional narrative framework. It is particularly noticeable in the figures of Essu and Maarja, combining the love of son and the love of mother with the concept of care and protection, salvation and mercy, compassion and empathy.

Folk interpretation of theological doctrine also extends to the perception of God the Father and God the Son, who may likewise merge, both taking the name of Jesus (Essu), a practice mentioned already by Jakob

Hurt in his collection of Seto songs (1904) when discussing the narrative legend songs. This practice of merging Mary and Jesus, and the Son and the Father, is observable in Anne's poetic heritage in general (cf. Kalkun 2000). It reflects Anne's cohesive religious worldview, where the pre-Christian and Christian concepts and practices are fused, presenting an imitation of the daily existence of the Seto community. A passage from one of the wedding descriptions of the epic with Jesus as a prominent participant illustrates this point:

*Essu nakas' kui vällä minemähe, tarõst vällä taganõmma,
oo õks tuud nuurt nuurtpaare, latsõköisi laulatõttu–
ilosahe nää' lätsi' Essu mano, madaluistõ Maarja mano, 4155
kolm kõrda jalga kumardiva', pardsikõsõ' painutiva'.
Hüä olli Essu meelekene, kerge Maarja keelekene,
et sai veri verd pite, sai ugla ukla pite.*

*Essu and' käe kärmähe, viis sõrmõ villatsõhõ:
"Siin naakõ' õnnõh elämähe, naakõ' kar'ah kasumahe, 4165
õnn naaku teil iih häitsemmä, au takah astumahe!
Mia õks ma ütle, tuu saa, anna sõna, tuu astus."*

When Jesus was about to leave, to walk out of the house,
oh that new married couple, these dear wedded children–
they went kindly to Jesus, meekly went to Mary, 4155
bowed to the ground three times, the dear ducks bent themselves.
Jesus was so truly happy, Mary's mind all so light
because blood was linked to blood, one heart matched with another.
Jesus gave his hand in haste, handed five fingers swiftly:
"May you see a life of happiness, may you see your cattle prosper. 4165
Happiness will blossom there in front of you, honor will there walk
behind you!
What I foretell, that will come to pass, I give a word and it will be."

At the same time, Jesus and Mary evince an omnipresence in a Seto household: they rule Seto life, establishing both its daily norms and its various religious fasts and rituals.

Into that pre-existing worldview and poetic tradition, in her epic composition Vabarna introduced the figure of Peko, in whose character she had the task of commingling a progenitor and ancient ruler of the Seto people, as suggested by Paulopriit Voolaine. Evidently, in imagining the ancient king of the Setos, Voolaine had suggested to Vabarna that Peko as the mythical/legendary forefather should provide the rules and regulations for the Seto existence in accord with the notion of the deity providing fecundity. Considering Vabarna's religious worldview, it is not surprising that in the course of her epic composition the regulatory agency of Peko gradually intermingles with the authority of Jesus, so that in the latter part of the epic narrative the focus shifts nearly entirely to recounting the acts of

Jesus. Apparently, for Vabarna the regulatory authority of Jesus eventually had to prevail over that of Peko: Jesus and Mary are present at Peko's birth, take part in the rites of passage of his life, care for, console, and give him advice. Jesus also grants him regal status:

Essu and' Pekolõ peo, käänd' kõvalõ käe: 3635

"No võidõ", keisre, keerätellä, veerüs Peko veerätellä!

Sullõ kingi õnnõ, anna avvo,

sullõ kingi õnnõ keisrille, kulla õnnõ kunigallõ.

[...]

Peko mingu' riik rikkast, kõva kolk korgõst!

Rikkusõ jätä sino kätte, kalle õnnõ sino kaala:

seto- olõt no -kõnõ sirgõ miis, korgõ seto olt kunigas– 3655

no kroonõ setot kunigast, noorõst nurmõjumalast!"

Jesus gave his hand to Peko, held out his palm to the mighty: 3635

"Now you may go, ruler, take to the road, powerful Peko!

I will grant you happiness, I will give you honor.

I will grant you happiness, ruler, good luck to the king.

[...]

May Peko's state thus prosper, the mighty land become powerful!

I'll leave wealth in your hands, hang happiness about your neck:

you are a strong man, dear Seto, you are the king, great Seto– 3655

I thus crown you king, my Seto, to be the young lord of the fields."

In his capacity as the king of the Seto, crowned by Jesus and acting under his watchful eye, Peko gives directions to the Seto people on how to manage daily life and predicts their future. But eventually it is Jesus who emerges as the chief regulator, ordaining and canonizing the Seto ways and customs.

Portrayal of the Community Experience

From that perspective Anne Vabarna also introduces into her narrative the experience of the Seto community, while combining mythological and historical time. Apparently, in the topics proposed by Voolaine, Vabarna was supposed to create an image of ancient times, and in carrying out that task Anne sings of a Christian ancient time when Jesus was still roaming the earth and mingling with the Seto people, thus depicting him among the Seto as guiding their life, or including traditional motifs from narrative songs on biblical legends:

[K]ui olli tuu tunnikõnõ, mustinõ moodukõnõ, 5445

Essu käve kui inne ilma piti, tandsõ rahva tarri piti,

Essu ol' ka helde hingega, piso pehme süämega!

[...]

Essu käve kui inne ilma piti, vanast marssõ maad piti, 7445

*kui käve' kundõh kur'a' mehe', Essul hannah halva' poisi',
kätte tahtsõ' võtta käokõist, pekko piiripardsikõist,
Essukõnõ pagõsi pal'lo maad, mõtsa piti mõtõldõh.
Liit' sis lepä lehe ala, haardõ haava ossa ala.*

[I]n that long-gone hour, in those dear ancient times, 5445
when Jesus still walked in this world, danced in people's farms,
then Jesus had a soul so gentle, slightly soft his heart, indeed.

[...]

When Jesus still walked upon the earth, marched the ground
in olden times, 7445
when the evil men were on his heels, bad lads stuck to the
coat-tail of Jesus,
they wished to catch the dear cuckoo bird, have the darling duck
in their hands.

Dear Jesus had to flee afar, he flew through the forest thinking.
Soon he sought rest under alder leaves, to find cover by an
aspen branch.

Concurrently with mythological themes, she provides a picture of Seto life extending back to ancient times, based on her own perceptions. Through an interpretation of the perceived mythological past, Vabarna actually creates a representation of the historical past of the Seto. In these descriptions, her perception of the past merges with the present: she compares her own past life experience to her current circumstances, and the past in her narrative is colored strongly by the events and observations she experienced in her own lifetime. At the same time, her poetic narrative draws strong inspiration from the traditional lyric and narrative epic poetry. In this context, Vabarna actually enacts the historical experience of her community: she describes the transition from agricultural past to the innovations of the industrial present, which are accompanied by the vivid and intensely painful portrayals of the Seto community's most recent war experience (the First World War, followed by the War of Independence). But even more immediately poignant looms the dramatic experience of the Seto migration to Siberia around 1893 to 1914 (see Piho 1995) that Vabarna herself witnessed:

*Tuu no ol' tuu jutt, arvo peräst tuu asi:
tiikese' kui vallalõ lasti', armu peräst astmahe, 6245
kui minti sinnä Siberihe, minti pargõl plaan'kil[.]*

[...]

*Sinnä lätsi' mul risti ristämmä', pääle tähe tädikese'.
Esi sai näid saatmahe, läbesigi lähätämmä.
Kõgõ sis üü kõnõlimi, valgõni vallatõlli,
kõik oll'i sääl kuuh kutsutava', aedu' arma' umadsõ'. 6325*

Thus went that story, thus was the state of those things:
 when the roads were opened up, mercy granted for walking, 6245
 when people set out to Siberia, headed out on wide horse carts[.]
 [...]

There went my sweet godmother, together with my star-dear aunt.
 I myself there saw them off, was there to send them off for good.

We did talk through the whole night, we sang until the dawn,
 all our own had come together, the loved ones were invited. 6325

Anne describes in drastic and dramatic detail the agony of leaving behind one's home, the long and dangerous journey, and the stalwart effort to build a new farmstead at an alien and distant location, an experience of great importance in Seto historical memory.

Hence, Vabarna appears well equipped and expertly qualified to create a representation of her immediate life experience and that of her community. Voolaine's proposal to sing about the great majestic deeds of Peko as an executive leader of the Seto people, gathering impetus from an imagined mythological or legendary background, could emerge in poetic expression only after being absorbed into Vabarna's worldview and becoming manifest through her traditional prism of knowledge and interpretation. On that ground, the greatest feat for the ruler of the people turns out to be the founding of the monastery, a feat that readily allowed Anne to amalgamate Peko with Essu [Jesus]; on the other hand, the theme of administrative parameters inspired her to draw parallels with the new independent Republic of Estonia and the changing life of the Seto people under new circumstances. In conclusion, Vabarna has adapted the innovative chronicle of Peko's heroic enterprise into her personal narrative framework in order to represent the Seto experience in her poetic epic composition. In her story of Peko, the epic singer enacts the story of the Seto people.

Conclusion

This article has analyzed the process of creating the Seto epic known as *Peko*. The discussion of the interpersonal relationships between the outsider folklorists and Seto singers helped to draw a portrayal of the project to record Seto heritage and the importance of establishing the institution of *lauluimä*, the mother of song—developments that simultaneously reflect the general agenda of folklorists at the time: to construct cultural symbols and to define a cultural identity through them. On the other hand, the Seto singer Anne Vabarna appeared as an active agent in that process, as one who recognized her poetry as a means of creating personal voice. In her

collaboration with A. O. Väisänen, Vabarna established herself as a prominent singer with creative talent. With the contribution of folklorists celebrating the Seto cultural tradition, she established a public identity as a poet and a performer with excellent traditional expertise. She recognized the important role of folklorists and their effort to collect folk poetry for her agenda. She was not a passive informant of folksongs but a creative performer of a tradition. Vabarna proved her talent in a collaborative project initiated by folklorist Voolaine, who was motivated by an intellectual program of the time for symbolic cultural representation in epic form. Voolaine proposed the theme of Peko, King of the Seto, to the singer, a theme that Vabarna used as creative poetic grid onto which she constructed a multilayered representation of Seto experience. Her epic poem presented a native interpretation on communal and personal levels, providing a description of daily farm life and family and gender relations while reflecting her religious experiences and recounting the historical experience of her Seto community. In her epic composition, Anne Vabarna expressed a strong personal voice through traditional poetic form to represent her personal identity as a Seto woman and the communal identity of the Seto people. Thus the interaction between the tradition-bearer and the tradition-researcher that led to the creation of the Seto epic *Peko* entailed complex communication and tangled collaboration with varying objectives.

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