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

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Editor's Column

With this issue of *Oral Tradition* we offer our readership perspectives on a cornucopia of traditions from around the world and from ancient times to the present day, and at the same time we inaugurate the new feature of *E-Companions* that will become a staple of our publication program.

Wakefield Foster begins the discussion with a highly suggestive comparison between two superficially quite different kinds of traditional performers: the South Slavic *guslari*, or bards, from the Former Yugoslavia who are widely known for their oral epic narratives, and contemporary jazz musicians from the United States. Drawing on what investigators have reported about the training and practice of the *guslari* and on his own fieldwork with jazz performers (consult the *E-Companion* at www.oraltradition.org for actual conversations with informants), Foster engages the important issues of memory, composition, creativity, and multiformity. His comparative observations will be useful for specialists in myriad different areas, as will Robert Cochran's study of three moments—again, superficially quite disparate—that share the quality of having been inspired by oral tradition. Looking at a young woman's burning of love-letters behind her family's farmhouse in northwest Arkansas, the intersection of a newsreel film and a joke tradition in Romania, and a custodians' retirement party at the University of Arkansas, he cleverly illustrates how implied traditions of folksong, jokes, and the web of cultural predispositions associated with retirement rituals act as supporting frames for the performance and reception of everyday events.

Next comes Lillis Ó Laoire's fieldwork-based study of the modern Gaelic song tradition in Tory Island, off the northwest coast of Ireland. Taking into account both comparative theory and the real-life experience gained over twenty years of *in situ* collection and analysis, he considers the topics of orality and literacy, formulaic structure and variation, ethnic (emic) terminology for the composition of oral songs, and the nexus of individual performance and the larger tradition. Ó Laoire's text is augmented by an *E-Companion* (www.oraltradition.org) that lets the reader become an audience by making available the audio recordings of the very song-performances discussed in the article. Marie Nelson concerns herself not with a contemporary oral tradition but rather with a medieval document, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, whose probably non-literate author engaged scribes to write down oral accounts of her revelations twenty years after the fact. Using speech-act theory, Nelson explicates the power and resourcefulness of Kempe's verbal duel with the clergy and in particular the transparently oral aspects of her rhetoric.

Margalit Finkelberg continues this issue's discussion with a penetrating look at the conjunction of orality and formulaic structure in the Homeric epics. Observing that the patterned phraseology of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* is not uniform in texture, she posits a continuum of diction from the formulaic to the nonformulaic, contending that the latter kind of diction is complementary to the former and therefore not at all an argument against the oral (or oral-derived) nature of the Homeric poems. Finally, Sabir Badalkhan closes the present symposium by opening a window onto the little-studied but fascinating oral traditions of the Balochi people of Iran, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. His focus is the epic tradition at large and especially the legend of Šey Murīd, which shares with Homer's *Odyssey* the story-pattern of the hero's return. Badalkhan includes many fascinating

details about the performance and collection of Balochi epic, gathered during fieldwork and archival study undertaken from an insider's perspective.

From this issue onward, *Oral Tradition* will, whenever feasible and helpful, enlist the opportunities afforded by the internet to flesh out its contents in as realistic and genuine a way as possible. Specifically, we plan to supplement the articles that appear in the physical and virtual pages of the journal itself (as published in paper format by Slavica Publishers and in virtual format as part of Project Muse) with a facility we call the *E-Companion*. Consisting of such supplementary aids as streaming audio and video, photographs, and ancillary text-based items such as bibliographies and appendices, these *E-Companions* are meant to accomplish what the published article by its very nature cannot: to fill in some of the background of real-life context and experience that is by convention eliminated from even the most carefully prepared textual document. Hopefully, they will help the reader to become a better, more faithful audience for the oral tradition under consideration.

The next few issues will house a number of special collections as well as the miscellaneous gatherings that are *OT*'s most common coin. Two issues will be devoted to the highly diverse proceedings of the Performance Seminar held at the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London, and another, prepared by the scholars and performers associated with the Bertsozale Elkarte in San Sebastián/Donostia, Spain, will feature Basque oral traditions. All three of these issues will be accompanied by *E-Companions* located on our website (www.oraltradition.org).

In closing this column let me share the happy news that the Center for Studies in Oral Tradition, the original and continuing home to the journal *Oral Tradition*, will next year celebrate its twentieth year of existence. And in that very year the CSOT will be welcoming an infant sibling at the University of Missouri: the Center for E-Research. The CER is being established to study and facilitate computer- and internet-based research across the disciplinary spectrum, with a view to helping coordinate communication among different areas. Toward that end it will inaugurate an online journal, *E-Research*, as well as undertake cooperations with other institutions in this emerging area of inquiry. We welcome proposals and news items from all quarters; please direct any responses to FoleyJ@missouri.edu.

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Jazz Musicians and South Slavic Oral Epic Bards

[**E-companion at www.oraltradition.org*]

H. Wakefield Foster

Albert Lord writes in *The Singer of Tales* (2000:13) that for the South Slavic oral epic poet, or *guslar*, “the moment of composition is the performance.” The *guslar* is concurrently performer, composer, poet, and singer. In performance, he participates creatively in shaping the tradition of which he is a part rather than acting merely as a transmitter. Similarly, though in a much more restricted sense, European art music of the late nineteenth century embraced a concept of performance—as contrasted to presentation—in which the musician provided “linear tension that went beyond what could be notated . . . and freely manipulated every part of every phrase . . . to achieve a performance that was itself inherent to the process of communication” (Ledbetter 1977:149-50). Until the 1920s, students of Franz Liszt and Theodor Leschetitzky, the unrivaled moguls of nineteenth-century pianism, flourished in a veritable hothouse environment of idiosyncratic performance styles.¹ Such discretionary powers today have been abrogated by the modern notion of “fidelity to the score.”² However, echoes of nineteenth-century performance practice resonate today among jazz musicians, who view their improvisatory art as a process of communication with a live audience that itself participates in the performance event. This essay explores the startling kinship that the jazz musician shares with the *guslar*.

¹ Harold C. Schonberg, music critic of the *New York Times*, concisely summarizes the perplexing situation that this introduces for modern listeners (1963:132):

By present standards, their (Liszt’s and Leschetitzky’s students’) playing tends to be capricious, rhythmically unsteady, unscholarly, and egocentric. But we blame them for the very things for which they were praised in the nineteenth century When listening to pianists born before 1875, it is necessary for us in the latter half of the twentieth century to change our entire concept about the very nature of music.

² John Miles Foley (1998) addresses a similar (and equally misguided) notion that has long been applied to textualized oral epic poetry.

Comparisons between various oral performance traditions and jazz music have often been made, directly or implicitly,³ and it is logical and natural to associate these groups since each artist produces his art “live” in performance, without text, and before an audience. That one discipline is verbal art and the other musical need not overshadow the common ground that they share: both involve specialized languages. Each art form is subject to traditional rules that govern a spontaneous and ever-changing mode of aural expression. Most important, perhaps, is that both art forms share the medium of live performance, which makes unique demands on the artists and essentially defines their manner of composition.

Indeed, the comparison is so immediate and attractive that it may thereby invite hasty and inaccurate assumptions. For example, whereas the oral poet is fluent in an epic language of formulaic phrases, he does not simply stitch together ready-made formulas to produce a familiar but “new” recombination. Likewise, jazz improvisation consists not of combining and recombining memorized motivic elements but of composing, within the parameters of traditional rules, new musical phrases that resonate with and respond to familiar chord progressions, themes, or styles. Jazz musicians and oral epic bards focus upon process rather than product, which is to say that their “product” exists only as the performance event itself, which temporally frames the “process” of creativity.

A brief (and necessarily selective) review of relevant scholarship that explores creative processes in traditions of oral composition—both verbal and musical—will provide a wider perspective from which to investigate similarities between the jazz musician and the *guslar*. Margaret Beissinger has examined varieties of structural modification within oral composition by Romanian epic singers, or *lăutari*, who “are able to employ variation and innovative patterning within the traditional boundaries of epic song” (2000:110). She asserts that the smallest unit of musical composition within the Romanian epic tradition is the melodic formula, a traditionally derived element with which the *lăutari* construct linear sequences of larger systems that she calls “musical strophes” (101). Thus the Romanian epic singers’ creative process involves an improvisatory “re-assembly” of traditional elements.

³ See Beissinger 2000; Lord 1960/2000:37; Titon 1978; Barnie 1978; Gushee 1981; Bronson 1954; and Treitler 1974, 1975, and a related article (1977) in which he discusses “reconstruction versus reproduction” of Gregorian chant as compared to the traditional concepts of improvisation and composition.

In a detailed study of the transmission of Gregorian chant, Leo Treitler writes that it is misleading to consider the medieval sacred singer's improvisation a "special" practice lest it be invoked solely as a rationale for explaining the unusual characteristics of problematic transmissions (1974:346). He conceives of a practice that involves elaboration and variation upon a *Grundgestalt*, or "fundamental model," and explains that "the singer learns one melody and imitates its pattern in inventing another like it. At some point his inventions do not refer back to the models of concrete melodies but are based on his internalized sense of pattern" (360).

Correspondingly, Lawrence Gushee (1981) demonstrates how oral-traditional jazz composition (as instanced by four performances of "Shoe Shine Boy" recorded by saxophonist Lester Young in 1936 and 1937) proceeds along several tracks at once. Gushee distinguishes between features of a broader, collective style ("swing") and those that are idiosyncratic to Lester Young. Particularly relevant for our purposes is his statement that transformation and varied repetition are fundamental creative processes for jazz musicians. Among the varieties of musical transformation, Gushee focuses particularly on formulas, which he defines within parameters of melody, phrase, and harmonic structure as reflected in melody.

The South Slavic Oral Epic Poet

In *The Singer of Tales*, Albert Lord outlines three phases of the *guslar*'s training (1960/2000:21-26). In the first phase, a boy of about 14 or 15 years of age who has decided that he wants to be a *guslar* himself spends much time listening to others singing. Familiarizing himself with epic poetry, he learns epic's themes, stories, characters, and names of distant places. In phase two, the boy or young man begins to sing privately with or without *gusle* accompaniment.⁴ In doing this, he is learning the physical aspect of singing the rhythms and melodies of epic song. He learns the weight and "feel," so to speak, of the ten-syllable epic line and is learning to think rhythmic thoughts. The third phase lasts indefinitely, beginning when the young man sings his first song all the way through to a critical audience.

Children learn language through the repetition of words and phrases and constantly reshuffle their increasing vocabulary within the syntactic patterns that they have assimilated as they expand their powers of verbal

⁴ The *gusle* is the bowed, single-stringed, fretless musical instrument with which the *guslar* accompanies himself as he sings.

communication. So too, the beginning *guslar* learns by heart a number of rhythmic formulas that express the most common ideas of epic poetry and practices substituting and reshuffling words and phrases within formulaic patterns as he gains fluency in his tradition's art form. Kernel patterns represent component elements of the idiomatic structure of his poetry and essentially constitute a special poetic language. The procedure is equivalent to "multiprocessing"—learning to use many levels of the language at once.

David Rubin explores various forms of coding information that is stored in memory during the learning process and examines psychologists' suggestion that language is the model for all cognitive processes (1977). Among the forms of coding that he identifies is the recognition of melodies; his essay cites studies that demonstrate the effectiveness of musical coding. Research subjects recognized a wide range of melodic transformations among familiar and unfamiliar melodies. Varieties of recognizable transformations include transposed melodies, inverted melodies, and melodic contours or interval series. Not surprisingly, the study found that rhythm can assist in recalling lists of words or numbers and that changing the rhythm can hinder recall (175-79). Most important, perhaps, for our discussion is the assertion by Frederic C. Bartlett in his 1932 study of the mechanisms of memory: "Remembering is a process not of reproduction but of reconstruction."⁵ In other words, exact repetition of an archetypal utterance is not the goal of the oral composer; instead, by imitating a traditional pattern, he creates or invents a "new" one. This reality has implications for the South Slavic epic bard as well.

Lord explains that the beginning *guslar* generally follows no definite program of study nor does he have a sense of having learned this or that formula or set of formulas. He learns to think rhythmically by means of a careful memory and sensitivity for conceptual, paradigmatic formulas that reflect the structure of rhythmic thought appropriate to his poetic tradition. This is a far cry from memorization of a fixed text, however, and compares more accurately perhaps to children who are learning to draw houses or cats. They do so not by "memorizing" the image of a particular house or cat but by remembering the traditional elements that constitute their mental image of each: walls and roof, or paws and whiskers.

Lord goes on to describe sets of formulas that express the most frequent actions, characters, time, and place (1960/2000:35). The "formula" as defined by Milman Parry is "a group of words which is regularly employed under the same metrical conditions to express a given essential

⁵ Bartlett 1972, quoted in Treitler 1974:344.

idea” (1971:272). What Parry calls “systems,” in turn, involve methods of adding, substituting, or omitting function words—a conjunction, for example—in order that a formula fill a particular rhythmic slot:

We may say that any group of formulas makes up a system, and the system may be defined in turn as a group of phrases which have the same metrical value and which are enough alike in thought and words to leave no doubt that the poet who used them knew them not only as single formulas, but also as formulas of a certain type (Parry 1971:275 [1930:73-147]).

For example, *u Stambolu* (“in Istanbul”) or *a u dvoru* (“and in the castle”) participate in a system of substituting vocabulary in order to balance rhythmically a two- or three-syllable noun within a prepositional phrase so that it can occupy the first (four-syllable) hemistich of the ten-syllable South Slavic epic verse (*deseterac*). Thus, through much practice and habitual usage, the singer internalizes his knowledge of the basic shape and syllabic weight of formulas until he develops an intuitive sensitivity to rhythmic proportion and completeness of form. The singer’s internalization of both the “tactile sensation” of the ten-syllable line and the traditional rules that govern composition allows him to sense in advance the completed shapes and sizes of hemistich and verse.⁶

An appropriate analogy might be that of a pedestrian crossing the street. Just as the poet/singer is skilled in sensing and adjusting in performance the shape of forthcoming verses, so a pedestrian (skilled in walking, as it were) senses the diminishing distance of the approaching curb. Several feet before reaching it, the pedestrian knows which foot will first touch the curb; should he desire the other foot to touch first, he alters step size accordingly—and in advance—in order to transition smoothly from street to sidewalk. Both movements, that of singer through the temporal distance of the *deseterac* and that of pedestrian across the spatial distance of the street, are governed by rapid and continual calculations that are made possible by much practice at internalizing the governing principles of each action, whether it be the traditional rules of oral epic poetry or eye/muscle coordination.

The performance setting, or arena, is especially important because of the demands it makes on the singer’s skill. Whether singing at coffeehouses on market days, or at weddings, or during Moslem religious festivals, the *guslar* was required to gauge his audience’s receptiveness to the length of

⁶ On oral traditional rules for the *deseterac*, see Foley 1990:158-200; 1999:69-72.

tale that he provided and often had to adjust the length in order to suit different situations. We must keep in mind that the singer composed as he sang and that, drawing from a rich language of formulaic phrases, he was fluent in compositional techniques governed by the traditional rules of his art. Thus command of rhythmic formulaic structures enables the singer to compose “new” phrases that resonate within the traditional epic language. Since the *guslar* does not sing verbatim from memory, it becomes quickly apparent that he has phenomenal speed and facility at composition.

Lord maintains that the *guslari* benefited from illiteracy with respect to their epic tradition, since their skills involved hearing language, not seeing it (1960/2000:20). Lord’s claim is problematic, however, since, as Foley points out, in other oral traditions literacy is not necessarily a handicap.⁷ Until a generation or two ago, the notion prevailed among jazz musicians that the earliest artists and innovators of jazz musical idiom were necessarily musically illiterate and that a conservatory training in traditional Western musical theory would have proven harmful to the natural development of a true jazz style. However, my interviewees explained that this presumption was simply part of the lore that recalled a “golden age” in which many (but not all) jazz artists were “untrained” musicians. They commented that if that were true, one would be hard-pressed to account for Scott Joplin or Benny Goodman or Dave Brubeck or, today, Winton and Branford Marsalis, since very few, if any, modern jazz artists are unfamiliar with traditional music theory or are unable to read music. The myopic concept of “oral” art as being fundamentally separate from “written” art, or the idea that a “Great Divide” necessarily exists between them, throws up an obscuring filter that blurs the reality of a natural repertoire of language registers (see Foley 2002:26, 36).

Interviews with Jazz Musicians

In an effort to cast light on the compositional techniques of South Slavic epic poets and thereby on their art, I interviewed by telephone and in person three professional jazz musicians about their concepts and techniques of improvisation. What they have to say about their own art may prove enlightening to the ongoing investigation of the *guslar*’s art.

⁷ In his later work, Lord implicitly discards the requirement of illiteracy: as long as the (traditional formulaic) systems continue, it does not matter whether the singer composes with or without a knowledge of writing (1991:25).

In order to benefit from their combined perspectives, I selected musicians from different musical backgrounds. Martin Langford, a well-known saxophone soloist at clubs in Houston, Texas, is a university-trained jazz musician. Langford makes his living as a freelance jazz saxophonist and teaches at his home. David Salge, who lives and works in the Seattle area, has a graduate degree in clarinet performance and has played in ballet and opera pit orchestras for several years. He is now primarily involved with klezmer music, which attracts him in part, he says, because of its blending of elements from traditional East European folk music and American “swing” music of the 1930s and 1940s. Larry Slezak grew up in New York City and spent much of his adolescence listening to musicians in Harlem jazz clubs in preparation for his own career as a jazz saxophonist. Slezak performs in Houston and teaches jazz saxophone and stage band at Rice University.⁸

A few preliminary remarks about terminology should precede our further explorations. Ensemble music consists of melody and harmony; the soloist’s melody moves above an underlying harmonic progression provided by other players. Jazz harmonic theory encompasses a great number of chords and chord progressions that successive jazz artists during this century have traditionalized by repeated usage. Jazz theory is not a body of rules, *per se*, but rather a collection of melodic and harmonic pathways that have gained popularity among players. Homer uses the term *οἴμασι/οἴμαι* (pathways) to denote the knowledge that the Muse teaches to poet/singers.⁹ Foley describes these “pathways” as vectors that the poet/singer knows how to navigate successfully and suggests that the Homeric *οἴμαι* are parallel to hyperlinks on the Internet (1998:19-21). As one expects, the more brilliant artists, “jazz legends” we might say, have imprinted their own preferred

⁸ Telephone, email, and personal interviews were conducted between April 10, 2002 and May 25, 2003. Notes and transcripts of interviews (edited by me and approved by the interviewees) are available at the website for the *Center for Studies in Oral Tradition*: www.oraltradition.org. My deepest thanks go to these three musicians for their kindness and patience in answering my questions and, more importantly, for their insightful comments concerning jazz improvisation and how it is so different in many ways from the textualized music of classically trained musicians.

⁹ *Odyssey* 8.479-81: *πάσι γὰρ ἀνθρώποισιν ἐπιχθονίοισιν ἀοιδοὶ / τιμῆς ἔμμοροί εἰσι καὶ αἰδοῦς, οὐνεκ’ ἄρα σφέας / οἴμας Μοῦσ’ ἐδίδαξε, φίλησε δὲ φύλον ἀοιδῶν* (“For among all men living on the earth, singer-poets / partake of honor and reverence, because to them / the Muse has taught the **pathways**, since she loves the tribe of singer-poets”) [my emphasis].

pathways upon the body of traditional jazz harmonic theory, and subsequent usage has traditionalized them.

Melodic and harmonic pathways that gain prominence through widespread usage in a localized geographical region generate a tradition or style of jazz performance—as found, for example, in New Orleans, Harlem, or the West coast. The South Slavic oral epic register also reflects regional varieties or dialectal differences within the broader context of the Serbo-Croatian language. That is not to deny the deeper, secondary level of epic speech that resides within the individual epic singer’s personal verbal compositional style. Stephen Erdely writes that the South Slavic singer/poet reveals idiosyncrasies of personal style when he changes the contours of his melodies by generating rhythmic, motivic, and modal variants.¹⁰

Similarly, Foley distinguishes between regional and individual varieties of epic speech with the terms “dialect” and “idiolect.” Epic dialect encompasses “the range of multiformity observable in the larger (regional) tradition of singing,” whereas idiolect constitutes “the range of multiformity found in the practice of one singer” (Foley 1990:312, and 1995:155-57). Using a musical example, we may link the jazz dialect or style of the “swing” era (1930s and early 1940s) to the so-called “high hat” rhythm pattern, whereas the ragtime era is commonly associated with a more rudimentary syncopation:

High Hat Rhythm



Ragtime Rhythm



Each pattern is a dialectal representative of an inexhaustible range of rhythmic multiformity characteristic of a particular jazz style. Idiolectal rhythms, on the other hand, reside within the performer’s personal collection of preferred rhythm patterns, which are necessarily subsumed within the larger, dialectal range.

¹⁰ Erdely 1995:630-32; see also Beissinger 2000:98-100.

Martin Langford

Martin Langford plays and teaches saxophone, clarinet, and flute in Houston, Texas. He is a graduate of the prestigious jazz performance program at North Texas University in Denton, Texas.

WF: Would you explain what jazz improvisation means to you?

ML: First, improvisation means that I have to temper my stylistic choices to audience composition so that my music will have the most consonance with my listeners. Improvisation involves very quick decision-making, and there are quick choices to make, all of which depend on the first and most important choice: what style or styles will do best with my audience tonight? Improvisation is making choices about chord changes, rhythms, tempos, and what kinds of notes I want to incorporate, like leading tones that want to go up to the next higher note—do I want my solo to go that direction, or not?

WF: Do you rely on rhythmic and melodic patterns during improvisation?

ML: You mean “licks.” Yes. I rely on licks in a pinch. You know, mistakes happen in the process—not big ones that anybody would notice, but little things, little things that are mistakes to you. That’s when I can incorporate a beat or two.

WF: A “beat or two” is not very much material. What length, generally, is a lick?

ML: Licks are usually two to four bars. A lick is a sentence; a bar is like a word, but the length of a lick depends on the frequency of chord changes. Longer licks give you more time to think.

WF: So . . . is a particular lick not made up of the same material every time you play it?

ML: No. Unless you happen to use it again under the very same circumstances, but that’s unlikely. Licks are more like somebody’s signature: because of the curve of an “S” or the shape of the flag on an “F,” you know whose it is. You can still use it yourself, but it’s not going to be exactly like the original. It doesn’t have to be.

WF: You mentioned earlier that improvisation entails making several choices very quickly—chord progressions and leading tones. What other kinds of choices do you have to make?

ML: I have to decide what kind of melody I’m going to play over the chord progressions. It’s not really like a conscious decision that you weigh in your mind but more like what I want to do at the moment because of what I’m hearing right then. I may want to mirror interval distances at the beginning or end of a melody, or mirror rhythms. Or I might decide to go double time or half time. Rhythms themselves are characteristic of different jazz styles. For instance, you could characterize all of 1920s jazz with the rhythm:



WF: Then, is improvisation melodic variation?

ML: More or less. But it's more than that because it's your own melody you're playing, but you're incorporating different styles.

By “mirroring” melodic intervals or rhythms, Langford refers to an improvisational device called inversion, by which a pattern of intervals or rhythms is played backward—or less commonly, retrograde inversion, when a pattern is played backward and upside-down. For example, the rhythm pattern



when inverted becomes



and the intervals



(a perfect fourth followed by a minor third, followed by a perfect fifth) in retrograde inversion become



“Double time,” also called diminution, does not necessarily refer to tempo but means that the rhythm is halved, so that quarter notes become eighth notes, eighth notes become sixteenth notes, and so on. “Half time,” known also as augmentation, is the reverse of double time.¹¹ These variational devices have become institutionalized among composers of art music as

¹¹ The paradoxical logic behind the term “double time” (which effectively halves the time that it takes to perform a passage) refers to a doubling of the note value signified by the lower number in the time signature, which describes the type of note that will occupy one beat. For example, a 4/4 time signature in which the quarter note occupies one beat would, in double time, become a 2/2 time signature in which the half note occupies one beat.

reflected in their musicological designations—inversion, diminution, augmentation—much like rule-governed patterns within language. The “emic”/“etic” relationship¹² of these terms broadens our perspective by providing evidence of a creative continuum among improvisatory artists, both verbal and musical. “Emic” or ethnic terms—such as “mirroring,” for example, with which our informants identify variational devices employed in jazz improvisation—and their analytic or “etic” cousins (inversion, diminution, augmentation) help to illuminate the kinship shared by the *guslar*/jazzman and poet/composer.

In his performance of *The Wedding of Mustajbey's Son Bećirbey*,¹³ the South Slavic *guslar* Halil Bajgorić employs variational devices identical to those Langford describes. For example, by using augmentation or “half time” Bajgorić produces a retardation in syllabic delivery rate without slowing his tempo in verse 87. Compare (from the C sharp in the third measure—*-ca na čekrku*) to verse 88 (from the third measure's C-sharp half note—*rezervu nosi*):

300
87 

vO - na sto - ji pu - ca na če - kr - ku—
(line 87: *That button was located by a winch—*)

305
88 

Mo - mak vi - no za re - zer - vu no - si:
(88: *The young man was carrying wine a reserve:*)

Bajgorić doubles the note values of syllables 6-9 in verse 88 (pitches are identical to those in 87). Without slowing the tempo, he has rhythmically halved the motive's delivery rate by doubling note durations.

Likewise, he shapes melodic motives by using “mirroring”:

¹² For an expanded discussion of the terms “emic” and “etic,” see Ben-Amos 1969.

¹³ For a musical transcription and analysis of the first 101 lines of Halil Bajgorić's performance of *The Wedding of Mustajbey's Son Bećirbey*, see Foster 2004. A full transcription and English translation of Bajgorić's poem are available in Foley 2004, and both the acoustic and textual records can be heard and read at www.oraltradition.org.

222
63 
vA na ple - či' tri tan - ke ko - šul - je:
(63: . . . and the second of golden thread,)

The second measure of verse 63 consists of two eighth notes and a quarter note followed by their rhythmic inversion, a quarter note plus two eighth notes. Bajgorić also generates variation by using “double time” or diminution:

204
58 
Ka - žu da su ve - za stam - bol - sko - ga,
(58: Some say they're of Istanbul fashion,)

210
59 
Ka - žu da su kro - ja bu - gar - sko - ga;
(59: Some say they're of Bulgarian style;)

He intensifies an existing sense of urgency in verse 58 by repeating the opening syllables (*Kažu da su*) and doubling their delivery rate in the first measure of verse 59. Bajgorić compresses their duration from four beats in 58 to two beats in 59 and, without increasing tempo, effectively increases the song's momentum. We would be enlightened to discover the “emic” or ethnic terms with which the South Slavic *guslar* referred to these improvisational devices common among jazz musicians, if indeed such terms exist. Jazzman and *guslar* share also a central concern for their audience's reactions.

Before discussing his techniques of improvisation, Langford points out the necessity of first gauging the composition of his audience in order to select which set or sets of stylistic (dialectal) choices will most likely succeed. He calibrates the musical style of the performance by relying on his sensitivity to conditions in the performance arena. For him, improvisation embodies rapid selection from a personal repertoire of chord changes, rhythms, and tempos. Langford goes on to describe a lick as a sentence and a bar (or measure) as a word. The duration or size of a lick depends on the frequency of underlying chord changes. His description recalls the *guslar*'s “word,” which denotes a unit of meaning—a phrase, scene, or entire tale—and is not restricted by our lexically derived notion of

size.¹⁴ Langford likens the improvisatory lick to a signature that need not be identical to all instances of its use, although, as an idiolectal expression, its authorship is instantly recognizable in other stylistic contexts.

David Salge

David Salge is solo clarinet with *The Best Little Klezmer Band in Texas*¹⁵ and has recorded with Janice Rubin¹⁶ and with Greg Harbar's klezmer group *The Gypsies* that *Rolling Stone* reviewed recently as being traditional but also innovative.¹⁷ Salge has been assimilating and perfecting the klezmer style now for ten years, before which time he was principal clarinet with the Houston Ballet Orchestra and associate principal with the Houston Grand Opera Orchestra.

WF: Is improvisation a part of your work with the klezmer band?

DS: I suppose you could call it improvisation. I do improvise, but I'm reluctant to include myself with jazz improvisers. It's really more of an ingrained style, or styles, of playing based on a knowledge of harmonic progressions and klezmer dance rhythms. Klezmer is very traditional—eight-bar phrases, melodic minor scales, usually with the raised fifth and seventh. What I do is start with the backbone, a tune or a "head," that's played over a sixteen-bar chord progression. Many of the traditional tunes popular for dancing are pretty simple sixteen- or thirty-two-bar melodies that we repeat several times, then segue into another tune so the dancing continues. As we repeat, the melody may become more ornamented, or new material is created in that framework over the same chords. As other instruments play the melody, I improvise figuration or countermelodies to sort of "make an arrangement" on the fly.

WF: What does the new material consist of?

¹⁴ See Foley 2002:11-21 for an explanation of what *guslari* mean by a *reč* ("word") in an epic poem.

¹⁵ CD, *The Gypsies, Schleppin' West* (Private Label, 1998).

¹⁶ CD, Janice Rubin and Friends, *Feels Like Family* (Houston: Heymish Music, 1995).

¹⁷ In "What Are You Listening To?" (*Rolling Stone*, 846 [August 3, 2000]:21), Trey Anastasio of *Phish* comments on David's several extended improvisatory solos from *The Gypsies'* CD, *Gypsy Swing* (Global Village: 1995, UPC: 759401080622): "We pump this groove into our skulls until four in the morning. We've listened to them twenty-thousand times."

DS: Well, I start with what I like but always defer to what the audience seems to like. Sometimes klezmer has a specific dance that accompanies it. In fact, dance rhythms dictate the klezmer tradition. Klezmer is what happened when Eastern European Jewish traditional dance music met “swing.” It’s like *The Andrews Sisters* in Yiddish. There are songs that we usually play very traditionally, others that are pure swing, and others that combine those influences in various ways. For example, we do *The Andrews Sisters*’ hit “Bei Mir Bist du Schon,” starting with a rendition in their style but then jumping into a hora.

WF: How much of the new material that you mentioned earlier is traditional?

DS: All of it is traditional. To go too far outside the tradition is to leave klezmer behind. I have cadenza moments, though, that are new, as you say, in the sense that things get looser as the song goes on. But in cadenzas, too, I’m in melodic minor keys and I’m using those traditional dance rhythms. Now, after we get started—after the violin, trumpet, or I play the melody—I’ll start adding figuration as the vocalist sings. Maybe I’m not aware of playing licks. I call them figurations. You can recognize the character of other players in their figurations. It happens very quickly; it’s spontaneous; there’s no time to think; it’s an ability that has to be ingrained deep inside you. Charlie Parker once said “First you master your instrument; then you master the chord changes; then you forget that shit and just play.”

WF: Can you tell me more about figuration?

DS: Figurations are very short, and they always hang on the harmonic structure. Arpeggiation¹⁸ is the basis; then I connect the notes of the arpeggio with scalar melodies. The harmonic progression is what unifies all this—it remains unchanged. My figuration is always—or it should be—within the bounds of the traditional scale and rhythms. I don’t know how old those are . . . probably centuries old. But remember, what we now call klezmer dates from the ’30s.

WF: Can you tell me any more about what you mean by “deferring to what the audience seems to like”?

DS: Yes. Of course, we want to please our audience, so they’ll have us back. Or maybe someone in the audience who’s never heard us before will call us or recommend us. But klezmer is tradition-bound—in a good way, though. The fact that these traditional Yiddish melodies and rhythms merged with swing style means that it’s a “new” way of hearing an older tradition. We’ve got people from the old country who come up after the show, and they loved it; they remember how it was. But there are young people, too, who enjoy it very much. We don’t discourage what any of them want—we don’t have the famous placard off to the side.

WF: What’s that?

¹⁸ For non-keyboard instruments such as the clarinet, arpeggiation consists of playing the notes of a chord in succession, rather than in unison.

DS: The old joke that says “Requests—\$5, *Feelings*—\$50, *Proud Mary*—\$500.”

As does Martin Langford, David Salge bases the calibration of his range of choices on the audience’s responsiveness. He reiterates what Langford has described of the “personalized” or idiolectal quality of licks or what he terms “figurations.” Salge refers to improvisatory composition as an ingrained style of playing based on the performer’s knowledge of harmonic progressions and dance rhythms associated with the klezmer tradition. New material created from scalar and arpeggiated ornamentation echoes the overarching framework of a repeating chord progression. His reluctance to use the term “improvisation” stems, perhaps, from an awareness of the peripheral position that klezmer holds in relation to more well-known forms of popular music or to the much more esteemed jazz music genre.

Salge admits to improvising countermelodies and to playing “figurations” that are based on traditional scales and rhythms in order to “make an arrangement” on the fly. His description of the spontaneity that is required to do this and the fact that such a skill demands deeply ingrained musical pathways recalls what Albert Lord tells us of the *guslar*’s training and skills.

Most intriguing to me is that Salge repeatedly emphasizes the centrality of musical traditions in the performance of klezmer music: “To go too far outside the tradition is to leave klezmer behind.” The dance rhythms and modalities of klezmer music are traditionalized pathways that constitute the register unique to its performance. He asserts that dance rhythms dictate the centuries-old klezmer tradition, but that its melding with swing style in the ’30s has created what he calls “a new way of hearing an older tradition.” Diachronic evolution of this sort is essential to oral epic traditions in order to maintain the process of self-renewal.

Larry Slezak

Larry Slezak has been a jazz performer for a longer period of time than Salge or Langford and has the distinction of having apprenticed, so to speak, by listening to jazz artists in Harlem clubs. When I asked what musical benefits he derived from growing up in New York City, Slezak explained that the jazz environment cannot be obtained from recordings: “A lifestyle nurtures its own music, and since I happened to live in New York City, my learning experience was more complete than it would have been if

I had not had access to that environment.” Slezak’s proximity to the performance arena allowed him to hear and see Harlem jazz in the setting for which it was created.

WF: Would you tell me how or why your having grown up in New York City was important to you as a developing jazz musician?

LS: It’s not important. That is, a person can learn the skills and develop them without access to the music’s environment, but it’s harder for them—they’ll have to catch up later. Maybe you know Dennis Dotson, a brilliant trumpet player here in town. Well, he learned jazz trumpet by listening to recordings as a kid in Rusk, Texas, where he grew up. When he came to town, he caught up quickly by listening to other players here. Growing up in New York just made my learning more complete. Without it, it takes more effort, but you can catch up later. The music itself is only one aspect. As a white kid, I put myself in the environment where jazz came from. Music is the result of people in an environment—audiences, neighborhoods, bar owners. Ghetto audiences were pretty tough; if they didn’t like something, they’d tell you to get off the stage.¹⁹ I was something different to them, though, and special. People used to invite me to their houses for dinner because they knew me as “the white kid who comes to Harlem to play his horn.” One time, a homeless man came up to me outside a club and pushed twenty dollars at me. In those days, I was an angry young man who despised all worldly things—you know, like personal appearance. It was his way of telling me that a jazzman needs to dress better than I was dressing. It really made an impression on me.

WF: Would you explain what a lick signifies?

LS: What you mean by lick is something like “. . . up the stairs” or “. . . around the corner.” *You* like to use these words. You have these particular words you like, but you might have to change something to make it fit when you use it.

WF: What do you mean? Where does a lick “fit,” as you say? Is this what is meant by improvisation?

LS: No. Improv’ is when you play a different melody to a familiar harmonic progression. A melody is like something worthwhile you have to say, and you say it in your own words—licks—but you’re saying it within the framework of a particular progression of chords. The harmony is what doesn’t change. It’s the foundation that you improvise *on*. Licks are like short phrases that you yourself tend to use often, because they’re how you think when you communicate. It’s a lot like language: there are general concepts that everybody learned a long time ago. You can change

¹⁹ Foley (2002:83-84) reports that the ethnographer Matija Murko observed a humorous and quite effective bit of negative audience response in Yugoslavia. “Murko merrily told the story of a bard who received perhaps the ultimate critical review: during one of his rest-breaks the audience greased the string of his *gusle*, rendering it unplayable and terminating that night’s performance without discussion or appeal.”

a lick from “. . . around the corner” in one situation to “. . . to the corner” in another situation, because some little detail of the new situation is different and you need to say it that way. You don’t stop and think about it; you just say it. You make it fit the situation. Improv’ is guided by general concepts that can be changed.

WF: Then, improvisation is not “variation”?

LS: No. An improviser is *first* of all a melody player. The melody is what you create. Your melody is what you say at that moment, and it depends on what has just been said around you. It speaks to what has just been said. When you’re having a conversation, do you think of your speech patterns as variations? Are they variations of some model? Is there ever only one way to say what you’re saying, or do you use the words you like but make them fit what you’re talking about?

WF: Are there local jazz traditions, styles of playing? Could you comment on some characteristic differences between local traditions? I don’t mean differences between individual players, but differences—if any—between, say, geographic regions in this country.

LS: Sure, there are styles of playing that are characteristic to different parts of the country. For example, the term “New York drumming” denotes aggressive playing, kind of an “in-your-face style.” West Coast jazz is mellow; it works by insinuation. Then there’s the term “Texas tenors.” It refers to the way of playing you tend to hear in this part of the country—a kind of tone. Each style brings up different interpretive associations. Like a Brooklyn accent. You’ll hear the great majority of people in Brooklyn speaking with the same accent, but then on another level, you’ll still hear differences within that accent between individual speakers.

WF: Like the phrase “Get outta heah” that I used to hear when I lived briefly in the Bronx?

LS: Yes. Exactly. When they said that to you, they meant—in a good-natured way—that they didn’t believe something you said. It’s got the same English words that we use all over the world, but when you’re in the Bronx, you’ll know, or you’ll soon learn, that they’re not telling you to “get out.” It’s like a local style of language.

WF: What characteristics or abilities does a good improviser have that a not-so-good one lacks? And let’s assume that both players have more than adequate technical command of the instrument and good pitch.

LS: Yes. I know what you’re saying. I can name two things that make an improviser great. First, in some measure, there’s a connection between hand and ear. Do you know what I mean? A good improviser can play something that not only fits but fits perfectly, because his hands are as skilled as his ears and they’ve got a great connection. He also has to have a concept of melody—a vocation for melodies. Then he must have a sense of derring-do. Without that, an improviser won’t get anywhere. It’s linked to personal confidence—like bungee jumpers, the exhilaration is in not knowing what will happen.

Slezak stresses the influence that a music's "environment" exerts on its essential characteristics and explains that the music itself is only one aspect of the art form. However, to say that a good musician can learn and develop jazz skills—though with more difficulty—without access to such an environment further discounts the notion that early jazz artists were necessarily untrained. Just as illiteracy was not a requisite condition for the South Slavic epic singer, whose skills did not require literacy, the jazz artist with a good "connection between hand and ear" need not suffer from possessing a conservatory training.

For Slezak, jazz licks are short compositional phrases that comprise the formulaic repertoire of the individual musician. Licks obey traditional harmonic and stylistic rules of the jazz idiom in the same way that the South Slavic *guslar*'s idiolectal phrases conform to the epic register. In fact, he likens the jazz lick to lexical phrases—" . . . up the stairs" or " . . . around the corner"—to which we default in conversation because of personal preferences for particular words. When a phrase must bear a slightly different meaning for use in another situation, fluency allows us instantly to recast the phrase to fit new situations: "Licks are like short phrases that you yourself tend to use often, because they're how you think when you communicate." In short, the jazzman's collection of licks corresponds to the *guslar*'s repertoire of idiolectal expressions. Most importantly, Slezak tells us, the improviser is a melodist. Improvisation refers to the re-creation of "new" melodies over familiar harmonic progressions. With speed and accuracy, the jazz musician shapes melodies in his own words—licks—by means of a fluent knowledge of the traditional register.

Slezak again draws a parallel to language: "[In language] there are general concepts that everybody learned a long time ago. Improv' is guided by general concepts that can be changed, [and when] you need to say something in a different way, you don't stop and think about it, you just say it. You make it fit the situation." Clearly, "variation within limits" oils the generative engines both of jazz improvisation and orally composed epic poetry. Foley's proverb comes to mind as a fitting descriptor of the techniques that relate *guslar* and jazzman: "Oral poetry works like language, only more so" (2002:127-28).

Summary

With regard to their definitions of improvisation, we do not have complete accord among our interviewees; nonetheless, what they describe as its process recalls much of what we know about South Slavic epic singers'

techniques of composition. Both groups of artists compose within a framework of generative traditional rules that are, at the same time, extremely flexible. Theirs are art forms that embrace the oral epic concept of “variation within limits.” Jazz musicians improvise within the parameters of a tradition-dependent harmonic progression; the South Slavic *guslar* composes within the bounds of traditional epic language.

As a continuing interview strategy, I strove carefully to keep my questions free of “leading terminology” that might have suggested a desired response. David Salge, our klezmer performer, said at first that he did not think he used improvisation. However, his description of “figuration” was remarkably similar to how our mainline jazz performers described improvisation. All three agreed that composition happens so rapidly that one must be utterly fluent with the traditional material with which one works.

Both Slezak and Langford used word- or sentence-related metaphors to describe component parts—licks—of their improvisations, although the former seemed to resist using the word “lick,” as though the term were inaccurate or had become hackneyed from overuse. Langford defines “lick” as a sentence and the musical bars that comprise a “lick” as words. Slezak, on the other hand, drew the analogy of prepositional phrases to clarify his definition of “licks.” For the *guslar*, a “word” may be what we term a colon, line, series of lines, narrative pattern, or whole tale (Foley 2002:17-18). To define “word,” the *guslar* relies on criteria that reflect the nature and requirements of his art. The *guslar*’s “word,” regardless of how large it may seem in contrast to our text-based notions, remains his basic unit of verbal expression and, as such, compares directly to the jazz musician’s understanding of “lick” as the basic unit of musical utterance.

Jazz licks form a collection of traditional musical phrases/motives, both dialectal and idiolectal, from which the performer draws when he wishes to substitute or redirect pitches, rhythms, or melodic material during improvisation without straying from the stylistic idiom. By drawing from his toolbox of traditional devices, the performer fills a desired melodic or rhythmic slot with quickly composed formulaic material. In short, jazz licks provide a multiform system of composition. Licks are “prepackaged” only to the extent that they must fulfill the rhythmic and harmonic requirements of a particular jazz idiom. Both the *guslar* and the jazz musician are fluent in specialized languages, and it is especially noteworthy that all three of our interviewees describe the processes of jazz improvisation in terms of language.

Note-for-note or word-for-word memorization of component sections of their composition is thus not the key. Facility at rapid composition

requires an internalization of the governing principles of the style of music or the rhythmic formulaic structures of the oral poetry that one wishes to improvise. The jazz artist draws upon a broad, style-specific musical vocabulary of melodies and rhythms and, under the governance of traditional rules, composes anew for each performance.

Though in some ways worlds apart, the performance of South Slavic epic shares a great deal with the performance of jazz music. Unfortunately, inexorable cultural and technological forces of the twentieth century have irrevocably altered the *guslar*'s performance environment, and by the late 1970s, as his audience dwindled, he eventually found himself without interlocutors. Oral tradition abhors monologue; subsequently, the *guslar* has faded into history.²⁰ From our discussion with jazz musicians who are part of ongoing performance traditions, we gain insight into the power and depth of the live audience's influence over improvisatory oral art. Dialogue between artist and audience and, to a broader extent, Larry Slezak's "environment" exert an indispensable, life-giving force upon oral traditional poetry. Perhaps if we listen carefully, we will hear the ephemeral song of the oral poet as he sings other traditions in other environments.

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²⁰ The publication series *Serbo-Croatian Heroic Songs* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press) chronicles, however, a precious remnant of that tradition. See also Foley 2004.

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Oblique Performance: Snapshots of Oral Tradition in Action

Robert Cochran

Consider three moments, widely separated in space, time, cultural setting. The first occurs in the northwest corner of Arkansas in the 1930s. A young woman kindles a small fire behind her family's farmhouse, kneels beside it, and burns the letters of a departed lover. The second takes place a half-century later, in 1989, in Timisoara, a provincial town in southern Romania. Captured on a bit of newsreel film, a man in a bulky coat leans from a curb and spits upon an X-crossed portrait photograph pinned by the wiper to the windshield of a slow-moving car. The bespattered face is the dictator Nicolae Ceausescu, just deposed and summarily executed. The third moment returns to Arkansas, goes back to 1983. It's a retirement party arranged by his subordinates for a supervisor of custodians at the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville. It's a surprise, unveiled when the crew breaks for dinner. A "gag" gift comes first, a silly hat with an obscene motto. Next is a cake, decorated with a straightforward message of respect and good wishes. Coeds in swimsuits then carry in the "real" gift, wrapped (another "gag") in a series of nested boxes. It's a watch, engraved with another farewell message.

For all their differences, the three scenes hold one central feature in common: each has at its center actions inspired and shaped by oral traditions. Such traditions, that is, are operating, being put to use, despite the fact that the actors in each instance are "performers" only in the most inclusive sense. The first scene is an essentially private act—the young woman is performing primarily for herself. The spitter is surely observed by others—perhaps he even knows his gesture is being recorded—but he too is his own primary audience, his action a form of invective, a curse hurled at a man who is not there. Even the retirement party is hardly a full-scale public event. The gathered janitors constitute a sort of occupational family, and their little celebration is essentially a domestic festival. The claim here is that close examination of these scenes (and others of like miniscule scale)

leads to enhanced appreciation of the multiform workings and subtle powers of oral traditions.

In the first instance the traditional genre in play is folksong. The repertoire of the young woman's family includes a song they called "Dear Charlie," though published collections most often have it as "Charlie [or Charley] Brooks."¹ The song's speaker is a young woman, recently jilted by mail. Charlie's letter reports his new love (usually for a Miss Gray), returns his old love's letters and evidently seeks the return of a ring, a photograph, and his own billets-doux. "Dear Charlie" is the young woman's proud, wounded, finally obliging reply. "Here is your picture, dear Charlie," opens one verse, adding that the photo's faded condition is a result of frequent kissing. "Here is your ring, dear Charlie," introduces another, which goes on to ask that Miss Gray receive a new band or at least be told the old one's prior history. But earlier than these verses is the second (in most versions), which deals with the letters: "Here are your letters, dear Charlie / I burned mine as they came. / And I hope without reading them over / You'll submit them at once to the flame."

In cold print "Dear Charlie" comes across as a hackneyed piece, thoroughly predictable both in its contents and in its overwrought expression. But this very conventionality is a point very much in its favor, given a young woman new to what seems to her a comparable situation. Alma Gilbert, in the summer of 1925, in Zion, Arkansas, has in fact just provoked a rupture with a boyfriend. Her future husband, Alex Allen, is a new boy in town, he and his brother Burl have access to the family's "model T Ford touring car," and current beau John is suddenly, awkwardly, placed squarely in the middle of the road to the future. "I had seen John with another girl," Alma wrote fifty years later, "and he had seen me in the car with [her sister] Thelma, Burl, and Alex; that was enough to start on. John sent word to me by a mutual friend to return his gifts—a bracelet, several strings of beads, and his letters." Alma's narrative does not specify what she did with the beads and the bracelet, but it does account for the letters: "But it hurt my pride," she continues, "to be asked to return his letters, so I burned them, one at a time, under the wash kettle" (Allen 1978:3)²

¹ The region's major collection, Vance Randolph's *Ozark Folksongs*, has it as "Charley Brooks" (1980:vol. 4:210-13), and it is #5, "Charlie Brooks," in Dianne Dugaw's collection (1983). Early recordings include Vernon Dalhart's "Nellie Dare and Charlie Brooks" (Victor 20058) and the Carter Family's "Charlie and Nellie" (Decca 5702).

² This discussion of "Dear Charlie" and Alma Allen's memoir is adapted from Cochran 1999:52-53.

The young woman arranging her life in northwest Arkansas burns her boyfriend's letters instead of her own, and her more or less deliberate act of sabotage bears only a limited comparison with the situation in "Dear Charlie." But a basic consonance seems nonetheless clear. Her family's folksong repertoire provided a dramatic and appealing model for the last acts of a courtship gone bad. No doubt there were other models, other guides to actions and attitudes appropriate to a young woman living through such a moment and required to act the part. But the song's image possessed vivid appeal. The image in the mind's eye of love letters curling in flame, once-cherished pages flaring and then turning black and cold—these must have seemed powerful tokens of finality and irreversibility. Burning the letters was a dramatic and flamboyant gesture, suitable and fitting. Soon the young woman was in the back yard, on her knees before her little fire, adding the letters "one at a time" to the flames. Confronted by novel experience, called upon to act an unfamiliar role, perhaps sensing the spotlight of family and community attention upon her, she found guidance in the songs of her family tradition.

My point here is that despite the prominent role of oral tradition in this episode, the young woman at its center remains an unlikely candidate for study. She was never a prominent singer or collector of folksongs; her "performance" of "Dear Charlie" was far more oblique. My recognition of the song's role in her actions required only the juxtaposition of a written "ballet book" collection with a personal memoir. (Simple but not necessarily easy—I had to hang around long enough to first learn of the memoir's existence and then earn its loaning, and before that I had to believe that such hanging around is a legitimate, even requisite, component of ethnographic work. The basic operating credo can be simply put: studying a family's music tradition, I dismissed *no* offered information, no anecdote, no diary or newspaper story or letter. I accepted anything and everything any family member found worthy of communicating. I even read a family cookbook. That's why a relatively small book took me a decade to research and write. The reward: I saw oral tradition in action, watched "Dear Charlie" actually get used. There were maybe a dozen no less vivid instances. I still think of it as ten years well spent.)

In the second instance the traditional genre involved is a joke. I heard it in Romania in 1986, although my article containing it did not appear until 1989, just months before I saw the newsreel film from Timisoara. The joke's star is Romania's megalomaniac dictator, Nicolae Ceausescu, here anticipating his death and preoccupied with the subsequent wellbeing of his children. He decides to leave the presidency and the Peles Castle in Sinaia to his eldest son, while a daughter gets the interior ministry and the priceless

rugs and jewels stolen from Brasov's famous Black Church. Finally he's given away everything, all the offices and all the treasures, but his youngest child is still unprovided for. "I'm sorry," he says, "but I have nothing left but my portrait. You always were my most resourceful child, so I hope you'll manage without the help I've been able to give the others." "Thank you, father," says the son. "Your portrait is more precious to me than any castle or Swiss bank account."

Then Ceausescu dies, but soon begins to worry, especially over the fate of the disenfranchised child. Finally he decides to return, just to see how the young Ceausescus are getting along. What he finds is shocking. All the children he left with palaces and jewels and powerful positions have fallen to the gutter—they're drunks and prostitutes and beggars, every last one. "My youngest son must certainly be dead," he thinks. But to his surprise he finds the last son is flourishing—he owns a fine, richly furnished home and a luxurious automobile. Ceausescu is flabbergasted. "How did you manage it?" he asks. "The others had money, houses, offices, and they're in terrible shape."

"Easy," replies the last son. "I took the portrait you gave me and printed thousands of copies—every leu I could get I spent on copies of your portrait. I put them aside. Then, on the day you died, I took one of them down to the Piata Unirii and spread it out on the sidewalk. Then I stood there and shouted, 'Spit—ten lei. Piss—100 lei.' Every day I went out with another portrait. I still do, whenever I need money" (Cochran 1989:268).

When I first published my study of Romanian jokes, I'd been too pessimistic in assessing their political potential. I'd closed the piece on a somber note, stressing that the efficacy of the jokes was psychological, not political, as if the two could be neatly separated. "Generically, the joke is Janus-faced," I wrote. "At once assertion of defiance and admission of defeat, it disparages itself even in its telling, proclaims its own limits, is always at least partly told on the teller. A private independence is maintained, but no public change is effected." I then ended with what I called the saddest joke of all, one featuring a Russian dog, a Polish dog, and a Romanian dog meeting to plan a New Year's celebration. "We could have the party at my place," suggests the Russian dog. "I've got some meat, but we can't bark." The Polish dog then offers his home. "There isn't any meat," he says, "but it's OK to bark." Meanwhile the Romanian dog looks more and more puzzled. Finally he speaks. "What's meat?" he asks. "What's barking?" (Cochran 1989:272).

I realized my mistake, of course, three years after I'd first heard the joke and perhaps three months after my study was published, when I saw the television newsreel footage from Ceausescu's violent overthrow, the oblique

performance of the old joke about Ceausescu's youngest son making his fortune with his portrait. "It's the joke!" I thought, the instant I saw the man with the bulky coat lean from the curb. "It's off the page and into the street!" The joke was more powerful than I'd realized, its use by Romanians more subtle and more resilient than I'd suspected. Back in 1986, when I'd first heard it, with Ceausescu wielding dictatorial power and seemingly immune to the popular discontent he so effectively throttled, the joke kept alive the sheer possibility of a nearly paradisaical world where desire could be freely enacted, where one could spit on the despised portrait without fear. The joke, in the dark world of Ceausescu's Romania, held out, however covertly, a utopian vision. I'd loved it, certainly, and admired the wit and courage of its tellers. I wrote the article in homage to them. But I'd underestimated it (and them) nonetheless—this was clear, finally, as I sat safe at home and watched the jokers take to the streets. Once again, at great remove from the obvious venues where it is customarily studied, oral tradition was very much in play. The jokers weren't at the moment telling jokes, any more than the Ozark schoolgirl burning letters was singing a folksong; she was breaking off a romance and they were overthrowing a dictator. But both were "performing" their oral traditions, their song and their joke, in vital and original ways.

Once again, however, the central actors on the Romanian street are unlikely candidates for the attention of students of oral tradition. Just like the Ozark girl who isn't singing a folksong but *using* her knowledge of the song to organize her behavior in a novel situation, the Romanian celebrators are *using* their familiarity with the joke to organize their response to a no less unprecedented occurrence. (I'm aware, of course, that my description of the men on the Timisoara street is finally speculative; it's quite possible they had no knowledge of the joke, just as it's possible that Alma Allen never thought of "Dear Charlie" when she decided to burn John's letters. I think that's unlikely—I never repeated the joke to a Romanian who had not heard it—but it is certainly possible. The joke, after all, surely reflected a widely shared desire—that's why it was so popular. The joke and the song fit nicely in Romanian and Ozark culture—they're deeply conventional productions, easily utilized, consciously and unconsciously, by Romanians and Ozarkers.)

Recognition of this second oblique usage of oral tradition, like the first, required only a simple juxtaposition—where appreciation of the Ozark scene required knowledge of the song and acquaintance with the memoir, the Romanian celebration required knowledge of the joke and the watching of a television newscast. Once again, the would-be deep student of an oral traditional genre is rewarded for sheer breadth and duration of attention, for

merely hanging around and for (as before, with the Ozark family) dismissing no information offered by (or in this instance about) Romanians.

In the third and final instance the traditional genre involved is a party. Here the connection with anything commonly understood as oral tradition is less obvious. For the first two situations there were at least more or less standard traditional texts (a folksong and a joke) discernible behind the actions, serving (I've argued here) as motivating templates. But these are almost entirely lacking for the retirement party. Here the "texts" (plural because the party is both a multifaceted and a composite achievement, the work of six men directed to the honoring of a seventh) have no stable verbal form. The party itself was a complex event—though it started as a straightforward plan to "get him something." The final version, developed over a period of several weeks, featured a "big one" straight gift with an engraved message, a "gag" gift with its own jocular (obscene) message, a decorated cake with yet another message, a "gag" wrapping of the straight gift in a series of nested boxes, presentation of this gift by three "bathing beauties" (coeds in swimsuits), an appearance by the honoree's own supervisor, and a series of snapshots providing a record of the occasion.

From the beginning I was most intrigued by the *shape* of the party—I didn't fully appreciate it at the time, but I'm now convinced that the competence shared among the party's designers is usefully comprehended as an instance of oral tradition. Each planner knew, for example, without reference to etiquette books or professional party consultants, that "everybody" gave watches to people when they retired. (I asked all six about this practice, one at a time, in terms verging upon sarcasm: "Why hand him a watch, when the whole point of retiring is you don't need to worry about what time it is any more?" Again and again I got the same answer, in terms verging upon incredulity—"everybody" did it. Surely I knew that.)

I did. And I also soon came to recognize this shared certitude as an instance of oral tradition in operation, no matter the absence of a specific codifying text. And of course this doesn't stop with the watch. The party's every feature is traditional—the hat, the cake, the bathing beauties, the straightforward tributes and compliments on the watch and cake, the obscene motto on the hat, the comic wrapping of the watch in nested boxes, even the commemorative photographs. The party in all its variety was assembled by the combination in temporal sequence of disparate elements contributed out of one man or another's idea of appropriate festivity. In a striking instance of communal recreation, each element suggested by one survived by not violating the notions of retirement party decorum held by five others.

Not just the party's constituent elements but also their combination into temporal sequence was a matter of tradition. The party opened with a

joke: the man they would honor they would first mock. Standard procedure, after all: one who would rule must first seek office, kiss babies, press flesh, suffer fools. Rituals of reversal, with the highly placed on their knees, scrubbing the feet of the lowly—such tableaux are familiar to students of culture. Here jocularly would make intimacy possible. The custodians were a group of southern working-class males, after all, and direct statement of affection and respect was a matter for careful handling. Indeed, the carefully prepared ceremony opened with its own repudiation. We wanted to get you a nice gift, the retiree's co-workers said, but all we could afford was this cheap cap with its obscene, contradictory message.³ Before the "real" gift, with its straightforward message of compliment, could be bestowed, its givers must bring in their "gag gift" and "throw it at him first." In his willingness to be the butt of their joke, their retiring supervisor demonstrated once again his worthiness of their honor, of the great pains they had taken to salute him.

This requisite balance, of comic surface and deeply felt core, was maintained throughout—as the cake was preceded by the silly hat, so the watch was wrapped in a toilet paper box and presented by the girls in bathing suits. It's all a big joke, the men said, as they handed him their heart. Just a good laugh, they said, but under the surface was a matter of sufficient importance to sustain several weeks of planning and preparation.

As best I could determine from my interviews, the party's designers shared a great tolerance for the ideas of their co-workers—I heard of no suggested element that was rejected as inappropriate by the group. The "retirement party," then, developed additively from the originating notion of a group gift. (Actually, the Romanian scene may share something of this composite character. It's difficult, for example, to know just where the limits of the joke's influence lie. The most obvious candidate for a conscious enactor of the joke's desires is the spitting man, of course, but what of the man at the wheel of the car, and—if a different person—the producer/copier of the X-ed out photo? It seems not extravagant, once the retirement party and the Romanian street scene are juxtaposed, to understand both as contrasted forms of festivity, structured by several creators. On the one hand we have a voluntary retirement, eased by colleagues bent upon the shared expression of respect; on the other an involuntary removal, celebrated by citizens bent upon the shared expression of hatred and contempt.)

³ The message on the cap was in fact cryptic. "HMFIC," it said, in capital letters, "Head Motherfucker In Charge," with "RETIRED" written below. My original discussion of this party appeared as "Rite of Passage: Retirement Party" (McNeil and Clements 1992:214-25).

But the point here, as before with the Ozark schoolgirl and the Romanian celebrators, is that the custodians are at first glance unlikely candidates for the attention of students of oral tradition. In fact they're the least likely candidates of all—at least the Ozark girl knows a song and the Romanians know a joke. The traditions deployed by the custodians are uncodified, even implicit, apparent only in the shape of the party they created. Appreciation of their accomplishment, too, is more than in the other instances a matter of fortuitous juxtaposition. No explicit credo of sustained and wide-ranging attention can be articulated by way of explanation—in fact, appreciation of the party's complexity was aided most not by a conscious attempt to attend other parties or listen to whatever the custodians had to say on various topics, but by the accidental memory of reading *King Lear*, that famous tale of injudicious and unhappy retirement.

But why the reprise of these disparate moments, each one long since presented in considerable detail in its own context? To what purpose the disinterment of old articles and books, their attempted reintroduction into scholarly circulation? What's new in all this old hat? Two events inspired this essay: first, I read an astonishingly uncomprehending review of one of my books (the one about the Ozark singers [Cochran 1999]); and second, only weeks later, I was asked for a contribution to a discussion of "New Directions in the Study of Oral Tradition."⁴ How can I manage this with any confidence, I asked myself, when my own efforts in the field are directed to purposes so far removed from current emphases as to be incomprehensible? This essay, then, is an attempt to be more explicit about the goals of my own studies, to get them up on the discursive screen, if possible, and then to nominate such goals as worthy candidates for future work by other investigators. I'm suggesting, then, to bring this essay's purposes to a belated explicit and generalized statement: namely, that students of oral tradition might profitably turn to just such figures as the Ozark schoolgirl, the Romanian jokers, and the custodians moonlighting as party consultants.

They seem at first glance an unpromising lot—incomparably less glamorous than epic *guslari* or Anglo-American balladeers. They live at a substantial remove from the great performance venues of oral tradition—in fact, they might be most appropriately described as *audiences* of the performances that have been at the heart of oral traditional studies. But that's precisely the point: isn't it of compelling interest to wonder what characteristically happens *after* the epics or the ballads have been sung, after the jokes have been told? Wouldn't it be exciting to see how the song, the

⁴ See my "Performing Off Stage: Oral Tradition Under the Radar" (2003). For a heterogeneous sampling of oral traditions, past and present, see *Oral Tradition*, 18, i-ii.

poem, the joke, the prophylactic charm or baneful hex, live on in the lives of those who only hear them, only know them? In such modest figures the scholar may by patient attention witness the ongoing, real-life operation of oral tradition, see it functioning in all its protean power at points far removed from its performance origins. That's no small payoff.

I have no suggestions, however, as to *method*. My own procedures, as best I can recall them, seem now so haphazard, so rooted in a mere "hanging around" in anticipation of that serendipitous moment when the juxtaposition of two apparently disconnected elements sparks a recognition of heretofore unrecognized pattern, that it would be perverse to offer them as models for the work of others. (The only justification would be the investigator's pleasure.) The television news program, the family memoir, the famous tragedy—their utility is apparent only in retrospect, and applicable only to the specific instance. The student of folksong might watch weeks of newscasts in vain; the investigator of jokes might read all of Shakespeare and learn nothing useful.

But I'll end by confessing I don't really believe it. My deepest methodological claim is striking at least in its cavalier bravado—I believe no painstaking attention is ever wholly wasted, that the investigator who nurtures a nearly obsessive interest in whatever topic will over time develop a nearly preternatural power of helpful association. Such reasoning leads, I know, to the bizarre assertion that *any* experience can stimulate insight. Somewhere in Shakespeare there are lines or scenes to lead not just the student of retirement parties but also the student of Ozark folksong or Romanian jokes to an enabling insight; in every month's newscasts there are stories to lead not just the investigator of jokes but also the investigator of retirement parties or Ozark folksongs to profound appreciations. I'll buy that.

This essay's core, then, is the notion of what I have called "oblique performance." The idea that the group of University of Arkansas custodians organizing their festival in honor of their supervisor are "performing" a traditional drama entitled "The Retirement Party" will not really stretch anyone's imagination, but I've not seen it suggested before that actions like those of the Ozark schoolgirl with her little bonfire or the Romanians celebrating Ceausescu's death are appropriately understood as performances, however oblique, of the song "Dear Charlie" or the joke "Ceausescu's Youngest Son." The hopes, of course, are first that the notion of "oblique performance" might itself prove fruitful, and, second, that other researchers may develop more systematic methods of investigation.

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The Right Words: Conflict and Resolution in an Oral Gaelic Song Text [**E-companion at www.oraltradition.org*]

Lillis Ó Laoire

Introduction

Although songs and singing are major genres of Irish oral tradition that have been studied from various points of view (Ó Tuama 1960, Partridge 1983, Ó Madagáin 1985, Uí Ógáin 1988, and Mac Aodha 1996), investigative studies regarding the terms in which texts are constructed in an oral context have been rare. Little knowledge is available regarding the dynamics of the interplay enacted between performers, texts, and receivers at a practical level in a living community. I will try to address here the question of what constitutes a correct text among one contemporary community of singers, based on an encounter in which such questions were highlighted.

Albert Lord's theory of oral composition in performance in *The Singer of Tales* (1960) has been subjected to critique and subsequent modification, particularly in the writings of Ruth Finnegan (1977, 1988). In her work she has drawn on studies from widely differing regions of the world to show that the theory of composition in oral performance describes but one of a number of ways that oral poetry can be created, performed, and transmitted. In a culture where variation occurs to a greater or lesser degree, the question of how orally performed items can be judged to be correct or wrong is important for such discussion.

Specifics of the Community

The community in question is that of Tory Island, a predominantly Gaelic-speaking island off the northwest coast of Ireland, where a lively song tradition has been maintained down to the present. It is three miles long and one and a half miles wide at its widest point and remains one of the

most strongly Gaelic-speaking parts of Donegal, with a strong tradition of narrative, music, and dance as well as song. In the late 1970s the islanders were under severe threat of evacuation, but this threat was resisted by some and the island still supports a population of about 160, although this is much reduced from former times. Those who left during the crisis period reside in various locations on the mainland, particularly in local authority housing estates in Falcarragh, the nearest large village on the mainland.

I have been visiting the island and working with some of the community's singers since about 1984, researching their rich tradition with a particular emphasis on Irish language songs. The material examined here gives an important insight into the mechanics and the aesthetics of the community and the individuals in question.

Oral Transmission—Evidence from the Field

In an early reaction to theories of oral-formulaic composition, James Ross (1959) proposed that Gaelic tradition, differing from South Slavic norms, emphasized accuracy and word-for-word repetition as the desirable requisites of transmission in orally recited tales, and that, consequently, the composition-in-performance paradigm did not hold for this culture area. Breandán Ó Buachalla (1998), citing Ross, has recently reiterated this position in his closely argued monograph proposing the acceptance of a purely literary origin for the renowned “*Caoine Airt Uí Laoghaire*,” or “The Lament for Art O’ Leary,” long supposed to have been extemporized over the body of her husband by his young widow, Eibhlín Dubh Ní Chonaill. This argument critiques what it considers to be an overemphasis on oral performance when hard evidence of the performance of texts surviving now only in manuscript traditions is singularly lacking.

On first consideration, Ross’s claim seems to obtain in Tory island, where great care was taken to ensure that song texts were correctly performed in regard to the words themselves and the order of the verses (Ó Laoire 2002). After dances, people who had transgressed these conventions were roundly criticized, sometimes to their faces, with the words “*chuaigh siad fríd an amhrán*” (“they went through the song”), had got it *ciotach* (“wrong”), and so on, or even perhaps “*rinne siad an mhuc den amhrán*” (“they made a pig of the song”). Such criticism is known as *loscadh*, “scorching,” and is not confined to music alone. Today’s singers clearly remember the severe correction of their elders in these matters. Singers who were considered to be good always sang the verses in the right order, their diction was precise, and their lyrics clearly audible, so that the verbal

component of the song and its “story” were comprehensible. Such performances were considered to be *ceart* (“right”) and to have *cuma agus craiceann* (“the proper appearance and finish”). One person reminisced about her favorite singer saying “phronouncálfadh sé na focla go maith” (“he would pronounce the words well”), indicating by her appropriation of an English loan word exactly what she believed was pleasing in his singing.

What this behavior points to is evidence of a highly developed and attentively maintained aesthetic, which obtained in all areas of life in regard to both art and work (Ó Laoire 1999, 2002, forthcoming). John Miles Foley has referred to the dynamics of oral poetry as a performance tradition in particular communities as “traditional referentiality” that “entails the invoking of a context that is enormously larger and more echoic than the text or work itself, that brings the lifeblood of generations of poems to the individual performance or text” (1991:7). My exploration in this paper will highlight one small example of such referentiality and its dynamics, revealing how one context is implicitly linked both to the existence of an ideal notion of the text in the present and to past and future engagements with and performances of it. By studying “how a song means” (Foley 2002:10) in terms of traditional referentiality, we gain insight into the complex, multilayered world of oral poetics that encompasses much more than what can be gained from an individual, alone, silently reading a reduced textual representation.

Orality and Literacy in Tory Island

Tory ideals of what is “right” and “wrong” with particular performances would seem to self-evidently preclude variation as a characteristic of this tradition. Yet variation exists, and consequently it seems to me that a claim for the supremacy of verbatim repetition in Gaelic tradition calls for closer examination, in order to discover exactly what its implications are for those who maintain oral texts within the community in question, and by extension perhaps in the wider Gaelic world. It is also fitting to give some account of literacy and its role in Tory society. Although Irish is the dominant vernacular in Tory, in modern times literacy has been predominantly in English. There was a monastery in Tory from early times until it was destroyed by the English in 1595 (Ó Colm 1995), and the scribe of “*Leabhar Chlainne Suibhne*” (Walsh 1920) and perhaps of some of “*Betha Colaim Cille*” (O’ Kelleher and Schoepperle 1918), one Ciothruad MacFindghail, was a native of Tory. Subsequently, after the fall of the Gaelic order, this tradition went into decline. Under the National

Education Board a school was established in Tory in 1839, but the Irish language was excluded from the curriculum until the late nineteenth century. According to Inspector Patrick Keenan (1857-58), very little was being learned by the pupils who attended; he comments on their lack of comprehension of and fluency in English. However, by 1883 (O' Donnell et al.), when a letter written by the resident priest to some English newspapers asking for aid on the islanders' behalf in averting a humanitarian crisis was sourly and aggressively answered by their landlord, St. John the Baptist Joule, they themselves wrote a letter answering what they considered to be his false charges against them. Fox (1995/1978) speculates that this letter may also have been written by Fr. O' Donnell on behalf of his flock, but it is also possible that an islander may have written it. The Gaelic League had established literacy classes in the Irish language by 1899 (Anonymous 1899), and the Bilingual Programme that came into Irish National Schools in 1904 established the teaching of Irish on a firm footing. Some achieved high levels of literacy in Irish after this period and songs were written down by some islanders (Ó Laoire 2002), although many more islanders still relied on oral transmission to acquire or "lift" the songs.

In fact, there is evidence to suggest that "lifting" (*tógáil*) and "learning" (*foghlaim*) are considered to be somewhat different processes, with some singers favoring the former as more effective and lasting. All important dealings with the state and even personal letter writing, however, continued to be predominantly in English, even for those who were relatively unfamiliar with the language. It is clear that a "mixed mode of literary distribution" prevailed in Tory for a considerable time (Finnegan 1977:160). It is safe to speculate that a wide range of ability existed with regard to literacy, with some individuals achieving a high standard in both English and Irish in reading and writing, while others, for various reasons, did not. Tory is a small-scale society, where as Glassie puts it, "all human interaction takes place face to face with the body in motion" and writing does not enter much into day-to-day communication. It would be wrong however, to state, as Glassie does, that literacy is "only a marginal convenience" (1982:57). This conclusion would deny the high value that islanders place upon literacy and the pride felt by individuals who excelled in this regard. The value ascribed to literacy has not displaced admiration for those who were able to absorb (to lift) texts without the aid of writing, and at least one singer commented that she remembered songs acquired in this way while she had forgotten those learned from written texts (Ó Laoire 2002:78-85). Regardless of how songs are acquired, performance is always oral. The "expressive strategy" (Foley 2002: 26) invoked in the acquisition and performance of the song discussed below was almost certainly

predominantly oral initially, although writing may have been used at different times to record it for other ends.

Variation and Stability: A Practical Example from Performance

For the purposes of my examination I am fortunate to be able to draw on an incident that occurred during a visit to Tory to collect songs there. In 1987, almost inadvertently, I documented a phenomenon that largely happened because of my own arrangement of a recording session with an island family, some of whom were acclaimed singers within their own community and beyond, while others rarely or never sang in public, confining their performance by choice and custom to informal house gatherings. However, all of those present, young and old, had an intimate familiarity with Irish (Gaelic) and English songs, gained through repeated exposure to their performance, both within the family context and at more formal island dances.

It was early August and some friends and I had gone to Tory for a weekend festival that was being held on the island. I brought a tape recorder, since it was my intention to record some songs from Séamus Ó Dúgáin (or Jimmy Duggan, 1928-2000), one of the island's leading experts on traditional song. I was also aware that his wife Gráinne was well versed in song lore and that her mother, Mrs. Hannah Duggan (1892-1988), then 95, resided in their home and was also regarded as someone who knew many songs. I visited the house in *Ceann Thoir*, the East End, the smaller of the two island settlements, on a Sunday afternoon, and after some initial conversation proceeded to record songs from Séamus and Gráinne, and from a teenage niece of theirs, Anne Teresa Nic Ruairí, who was also present on that occasion.

Eventually, as things seemed to be going rather well, I ventured to ask the old lady, Hannah, if she would be willing to record for me. Initially, I had been hesitant about making such a request because of her age. She was, however, extremely lucid and knew exactly who I was, and laughed and joked during the course of my visit, which had encouraged me. She consented, and I recorded the song "*Seán Bán Mo Ghrá*" ("Fair Seán My Love") from her. This is a love song taking the point of view of a young girl who has been deserted by her lover, classified by Seán Ó Tuama as a "*Chanson de Jeune Fille*" (1960:76-102, 1995). At that time it was quite a popular song, as it had been used on the island in the two years previously as the basis for a play composed by the islanders themselves and acted at a number of local drama festivals (Tóibín 1990, Ó Péicín 1997:51-55). This category of love songs, where a deserted girl both celebrates her passion for

her lover and laments his ill treatment of her, forms an important part of the love song tradition in Irish folklore. This tradition touches on the harsh economic conditions prevailing until relatively recently, where arranged marriages were often the norm and parental disapproval could harm chances of love matches. Moreover, these songs also deal with the double standards that allowed males to escape scot free from any consequences of their actions, although women could often be left with compromised reputations and sometimes literally holding the baby. As such, it is a genre that centers on unspoken gender and social relations fundamental in this society (Nic Eoin 2000). In addition, its specialized language, its *caint mhaith* (“good speech”), is relished by its hearers for its aesthetic pleasure, so that it functions on many levels, from social commentary to entertainment. It is a prime example of an oral poem that does not “divorce entertainment from instruction, artistic craft from cultural work,” that emerges from the active repertoire of “a people’s poetry serving a wide spectrum of people’s needs” (Foley 2002:28).

As her performance progressed, Hannah grew hesitant on a few occasions and had to be prompted by her son-in-law in order to get her started again. When she had finished, despite her occasional hesitation, I had what I considered to be a relatively creditable performance of the song from the old lady, considering her advanced age and frailty. However, this assumption was immediately dispelled by her daughter Gráinne, who became rather agitated and warned me that under no circumstances was I to learn the song from her mother's performance, since it was, according to her, *ciotach* ("wrong"). She persisted in this vein, vehemently asking that I erase the song from the tape completely. Aware as I was that this was probably the only recording of Mrs. Duggan's voice in existence, I politely refused. I did suggest, however, that I would ask her husband to sing the song for me a second time and that I would then have the correct version. I recorded some other songs then, and shortly afterwards asked Séamus to sing me the song again, which he duly did. When he had finished, Gráinne seemed satisfied that I had the correct version of the song in hand and let the matter drop.

Subsequently, I transcribed both versions and upon comparing the two texts immediately understood what Gráinne's point had been and why she had become so concerned about her mother's performance. The versions differ in significant ways in light of the question I have raised, namely, what is the correct text of an orally transmitted song, and, arising from it, when are the limits of variation transgressed?

There are many differences between the two performances of the song. Hannah's amounts to the testimony of a sharp intellect besieged by the weight of years, but willing, nevertheless, to accept the challenge of performing with what are in Tory's terms considered to be *brí* ("life, force, energy, meaning") and *misneach* ("courage, confidence") despite the difficulties presented by her great age (Ó Laoire 2002). The recording also shows the process of *cuidiú* ("helping") in operation, with her son-in-law supporting her when she requested it and even prompting her when she unwittingly erred. Of course, this was quite an artificial and no doubt an uncomfortable situation, since I was sitting there as a stranger with a microphone in my hand, recording. Séamus seemed concerned about spoiling the recording by interrupting, although he also felt compelled to intervene through a desire to assist his mother-in-law.

Two Orally Performed Texts

I give below, then, as a preliminary to analysis, Hannah's rendition of the song with Séamus' additions, prompts, and interpolations, as he became

aware of her straying from the correct lyrics. The (a) written between words represents a non-lexical sound often inserted by traditional singers for musical but not for semantic reasons. The original is followed by an English translation. Subsequently, Séamus' version is given, also with a translation.

To listen to the following performances visit *Oral Tradition's* e-companion at www.oraltradition.org.

Hannah's Version (VH):¹

*Mo chosa mo lámha mo chnámha' gus (a) tá mé 'lig (a) tinn
'S (a) níl a' n osna dá ndéanfainn nach ag gáirí bheadh an rógaire liom
Nach trua mé a chairde mar a fágadh mé i gceartlár na dtonn
'S gan (a) coite long ná bád agam ach amháin do Seán Bán a bheith liom*

*Nach beag a shíl (a) mé 'Sheáin Bháin, go bhfuígeá thusa mise liom féin
I ndiaidh gach oíche is gach lá is gach gáire dá raibh eadrainn ariamh
Mo sheacht m' anam déag ar an dá lámh a bhí tharam 's nach mbíonn*

Cá bhfuil an cheathrú eile anois a Jimí?

Jimí: Sé Seán Bán mo ghrá

*Sé Seán Bán mo ghrá 's nach bhfuil áit nach n-insíonn sé scéal
D'fhág sé osna in mo lár agus (a) leon sé mo bhuillí go léir
Agus mí cha bhím beo má phósann sé 'n bhean dubh den tsiabh*

*'S nach iomaí sin áit álainn dá dtear mé is tú féin tamallt (a) grinn
I gcúl claidhe chois garraí ná i lár na machaireacha lom
Nach trua libh mé a chairde...*

Jimí: Níor mhilse liom do phóg

*Nár mhilse liom do phóg ná 'n bhróg atá ar (a) caitheamh le bliain
'S tá cumhaidh orm i ndiaidh mo stóirín 's ní mó ná go bhfuil mo chroí
slán*

Cá bhfuil?...

Jimí: Ag geaftaí an tí móir

Ag geaftaí an tí móir a chónaíos agus chodlaíos mo ghrá

*'S tá mo shúile ar an réalt eolais atá 'na cónaí ar mhalaidh an tsléibh
ruaidh*

Tá long ar an Éirne agus bhéarfaidh sí mise 'na Spáinn'

¹ Hannah and Seamus were recorded between 2:30 and 5:30 on Sunday August 2, 1987.

'S cha phillimse go deo deo go raibh féirín ó liom 'soir Sheán Bhán

*Suigh síos a ghrá díleas 'gus gheobh' tusa duais
Gheobh' tusa féirín lá aonaigh agus margaidh uaim*

*'S beidh tú a' siúl in do bhróga éadaí go haerach ar mhalaidh an tsléibh
ruaidh*

H: My feet, my hands, my bones, and I am all sick
And with every sigh I make the rogue is laughing at me still
Don't you pity me, my relations, how I have been left in the very center of
the waves
With no vessel, neither ship nor boat, and not even to have Seán Bán by my
side?

It was little I thought, Seán Bán, that you would leave me by myself
Despite every night and day and all the laughter that passed between us.
How dearly I love the two hands that no longer surround me.

Where's the next verse now Jimmy?

J: Seán Bán is my love

H: Seán Bán is my love and there is nowhere that he doesn't tell a story,
He left my being sighing and has blighted all my intentions,
And I'll not live a month, if he marries the dark woman from the mountain.

Many a beautiful spot where yourself and I enjoyed some fun
Behind the hedge, in a garden, even on the exposed plains,
Don't you pity me, my relations...

J: Your kiss to me was no sweeter

H: Your kiss to me was no sweeter than the shoe that has been worn for
a year,
I grieve with longing for my treasure, and my heart is all but overcome.

H: Where . . . ?

J: At the gates of the mansion

H: At the gates of the mansion my love lives and sleeps,
And my eyes are fixed on the guiding star who lives on the brow of Sliabh
Rua [the Red Mountain].
There's a ship on the Erne that will carry me over to Spain,
And I will not return until I bring a gift back with me for Seán Bán.

Sit down my love and you will get the reward,
 You will get a gift from me on fair and market days,
 And you'll be walking joyfully in your cloth shoes on the brow of Sliabh
 Bán [the Fair or White Mountain].

Séamus and Gráinne Duggan at Traditional Singing Festival, Dublin 1995.
 Photograph by Colm Ó Torna.

Séamus' Version (VS)

*Mo chosa mo lámha mo chnámha ' gus tá mé ' lig tinn
 'S níl a' n osna dá ndéanfainn nach ag gáirí bheadh an rógaire liom
 Nach trua libh a chairde mar a fágadh mé i gceartlár na dtonn
 Gan coite long ná bád agam ach amháin do Sheán Bán a bheith liom
 Nach beag a shíl mé 'Sheáin Bháin ó go ndéanfá thusa m' athrach go*

deo

*Go n-éalófá le Mailí Bhán is go bhfuígeá thusa mise liom féin
I ndiaidh gach oíche 's gach lá 's gach gáire dá raibh eadrainn ariamh
'S mo sheacht mh' anam déag ar an dá lámh a bhí tharam is nach
mbíonn*

*Nach iomaí áit álainn dá dtear mé 'gus tú tamall grinn
I gcúl (a) claidhe chois garraí ná i lár na machaireacha lom
Níor mhilse liom do phóig ná 'n rós a dtig míl ar a bláth
'S tá cumhaidh orm i ndiaidh mo stóirín 's ní mó ná go bhfuil mo chroí
slán*

*'Sé Seán Bán mo ghrá 's gach áit dá n-insíonn sé a scéal
D'fhág sé osna in mo lár agus leon sé mo bhuillí go léir
Agus bliain cha bhím beo má phósann sé an bhean úd ón tsiabh*

*'S ag geaftaí an tí móir ó a chónaíos agus chodlaíos mo ghrá
'S tá a shúile ar an réalt eolais atá 'na cónaí ar mhalaidh 'n tSléibh
Báin*

*Ach tá long ar an Éirne agus bhéarfaidh sí mise 'na Spáinn
'S cha phillimse go deo deo go raibh féirín ó liom 'soir Sheán Bhán*

*Suigh síos a ghrá dílis agus gheobhaidh tusa an duais
Nuair a thiocthas na daoine agus dhéanfar an t-airgead suas
Ó gheobhaidh tusa féirín lá aonaigh agus margaidh uaim
'S beidh tú a' siúl in do bhróga éadaí go haerach ar mhalaidh an tSléibh
Báin*

H: An tSléibh Ruaidh a ba cheart duit a rá.

My feet, my hands, my bones, and I am all sick
And with every sigh I emit the rogue is still laughing at me.
Isn't it pitiful to you my friends, how I was left in the very center of the
waves
With no vessel, neither ship nor boat, and not even to have Seán Bán by
my side?

It was little I thought, Seán Bán, that you would ever change from me,
That you would elope with Mailí Bhán [Fair Molly] and that you would
leave me by myself
Despite every day and every night and all the laughter that ever passed
between us.
How dearly I love the two hands that no longer surround me.

Many a beautiful spot where you and I enjoyed some fun

Behind the hedge, in a garden or in the middle of the exposed plains,
 Your kiss to me was no sweeter than the rose whose blossom yields
 honey,
 And I grieve with longing for my treasure and my heart is all but
 overcome.

Seán Bán is my love, and everywhere he tells a story,
 He has left my being sighing and has blighted all my intentions,
 And I'll not live a year, if he marries yonder woman from the mountain.

At the gates of the mansion is where my love lives and sleeps,
 And his eyes are fixed on the guiding star who lives on slope of Sliabh
 Bán [the Fair or White Mountain],
 But there's a ship on the Erne that will carry me over to Spain,
 And I'll never, never return until I have a gift with me for Seán Bán.

Sit down faithful love and you will get the reward
 When the people assemble and the money is counted up,
 You will receive a gift from me on fair and market days,
 And you'll be walking joyfully in your cloth shoes on the slope of Sliabh
 Bán [the Fair Mountain].

H: "An tSléibh Ruaidh" [of the Red Mountain], you should have said.

Shared Assumptions Regarding Songs and Textual Analysis

Before analyzing the texts themselves, it is worth drawing attention to the manner in which the old lady asked her son-in-law for assistance. She asked, significantly, I believe, "*Where* is the other verse now, Jimí?" almost as if the missing verse were actually stored in a particular *place*, where he might actually find it.² I surmise that this is possibly related to the idea of *ceapadh* ("stopping"), a term used in Tory to convey the idea of acquiring songs orally by means of hearing them, without the aid of writing. Séamus Ó Dúgáin used this term when referring to his own early experiences of learning songs declaring "nuair a bhí an ceann óg, bhí sé ag ceapadh achán rud" ("when the head was young it was stopping/capturing everything"). It is arguable that he perceived these creations, which after all existed fully only when performed, to be truly physical things. If my interpretation is correct, then it reveals that the old woman's metaphorical conception of songs as entities stored in a particular location is closely related to her son-

² On the other hand, *cá bhfuil sé?* might also be translated as "show it to me," since the phrase is sometimes used in this way in the Irish of northwest Donegal.

in-law's. Moreover, a shared understanding of *ceart*, the correct manner of performing and presenting songs, can be seen to be operating between mother, daughter, and son-in-law.

The way in which I resolved the difficulty of the *ciotach*, the “wrong” text, seemed to satisfy Gráinne, who agreed that her husband's realization of the song was streamlined and accurate with no errors. His fourth verse has only three lines instead of the normal four. This characteristic is often found in oral cultures when transmission of songs occurs without the aid of writing (O' Boyle 1976:87). Nevertheless, it gives a fair idea of the island standard of *ceart* (“right” or “correct”), a term also used among Gaelic speakers in Cape Breton (Shaw 1992-93:42). It must be said that I was not aware of any of this when the song was being sung. In fact, I was quite perplexed by Gráinne's reaction to the song, since I did not know the song well, and consequently had no clear idea of how it ought to progress. My awareness of this only came afterwards as I transcribed both versions with Gráinne's caveats ringing in my ears.

As Séamus' version can be seen to represent *ceart*, a correct text, Hannah's rendition gives a reasonable impression of a *ciotach*, a wrong or unacceptable one. Certainly these two variants collectively represent a distinct phenomenon because the second was given explicitly, at my request, as a correction of the first. Consequently, a detailed comparison will prove useful in that it will reveal each of their strong and weak points respectively. In this way we will gain a clearer perspective of how the first transgresses the concept of “multiformity” (Lord 1960, Nagy 1996), which refers to the ability of oral texts to encompass disparate configurations and yet be considered variants of the same text, a principle held by theorists to be a fundamental precept of oral poetry. In this regard the evidence from South Slavic *guslari* consulted about the meaning of the term *reč* or “word” (Foley 2002:12-20), bears striking similarities to Irish ideas on the same topic. *Focal* in Irish can mean a single lexical unit, but it may also mean more than that. *Seanfhocal* (literally “old word”), for example, is the usual term for proverb, clearly always more than a single lexical unit. As Foley remarks, “a word in oral poetry is a unit of utterance, an irreducible atom of performance, a speech-act” (2002:13). By adapting this idea to the present case, it is possible to state that the variant readings discussed below fulfill the conventions for the correct realization of *caint mhaith* (“good speech”). These variations thus cannot be considered wrong, because they work within the limits of acceptable variation and in some cases can be potentially regarded as enhancing the performance.

Variant Readings That Are Not Mistakes

At first, then, I will highlight the variant readings in both texts that I do not consider actual errors, but rather integral components of the multiformity characteristic of most oral poetry. Perhaps the most convenient way to do this is to list the differences as they occur in each corresponding verse of the two renditions above.

Verse 1: This verse is almost identical in both VH and VS except that Hannah says “nach trua mé a chairde,” “don’t you pity me, my friends/relations,” where Séamus has “nach trua libh a chairde” (“isn’t it pitiful to you, my friends/relations”). From a semantic point of view there is very little between them, except perhaps that VH is slightly more poignant. It is conceivably due to a closer, more personal identification by the female performer with the distressed state of the female speaker in the song. I have also noted this tendency among other female performers, so that this variation cannot be regarded as a mistake, but part of a practice of “personalization” or first-person association, previously noted for Gaelic oral poetry in Ireland and Scotland (Dubois 1996:238-39).

Verse 3 (VH) and Verse 4 (VS):

(1) VH “nach bhfuil áit nach n-insíonn sé [a] scéal” (“there is nowhere that he doesn’t tell a story”); VS “gach áit dá n-insíonn sé [a] scéal” (“everywhere he tells a story”). Again these are slightly different ways to express the same intention. Both could also read “his story” since the possessive particle (in square brackets) may be present in both texts, but due to its elision in the spoken language it is unclear whether or not this is the case.

(2) VH “mí cha bhím beo” (“I’ll not live a month”); VS “bliain cha bhím beo” (“I’ll not live a year”). There is a difference of semantic sense here, though the referential intention is very close. Both of these variants would arguably be acceptable in performance. Prosodically also they are both suitable and reasonably equivalent in the use of the [ia] diphthong in *bliain* and the [i:] vowel in *mí*. The difference in gender may again be a factor here, since the idea of living for less than a month after the former lover’s marriage to another is again more intense than living for less than a year. Such passionate expression is entirely consistent with the mood of the song, in which a woman is the speaker. More passionate emotional expression among women is also an approved feature in this culture.

(3) VH “an bhean dubh den tsliabh” (“the dark [haired] woman from the mountain”); VS “an bhean úd ón tsliabh” (“yonder woman from the

mountain”). The [u] vowel is identical in both words but there is a significant difference in the words. In this case I think VH is more acceptable according to island tradition, since in the composition of the play based upon the text and accompanying narrative of this song, a dark-skinned woman played an important character role. Usually in Irish, color epithets refer to the hair, as I have indicated, but the playwright interpreted the phrase *an bhean dubh* as referring to a woman with black skin. It is likely, however, that both variants are current, with one being selected for the purposes of the play because it answered the dramatic requirements more closely.

Verse 5: There are two small but important differences in the two performances of this verse.

(1) VH “mo shúile” (“my eyes”); VS “a shúile” (“his eyes”). Although this is a small change from a phonological perspective, it is quite significant from a referential point of view, in that it represents two disparate perspectives: one, presumably, the first person voice of the lamenting girl referring to her lover as *an réalt eolais* (“the guiding star”); the other, also in a female persona’s voice, referring to *a shúile* (“his eyes upon the guiding star”), perhaps to her replacement who lives on the *Sliabh Bán*. The more passionate female gender perspective is again inherent in this change of pronoun, once again displaying “personalization” and closer identification with the song’s female speaker. In fact, this instance may approach the interpretive strategy Dubois labels “invocation,” which he notes is particularly linked with keening or funeral laments. Keening was especially associated with women, and it seems apposite to mention here that Mrs. Duggan was proficient in this moribund skill and practiced it on occasion.³ The custom has now become stigmatized to the extent that the few who know how to perform it are rarely willing to do so publicly.

(2) VH “ar mhalaidh an tsléibh ruaidh” (“on the slope of the red mountain”); VS “ar mhalaidh an tsléibh báin” (“on the slope of the white mountain”). Metrically, the long [a:] sound of *báin* is the required one here, rather than the [ua] diphthong of *ruaidh*. This substitution is probably due to the fact that *malaidh an tsléibh báin* is also mentioned in another verse of the song, as discussed below.

Verse 6: VH “malaidh an tsléibh ruaidh” (“the slope of the red mountain”); VS “malaidh an tsléibh báin” (“the slope of the white mountain”). This is

³ One of these was her twenty-year-old granddaughter’s tragic drowning by a freak wave in 1975.

the same variation that we have just dealt with in verse five regarding the color of the mountains and the metrical requirements. Here, however, the requirements are reversed; it is the [ua] of *ruaidh* that is prosodically correct. Interestingly, Hannah's correction of Séamus after he has finished confirms this; as she observes, “an tsléibh ruaidh a ba cheart duit a rá” (“*an tsléibh ruaidh* you should have said”). Although in one sense this is a throwaway remark, it draws attention to the care taken with correct realization of song texts and underscores the dialogical process involved in observing *ceart*, the “right” or “correct” way of doing a thing. Although Séamus' performance was acknowledged as being more accurate and therefore more desirable than his mother-in-law's, this status did not preclude him from being corrected, even if the correction was a minor one.

Mouvance—*Acceptable Variation*

The differences I have highlighted, then, can be considered to constitute the kind of variance that theorists call *mouvance*, a term originating in French Provence that refers specifically to the variational nature of medieval poetry in that tradition (Zumthor 1992, Nagy 1996:9-11). Gregory Nagy defines the concept in the following way (25): “I propose, then, that *mouvance* is the process of recomposition-in-performance as actually recognized by a living oral tradition, where the recognition implies the paradox of immediate change without ultimate change.” *Mouvance*, the troubadours' term for permissible textual changes in song lyrics, derives from the verb *mover*; its negative equivalent, signifying unacceptable variation was the verb *franhar*, “to break” (Nagy 1996:23). In this context, it is striking that another singer referred to the occurrence of variants as *bogtha* (“moved” or “changed”) in a critical way. By invoking these terms of the troubadours, however, I am not suggesting that the conditions for the stability and change of texts that obtained in their poetry were in any way identical to those in Tory. It is rather that the terms provide useful labels that may be attached to broadly similar processes. In this case the terms are being adapted to the particular context. Having first examined *mouvance* or “acceptable variation” in these two song texts, the question of what can be regarded as “broken” in VH may now be addressed, in the sense that it departs from the norms of acceptability that function in the community of singers in Tory. In this particular case the norm or standard may be regarded as VS.

Discontinuities in VH—Unacceptable Variations

Apart from the acceptable variations discussed above, verse 1 and verse 6 are quite fully realized in VH. What can be regarded as the most serious errors then, occur in the other verses 2, 3, 4, and 5. The first change is that the order of the verses differs in both performances. The verse beginning “sé Seán Bán mo ghrá” was sung as verse 3 in VH and verse 4 in VS and, apart from the omission of a line, it is substantially the same in both performances. However, the order of verses is an important part of realizing *ceart* in Tory. Some singers observed the correct verse order according to pre-ordained island norms, while others departed from this standard and sang the verses in the order that they thought of them, or as they came to them. Those who observed the set pattern were accorded more respect as singers than those who sang the verses randomly.

In verse 2 it is clear that two half-lines have been omitted in the first two lines of the quatrain—the second half of the first line and the first half of the second line. From the point of view of the plot and the narrative (usually related before or sometimes after the performance), these two units are important because they reveal the reason why the speaker in the song is sorrowful, namely, that Seán Bán has eloped with the other woman, Mailí Bhán. In this truncation, the quatrain becomes a three-line verse, with the first section of the first line joining the second part of the second to form a complete semantic unit. Because it conveys the essential message it still makes sense, of course, although it has omitted an important part of the plot of the song’s associated narrative, and in this aesthetic the proper realization of *scéal* or *brí an amhráin*, “the story or the meaning of the song,” is essential (Shields 1993). In Foley’s terms, the communicative economy (2002:121-22) of the *athrach* (“change”) that overtook the male lover, leading him to escape with another, Mailí Bhán, has been breached, leaving unacceptable gaps in crucial narrative detail. Hence the metonymic conventions favored by many songs in this genre have been attenuated to the point where meaning has been compromised. The story becomes poorer when we are not told that the lover’s departure is a public betrayal, directly linked to his new romantic alliance with another. Although the song is a lyric, its associated story will draw on such details in the telling of the extratextual narrative (Dubois 1996:243).

VH becomes confused in the verse beginning “s nach iomaí áit álainn dá dtear mé is tú féin tamall grinn” (“many a lovely spot where yourself and I enjoyed some fun”). In the third line the singer repeats a line from verse 1: “nach trua libh mé a chairde” (“don’t you pity me my friends/relations”). Séamus tries to “help” her by prompting her with the first half of the correct

line: “níor mhilse liom do phóóg” (“your kiss to me was no sweeter”). The singer begins again but gives the second half of the line as “ná’n bhróg atá ar caitheamh le bliain” (“than the shoe that has been worn for a year”). This is a line from a different song often called “*Buachaill Ón Éirne*” (“A Lad from the Erne”) on the basis of its usual first line. The song is in the same meter as the one we are discussing and their tunes are also similar. In that song the line is usually: “ní mó liom do phóóg ná’n bhróg atá ar caitheamh le bliain” (“I care less for your kiss than the shoe that has been worn for a year”), or as recorded from another island singer: “s gur bhinne liom do phóóg ná’n bhróg atá ar caitheamh le bliain” (“your kiss to me was sweeter than the shoe that has been worn for a year”) (Ó Laoire 2002:351). I believe the “logic,” if it may be called that, of the error can be found in the occurrence of the phrase *do phóóg* (“your kiss”) in the same location in both lines, and that the phrase *do phóóg* elicited the incorrect poetic formula or *caint* (“speech”)—*reč* in South Slavic terms—from the old lady’s memory.

Another strategy might have been to make the line positive with “gur mhilse liom do phóóg” (“that your kiss to me was sweeter”), which would have worked in the context. Incorrect as it is, however, it is worth noting that the line still satisfies the prosodic length and the assonantal pattern of the line. The meaning here is, of course, completely at odds with the intention of the song, which becomes clearer in a comparison with VS, where the correct line is seen to be “níor mhilse liom do phóóg ná’n rós a dtig mil ar a bláth” (“your kiss to me was no sweeter than the rose whose blossom yields honey”). I take this to be the most serious lapse in VH, since, as mentioned above, it is completely out of character with the tone of the rest of the song. In this case it is the poetic “register” (Foley 2002:114-16) that has been compromised. One song has a female speaker lamenting the betrayal of a lover. In the song from which the unsuitable half-line has been borrowed, the speaker is the eponymous *buachaill* (“boy” or “lad”) who wears his heart on his sleeve and spends his time “ag imirt is ag ól le hógmhna deasa fá shliabh” (“drinking and sporting with pretty young women in the mountains”) (Ó Laoire 2002:351). The mood of the song is playful and light-hearted, starkly contrasting with the passionate outpouring of the betrayed female speaker in “*Seán Bán mo Ghrá.*”

Verse six also omits some significant phrases and becomes a three-line verse in VH. I must stress again that I was not aware of these errors as they were being performed, since I was concentrating on my microphone and tape recorder for most of the time. Apart from the prompts and hesitations, I believed that I had captured a reasonably satisfactory performance and was only advised of the contrary due to Gráinne’s concern

about it.⁴ In carrying out such a minute and detailed analysis here, I am also affected by a certain unease due to the fact that the singer is deceased and that this performance of hers is not one that she herself would consider ideal.⁵ I remain convinced, however, that it is a performance of immense value because of its revelatory potential in regard to the idea of *ceart* (“correctness”) and *cuma* (“the proper appearance”).

Implications of the Analysis for Ceart and Cuma

VH, then, because of its discontinuities, can be viewed as not having attained the island’s standards of performance represented here by VS. The examination reveals the cause of Gráinne’s misgivings about her mother’s performance and her wish to have it erased from the record. When her husband provided VS, he succeeded in calming her fears and she stopped asking me to erase her mother’s song. Having examined the differences between the two performances in detail, one may also observe similarities between them, a significant one being that they both have a three-line verse in common, the one beginning “sé Seán Bán mo ghrá” (“Seán Bán is my love”). Consequently, it is clear that lapses in memory did not begin with VH, but form an integral part of the challenges confronted by orally transmitted songs. Gráinne’s strong reaction to her mother’s memory lapses, which caused her to give a rendering that was *ciotach* (“wrong”) reveals the care taken to achieve the proper *ceart* and *cuma* in this culture. Because Gráinne believed that there was a chance that I would learn the song as I had recorded it from her mother, she felt bound to attempt to stop the process of faulty transmission. When a better rendering of the song was provided, her fears subsided. The old lady’s lapses of memory may be accounted for by the debilitating effects of her advanced age, and, of course, the discomfort caused by having a stranger set a microphone in front of her. Nevertheless, her mistakes are not vastly different from those committed by singers in the prime of their lives and health, as evidenced by her son-in-law’s three-line

⁴ During preparation of the CD that accompanies Ó Laoire 2002 the sound engineer, Harry Bradshaw, removed what he viewed as the “interruptions” in the song, viewing them as unnecessary and an impediment to the aesthetic effect of the overall song. During our editing session I told him that the inclusion of the additional commentary and interpolation was crucial to my analysis of textuality, so he put them back in again.

⁵ See Ó Laoire 2003 for a discussion of the challenges of negotiating an ethical relationship with the Tory community.

verse. For that reason, I do not consider such errors exceptional—except perhaps in their frequency—in this case. On the contrary, they represent examples of aberrations that anyone studying oral performance may encounter from time to time. Thus the respect and high prestige that accrue to those who both maintain the knowledge of songs and achieve the high performance standards necessary for their correct realization and transmission time and again should not be surprising.

In Search of the “Work”

Paul Zumthor observes that in orally transmitted material there is no such entity as “the authentic text,” since constant performance of oral poetry entails constant change (1990:203): “From one performance to the next, we glide from nuance to nuance or to sudden mutation; where is there, in this deteriorated state, the demarcation between what is still the ‘work’ and what is no longer the ‘work’?” It seems to me that a textual analysis of both the differences and the similarities of both these performances of the same song delivered on the same occasion can and do reveal what is “the work” and what is not. Comparison of both also reveals a middle ground of minor variations that are part of the work, perhaps crucially in that they contribute to an ongoing debate about correct form, structure, register, and communicative economy. As I have described the encounter, I was not aware that the first performance had transgressed the boundaries of *ceart* or “correctness” until I was alerted to this transgression by the performer’s daughter, herself skilled in her family’s repertoire of songs. Because of her concern for the correct transmission of the song, she was worried that the performance I had was faulty and that I would learn it and in turn transmit an incorrect variant. My strategy in allaying her fears by recording a second performance deemed to be acceptable was the deciding factor that alleviated her misgivings. However, I also tried to show that some small differences in the performance were not to be considered errors, but variants that existed in oral performance and were consistent with “rule-governed variability” (Foley 2002:116) characteristic of this tradition, which includes practice of personalization, that is, invocation directly related to disparate expressive modalities predicated upon a performer’s gender. Such variations may certainly be considered to lie well within the boundary of the work. By likening this variability to the concept of *mouvance*, or acceptable change, it becomes possible to recognize that even in a tradition where oral performance predominates, the ideal of composition-in-performance, as described by Lord, is not present. The ideal of exact repetition of texts,

however, in such a society, does not always mean verbatim reproduction, but something that closely resembles it. As Foley has shown, the term “word” in oral tradition is not to be unproblematically regarded as “a string of black letters bounded by white spaces” (2002:17) but as anything from single “units of utterance” to phrases, to half-lines or whole lines of poetry and beyond.

I would hesitate to extend the idea of *focal*, “word,” further than this for the Irish case at this point. However, in this context it is worth relating the story told of the famous collector and Irish language activist Lorcán Ó Muireadhaigh, who founded the renowned Gaelic college in Rannafast, Co. Donegal in the early part of the twentieth century (Ó Baoill 1977).⁶ Trying to transcribe a song from Méabha Tharlaigh Mhóir, he encountered a problem in that he could not understand the word *eilagus* in the song “*Mal Dubh an Ghleanna*” (“Dark Moll of the Glen”). When he asked her to pronounce each word (in his literate, text-bound sense) separately, she was unable to do so. “*Bean eile agus dhá mhíle bó léi*” (“another woman and two thousand cows with her”) was the line that caused him the trouble. When vowels from two words meet in Irish, one is usually elided. This is what the singer did in the combination *eile* (“other”) and *agus* (“and”), producing the combination *eilagus*. The collector took this composite to be one word since it was pronounced in this way and was unable to recognize the two constituent lexical units. His singer was unable to help him separate them.

Frequency of Performance and Textual Stability

It may be observed in Tory that some songs remain substantially unchanged over time, while with others there seems to be little agreement as to their correct order (Ó Laoire 2002:130-35). I consider this phenomenon to be related to frequency of performance. Some songs, because they were highly regarded, were performed at almost every public occasion of entertainment and indeed during informal evening visiting. They were also performed by prestigious singers, those who were admired not only for their skill in musical performance but precisely because they could repeat the songs in the correct format. Those who confused the order were not considered to be excellent performers and were criticized afterwards. Through such discussions, reminiscent of “oral literary criticism” (Dundes

⁶ See Lambert 1985 for an ethnography of speech and storytelling genres from Rannafast, Co. Donegal, Ireland.

1966, Narayan 1995), a standard was laid down that was clearly a more achievable goal for frequently heard items than for those more rarely sung. Thus, on one level James Ross' assertion that verbatim repetition (as opposed to composition-in-performance) is the ideal of Gaelic tradition can be viewed as correct. The example discussed above, however, indicates that the picture is more complex and that some variation occurs even with frequently performed items. Although such minor variation is itself the subject of argument among singers, it may be used deliberately by singers to put an individual stamp on their performances and is not condemned outright; it can consequently be understood as acceptable change.

Where, however, serious memory lapses, such as the one discussed above, occur, when verse order is changed unnecessarily and other serious alterations are made, this is considered to be *ciotach* ("wrong"). Post-performance criticism re-emphasizes the correct format and encourages conformity to the normative standard. *Ceart*, then, may be considered a dialectically achieved position where individual performances and subsequent critique of them refer to idealized performances in the past as models to which present shortcomings may be compared. Furthermore, they hold up a standard to which future performances and performers should aspire. This attempt at the ideal performance might indeed, then, be described as composition-in-performance, in the restricted sense that a song is realized fully only in the heat of performance and that it must be realized with the proper configuration in order to achieve *ceart* ("correctness") and *cuma* ("the proper appearance"). Recitation without the music is frequently used as a mnemonic or illustrative strategy in Tory and may be considered another way of maintaining songs in correct order. However, when the song is performed at an occasion such as an island dance, the margin of error is considerably narrowed. The singer is attempting to achieve the high critical standards outlined above by standing usually alone in front of his or her peers in order to deliver a complete and satisfactory rendition of a particular song.

Reception and Judgment

Understood in this way as an "exacting test of verbal, musical and dancing abilities" (Glassie 1975:107), the creative element becomes more important, since a singer creates the song according to shared conventions for an "implied audience" (Foley 1995:45), who in the event are no longer implied but present in the performance space during the limited period of the formal ritual of public performance. One slip will result in a loss of face in

front of community arbiters, many of whom are singers themselves, since the performer has failed to meet the challenge of correct performance and will be sharply criticized. On the other hand, when a singer achieves *ceart* the performance is praised and discussed minutely in positive terms as a model for others to emulate. As Zumthor remarks (1990:186), “the listener contributes to the production of the work in performance. The listener is author scarcely less than the performer is author. Whence the specificity of reception in oral poetry.” Consequently, although singers are not composing new texts in performance, in an oral tradition it is through their performance that they realize the text by means of their understanding and their physical, mental, and musical skill. Through their embodied practical mastery of their own cultural norms they compose the text in an acceptable, intelligible form—“i ndiaidh a chéile i gceart” (“arranged in the proper sequence”)—in a satisfying fulfillment of the “unifying rules of performance” (Foley 1995:45). It is worth remembering that composition also retains the sense of “configuration,” and that it is in this sense that performers compose according to their best estimate of their culture’s ideals in order to achieve an excellent performance that is pleasing to all and enhances the festivity of which it usually forms an integral part. If the performance is not good and the text is considered faulty by listeners, the celebration is not enhanced. Furthermore, the danger arises that such a version will be transmitted, so that it becomes important to halt such faulty versions. Singers are often aware of this potential problem. Teresa McClafferty, a sister of Gráinne Duggan, told me that she often ceased trying to “lift” songs from other singers when it became apparent to her that they were not performing the song correctly.

However, such judicious insight is not always guaranteed, since the maintenance of the correct text represents an ideal to which many aspire but few attain. This is what is meant by Foley’s dictum “composition and reception are two sides of the same coin” upon which both intelligibility and art depend (2002:138-39). Changes in verse order and variations in words were and are common, giving rising to the oral literary criticism that attempts to reinforce norms associated with *ceart* or “correct” texts. This was a matter decided by dialogue and argument and, in fact, the argument itself was crucial to the dynamic since it might lead to an increase in individual prestige and authority in such matters. Variation then contributes to a continuing debate within the community regarding what is acceptable and what is not. Minor changes from person to person, part of “rule-governed variability” (*ibid.*:116), also contribute to this debate. Although they may be considered unimportant and merely inconvenient from a narrowly textual point of view, in the dialogic setting of competing community participants they are central to the vibrancy of poetic debate.

Through their enactment and discussion at “the intersection of the traditional and the particular” (*ibid.*:144), they form a part of the cultural uniqueness that gives the community a persistent sense of identity, further reinforcing strong ties between individuals, their place, and their means of oral expression.

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From *The Book of Margery Kempe*: The Trials and Triumphs of a Homeward Journey

Marie Nelson

Margery Kempe (c. 1373-1438), the author—not the writer—of *The Book of Margery Kempe*, lived—when she was not traveling to the Holy Land or Assisi, the Shrine of St. James at Compostela, the Chapel of St. Bridget in Rome, or to Norway, Danzig, or Aachen—in the prosperous East Anglian town of Lynn.¹ She was the daughter of John Burnham, who, she did not hesitate to say when required to identify herself, was five times mayor of Lynn; the wife of John Kempe, a respected burgess; and the mother of fourteen children. Her adversaries saw Margery Kempe as a heretic, a Lollard, and hence a danger to the social order. She saw herself, if not as a potential saint, at least as a servant of God who lived a life comparable to that of St. Bridget of Sweden.

Richard D. Altick tells the story of how *The Book of Margery Kempe* came to be made accessible to readers of our time (1960:298-300). As he presents it, the twentieth-century discovery of Margery Kempe's story of her own life seems to have been almost inevitable. Altick begins by tracing the first part of the *Book* to be set in print to an eight-page leaflet called *A Shorte Treatyse of Contemplacyon . . . Taken Out of the Boke of Margerie Kempe of Lynn*. This small part of Margery's life history was published by Wynkyn de Worde in about 1501 and reprinted in a collection of religious treatises in 1521. Then in 1910, almost four centuries later, Professor Edmund Carter published *The Cell of Self-Knowledge*, a collection that contained some of Margery's reflections. This publication came at a time of growing interest in mysticism and the contributions of women to the literature of religious experience. And then, in 1934 Colonel William Erdeswick Ignatius Butler-

¹ For a chronological table of the events of Kempe's life, see Meech and Allen 1940/1979:xlviii-li.

Bowdon, in whose family a manuscript had been “from time immemorial,”² took that manuscript to the Victoria and Albert Museum in South Kensington for identification. There, Altick’s story continues, the librarian “consulted three of the best authorities on medieval devotional literature” (299). They could identify neither the book nor its author, but Evelyn Underhill, one of the three authorities, suggested that the American scholar Hope Emily Allen, who was doing research as a recipient of a grant from the American Council of Learned Societies in London at the time, be consulted. Having read Carter’s 1910 reprint, Allen knew immediately that Butler-Bowdon’s manuscript was the “Book of Margery Kempe.” The book was subsequently published, first in modernized form and then, in 1940, edited by Professor Sanford B. Meech and Hope Emily Allen, as number 212 of the Early English Text Society series.³

The story of how the book came to be *written* does not communicate a comparable sense of inevitability. Margery herself seems never to have learned to write. This does not necessarily mean that she was “illiterate” in the sense in which we use the word today.⁴ It was not unusual, Josephine K. Tarvers points out in “The Alleged Illiteracy of Margery Kempe” (1996), for women of Margery Kempe’s social class to be able to read pious works aloud to each other and keep business records, to read basic correspondence, and “probably to compose their own correspondence.” Tarvers presents the possibility that Margery employed scribes not because she was totally illiterate, but because she felt a need for their training in “the language and rhetorical forms that she lacked” (113-14).

Margery Kempe felt a strong sense of obligation to share her revelations, but did not begin to engage in the process of recording them

² Staley (1996:10) notes that the Butler-Bowdon family had possessed the manuscript since at least the mid-eighteenth century, and that before this time the book belonged to the Carthusian monastery of Mount Grace in Yorkshire.

³ Lynn Staley’s Middle English edition was published in 1996, and Barry Windeatt’s Middle English text for *The Book of Margery Kempe*, which will be the source for quoted passages here, followed in 2000.

⁴ For expression of a long-held understanding that Margery Kempe dictated the words of her Book to a scribe because she was “illiterate,” that is, because she could neither read nor write, see Atkinson 1983:18. The antonymic pair “literate-illiterate,” however, does not necessarily constitute an either-or, or “cut opposition,” to call upon a term introduced by C. K. Ogden (1932:58-59). The two terms may instead represent opposite poles of a continuum of literacy and thus become part of a system of “scale” oppositions.

until twenty years after her first one. In *Margery Kempe's Dissenting Fictions* (1994), Lynn Staley considers the possibility that the twenty-year delay between the time of that revelation and the time she began to dictate her book to her first scribe was related to the intensity with which people suspected of Lollardy were persecuted during the intervening years. Staley also observes that twenty years after the time of Lollard activity, Kempe shows "her sensitivity to the tone of the debate about literacy" (146). The ability to read was thought to be shared by heretics, so, Staley points out, it was in Margery's best interest to be shielded by claims that she could not read texts that had to do with the religious belief herself, but that "a priest, a licensed member of the church, read such material to her" (136), and she concludes that Margery's scribe, "who plays a major role in the text, shields Margery from authorities even as he authorizes the text she provides" (147).

In any case, placing aside the question of her supposed illiteracy and the possible advantage of *illiteracy* at a time when the ability to read and write could place a woman in danger of persecution as a heretic, we turn now to Margery's own "Proem" to her *Book*, and to the story of her difficulty in finding a scribe who could transform her oral history of her own life into readable written form.

Here Margery tells how her first scribe, an Englishman by birth who had been living with his wife and child in the Netherlands, returned to England "wyth hys wife and hys goodys and dwellyd wyth the forseyd creatur tyl he had wretyn as mech as sche wold tellyn hym for the tym that thei wer togydder" (47).⁵ This man died after one year.

The second scribe, a priest Margery thought well of, finds the language of the first to be "neither good Englysch ne Dewch" and his handwriting so bad that it is hardly legible. He nevertheless promises Margery that *if* he can read it he will copy out what the first scribe has written. This same priest, because "there [was] so evel spekyng of this creatur and of hir wepyng" is afraid to speak with her very often, but he advises her to consult with a man who, since he had often "ben conversawnt" with the first scribe, might be more able to read his writing. It turns out, however, that the man who *could* read the letters the first scribe had earlier sent from abroad cannot read his record of what Margery has told

⁵ Staley (1994:79) notes the consistency with which Margery avoids the use of first person pronouns by referring to herself as "this creature," citing as a single exception her account of the Bishop of Lincoln's response to her husband John's statement of readiness to take a vow of married chastity. This usage, it should perhaps be noted, is also followed in the translations of *The Book* by W. Butler-Bowdon (1944) and B. A. Windeatt (1985), but not in John Skinner's 1998 translation.

him. Finally, after a four-year delay, the well-thought-of priest remembers his promise and attempts to begin his long delayed rewriting task—only to find that, though his vision is adequate for other activities, he is now unable to see well enough to read the letters he has just written or even to mend his pen. And spectacles do not help.

Clearly, this is not a simple physical problem. Margery explains that the priest's "enmy had envye at hys gode dede and wold lett him yf he mygth" (50). The devil is envious and will prevent the priest from doing his work if he can, but Margery promises the priest the support of her prayers when he needs them to get into heaven. He at last takes up his task as scribe in Anno domini 1436, apparently able both to write and to read what he has written.

The result, as B. A. Windeatt writes in the introduction to his 1985 translation of *The Book of Margery Kempe*, is that "in these dictated recollections . . . it is human speech itself which continually catches and sharpens the attention" (22). In addition, John F. Skinner, the *Book's* most recent translator, speaking of the oral quality of the trial scenes to be considered here, says that it enables us to know "that it is Margery speaking directly onto the page" (1998:5).

Margery Kempe does not use the autobiographical "I" in the basic narrative structure of the story of her life and travels. She does, however, use the first person singular nominative pronoun to represent her own speech in the trial and pre-trial exchanges included in chapters 46 through 54 of her *Book*, the part of her story to which I will give attention here. And it is this use of "I" by a woman who otherwise refers to herself as "she" or "this creature" that makes it possible to focus on her skillful dramatization of her own encounters with representatives of secular and religious authority who attempt to hinder her homeward journey, and to do so from a critical perspective provided by twentieth-century speech act theory.

In this paper I will be reading a fifteenth-century text in terms of a theory introduced by John L. Austin in a series of lectures delivered in 1955.⁶ My justification for reading from this perspective is Mary Louise Pratt's recognition of the "enormous advantages" of talking about literature in terms of "unspoken, culturally-shared knowledge of rules, conventions, and expectations" (1977:86). Defendants in fifteenth-century (as in

⁶ Austin's lectures were published as *How To Do Things with Words* (1962). Reference will also be made to contributions to speech act theory by John R. Searle (1969), Paul Grice (1989), Frank Parker and Kathryn Riley (1994), Diane Blakemore (1992), and William P. Alston (2000).

twentieth-century) trials were expected to answer questions, not to ask them. They were, moreover, expected to follow established conventions as they answered specific questions. Certain answers were expected of individuals attempting to defend themselves against charges of heresy, and, as we shall see in the Leicester trial of chapter 48, Margery Kempe was perfectly capable of providing satisfactory word-for-word answers. It was *not* to be expected that a woman accused of Lollardy and of attempting to lead other women astray would turn to an accuser and say that *he* was guilty of swearing, nor was it the convention that she would delay an answer to a specific question until the point in the question-answer sequence at which it would most dramatically call attention to her accuser's reliance on false information. But again, reading from a pragmatics perspective, we can see not just how these violations of expectation enable Margery Kempe to defeat her adversaries, but how they function as elements in the dramatic representation of her story of triumph over difficulties posed by men of authority. Let us turn, then, to what Margery Kempe shows herself *doing* with the words she speaks.

It is now August of the year 1417. Margery has returned from her pilgrimage to the Holy Land,⁷ has undertaken another pilgrimage—this time to Santiago, and finds herself threatened, once again, by difficulties encountered on the homeward journey. Thomas Marchale, a “good man” who traveled with her to Santiago and is continuing to help her on her homeward journey, is writing a letter to Margery's husband when he is interrupted by their hosteler's demand that she come quickly to speak with the Mayor of Leicester. In what can be read as a pre-trial scene, we hear the Mayor's opening demand that Margery tell him what country she comes from and whose daughter she is. Her reply follows here, recast from Windeatt's 2000 edition of *The Book of Margery Kempe* into conventional dramatic form (229):

⁷ Staley uses Margery Kempe's surname to refer to her in her function as narrator of her own story, and her given name to refer to her as the person whose story is being told. I will be using *Kempe* to refer to Margery Kempe the playwright and *Margery* to refer to the central character of her drama of personal experience, but I should perhaps say here that I am not suggesting, of course, in referring to Kempe the “playwright,” that Margery Kempe was dictating with the intention that her plays would be performed. Her intentions, however, do not seem notably different from the intentions Gail McMurray Gibson ascribes to those of the theater of East Anglia at the time her words were being recorded, which were “to teach and preach, and move to penance and rightful action” (1989:67).

MK: Syr, I am of Lynne in Norfolke, a good mannys dowtyr of the same Lynne, wech hath ben meyr fyve tymes of that worshepful burwgh and aldyrman also many yerys, and I have a good man, also a burgeys of the seyde town, Lynne, to myn husband,

an answer to which the Mayor responds,

M of L: A, Seynt Kateryn telde what kynred sche cam of and yet ar ye not lyche, for thu art a fals strumpet, a fals loller, and a fals deceyver of the pepyl, and therfor I schal have the in preson.

Margery then replies,

MK: I am as redy, ser, to gon to preson for Goddys lofe as ye arn redy to gon to chirche.

There can be no doubt that when “the meyr [of Leicester] askyd [Margery] of what cuntre sche was and whos dowtyr sche was” he was certain he had a right to ask these questions. There can, however, be some doubt about whether his speech acts satisfy one of John Searle’s conditions for questions. A speaker who asks a question, if it is a genuine question, does not already know the answer (1969:66), and it is likely that the Mayor of Leicester *does* know who Margery Kempe is, since she has by this time achieved a certain notoriety with her public displays of weeping and crying out, or “roaring.” But, in any case, she answers his “question.”

In fact, she over-answers it, thus violating what Diane Blakemore, following Paul Grice, presents as one of the requirements specified by the Maxim of Quantity. “Do not make your contribution more informative than is required,” Blakemore states the rule (1992:26), and Margery not only tells the Mayor she is from Lynn and the daughter of John Burnham; she also shows how important her father is by referring to offices he has held, and she establishes her own identity with respect to her husband and *his* position as well. She has, then, done more than tell where she is from and who her father is. She has asserted the importance of two male relatives, and assumed a self-importance by virtue of her association with her father and her husband.

The Mayor responds to *her* response with a negative assertion. He says her answer is not like the answer of Saint Katherine, who told the truth when she was asked to identify herself. This assertion, in itself, constitutes an indirect accusation of lying (Saint Katherine told the truth; Margery does not answer as Saint Katherine did, therefore Margery lies), which the Mayor

makes more directly with the repeated adjectives of “*false* strumpet,” “*false* Lollard,” and “*false* deceiver”—and of course with the agent noun “deceiver” (a “deceiver” is one who “deceives”) as well. He continues with a threat of imprisonment to which Margery cheerfully responds: if imprisonment is what her love of God requires of her, she does not object to it. She asks only that she not be imprisoned with men.

With the emergence of the Steward of Leicester as a second pre-trial adversary, we find justification for Margery’s request. As chapter 47 begins, the Steward, identified by Margery as a “semly,” or good-looking, man, first begins to speak to her in Latin, a verbal strategy that could be regarded as a violation of Grice’s Maxim of Manner (1989:27),⁸ since Margery does not understand Latin. She responds with a natural request that the Steward speak the language she understands and the exchange progresses in this way (231):

MK: Spekyth Englysch, yf yow lyketh, for I undyrstonde not what ye sey.

S of L: Thu lvest falsly in pleyn Englysch.

MK: Syr, askyth what qwestyon ye wil in Englysch, and thorw the grace of my Lord Jhesu Cryst I schal answeyn yow resonably therto.

Despite the Steward’s rude accusation (he says Margery lies in plain English), he asks questions that, having promised to do so, she answers readily and reasonably. Unable to get a case against her, the Steward leads Margery into his chamber and speaks “foul ribald words” to her, wrestles with her, shows “unclean signs,” and otherwise indicates his intentions. The dialogue continues as follows (231-32):

MK: Ser, for the reverens of almythy God, sparyth me, for I am a mannys wife.

S of L: Thu schalt telle me whethyr thu hast this speche of God er of the devyl, or ellys thu schalt gon to preson.

⁸ Having listed the requirements for the Maxim of Manner as “1) Avoid obscurity of expression, 2) Avoid ambiguity, 3) Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity), and 4) Be orderly,” Grice notes that “one might need others.” It would seem that since, as R. W. Chambers observes (Butler-Bowdon 1944:xvii), “the Norfolk towns, to judge from the regulations of their guilds, had been the first in England to abandon the official use of Latin and French,” another requirement we might add would be 5) Speak in a language that the Hearer can be expected to understand.

MK: Ser, for to gon to preson I am not aferd for my Lordys lofe, the which meche mor suffyrd for my lofe than I may for hys. I pray yow doth as yow thinkyth the beste.

Margery has again answered in a way that is straightforward and courteous, but the Steward, his verbal and nonverbal demands for sex having been denied, repeats the Mayor's threat of prison. If preparatory conditions for threats are to be understood as Frank Parker and Kathryn Riley suggest (1994:18), that is, as being different from promises because a Speaker believes that a Hearer does *not* want something to be done, the steward succeeds in performing the illocutionary act of threatening. He does not, however, achieve the perlocutionary effect⁹ that he, and the Mayor of Leicester before him, intended to achieve: he cannot force Margery Kempe into a state of compliance. She must, therefore, be brought to trial.

As the formal trial scene of chapter 48 begins in the Church of All Saints in Leicester, the presence of an audience increases our possibilities for interpretation of perlocutionary effects. Margery is brought before the altar, where the Abbot of Leicester sits with the Dean of Leicester. There is a large audience, with friars and priests and so many lay people that some have to stand on stools to be able to see Margery Kempe, who is praying to God on her knees. Margery's consciousness of her audience is shown by the substance of her prayers: she wishes not just to answer the questions put to her in ways that may be most pleasing to God and of greatest benefit to her soul; she also wishes to be the "best exampyl to the pepyl" (234).

A priest enters, takes Margery by the hand, and brings her before the Abbot and his "assessors." Margery is now required to "answeryn trewly to the artyculys of the feyth lych as sche felt in hem." She asserts her belief that a man who has taken the order of priesthood, no matter how vicious he may be in his daily life, is empowered to turn the bread and wine of Communion into the body and blood of Christ,¹⁰ and she correctly answers

⁹ William P. Alston (2000:37) defines perlocutionary success with respect to the Speaker's intention of affecting the Hearer in some way, that is, by getting the Hearer to believe that what is being presented is true, or getting the Hearer to do something the Speaker wishes him to do. The illocutionary success of a Speaker's performance of an act of threatening, then, would depend on a Hearer's understanding that the Speaker's utterance is a threat. Perlocutionary success in this case would depend on (1) the Hearer's willingness to do what the Speaker wants her to do or (2) her willingness not to do what the Speaker does not want her to do.

¹⁰ Louise Collis (1964) and Katharine Cholmeley (1947), who see the life of Margery Kempe from strongly contrasting perspectives (Collis views Margery as a headstrong woman who would talk as long as anyone would listen, while Cholmeley

all the other questions addressed to her as well. The Mayor of Leicester, however, claims that “sche menyth not wyth hir hert as sche seyth with hir mowthe” (235), which, if his accusation were well founded, would mean that she has violated a Quality Maxim that Blakemore expresses with the succinct imperative: “Do not say what you believe to be false” (1992:26). Margery’s adversary, then, has just accused her again of lying, but the assembled scholars, who say she answers “rhyt well,” are convinced of her sincerity.

Margery chooses to leave the mayor’s further accusations unexpressed, but then declares her innocence with a first person “I” followed by the verb phrase “take wisse” (235-36):

MK: Sir, I take wisse of my Lord Jhesu Crist, whos body is her present in the sacrament of the awter, that I nevyr had part of mannys body in this worlde in actual ded be wey of synne, but of myn husbondys body, whom I am bowndyn to be the lawe of matrimony, and be whom I have born xiiii childeryn.

Her assertion of innocence, its sincerity supported by what would seem to be an act of swearing (“as God is my witness” might be a reasonable Modern English equivalent for “I take wisse of my Lord Jhesu Crist”), succeeds as an act of illocution. No one could misunderstand her intention. It also achieves a perlocutionary success in that it accomplishes her objective. The Abbot of Leicester and his colleagues consider it to be a straightforward and appropriate self-defense.

Margery does not stop here. She moves on to a dramatic performance of the role of the accuser. Her accuser, the Mayor of Leicester, is now forced into her former role (235-36):

MK: Sir, ye arn not worthy to ben a meyr, and that schal I prevyn be Holy Writte, for owr Lord God seyde hymself er he wolde takyn veniawnce on the cyteys, “I schal comyn down and seen,” and yet he knew al thyng. And that was not ellys, sir, but for to schewe men as ye ben that ye schulde don no executyon in ponischyng but yyf ye had knowyng befor that it wer worthy for to be don. And, syr, ye han do al the contrary to me

finds her “manner [to be reminiscent] of St. Joan” [xiiii]), both advise that this assertion be taken as an affirmation of orthodox belief rather than criticism of the priesthood. Margery does not hesitate to criticize individual representatives of the church when opportunity arises, but she does not let her perception of their failures interfere with the way she represents her understanding of basic articles of faith when called upon to do so.

this day, for syr, ye han cawsyd me myche despite for thyng that I am not gilty in. I pray God forgeve yow it.

With this speech Margery successfully reverses the roles she and the Mayor play with respect to each other. She accuses the Mayor of being unworthy of his office. She states her intention to prove her case by reference to Holy Writ, and then she proceeds to tell a story. The All-knowing Judge himself set an example for earthly judges by coming down to earth to verify with his own eyes that accused sinners were indeed guilty. The Mayor, on the other hand, would determine guilt without evidence. Indeed, this is what he has just attempted to do in the case of Margery Kempe. Thus this Mayor, this self-appointed judge, is now found guilty of poor performance of his office as mayor, because, failing to follow the example of the Lord, he has just found an innocent woman guilty without cause.

The Mayor of Leicester is not silenced. He introduces another complaint, but as we see in the following exchange, Margery has an answer for this as well (236):

M of L: I wil wetyn why thow gost in white clothys, for I trowe thow art comyn hedyr to han away owr wyvys fro us and ledyn hem with the.

MK: Syr, ye schal not wetyn of my mowth why I go in white clothys; ye arn not worthy to wetyn it. But, ser, I wil tellyn it to these worthy clerkys, wyth good wil, be the maner of confessyon. Avyse hem yyf thei wyl telle it yow.

The Mayor's change of subject, which leads to yet another accusation, does not result in what he would seem to be hoping for: control of the exchange with Margery Kempe. Margery lets the Mayor's white clothes question rest for the moment (and this will not be the last time she delays a response to a question), and she does not choose to dignify his accusation concerning the wives of Leicester with a reply. She responds instead by saying he does not have the right to ask her about her white clothing. That question, she says, must be directed to men of the church empowered to hear her confession. With this speech Margery calls upon a higher authority than the secular authority of the Mayor, and wins the round by challenging once again the right of an accuser to speak as he does. The scholars, when consulted, tell Margery's accuser that she wears white clothes not to lead the wives astray, but because she has been ordered to do so by her spiritual father. And thus the Leicester sequence ends, with charges brought and left unsubstantiated.

Chapters 50, 51, and 52 serve as preparation for the first trial Margery faces in York. Upon coming into Yorkshire Margery finds that an

anchoress, a former friend, has been turned against her by her enemies; and here, in this unwelcoming place, we observe that an issue concerning the length of time that Margery plans to stay—a question that will come up again—very quickly arises. On this occasion Margery, who often seems to violate the Quantity Maxim by saying *more* than she has been asked to say, gives too little information. This is the question-and-answer sequence (242):

A CLERK IN THE MYNSTER OF YORK: Damsel, how long wil ye abyden her?

MK: Ser, I purpose to abyden these xiiii days.

Though Margery *could* have understood the scholar's question to be a request for information about her expected time of departure, she apparently does not choose to do so. Then, when the question arises again in chapter 51, this is the pattern of exchange (245):

CLERK: Damsel, thu seydest whan thu come first hedyr that thu woldyst abyden her but xiiii days.

MK: Ya, ser, wyth your leve, I seyde that I wolde abydyn her xiiii days, but I seyde not that I schulde neithyr abydyn mor her ne les. But as now, ser, I telle yow trewly I go not yet.

This second exchange can be taken simply as an effort to clarify Margery's earlier answer, but it is not hard to see that there could be reason to regard her as a difficult woman to deal with. She will stay as long as she pleases, and then she will go.

The how-long-will-you-be-here question, at least as it is first asked, could be taken as a simple request for information. Another question addressed to Margery right after the first how-long-will-you-be-here exchange can hardly be considered a question at all, but these are the words that she recalls from an exchange with a priest from York Minster (242):

PRIEST: Thu wolf, what is this cloth that thu hast on?

If we could disregard the direct address to Margery as “wolf” (and this is difficult to do, especially if we take into account Atkinson's suggested reference to Matthew 7:15, “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves” [1983:121]), we might take this utterance as a request for information. At least this is the way the schoolboys who overhear the question and answer *for* Margery—that her

clothing is made of wool—would seem to understand it. It is more likely, however, since Lollards were known to wear white, that the priest is trying to force a pre-trial admission of heresy. In any case, with Margery's subsequent reprimand of him for swearing (she simply ignores the white clothes question, or non-question, for the moment), it would seem that she oversteps the boundaries laid down for her. She is obligated as a Christian to follow the commandments; she is not obligated to instruct other Christians—priests or plain members of the spiritual community—about *their* obligations.

As chapter 51 begins, Kempe tells of another scholar who approaches Margery and asks her how the words “Crescite et multiplicamini” should be understood. Recognizing the question as an intended trap (Lollards were said to believe in free love), Margery says that the words should be understood not only with respect to the begetting of children but also with reference to the “purchase” of virtue through “charite and chastite.” After this display of understanding, which could suggest a greater literacy than it might be prudent to admit,¹¹ Kempe returns to the more familiar who-are-you-and-why-are-you-here question-and-answer format (246):

A WORSHIPFUL DOCTOR: Woman, what dost thou her in this cuntre?

MK: Syr, I come on pilgrimage to offyr her at Seynt William.

WD: Hast thou an husband?

MK: Ya.

But when the Worshipful Doctor (note the respect built into the nominalization) then asks Margery if she has written permission to travel, she gives him an extended answer that again makes it possible to see why she could be considered difficult, and why the Archbishop of York will finally be willing to hire a man (even as he quibbles about how much it will cost him) to guide her out of his diocese. But let us proceed to chapter 52 and the first York trial.

¹¹ Staley, writing about the defensive value of Kempe's claim of illiteracy, says that “throughout the Book, Kempe reveals her sensitivity to the tone of the debate about literacy and the uses of the vernacular. Though she locates the *Book's* action during a period of anti-Lollard activity, she maintains that the *Book* was written some twenty years or more after it was lived. Kempe thereby distances herself (and her reader) from Margery and from activities that are manifestly suspicious” (1994:146).

The setting now is the Archbishop's chapel. Accusations and threats become a part of the audible context as members of the audience call Margery "loller" and "heretyke" and swear "many an horrybyl othe that sche schulde be brent" (248), and once again Margery responds in kind to those who would call her virtue into question. She predicts a terrible punishment for them: if her accusers do not stop their swearing they will most certainly go to hell. Her strategy works. Her accusers retreat, seemingly ashamed. And now with the entry of the Archbishop of York the trial begins.

I read the Archbishop's opening questions—"Why gost thu in white? Art thu a mayden?" (249)—as close to the "Are you twenty-one?" question I am sometimes asked at the grocery store check-out counter. The Archbishop can see that Margery Kempe is not a young maiden, and she knows he can see this, but she answers respectfully. When he orders that she be fettered, however, she not only denies she is a heretic but asserts that he cannot prove that she is. The Archbishop retreats, leaving her to stand alone, and Kempe's narrative focuses again on the audience gathered in the chapel. Some wonder if she is a Christian or a Jew; some say she is a good woman and others say "nay." And Margery stands alone, praying for help against her enemies until at last she cries out.

Her crying past, she is again brought before the Archbishop, who questions her about her tears. Instead of directly answering his question, she predicts: "Syr, ye schal welyn [wish] sum day that ye had wept as sor as I" (250). The Archbishop may be asking a straightforward question, but Margery answers with an implicit threat of future punishment for him.

The Archbishop consults again with his advisors. He says that Margery knows the rules of her faith well. *They* say that she cannot be allowed to stay because she has such influence over the people and may "pervert" them. The pattern of accusation and counter-accusation then continues with this exchange (250):

ARCHBISHOP: I am evyl enformyd of the; I her seyn thu art a ryth wikked woman.

MK: Ser, so I her seyn that ye arn a wikkyd man. And, yyf ye ben as wikkyd as men seyn, ye schal nevyr come in hevyn les than ye amende yow whil ye ben her.

ARCHBISHOP: Why, thow . . . ! What sey men of me?

MK: Other men, syr, can telle yow wel anow.

At this point of the tit-for-tat exchange a great scholar enters to insist that the rules of interrogation be followed, thus defending the Archbishop from Margery's attacks.

Margery refuses to make promises she is asked to make. She will not swear to leave the diocese of York as soon as she can. She will not promise not to speak of God nor will she promise to stop telling offenders to cease their swearing. Furthermore, having been given the right to speak by the words of Christ (she tells a gospel story that recalls His permission to a woman in support of her position on this issue), she will not cease speaking until the pope and holy church order her to be silent. As Staley observes (1994:148-49), Margery will not make an insincere promise. She does, however, perform an unconditional act of promising concerning her own future use of words: she will use "good wordys" as long as she lives.

A Doctor of the Church now enters the exchange with a report of a story that Margery told about a priest. This speaker's clear intention is to add another charge to the series already brought. Margery Kempe wears white clothes, she assumes a right to speak that women do not have, and furthermore she tells stories about men, priests, who *do* have the right to speak. But his accusation provides an opportunity for Margery to tell the story of the bear and the pear-tree blossoms.

This story describes a priest who walks in a wood for the improvement of his soul and finds that night has come upon him before he finds a resting place. He lays himself down in a fair arbor that has a pear tree all blooming with flowers. A bear comes to the arbor, shakes loose all the blossoms from the pear tree, and then devours the flowers. Then, turning his "tayl ende" toward the priest, he voids the flowers he has just devoured. The priest wanders forth the next day, all heavy with thought. He meets an aged man who explains the meaning of what the priest has just seen. The priest is himself the pear tree. He seems to flourish through saying the service and ministering the sacraments, but because he does his work undevoutly and has little contrition for his sins all that he does comes to nothing.

Margery's story ends with the aged man addressing the priest with words that she, as a teller *required* to tell a story, is privileged to repeat, and once again she plays her accuser role (255):

MK: Thu brekyst the comawndmentys of God thorw sweryng, lying, detraccyon, and bakbytyng, and swelch other synnes usyng. Thus be thy mys-governawns, lych onto the lothly ber, thu devowryst and destroyist the flowerys and blomys of vertuows levying to thyn endles dampnacyon and

many mannys hyndryng, lesse than thou have grace of repentawns and amending.

Her story not only constitutes a successful defense, it impresses the Archbishop and has a very strong effect on one of her scholar-accusers, who says “Ser, this tale smyteth me to the hert” (256).

With the response of this listener Margery’s perlocutionary success would seem to go beyond her own expectations, but she does not stop here. She follows her verbal victory with a parallel recollection. She knows a preacher back home in Lynn who speaks boldly against the sins of the people and who will flatter no one. This preacher often says that anyone who is displeased by what he says shows his guilt by his displeasure. The man who has just been smitten to the heart would seem to have acknowledged his guilt in a comparable way. Margery may deny that she preaches (only Lollards extended this privilege to women), but she says to the scholar who has responded as the sinners back home who recognized their sins responded, “ryth so, ser, far ye be me, God forgeve it yow” (256).

This trial over, Margery is allowed, once again, to proceed on her homeward way. But this is not the end of her tribulations, nor is it the last of her meetings with the Archbishop of York. As she reaches Hull, Margery is once again beset by “malicyows pepil,” and by the time she is ready to cross the Humber she is arrested by two servants of the Duke of Bedford, who is identified by Meech and Allen (1940/1979:316) as John, the third son of King Henry IV by his wife Mary; the Duke is now acting in the absence of the King as Lieutenant of the kingdom. The power of the secular forces pitted against this sixty-year-old woman seeking to return to her home has escalated considerably, and the threat posed by Margery Kempe would seem to have escalated as well. She is now accused not just of being a heretic and a Lollard, but of being “the grettest loller in al this cuntre er abowte London eyther” (258).

One of the men required to arrest her, however, is sorry to have “met with her,” which I take to be intended to function as an apology, an assertion that he is sorry to have had to arrest her because it seems to him that she speaks “ryth good wordys” (259). Margery is nevertheless required to meet once again with the Archbishop of York, whose greeting when they meet is “What, woman, art thou come agen? I would fayn be delyveryd of the” (261).

We are not told how many people are in the audience as Margery’s second meeting with the Archbishop of York begins in Chapter 54. The Archbishop, however, begins with an address to a group assembled in the chapterhouse at Beverley (261-62):

ARCHBISHOP OF YORK: Serys, I had this woman befor me at Cowode, and ther I wyth my clerkys examynd hir in hir feyth and fond no defawte in hir. Forthermor, serys, I have sithyn that tyme spokyn with good men which holdyn hir a parfyte woman and a good woman. Notwythstandyng al this I gaf on of my men v schelynges to ledyn hir owt of this cuntre for qwietyng of the pepil. And, as thei wer goyng in her jurne, they wer takyn and arestyd, my man put in preson for hir, also hir gold and hir sylver was takyn away fro hir, wyth hir bedys and hir ryng, and sche is browt her agen befor me. Is her any man can sey any thyng ayens hir?

The Archbishop clearly feels that he has performed his responsibility to listen to complaints. He has examined Margery and found her beliefs to be in conformity with those of the church. “Forthermor” (he is building his case with the language of judicial argument), he has followed through by questioning other reliable Christians and they spoke in very positive terms concerning her character. “Notwythstandyng al this” (the legal phrase attests to his willingness to go *beyond* what could be expected of a man called upon to adjudicate a case involving charges of Lollardy), he still, to satisfy the complainers, had her safely escorted out of his diocese only to have her arrested, deprived of property, and brought before him again. Nevertheless he asks, as he concludes a speech that is as much a defense of his own procedures as it is of Margery Kempe, if anyone has anything now to say against her. And thus the way is cleared for what can be read, perhaps, as a post-trial sequence when a group of men put forth a friar as spokesman, saying that he “can meche ayens her” (262).

Much of the “much” the Friar knows against Margery is indirectly referred to with a phrase about the “meche ylle langage” he uttered concerning her. Kempe does, however, show how the Friar directly accuses her of disparaging all men of the holy church and expresses his judgment that she should have been burned at Lynn. The Friar’s accusations then become more specific. Margery Kempe not only gives offense by her loud crying but she asserts her *right* to do so, saying that she can weep and express her contrition when she pleases. Next she is said to be the daughter of Cobham, or John Oldcastle, a famous Lollard who escaped from the Tower of London and has been in hiding for years, which, of course, she is not—either literally or otherwise. She is the daughter of John Burnham, five times mayor and often alderman of Lynn, as she does not hesitate to say when challenged on other occasions. And she is not “the spiritual [heretical] daughter of Sir John Oldcastle, the Arch-Lollard, who bore the title of ‘Lord Cobham’ by right of his wife.”¹² Her challengers also say that Margery

¹² As Butler-Bowdon explains the reference to “Combomis dowtyr” (1944:119).

has lied about having gone to Jerusalem and has never been there at all, but her insistence that “‘a staf of a Moyses yerde,’” a relic she had brought from the Holy Land, be returned to her would seem to belie that charge as well.

The Archbishop, having listened to these charges, turns to Margery, questions her, and accepts her words as truth, dismissing the friar-spokesman’s words as lies. The Friar now turns to a second line of attack. Margery cannot, perhaps, be proven to be a teller of lies, but the Archbishop cannot dismiss the difficulty to which the Friar will next draw attention.

Pleading her wedded state once again, Margery asks not to be imprisoned with men and is assured that she will not be harmed. She is well treated by the man into whose charge she is given, and a crowd of well-wishers gathers outside his home to hear her speak. Summoned shortly afterward by the Archbishop, she thanks him for his earlier kindness, and another question-answer sequence begins. Margery is now charged with an attempt to deprive Lord Greystoke, a man of high rank, of his wife’s companionship.¹³ Her success in dealing with the current charge now depends, to some degree, not just on the time sequence of Margery’s travels but on the timing of her answers.¹⁴

Margery *delays* her correction of the Friar’s dating of her meeting with Lady Westmoreland (he says simply that they met “at Easter”) until it will do her defense the most good. When the right moment comes, she says she has not seen Lady Westmoreland (the mother of Lord Greystoke’s wife whose help she supposedly attempted to gain in her effort to deprive Lord Greystoke) for two years or more. She *did* once have an audience with her, but that was before she went to Jerusalem (and her return now is from a pilgrimage undertaken after that pilgrimage). The Friar’s account of her supposed meddling, then, is clearly open to challenge. Margery’s opponents, however, do not give up easily. Members of the audience ask for written verification of Margery’s account of the time of her meeting with Lady Westmoreland. The forty days it might take to get such verification, one advisor says, could be well spent by Margery in prison. But the Archbishop is less concerned with the time of an earlier visit than with what she said when the conversational exchange took place. Margery’s response to this request for information includes a story of judgments that becomes

¹³ His wife, Meech and Allen note (1940/1979:317), was Joan de Beaufort, the legitimated daughter of John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, and Catherine Swynford.

¹⁴ David Aers relates this charge—and the Mayor of Leicester’s earlier charge that Margery intends to lead wives astray—to male anxiety about losing control over women (1988:ch. 2, espec. 99-103).

directly relevant to her present situation: “I telde hir [Lady Westmoreland] a good tale of a lady that was dampmyd for sche wolde not lovyng hir enmiis and of a baly that was savyd for he lovyd hys enmys and foryaf that thei had trespasyd agen hym, and yet he was heldyn an evyl man” (266).

The story of an unkind woman damned for her unkindness, and of a kind man wronged, brings forth a response from a pro-Margery spokesman identified as the Archbishop’s steward, and from a group of her supporters who ask the Archbishop to let her go and promise to burn her themselves if she ever returns. It also brings forth this expression of a judgment of Margery’s accusers, made directly to those accusers, by the Archbishop: “I leve ther was nevr woman in Ingland so ferd wyththal as sche is and hath ben,” and an acknowledgment to Margery of his own inability to make a judgment on her case: “I wote not what I schal don wyth the” (267).

Margery takes the Archbishop’s “I don’t know what to do with you” as a request for advice. He does not say “I request that you tell me what to do now that you have been so mistreated,” but Margery promptly responds by *telling* him what he should do. The form of her response does not violate fifteenth-century conventions of courtesy and respect. And it does satisfy the rules for making an explicit request set forth by twentieth-century speech-act theorists (267):

MK (to the Archbishop of York): My Lord, I pray yow late me have yowr lettyr and yowr seyl into recorde that I have excusyd me ageyn myn enmys and nothyng is attyd agenys me, neither herrowr ne heresy that may ben prevyd upon me, thankyd be owr Lord.

The direct address, “My Lord,” is perfectly appropriate in this context. Then, with the word “I,” we have the first person singular nominative pronoun required for speech acts of requesting; with “pray” (which would become “ask” in Modern English) we hear a first person singular present tense verb of speaking; and the proposition follows: the Archbishop is to write that Margery has cleared herself of all charges brought by her enemies and there are now no charges of error or heresy against her, and he is to verify his written words by attaching his official seal to the document. Finally, with a gratuitous “thankyd be owr Lord” Margery ends a sentence that satisfies all the requirements for performance of requests. But the act Margery performs goes beyond this format. Margery *tells* the Archbishop what he should do. He is to grant her request for a letter of safe conduct.

The Archbishop complies, and thus Margery’s “request” succeeds not simply as an act of illocution, which is to say that the Hearer, the Archbishop, is able to respond to it as a request. It also succeeds as

perlocution, perhaps in part because her story of the unforgiving lady and the generous man of the law (the good man of her story is referred to as a “baly,” or bailiff) fits so neatly into the trial scene that Margery Kempe, the dramatist, has created. The Archbishop of York not only grants her wish for a guarantee of safe conduct, he also returns property seized by the Duke of Bedford’s men and provides a guide to help her on her way. Margery is at last free to go home.

But Chapter 54 of *The Book of Margery Kempe* does not end without one final criticism of Margery’s behavior. The Archbishop’s men, now ready to show their respect for her commitment to God, ask her to pray for them, but his steward, hearing her laugh as she goes, says “Holy folke schulde not lawghe” (267). Margery’s response is quick. She has good reason to laugh, she says, and, as Karma Lochrie explains (1991:138), she rejoices not simply because she has triumphed over her accusers, but because the trials she has undergone have made her spiritually stronger. And since I have chosen to focus on Kempe’s skill as a dramatist, I cannot help adding that Margery’s triumphant exit as a character from this scene is as beautifully contrived as the scene itself.

What does Margery Kempe do with words? She tells a story of her life. In the opening scenes of her *Book* she shows herself, a woman twenty-some years of age, despairing of life after the birth of her first child. She tells of her recovery, made possible by a conversation with a young Christ who comes to her in person, and of her later lapses into vanity and lecherous thought. She tells of persecution by people who cannot tolerate the cries she is unable to hold back when overcome by religious fervor. And she tells of difficult pilgrimages in which fellow pilgrims are determined not to associate with her while other people, some of them high-ranking men of the church, help her on her way.

What does Margery, the central character of the scenes just considered, do with the words she speaks? She answers questions about whose daughter she is and where she comes from. She denies the truth of allegations against her, asserting that she does not lie and that she is not a heretic. She asks an accuser to speak in language she can understand. She accuses another accuser of failing to perform his duties as he should. She refuses to be intimidated by threats and, at one point, introduces a threat of damnation that awaits an accuser if he does not show contrition for his own wicked ways. She asserts her right to wear white clothes and to weep when she must weep. She predicts a terrible punishment for adversaries who refuse to stop their swearing. She refuses to make promises she is asked to make, but asserts her own intention to speak the “good words” she knows she must speak for as long as she lives. And finally, in requesting a letter

that will enable her to return safely home to Lynn, she advises the Archbishop of York about the course of action he should take.

And thus we see, in a text dictated by a woman who, according to her own account, did not have the ability to write, abundant illustration of her power to speak in her own defense and to move the hearts of those who would listen to her words.

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Oral Theory and the Limits of Formulaic Diction

Margalit Finkelberg

Introduction

It has been pointed out more than once that the theory of formulaic composition in the form originally given it by Milman Parry is far from homogeneous.¹ Not only chronologically but also in content Parry's studies of the Homeric formulae fall into two parts: the French publications of the 1920s and the American publications of the 1930s. In the former, Parry showed, first, that there are formulae and formulaic systems in Homer, and second, that they are characterized by extension and economy. He identified the style he thus described as "traditional." It is only in the American publications of the 1930s that he introduced the hypothesis that the formulaic character of the Homeric style is to be explained by its being the characteristic style of oral composition. A by-product of this development was that for all practical purposes "oral" became identified with "formulaic," giving rise to the widespread view that 100% orality amounts to 100% formulaicity. From then on, to claim that Homeric diction is oral-traditional has become equivalent to claiming that all of Homer consists of formulae.

As is well known to every student of Homer, neither Parry's definition of formula nor the rules of repetition, economy, and extension that he introduced would apply equally to all Homeric expressions. This fact became obvious to Parry himself as soon as he moved from noun-epithet combinations to other parts of Homeric diction. A partial solution that he proposed was, first, to introduce the notion of so-called "formulaic expressions," that is, such modifications of the traditional formulae that adapt them to situations not provided for in the poet's stock of traditional phrases; and, second, to approach all the unique expressions that cannot be accounted for in this way as underrepresented formulae. But even when both formulaic expressions and underrepresented formulae are taken into

¹ See, e.g., Hoekstra 1965:10-12, Holoka 1991:457-60, Sale 1996:377, Foley 1997:147-49, and Bakker 1999:166-67.

account, this would not change the fact that, insofar as one proceeds from Parry's definition of the formula, the claim that 100% of Homer is formulaic is highly problematic.

A priori, there were two ways out of this difficulty: (a) to abandon the idea of 100% formularity in Homer, or (b) to loosen the criteria for identifying the basic unit of Homeric composition so that they may apply equally to all Homeric expressions. Yet insofar as in the minds of most scholars "oral" became equivalent to "formulaic," adopting (a) would have amounted to recognizing that while some parts of Homer are oral others are not. This is why both Parry himself and his disciples Albert Lord and J. A. Notopoulos chose the other option, with most of the Parryists following their lead. As a result, not only single words regularly placed in the same metrical positions but also recurring syntactic and phonic patterns not identical in their wordings gradually began to be treated as formulae. Soon enough, the tendency to stretch the definition of the formula so that it might apply equally to all Homeric expressions began to be felt unsatisfactory by many. This led to the efforts, discussed in detail below, to replace the formula with another, more flexible, unit of composition.

In all this, it has largely been overlooked that abandoning the original definition of the formula while preserving the thesis of the oral character of Homeric composition inevitably leads to a fallacy, for the simple reason that the only foundation we have for the hypothesis of oral composition of the Homeric poems is the Homeric formula as identified by Parry.² This fallacy is characteristic of those recent developments in Homeric scholarship that seek to modify the formula in such a way that it is replaced by other entities that are ostensibly more apt to supply a unified explanation for the totality of the Homeric text. In Section I of this paper, I will dwell on two such developments, both of them issuing from the application of contemporary linguistic theories to the phenomenon of Homeric language—the "generative approach" launched by Michael Nagler (1967 and 1974) and the "nucleus-periphery" theory introduced by Edzard Visser (1987 and 1999) and further developed by Egbert Bakker (1999; cf. Bakker and Fabbricotti 1999). In Section II, I will try to examine the possibilities offered by the alternative view, namely, that the text of Homer does not lend itself to a uniform explanation in terms of the formulaic theory.

² The Parry-Lord theory of oral composition differs from other theories of oral transmission of the Homeric poems—such as, e.g., the memorization theory, posited as a basis for an oral Homer long before Parry—in that it approaches the oral-traditional poem, or the "song," as being composed anew at the time of performance. On memorization see Pelliccia 2003.

I. Revisionist Approaches to Oral-Formulaic Theory

Nagler, whose approach was closely associated with the generative linguistics of Noam Chomsky, adopted the tendency, first introduced by Parry himself, of loosening the criteria for identification of the formula, and took it further. He famously proposed “to abandon the word ‘formula,’ which means different things to different people, in favor of an entirely new concept” (1974:11). This new concept was that of a “preverbal Gestalt,” or an underlying deep structure actualized in the surface structures of the spoken language (Nagler 1967:282-83). Technically, this meant that, in addition to the semantic and metrical criteria on the basis of which the formula had originally been identified by Parry (“an expression regularly used, under the same metrical conditions, to express an essential idea” [1971:13]), the generative approach introduced an additional criterion, that of resemblance in sound, thus turning the formula into “a highly suggestive associative pattern of sound and sense” (Nagler 1974:4) or, as one of Nagler’s followers had it, “the nexus of rhythmic, phonic, and thematic associations” (A. Edwards 1988:25).

It is immediately obvious that what we have here is not so much two different interpretations of the formula as two different concepts of what should be taken as the basic unit of Homeric composition. According to Parry’s original definition of the formula, such a unit should be identified on metrical and semantic grounds, whereas Nagler identified his basic unit on the grounds of rhythmic, semantic, and phonic criteria. The result was not just a modification of Parry’s original definition of the formula but an entirely different concept of the process of formulaic composition. This becomes especially obvious as one proceeds from the minimal unit of a formula to formulaic systems, the larger categories into which Parry’s formulae are organized.

The formulaic system is a group of expressions of varying metrical shape, specialized for rendering a given idea under various metrical conditions. In that they make it possible for the poet to express the idea he needs in various parts of the verse, the formulaic systems can justly be treated as the central core of the formulaic composition. Thus, for example, the idea “one’s *thumos* (‘spirit’) orders one to do something” is covered by the following series of formulae running from the beginning of the verse up to the bucolic diaeresis:

- ∞ - ∞ θυμός ἐνὶ στήθεσσι κελεύει (9 times)
“the spirit in one’s breast orders”
- ∞ - ∞ - καρδίη θυμός τε κελεύει (6 times)
“the heart and spirit order”

- ∞ - ∞ - ∞ - κέλεται δέ με θυμός (3 times)
“the spirit orders me”
- ∞ - ∞ - ∞ - ∞ θυμός ἀνώγει (17 times)
“the spirit commands.”

We can see that the formulaic system at the poet's disposal allows him, by employing two synonymous verbs, *κελεύω* and *ἄνωγα*, to express the idea “one's *thumos* orders one to do something” in any part of the verse. Now such a system can never be arrived at on the basis of Nagler's criteria, for the simple reason that the verbs *κελεύω* and *ἄνωγα* neither resemble each other in respect of sound nor necessarily occupy the same part of the verse. According to the criteria of the generative approach, the expression *θυμός ἀνώγει*, “*thumos* commands,” would rather belong to the same category as, say, *θυμός ἀγήνωρ*, “manly *thumos*,” which resembles it phonetically and is usually found in the same metrical position. That is to say, the significative value of the formula, essential as it is to Parry's theory of formulaic composition, plays practically no part in Nagler's taxonomy.³

What is at issue here is not just a difference between two taxonomies. Parry's classification of the formulae on the basis of meaning was introduced not for its own sake but in order to explain the process of Homeric composition. Following the formulaic systems that he discovered, one will eventually arrive at a general picture of how the poet expresses a given idea using a limited number of differently shaped expressions that are close in their meanings.⁴ But what would our concept of the process of Homeric composition be like if we follow Nagler's units? The answer is that the introduction of the criterion of sound transforms Parry's unit of signification into an associative pattern in which signification plays only a subordinate part. Proceeding from such patterns we shall arrive, at best, at something on a par with associative lyrics, but never at narrative poetry.

This is not to say, of course, that the associative patterns beyond meaning do not exist or take no part in composition. However, to take them as units of composition is to ignore the fact that any composition is eventually a process of selection out of the infinite number of possibilities,

³ As Sale (1996:398, n. 27) points out, the factor of sound was first introduced by Parry himself in his 1930 article “Homer and Homeric Style” (Parry 1971:266-324). However, the full text of the passage to which Sale refers makes it clear that Parry saw the factor of sound as not applicable to formulaic systems, and therefore as subordinate to the factor of meaning. See Parry 1971:323: “Here it [the sound] has followed the thought which the singers wished to express.”

⁴ As was done, for example, in Jahn 1987.

including those offered by the associations emerging in the poet's mind. Whatever such associations may be, it is reasonable to suppose that the poet would choose only such that are semantically appropriate (which would of course be true of associative lyrics as well). To claim that the poet would behave otherwise amounts to claiming that it made no difference to him whether it was $\theta\upsilon\mu\acute{o}\varsigma \acute{\alpha}\gamma\eta\gamma\omega\rho$ or $\theta\upsilon\mu\acute{o}\varsigma \acute{\alpha}\nu\acute{\omega}\gamma\epsilon\iota$ that emerged whenever he intended to say "one's *thumos* orders one to do something." In other words, the associations favored by the partisans of the generative approach are subordinate to the process of signification, and it is above all the significative value of such associations that controls their actualization or non-actualization in epic diction.

Again, least of all do I intend to claim that associative patterns beyond meaning do not exist or deserve no scholarly attention. Yet, though they can certainly throw much light on unconscious processes in the poet's mind, these patterns cannot effectively account for the process of Homeric composition. Studying the associative patterns and the psychological processes they imply is quite a different discipline, with a different unit to proceed from and objectives other than those pursued by Parry. That is to say, what is being dealt with here is not just a modification of Parry's original hypothesis nor even a far-reaching revision of it, but the introduction of an alternative hypothesis regarding the nature of Homeric composition. Insofar as it purports to account for the oral character of Homeric composition without at the same time adopting the identification of the formula on which the idea of oral composition is founded, this is a hypothesis that suffers from *petitio principii*.

Nagler's approach to Homeric formulae was especially influential in the 1970s and 1980s. In the late 1980s and 1990s, oral-formulaic theory was taken in a different direction by Visser and Bakker, who approached Homeric diction as first and foremost an act of communication and its stuff as "information to be versified by the epic singer" (Bakker 1999:169, 174). Thus, in an article summarizing his earlier analysis (1987) of phrases of the type "A killed B" Visser wrote (1999:376):

Homer did not use given word-blocks, his basis rather was the semantically functional single-word, which cannot be replaced by any other. In the process of versification in the imaginative rhythmical structure called "hexameter" . . . he proceeded in such a way that he first placed the semantically most important elements (in our example: the personal names) and then adapted to this basic structure material whose semantic content is likewise indispensable, but whose prosodic scheme is variable (in our example: the verb-forms and conjunctions).

Visser's theory was taken further in a 1991 article by Bakker and Fabbricotti, who applied it to phrases of the type "A killed B with a spear" (see 1999). According to their modification of Visser's theory, the verbs of killing should be regarded as nuclear in respect of such expressions as, for example, the dative "with spear." When approached in this way, all the elements of Homeric diction would fall into one of the following categories: (a) the semantically functional "nucleus," without which the act of communication cannot take place, and (b) the semantically neutral "periphery," which is subordinate to the nucleus in that its essential function is "verse-technical;" it is here that the Homeric formulae belong. Bakker and Fabbricotti write in this connection (1999:385):

Peripheral elements are semantically neutral in that they may just be present or absent, there being no difference for the intended meaning of the combination nucleus-periphery. This is the logical consequence of the notion of peripherality: a peripheral element is peripheral precisely because it may be absent without more ado. And when it is present, it serves primarily a verse-technical, rather than a semantic role.

Although nobody would deny that Homeric diction delivers meaningful messages that in the last analysis rely on the rules of ordinary speech,⁵ it is highly doubtful that its primary function was to serve as a means of communication, or at least a means of communication in the straightforward sense ascribed to it in the nucleus-periphery theory. Thus, in contemporary literary theory the language of art is approached as an act of communication *sui generis*, in which the artistic form is possessed of a special communicative function that is complementary to the communicative function of ordinary speech (see, e.g., Lotman 1977). As far as Homer is concerned, it is above all what John Miles Foley has defined as the "traditional referentiality" of the Homeric language that fulfils this special communicative function (1997:170; cf. 1991:38-60):

[A] language marked by its archaisms and dialect mixture, as well as by its own distinctive array of "words," becomes the dedicated medium for the composition and reception of the poems. In its very idiosyncrasy, long misunderstood as a curious blend of forms fossilized into convenient building blocks, lies the secret to its success as a signifying instrument. This "way of speaking" designates a channel for communication, a precise wavelength for both the making and the receiving of Homeric epic. Far from being a limitation or an awkward hindrance that leads to a nodding

⁵ See espec. recent work by Bakker 1997, M. Edwards 2002, and Minchin 2001.

Homer, it is a uniquely empowering medium, full of traditional implication at every level.

Characteristically, the unit from which Visser proceeds is that of a single line commensurate with a sentence containing both the names of the killer and the killed and the verb of killing. Bakker and Fabbricotti extend this unit also to such cases where an expression “with spear” is placed in enjambment, that is, when it “fills the remaining first half of the verse in a situation where the second half is to be filled by the metrical determinants (the names of the victor and his victim).”⁶ The fact, however, is that Homeric descriptions of the act of killing are far from constrained by this format. Consider for example the following passage, which is quite typical of such descriptions (*Il.* 17.346-49):

τὸν δὲ πεσόντ' ἐλέησεν ἀρηΐφιλος Λυκομήδης,
 στῆ δὲ μάλ' ἐγγύς ἰών, καὶ ἀκόντισε δουρὶ φαεινῶ,
 καὶ βάλεν Ἴππασίδην Ἀπισάονα, ποιμένα λαῶν,
 ἦπαρ ὑπὸ πραπίδων, εἶθαρ δ' ὑπὸ γούνατ' ἔλυσεν.

When he fell the warrior *Lycomedes* felt pity for him:
 Going in close he took his stand and *cast with his shining spear*,
 And hit *Apisaon*, Hippasus' son, shepherd of the people,
 In the liver under the midriff, *and instantly collapsed his strength*.⁷

The act of killing is described here in four consecutive lines, of which the first delivers the name of the killer; the second introduces the act of hitting with a spear; the third gives the name of the killed; and the fourth refers to the act of killing as such. That is to say, not only is each of the so-called metrical determinants placed in a separate line but even the metrically variable and “peripheral” elements, the verb of killing and the expression “with spear,” are each provided with separate lines of their own. It is difficult to see how such a lavish elaboration on the message “Lycomedes killed Apisaon” could have resulted from verse-technical constraints on the part of a poet communicating the given piece of information. In other words, there is good reason to believe that Homer was possessed of much

⁶ As for example in the phrase Πιδύτην δ' Ὀδυσσεὺς Περκώσιον ἐξενάριξεν / ἔγχρῃ χαλκείῳ (“And Odysseus slew Pidytes, a man from Perkote, / with his spear of bronze”; *Il.* 6.30-31). See Bakker and Fabbricotti 1999:384.

⁷ Trans. by Hammond 1987 (my italics). Cf. also *Il.* 5.610-17, where Aias kills Amphios, or *Il.* 11.575-79, where Eurypylos kills Apisaon, son of Phausiades.

greater liberty in describing the act of killing than the “nucleus-periphery” theory would allow.

Furthermore, if we look at the entire gamut of Homeric descriptions of killing and wounding, the hierarchy of the nucleus and the periphery, which worked rather well on the level of the single verse-sentence, will be reversed. Rather often than not it is the formulaic patterns for throwing the spear, hitting the shield, and so on that are invariable, whereas the names of the participants vary. Thus, expressions of the type *καὶ βάλε(ν) Ἀτρεΐδαο* (*Πριαμίδαο, Τυδεΐδαο, Αἰνείαο, Ἀρήτοιο, κτλ.*) *κατ’ ἀσπίδα πάντοσ’ ἐΐσην* (“and he hit the all-round shield of the son of Atreus/Priamos/Tydeus” or “of Aineas/Aretos”) are obviously specialized for incorporating as many names as possible into the formulaic pattern describing the act of hitting someone’s shield.⁸ In cases such as these, the “nucleus,” i.e. the name of the man hit, would be subordinate to the “periphery,” i.e. the formulaic patterns describing the act of hitting.

The main problem of the “nucleus-periphery” theory as I see it is the uncritical transferring of communicative aspects of ordinary speech to the language of poetry. It is not difficult to discern, however, that extrapolating the entire style of Homer from the unit on which the nucleus-periphery theory is based would result in a telegraph-like report of war casualties rather than the Homeric battle scenes as we know them. Small wonder, therefore, that the non-formulaic expressions are the only part of Homeric diction that the theory would effectively account for. Both the one-line expressions of the type “A killed B” studied by Visser and the so-called “expressions with referential potential,” that is, those using the word “spear” beyond the standard situations prescribed by the battle scenes, studied by Bakker and Fabbricotti, belong to this category. All the rest is a huge periphery—a noise in the channel of communication, as it were—which is of no use in delivering nuclear information of any kind whatsoever. But this is exactly the sphere in which the poetic language of Homer or indeed any poetic language resides. In other words, the claim that all of Homer consists of nucleus and periphery, correct as it may well be on a purely linguistic level, does not do justice to the poetic style of Homer.

Just as in the case of the generative approach, the exponents of the nucleus-periphery theory proceed from the assumption of the oral character of Homeric composition without at the same time supplying an independent hypothesis by which this assumption could be substantiated. Yet to the extent that the theory seeks to replace the formulae, which are after all the only foundation available for the hypothesis of oral composition, by

⁸ *Il.* 3.347, 356; 5.281; 7.250; 17.517; 20.274.

alternative units of composition that are identified on entirely different grounds, the assumption of the oral character of Homeric composition is again left unsupported.

II. The Applicability of the Theory of Formulaic Composition

More than anything else, the ease with which revisionist approaches to the Homeric formula have succeeded in replacing traditional Parryism in the minds of so many scholars is indicative of the fact that traditional Parryism itself is undergoing a major crisis. It is symptomatic of the current situation that the number of scholarly publications on matters of formulaic analysis has sharply decreased, and the enthusiasm with which the essentials of the formulaic theory were being discussed in the 1960s has given way to an expressed fatigue and a defensive, if not apologetic, attitude. Paradoxically enough, one of the most important contributions to the Parry-Lord hypothesis since *L'Épithète traditionnelle* (Parry 1971:1-190; orig. publ. 1928) has been mainly responsible for this unwelcome development. I mean *The Flexibility of the Homeric Formula* by J. B. Hainsworth (1968).

Hainsworth's application of Parry's concept of formula to noun-epithet combinations that are not proper names, which had been treated only incidentally in Parry's work, brought about several significant results. First, Hainsworth showed that the introduction of additional qualifications, which necessarily emerge when a given hypothesis' scope of evidence becomes considerably enlarged, renders Parry's hypothesis applicable to common nouns as well. This important conclusion has generally been overlooked. Second, he showed that Homer's diction is much more subtle and rich a phenomenon than could be inferred from the evidence of proper names. There was nothing in this conclusion to undermine the essentials of Parry's theory, and the extremely rich formulaic variations discovered by Hainsworth could be accounted for perfectly well along the lines of Parry's concept of formulaic modifications. True, Hainsworth's evidence demonstrated that there was an urgent need for a large-scale revision of the original concept of formulaic modification, but this is one of those things that happens when a hypothesis is being effectively developed. All this could have made the study of Homer's formulaic language even more rewarding; instead, the most conspicuous impact of Hainsworth's work on Homeric scholarship has been general bewilderment and the distinct impression that something is fundamentally wrong with Parry's hypothesis.

The revisionist atmosphere that became dominant after the appearance of Hainsworth's book has made most Homeric scholars overlook another

significant consequence issuing from the application of the theory of formulaic composition to expressions that are not proper nouns. Namely, the studies of both Hainsworth and Arie Hoekstra have amply demonstrated that, insofar as one strictly follows Parry's definition of formula, it would be hard to avoid the conclusion that the gaps in the formulaic systems are too numerous to be ascribed to the chances of representation.⁹ To put it bluntly, there is insufficient evidence for asserting the thoroughly formulaic character of Homeric diction. Thus, according to Hainsworth's figures, the proportion of unique expressions among noun-epithet combinations containing the common rather than the proper nouns ranges from one-third to one-half—the proportion that, as Hainsworth himself remarked, is “disturbingly high in a diction commonly supposed to be entirely formulaic” (1962:66), whereas Hoekstra, proceeding from his own evidence, stated unequivocally that “it is practically out of the question that Homer's diction is wholly formulaic and traditional” (1965:24; cf. 15-16).¹⁰ Similar conclusions were also reached later in the studies of Mario Cantilena (1982), W. Merrit Sale (1989 and 1996:385), and Finkelberg (1989). As a result, today we can claim with a considerable degree of certainty that at least one-third of the Homeric corpus consists of individual expressions, that is, expressions that are both unique and not modeled on formulaic patterns.

This brings us back to the problem of the limited applicability of the theory of formulaic composition with which I started this paper. We have seen that there are two possible solutions to this problem: either (a) to abandon the dogma of the 100% formularity of Homer; or (b) to try to save it by loosening the criteria by means of which the basic unit of Homeric composition is identified. As I hope to have shown, sticking fast to the idea of 100% formularity is not only ruinous for oral-formulaic theory, in that it eventually leads to replacing the formula with other units that undermine the principles on which oral-formulaic theory is based, but also fallacious, in that it sticks to the hypothesis of oral composition even after the theoretical basis for such a hypothesis has been removed. In view of this, adopting the position of those who propose to abandon the idea of 100% formularity seems to be the only methodologically valid solution at hand.

We have seen that the unwillingness to abandon the idea that all of Homer consists of formulae is mainly due to the prevailing assumption that for all practical purposes “oral” is identical to “formulaic.” Thus, Bakker and Fabbricotti, while criticizing attempts at loosening the criteria for

⁹ See Hainsworth 1968:72-73 and Hoekstra 1965:15-16; cf. Pope 1963:12-13.

¹⁰ For figures, see Hainsworth 1964:155-64; cf. 1968:13.

identification of the formula, nevertheless reject the solutions proposed by Hainsworth and Hoekstra as “not necessary at all and even false,” simply because “the way out of the problem pointed out by the above studies is to question the degree of orality and formularity in the Homeric poems” (1999:382, n. 3). On the other hand, scholars who, like Jasper Griffin or Rainer Friedrich, do not unreservedly support the hypothesis of the oral character of the Homeric poems tend to use the equation between orality and formularity for questioning the extent to which the text of Homer as we have it should be considered oral.¹¹ But are the nonformulaic and the oral indeed as mutually exclusive as many are inclined to believe?

As studies of the contexts in which both the formulaic and the nonformulaic expressions emerge have shown, there is a clear functional specialization between these two categories of Homeric expressions. As distinct from the formulae and formulaic expressions, the nonformulaic expressions not only cannot be shown to be modeled on formulaic patterns but are also regularly employed in untypical narrative situations. Thus, to take my own study of Homeric expressions for joy as an example, instead of evenly covering all possible situations requiring an expression of joy, the formulaic system for this idea provides only (a) expressions that represent the joy that springs from hearing or seeing something cheerful—these expressions are cast in the third person of the aorist indicative and occur in every portion of the verse; and (b) expressions that describe joy as a feeling accompanying the main action—these expressions are cast in the imperfect and occur in the second half of the verse. As for other expressions of joy, I previously concluded (1989:196) that “all other situations in which joy might be expressed constitute one huge ‘gap’. . . though this gap can occasionally be filled with modifications of formulaic patterns, it is most commonly filled with nonformulaic expressions: this is their primary function.”

How can a nonformulaic expression be identified? Let us consider for example the expression θάλασσά τε ἠχέεσσα (“and the roaring sea”; *Il.* 1.157), the very one of which Dorothea Gray once commented that “it is impossible even to guess whether ἠχέεσσα in *A* 157, οὔρεά τε σκιόεντα θάλασσά τε ἠχέεσσα, is the sole survival of a traditional phrase or a new creation” (1947:111; cf. Finkelberg 1989:195-97). Yet, as Gray herself

¹¹ Griffin 1995:32-35; Friedrich, personal communication. But see already Hoekstra (1965:16): “Since, then, the supposition that Homeric poetry is wholly formulaic is at all events unprovable (if not entirely unsound), it cannot lend support to the view that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are oral compositions.”

showed, the group of formulaic expressions for sea lacks a formula in the nominative: all of the nominative expressions for sea are unique. The reason for this becomes clear if we reflect that the idea “sea” usually appears in contexts such as “to sail across the sea,” “to come to the seashore,” and the like, none of which requires the nominative case. Moreover, the idea “the sea divides,” which is the original context of *θάλασσά τε ἠχήμεσσα*,¹² is hardly an idea that the epic poets would need to express as frequently as, say, “to sail across the sea.” Since the phrase is not related to an attested formulaic pattern, is found in the case that is not represented in the formulaic system for sea, and expresses an unusual idea, it seems reasonable to infer that *θάλασσά τε ἠχήμεσσα* is a nonformulaic expression rather than an underrepresented formula.

Now if the function of nonformulaic expressions was to fill the gaps in the formulaic systems, this can well mean that the nonformulaic elements in Homeric diction were complementary to the formulaic ones. This relationship can be consistently accounted for by the application of the same principle of economy on which Parry based his theory of formulaic composition. That is to say, just as it makes sense in terms of formulaic economy to have formulae and formulaic systems for any frequently recurring idea and standard narrative situation, so it equally makes sense not to overload the poet’s memory in the case of ideas and situations that do not fall into this category, leaving room for the creation of individual expressions instead. As Maurice Pope (1963:9) put it, “it is easy to see how an equipment of formulae complete enough to meet the demands of every emergency might exceed the creative capacity of any individual singer.”¹³

The comparative evidence at hand also suggests that the recognition of the fact that nonformulaic expressions are germane to Homeric diction is not incompatible with the hypothesis that the Homeric poems were orally composed. Thus, according to Sale (1996:385), only about 65% of *The Wedding of Smailagić Meho* by Avdo Mededović can be considered formulaic, while John D. Smith supplies the following figures for the epic of Pabuji (1991:26):¹⁴

¹² Achilles is explaining to Agamemnon that he has no feud with the Trojans (*Il.* 1.156-57): “ἐπεὶ ἦ μάλα πολλὰ μεταξὺ / οὔρεά τε σκιόεντα θάλασσά τε ἠχήμεσσα” (“since between us there lie / both many shadowy mountains and the roaring sea”). As Griffin (1986:53-54) has shown, the expression is part of a passage whose language is highly individual.

¹³ Cf. Hoekstra 1965:15-16 and Hainsworth 1968:114.

¹⁴ I am grateful to David Shulman for drawing my attention to this publication.

In terms of approximate percentages, this means that in two performances by two sets of epic singers who are unrelated, who live at some distance from each other, and who have never met, 23% of the text sung is held identically in common, 18% is equivalent, and 36% is composed of formulae known to both sets of performers Only 23% can be said to be truly unique to one or the other performance.

This is not to say that comparative evidence alone can serve as conclusive proof that nonformulaic expressions belong with oral rather than literary composition. The caveat expressed by Hoekstra (1965:25), perhaps the most methodologically rigorous of all students of the Homeric formula, that “it is uncertain whether the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were composed orally,” seems to be in place here.¹⁵ Hoekstra’s caveat equally concerned nonformulaic and formulaic expressions, his claim having been that the use of formulae may be characteristic of both genuinely oral composition and such literary composition that, like the *Posthomerica* of Quintus of Smyrna, worked by way of deliberate imitation of traditional technique. This part of his argument has been effectively refuted by Sale, who showed (without, however, specifically referring to Hoekstra) that, though Quintus did use traditional formulae, he failed to employ such a hallmark characteristic of oral composition as formulaic systems.¹⁶ Defining the status of the nonformulaic expressions would require a separate examination. As far as I can see, such an examination should include, among other things, a comprehensive study of the ratio of metrical irregularities in this group of Homeric expressions. It is reasonable to suppose that the so-called metrical irregularities, frequently occurring as they do in Homer’s modifications of traditional formulae, are a necessary by-product of oral composition, in that they can consistently be accounted for as resulting from the poet’s need to adjust the traditional formulae to nontraditional contexts at the time of extempore composition.¹⁷ It follows, then, that the presence of metrical irregularities in nonformulaic expressions can serve as a test of their orality. However that may be, the only thing of which we can be certain at this stage

¹⁵ Cf. Hoekstra’s comment (1965:18): “Of course the objections I have raised against the argument do not prove that the hypothesis is untenable. Personally I believe that it is not impossible.”

¹⁶ See Hoekstra 1965:16-17 and Sale 1996.

¹⁷ Cf. Parry 1971:196, 237; Hoekstra 1965:9-10; Finkelberg 1988 and 1997.

is that these expressions constitute an inseparable part of Homeric diction as we know it.

The ensuing vision of Homeric diction would thus be that of a continuum or, as Joseph Russo put it in his 1997 assessment that incorporated the results of recent studies of nonformulaic elements in Homer, “an amalgam of elements covering a spectrum from highly formulaic to nonformulaic, a view that may be considered both unsurprising and uncontroversial” (259).¹⁸ The alternative to this view would be to abandon Parry’s principles of repetition, economy, and extension, principles meant to account for the way in which the same meaning can be rendered by a limited number of traditional expressions, and to adopt revisionist theories whose practical usefulness for the concrete analysis of the text of Homer is far from conclusive.¹⁹ It is too often forgotten, indeed, that the explicative value of Parry’s hypothesis of formulaic composition has proved its worth in the work of many scholars whose main interest was not so much the formulaic theory as such but, rather, the study of a given traditional Greek text cast in hexameters. To claim that the formulaic theory does not work, insofar as it cannot be indiscriminately applied to the totality of the text of Homer, is to ignore the fact that its application in the course of the last 70 years has changed the face of Homeric scholarship almost beyond recognition. This being the case, it would be an unforgivable mistake to abandon the approach that has contributed so much to our understanding of Homeric diction.²⁰

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¹⁸ Cf. M. Edwards 1997:269-72. At the same time, such a supposedly representative collection as de Jong 1999 ignores this development altogether.

¹⁹ See, e.g., Russo on the generative approach (1997:252): “While the formulation makes elegant theory, it renders our concordance-compiled repetitions of limited use in finding the allomorphs of any *Gestalt*, leaving us with no investigative tool as a replacement except for each individual researcher’s ‘nose’ for formulas.”

²⁰ An earlier version of this paper was read at the conference “Oral Performance and Its Context,” held at the University of Melbourne in July 2002. I would like to express my thanks to Chris Mackie, the convenor. As far as the present version is concerned, I am much indebted to the criticism and discussion of Thomas Hubbard, Toph Marshall, and Steve Nimis. I am also grateful to Rainer Friedrich for having allowed me to read sections from his forthcoming book on Homeric formulae and to the anonymous referee of this journal for his/her helpful remarks.

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“Lord of the Iron Bow”: The Return Pattern Motif in the Fifteenth-century Baloch Epic *Hero Šey Murīd*

Sabir Badalkhan

Background

The fifteenth and sixteenth centuries are considered to be the heroic age of Balochistan and the classical period of Balochi literature. It was in the fifteenth century that the powerful Rind and Lāšār tribes, alongside a large number of other Baloch tribes, migrated from western Makran (now in Iran), conquering other Baloch tribes on their way. Their realm stretched to Sībī and Dāḍar in the eastern fringes of the present-day Pakistani Balochistan and formed the first unified Baloch confederacy (Qizalbāš 1979:19). Mīr Čākar Khān Rind, who ruled from his capital at Sībī from 1487 to 1511 (Harrison 1981:12) was nominated as “the Great Chief” of the Baloch confederacy and the chief of all the Baloches (Baluch 1965:121; Hetu Ram 1898:105; cf. Rzehak 1998:164).¹ Tradition holds that Mīr Bibagr Rind, Mīr Čākar’s nephew, gave the name Balochistan (lit. “country of the Baloch”) to the newly unified country (Badalkhan 1992:37, n. 23).² Chakarian Balochistan was composed of the presently Iranian and Pakistani Balochistans as well as a great chunk of Afghani Balochistan.³ Legend has it that under Mīr Čākar Rind the city of Sībī, then the capital of Balochistan,

¹ Mīr is an honorific title meaning “chief” or “leader.”

² Baloch (1983:188) traces the first use of the name Balochistan to the fourteenth century.

³ Balochistan presently lies within the borders of Iran (in the east), Pakistan (in the west), and Afghanistan (in the southwest). Its natural boundaries comprise the southeastern quadrant of the Iranian plateau from the Kirman desert east of Bam and the Bashagird mountains to the western borders of Sind and the Punjab (Frye 1960:1005). Its southern borders stretch from Bandar Abbas on the Persian Gulf to Sind, and the northern lines mark the delta of the Helmand River in Sistan up to south of Qandahar in Afghanistan (for details see Baloch 1987:19-21; Redaelli 1997:25-27; Harrison 1981:1-2; Spooner 1983:95-96 and 1989:599; Konieczny 1979:11). During the Chakarian period this whole region was more or less under the direct rule of the Baloch.

reached the height of its grandeur and attracted Baloch tribes from all corners of Balochistan. The population of Sībī, now a town of only several thousand souls, exceeded 100,000 (cf. Harrison 1980:13; Matheson 1967:9; Baluch 1958:171) and another 10,000 *rāpčis*—musicians, singers, storytellers, and cup-bearers—entertained the nobility and the masses (cf. Matheson 1967:9; Baluch 1958:170-171 and 1965:124).

Balochi oral tradition describes the Chakarian age as the age of heroism and gallantry when every Baloch young man of noble birth was expected to be an archer, a horse-rider, and a swordsman, as well as have at least one lover—generally these were women of low social class and usually of non-Baloch origin such as the Jatts and Dombs (Nasīr 1976:31; cf. Nasīr 1979a:228-29; M. K. Marī 1991:53, 80; Badalkhan 2002a:303). Noble sons were also believed to be well-versed in traditional Balochi poetry and were expected to compose their own poems, for the intelligence of a Baloch was also judged by his command of the art of poetry.⁴ They would play a musical instrument—preferably a reed-pipe (flute), since it is the instrument of an upper-class Baloch and all other musical instruments were played exclusively by musicians of a lower social class. This age produced some of the finest oral poems and epic cycles in Balochi oral poetry, poems that have been transmitted from generation to generation by a class of professional minstrels and common Baloches with no help of the written word.

The Legend of Šey Murīd

This age also produced the legend of Šey Murīd, the topic of the present discussion. The oral tradition recounts that Šey Murīd, son of Šey Mubārak, the chief of the Kahīrī tribe (Baluch 1977:244; cf. Qizalbāš 1979:19), was the chief companion of Mīr Čākar Khān Rind.⁵ Mīr Čākar

⁴ Baloch intellectuals generally believe that the thirty-year fratricidal war between the powerful tribes of the Rind and the Lāšār, which started because a band of youths from the latter tribe slaughtered the baby camels of a widow refugee of the former tribe, gave the first mortal blow to the sovereignty of the Baloch in Balochistan. This incident ignited a series of battles that completely undermined Baloch national strength. Nasīr writes that prior to this fratricidal war, Baloch nobles of the Chakarian Age lived a life of comfort and ease, unaware of the common problems of day-to-day life (1976:75).

⁵ On one occasion Murīd addresses his father as “the king of the Kahīris of Chatur” (Baluch 1977:290). However, some other traditions record Šey Murīd’s father as Mīr Mubārak Rind (Barker and Mengal 1969:II, 313), and say that he belonged to the Rind tribe, the tribe whose chief was Mīr Čākar, but the majority of the oral sources attribute them to the Kahīrī tribe.

and Šey Murīd were inseparable companions, hunting by day and enjoying gatherings of music, singing, and drinking at Mīr Čākar's palace by night. Baluch writes that Murīd was famous as having "mastered the art of swordmanship, horsemanship, and arrow-shooting. His bow made of steel was so heavy that he was known as the owner of the "Iron bow," because none but he alone could draw and shoot arrows from it" (Baluch 1977:244). The legend is that one day when Mīr Čākar and Šey Murīd are returning from a day of hunting they stop at the town where their fiancées live. Since a Baloch fiancée never appears before her betrothed, Mīr Čākar and Šey Murīd decide to visit each others' fiancées. Šey Murīd goes to Mīr Čākar's fiancée, who brings him clean water in a silver bowl. Murīd, dying of thirst, drinks the entire bowl in a single gulp and becomes sick. However, when Mīr Čākar goes to Šey Murīd's fiancée Hānī, the daughter of the Rind noble Mīr Mandaw, she brings him clean water in a silver bowl in which she has placed dwarf palm leaf, properly washed.⁶ The Chief is surprised by the pieces of straw, but he drinks the water with care in order to avoid swallowing the straw (Šād 2000:446-47). When he leaves Hānī he finds Murīd vomiting and sick. Murīd tells him that the water has made him ill because he drank a lot of water on an empty stomach. Now Mīr Čākar realizes that Hānī had acted wisely by putting pieces of straw into the water. Captivated by her intelligence and enchanted by her unmatched beauty, he makes up his mind then and there to employ any means to have her as a wife.

Some time later, Mīr Čākar organizes a party where everyone grows drunk while musicians play music and sing heroic songs. At the height of the drinking and music-playing, Mīr Čākar asks the nobles to make vows on which they must pledge their lives (Nasīr 1976:75).⁷ Every chief at the

Al-Qādrī writes that Murīd was recruited as a soldier in the army of Mīr Čākar Khān Rind (1976:156).

⁶ Dames 1907:I, 54; Z. S. Baloč 1965:179, n. 3; Barker and Mengal 1969:II, 314; Baluch 1977:244. Qizalbāš (1979:20) writes that Hānī was Murīd's cousin. In some versions her father's name is reported as Dīnār (Šād 2000:440 ff.; Farīdī 1983:55), as well as Sardār Dīnār (Rooman 1967:13), but the majority of the sources report Mīr Mandaw as the name of Hānī's father.

⁷ *Rindānī kawl* ("vows of the Rinds") are very famous in Balochi oral tradition and have remained proverbial to this date. Each one of them is also the subject of one or more poems and there is hardly any Baloch of a certain age who does not know about any of these *kawls* (cf. Dames 1907:26 ff.; Elfenbein 1990:I, 354-65; Badalkhan 1994:185-86; Š. Marī 1970:4 ff.; Farīdī 1983:42 ff.; H. Marī 1987:233; Nasīr 1976:75-92; Baluch

gathering makes a vow. Mīr Jāḍo swears that he will chop off the head of anyone who touches his beard at the assembly of nobles. Then Bibarg vows that he will kill anyone who kills Hādeh. He is followed by Mīr Haibitān who vows that if anybody's camel joins his camel-herd he will never give it back. At last, comes the turn of Šey Murīd, who, "striving to outdo all the rest . . . swore that if anyone came to him in supplication, he would grant anything he wished" (Barker and Mengal 1969:II, 313).⁸ Later on, Mīr Čākar tests Mīr Jāḍo's word by asking his maidservant to put his baby son upon his lap. When the son is placed in his lap he grabs his father's beard. Full of wrath, Jāḍo unsheathes his sword and smites the head of his milk-sucking baby in the presence of all the Rind nobles (cf. Baluch 1977:314-15; Š. Marī 1970, Dames 1907:27; Qizalbāš 1979:22). Mīr Čākar also tests Bībagr and Haibitān, finding them true to their word.

Now it comes time to test Šey Murīd. Murīd hosts a festive gathering and invites renowned musicians to entertain the audience. The musicians play to the best of their art "and at the close of the function, Sheh Murīd, dead drunk, in an ecstatic mood avowed to bestow whatever they demanded" (Baluch 1977:246). The musicians, in accordance with a premeditated plan conceived by Mīr Čākar, ask him to renounce his engagement to Hānī.⁹ The unexpected demand distresses his heart and he

1977:246, 314, 319; Qizalbāš 1979:20; Al-Qādrī 1976:128-30, 156; Gimmī 1961:48; Šād 2000:110-14; Šāwānī 1996:40-47).

⁸ Mīr Čākar is noted to have also made a vow: *Rindān kawl kutag dīwwānā / yakke Čākar-i Šeyhakkā / ikrār int manā tān zindā / drogā man na bandān wassā* ("The Rinds made vows in the assembly / one [among them] was Čākar son of Šeyhak, / [he vowed:] 'it is my vow that as long as I live, / I will not lie intentionally'"; Badalkhan 1991, I:246; cf. Elfenbein 1990, II:360-61).

As with the rest of Balochi oral literature, no full-scale collection of the available material about the legend of Šey Murīd and Hānī has been undertaken so far. I have carried out several tours to different parts of Balochistan and collected as much material as possible, but my collection is far from exhaustive. However, different episodes are given in different sources and, as such, one may find one episode in one source but another in another source; no attempts have been made to compile them into a single volume. Only recently, Šād (2000:440-511) has published 16 poems related to this romance, but a number of episodes are still missing in his collection. Here I have also quoted from my field notes, sometimes without page numbers because they still need to be organized systematically.

⁹ H. Marī (1987:127-28) records that Mīr Čākar himself asks Murīd to denounce his engagement with Hānī, but the majority relates the legend as mentioned above. The romance of Hānī and Šey Murīd is one of the most famous legends in Balochi oral tradition. Almost every Baloch, as I can affirm from personal experience as a local

replies in this way (Badalkhan 1991:II, 146):

<i>Šeyhā jawāb gardentag at man Hānīā dāt nabān</i>	The Šey replied [thus], “I cannot break my engagement with Hānī, ¹⁰
<i>manī dištāriey nāme pir int</i>	She takes the name of being betrothed to me,
<i>manī nākoey sawlen duttuk int šumā loṭit mani myāney luṛā</i>	She is the grown-up daughter of my uncle, You should ask me for the sword of my loin as a reward,
<i>dastey du-gošen hanjarā</i>	Ask for the double-edged dagger of my hand,
<i>misri kamān gon jāboā borā gon rakšey kurragā</i>	The Egyptian bow with the quiver, Accept my [riding] mare with the stallion colt,
<i>zeney hazāri markabā</i>	Ask for my riding horse with the saddle worth thousands,
<i>pākeḍa u pull u taḍān</i>	[The riding camel] with its saddle, flowers and ornaments,
<i>guḍa Šey dādinān band nabīt</i>	Then [you will see that] Šey will not hesitate to give rewards,
<i>bali mihr dādinī šeyhe na int.</i>	But love is not something one can give as a reward.”

But the musicians will not accept any gift except for the announcement of the annulment of his engagement with Hānī. They begin mocking him, saying that he is not accustomed to giving gifts and that Mīr

scholar and as a student of oral traditions, remembers some poems or fragments of poems from this legend. Similarly, there is hardly any work on Balochi oral poetry with no mention of the story (see for example, Dames 1907, poem no. XXII; Baluch 1977:244-99; Šād 2000:440-511; Nasīr 1976:93-136; H. Marī 1987:125-66; Hetu Ram 1898:145-46 [the translator has wrongly taken the name Murīd as a word and translated it “attendant”]; Š. M. Marī 2000:101; Hāšmī 1986:73; Qizalbāš 1979:18-28). Breseeg (2001:56) reports that even in Sind, where Baloch have lost their language and speak Sindhi, they sing songs from the cycle of Murīd and Hānī at their wedding celebrations and on other festive occasions. Modern poets also draw on the accounts of Murid, comparing his suffering for his beloved Hānī with their sufferings for their motherland, Balochistan. In this latter case, Nasīr has composed some touching poems comparing his suffering with that of Murīd’s for Hānī. Minstrels from all over Balochistan sing poems from this cycle with great passion, dedication, and veneration. It is always fascinating to be among the audience at such a public performance. It is a pity that the written word, and above all the translation into a second language, cannot convey some of the epic’s passion and musicality.

¹⁰ Lit., “I cannot give Hānī.”

Čākar, the great chief, is the only one worthy of this deed (Badalkhan 1991:II, 146).

<i>pahlawān jawāb gardentag at</i>	The minstrel responded as such:
<i>Šeyhen Murīd gošān bidār</i>	“Šey Murīd, keep your ears attentively open,
<i>taw dādinī marde naey</i>	You are not a man of bestowing gifts,
<i>dādān hamā mard dayant</i>	Only those men give gifts
<i>piren pitān dād dātag ant</i>	Whose ancestors (lit. aged fathers) have given gifts,
<i>dādānī laik Čākar int</i>	[Only] Čākar is worthy of bestowing gifts,
<i>Rindey kawīhen mastir int</i>	Who is the mighty chief of the Rinds,
<i>Sībī kalātey wāja int</i>	[And] is the master of the Sībī fort.”

Now Murīd realizes that he has lost the bet; if he does not keep his vow he will be mocked and future generations will have contempt for his name. So he then and there announces the end of his engagement with Hānī. The poet continues (Badalkhan 1991:II, 147):¹¹

<i>nīn Šeyhā hayāl kut mān dilā</i>	Now Šey thought in his heart,
<i>parčā watī labzā warān</i>	Why should I break [lit. eat, deviate from] my word,
<i>kawmā dap o nāmī bibān,</i>	And become ill-famed among my people?
<i>šartā wa zānān burt manā</i>	I know that I have lost the bet,
<i>drogband bān gon Čākarā</i>	[Why should] I become a liar with Čākar?
<i>Hānī na dīstag čonen kase</i>	I have not seen Hānī and don't know what she looks like.
<i>naey sabzale naey gorage</i>	She is [probably] neither a bronzed one nor a blonde one, ¹²
<i>balken čo mulkey mardume</i>	Maybe she is like any other person of the country,
<i>bāndā manā maṭṭe rasīt</i>	Soon [lit. tomorrow] I will find an equal to her.

Thinking along these lines, he tells the minstrels (Badalkhan 1991:II, 147; cf. Qizalbāš 1979:22):

<i>Hānī manī dašt dar int</i>	“Hānī is beyond my power,
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¹¹ The majority of singers from Makran dramatize this episode so that the audiences laugh at the musician's mockery of Šey Murīd.

¹² That is, of a fair complexion.

<i>dištārīey nāme pir int</i>	She is only nominated as being betrothed to me,
<i>justā ča ā mātā kanit</i>	Ask [for her from] her mother,
<i>mātā u ārīpen pitā</i>	From her mother and her venerated father.”

But when the news is taken to Hānī she rebukes Murīd (Badalkhan 1991:I, 38; cf. Elfenbein 1990:II, 378-79):¹³

<i>tām mard waθī loyī kasān</i>	“Who is the man who gives away the persons of his house,
<i>lozey amullen bānukhān</i>	The precious ladies of his house?
<i>baškī awā kassāna dān</i>	[One] gives as gifts to persons
<i>borā yon tāsen dorawān</i>	His mare with silver stirrups,
<i>jāney amīrī walḍahān</i>	The lordly clothes of his body,
<i>par baškayā mard dayān</i>	Men give such things as gifts.
<i>tām mard waθī māhen janān</i>	Who is the man, who his moon-like ladies
<i>baškī hawā kassāna dān</i>	Gives as gifts to men?
<i>lajj baškayī čīe na int</i>	Honor [i.e., of women of a house/family] is not a thing to be given as a gift.”

And she further rebukes him saying:¹⁴

<i>“O Murīd, taw dīst ki lāngaw</i>	“O Murīd, when you saw that minstrels
<i>pa drohe atkag ant</i>	had come with a plan,
<i>ki Mīr Čākarā parmātag ant</i>	That Mīr Čākar had instigated them,
<i>labb u malāme dātag ant</i>	[He had] given them gifts and compensations,
<i>ki atkān taī kulley dapā</i>	When they had come in front of your house,
<i>watī čang u rabābe sāz kutān</i>	When they had tuned their musical instruments [lit. harps and lutes],
<i>taw dīst ki diga hičč nazīrant</i>	You saw that when they accepted nothing,
<i>ešān šarte ast int</i>	they had a plan [lit. condition],
<i>ki ahān manī nām-i dap int</i>	That they had my name upon their

¹³ Cf. Badalkhan 1991:II, 148 and Š. Marī 1970:60-61. A short variant, given in Gamšād, runs as follows: *marde watī myāney luṛā / mišrī kamān gon jāboā / zeney hazārī markabā / dant pa watī wašnāmīā / hičč kas čušen kār na kant / sangīn-paren dostā na dant* (1998:190-91) (“A man [gives] the steel blade of his loins / his Egyptian bow with quiver / thousands worth of steed with the saddle / gives for his good name / nobody does such a thing / to give his precious and well-regarded beloved”).

¹⁴ Transcribed from the singing of Mullā Kamālān, the most famous minstrel from Iranian Balochistan (Badalkhan 1993:III, 22-38).

	tongues.
<i>dištār kujām čizzen Murīd</i>	Betrothed is a person [lit. what a thing], O Murīd,
<i>ā peym na bitt pa dād u harīd</i>	She cannot be given either as a gift or sold!
<i>to hanjar ča lānkā kaššiten</i>	You had to pull out your dagger from your loin,
<i>ča nukkā zubān it dar kuten</i>	You had to cut [lit. pluck out] their tongues out of their mouths,
<i>nin šuten gon Čākarā gungī</i>	Then they had gone to Mīr Čākar and
<i>kuten</i>	spoken in dumbness,
<i>guḍa taw yakk yādgāre er kuten</i>	Then you would have left a memorable record behind you.”

Murīd, for his part, still believes that Mīr Čākar, as the great chief of the Baloch, would not take his betrothed from him. In one of his poems he says (Badalkhan 1991:II, 148):

man na zāntag ki Čākar-i Šeyhak čoš kant
bārt mani dištārā manā ponz u goš kant

I did not know that Čākar, son of Šeyhak, would behave this way,
He would take away my betrothed and dishonor me [lit. cut my nose and ears].

Soon after the annulment of Murīd’s engagement with Hānī, Mīr Čākar sends messengers to Hānī’s father demanding her hand in marriage. In no time she is married to Mīr Čākar. But Murīd is so shaken by this turn of events that he abandons his former life and passes the days and nights roaming around the palace of Mīr Čākar, composing poems eulogizing Hānī’s beauty and openly expressing his passionate love for her. According to tradition these poems were then memorized by minstrels of the Lāšārī tribe, the tribe at war with the Rinds, and the scandalous news of Murīd’s love for Mīr Čākar’s wife became the talk of every household in Balochistan.

Murīd’s father, Mīr Mubārak, learns that the wandering of his son about the palace of Mīr Čākar Rind has brought a bad name to the Chief and that his bodyguards may harm him. Mubārak tries to convince Murīd to refrain from his actions as follows (Badalkhan 1991:II, 150; cf. Nasīr 1976:108):

bill O Murīd, bill O Murīd “Leave, O Murīd, leave, O Murīd,
bill O Murīd, bad peylān Leave, O Murīd, misdeeds,

<i>bad-peylī o bad-rāhīā</i>	(Leave) misdeeds and wicked actions,
<i>akl o sarey gumrāhīā</i>	(Leave) the deviation of mind and heart.
<i>Čākar taī maṭṭey na int</i>	Čākar is no equal to you,
<i>lakk o hazārey wāja int</i>	He is the master of hundreds of thousands,
<i>zeney sare kull nugrah int</i>	His outer part of the saddle is all made of silver,
<i>aspey lagām peroza int</i>	His horse's bridle is [bedecked] with turquoise,
<i>zene jaz o murwārid int</i>	His saddle is bedecked with precious stones and pearls,
<i>robande lāl o gawhar int</i>	His head cloth is strewn with rubies and gems,
<i>gon čill hazārā swār bīt</i>	He rides with forty thousand of his cavaliers,
<i>pošindag o tāzī sawār</i>	All of them are well-dressed, armed, and expert riders, ¹⁵
<i>pullen payādag bešumār</i>	[Besides, his] flower-like infantry is countless,
<i>taī pujjagey handā na int</i>	He is not in your approach [i.e., you cannot compete with him].”

But, Šey Murīd, aware that the Chief is only an elected official and not superior to others, replies to his father as follows (Badalkhan 1991:II, 150):¹⁶

¹⁵ Lit. expert riders of slender mares.

¹⁶ The version in Baluch (1977:275; trans. p. 290) goes as follows:

<i>ān gon hamzādagān čarhī</i>	He bestrides at the head of thousands of cavalry,
<i>mān waṭhī šad hamzādagān</i>	I only with a hundred of my relatives;
<i>lawhen kamāney wažahān</i>	I am owner of the iron bow,
<i>man dī Murīdān maṛdwaren</i>	I am Murīd, the man killer;
<i>čamsuhr o āšiq dilbaren</i>	A greatly loved lover with red eyes
...	...
<i>bāwar kan O šeh nangaren</i>	O, the generous Sheh,
<i>Čatren kahīrey bādšāh</i>	the king of the Kahīris of Chattur, believe me.

The version recorded in Gamšād runs in this way (1998:82-83):

<i>bābā manī, bābā manī</i>	O my father, O my father
<i>ā Čākaren man dī Šeyān</i>	if he is Čākar, I am Šey too
<i>man ham baden marde nayān</i>	I am not an inferior (lit. bad) man either
<i>Čākar pawānke šartir int</i>	Čākar is a little superior to me
<i>kaṭarey mušte tanga int</i>	the hilt of his dagger is of gold
<i>sardārīey nāme pīr int</i>	he takes the title of the chiefdom
<i>pāge dupečā mastir int</i>	his turban is only bigger by two rolls than mine
<i>ač man gabarre zyāt na int</i>	he is not superior to me even by the value of a coin;
<i>harden baloči jeṛawān</i>	whenever in crises of the Baloch [nation]
<i>man ham waṭī boren bihān</i>	I have, my chestnut mare

*ā Čākar int gar Šeyhakey
man dī Murīdān pulguden
čammsuhr o āšik dilbaren
ač Čākarā kamtir nayān
čamman gabbare gihtiren*

sardārīey nāme pirint

“If he is Čākar [the son] of Šeyhak,
I am too, the Murīd of flowery clothes,
I am the red-eyed, heart-capturing lover,
I am no inferior to Čākar,
He is a bit [lit. value of a coin] superior to
me, as
He has only the title of *Sardār* added to his
name.”

He explains to his father that he has no fear of Mīr Čākar (Qizalbāš 1979:24):

čo manā dāiyān na lolentā

čo manā mātā šīr na mečentā

*sar watī šúmmen Čākarā
pallīn*

“Midwives had not lullabied me in such a
manner,
My mother had not suckled me in such a
way,
That I go into hiding to protect my head
from the wretched Čākar.”

Upon hearing these rude remarks concerning the mighty chief of the Baloch, his father pulls off his shoe and beats Murīd in the assembly of the Rinds (Dames 1907:I, 56; Nasīr 1976:110). Murīd decides to leave the country and visit unknown lands across the seas.¹⁷ He follows a group of mendicants going to perform pilgrimage at the Muslim holy cities of Mecca

*pīskentag o nyāmā jatag
ā gon hazārān čarhī
man gon watī hamzādagān
čamhuhr o āšiq dilbaren
pa ɣeyratey nāmā mir ant
kārčey sariš perozag ant
zahmā pa dantānān gir ant*

*zīr ant tanakken ɖangare
band bar kalātānān na bant*

brought too and placed in the middle [of the army]
he [Mīr Čākar] mounts with thousands [of followers]
I, with my colleagues
[who are] red-eyed and heart-capturing lovers,
who sacrifice their lives for the name of honor
tips of their daggers are of turquoise
[they are such expert swordsmen that] they catch
swords with their teeth
even with a thorny branch of a tree
they cannot be stopped in forts [i.e., even with an
ordinary branch of a tree they capture forts].

Cf. Qizalbāš (1979:26) for another version; see also Mayer 1900-07:III, 17.

¹⁷ Murīd says to his father as such (Nasīr 1976:110):

*bašk int ki arīpen pitey
littir manā tiā jaten
Rindān du demī nārīten
honān ɖagārā rej kuten*

“I forgive you because you are my venerated father.
If another person had hit me with a shoe,
(I would have given such a battle) that the Rinds would
have moaned on both sides,
The blood would have soaked the earth.”

and Medina in Saudi Arabia and remains there, as tradition has it, for 30 years. One of the poems attributed to him states:¹⁸

<i>čīḍ Makkahey čandentagān</i>	[I] shook the ropes at Mecca ¹⁹
<i>gon dast o gunāhen čambawān</i>	With my sinful hands and fingers,
<i>sī sāl hamūdā ništāgān</i>	I spent 30 years there, and
<i>panjāh o panč šeyr guštāgān</i>	I composed 55 poems,
<i>dilmānagān šastiš kanān</i>	My intention is to make them 60 (i.e., before leaving Mecca).

After spending 30 years away, he returns to Sībī in the middle of an archery contest organized by the Rind nobles (Dames 1907:I, 56-57). Attracted by the contest, he asks for an arrow to test his arms in order to see if they retain their prior strength or if his wanderings have weakened them. The nobles do not recognize him but give him a bow and arrow amid mockings and jeers. He bends the bow but it cannot bear the power of his arms and breaks into pieces. They give him another one, which also breaks. After he breaks the third bow, they send someone to fetch the “iron bow” of Šey Murīd, which is made out of steel and is also called *jug* (“yoke”) due to its form and weight (Qizalbāš 1979:27).²⁰ Using this bow he shoots three arrows, passing each one through the end of the other.²¹ Since no man except Šey Murīd has ever been able to bend his “iron bow,” the Rind nobles begin to suspect his identity, which is soon confirmed when it becomes clear that he bears secret signs and marks known only to Hānī. The Rinds ask Mīr Čākar to divorce Hānī so that she may be married to Šey Murīd. Mīr Čākar does so and gives Hānī an immense quantity of gold and other bridal gifts when she is married to Šey Murīd. They spend a single

¹⁸ The number of poems composed at Mecca varies in different versions. In some variants he is said to have composed 77 poems (Badalkhan 1991:II, 149), while in others it is 55 poems (cf. Gamšād 1998:86; Baluch 1977:293; Nasīr 1976:128).

¹⁹ The word *čīḍ* in this line is not known to me. It is found only in M. Marī and Khān (1970, s.v.) where they give the Urdu translation meaning “a curling lock, tress, wreath of flowers tied upon hair” and so on (Dr. Šāh Mahmād Marī also confirmed this meaning). However, I have translated it here as rope because ropes are usually kept hanging at sacred trees and shrines, and people shake them in order to make their prayers heard.

²⁰ In some versions he breaks 18 common bows before his own bow is brought to him (cf. Gamšād 1998:86; Šād 2000:294).

²¹ Gamšād’s variant mentions his shooting seven shafts (1998:86).

night together. On the following day Murīd visits his father's camel herd, chooses a white she-camel, mounts her, and disappears from mortal eyes. He has become the immortal saint of the Baloch, and the common belief among the Baloch is that "until the living world, Šey Murīd remains immortal intoxicated in love" (*tā jahān ast, Šey Murīd mast*) (Nasīr 1976:135 and 1979a:34; Rzehak 1998:174; see also Al-Qādrī 1976:155-63; Š. Marī 1970:56).

Parallels in the *Odyssey*

The story-pattern of Šey Murīd's return and recognition has a number of points in common with that of Odysseus in Homer's *Odyssey*.²² The following section discusses some of their shared features.

(1) Return and Recognition of the Hero

(1.1) Return of the Hero

Both the *Odyssey* and the story of Šey Murīd present the return of the hero in the same manner: both return to their homelands as beggars clad in rags and tattered clothes.²³ However, we read in the *Odyssey* that the goddess Athena disguises Odysseus as a mendicant in order to protect him from being recognized by Penelope's suitors, whom he intends to kill: "She [Athena] shielded him from prying eyes: the goddess did not want him recognized" (*Od.* 13.190-94).²⁴ And in Book 17 Homer further describes the state in

²² A story-pattern has been described as one of those "narrative patterns that, no matter how much the stories built around them may seem to vary, have great vitality and function as organizing elements in the composition and transmission of oral story texts" (A. B. Lord, quoted in Foley 1990:362, n. 7).

²³ The motif of the bridegroom, the husband, or the ex-fiancé returning home in humble disguise, such as that of a beggar, a pilgrim, or a minstrel, is found in many variations in world literature (cf. Page 1976:165). Reichl (1992:148) states that "the best-known example is of course the return of Odysseus in the *Odyssey*; other well-known examples are the romance of *King Horn*, the *bylina* of *Dobrynja and Aljoša*, and the various versions of the epic of *Alpamiš*" (see also Ping-Chiu 1997). Cf. Thompson 1955-58: Motif K1815.1 *Return home in humble disguise*, and K1817.1 *Disguise as beggar*.

²⁴ All quotations from the *Odyssey* have been taken from Allen Mandelbaum's verse translation (1991) unless otherwise stated.

which Odysseus leaves the farm and starts toward the town in the company of the swineherd (197-203):²⁵

He [Odysseus] flung his miserable sack,
in tatters, round his shoulders, with a strap.
Eumæus handed him the welcome staff.
So they went off together; . . .
Along the road to town, Eumæus led;
his master, dressed in rags, seemed but a sad
old beggar as he leaned upon his staff.

Murīd, on the other hand, has truly become a mendicant and lives the life of an ascetic. He returns to Sībī in shabby clothes with his hair hanging down to his waist; his once-curly moustache has grown so long that it is indistinguishable from his beard. In the company of a band of beggars he passes himself off as an anonymous mendicant begging for alms at the palace of Mīr Čākar Khān Rind. The poet recounts the episode as follows (Badalkhan 1991:I, 164; cf. Nasīr 1976:122):

<i>mīyyā kābulī dar kapt ant</i>	Beggars of Kābul came forward together,
<i>kačkol u asāiš zurt ant</i>	They took their begging bowls and staffs,
<i>dem pa Hānīey čār kullā</i>	[Went] toward the beautiful house of Hānī, they
<i>allāhe jat u oštātān</i>	Called the name of God and stood there [to receive alms].

The maidservant gives bowls filled with grain to each mendicant, but when she presents this food to Murīd, whose eyes are fixed upon lady Hānī and her stature, he counters (Nasīr 1976:125):

<i>bībī, man na zīrān dānān</i>	“Madam, I won’t accept grain,
<i>mīyāe nayān šām piṇḍen</i>	I am not a food-begging beggar,
<i>pamman pakkagen čunde biyār</i>	Bring a piece of baked bread for me,
<i>logāḍen sarey šodokān</i>	[A bowl full of] the water with which she (i.e., lady Hānī) has washed her head.”

(1.2) Recognition by a Maidservant

We are told that when Šey Murīd does not accept alms and keeps

²⁵ Cf. also 17.336-41.

fixing his eyes upon lady Hānī, the maidservant grows suspicious. She rebukes him and sends him away. When Hānī reprimands her, she defends herself by saying that this is not a common beggar, that he must be a cheater either from Kābul or from Sind:

<i>bībī, e mīyyāe na int dān</i>	“Madam, this is not a grain-begging
<i>pinḍen</i>	ascetic,
<i>e Sind u Kābulī sarrāpe</i>	He must be a cheater either from Sind or
	from Kābul,
<i>e mīyyāh nazūrīt dānān</i>	This ascetic does not accept grain,
<i>čamme Hānguley durrān ant</i>	His eyes are fixed upon the earrings of
	flower-like Hānī,
<i>burzā misk-hawāren jiggā</i>	Upon her musk-scented bodice,
<i>jahlā mān gwar u dilbandān</i>	Down on her breasts and bosom.”

We find a parallel in the *Odyssey* when Eurycleia, the old and faithful nurse of Odysseus, recognizes her master when Penelope asks her to wash his feet. She says to Odysseus: “Though many strangers, / sore-tried, have landed here, I say that I / have never seen a man so like Odysseus / as you are—in your form, your voice, your feet” (19.378-81).

(1.3) *Encounter with Wife/Beloved and the Delay in Recognition*

In both traditions the hero encounters the wife or beloved. In the *Odyssey* Penelope decides to have a meeting with Odysseus in the hall, where she asks him for news of her husband, not realizing that the man in front of her is the one for whom she has been desperately waiting for almost twenty years. Penelope asks Eumæus, the swineherd, to bring her the stranger (17.508-11):

“Go, good Eumæus, bring the stranger here.
I want to greet him and to hear if
he has the news of brave Odysseus or has seen
my lord with his own eyes; he seems to be
a man who’s wandered far, to many lands.”

However, Odysseus invents false stories and hides his true identity from Penelope. There is a parallel in the legend of Šey Murīd: Hānī decides to interview one of the band of mendicants to learn whether they have seen Murīd at Mecca.²⁶ So she stops Murīd and asks him (Nasīr 1976:122-23;

²⁶ It is worth noting here that our poet relocates Murīd and his companions from the sea directly to the vicinity of Sībī (cf. Šād 2000:465-66; Nasīr 1976:121-22;

cf. Šād 2000:466; Badalkhan 1991:II, 170-71; Farīdī 1983:66):

<i>kāey ča Makka-ā darband-ā</i> ²⁷	“You come from the courtyard of Mecca,
<i>gal kan, daey manā ahwāle</i>	Speak, give me the news,
<i>mīyyāe na disten čošēn</i>	Have you not seen an ascetic?
<i>hančo ki taen warnāe</i>	A young one like you
<i>nāme Šey Murīd u teg int</i>	Who is called Šey Murīd, the swordsman?”

But, like Odysseus, Šey Murīd hides his true identity and responds to Hānī as follows (Nasīr 1976:123):²⁸

<i>bībī, daryā mān tahā begwāz</i>	“Madam, [the way] the sea is measureless
<i>int</i>	in the open,
<i>miyyā Makkah-ā sak bāz int</i>	[In the same way] ascetics in Mecca are too many,
<i>bale čošēn mard parādān nesten</i>	But no such man is there among them,
<i>ki nāme Šey Murīd u teg int</i>	Whose name is Šey Murīd, the swordsman.”

On another occasion, just before the trial of the bow, we learn that Hānī is the first to know of Murīd’s arrival though she does not disclose this to anyone. The poet delays public recognition of his return until the archery contest, since it is the main recognition test. Hānī recognizes Murīd on an outing with several of the Rind noblewomen. In an open field they see a band of six mendicants proceeding toward the town. She immediately

Badalkhan 1991:II, 169; Farīdī 1983:66), hundreds of kilometers inland, while Hānī seems to be watching the arrival of the ship from a sand dune in the outskirts of Sībī where she sees small boats bring passengers and goods from a vessel anchored on the open sea. I asked several bards how Hānī could have seen the boat bringing Murīd. Most became perplexed by my question because they had never asked themselves this before, but Sāleh Mahmad Gorgej told me that Mīr Čākar would often come to spend the summer in the area of Habb, west of Karachi, since Sībī becomes extremely hot. What may be worthy of notice here is that both Murīd and Odysseus return to their homelands by sea.

²⁷ *Makka-ā* should be *Makkahey* (i.e., of Mecca). The literal meaning of *darband* is “main entrance,” but this meaning does not seem to fit the usage on several occasions in this legend.

²⁸ It is surprising that Murīd, despite his reputation as an ascetic with a saintly demeanor, lies to Hānī about his identity. Clinton, discussing a similar case in the *Shāhnāme*, opines that “it is a common convention in heroic tales that heroes both lie and think themselves honest men” (2001:32; cf. also Clinton 1999:224).

perceives that Murīd is leading them (H. Marī 1987:162-63):

*ān šaš malangā sar khuṭā
aḡ ki hudā droḡo makhant
diwānayeṅ Šeh pa saren
gon čambawey čhandenayā*

*gon kofayey loḍdenayā
geštir gon loḍ u mallagān
kamtir gon šerī ṭilliḡān*

“There appeared six mendicants,
If God may not make me a liar,
The ‘mad’ Šey [Murīd] is leading them,
[I recognize him] by the movement of his
hands [while walking],
By the swaying of his shoulders,
[But] mostly from his walking style,
To a lesser extent, from his elegant
lion-like swaying.”

However, Hānī keeps the secret to herself and, pretending that she is not feeling well, asks her companions to turn back immediately. Later, when as a result of the archery contest a messenger is sent to Hānī to ask her about Murīd’s special marks, she seems to be unaware of Murīd’s arrival: she promises a huge reward to the messenger if the news of Murīd’s homecoming turns out to be true (see below).

(1.4) *Recognition Through the Trial of the Bow*

Both Murīd and Odysseus enter their home towns as archery contests are either in progress or about to begin. In the *Odyssey* nobles from Ithaca and the surrounding areas are gathered in the house of Odysseus, consuming his food and waiting for Penelope to conclude that her husband is dead and marry one of them. Penelope, tired of the suitors’ arrogance, organizes an archery contest, saying that she will marry the one who strings the mighty bow of Odysseus with the greatest ease and shoots a shaft through twelve axeheads. At this time Odysseus’s return is known only to his son, the old housemaid, and the swineherd. When Penelope fetches the bow for the archery contest, she weeps over it, remembering “her dear lord” before she brings it to the suitors (21.42-60).²⁹ She addresses the suitors as follows (21.73-76):

“Come, suitors, stand—for you can win your prize.
You see divine Odysseus’ mighty bow;
Whoever strings this bow with greatest ease

²⁹ We find that the presentation of bows, both in the *Odyssey* and the *Ramayana* (see below), is greatly elaborated. In Murīd’s case, the bringing of the bow is recounted in simple words because the poet needs to underscore that it has been treated carelessly in its master’s absence. However, when the poet wants to highlight how the hero weeps for the condition of his iron bow, the handling of the bow by Murīd is elaborated.

will be the man I follow.”

Many nobles try to bend the bow but to no avail. They have decided to suspend the competition until the following day when Odysseus begs them to let him test the power of his arms, saying “Do I possess / the force that once informed my supple limbs, / or am I weak from wandering and neglect?” (21.282-84). The nobles grow enraged, fearing that he might string the bow, and they ask the servant not to give it to him. But Penelope intervenes, observing that “it is neither honourable nor just to deny his due to any guest of Telemachus who has come to this house. If the stranger here has trust enough in his strength of arm to string the great bow of King Odysseus, do you think he is then to lead me home as bride? He himself—I am sure of it—has no such ambition in his heart” (21.311-16; Shewring 1980:261). Despite fervent protest by the suitors, Penelope orders that the bow should be given to Odysseus.

The swineherd then carries the bow to Odysseus (21.393-97, 405-13):

[Odysseus,] bow now in hand, intent upon
its sides, its every part: he turned it round
and round, again, again—afraid that when he,
master of the bow, was far from home,
worms might have worked their mischief on the horns.

...

Odysseus, now, had scanned the bow on every side; and just as one
expert in song and harping works with ease
when he is called upon to stretch a string
around new pegs and so at either end
makes fast the twisted gut—just so, Odysseus’
stringing of that great bow was effortless.
Then he took up the bow with his right hand,
he tried the string; it sang as clearly as
a swallow’s note.

After checking and caressing the bow (21.419-23),

Then . . . he laid that arrow on the bridge, then drew
the bowstring and notched shaft. His aim was true:
he shot clean through each axehead in that row;
not one was missed; through every socket hollow
the shaft had passed—the heavy, bronze-tipped arrow.

All the nobles were startled with this show of strength and recognized that he was Odysseus, for no other man could have strung the bow with such

ease and mastery.³⁰

In the case of Murīd, the Rind nobles are gathered for an archery contest just for sport, since it was a favorite pastime of the Chakarian age (cf. Baluch 1965:118). The poet relates that the Rind nobles notice the curiosity and interest of the leader of beggars (Murīd) in the archery contest and are startled (Badalkhan 1991:I, 86, 45):³¹

Rindān turāe aḍḍitag

The Rinds have organized a target-hitting
contest

Patihpūrey burjey sarā

At the tower of Patehpūr,³²

³⁰ Cf. the story of Rama bending Lord Shiva's bow and also the story of Alpamiš, the Turkic oral epic known to a great number of Turkic peoples from the Aegean to the Altai (Reichl 1992:160), where only Alpamiš is capable of handling of the bow of his grandfather Alpinbiy (*ibid.*:164). See also Thompson 1955-58: Motif 31.2, *Recognition by unique ability to bend bow*. The archery contest is also present in the South Slavic Muslim epic tradition. Mary P. Coote (1981:17) writes that "Beyrek competes in archery with the wedding guests on his return, displaying strength too great for any bow but his own." Similarly, in "Dobrynja and Vasilij Kazimirov," Dobrynja "wins the shooting contest by bending his own heroic bow that presumably only he can handle" (*idem*, emphasis added).

³¹ In some versions it is Šey Murīd himself who asks for a bow and arrow (cf. Nasīr 1976:129; Baluch 1977:280, 294; H. Marī 1987:163; Sābir 1978:91). In other versions one of the Rind nobles proposes giving a bow and arrow to "the leader of the mendicants" (cf. Badalkhan 1991:I, 45 where Hasan Maulānag makes this proposition). Yet in some other versions it is Mīr Čākar Rind who suggests giving the leader of the beggars a bow and arrow upon seeing his extreme interest and curiosity in the archery contest (cf. Baluch 1977:281-82, 294).

The archery episode is present, as far as I know, only in eastern versions of the epic (cf. Dames 1907:I, 57; H. Marī 1987:148-49, 163; Badalkhan 1991, recorded in Dera Bugti and among Marī informants in Quetta; Baluch 1977:280-82, 293-95; Sābir 1978:89-95). It is also recorded in Gul Khān Nasīr (1976:128-31), who has not given the provenance of the material collected by him. It is reported too in Rzehak (1998:170-71), who quotes the episode from a MS. by Abdulrahmān Pahwāl from Afghani Balochistan. It cannot be said with any certainty from which part of the Baloch land Pahwāl has collected his material, but the close verbal similarity with Nasīr's versions makes me suppose that he might have taken the information from Nasīr.

³² In the majority of versions the archery contest takes place "behind the palace of Mīr Čākar" (*Mīr Čākarey koṭey bunā*, cf. Nasīr 1976:128; Baluch 1977:280, 293), but in the above quoted version, which I recorded in Dera Bugti in 1991, the archery contest is organized at Mīr Čākar's fort at Patihpūr. The oral tradition recounts that Mīr Čākar had four forts in the area of Sībī: one in Sībī, one in Sorān, one in Patehpūr (a few kilometers to the south of Gandāwa [Baluch 1965:160]), and one in Gidar (a few kilometers west of Bhāg [H. Marī 1987:143]).

<i>Rind m̄an turāyā lev at ant</i>	Rinds were busy with the game of target-hitting.
<i>atkā pakīrī wallare</i>	There came a band of beggars,
<i>gwaštā pakīrey mastirā</i>	Said the leader of the beggars:
<i>yakke bidait ta manā</i>	“Give [a bow] also to me,
<i>man dī diley zangan kušān</i>	I, too, will remove [lit. kill] the rust of my heart.”

At first the Rind nobles treat him with a certain amount of disrespect on account of his shabby appearance, laughing at him and asking how a mendicant clad in tattered clothes could bend a bow and hit a target (Nasīr 1976:129; Rzehak 1998:170-71):³³

<i>awwalī-iš dāt int par maland</i>	They gave him the first [bow] to make fun of him,
<i>pruštā kamān bītā kaland</i>	[But when he stretched it] it broke into pieces and became useless,
<i>duhmī-iš dāt int par hunar</i>	They gave him the second [bow] with more contemplation,
<i>pruštā kamān-ey band u sar</i>	[But as he stretched it] its head and cords broke into pieces,
<i>sihmī-iš dāt int pa gumān</i>	They gave him the third [bow] with suspicion,
<i>sey ṭukkur at pešā kamān</i>	[But when he stretched it, it broke into pieces as] it was already in three pieces. ³⁴

When the Rind nobles see the beggar’s extraordinary strength and his skill at handling a bow they decide to retrieve for him “Murīd Khān’s bow.” The epic tells us that this famous weapon had been tossed in a pen for sheep and goats after the “master of the iron bow” had departed and it had no owner to care for it. Because of its weight and toughness, it was useless in the hands of anyone else. When it is turned over to him, Šey Murīd caresses

³³ Cf. also H. Marī 1987:163 and Badalkhan 1991:85, where there are only verbal changes in the description of this episode. In most of the versions the episode of archery contest is recounted with minor verbal changes, but, since we are more concerned here with the story than the textual analysis of the epic, we do not analyze variations among different versions (for details on textual variations in Balochi epic poetry, see Badalkhan 1994: part III and 2002a).

³⁴ In some versions Murīd is said to have broken 18 bows before he is brought his own (cf. Baluch 1977:294; Gamšād 1998:86; Sābir 1978:91), but the majority record three bows (cf. H. Marī 1987:148).

and kisses it, gently touching the strings as if they belonged to a sacred instrument; he scrutinizes every inch (Mayer 1900-07:III, 18). The poet describes the presentation of the bow and his reaction upon seeing its pitiful condition (Badalkhan 1991:I, 45-46; cf. Sābir 1978:93-95):

<i>Byārey Murīd Khāney juḡā</i>	[The nobles said:] “bring the ‘yoke’ of Murīd Khān.” ³⁵
<i>“ārtiš manī lôhen kamān lôhen kamān gon jābawā ohey manī lôhen kamān ākhir ki be wāza u be bānukey</i>	“They brought me my iron bow, ³⁶ The iron bow with the quiver, Ah, to my iron bow, Definitely you are without a master or a mistress,
<i>čer-i tagirdān kaptagey sar manjagān gassentayān</i>	You are thrown under mats, Your heads [i.e., both ends] are consumed by <i>manjahs</i> ³⁷
<i>čakkā šanikkān drikkiṭhā</i>	Baby-goats have played [lit. jumped] upon you,
<i>sarhoš šanikkān čarṭayān</i>	Your adorning flowers are plucked by baby-goats, ³⁸
<i>band čorawān resentayān</i>	Your bands have been disbanded by children,
<i>nambān u nodān misentayān drāh morčag u zangān jaṭhā diṭhā kamān mān kāhalā mawžen dilā akkīr kuṭhā čammān juḡī jehar kutā greta man u gretā dilā goḡaw trakhoken trīnziṭhān</i>	Mist and clouds have moistened you, You are fully covered by stains and rust. I saw my bow in these conditions, My yearning heart bewailed, My eyes shed tears like a monsoon cloud, Wept me and wept my heart. When the obstinate round tears splashed [enough] from my eyes, ³⁹

³⁵ Murīd’s bow is called *lôhen kamān* (“iron-bow”) as well as *juḡ* (“yoke”).

³⁶ The word *lôh* is probably a contraction of *lôhā*, “iron” in Hindi and Urdu (cf. *Ferozsons Urdu-English Dictionary*, Lahore, n.d.: s.v.), thus *lôhen* “of iron.” *Lôh* also means a plank of wood, but I believe that here it refers to iron and not to something else (cf. *lohī*, “iron kettle”). *Lawhen kamān* has also been translated as “iron bow” in Dames 1907:57; Baluch 1977:275 ff.; and Rzehak 1998:170.

³⁷ *Manjah* is a raised wooden platform usually used for piling up mattresses, quilts, and the like.

³⁸ In the majority of cases Baloch youths adorn their musical instruments and arms with artificial flowers made of bunches of threads and the like.

³⁹ My sincere thanks are due to Dr. Shah Mahmud Marī from Quetta for suggesting the translation of this line: *goḡaw* (round [tears]), *trakhok* (agitated, restless,

<i>jahlā barotān dāštayon</i>	I placed it below my moustache [i.e., upon the lips to kiss it],
<i>dān habbaṛā zyārat kuṭhā</i>	I venerated [lit. performed pilgrimage to] it seven times,
<i>khonḍān bīt u jīg kuṭhā</i>	I sat on my knees and strung it,
<i>ersāzat u man sāz kuṭhā.</i>	It was out of tune, and I tuned it.” ⁴⁰

Then, as a master archer, he rolls up his beggar’s mantle, bends the bow with great skill, and shoots three arrows from it passing one from the hole left by the previous one (cf. Sābir 1978:93). The poet describes the sequence as follows (Badalkhan 1991:I, 46; cf. Dames 1907:I, 57):

<i>say tīr ham relā jaṭhā</i>	“I shot three shafts one following the other, ⁴¹
<i>tīrā hawā tīrā jaṭhā</i>	The shaft hit [the end of] the shaft,
<i>Rindey nišān borentayon</i>	I smashed the target of the Rinds,
<i>Rindān hamedā šakk kuṭhā</i>	The Rinds began to suspect here.”

The suspicion of the Rinds that this beggar is in fact Šey Murīd is stated thus (cf. Nasīr 1976:130; Dames 1907:I, 57):

obstinate), *trīnzay* (to splash). Cf. Penelope’s tears when she fetches Odysseus’ bow (*Od.* 21.55-56).

⁴⁰ The version in Baluch records the event as follows: “Said the mighty (Mir) Čākar, / Bring the iron-bow (lit. yoke) of Murīd, / Give it to the mendicant, / Put it next to the mendicant, / He had it brought and cleaned it up, / He had it brought and adjusted it, / I saw it and my heart wept, / ... / Tears flew from my eyes, / My lone head deplored, / My iron-bow spoke to me, / “My master of kingly demeanour, / Of kingly and beautiful manners and appearance, / Arrows are not fit for you, / They are fallen in crust and rust, / They were thrown under stands for utensils and mattresses, / From the sky they were damped by clouds”; / I put in order my tattered clothes of beggary, / For seven times I paid homage to it (as if it was a sacred holy book or shrine), / I kissed its head and put it (as a sign of respect and veneration) against my eyes, / It was out of tune and I tuned it (i.e., adjusted and tightened the string), / It was unstrung and I strung it, / Arrows followed the dust of arrows, / I shot three arrows to the target (consisting of a piece of rug), / Each arrow hit the target” (1977:280-82 for the Balochi text and pp. 294-95 for the English translation. I have made minor modifications in Baluch’s translation where I felt they were necessary).

⁴¹ In the version given in Sābir (1978:95) he shoots seven shafts, “each one passing through the hole left by the first one” (Dr. Š. M. Marī’s recitation of this episode also mentioned seven shafts; this version probably comes from the Marī area).

ā Šey Murīd int pulguden [Surely] he is Šey Murīd of flowery
clothes,
čamm-suhr u āšik dilbaren, The red-eyed, heart-capturing lover,⁴²
lawhen kamān-ey wāja int The master of the “iron bow.”

(1.5) *Recognition by Scar*

Both of our heroes have special signs by which they are finally identified. Our legend recounts that after the trial of the bow the Rind nobles stop Murīd and a servant is sent to ask Hānī for Murīd’s distinguishing signs and marks, which she would know because they had played together as children. Hānī responds to the servant’s question as follows (Badalkhan 1991:I, 47):

Hāno ki ham čošā gušit Hānī responds in this way:
mā ki kasānā leyv kuθa “When we used to play in childhood,
mā našk o nišāni e kuθa We left these marks and signs,
ṭikke mān čappen zānsaren A sign on the upper left thigh,
mey manguli-ā rand kuθa My bracelet had left that sign;
yakke mān burwānā paden Another one is behind the eyebrow.”⁴³

And she adds:

gind ki našk o nišān “See if the signs and marks correspond,
gwāhenagān
ta man Rinden janān meṭ khanān Then I will congregate the Rind women,
bandān sarīā gaṛdinā I will tie my head-scarf round my neck,⁴⁴

⁴² The adjective “red-eyed” is generally used for brave young men in the bloom of youth because of their formidable appearance. However, “red-eyed” is also used for those lovers who lay awake either in the company of their beloveds, waiting for them, or suffering in their absence.

⁴³ Cf. Nasīr 1976:132. In another recording, which I also made in Dera Bugti in 1991 (Badalkhan 1991:II, 47), Hānī replies to the messenger as follows:

mā ki kasānā leyv kuθa When we used to play in the childhood,
našk o nišāni mā hame kuθa We left the following marks and signs,
mundrī man zānā šer šuθā My ring penetrated down his thigh (and left a scar),
(while, on another occasion)
daste kazāhī dranziθā I suddenly spread (lit. scattered) my hand, and
ṭikke gwarey burwānāyā Left a scar above his eyebrow.

⁴⁴ To tie the head-scarf round the neck is a symbol of supplication. In Baloch society if a woman interferes in a rivalry, enmity, or even in the middle of an armed

<i>bīngīe zirān littirā</i>	Like a dog I will take [in my mouth] the slipper, ⁴⁵
<i>key zānt Murīdā ber dayān</i>	Who knows, I may succeed in bringing back Murīd,
<i>Hānī o miskānī Murīd</i>	[So that] Hānī may join the musk-perfumed Murīd.”

When the Rinds check the signs, Šey Murīd is recognized. Mīr Čākar responds thus to Murīd’s return (Badalkhan 1991:I, 48; cf. Nasīr 1976:128-34):

<i>Čākar ki ham čošā gušit</i>	Now Čākar said as follows:
<i>“mā naškān Murīd pedāwaren</i>	“Murīd is recognized [lit. evident] through the signs,
<i>byā nind u Šeyhey gwarā</i>	Come, [O Hānī,] and sit next to Šey Murīd,
<i>Hāno Murīd bakšen tarā;”</i>	Hānī, Murīd is bestowed to you;”
<i>Hāno u birrānī Murīd</i>	Hānī and Murīd of the wilderness;
<i>Hāno ki daste šuhār</i>	When Hānī stretched her hand [toward Murīd],
<i>gipte mān rāsten čambawā</i>	He held her with his right hand,
<i>mān sand u bandān er kuten.</i>	And entered into her body and spirit. ⁴⁶

A scar also serves as evidence of the hero’s identity in the *Odyssey* when Odysseus is recognized by the scar left by the white tusk of a boar on his leg just above the knee. He is first recognized by his old and faithful nurse, Eurycleia, when she washes his feet (19.361-507) and later when Odysseus discloses his identity to the swineherd and the cowherd just before the beginning of the archery contest in his hall (21.205-25). However, in both cases the recognition is kept secret because the poet is determined to make the archery contest the main proof of identity, and all other recognition signs should occur after that (it is exactly the same in the legend of Murīd as we have just seen). After the archery contest when Odysseus’s father does not recognize him initially, the old man asks Odysseus to give him an irrefutable sign of his identity. Odysseus tells him: “First mark this scar; /

conflict between two rival groups, the men are bound by honor to stop fighting and settle the matter peacefully.

⁴⁵ Meaning to downgrade her status to that of a dog begging him to stay with her and not depart anymore.

⁴⁶ Meaning that the touch of Murīd’s hand was so strong that she felt it throughout her body and soul.

you see the wound inflicted by a boar, / the one whose white tusks gored me on Parnassus” (24.331-33).

(1.6) *The Bath*

The hero’s bath and donning of new clothes is another common theme present in both legends. Murīd’s bath occurs at his marriage to Hānī, when she calls her people to bathe him and dress him in new clothes. The poet recounts (Badalkhan 1993:III, 36; cf. Šād 2000:505, from a recording of Mullā Kamālān [cf. Farīdī 1983:71]):

<p><i>atkā Murīd diwānahan</i> <i>man nazzīk gwarey</i> <i>šīmmoštagān</i> <i>dast u gulāešon kutag</i> <i>pešānion drūt dātag at</i> <i>byā O Murīd diwānahan</i></p> <p><i>mey dawr nīn pa dubāra</i> <i>atkaḡān</i></p> <p>...</p> <p><i>twāron pamā halkā jatag</i> <i>pa nākog u trīgī pussagān</i></p> <p><i>byā it šumā yalā jānšod kan it</i> <i>atkā pa sīrī šādihān</i></p> <p><i>šeren yalā jānšod kan it</i> <i>sīrī libāsān pir kan it.</i> <i>man mahramen jāhe šutān</i> <i>misk u zabād man mentagān</i></p> <p><i>šiptān pame man mahparān</i> <i>bānorīey šarren libās</i> <i>man pa murāde pir kutān</i></p> <p><i>man hančo gulāešon kutag</i></p>	<p>“Murīd, the mad, came, I [Hānī] slipped into his nearness, I took his hand and embraced him, I kissed his forehead, [I told him,] come, O Murīd, the mad one, Our epoch has returned once again; ... I gave a call to the town’s [folk], [I called] the offspring of [my] uncles and aunts,⁴⁷ You come and bathe the companion, He has come for the merriments of weddings, Bathe the lion-like companion, Dress him in wedding clothes; I went to a private place, I soaked musk and <i>zabād</i> [a strong, musky perfume], I rubbed them on my tresses, [I took out] the beautiful bridal clothes, I put them on with a great desire, [I went to him and] I embraced him with great eagerness.”</p>
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The theme of bathing, anointing, and donning new clothes is also present in the *Odyssey*, where it occurs seven times, but here we shall quote

⁴⁷ In some versions she is said to have called the servants (*twāron pa kārdārān jata*; Badalkhan MS 1993:III, 107).

only the episode in Book 23, which takes place soon after the trial of the bow and the killing of the suitors.⁴⁸ The poem states (23.150-60, 163-64):

. . . Eurynomē, the housewife, bathed
in his own halls the resolute Odysseus,
then smoothed his body down with oil and cast
a tunic round his back. That done, Athena,
the gray-eyed goddess, made him more robust
and taller, and she gave him thicker hair,
which flowed down from his head in curls and clusters
that seemed much like the hyacinth in flower.

. . . .

When he came from the bath and reached the hall,
his form was like the form of the immortals.

(1.7) *Recognition by a Parent*

In his 1960 study of the Greek and South Slavic return-songs, Lord maintains that the recognition of the returning hero by his parent “is a well-established element in the general story of return” and the “recognition by a parent is a necessary element in the story and a regularly recurring part of the theme of recognitions” (177).⁴⁹ In the same way we find recognition by a parent for both Murīd and Odysseus taking place after the accomplishment of the archery contest. In the case of Murīd, tradition has it that his father’s blindness results from his grief at Murīd’s absence and the lack of news about him.⁵⁰ However, despite his blindness he recognizes his son from the hissing sound of the shafts shot from his “iron bow.” The poet recounts this moment in Murīd’s voice (Badalkhan 1991:I, 46; cf. Nasīr 1976:131; Sābir 1978:138; and Rzehak 1998:171):

gwaštā manī pīren pitā

Said my aged father:

⁴⁸ For a detailed discussion of the bath theme in the *Odyssey*, see Foley 1990:248-57.

⁴⁹ Lord observes that the order of recognition in South Slavic epics supports the placement of recognition by the parent after that by the wife: “There seems then to be reason to believe that the singer of the *Odyssey* was following a common practice in the order of recognitions in respect to that of wife, parent” (1960:178).

⁵⁰ We are also told that his mother is alive, but she is not discussed much in the legend (cf. Sābir 1978:95 where the poem mentions that both the parents heard the hissing sound of the arrows and knew that they were Murīd’s shafts shot from his “iron bow”).

<i>tīrānān marčī hinžagen</i>	“Arrows are hissing today [due to the force of their propulsion],
<i>čammān manīān rošinen</i>	A new light has come into my eyes,
<i>e Šey Murīd-ey gonḍal ant</i>	These are [surely] the shafts of Šey Murīd,
<i>lawhen jugā darkaptag ant</i>	They have been shot from his iron-yoke [i.e., the bow].”

We find the same parallel in the Greek epic when Odysseus goes to visit his father at the farm outside of town (24.225-32):

But he
did find his father there; he saw Laertes:
alone, he spaded soil around a sapling;
his clothes were miserable, filthy, patched;
to shield his shins from scratches, he had wrapped
two greaves of stitched cowhide and, on his hands,
wore gloves to fend off thorns; a goatskin cap
was on his head. He held his sadness fast.

However, Odysseus, despite having put on his splendid armor before leaving the palace, is not recognized by his father. Lord notes that “when he accosts his father, Odysseus pretends that he has just arrived in the island and inquires if he is really in Ithaca and if that old man knows anything about a friend of his named Odysseus” (1960:179). Lord calls this delay tactic “a multiform of the recognition theme by another multiform of the theme” (*idem*)—because Laertes is not blind an alternative form of delayed recognition is played out here (he opines that the only alternative to this recognition scene would have been one in which Laertes was blind; *ibid.*:178). Odysseus then reveals his identity to his father and they embrace.

(2) The Recounting of Sufferings

After countless sufferings both Odysseus and Murīd return home, the former in the twentieth year, the latter after 30 years. During the long period of absence both have endured all types of hardships, sufferings, and miseries. In Book 7 Odysseus describes his sufferings to Alkinoos, saying, “If you know men / who have endured much suffering, you can see / me as one of them. And I could tell / of more trials and griefs the god have willed” (211-14).⁵¹ Similarly, Murīd describes his sufferings to the band of his

⁵¹ Marincola (1997:9) argues that “this suffering, like his exploration, enables Odysseus to be the most experienced and knowing of men. It is precisely because the

fellow mendicants who ask him why he suffers so much that he neither sleeps himself nor allows others to sleep because of his moans and groans. He replies thus:⁵²

<i>gamzadī bāre man čame hijrā</i>	“I have heavy burdens of grief
<i>giptagān</i>	from this separation,
<i>ney jarīš zúrānt ney du-dantāniš</i>	[They are so heavy that] neither young
<i>čist kanān</i>	nor mature camels can carry them,
<i>leđahiš čātren pa diley nākāme</i>	Only full grown camels may carry them
<i>barān</i>	with desperate hearts,
<i>āhinī palkān gon manī bālādā</i>	They are like iron slabs fixed to my body,
<i>juđān</i>	
<i>teyl u zamzillān bir manī</i>	Like fetters and chains fallen around my
<i>guṭṭā kaptagān</i>	neck.”

(3) Departure to the Unknown World

After Hānī is married to Murīd they spend a single night together, but Murīd does not allow her to come near him. On the following day Hānī tells the people that Murīd no longer cares for her and that he has become indifferent toward her. Murīd for his part explains to Hānī that when he was capable of having a wife and desired to remain in the company of the Rinds they did not give him the opportunity, but now he is no longer in a position to have a wife. The poet recounts (Nasīr 1976:133):

<i>Hānī nīn pakkāron na int</i>	“Now Hānī is no more needed by me.
<i>roče ki pakkār at manā</i>	The day when I needed her,
<i>Rindān manā Hānī na dāt</i>	The Rinds did not give Hānī to me,
<i>brātān manā brāt na kurt</i>	Brothers [i.e., tribesmen] did not call me
	their brother,
<i>mān meṛawān gwānkon na jat</i>	They did not call me in their assemblies.”

Murīd concludes (Nasīr 1976:134):

<i>bāndā hudā roče bikant</i>	“God may bring a day tomorrow,
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gods have placed such troubles upon him that he grows in knowledge, as he learns from suffering.” It is the same in the case of Murīd, who achieves the highest status of sainthood during his lifetime and becomes immortal without experiencing the bitter taste of death (see below).

⁵² The text has been transcribed from the singing of Nūrmahmad Nūral, cassette vol. 45, recorded for Fāzul Recording Company, Dera Dubai (n.d., 1980s?) (cf. Gamšād 1998:85; Barker and Mengal 1969:II, 321-22; Nasīr 1979a:35; Sābir 1978:137-39).

kārān jare jammāz bān I will bring a young she-camel and, riding
on it,
jahlā ki yā bālā rawān I will go either west or east.”

On the following day he selects a white she-camel from his father’s herd, says goodbye to the people, mounts the camel, and disappears, never to return as a mortal.⁵³ He and his camel are believed to be immortal, and they are still seen wandering in deserts providing help to needy persons and guiding lost travelers. Baloch commonly believe that *tā jahān ast, Šey Murīd mast* (“Until the living world, Šey Murīd lives intoxicated [in divine love]”) (Nasīr 1976:135; 1979a:34; Rzehak 1998:174; see also Al-Qādri 1976:155-63).

A departure to an unknown world is also present in the *Odyssey*. Lord observes (1960:182-83, emphasis added) that

Odysseus not only went on further travels but that those further travels were somehow connected with the other world from which he had just come. Everything in oral tradition points to the conclusion that at this moment in the story of Odysseus’ return there should be departure from Penelope and another visit to that strange world from which the hero had been rescued or released.

(4) The Hero as Poet

Another parallel between Odysseus and Šey Murīd worth mentioning is that both are famed poets. We learn that “Odysseus is not only a great liar and raconteur, but a true bard who composes originally (as contrasted with the rhapsode who recites songs composed by others)” (Friedrich 1997:310). Murīd, for his part, is considered to be one of the greatest poets in Balochi (cf. G. F. Baloč n.d.:20), and some later poets claimed that they received inspiration and benediction from him (cf. M. K. Marī 1991:90-91). One of the poems attributed to him records him saying: *aptād u apt dāgon kutag, / aptād u apt šeyron jatag, / mān Makkahey ganjen darā* (“I have branded my body at 77 points, / and composed 77 poems, / at the affluent place of Mecca”; Badalkhan 1991:II, 149).⁵⁴

⁵³ Nasīr 1976:134; cf. Rzehak 1998:172; Š. Marī 1970:56. In some traditions Hānī also rode with him and both disappeared from mortal eyes (cf. Qizalbāš 1979:28; Al-Qādri 1976:158; Farīdī 1983:71-72), but the majority of the Baloch believe that Hānī did not accompany him (cf. Š. Marī 1970:57, n. 2).

⁵⁴ In some other versions he claims to have composed 55 poems at Mecca (cf. Baluch 1977:279, 293; Nasīr 1976:128). Several informants in Makrān told me of

(5) A Further Note

It should be added here that the two characters differ significantly and that the reasons behind their wanderings and the returns to their homelands also differ greatly. One of the main differences between Odysseus and Šey Murīd is that the former “is a survivor who fights his way home to take up life again where it should be taken up after a war: among one’s own people, surrounded by the possessions one has fought for, and solaced by the wife who is one’s partner and whom one struggled to win” (Kirk 1980:xix). Murīd, on the other hand, has lost everything: his madly beloved betrothed from childhood who is now married to Mīr Čākar Rind, the ruler of Balochistan and the venerated chief of the mighty Rind tribe; his place at the court; and his life of a noble Baloch in the court as well as in the society. He has abandoned his personal and social life, and is returning home after having taken refuge in the Muslim holy cities of Mecca and Medina on the other side of the Arabian Gulf for 30 years.⁵⁵

(6) Hānī versus Penelope

(6.1) Loyalty

Before concluding this discussion I would like to add here that there is some similarity between the characters of Penelope and Hānī as well: both are icons of loyalty and devotion. As Kirk (1980:vii) observes, Penelope

has had for years to hold out against the arrogant and violent importunity of a whole crowd of unwanted suitors, princelings from Ithaca and the surrounding regions who have crowded into the palace and are trying to force her to give up her husband for dead and marry one of themselves. Her only defence is stratagem (like the web that she weaves by day and undoes secretly each night).

Although Hānī is married to Mīr Čākar, it is firmly believed by the Baloch in general that she remained chaste. M. Sardar Khan Baluch, one of the

persons who knew all 77 of his poems, but because none of these people remained alive I could not verify it. The 16 poems concerning the romance of Murīd and Hānī in Šād (2000:440-511) is so far the largest collection available to us.

⁵⁵ Cf. the *Rāmāyana*, in which Rama is banished for 14 years to live in the jungle as a devotee clad in a robe of bark (Mackenzie 1971:386).

great authorities on the Chakarian age and the author of Mīr Čākar's biography (1965), contends (1977:248) that

throughout her days with Chākar, she kept her temple unsexed and her fair mind unshaken towards Sheh Murīd. Heavens always maintained fixed the walls of her dear love and honour, and from head to foot she remained marble-constant and had nothing of woman in her. She held her honour higher than her ease, and never yielded to Chākar her bluest veins to kiss. She never loved Chākar, married his royalty, was wife to his place, but disliked his person Chākar wedded her but not bedded, and at the same time, he never reproached her, for she was so delicate of rebukes that words were strokes and strokes death to her.

Yet the poem records that when the Rinds succeed in convincing Mīr Čākar to divorce Hānī so that both the lovers may finally be united, Murīd refuses to take Hānī as a wife. When Hānī begs him to stay Murīd upbraids her, saying that when he needed her, her heart did not desire him because she was happy as the wife of Mīr Čākar. Hānī then tries to prove her faithfulness to Murīd:⁵⁶

*Hānī jawāb gardent padā
O Šey Murīd dīwānahen
ā zāl ki mardān giptag ant
čer čādirān kinzentag ant
rāsten gware borentagān*

guḍā bačč u janikkiš artag ant

*O Murīd, ko ant manī bačč u
janikk?*

Hānī replied to him then:

“O Šey Murīd, the mad one,
Those women who are married to men,
They are moved under the [bed-]sheets
Their tough breasts are loosened [by their
husbands],

Then they have given birth to boys and
girls,

O Murīd, where are my sons and
daughters?”

(6.2) *The Presence of Soothsayers*

In both cases soothsayers are present to deliver omens about the return of the absent hero. Both Hānī and Penelope lived with the sole hope of either seeing the one they loved the most or embracing death in chastity and remaining loyal to him. We learn that both turn to prophets for the news of their loved ones. Hānī calls for the soothsayer (Rzehak 1998:162):

⁵⁶ Badalkhan MS 1993:III, 33-35. The text was transcribed from Mullā Kamālān's performance of the epic, but for the sake of brevity I have omitted repetitions and comments on the part of the singer as well as those of the audience present in the recording.

<i>byāten bimā ye pālgirā</i>	[She] came to the soothsayer [and said]:
<i>ballī manī māsi manī</i>	“My grandmother, my aged aunt, ⁵⁷
<i>pāle bkan Šaygān šuta</i>	Make an omen, dear Šey has gone.”
<i>pālgīr ki pāle kurtaten</i>	The soothsayer made an omen:
<i>Šaygān šuta bi Makkawā</i>	“Dear Šey has gone to Mecca,
<i>apt sālā mnindīt ā Makkawā</i>	He will stay seven years in Mecca,
<i>bāz-um ki ā kayt bi padā</i>	Then he will return and come here.”

The soothsayer in the *Odyssey* makes a somewhat similar prophecy to Penelope about the return of Odysseus (17.151-59):

And now she [Penelope] heard
 from Theoclymenus, the godlike augur:
 “Odysseus’ honored wife, . . .
 hear what I have to say; this is the truth—
 I tell you everything—all is revealed.
 May Zeus, the god of gods, now be my witness,
 and, too, the cordial board and hearth of lord
 Odysseus, where I am a guest: I say—
 he’s here already in his own dear land.”

(6.3) *The Promise of High Reward*

The high reward for the news of the return of the long-awaited hero is also common to both legends. When Hānī is asked how she would compensate the bearer of news about Šey Murīd, she responds (Badalkhan MS 1993:III, 105; cf. Nasīr 1976:124 and 1979a:39-40; Sābir 1978:133):⁵⁸

<i>gwašte pa diley armānā,</i>	She said it with the highest desire of her heart:
<i>“durrāne dayān jāḍenān</i>	“I will give him the pair of the earrings, ⁵⁹
<i>kandīgān kawānṭ-bāhenān</i>	The necklace, with the value of a young camel,

⁵⁷ Both *ballī* and *māsi* are respectful terms to address aged women, but I have translated them here as “grandmother” and “aunt,” respectively, since *māsi* is also used for one’s maternal aunt in some eastern dialects of Balochi (cf. Elfenbein 1990:II, s.v.).

⁵⁸ A gift (*mistāgī*) is bestowed upon a person who brings good news, especially in response to the birth of a child, the arrival of a close relative from a long journey, or recovery from a long illness and return from the treatment journey.

⁵⁹ *Durr* simply means “gold,” but here it is a metonym for a pair of heavy earrings worn by Baloch women.

<i>ponzey pulluk o grānzīgān</i>	The nose rings and nostril rings,
<i>dastey sangahān Sībīey</i>	The bracelets of Sībī made,
<i>pādey mār-saren pādīnkān</i>	Serpent-headed anklets of my feet,
<i>kull gon sī hazārī ganjān</i>	Home with the treasure of thirty-thousand worth, ⁶⁰
<i>Čakar gon silāh o sanjān</i>	Čakar with his arms and harnesses [i.e. the riding horse and its harnesses],
<i>bačč gon gwānzagā šāgenā</i>	Son with the cradle of the <i>šāg</i> wood, ⁶¹
<i>jān gon jāmagā narmenā</i>	My body with its soft gown, ⁶²
<i>ḍillā gon baloči weysā</i>	My stature with its Balochi costumes, ⁶³
<i>angat sar manī kurbān int.”</i>	Above all, my head is sacrificed to him [i.e., to the person who brings me the news of Šey Murīd].

We find a similar episode in the *Odyssey*, where Penelope promises Theoclymenus, “the godlike augur,” that if his prophecy turns true and her husband Odysseus returns she will give him many gifts: “I would your words might be fulfilled. My guest, / you’d see my kindness then—so many gifts / that any man you met would say you’re blessed” (17.163-65). In Book 19 (309-11) the same reward is promised again to Odysseus, who presents himself before Penelope in the garb of a beggar and, in reply to Penelope’s inquiries, tells her that Odysseus “will return within the year—just when, at old moon’s end, the new begins” (19.306-07).

Conclusion

Returning briefly to the absence, return, and recognition of the heroes

⁶⁰ A house with things worth 30,000 means a house full of riches.

⁶¹ *Šāg* is a species of teak (*Grewia vestita*). It is a very valuable hardwood used to make musical instruments, ships, beds, cradles, and so on.

⁶² The famous minstrel Sāleh Mahmad Gorgej told me that, in his opinion, this verse was later added by minstrels, since Hānī would have never said that she would give her body in a soft gown in compensation to the one who brings the news of the arrival of Murīd (interview recorded in Malīr, Karachi, 1989). I am grateful to Ghulam Farooq Baloch and Beg Mahmad Baloch for arranging a number of encounters with Sāleh Mahmad Gorgej. Nasīr (1979a:40) records this line as *jāney jāmagā narmenā* (“the soft gown of my body”).

⁶³ The word *weys/ves* is not known to me but is found in Mayer (1975:36) with the meaning of “clothes.”

in both traditions, we find that Odysseus is recognized at home by a dog, a nurse, two farmhands, and his wife, in addition of course to the suitors. The dog recognizes him instinctively; the nurse knows him by the scar; he tells the farmhands who he is; and the suitors discover his identity as a result of the trial of the bow. His wife recognizes him by three different methods: (a) the trial of the bow, (b) the bath, and (c) the token of the bed (Lord 1960:169-70). Finally, he reveals himself to his father at his farm. Murīd, on the other hand, is first seen by Hānī, whose friends have brought her on an outing to the fields after years of self-seclusion.⁶⁴ However, she does not reveal the news of the possible arrival of Murīd to anyone and the people are unaware of his arrival in town. Later, after the trial of the bow, when a messenger goes to Hānī and asks her for the secret signs of Murīd, she seems to be, or at the least the poet gives us the impression that she is, unaware of Murīd's return. She promises that if the signs correspond and the mendicant really turns out to be Murīd, she will go to him supplicating him to stop. Here, we may suppose that the poet, following the traditional return and recognition story-pattern, has deliberately positioned the recognition of the hero by the wife/lover after the main trial, which is the trial of the bow. As such, in the cases of both Murīd and Odysseus the test of the bow is presented as the decisive recognition scene. Lord, discussing the *Odyssey*, explains that "here is a frustrated, a vestigial recognition scene brought about by accomplishing a feat of strength possible only to the returned hero" (1960:175).⁶⁵ Murīd's recognition by his father takes place at the end of this scene, who recognizes him by the hissing sound of his shafts shot from his "iron bow." So, here we have the threefold recognition of the returning hero completed: the recognition by the nobles, by the lover, and by the father. Thus we can say that our poet has faithfully followed "the traditional story-pattern" of the absence and return of the hero and his recognition upon arriving home.

⁶⁴ In some versions Hānī recognizes him, while in others she only suspects that the head of the beggar-band could be Murīd (*man dī gumānī būttagān, ki dīwānagen Šey pa saren* [Badalkhan 1991:I, 45; Nasīr 1976:131]; "I suspected too, that the mad Šey Murīd is in the lead"). In some versions from Makrān she watches the ship coming from a distance from a sand dune on the seashore and sees passengers disembark onto the small boats that bring them to shore.

⁶⁵ Among other recognition motifs in return songs we may cite the South Slavic epic poetry, where the common recognition motif is that only the returned hero is able to successfully saddle and ride his horse: "a feat no one else has been able to accomplish" (Foley 1990:371).

How was this story-pattern transmitted? Are the parallel motifs in the Balochi epic and the *Odyssey* the result of direct contact between the Baloch and the Greeks thousands of years ago? Or could the composers of both legends have simply followed a traditional return theme inherited via a common Indo-European cultural heritage? Or are these coincidences only accidental?⁶⁶ It is beyond the scope of this study, as well as my capabilities, to forward any hypothesis in this regard, but we know for sure that the Greeks were present in Balochistan and the surrounding regions, directly or indirectly, for almost three centuries and that their cultural and economic contacts and influence lasted much longer than that. The presence of the Greeks in the area is reported to have lasted for about 1,000 years, “from the sixth century B.C. to the fifth century A.D. . . . They travelled as explorers in the pay of the Persians and marched as soldiers in Alexander’s army, they came as wandering philosophers and seaborne traders, as artists and ambassadors, as administrators and princes. They found kingdoms and cities” (Woodcock 1966:13). The Greeks came as strangers, but “most stayed to take their places in Indian society. Their descendants became absorbed into its great hybrid race. Many accepted Indian religions” (*idem*).

The country of Balochistan first came into contact with the Greeks when Alexander the Great crossed it in 325 B.C.E. on his way from India to Iran.⁶⁷ Greek chroniclers record that the river Hab (Arabis of the Greeks) was the boundary, ethnologically and linguistically, between India and Gedrosia (cf. Tarn 1950:II, 250).⁶⁸ The Gedrosii were a free people “who agreed to surrender after holding a council to consider the subject” (McCrimdell 1969:262). Arrian records that when Alexander arrived at

⁶⁶ Lord observed that the “story patterns in oral tradition . . . have been in traditional epic in the Balkans and the Near East at least since Homeric times and very probably long before then” (1969:18-19). He considered it as “simply an older stratum of one and the same Indo-European oral tradition” (*ibid.*:19). See Kirk (1993:270) for a similar discussion of parallel motifs in the Homeric epics, *Gilgamesh*, and the Indian epic *Ramayana*. It has also been argued that “l’*Odyssee* renferme des épisodes dont l’origine orientale est incontestable” (Lévêque 1974:581).

⁶⁷ The Greek name for southern Balochistan was Gedrosia and it “designated the vast region which extended from the eastern borders of Karmania [the region of former Hormuz and present Bandar Abbas] to the Lower Indus” (McCrimdell 1971:187, n. 2).

⁶⁸ The inhabitants here were Oreitae, who were not Indians and had another language and set of laws, though some Indian customs (Tarn 1950:II, 250, n.6): “This people, a sept of the Gedrosii, who lived west and north of them, were Iranians, perhaps somewhat mixed; they are sometimes referred to in general terms as Gedrosians” (*ibid.*:251).

Rambacia, the largest village of the Oreitans, “he was impressed with the position, and felt that a city founded there would become great and prosperous” (1933:II.vi, 21.5).⁶⁹ Here Alexander established the first large city (Fraser 1996:178):

[H]e believed, as he believed of Alexandria in Egypt and Alexandria on the Jaxartes, [that it had] become great and prosperous. It was here, then, in the heat of Baluchistan that Alexander saw the main base for his coastal trade, and possibly also the strategic base for lasting control of northern Gedrosia and Arachosia, by way of the well-worn tracks over which caravans and armies have marched over the centuries, up the Porali valley to Kalāt in the Harboi Hills and Quetta, and through the Bolān and Khojak passes to Kandahar, the circle of his empire thus completed.

Here Alexander saw commercial and military purposes operating simultaneously, and the importance of this city was doubled as it was situated at the “Western Gate of India” (*idem*).⁷⁰

Alexander built a second Alexandria in Harmozia, which lies on the western extremities of Gedrosia.⁷¹ I believe that this second Alexandria is

⁶⁹ Probably located at the head of the plain of Las Bela, at the northern end of the estuary of the Porali river (Fraser 1996:178).

⁷⁰ The city is recorded in Stephanus’ list as the thirteenth Alexandria in Makarene beside which flows the river Maxates or the present-day Porali (cf. Tarn 1950:II, 249). This city was then the capital of eastern Gedrosia, and Tarn writes that from the eparchy name Makarene we can deduce that “the city was in existence in the Seleucid period; and it must have been existing in Parthian times” (*ibid.*:254-55). Alexander founded this city to “develop the spice trade” (*ibid.*:252), but Tarn believes that “probably his dominant motive throughout was to strengthen the remote parts of his empire with Greek cities and all that they implied as a mainspring of his policy of the fusion of races” (*ibid.*:247). Greek sources mention that although most of the country of Balochistan was as arid as in modern times, “it produced one of the things which all Greeks coveted—spices” (Tarn 1951:94). We read in later times that “ivory, ebony and the spices of the Himalayas and Gedrosia were the main exports from India during the Seleucid period” (Woodcock 1966:47-48). We also read that Alexander forbade the fish-eaters (of Gedrosia) to live on fish, which, according to Tarn (1951:260), must mean that “someone had sought to make these coasting voyages easier by trying to establish centres of agriculture along the dreary coast of the Mekran.”

⁷¹ This Alexandria is also recorded under the name of Alexandria in Carmania (Tarn 1950:II, 239; Hansman 1973:582) as well as Alexandria Gulashkird (Tarn 1950:I, 109; Sykes 1915:I, 278). Hansman (1973:583) argues that “the Alexandria Carmania was built in Tepe Yahya, half way between Pura and Persopolis.” Pura of the Greeks was then the capital of whole of Gedrosia (Arrian 1933:II.vi, 24.1), and Alexander spent 60

more important to our present study because all Balochi oral legends lead us to the east of ancient Hormuz as the early homeland of the Rind and the Lāšār tribes, the main tribal and political forces at the time of our present legend.⁷² They are reported to have migrated east during the early Islamic period.⁷³ However, it could also be possible that some earlier migrations had taken place from east to west, though we lack any records, either in written or from oral recounts, of any westward migration of the Baloch.

Gedrosia, as the principal linking corridor of the West with India, occupied an important position, and Greek merchants continued sailing along the coast of Makrān to and from India for a long time after the break-up of Greek political power in the Orient.⁷⁴ In Menander's time (d. 150-145 B.C.E.) Barygaza (modern Broach in Gujarat, India) was the great port for the sea-trade between India and the West, and "ships from the Greek ports of India were following Nearchus' route along the Gedrosian coast to the Greek centre on the Gulf of Ormuz, whence the goods went by water to Seleuceia" (Tarn 1951:367). By the middle of the first century C.E. the Greek sea-trade to India reached its peak and we find statements such as one calling Barygaza "a port of Gedrosia" and another placing Patalene in Gedrosia (*ibid.*:260).⁷⁵ It is also important to emphasize that "the Greeks did not come

days traveling from Rambacia to Pura. Here he rested his army before proceeding to Carmania. The Balochi name for Pura was Pahra, which was changed to Irānšahr by Reza Shah Pahlavi in 1930 (Hosseini 1984:79). It was the main cultural and political center of the Baloch ethnic group until the early fifteenth century and it was here that they found the first Baloch confederacy in the fourteenth century and named it Balochistan (Baloch 1983:188; see Breseeg 2001:108 for a detailed discussion).

⁷² Nasīr (1979a:67) believes that 44 Baloch tribes, under the leadership of Mīr Jalāl Khan, migrated from Jagīn in southern Iran and settled in Pahra, modern Iranshahr in western Makran. However, some other sources, basing their supposition on linguistic connections, assign "the original home of the Baluch to somewhere just east or southeast of the central Caspian region" (Elfenbein 1989:634; Sheehan 1994:48), but I am not sure how much credit we can give to origin myths and legends.

⁷³ For a detailed discussion of Baloch migrations and settlements, see Badalkhan forthcoming.

⁷⁴ See Badalkhan 2002b for a general discussion.

⁷⁵ We know for sure that neither Barygaza nor Patalene (the Indus delta country) ever made a part of Gedrosia, unless we agree with Hansman that "in Seleucid or even Indo-Bactrian times the jurisdiction of Gedrosia was considered to extend as far eastward as the Indus" (1973:568). However, these statements attest to the importance of Gedrosia

merely as transient sailors. . . . [T]hey set up their trading posts, establishing small settlements, and wandering far inland” (Woodcock 1966:142). As a result, within a generation or so after the death of Alexander, Greek civic life and traditional Greek culture had spread to some remote corners of the Indo-Iranian world (cf. Fraser 1996:181).

The anonymous author of *The Periplus*, who wrote during the first century C.E., found remains of the signs of the expedition of Alexander in India, especially in Barygaza, “such as ancient shrines, walls of forts and great wells” (Schoff 1974:39). He reports that ancient drachmae were current in Barygaza, “bearing inscriptions in Greek letters, and the devices of those who reigned after Alexander, Apollodotus and Menander” (1974:41-42). Similarly, Seneca is said to have attested that the Greek language was spoken in the Indus valley as late as the middle of the first century C.E. and that “it was employed upon coins of the conquering nations for many centuries later” (quoted in Bellew 1973:189; cf. Holdich 1910:21).

Tarn argues that “Egypt has at least taught us that whatever other works Greeks might take with them to foreign lands they would certainly take Homer and Euripides” (1951:382). Plutarch writes that by means of Alexander “Asia was civilised and Homer read there, and that *the children of Persians, Susians, and Gedrosians sang the tragedies of Euripides and Sophocles*” (quoted in McCrindle 1971:177, n. 1, emphasis added; cf. Tarn 1950:II, 254). According to Tarn, this also implies a Greek *polis* in Gedrosia (1951:254-55) since “Greeks could not imagine a town without a theatre” (*ibid.*:322).⁷⁶ Tarn further explains that “Plutarch is referring specifically to Alexandria in Makarene, though he speaks of a later period than Alexander’s” (1950:II, 255). McCrindle cites Ael (*V. Hist. xii*, 48), saying that “not only the Indians, but the Kings of Persia have translated and sung the poems of Homer” (1971:177, n. 1).⁷⁷

Gedrosia was an independent satrapy undoubtedly lying beyond the

in those times—at least in terms of its geographical location and the sea-trade between Gedrosia and these cities (cf. Tarn 1950:II, 254).

⁷⁶ One thing seems to be sure: that “in Alexander’s day there was no such thing as a theatre in Iran, or anywhere east of Asia Minor, though there were plenty later on” (Tarn 1950, II:322).

⁷⁷ Arora is of the opinion that “the Indian epic *Ramayana* or the *Mahabharata* was probably seen by the Greeks as the Indian version of Homer, for the authors like Dio-Chrysostomos and Aelian mentioned the translation of Homer into the Indian languages” (1991:93).

limits of India proper (Smith 1904:98).⁷⁸ As “each satrapy contained a small nucleus of Greek officials for purposes of administration and revenue, and . . . the general of the satrapy, if a Greek, would dispose of a few troops” (Tarn 1951:258), we may assume that the inhabitants of the country of Balochistan had some sort of contact with the colonizers and each group would naturally influence the other in some way or another. This will bring us to suppose that some direct or indirect knowledge of Homeric epics had reached and survived among the inhabitants of present-day Balochistan. However, it is also possible that both traditions employed a return narrative-pattern inherited from a common Indo-European heritage.

A further word should be added about the historicity of the character of Murīd. While there is ample evidence that Hānī’s was a historical personality (we know of her tomb and her living quarters—her palace was built just opposite to the Sībī fort and the remaining walls are still shown by the local people to visitors), there is no such evidence for Šey Murīd. A number of Baloch scholars conjecture that the whole episode was constructed upon an already-existing oral tradition and that the name of Hānī was added by poets and minstrels of the Lāšāri tribe to defame Mīr Čākar Khān Rind, with whom they were at war.⁷⁹ Barker and Mengal share the view that “there is no historical corroboration for the story of Shay Murīd and Hānī, and the ascription of these events to the time of Mīr Čākar Rind appears to be apocryphal” (1969:II, 314). If this is the case, then we may suppose that the whole or a part of the narrative has been built upon a pre-existing story of the absence and return of a hero and that later poets and minstrels have added names of persons and places to create a new legend from a traditional structure. But it is not our intention to posit any thesis about the historicity of Murīd’s legend. The key issue is the remarkable parallelism in the return and recognition motifs in the legends of *Hero Šey Murīd* and Homer’s *Odyssey*.

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⁷⁸ Gedrosia’s name designates that it was a satrapy; Tarn observes that “the great satrapies almost always bore names ending in *-ia*” (1951:3).

⁷⁹ Gul Khān Nasīr, one of the leading authorities on Balochi oral traditions, believes that Murīd was a historical personality. Commenting on opinions questioning the historicity of the Murīd legend, he concludes that it is not easy to refute the legend of Hānī and Murīd (Nasīr 1976:96).

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⁸⁰ This article is the outcome of fruitful discussions with John Miles Foley at the Folklore Fellows' Summer School in Lammi, Finland in 1997. An earlier draft was presented at the International Conference on Traditions and Transitions in Melbourne, July 16-20, 2001. Some of the material presented here was drawn from field recordings I made during visits to Balochistan. Trips to Pakistan and Melbourne were partially funded by MURST (*Etnolinguistica ed etnostoria dell'area iranica*). Very sincere thanks are due to Prof. Adriano Rossi (Università di Napoli, l'Orientale) for all of his assistance.

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