



# ORAL TRADITION

Volume 1, Number 1

January, 1986

Slavica



# ORAL TRADITION

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Volume 1

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Slavica Publishers, Inc.  
P.O. Box 14388  
Columbus, Ohio 43214

ISSN: 0883-5365

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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.

*Oral Tradition* will appear three times per year, in January, May, and October. Annual subscription charges are \$20 for individuals and \$35 for libraries and other institutions.

All manuscripts, books for review, items for the annual bibliography, and editorial correspondence should be directed to the editor, John Miles Foley, Department of English, University of Missouri, Columbia, MO 65211.

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## **Introduction**

Tradition demands that an editor of a new scholarly journal perform the ritual gesture of justifying the birth of the new academic child, and certainly any periodical named *Oral Tradition* cannot afford to ignore either the demands of tradition in general or ritual gestures in particular. Nonetheless, those of us assisting at the delivery feel strongly that in this case the proverbial claim that the new medium “fills a gap” really does contain a modicum of truth. For nowhere in the hallowed halls of academia have we found a journal devoted exclusively to the study of oral tradition in its many forms, nowhere a single, central periodical through which scholars in this wide variety of specialties might communicate. And in recent years this simple “gap” has grown into a chasm: there are now more than one hundred separate language areas affected by studies in oral tradition, among them ancient Greek, Anglo-Saxon, Chinese, Japanese, Russian, Serbo-Croatian, Old French, medieval Spanish, and dozens more; and the disciplines summoned to this collaborative undertaking include, at a minimum, literary history and criticism, folklore, anthropology, linguistics, and history. Thus it is that *Oral Tradition* is being inaugurated to inform specialists of parallel developments in their own and different areas, to build and maintain bridges among disciplines in order to promote the healthy growth of the field as a whole.

Our publishing program has been tailored to correspond to the various aspects of research and scholarship on oral tradition and on “literary” forms with roots in oral tradition. Especially over the first few years, and to some extent at regular intervals after that, we shall be featuring a series of *survey* or *state-of-the-art essays*, reviews of previous work on important areas intended to advise specialists in other fields of the current state of scholarship outside their own immediate areas of expertise, and in this way to facilitate comparative work. The first year of publication will see such essays on ancient Greek, Biblical studies,

Old Irish, Old English, medieval Spanish, modern Greek, and Middle High German. We shall also present a number of *analytical essays*, treating problems of many sorts in a wide range of fields. And alongside these two types of articles will stand more occasional *reports on ongoing or recent fieldwork*, which will allow readers to keep up to date with current field projects.

In addition to individual scholarly essays, *Oral Tradition* is committed to other kinds of forums for dissemination of the best and latest thinking in this multidisciplinary consortium. We shall be publishing a number of *special issues* on particular areas or genres, each of them edited by a scholar of eminence. Thus, over the first five years plans have been made for special issues on Native American (ed. Barre Toelken), the Hispanic ballad (Ruth Webber), Arabic (Issa Boullata), South Pacific (Ruth Finnegan and Margaret Orbell), and Turkish and Turkic (Ilhan Başgöz), and more are being discussed. The first in this series (January 1987) will be a Festschrift for Walter J. Ong, and will contain about twenty essays on a variety of literatures as well as on religion, philosophy, and linguistics. In order to keep the readership apprised of recent advances in the field on a regular basis, we shall also include *review essays*, that is, essay-length reviews of relevant research in a given area, and a *Year's Work Annotated Bibliography*. The object of this latter digest, to be published in the third and final issue of *Oral Tradition* each year, is to continue the bibliographical record begun by my 1985 *Oral-Formulaic Theory and Research*. Finally, we shall maintain a *Symposium* section specifically for readers' extended responses to earlier contents; these responses may be approbative or critical of the essays published in *Oral Tradition*, and will be printed at the discretion of the editorial board. We encourage this sort of immediate and focused reaction to important issues.

This inaugural issue presents a sample of the mix of survey and analytical essays that we hope will be typical of *Oral Tradition*. Robert Culley takes on the daunting task of reviewing scholarship on oral tradition and the Bible, with special emphasis on recent work, and Roderick Beaton surveys the complex world of modern Greek oral traditions, stressing the interactions between oral and literate and the different genres one encounters. The fascinating process of translating an oral text, or texts with roots in oral tradition, is the subject of Burton Raffel's lead essay on Russian, Indonesian, and Anglo-Saxon poetry, while Eric Havelock

continues a distinguished series of studies on the impact of letters on the ancient Greek world in “The Alphabetic Mind.” Frederick Turner’s anthropological view of oral performance offers a new perspective on oral tradition, one that draws from exciting advances in the study of aesthetics by the scientific community.

Our next two issues will contain survey articles on comparative perspectives (Albert B. Lord), ancient Greek (Mark Edwards), Old Irish (Joseph Nagy), and other areas, as well as a selection of analytical essays, the Year’s Work Annotated Bibliography, and the first annual Milman Parry Lectures on Oral Tradition, given at Missouri in April 1985 by Joseph J. Duggan (“Social Functions of the Medieval Epic”).

We invite all members of the community interested in studies in oral tradition to join this enterprise, and not only by entering personal and institutional subscriptions to *Oral Tradition* (always a high priority) but also by contributing manuscripts, responses for the Symposium section, copies of books and offprints of articles for review and report in the bibliography, ideas for special issues, and suggestions about any aspect of the journal’s operation or contents. We who work in this rapidly evolving field have long needed a place to communicate about moving the field forward by sharing our ideas and by responding to the ideas of others. It is our hope that *Oral Tradition* will serve these purposes.

John Miles Foley, Editor

## Acknowledgment

It is a genuine pleasure to have the opportunity to thank the two institutions that have provided the financial backing necessary to this enterprise. Slavica Publishers of Columbus, Ohio, under the direction of Charles E. Gribble, has assumed responsibility for publishing *Oral Tradition*, and I am grateful for both the support and the good will all associated with Slavica have shown. The University of Missouri has also contributed in extremely significant ways to the establishment of the journal, principally by funding a grant from the Weldon Spring Endowment. I would particularly like to acknowledge the encouragement and counsel of Don H. Blount, Dean of the Graduate School and Vice Provost for Research, in connection with the University funding.

The English Department has been of invaluable help for the last two years in providing research assistantships for the early and continuing work on the journal, and I wish to thank the Chair, Timothy Materer, for his willingness to support our activities in this way. Likewise, and more than I can say here, I owe a great deal to those graduate student assistants who have willingly and even enthusiastically performed many of the myriad duties associated with editing *Oral Tradition*. All of them are acknowledged in the front matter as editorial assistants, and special thanks go to Ed Tyler for his untiring work of all sorts.

Finally, and quietly (because that is the way he would prefer it), I would like to dedicate this inaugural issue to Melvin D. George, former Vice President of the University of Missouri and (himself newly inaugurated) President of St. Olaf College. While the idea for *Oral Tradition* had been long germinating, it first began to look like a reality during a 1983 lunch at, appropriately, the only Greek restaurant in Columbia, Missouri. Mel encouraged and supported the Missouri Oral Literature Symposium in 1984, and, when other funding emerged for its activities, stood ready to apply his original support to the founding of the journal. Although *Oral Tradition* would not have come to be without the backing of both Slavica Publishers and the Weldon Spring Endowment, it is also fair to say that it was Mel's intellectual and institutional commitment—all made evident at that truly Greek lunch—that provided the foundation.

## **The Manner of Boyan: Translating Oral Literature**

**Burton Raffel**

The force of oral transmission—its accuracy and integrity—is perhaps best demonstrated by comparing texts which have been transmitted in written form and orally transmitted texts, both sorts of transmission covering some fairly extensive period of time. One might expect that oral transmission would be far less effective, and that texts transmitted orally would contain many more errors, changes, deletions, accretions, and all manner of other divergences from the original form. Judah Goldin, however, describes the “baskets full of books,” the “living texts” represented by the living men who both orally transmitted and constituted, in their own persons, effective “oral publication” of Hebrew sacred material. He adds that “to us it no doubt seems that an oral text would be less trustworthy than a written one. This was not necessarily the case with the ancients”—and he cites the very plain passage in Plato’s *Phaedrus* which argues that writing, as opposed to oral transmission, tends to decrease rather than to increase understanding (Goldin 1955:24, n.). It must be understood, of course, not only that the ancients were accustomed both to transmitting texts orally and to acquiring texts from others via oral transmission, but also that such transmission is a very different thing from what we think of, today, as memorization. Memorization, that is, is understood by us as an essentially word-for-word affair. Oral transmission, on the other hand, plainly works with larger blocks of material, using thematic and a variety of traditionally derived patternings to aid retention. Goldin notes that in Jewish tradition “no written text, particularly if it is meant as a guide for conduct, can in and of itself be complete; it must have some form of oral commentary associated with it.”<sup>1</sup>

So too with literary rather than religious texts: scribes and copyists plainly corrupt texts quite as readily as they preserve them, sometimes from carelessness or stupidity or inability to read what they are reproducing, but sometimes also from such motives as shaping a text to more modern standards or eliminating or altering something no longer either appropriate or apposite. It is for such reasons, to be sure, that we have, and that we need, textual scholars, even in dealing with material as recent, relatively speaking, as the works of Geoffrey Chaucer, dead only so short a time ago as A.D. 1400.

There is of course no need to argue that oral transmission is always and inevitably superior to written transmission. Where a single piece of written material survives intact, over some lengthy period, written transmission is in fact almost invariably superior. But single pieces (or single collections or groups) of written material do not usually survive intact. They are usually recopied, and recopied again, and that is what produces true comparability between the two methods of transmitting texts. In this process of re-transmission, which is arguably a more accurate term for what actually takes place, oral transmission is apt to be as good as or even better than its written competitor. As Marc Slonim noted in 1950 (10), Russian *byliny* ("tales-of-things-that-have-been," a form of folk epic poetry conclusively oral both in origin and in transmission) have been "collected quite recently in certain remote villages of northern and eastern Russia, where they were still being narrated in an amazingly well-preserved form by old men or women" (see also Arant 1967, 1970).

## I.

In the best of all possible worlds, where written texts and oral texts might be neatly and conclusively separable, translation too would be a simpler and infinitely more straightforward process. Interpenetration is however a fact of life: oral texts influence written ones, and vice versa, and at various stages of literary development it is essentially impossible to know which (if either) is primary (cp. Foley 1983). The *Slovo o pulku Igoreve* ("Word of the Campaign of Igor," or as Sidney Monas and I have translated it, "The Tale of Igor's Men"), for example, may well combine both aspects of indeterminacy. That is, it was found in a

sixteenth-century manuscript, later burned, and was probably composed in the fourteenth century. Transmission from the fourteenth to the sixteenth century may have been via written texts; it may also have been by oral means, since as Dmitri Mirsky says, “There existed in Kievan times [tenth through thirteenth centuries] a secular oral poetry, preserved by singers belonging to the upper military class. . . . This poetry flourished in the eleventh century; some of the poems were still remembered in the end of the twelfth. . . . But it is not clear that at the time of the composition of the *Slovo* this oral poetry was still alive.” Mirsky quite properly insists that “the *Campaign of Igor* itself is a purely literary work, *written*, and not sung.” Scholars are on the whole well agreed on this. But it remains perfectly clear, too, that the author of the *Slovo*, to quote Mirsky again (1949:14), “was steeped [both] in books and in oral tradition. The great originality of his work was that he used the methods of oral poetry in a work of written literature.”

This sort of inchoate interpenetration is surely a more problematic matter, especially for the translator of such a work, than Mirsky seems willing to recognize. It seemed plain to Vladimir Nabokov (1960:6) that the *Slovo* “is a harmonious, many leveled, many hued, uniquely poetic structure created in a sustained and controlled surge of inspiration,” a work of such polished, balanced art that its very existence “attests to deliberate artistic endeavor and excludes the possibility of that gradual accretion of lumpy parts which is so typical of folklore. It is the lucid work of one man, not the random thrum of a people.” Thais Lindstrom (1966:11), operating with fewer preconceptions, points out that “The *Slovo* is written in rhythmic prose and its title (*slovo* meaning ‘word,’ ‘discourse’) tells us that it was intended to be declaimed rather than read. It is almost certain that the minstrels, as they recited it, emphasized the rolling alliteration of its phrases with accompanying chords on the gusli, an ancient Russian harp.” Dimitri Obolensky speaks, similarly, of “the highly musical texture of the poem,” noting too that “the use of the repetitions and refrains, the numerous fixed epithets so characteristic of heroic poetry, and the visible signs of strophic composition leave no doubt that the [*Slovo*] was intended for oral recitation; and the author himself describes his work as a ‘song.’” Like other scholars, Obolensky is clear that the *Slovo* was a written performance: “the terseness of its style, the richness and complexity

of the imagery, the subtlety of its euphonic devices, are quite incompatible with the view that it was ever improvised orally.” The point can be argued, to be sure: if oral transmission is in fact based on a patterning of structures larger than single words, then the sort of acoustic patterning Obolensky describes may well be a sign that the *Slovo* is distinctly related to orally transmitted texts about which, today, we know nothing. But Obolensky also understands that these neither are nor can be black-and-white matters; he like most scholars recognizes without hesitation that “the author [of the *Slovo*] seems to have known and sought inspiration in an earlier, oral tradition” (Obolensky 1962:xxxii). And Serge A. Zenkovsky, finally, after pointing out that, although poetic, the *Slovo* is not in the usual sense a poem, being “neither rhymed nor organized in verses, nor does it follow any metrical pattern,” goes on to observe that “the rhythm and the length of the sentences to some extent replace verse organization.... Among other devices, the author of the [*Slovo*] employs the repetition of characteristic images, stylized descriptions of military action, assonance and alliteration.” And he concludes, accurately, that these devices are “impossible to reproduce in translation” (Zenkovsky 1963:137-38).

How does a translator approach this mare’s nest of uncertainties? The *Slovo* is not an oral text, but it is heavily oral-influenced; it may or may not have been transmitted orally, at some point in its history; it features a rhythmic prose but also many of the devices characteristic of oral heroic poetry; and its artistic density, above all else, is remarkable, making it “a national classic, familiar to every educated Russian and often known by heart by lovers of poetry” (Mirsky 1949:15). Nabokov’s translation chooses a poetic form, and the lineation of verse, but employs a diction so remote and strained that we seem to be reading some ancient artifact, effectively neither literary nor oral (1960:29):

Might it not become us, brothers,  
to begin in the diction of yore  
the stern tale  
of the campaign of Igor,  
Igor son of Svyatoslav?

Let us, however, begin this song  
in keeping with the happenings

of these times  
and not with the contriving of Boyan.

Zenkovsky too seems to believe that an ancient poem is necessarily an archaic poem and that, as J. R. R. Tolkien insisted (1950:xviii), you must not “eschew the traditional literary and poetic diction which we now possess in favour of the current and trivial”:

Might it not behoove us brethren  
to commence in ancient strains  
the stern lay of Igor's campaign,  
Igor, son of Sviatoslav?  
Then let this begin  
according to the events of our time,  
and not according to the cunning of Boyan.

(Zenkovsky 1963:139)

It seemed to Sidney Monas and myself, on the other hand, that something of the sweep, the rolling prose rhythms of the *Slovo* could in fact be brought over into modern English, which is surely as dignified a tongue as is old Russian. That which is “current,” despite Tolkien’s (and Nabokov’s) prejudices, is not necessarily “trivial.” One can adjust, one can fine-tune any language, at any time, to reflect such matters as heroism and ambition, suffering and celebration.

And how would it be, brothers, to begin telling the hard tales of the men of Igor, of Igor Svyatoslavich, telling the tales as they used to be told?

But let us rather be true to our time, not to the manner of Boyan.

(Monas and Raffel 1971:5)

I take my title from this last-quoted line. No one knows just who Boyan was, but everyone assumes, probably correctly, that he was a once-famous poet, a singer perhaps of orally-composed songs, certainly dead though not yet forgotten at the time of the *Slovo*’s composition. Like the author of the *Slovo*, I want the translator of oral poetry, and of partially oral poetry, and of oral-connected or oral-derived poetry, to be “true to our time, not to the manner of Boyan.” And I insist quite as fervently as Nabokov that it can be done, and done well, given a proper respect for both original and translation.

## II.

Topi saya bundar,  
 bundar topi saya;  
 kalau tidak bundar,  
 bukan topi saya.

This is a child's verse, from a game familiar, in different linguistic guise, to many children all over the world. In dogtrot translation, this Indonesian exemplar would run: "My hat is round,/ round is my hat;/ if it's not round/ it's not my hat." No one would argue, and I certainly do not propose to, that this is significant poetry. But it is distinctly oral—and in this particular linguistic guise, at least, it presents both linguistic features and translation problems that make it worth some attention. Most notably, for Indonesian is a syllabic rather than a stress-phonemic language, this little oral quatrain demonstrates a quite remarkable pattern of stress. As sung, which it always is, and to a melody which is similarly employed in a good many other cultures, including our own, it sounds like this (with stressed syllables marked in capital letters):

TOpi SAya BUNDar  
 bunDAR toPI saYA  
 KAlau TIdak BUNDar  
 buKAN toPI saYA

Neither spoken nor written Indonesian ever organizes a linguistic presentation in this fashion, lines one and three following a completely trochaic mode, lines two and four counter-balancing with a completely iambic mode. Neither iambic nor trochaic, to be sure, either means or possibly can mean anything in Indonesian, which has no prosodic pattern of a stress-based nature. Stress not being phonemic, one can as readily say BUNDar or bunDAR, TOpi or toPI, SAya or saYA. The prosodic organization of traditional Indonesian verse is entirely syllabic; stress has nothing to do with it. One neither would nor could hear a stress patterning of this sort either in ordinary spoken Indonesian or in Indonesian poetry. Here for example is a classic Indonesian *pantun*, or traditional four-line poem:

Dari mans hendak kemana?  
 Tinggi rumput dari padi.  
 Tahun mana bulan yang mana,

Hendak kita berjumpa lagi?

The lines each contain eight or nine syllables, but the rules of Indonesian prosody, which disqualify particles and the like, reduce the syllable count to eight. (All particles in Indonesian are enclitic. *Ke-*, in line 1, is a direction particle; the first word in line 3, *tahun*, is invariably pronounced with one syllable; and *ber-*, in line 4, is again a particle, though here indicating certain verb-like meanings rather than direction.) There is rhyme, there is a steady, stable syllable count (by Indonesian prosodic standards), but there is no detectable pattern of stress whatever. One possible way of emphasizing the poem in speaking or reciting it (and I deliberately use the term “emphasize” rather than the more technical, linguistically-oriented term “stress”) would be:

dari MAna hendak keMAna  
TINGgi rumput dari PAdi  
tahun MAna bulan yang MAna  
HENdak kita berjumpa LAgI

What this indicates, truthfully, is a phrasal sort of emphasis, allied in lines 1 through 3 with meaning clusters, and switching in line 4 to a greater emphasis on meaning. The *pantun* says, once more in dogtrot translation: “Where are (were) you from? where are (were) you going?/ Grass is taller than [wet field] rice./ When will it be the year? when will it be the month?/ that we’ll want to meet again?” (I have rendered it, in more literary fashion: “Where have you gone to, where were you from?/ Weeds grow taller than grain./ What year, what month, will time have spun/ Around to when we meet again?” [Raffel 1967:14])

The important thing about the stress pattern in the Indonesian child’s quatrain, bluntly, is that it is not in the usual sense prosodic at all, but melodic. That is, only in sung form, and only in conjunction with the particular, familiar melody used around the world for versions of this quatrain, do we get a stress pattern of this sort in a syllabic language like Indonesian. Material which is not sung does not and cannot have any such pattern, in Indonesian. And what this means for the conscientious translator is that usual translation practices for dealing with poetry must be altered. That is, verse which is not only oral but also and always melodic falls into a distinctly separate category; one needs to try to reconstruct, on the page, at least something of what the tightly joined combination of words and melody produces, in performance.

One might, for example, translate the words of the child's quatrain like this (that is, without trying to match the melody):

I've got a hat  
 That isn't flat,  
 If that one's flat  
 It's not my hat.

What this sort of translation does, plainly, is reconstitute the original's overall verbal effect, but via lexically very variant usages. The formal, structural patterns are different, though related, but the lexical differences are most significant; in material of greater breadth and range than this little poem those differences would appear enormous, not to say disabling. And then, to attempt to match not only the words but also the music, presents complications of enormous difficulty, involving such issues as singability of consonants, the difficulty of certain vowels at higher pitch levels, and so on. This is why translations of texts set to music (songs, opera) are ordinarily so awful.<sup>2</sup> Their translators seem not to understand that lexical fidelity is not only not expected of them, not only impossible of attainment, but is in fact counter-productive. Lexically accurate translations of a text tied to a melody cannot be properly sung, cannot be properly heard, cannot be properly understood or appreciated if one does try to sing them.

But this is a very special order of oral poetry; the *requirement* of nonlexical translation applies only to texts that in a sense do not exist apart from some particular melody. This is not the case with most fully oral poetry, and is certainly not the case with oral-connected or oral-derived poetry. The *pantun*, for example, is a traditional poem very often recited aloud, frequently in "battles" of two reciters (who may in some areas of Indonesia be a man hunting a wife and the young woman he is trying to win), but it is not tied to a melody (Raffel 1967:8-9, 12-15). That there is an oral and a folk background to the *pantun* is plain; exactly which *pantun* are derived from this nonlettered background, and which have been composed by lettered authors, is often impossible to say. Nor does it matter: "I have excluded a good many which seemed to me to smell of the lamp," explains C. C. Brown in his admirable *Malay Sayings*, "but some had to be admitted, by reason of their being heard so often . . . that they could not well be left out" (Brown 1951: ix). Combining oral and

lettered traditions does not leave the resultant form diminished in vitality, or in endurance.

Let me set out, once again, the *pantun* quoted earlier:

Dari mana hendak kemana?  
 Tinggi rumput dari padi.  
 Tahun mana bulan yang mana,  
 Hendak kita berjumpa lagi?

And let me, this time, give a word-for-word, syntactically absurd rendering, so that something of the flavor of the poem may be appreciated:

From where wish to-where?  
 High[er] grass than [wet field] rice.  
 Year where month where,  
 Wish we meet again?

Note that *yang*, in line 3, is not translated; it is a function word, a connective, sometimes with lexical meaning, sometimes without it. Note too that “we” in line 4 is the form which includes the person spoken to, rather than (as in Indonesian’s other form of “we”) excluding that person. In a sense, then, “we” is here understood by an Indonesian to mean something like “we two.”

Once more, here is my translation of this *pantun*:

Where have you gone to, where were you from?  
 Weeds grow taller than grain.  
 What year, what month, will time have spun  
 Around to when we meet again?

The original rhymes A B A B; so too (more or less) does this translation. The assumption of a past tense query in line 1 is only that, an assumption, since Indonesian does not usually specify tenses. The assumption permits use of the rhyme word “from”; it is lexically quite as justifiable as the assumption of a present tense would be. More importantly, as well as more basically, the translation follows a metrical pattern familiar to all readers of English balladry, namely, first and third lines of four metrical feet, second and fourth lines of three metrical feet. (Basically iambic, as of course the English language itself is, the translation has three trochaic substitutions, at the start of lines 1 and 2, and internally in the third foot of line 1, where the line—like the Indonesian original—repeats itself syntactically. Trochaic substitutions, especially in the first foot of a line, are of course so frequent in English prosodic tradition as almost to be as regular as the iambic

feet they replace.) Again: the single most important fact of the translation is exactly this use of a ballad metric, for it explicitly recognizes that comparability of forms requires, when possible, the use of forms that more or less evoke the same genre-feeling in the host language as they evoke in the original. It might be possible, surely, to produce a better piece of poetry in the translation, if this requirement were to be scanted, but comparability would be sharply reduced. For example:

Where have you come from? Where will you go?  
 Grass grows taller than grain. What year will it be,  
 What month will it be,  
 When we come together again?

This version, which I have just concocted, does preserve the lexical shape of the original; it also keeps a bit of the rhyme. And it may well be, as I say, somewhat better poetry. But it is obviously, indeed flagrantly less *like* the original, in the basic structural sense. The repetitions in lines 1 and 2, and in lines 4 and 5, also preserve something of the folk character of the original; again, this version seems to me to preserve less of the original than a structurally parallel version like my first one. And that, I would argue, is inevitable and unavoidable, for poetry is structure and genre quite as much as it is individual words or even syntactical patterns, and oral and oral-connected poetry, as I shall hereafter argue, is even more structure- and genre-dependent than is strictly lettered poetry.

### III.

Longer poems, and especially more sophisticated poems, with more and more admixture of written literature's approaches and devices, require the translator to scramble a good deal more flexibly. Nor do we need to move to a full-length epic to exhibit this difficulty. Indeed, we can choose one of the few Old English works we know pretty reliably to have been composed orally, and by an illiterate, namely the poem we now call "Caedmon's Hymn" (see, e.g., Fry 1974 and 1981). But we also need to note that Caedmon surely learned his poetic techniques in some significant

part from learned monks, whose ultimate literary ancestors were oral bards (or *scops*), but whose poetry just as surely reflected a whole battery of lettered influences. Caedmon, that is, is an oral poet shaped by lettered poets who were in turn shaped in good part by both oral and lettered influences.

Nu sculon herigean hefonrices weard,  
meotodes meahte and his modgethanc,  
weorc wuldorfaeder, swa he wundra gehwaes,  
ece drihten, or onstealde.  
He aerest sceop eorthan bearnum  
heofon to hrofe, halig scyppend;  
tha middangeard moncynnes weard,  
ece drihten, aefter teode  
firum foldan, frea aelmihtig.

(West Saxon version, typographically  
normalized; see Dobbie 1942:106)

In plain prose, arranged to follow the original's lineation:

Now should (must) we praise the lord (keeper, guard) of heaven,  
the power (strength) of God (the creator; fate) and his thought,  
the work (action, labor) of the glorious father, as he all (each  
one of) wonders (marvels, miracles),  
eternal (everlasting) lord, in the beginning created (established).  
First he shaped (created, formed) for the sons of earth  
heaven as a roof (summit), holy creator;  
then the earth (world) mankind's guardian,  
eternal (everlasting) lord, afterwards created (intended, appointed)  
the land for men (mankind), lord (king, ruler) almighty.

Large cosmological matters, and large theological ones, are here handled with great sureness and, equally, with immense conviction. The stuff of the poet's belief, that is, is of no greater importance for the poem than the quality of his belief, its intensity and persuasive power. It is a noble and a memorable poem—as is witnessed by the fact that no less than seventeen manuscript versions have survived (thirteen in the West Saxon version here reproduced; summary in Dobbie 1942:xciv). People obviously listened to, and read, this nine-line hymn with engaged, devoted attention.

It seems to me indisputable as well as completely sensible to say with John Foley (1983:206) that “the phraseology is most productively understood not as a collection of prefabricated units

ready to hand, but as a living tissue of language with genetic associations.” The signs of oral connection are of course different, here, than in either the *Slovo* or the *pantun*. Caedmon’s poem employs formulaic or formula-like expressions, and a prosodic patterning which joins stressed syllables within a line by means of alliteration. It is next to impossible to fully evaluate just how truly oral a poet Caedmon was, for just as we lack much understanding of the background to the *Slovo*, so too we do not know a great deal about Caedmon, his training, just what he had heard and what not heard, to whom he talked, by whom he might have been instructed, and so on.<sup>3</sup> We lack almost entirely the poems that preceded and were contemporaneous with the *Slovo*; we have some but by no means all the poems that were roughly contemporary with “Caedmon’s Hymn,” and that deficiency makes it impossible to be authoritative about what is and what is not formulaic in the poem. In translating it, accordingly, we have to reckon not only with assorted uncertainties, but also with the imprecise certainty that it is in part an oral poem, that it is connected to all sorts of other poems in the same tradition, some of which we know, most of which we probably do not and never will know, and also that “Caedmon’s Hymn” is, as I have said, doctrinally and cosmologically distinctly sophisticated. Its diction fairly rings with echoes both poetic and theological/philosophical. And yet that direction, at the same time, resonates quite as fervently with the strength and joy of Caedmon’s personal faith.

Now we must praise the Ruler of Heaven  
 The might of the Lord and His purpose of mind,  
 The work of the Glorious Father; for He,  
 God Eternal, established each wonder,  
 He, Holy Creator, first fashioned the heavens  
 As a roof for the children of earth.  
 And then our guardian, the Everlasting Lord,  
 Adorned this middle-earth for men.  
 Praise the Almighty King of Heaven.

(Crossley-Holland 1965:95)

This translation is by Kevin Crossley-Holland; it dates from 1965 and is plainly very competent. I want however neither to praise nor to damn it, but only to try to understand, from the perspectives so far here employed, what its rationale is and is not. The Old English *scop* employs three large phrase units (which is

what contemporary poets are apt to call breath units), the first of four, the second of two, the third of three lines. Crossley-Holland uses four phrase units, the first of almost three lines, the second of just over three, the third of two, and the last of just a single line. His is a similar patterning, though not identical; since however there is no reason to think the *scop*'s phrase units inherently fixed, such minor variations are in one way unimportant. More significant by far are the particular rhythmic effects aimed at, and created, by the translation's use of phrase units. That is, whatever Caedmon's models (and we do not know what they were, or whether he indeed had any), he obviously aimed at a series of sweeping, piled-up phrasal units, with all the usual repetitions and sideways poetic movement (as opposed, that is, to straight-ahead, linear movement) that we inevitably and correctly associate with Old English poetry generally. The translator has plainly sensed this rhythmic intention and done his best to reproduce it. His one-line final phrase unit, however, seems just as plainly a totally different sort of verse movement from Caedmon's. It may not be a crucial difference, but it is quite unlike the original's more modular effect, built like a series of waves, each sweeping in to the shore, rather than on such neat, single, separate assertions.

The *scop*'s architectonic, as opposed to his strictly architectural, patternings are however partially ignored in this translation. We have replication of the formulaic phrasing; we do not have any replication of the stress-alliteration prosody. One can argue that Old English prosody no longer exists, in the language that modern English has become. The answer, however, must I think be that we need not attempt fully to re-create it in the different language we work in, but only suggest it, re-create it to the extent feasible. The loss of stress-alliteration seems to me distinctly critical, and a serious deficiency in the translation.

Lexically—and I trust it is plain that lexical considerations are a second order of consideration: structure and genre most emphatically come first—the variations are somewhat more serious. And they fit, it seems to me, a doctrinal pattern. *Weard* comes to us as “ruler” rather than as “lord, guard, keeper.” *Drihten* (commonly used for both secular and sacred monarchs) comes to us as “god” rather than “lord.” *Teode* comes to us as a distinctly King-James-Bible-sounding “adorned” rather than as “created, intended.” And *frea*, “lord, king,” which is sufficient for the *scop*, comes to us as “King of Heaven” (italics added). These variations

create an oddly late-nineteenth-century verbal atmosphere—at the same time, too, as the rendering of *middangeard* as “middle-earth” rather than “earth, world” sounds a note of antiquarian preciousity which is sharply out of key with both the original and with the general tone of the translation itself. There is some sense, too, of lexical inconsistency, with words like “established,” “fashioned,” and “adorned” being somewhat more formal than the rest of the translation’s vocabulary—as well as distinctly stiffer, more constrained, less “popular,” even less colloquial, than their Old English equivalents, *onstealde*, *sceop*, and *teode*.

The essential competency of the translation, however, becomes clear when we compare it to what has sometimes been done with the poem. Here for example is the rendering of Richard Hamer (1970:123), who sees very fully the structural principles involved but who totally fails to embody them lexically:

Now must we praise the Guardian of heaven,  
The power and conception of the Lord,  
And all His works, as He, eternal Lord,  
Father of glory, started every wonder.  
First He created heaven as a roof,  
The Holy Maker, for the sons of men.  
Then the eternal Keeper of mankind  
Furnished the earth below, the land for men,  
Almighty God and everlasting Lord.

All the same, note how the verse movement of the last three lines here, no matter how dull and flatfooted the translation as a whole, far exceeds Crossley-Holland’s in both inherent sweep and in accurate reflection of the original. Structural matters, again, almost automatically take precedence over merely lexical ones in this sort of poetry, despite the equally obvious fact that inadequate handling at the lexical level can ruin a sound structural perception. Had Hamer made some attempt to echo the stress-alliteration pattern, which in fact he ignores quite as steadfastly (and erroneously) as does Crossley-Holland, he could have much improved the translation. Its general insensitivity, however, seems clear. One can acquire some notion of the original from Crossley-Holland. One can acquire very little notion of the original from Hamer.

Now sing the glory of God, the King  
Of Heaven, our Father’s power and His perfect

Labor, the world's conception, worked  
In miracles as eternity's Lord made  
The beginning. First the heavens were formed as a roof  
For men, and then the holy Creator,  
Eternal Lord and protector of souls,  
Shaped our earth, prepared our home,  
The almighty Master, our Prince, our God.

(Raffel 1964:21)

This translation, now thirty years old (though it was not published until 1960), is one for which I am myself responsible. It makes use of only two phrase unit structures, one just over four lines long, the second just under five lines long. In strictly numerical terms, plainly, this is neither closer to nor farther from the phrase unit arrangement of the original than is Crossley-Holland's rendering, which as I have noted consists of four units of just under three lines, just over three lines, then of two lines, and finally of one line. The original, once more, has three phrase units, of four, two, and then of three lines. But numerical terms hardly settle the issue, for as I have said Crossley-Holland's final phrase unit, consisting of but a single line, does not accurately reflect the verse movement of the original. I would argue—quite apart from my own authorship of the translation—that my version does in fact capture more of the basic structural sweep of the Old English. Furthermore, the second of the original's primary attributes, namely its stress-alliteration prosody, is distinctly echoed, if not entirely accurately replicated. (The four-stress pattern, too, is more carefully adhered to than in Crossley-Holland, where lines 5 through 8 are of dubious four-stress authenticity.) Only lines 5 through 8 do not preserve some clear stress-alliterative patterning, and even these lines at least hint at what they do not quite effect. Line 5 has /f/ as the initial sound of the third stressed word in the line, and /f/ as the final sound of the fourth stressed word. Line 6 substitutes rhyme for stress-alliteration, in the first two stressed words, just as line 7 blends /l/ and /r/ to at least suggest stress-alliteration, and line 8 uses /r/ to the same impressionistic but nevertheless palpable effect.

Lexically, though it may seem somewhat less close to the original, the translation follows a deliberate course that may not at first seem apparent, namely, an attempt to replicate key Old English words with a small cluster of alternate meanings, rather

than merely rendering them word for word, and a parallel attempt to use modest syntactic rearrangement to replicate more of the lexical variety of the original. Modern English is of course a very great deal freer in its word arrangements, having a decidedly analytical syntax and employing many fewer morphological markings to indicate a word's function. And Old English poetry is notorious for its insistent delight in multiple iteration of essentially the same thing. "Heofonrices weard," in line 1, is thus rendered doubly as "God, the King/Of Heaven"; *frea aelmihtig*, in line 9, becomes "The almighty Master, Our Prince, our God." "Prince" evokes some of the dual sense of *drihten*, in line 4, just as *frea*, which Crossley-Holland correctly renders "King," here evokes "Master," making a total of nine epithets for God in this translation, as against a total of seven in Crossley-Holland and eight in the original. *Wuldorfaeder*, in line 3, is divided among "the glory of God," in line 1 of the translation and "our Father's power," in line 2 of the translation. *Modgethanc* in line 2 and *weorc* in line 3 become, in the translation, "the world's conception" and "His perfect labor."

In short, the translation attempts to incorporate structural and lexical features of the Old English original, adapting those features to the very different linguistic nature of modern English. The verse movement of the partially oral original is not precisely recreated, but it is echoed—and, just as importantly, it is never contravened, as it is in the last line of Crossley-Holland's version. Literary tone and rhetoric, too, are adapted rather than precisely replicated.

However, there is I think nothing internally inconsistent in the presentation of rhetoric and tone, as there is in line 8 of Crossley-Holland and in certain of his lexical choices. Just as the original is internally consistent, so too must the translation be, if it is to convey in a new linguistic garb any of the authority of the original. Translation is surely approximation, but like Janus the translator must constantly be looking in both directions, carrying out of the original as much as he is able, but also creating in his translation a replica which can have some chance of standing for itself as well as for the original on which it is based.

This is in some ways doubly difficult, when that original incorporates indeterminate elements of two traditions, one oral, one lettered. But a scale of priorities—whether analytical and articulated or impressionistic and unstated: it does not matter, to

my mind, so long as the scale is basically accurate, and so long as the resultant translation works—can do a great deal to help point the way. For oral or oral-connected poetry, as I have argued, the two highest priority items on that scale must be genre and structure, with the latter incorporating both formal external structure and such internal structuring devices as stress-alliteration, in Old English poetry, or balanced eight-syllable lines, in Indonesian forms like the *pantun*.

Indeed, the translator of oral or oral-connected poetry who keeps his priorities right can succeed, I firmly believe, far better than a perhaps more talented competitor who simply follows his nose (and his sometimes too contemporary inclinations). For those priorities reflect, and when properly framed accurately reflect, the true meaning of the word “tradition,” which is inevitably the single key word both in reading and in translating all oral and oral-connected literature (cp. Foley 1983:*passim*).

We cannot, either in reading or in translating, validly substitute our own basic priorities for those of the original poet: his priorities, functionally embedded in the operating forms of his culture and tradition, are in fact what “tradition” means to him. In seeking to understand another tradition, what more fundamental error could there be than replacing one set of basic priorities with another—thus effectively replacing one tradition with another? All cross-cultural, cross-traditional understanding ought to involve as little substitution, and as much replication, as can possibly be achieved.

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#### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Goldin 1955:22. See also Kellogg 1977, and especially Snyder 1982: “In a completely pre-literate society the oral tradition is not memorized, but *remembered*” (vii).

<sup>2</sup>Let me expressly exclude the intelligent and obviously *singable* translations of Mark Herman and Ronnie Apter. Dr. Apter, who is also the author of *Digging for the Treasure: Translation after Pound* (1984), observes in a letter to me, dated 5 May 1984, that while the translator of poetry “may choose to be tied to a syllable-for-syllable translation, or a stress-for-stress translation, he may choose to be free of both. The translator of lyrics [meant to be sung] has no such freedom. He must translate syllable-for-syllable, stress-for-stress (although the stress may be ordained by the music, rather than by the original words). He must crest meaning where the melodic line crests. Also, he must . . . [ask] can this syllable be held for two beats without sounding silly? Can the tenor get off this syllable in the space of an eighth note and take a catch breath?”

<sup>3</sup>All we really know is from Bede, *A History of the English Church and People*, book iv, chapter 24; see Sherley-Price 1955:245-48.

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## **Oral Tradition and Biblical Studies**

**Robert C. Culley**

The discussion of oral tradition in biblical studies has a rather long history, so there would be no point in trying to review everything or to examine all the material with equal thoroughness. This review, then, will attempt to cover the ground in three chronological stages. The first stage, up to the early decades of this century, will do little more than consider two remarkable scholars from the end of this period, Julius Wellhausen (d. 1914) and Hermann Gunkel (d. 1932). The next stage will note the main features of three streams of research which run alongside one another from around 1930 to about 1960. The last stage will review the last twenty-five years, and here the aim will be to cover all relevant contributions and authors. For the last two stages, the Old Testament and the New Testament will be treated separately.

The terms “Bible” and “biblical studies” are ambiguous in the sense that both may refer to overlapping entities. The Christian Bible contains the Old Testament written in Hebrew with a small amount of Aramaic and the New Testament written in Greek. The Jewish Bible is, of course, that Hebrew collection which Christians adopted as the Old Testament. In what follows, the terms “Bible” and “biblical studies” will retain some of this basic ambiguity, since both Hebrew Bible, or Old Testament, and New Testament will be taken into account. Scholarship has also divided along these lines in that scholars tend to be identified as specialists in the Hebrew Scriptures or Old Testament on the one hand or New Testament on the other. While I would be known as a student of the Old Testament, I will venture gingerly into New Testament studies in order that biblical studies in both senses of the term may be included.

There is no single book or article on oral tradition in the

Bible which covers the whole territory and so could serve as a basic reference work. The most extensive study of oral tradition in biblical studies covers only the Hebrew Bible and was published in 1973: *Rediscovering the Traditions of Israel* by Douglas A. Knight. This ample volume contains a critical history of the study of tradition in Old Testament studies. While Knight's interest is mainly in work done during this century in Germany and Scandinavia, he notes some earlier discussions.

My own article in *Semeia* (1976a) and my chapter in *The Hebrew Bible and Its Modern Interpreters* (1984) attempt to cover research in Old Testament studies over the last twenty-five years. An encyclopedia article on oral tradition by Robert E. Coote in 1976 covers part of the modern period. For New Testament Studies, there is an article by Leander E. Keck, "Oral Traditional Literature and the Gospels: The Seminar" (1978). Werner Kelber's work (1979, 1983) also offers background and assessment of earlier discussions, as does the book by Güttgemanns (1979, original German 1971).

As this simple chronological scheme is followed, it will be important to keep a basic question in mind: how have biblical scholars formed their opinion about oral tradition and its significance for the Bible? As with most other ancient texts, we lack substantial information as to how it was composed and reached its present form. Little can be said directly about the role of oral tradition. Since no clear picture can be reconstructed on the basis of evidence from the Bible and its historical context, one must resort to other means. Three avenues have been followed. First of all, there is the shape of the biblical text itself and the extent to which it yields clues to modes of composition and transmission. Second, one may turn to other cultures, ancient or modern, which seem to give a clearer picture of oral tradition and use these as analogies to draw conclusions about biblical texts. Third, a general picture may be assumed or a general model may be constructed which contains what appear to be the more or less universal characteristics of an oral culture; or the picture may include the main features of both oral and literate societies placed in contrast. Such a broad schema is then used to discern the presence or absence of features related to oral and written texts.

### I. Up to the time of Gunkel (d. 1932)

Douglas Knight traces discussion of oral tradition among biblical scholars back as far as the time of the Reformation (1973:39-54), although at this stage oral tradition was enmeshed in debates between Catholics and Protestants about inspiration and authority of Scripture. Because it was accepted that Moses had written the first five books of the Bible, some assumed that he must have had oral traditions concerning those things recorded in the book of Genesis which had occurred before his lifetime. While this idea persisted for some time, two figures contributed significantly to an important change. Johann Gottfried Herder assumed oral sources not only for early parts of the Old Testament (Knight 1973:57-58) but also for the Gospels, as noted by Kelber (1983:77-78) and Güttgemanns (1979:178-81). A contemporary of Herder, Johann Christoph Nachtigal (1753-1819) was, in Knight's estimation (61-63), the first to propose in detail a post-Mosaic oral tradition of historical and prophetic material with his theory that oral and written traditions emerged as literature only in the period of David.

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, two scholars emerged as leading figures in biblical studies, Julius Wellhausen and Hermann Gunkel, and indeed they have continued to effect a remarkable influence up to the present day. Their views on oral tradition were quite different. For Wellhausen (1844-1918), authors and documents were the critical elements in any study of composition of the Bible. Drawing on the work of many predecessors, Wellhausen fashioned the classic statement for the source analysis of the first five books of the Bible. His version of the literary analysis of the Pentateuch entails four documents: J was the Yahwist document from the ninth century B.C.E., E was the Elohist from the eighth century, D or Deuteronomy came from the seventh century, and P or the Priestly tradition from the fifth century. Wellhausen also analyzed other parts of the Hebrew Bible and produced a literary analysis of the Gospels. In his famous *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel* (1883), oral tradition comes up in only a few, scattered comments. These are discussed, among other things, in an article by Knight in *Semeia* (1982). Wellhausen assumed that oral tradition lay behind the documents but consisted of individual stories only loosely related to each other (296) and bound originally to localities having special features like

sacred sites or geographical oddities reflected in the stories (325). Bringing oral stories together into larger, organized structures was the work of authors producing written sources. As a historian, Wellhausen did not credit oral traditions with much reliability (326).

While Hermann Gunkel (1862-1932) accepted the general framework of Wellhausen's documentary theory, he displayed a much greater interest in the role of oral tradition in shaping the material which ultimately emerged as documents. Gunkel began from a basic distinction which he made between the literature of ancient peoples and the literature of modern times (1963; reprint of 1925:1-4). While modern literature is marked by the dominant role of authors who produce *Kunstpoesie*, the literature of Israel is closer to folk literature. The notion of *Gattung*, sometimes translated in English as "form" but more recently as "genre," is a key concept in Gunkel's general approach which he referred to as *Gattungsgeschichte* but which is known in English as "form criticism." In his view, most of the basic genres of Israel's literature were formed in an oral period when each had a specific setting in the life of the people (*Sitz im Leben*). Even when writing and authors took over, ancient patterns were still employed. Using this perspective, Gunkel made important contributions to the understanding of the narrative and prophetic traditions of the Hebrew Bible, as well as the Psalms.

Gunkel does not indicate how he arrived at his approach to biblical literature or where he came by his perception of oral tradition, although he acknowledges a general debt to Herder. In a major study of Gunkel's life and work, Werner Klatt mentions a number of possible, indirect influences on Gunkel's thought (1969:104-25), such as the Grimm Brothers, but Klatt is strongly inclined to attribute the large part of Gunkel's approach to his own originality (110-12; but see the views of Warner 1979 and Kirkpatrick 1984).

The fullest discussion of oral tradition by Gunkel may be found in the introduction to his commentary on Genesis. An English translation of the introduction to the second edition has appeared under the title, *The Legends of Genesis*, although in what follows reference will be made to the third edition of 1910. A number of references can be found in this edition to the now famous article by Axel Olrik, "Epische Gesetze der Volksdichtung" (1909). However, these are clearly used to substantiate insights

Gunkel had already arrived at and stated in earlier editions of his commentary. He was a perceptive reader of the biblical text.

The style of the Genesis stories may be understood, Gunkel argues, only if it is seen that they are legends from oral tradition. As folk tradition, these stories are in some real sense the common creation of the people and thus express their spirit. The setting of these stories in the life of the people is the family. Here Gunkel offers a picture, frequently cited, which describes the family seated around a fire on a winter's evening listening with rapt attention, especially the children, to the familiar, well-loved stories about early times (xxx). Gunkel also envisages a class of storytellers, well-versed in the traditional narratives, who travelled the country and appeared at festivals. While he agreed with Wellhausen that the basic unit in narration was the single legend, he estimated that groups of stories were already brought together into small collections at the oral stage (*Sagenkränze*). Nevertheless, the main blocks of material in Genesis (primeval history, the patriarchs, and the Joseph story) were assumed to have been the result of literary collection, at which point some artistic reformulation may have taken place.

Gunkel imagined that an oral period must have entailed substantial limitations of both an intellectual and literary nature on the part of both listeners and storytellers. For example, he believed that only short works could be produced. Hence, the axiom: the shorter the story, the older it must be. He spoke of the poverty of the ancient artistry from an oral period (xxxiv). To this he traced the repetition of expressions as well as the simplicity of the description of character and the development of action. Nevertheless, legends of Genesis were for Gunkel a mature and developed art form which appealed to him very much. Oral tradition involved both stability and change. While Gunkel spoke of a remarkable reliability in the transmission of stories, he noted that transmission was characterized by change, for oral tradition exists in the form of variants (lxv). Still, in the long term, this multiformity was also a limitation. Inability to retain its purity renders oral tradition an unsuitable vehicle for history, which can arise only in a period of writing.

To be sure, Gunkel's views are open to criticism on a number of points, and indeed apt critiques have been produced by a number of scholars, for example, Sean Warner, Alois Wolf (a Germanist), and Patricia Kirkpatrick. But, given the fact that he

was writing over eighty years ago, one is rather impressed with what he attempted to do and how far he got with it. His perception of oral tradition in the biblical texts appears to be based on a sensitive reading of the texts along with a rather general notion of oral tradition and oral culture, perhaps owing much to Herder. Having sensed distinctions in style, structure, and genre between the stories in Genesis and the literature of his own day, he sought to explain them in terms of his idea of what oral tradition must have been like. He also devoted considerable attention to the presence of folklore genres and motifs in biblical texts.

Gunkel's form-critical approach and the notion of oral tradition that went with it have had a remarkable and persistent influence in both Old and New Testament scholarship up to the present. In what follows these two fields will be treated separately. Broadly speaking, they carried on their research and discussion apart from each other, even though significant overlapping and interplay can be discerned.

## II. The Hebrew Scriptures or Old Testament

### A. From Gunkel to the Sixties

The period from Hermann Gunkel to the early sixties can be traced by considering the work of scholars in three geographical areas: Germany, Scandinavia, and North America.

1. *Germany.* After Gunkel little was written by the German scholars who followed him and developed his approach on the subject of oral tradition. Knight (1973:84-142) provides a good survey of the contribution made to the study of tradition by scholars like Gressmann, Alt, and von Rad. Only one scholar will be mentioned by way of example.

Martin Noth (1902-1968) produced major studies of the history of tradition in the historical books and in the Pentateuch, as well as writing an important history of Israel. His broad aim in the study of tradition was stated on the first page of *A History of Pentateuchal Traditions* (1972, original German 1948), namely, to trace the growth of the tradition from its earliest preliterate elements to the final form we now have in the Bible. He assumed a significant role for oral tradition but made no substantial

comment on its nature. Discussion and analysis of Noth's work may be found in Knight (1973:143-71) and especially in Bernard W. Anderson's introduction to his English translation of *Pentateuchal Traditions* (Noth 1972). Noth is known particularly for his frequent use of aetiological elements to trace the origins of the oral legends he identified in the Bible. He assumed they were frequently bound to specific localities.

As with Gunkel, Noth's conclusions are derived from minute examination of the characteristics of the biblical text in conjunction with some general assumptions of what must have happened in oral tradition. He did not draw a clear line between literary and oral traditions. While he accepted J and E as written sources, he posited a common tradition behind them identified as G (*Grundlage*). It could have been oral or written and Noth did not seem to think it mattered which.

2. *Scandinavia*. Alongside developments in Germany, and to some extent in reaction to them, a debate about oral tradition arose among Scandinavian scholars and continued over two decades or more. Actually, oral tradition was only one of a number of issues under discussion. For example, one finds a particular interest in the role of the cult in Israel's religion, especially sacral kingship. Knight's *Rediscovering the Traditions of Ancient Israel* provides a very useful guide to this discussion along with a full bibliography (215-382). Since the debate on the issue of oral tradition moves back and forth among a number of scholars, it would not be helpful to try to describe the whole debate or trace the exact chronology of discussion. Thus, only a broad account of the main figures and central issues in a rough chronological order will be attempted.

Most agree that the debate began with the publication of *Studien zum Hoseabuche* by the Swedish scholar H. S. Nyberg (1935). In a few brief comments Nyberg argued the following. Tradition in the ancient Orient was mainly oral and only on rare occasions purely written. A period of oral tradition lay behind most written texts, and even after inscription the principal means of transmission continued to be oral. No support was offered for these statements beyond cursory mention of two examples: the memorization of Qur'an by Muslims and the case of a Parsee priest who knew the Yasna by heart but had trouble using a written text. Nyberg claimed to have more material which has never been published (1972:9; also Widengren 1959:205-6).

Nyberg seems to have envisaged a relatively fixed and stable transmission through memorization, even though he spoke of the possibility of changes through a *lebendige Umformung* (1935:8). In large part the traditions of Israel achieved a written form after the Babylonian Exile of the fifth century B.C.E. Nyberg also stressed the contrast between cultures which rely on memory to preserve literature orally and cultures which rely on writing. Texts from ancient times should not be read like the written literature with which we are familiar because such texts are only supports for an oral tradition which remained dominant.

Others were influenced by Nyberg's views. In a monograph on the prophetic books, *Zum Hebräischen Traditionswesen* (1938), Harris Birkeland sought to support Nyberg's proposal further by appealing to descriptions of how early Arabic poetry was transmitted. While he argued for the priority of oral tradition, he accepted an interplay between oral and written.

However, the most lively and controversial supporter of Nyberg's views was Ivan Engnell. His earliest comments appeared in *Gamla Testamentet* (1945), which has never been translated into English. In 1949 he published *The Call of Isaiah*, a volume containing a brief summary of his views in response to some of his critics. A further presentation may be found in *A Rigid Scrutiny* (1969, original Swedish 1962). For Engnell oral tradition was part of a larger approach to biblical texts, called the tradition-historical method, which rejected the theory of literary documents in the Pentateuch (Wellhausen's J, E, D, and P) as well as similar documentary analysis for other parts of the Bible.

Engnell followed Nyberg in maintaining that the Old Testament was essentially oral literature which only gained written form at a later period. Oral tradition could be reliable and resistant to corruption, although he too spoke of change in terms of a "living remodeling" (likely Nyberg's term). Analysis of texts was not a matter of sorting out documents which had been put together with scissors and paste but of attempting to determine the units and blocks joined in the process of oral transmission to make larger elements of tradition (Engnell 1969:6). Cultic texts like the Psalms may have been treated differently and written down well before the Exile, so that oral and written should not be set in absolute opposition (1949:56). As evidence for the oral composition and transmission of the biblical text, he pointed to features like the use of word association, doublets and variants, epic laws, and

various kinds of patterning in poetry and prose (1969:8).

Engnell did not in the end accept Arabic traditions as useful comparative material on the question of oral tradition. They were too far removed in time and space and existed in a context with very different religious and cultic perspectives. He stressed the special character of the traditions of Israel as sacred text.

Perhaps the best known book in the English-speaking world that summarized the position of Nyberg and Engnell is *Oral Tradition* (1954) by Eduard Nielsen. The author reviews comparative material from the ancient world for learning by heart, such as the Qur'an and the Rigveda, and adds some arguments in support of oral tradition in Mesopotamia. He also covers topics like the creators and bearers of the tradition, the interplay of oral and written, and the reduction to writing. His list of the formal characteristics of oral tradition include: monotonous style, recurring expressions, paratactic style, conformity to Olrik's laws, and emphasis on memory words and representative themes (36). Nielsen tries to show that similar conditions applied for Israel.

Other Scandinavian scholars took up a critical stance. One of these was the Norwegian, Sigmund Mowinckel, whose views were noted in his *Prophecy and Tradition* (1946) as well as in an encyclopedia article (1962). He held that both traditio-historical (Nyberg, Engnell) and literary-critical (Welihausen, Gunkel) methods are important and must be allowed to interact (1962:685). He agreed that a substantial amount of the biblical traditions must be oral. But popular traditions were not, according to Mowinckel, passed on in a fixed form. Unchangeable traditions came only with the notion of a sacred text. For him oral transmission is a living process in which the traditions constantly gained new forms and entered new combinations (27). Another critic, J. van der Ploeg, expressed his doubts about any major role for oral tradition (1947).

The most vehement critic of Nyberg and Engnell was G. Widengren. In a book on the prophets, *Literary and Psychological Aspects of the Hebrew Prophets* (1948), he questioned the analogy of early Arabic poetry, claiming that it had been written down much earlier than usually assumed. He proposed rather a scribal culture in which oral tradition was not nearly as reliable as written texts (29). In Arabic tradition he distinguished two kinds of historical literature: one which was largely oral tradition and one which had mixed oral and written from the start. There was also

a more developed historical literature in which the hand of an author could be discerned (56). On the basis of this analogy, Widengren concludes that the role of oral tradition in Israel should not be exaggerated, especially with reference to its reliability. He would only assume a long oral tradition in Israel where the literature reflects nomadic or semi-nomadic conditions (122). This might be so for Joshua and Judges but not for Samuel and Kings, which must have involved a mixture of oral and written materials. In a later article, “Oral Tradition and Written Literature among the Hebrews in the Light of Arabic Evidence, with Special Regard to Prose Narratives” (1959), Widengren reasserted his earlier position with further discussion of Arabic and other traditions. In addition he suggested a distinction between Indo-European cultures, which emphasize oral, and the Ancient Near East, which had developed written traditions (218-25).

Finally, one might note a study by Helmer Ringgren (1949). Aware of the difficulty of using analogies, he attempts a study of parallel texts (e.g., Psalms 40:14-17 and 70) in the Hebrew Bible in an effort to determine whether the small differences that exist between the texts can be traced to written or oral transmission. Since some of the differences appear to be errors in hearing, he urges that one should allow for oral as well as written transmission.

In this debate the characteristics of the biblical texts retained a central place, although Engnell read the evidence differently from Wellhausen or even Gunkel. It is significant also that the Scandinavian discussion produced attempts to find suitable analogies in other cultures, although the appeals made on both sides were usually to examples from antiquity. Beyond this, some attempt was made to distinguish appropriate analogies from those that were not.

3. *North America.* Oral tradition was also discussed on the other side of the Atlantic, although not as extensively. This was very much the work of William Foxwell Albright (1891-1971), a brilliant and inquisitive scholar whose interests ranged far and wide through many disciplines and whose influence has been quite remarkable in biblical scholarship in North America.

It is astonishing that as early as 1950, in an article on “Some Oriental Glosses on the Homeric Problem,” Albright referred to Parry’s view that Homeric style with its repeated language and patterns was the product of many generations of singers. Albright suggested that the Canaanite texts from Ugarit may have been the

result of a similar mode of composition in which poets employed traditional diction while remaining creative artists. On the basis of Parry's suggestion, Albright criticized Gunkel's proposal that oral poetry necessarily must have begun with very short compositions. He also surmised that even in such literate regions as Egypt, Babylonia, Iran, India, and China, composition and transmission of literary works were largely oral and frequently without use of writing.

Later comments by Albright on the subject of oral tradition take no further account of Parry or even Lord. In *From the Stone Age to Christianity* (1957), there is a brief section on the characteristics of oral tradition. Here he discerns no clear line between oral and written transmission of the sort one finds in connection with texts like the Qur'an, the Rig-veda, and the Talmud in which oral transmission exists both before and after the written text. Still, he finds prose less suited than verse for reliable oral transmission and so prefers poetry to prose as historical sources. On the grounds that prose was frequently a secondary form behind which lay a poetic version, Albright agreed with the suggestions of some preceding scholars that early Hebrew prose had a poetic background. The first chapter of his *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan* (1969) bears the heading "Verse and Prose in Early Israelite Tradition" and is devoted to presenting "some of the evidence for early oral transmission of historical information through archaic verse" (52). It is urged that orally transmitted poetic saga lay behind the sources of the Pentateuch (35).

Albright's comments are frequently directed toward the problem of assessing the historical reliability of biblical texts. In contrast to Wellhausen and Noth, who put little trust in the early traditions of Israel, Albright urged historians to take these early stories much more seriously as sources for historical reconstruction and to be cautious in their use of aetiology in explaining origins of narratives. While conceding that oral tradition was liable to refraction and selection through adding folkloristic elements or dramatizing for pedagogical reasons, he continues to insist on the general accuracy of oral tradition and the substantial historicity of the biblical traditions (1964:56). This appears to mean the essential outline of events (1966:11).

Former students and colleagues of Albright have also spoken of an original poetic epic. In an article on the Pentateuch in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (1962), D. N. Freedman leans

toward the notion that G (*Grundlage*), the common source which Noth assumed lay behind the Pentateuchal sources, was “a poetic composition, orally transmitted” and had its setting in the sacred festivals of Israel (714). In a later article, he doubts the notion of an epic, however attractive, and thinks rather of several poems of considerable length (1977:17). In *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic* (1973), Frank M. Cross argues that the sources J and E are prose variants of a cycle in poetry from the time of the Judges. In his opinion, this cycle was “originally composed orally and was utilized in the cult of covenant-renewal festivals” (294).

Neither Albright nor his successors resorted to specific analogies from other cultures to support their conception of oral tradition, although as we shall see Cross is fully aware of the work of Lord. Nor do they present any substantial argument for the existence of a poetic epic. Albright supports his theory of the priority of verse with a study of Canaanite and early Israelite poetic style (1969:1-52).

## B. From 1963 to the Present

In 1963 a new dimension was introduced into the discussion of oral tradition in Old Testament studies. Attempts were now undertaken to employ field studies describing modern oral transmission in order to define the nature of oral tradition and the characteristics of oral texts. The intention was to examine the Hebrew Bible in the light of whatever information might be gained. This strategy resulted in large part from the work done by Milman Parry and Albert Bates Lord in collecting Serbo-Croatian oral narrative. Added to this original focus was the interest their work generated in disciplines like classics as well as Old and Middle English. Texts from an oral narrative tradition of Serbo-Croatian bards, along with some commentary, became available in the first volume of *Serbocroatian Heroic Songs* (1954), edited by Albert B. Lord, and in his book *The Singer of Tales* which appeared in 1960.

In my own article, “An Approach to the Problem of Oral Tradition” (1963), I tried to describe oral tradition in broad outline by surveying the comments of a number of scholars who had observed oral tradition at first hand. The aim was to sample descriptions from as broad a range of different oral traditions as possible, involving a wide variety of literary types in poetry and prose in both long and short texts. From the limited studies

available, it was clear that alongside the fixed form of transmission assumed by many earlier biblical scholars there was also an unfixed form. In fact, this latter form appeared to be the more common variety. Transmission of traditional songs, poems, and stories was accomplished by improvisation during performance involving the use of traditional language. The work of Parry and Lord, the most detailed study of this kind of transmission, suggested that ready-made language-*formulas* and formulaic phrases as well as stock scenes and descriptions called *themes*-enabled the poets to compose rapidly in performance.

My conclusion was that one would need to hold open a number of possibilities regarding composition and transmission of Old Testament texts. Some may have been written by authors. Some might have been dictations taken from an oral performer. Complexes of relatively stable material may have been joined in oral tradition. There may have been so-called “transitional” texts composed in writing but in an oral style. Finally, one would have to allow for oral texts produced in a fixed form and passed on through memorization until written down.

In what follows the studies relating to Hebrew poetry will be examined first, then studies on prose, and finally other kinds of studies.

### ***1. Biblical Hebrew Poetry***

Also in 1963, two scholars attempted to relate the work of Parry and Lord to biblical poetry. William Whallon, not a biblical scholar, published an article with the title “Formulaic Poetry in the Old Testament.” He argued that parallelism was a prosodic requirement analogous to meter in Homer and alliteration in Anglo-Saxon. Thus, the equivalent of the formula in Hebrew poetry was the pair of synonymous words in parallel sections of the line. Numerous examples were supplied. In a later book (1969), Whallon accepted both word pairs and repeated phrases as formulaic.

In the same year, and independently, Stanley Gevirtz commented briefly on “fixed pairs” (synonymous, parallel words) in the introduction to a book on Hebrew poetry. This phenomenon had already been recognized by some biblical scholars as an important feature of Canaanite and biblical poetry, but Gevirtz made the suggestion that these fixed pairs were part of a

traditional language used by Syro-Palestinian poets in oral composition (1963:10). Having come across the writings of Parry on Homer, he proposed that Hebrew poets (unlike Greek) constructed their verse primarily with the aid of these fixed pairs rather than with formulaic phrases, although he did not exclude the presence and use of such phrases as well (12).

My dissertation on formulaic language in the biblical psalms (1963) appeared as *Oral Formulaic Language in the Biblical Psalms* in 1967. This study collected phrases, usually of a line or a half-line in length, repeated either exactly or with some modification. Recent descriptions of oral poetry from three distinct areas and traditions were used as analogies: Serbo-Croatian narrative, Toda songs from South India, and Russian narrative and ceremonial poetry. It appeared that the mode of composition and transmission was similar in each case. Stock phrases were present in all these traditions. The descriptions of Toda and Russian poetry suggested that improvised composition was used for different kinds of poetry, even for short non-narrative poems. Since the fullest and most detailed account of oral composition and transmission came from Parry and Lord, their description was relied upon extensively and their terminology was adopted in a modified form. Analyses of other ancient documents like Homer and Anglo-Saxon texts were used to amplify and illustrate the field studies.

Repeated phrases were identified as formulas and formulaic phrases on the basis of close similarity in syntactical pattern and lexical items as well as conformity to line or half-line length. Since Hebrew meter was, and remains, a much-disputed question, it was left out of consideration. One hundred and seventy-seven examples of formulas and formulaic phrases were listed. Almost half of these occurred at least three times (some more than this), the rest twice. There were fifteen examples of small blocks of lines being repeated. A small number of psalms showed a clustering of repeated phrases, but only a handful of psalms contained over forty percent of this language. While it was argued that the phrases were traditional, oral-formulaic language, it was left open as to whether or not any of the present psalms are oral compositions.

A brief reply was made to Gevirtz and Whallon. While conceding the force of their suggestions, I argued then that the presence of a body of repeated phrases similar to formulas and formulaic phrases found in other traditions suggested that the

major formula in Hebrew was related to lines and *cola* rather than parallelism and was thus the fixed phrase rather than fixed pair. It was proposed that, while parallelism was almost always present, there was something more basic to the structure of Hebrew poetry, perhaps meter, which had to do with building lines and *cola* within certain limitations (1963:119). I left open the question of precisely how fixed pairs might be related to oral composition.

In a 1970 dissertation followed by an article, "A-B Pairs and Oral Composition" (1971), Perry B. Yoder made a strong case for fixed pairs as the Hebrew formula. With no demonstrable metrical limitations, he urged, formulas and formulaic phrases would not be needed. On the other hand, fixed pairs could be explained in terms of the need to produce parallel lines. Thus, Yoder contended that parallelism and not meter was the formal requirement which had to be met by the poet (1970:102). He appealed to the examples of Ob-Ugric and Toda poetry, where paired words appear to be found. Fixed pairs are then formulas, and formulaic systems involve substitution of another word in one of the positions. In psalms where I found clustering of phrases, he finds clustering of fixed pairs (1970:205-6).

The views of Culley, Gevirtz, and Whallon are specifically criticized in another study of word pairs by William R. Watters (1976). In his view, what repeated phrases exist are not sufficient to be marks of traditional oral diction, and this goes for word pairs as well. Thus he does not relate his study of fixed pairs to oral language.

About this time an interest in oral-formulaic studies became evident among some students of Frank M. Cross at Harvard University. The first sign of this interest came through a thesis on Ugaritic poetry, which is usually taken to be very closely related to biblical poetry if not part of the same Syro-Palestinian tradition (as Gevirtz [1963] has said). Richard E. Whitaker's unpublished dissertation, "A Formulaic Analysis of Ugaritic Poetry" (1969), began with a study of epithets and how they were paired to build parallel *cola*. From there he studied the patterns of lines which yielded traditional features like fixed line positions for elements, conventional phrases, traditional verse patterns, and groups of *cola* which cluster (154). One text showed a level of eighty-two percent formulaic language. He concluded that the poetry was created in oral tradition (157).

Further comments on the oral nature of the Ugaritic poems

may be found in an article by Cross (1974). He offers a few examples where, in his view, irregularities have occurred in the process of dictation to a scribe, and in this interpretation he is relying on Lord's discussion of dictation. A number of restorations are proposed which "reconstruct the original text" (8).

Another Harvard thesis, "Evidences of Oral-Formulaic Composition in the Poetry of Job" (1975), came from William J. Urbrock. It remains unpublished, but some of his material has appeared in a paper on Job (1972) and a later article (1976). Urbrock contends that significant evidence of formulaic language in Job suggests oral antecedents. This evidence includes traditional word pairs, which are deemed the basic building blocks for composing parallel *cola*. Over a hundred examples of colon-length formulas and formulaic systems are proposed. In selecting formulaic phrases, Urbrock was less restrictive than I was, not demanding as great a measure of semantic identity. A particular contribution of Urbrock's study is his attempt to deal with traditional *themes* in Joban poetry. Fifteen examples of repeated groups of ideas are presented which occur more than once in Job or elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible. Smaller units or motifs are also identified.

Two articles by another Harvard graduate, Robert B. Coote, appeared in the same year (1976a and b) with a general assessment of the application of the oral theory of Parry and Lord to biblical studies. Limitations are noted. Features like conformity to meter, formulaic density, and thrift, which made the theory convincing for Homer and Yugoslav poetry, are lacking in Hebrew poetry. Since Hebrew meter has never been described and the length of line, while apparently subject to limitation, is rather flexible, Coote wonders why Hebrew oral poets might need stock language. In addition, formulaic density is difficult to establish in any substantial way due to the paucity of comparative material. Nor can thrift be measured. The result is that, while one can make a good case for conventional language in the Psalms and Job, it cannot be demonstrated positively that this language was functional in oral composition (1976b:56-57). It is, then, hardly possible to establish whether or not a given poem was orally composed. What studies on oral language have shown, however, is that Hebrew poetry at least derived from an oral tradition. Coote defines the formula in terms of the line or colon rather than the fixed pair, which he nevertheless accepts as a device which facilitates the

composition of parallel lines. As far as the present biblical text is concerned, he is inclined to think of oral language as traces of an oral heritage in a written tradition. The question then becomes: "how is written convention shaped by the oral tradition from which it derives its constituent elements?" (57). He relates this question to those posed by form criticism and tradition history.

Coote identifies two areas where discussion of the oral nature of biblical texts may prove helpful. First, he argues that the constraints of oral Hebrew poetry have been clarified, and that they are two: "the line is of a certain length, and its meaning is self-contained" (58), although the metrical characteristics of written poetry in the Bible are still an open question. The other area is textual criticism. Since oral tradition exists in multiforms at all levels, the notion of a single original text may have to be modified at the very least. It may be useful to consider retaining variants rather than reducing and harmonizing them (1976a:915).

Three further discussions of oral poetry may be noted. A 1978 monograph by a Scandinavian scholar, Inger Ljung, applies the results of formulaic analysis to a biblical problem. Ljung tries to test the theory that there was a specific genre known as Servant of Yahweh psalms, which were rituals or reflected rituals depicting the suffering of the sacral king in an annual festival. Using the phrases collected in my work on the Psalms, she finds no clustering of this language. On the assumption that there would be a close link between oral-formulaic language and genre, she concludes that lack of this clustering rules out a special genre of Servant of Yahweh psalms.

Yehoshua Gitay turns to the question of oral tradition and a prophetic book, Isaiah 40-45, in a 1980 article, "Deutero-Isaiah: Oral or Written?" He contends that any phenomenon which might be identified as oral style can also be found in written texts. He goes on to assert that it is not appropriate to ask about oral or written, since all early texts were produced to be heard and not read.

Finally, one should note some brief comments made on the subject of oral poetry by M. O'Connor in a massive study on Hebrew meter entitled *Hebrew Verse Structure* (1980). Since this author's main interest lies in the problem of Hebrew meter, his comments on oral poetry are presented rather cryptically in a few paragraphs. He does not discuss any of the analyses carried out on Hebrew texts but limits himself to a few general assertions about

formulas. O'Connor accepts the notion that Canaanite poetry, which in his terminology includes Hebrew, was essentially oral (103). A principal reference in his discussion of oral poetry is the collection of articles in *Oral Literature and the Formula* (Stoltz and Shannon 1976), and he shows a great deal of sympathy for the views expressed in Paul Kiparsky's essay in particular. As a result, O'Connor prefers to separate the formula from the definition of meter, feeling that meter does not create the formula (104-6). He does not believe that Parry's definition of the formula, because of its metrical component, can be made to fit Hebrew or Ugaritic, which in O'Connor's view are not metrical, although they have constraints. In his opinion fixed pairs, which he calls dyads, appear to belong to the same phenomenon as do formulas in other poetic traditions, but he does not wish to tie formulas to oral composition. For example, he suggests that Homer is orally based but does not assume that it is orally composed (106).

## **2. Biblical Hebrew Prose**

David M. Gunn has produced four articles (1974a and b, 1976a and b) on aspects of oral prose style and biblical texts. His views are summed up conveniently in chapter three of a subsequent book, *The Story of King David* (1978). Gunn is well acquainted with the work of Parry and Lord but also with a wide range of descriptions of oral prose. In his approach to the biblical text he makes a distinction between what he calls *traditional material*, conventional for the author and his audience, and *oral traditional material*, where the mode of composition of the conventional material can be specified as oral.

Examples of traditional material given by Gunn entail some specimens of repeated patterns which he calls traditional motifs. He identifies these with labels like "the two messengers" and "the woman who brings death." Examples of a given motif share a general similarity in form and content but not in wording.

Examples of oral traditional material offered by Gunn consist of short patterns which show some close verbal correspondences along with a significant measure of dissimilarity. That is to say, they seem to reflect both fixity and fluidity (1978:49-50). These, he argues, correspond to the stock description or incident identified by students of oral tradition as *theme* or *type-scene*, and so provide evidence of some kind of a connection with oral tradition.

Since he has only a limited number of examples, Gunn is cautious about what conclusions can be drawn, but he is prepared to say that "somewhere behind the story of King David (or parts of it) lies a tradition of oral narrative composition" (59). As to how biblical texts may be related to oral tradition, Gunn holds open a range of possibilities which include: transcription of a dictation of an oral story, a text written by a literate author but in an oral style, or a text in a written style with some traces of oral style. On the basis of the relatively small amount of evidence usually available, he concedes that it would be difficult to choose among these options. What keeps the possibility of some oral influence open for Gunn is the general likelihood that the stories of Israel had their formative stage in an oral tradition.

My own monograph, *Studies in the Structure of Hebrew Narrative* (1976), deals in part with the question of oral prose. The first chapter sought on the basis of four field studies from such different geographical areas as Africa, the Bahamas, and Europe to determine what it is possible to say about the creation and transmission of oral prose. Only some general observations could be made. It seemed evident that traditional stories were passed on in such a way that both the loyalty to tradition (stability) and the creativity of the narrator (variation) were blended. Among the traditional elements commonly used in one way or other was the stock incident or episode, similar to the theme, or at least one kind of theme, discussed by Lord. It was concluded that, while the identification of such a device provided interesting clues to the nature of orally composed texts, it did not offer a definitive test for distinguishing oral texts from written. In the second chapter of the monograph, some of the famous cases of variants in the Hebrew Bible were examined in the light of the discussion of oral prose. As I had anticipated, clear judgments were not possible on the basis of such a small number of variants. Evidence for both stability and variation was compatible with what one would expect in oral variants, but it was difficult to rule out the possibility that the same sort of thing might occur in a scribal tradition which stood somewhere between a distinct oral tradition and a fully developed literary tradition. It was urged that more needs to be known about the possibility of such a "transitional" phase.

A very different approach to the oral nature of a text is found in Heda Jason's "The Story of David and Goliath: A Folk

Epic?" (1979). A whole range of criteria is applied to the biblical story. This analysis is based on a model developed by Jason for the study of folklore. It is organized under two main headings: narrative syntax (texture and plot) and narrative semantics (terms of content and dimensions of time and space). Jason presumes that a written text would not respond to measurement by folkloristic models. Since this one does, Jason takes the story to be "an original work of oral literature or a successful imitation" (61).

A few other studies that touch on the oral question in connection with prose texts from the Bible may be noted briefly. Alexander Rofé in his "Classification of Prophetic Stories" (1970) identifies some tales which may have had their origin in oral tradition. Because they are so short in their present form, he assumes that a skillful narrator must have condensed them drastically to produce the purest form of the written *legenda*. Using a statistical approach, R. E. Bee (1973) offers a method for distinguishing oral from written texts, although he makes no reference to any studies of oral style in ancient texts. A lengthy study of the Jacob story by Albert de Pury (1975) includes several references to the work of folklorists and students of oral literature in the discussion of the nature of the cycle (463-502). In a study comparing Ancient Near Eastern and biblical tales (1978), Dorothy Irvin identifies and gives some examples of a "traditional episode" used to build stories in oral narration, although she derives this notion from Parry's description of epithets in oral narrative poetry. Finally, a study by Hans-Winfried Jüngling (1981) examines the role of formulas (repeated phrases) in Judges 19 as marks of oral prose. He concludes that the text was a written composition based on folk models.

A much more restricted view of oral tradition in biblical prose comes from John Van Seters and is summed up in comments found in his two books: *Abraham in Tradition and History* (1975) and *In Search of History* (1983). Van Seters is unable to accept the notion of scholars like Gunkel and Noth that there was a long period of oral tradition in which significant collection and formation of tradition took place. He is even less enthusiastic about Albright's idea of an oral epic poem behind the prose sources. Gunn's approach is not acceptable either, as can be seen from Van Seters' 1976 article and Gunn's response (1976). Like Wellhausen, Van Seters stresses authors and documents, arguing that we must

think primarily of scribal traditions in a literate society (1975: 158-59, 164). As far as he is concerned, much of the writing took place rather late in the history of Israel and was the activity of distinct authors working in a scribal tradition.

To support this contention Van Seters appeals to Herodotus as an analogy (1983). A clear parallel is proposed between Herodotus and the Deuteronomist, the presumed historian of Joshua to 2 Kings. The same would be true, he suggests, of the Yahwist (J) in the Pentateuch. Like Herodotus, such historians would have both oral and written sources at their disposal. Oral tradition is envisaged as a major source not only for material but also for genres. That is to say, the historian might well have employed imitations of oral forms to invent stories for his own purposes. A historian in "a literate society as small and closely knit as the Jerusalem religious community" (1983:48) would have the writings of previous historians available to him. Consequently, while variants may be due to oral tradition, it is more likely that they can be explained as instances of literary dependence on other texts. In his book on Abraham, Van Seters was prepared to identify a few oral sources using certain criteria which he had established. Such stories must have "a clear narrative structure, movement, and unity and have features that correspond to Olrik's epic laws" 1975:243). Questions about the usefulness of Olrik's laws as criteria for distinguishing oral texts from written have been raised by myself (1972:28-30) and by Kirkpatrick (1984:85-88).

A recent Oxford thesis, "Folklore Studies and the Old Testament" (1984) by Patricia G. Kirkpatrick, examines some basic issues of oral tradition raised by scholars in connection with the patriarchal traditions and then investigates the Jacob stories in the light of this discussion. While Kirkpatrick agrees that oral and written literature are different, she concludes that no sure test exists which can distinguish between oral and written in the stories of the Patriarchs. Lord's work is discussed, but it is held (following Finnegan 1977) that repetition cannot be used to distinguish oral from written texts (83-84). Nor can appeal to the presence of originally oral genres like legend help, since potential oral contexts cannot be deduced on the basis of genre (162). It is further concluded from studies on oral history that oral tradition does not preserve accurate descriptions of events for long periods of time. The work of a number of biblical scholars like Gunkel, Noth, Engnell, and Van Seters is discussed, although the

contribution of Gunn is not. When the Jacob tradition is analyzed in the light of this discussion, Kirkpatrick argues that there is no reason to posit oral units behind it. The absence of clear evidence for oral background leads her to conclude that the original Jacob story may well have begun as a continuous written narrative sometime during the reigns of David and Solomon, with some elements being added after the fall of the Northern Kingdom (722/21 B.C.E.).

### **3. Other Issues**

Two scholars treating oral tradition in biblical texts have emphasized an anthropological point of view. In an article (1975) and a subsequent book, *Genealogy and History in the Biblical World* (1977), Robert R. Wilson makes a contribution to the problem of the historiographic value of biblical genealogies. Wilson is sensitive to the difficulty of applying modern studies from one discipline to ancient texts in another, and so he suggests four guidelines for biblical scholars to follow when using anthropological data (16). First, comparative material must be systematically collected by trained observers. Second, the anthropological material must be seen in its own context. Third, a wide range of societies must be considered to avoid the pitfall of atypical material. Fourth, one should concentrate on the data and seek to avoid the interpretive schema placed on the data.

On the basis of an extensive examination of the relevant anthropological literature on genealogies, Wilson establishes the formal characteristics of oral genealogies in terms of segmentation, depth, fluidity, and internal structure. He concludes that genealogies are used not so much for historical purposes but rather for domestic, politico-jural, and religious goals. Oral and written genealogies are similar, except that written ones tend to become frozen while oral ones remain open to continual change. Since biblical genealogies appear to reflect the same characteristics and functions seen in the anthropological studies, historians must use them with care (199-202).

Burke O. Long also develops an anthropological slant in two articles from the year 1976. The first article (1976b) is a survey of recent field studies, especially those available since my survey of 1963. These come largely from Africa and are mostly by anthropologists. Long stresses the social and cultural dimensions of

oral tradition and is primarily interested in the social context and the dynamics of performer-audience-occasion. Nevertheless, he does touch on some of the issues involved in applying information on oral performance to texts in the Hebrew Bible: the presence of doublets and variants as common features of oral tradition, a critique of analysis of the Ugaritic texts by Cross, and the appearance of formulas in texts (contending that their presence as such proves nothing). In his other article (1976a) Long focuses on the concept of *Sitz im Leben*, or setting in life, a basic element in Form Criticism from Gunkel onward. Long argues that information from some field studies indicates that the connection between genre and setting is not nearly so close as had been suggested by Gunkel.

Two further studies relating to prose may also be noted. An article by Everett Fox, "The Samson Cycle in an Oral Setting" (1978), attempts to deal with the oral nature of the Samson story. First, he provides an English translation which seeks to reflect this oral nature and then, pointing to various kinds of repetitions in the text, he attempts to indicate their significance for interpretation. In this he harks back to Martin Buber's notion that the bible arose from recitation. The other article by Yair Zakovitch (1981) offers a number of suggestions as to the changes both in content and form which took place when oral traditions became written text.

With regard to oral tradition and historicity, three brief studies can be mentioned. There is my own article on the subject (1972), a chapter in a book by Beat Zuber (1976:73-98), and a section of Kirkpatrick's dissertation (1983:163-90). All three studies urge varying degrees of caution about the usefulness of oral tradition for historical reconstruction.

### **III. The New Testament**

While less has been written about oral tradition in the field of New Testament studies, the course followed has been somewhat parallel to what happened in the Old Testament field, at least up until the most recent contributions. There is no complete survey of the New Testament discussions, although an article by Leander E. Keck gives a brief review of research in the sixties and seventies (1978:106-13).

One of the leading figures in New Testament studies in the twentieth century was Rudolph Bultmann (1884-1976). He had

studied with Gunkel and was a leader in the application of form criticism to the New Testament. Nevertheless, Bultmann's comments on oral tradition are limited. An analysis of his position may be found in Kelber's works (1979:8-20, and 1983:208). Broadly speaking, Bultmann assumes a mixture of oral and written in the gospels. However, in his *History of the Synoptic Tradition* (1963, third German edition 1958), he makes the claim that one cannot distinguish in the end between oral and written traditions since the written material displays no specifically literary character (6). As a consequence, whether the gospels were oral or written is not an issue. Thus Bultmann speaks in general terms of tradition and even mentions some laws of tradition, which may go back to Gunkel and Olrik. He argues that the person who produced the Gospel of Mark was the first to connect existent tradition complexes into a continuous story and in this he functioned largely as a redactor.

The first major study of oral and written transmission in the New Testament period came in 1961 from a Scandinavian New Testament scholar, Birger Gerhardsson, and it owes something to the significance attached to memorization and oral tradition by Nyberg and Engnell in Old Testament Studies. This book, *Memory and Manuscript* (1961), sought to establish from a technical point of view how the early gospel tradition was passed on. He argues that the preservation and transmission of the gospels followed the practices employed for sacred materials in Judaism of the New Testament period, although these methods are projected back from and reconstructed on the basis of Jewish writings from later periods. His analysis is long and impressive but has received sharp critique, some of which is summarized briefly in Kelber (1983:8-14). According to Gerhardsson, Jewish transmission had two features: text and interpretation; this involves an interplay between a fixed tradition which is memorized and a more flexible commentary which is less fixed. In the last few pages of the book, Gerhardsson indicates how he would apply his proposals to the gospels. Jesus taught, he claims, using the same scheme of text and interpretation. He had his disciples memorize teachings, but he also gave interpretation in a more flexible form. Differences between the gospels can be explained by assuming different redactional procedures on the part of the evangelists who worked from a Jesus tradition which was partly memorized and partly written down (334-35).

A few years later Thorlief Boman published *Die Jesus-Überlieferung im Lichte der neueren Volkskunde* (1967). The first two chapters of this book attempt to apply the results of folklore studies to the Jesus tradition. Drawing on a small selection of folklorists from the preceding half-century or so, Boman discusses a number of issues, among them topics like the narrator, the sociological setting, and the difference between *Märchen* and *Sagen*, including their historical reliability. When he examines the Gospels on the basis of this discussion, he favors, in general agreement with Gerhardsson, a period of relatively stable oral transmission of fairly large blocks of material by a series of gifted narrators extending back to Jesus.

Four other articles touch on oral tradition in various ways. A 1961 study by C.H. Lohr showed some slight awareness of new directions initiated by Parry and Lord; these are also noted in Klemm (1972). Elements of a different strategy were proposed by Ernest L. Abel (1971) and John G. Gager (1974), who have appealed to studies on the transmission of rumor as potential sources of information about what may have happened to the traditions lying behind the Gospels.

At the beginning of the seventies a book by Erhardt Güttgemanns, *Candid Questions Concerning Gospel Form Criticism* (1979), from the second German edition, 1971, engaged form criticism in an extensive critique. At the same time, considerable space was devoted to various aspects of the question of oral tradition and New Testament studies, and this examination included the roots of form criticism in Herder and Gunkel. On the basis of a brief treatment of the work of Lord, Güttgemanns concluded that one should anticipate a sharp cleavage between oral and written tradition. Thus he calls into question the notion that there was an unbroken continuity from early traditions to final Gospel (204-11). The views of Gerhardsson and Boman are explicitly rejected.

In 1977 a colloquy on the relationships among the Gospels was held at Trinity University in San Antonio, Texas. The papers were edited by William O. Walker and published in the following year. One of the four seminars in the colloquy bore the title "Oral Traditional Literature and the Gospels" and featured an invited paper by Albert B. Lord with a response by Charles H. Talbert. As Leander Keck noted in his paper summing up the seminar, Lord and Talbert delineate two clear and mutually exclusive

alternatives.

In his contribution to the discussion, Lord considers two kinds of evidence. First, he examines the presence of an oral traditional mythic pattern based on the life of the hero which he calls the “life story” pattern. In the case of the gospels this covers birth, precocious childhood, investiture, death of a substitute, and death and resurrection. The way the pattern appears in each of the gospels suggests to Lord that they are independent traditions. Second, he investigates sequences of episodes and how they vary among the gospels as well as the nature of verbal correspondence. The picture of stability and flexibility which he discovers is compatible with what he would expect in oral traditional versions of the text. On the basis of such a brief study and conscious of his restricted familiarity with New Testament studies, Lord does not wish to offer firm conclusions. However, he notes four ways in which the gospels appear to show oral characteristics which would relate them very closely to oral traditional literature: (1) texts vary in such a way as to rule out copying, (2) sequences of episodes betray chiastic ordering, (3) there is a tendency toward elaboration, and (4) duplications are like oral multiforms.

In his response, Charles Talbert seeks to turn each of these points around so that it supports the notion of a literary text. Supplying examples from authors around the New Testament period, he claims that: (1) authors varied the sources they copied, (2) agreement of some episodes is so close that a literary explanation is necessary, (3) authors expanded their sources, and finally (4) authors would often draw on more than one source. Thus, while the oral traditional model might well be relevant to pre-gospel materials, it is not in his opinion appropriate for the present gospels, which do not fit the pattern of oral traditional literature and which emerged in a Mediterranean culture in which books were common for a large reading public.

Finally, there is the approach of Werner H. Kelber. An article of his on oral tradition in Mark appeared in 1979, and there was a response from T. Wheeden in the same year. This exchange was followed by Kelber’s book, *The Oral and the Written Gospel* (1983), which also concentrates on the Gospel of Mark but extends the discussion into the other synoptic gospels and the writings of Paul. Kelber is concerned with both the oral and the written, described broadly as the world of orality and textuality, as well as the interaction between the two (xv). He seeks thereby to broaden

the scope of biblical hermeneutics.

For Kelber oral and written are significantly distinct and there is no smooth transition from one to the other. He explains that he wants to move beyond the work of Bultmann and Gerhardsson to a reconsideration of a synoptic model along the lines of Güttgemanns using the categories proposed by scholars like Parry, Lord, Havelock, Ong, Peabody, Finnegan, and Goody. In addition, he wants to go further than “a formal analysis of speech patterns, since “literary purism” cannot “penetrate to the soul of oral life” (45). From oral forms one should learn the way in which “information is organized and conceptualization transacted” (45). In other words, while he accepts the results of particular models of oral tradition in specific cultural settings and is prepared to use them, he gives a prominent place to a more general, universal model of oral culture of the type suggested especially in the work of Havelock and Ong.

In Mark, the feature of storytelling is chosen as an appropriate element through which to study pre-Markan oral tradition. While Kelber explores things like story types, language, and the arrangement of episodes, he also introduces as tools of analysis a number of general principles for defining orality. It is assumed, for example, that an oral culture grasps life in its opposites (55), values confrontation over harmony (71), and is homeostatic and self-regulated (92). It is argued that the present Gospel could not have emerged from oral composition and so must be a literary work. Thus a tension exists in Mark between the oral and the written, orality and textuality, and this tension can be seen in the way Mark seeks to “disown the voices of his oral precursors” (104) and to transform the oral traditions into a new kind of unity (130). Kelber follows this tension in the writings of Paul and concludes as a result of his whole study that the written gospel is a counterform to oral hermeneutics (185).

#### IV. Final Comments

After many decades of discussion, much remains unresolved. Almost all agree that the Bible probably has oral antecedents, but there is little agreement on the extent to which oral composition and transmission have actually left their mark on the text or the degree to which one might be able to establish this lineage. The

difficulties may be summed up under the headings mentioned at the beginning: the use of the biblical text, the use of analogies, and the use of broader theories.

a. *The Biblical text.* As one might expect, most scholars have sought to base their discussions on evidence derived from the Bible. Clearly, any case must finally rest on the kind of support found in the biblical text. Unfortunately, the evidence which has been used to argue for the oral nature of the biblical text is ambiguous. This is in no small measure due to the rather limited amount of evidence produced so far, a limitation which in turn is inherent in the relatively small amount of prose and poetry in the Bible. Thus, close verbal repetition of phrases, pairs of words, or blocks of material suggestive of formulaic language do not lead to definitive conclusions.

Larger repeated patterns with little or no verbal correspondence may also be compatible with what one might expect in oral variants. Nevertheless, some of the same evidence has been used to support a notion of copying and imitation in a scribal or literary tradition. This was seen in the debates between Gunn and Van Seters for Old Testament and between Lord and Talbert for New Testament. What complicates matters further is the fact, inevitable though it may be, that evidence from the biblical text is always selected consciously or unconsciously in conjunction with some general description or theory about the nature of oral and written texts. As often happens, the more ambiguous the evidence, the more decisive the outside theory becomes.

It may well be time to review again the question of repeated language of various kinds in the light of recent discussions among students of oral literature. As far as Hebrew poetry is concerned, renewed discussion of parallelism and metrical structure has taken place over the past few years. Some issues are emerging also in the study of prose. Even if there are at the moment no substantial grounds for optimism with regard to a solution of the oral/written problem, there may be room for some clarification.

Another matter worth noting is that biblical scholars have taken up the issue of oral tradition with different interests in mind. An historical interest may be prominent. In order to reconstruct the political, social, or cultural history of the people of Ancient Israel, one must assess the nature of the sources-oral or written-and their reliability. Even a history of the literature

requires that one be able to identify early sources from later ones. On the other hand, the focus may be more on the nature of text. In this case, one would seek to discover whether different modes of composition have a decisive influence on the shape of the text and what response may be required in defining critical approaches most appropriate to its interpretation.

b. *Analogy*. Discussions of oral tradition and biblical texts have frequently made use of descriptions of oral traditions in other cultural settings as analogies. The Scandinavians were the first to exploit this method to any great extent in their appeal to other ancient cultures. Some pointed to the role of oral tradition in cultures like Mesopotamia, India, or in early Arabic literature. As analogies these cultures had the advantage of being relatively close in time and space to Ancient Israel and of bearing some social, cultural, and political similarities to that people. Still the descriptions were challenged or the evidence was interpreted differently by others, all of which variety of opinion illustrates the problem of studying oral tradition in ancient societies. These situations can be no less difficult to interpret than that of the Bible.

As far as the use of field studies is concerned, the disadvantages lie not so much in the gap in time and geography, although this is a factor to consider, but in the unlikelihood of finding societies in the modern world with social, political, and cultural features closely similar to those of the biblical period. At the same time, field studies permit descriptions of what actually happens in oral situations in a wide range of different societies and cultures. On the basis of several specific descriptions of composition and transmission, one should be able with care to develop a rough general model of what is possible and likely in oral tradition when seen as a whole.

There remains the problem of how one moves from these analogies to the biblical text. Wilson's concern about guidelines with regard to drawing on the results of descriptions of oral tradition by anthropologists, folklorists, and comparatists has some pertinence. It is necessary to seek the broadest spectrum of descriptions possible, and in so doing priority needs to be given to thorough studies by careful observers. Studies of other ancient literature like Homer or *Beowulf* are important but remain secondary to field studies in that the latter are applications of fieldwork. It is also important to take account of the different

interpretative schemata being used by investigators.

When biblical scholars have discussed oral tradition, they have almost always made reference to written tradition also. It seems difficult to avoid dealing with the one without the other. While some progress has been made toward a more accurate perception of what oral tradition is, the concepts of "scribal," "written," and "literate" have been left more or less vague. Perhaps it is taken for granted that we know what these terms mean, since scholars go about their business by reading and writing. To be sure, Van Seters has proposed Herodotus as a model to explain how some sections of the biblical text may have been produced. In his response to Lord, Talbert has also offered a number of analogies to show how authors used written documents. It would be very useful to pursue this whole matter further to see what can be said about scribal practice in the biblical era, a period of some several hundred years. Some Old Testament scholars (Culley, Gunn, and Coote) have alluded to the difficult concept of a "transitional" text or period which presumably involves a mixture of oral and written styles or perceptions. New Testament scholars like Gütgemanns and Kelber argue for a sharp tension between the two.

c. *Broader theories.* Oral tradition may be discussed principally in terms of the nature of texts and the value of specific analogies. Yet even in Gunkel one catches a glimpse of a broader, more general view of oral culture distinct from a literary one. Nyberg also appeared to hold a similar general distinction when he claimed that we cannot read texts produced in oral tradition as we do modern literature. Kelber quite consciously and explicitly employs features of a general model of orality and textuality, here understood in terms of different media which handle information differently, an oral medium linking mouth to ear and a written one linking eye to text (xv).

The difficulty in adopting such a broad theory as a tool for text analysis lies in assessing the validity of the rather broad and general principles laid down to define orality and textuality. Old Testament scholarship has encountered similar models in the past, developed variously in terms of pre-logical or primitive mentality, corporate personality, mythopoeic thought, as well as Hebrew mentality. These models are usually based on a sharp contrast, such as pre-logical versus logical, worked out in terms of opposites. It is somewhat disconcerting to find features used in these theories now taken up and explained in terms of orality.

On the other hand, these general models have been produced because scholars have sensed distinctions and have struggled to articulate and explain them. Such general models have been challenging in the past and continue to be suggestive. Perhaps this is their primary value. They serve as probes, in McLuhan's sense, to stimulate thought and provoke reaction which may lead to new ways of looking at problems. Kelber is certainly aware of this when he treats orality and textuality as a hermeneutical problem related to how we perceive texts. It remains to be seen how matters proceed in this area, although discussion is underway. At the 1984 annual meetings of the Society of Biblical Literature, for example, one of the sections on the program was a consultation on "The Bible in Ancient and Modern Media."

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## **Performed Being: Word Art as a Human Inheritance**

**Frederick Turner**

The study of the oral tradition presently lies at the crossroads of several new lines of research that promise to transform the shape of literary criticism and critical theory forever. The nature of this change may perhaps be indicated by an analogy with the revolution in the study of biology which was wrought by the theory of evolution.

Before Darwin and Wallace proposed the mechanism of natural selection, biology was essentially disconnected from the other sciences of the physical world. Various strategies or approaches existed for the pursuit of biological studies: the descriptive (corresponding to the common or “garden-variety” descriptive criticism one finds in the standard surveys of literature), the taxonomic (corresponding to classical genre study), the functional (corresponding to the study of rhetoric and reader response), the developmental (corresponding to biographical and historical criticism), the anatomical (corresponding to the New Criticism and Structuralism), the mystical/vitalist (corresponding to Deconstructionism), and the ecological (corresponding to “influence” criticism). But no single principle unified these strategies; no way of relating living matter to other forms of organization existed; no concrete connection appeared between higher and lower forms of life; and no opportunity was offered for the use of mathematical models on one hand and experimental analysis on the other, though these tools had proved extremely powerful in understanding less complex physical entities such as planetary motions and chemical compounds.

The evolutionary perspective, however, provided a single underlying principle uniting all branches of biological science. It

opened the way for the development of biochemistry, which links nonliving with living matter and derives the latter from the former. It showed how the higher forms of life derived from the lower. It spawned population genetics and the elegant statistical mathematics of gene pool models. And it not only provided a starting point for biological experimentation, but also demonstrated that many “experiments” already existed in the form of isolated evolving ecosystems like the Galapagos Islands, or in the selective breeding of domesticated species. Above all, evolutionary theory provided the biological phenomena of the present moment with a deep history, so that their significance sprang suddenly into three-dimensional clarity. The result of these changes was to transform biology—as a discipline—from a hobby of gentleman scholars to a central and vital element of public life and cultural development.

Would it not be a worthy goal for the literary scholar to seek an equivalent unifying idea? The various schools of critical theory and practice all have their successes, but taken together their differences cloud rather than sharpen the student’s vision; we have no theory of the relation between literature and the other arts, and those human activities such as religion and politics; we have little coherent idea of the connections between “high” literature and folk and popular literature; we have not seriously studied how literature might be understood in terms of the organs which produce and appreciate it, the linguistic and auditory systems of the brain; and we have no way of constructing genuine literary experiments, because we have no basic language for asking the questions experiments are designed to answer. (A merely random reshuffling of linguistic elements, which characterizes much modern “experimental” literature, is not, for this reason, truly experimental at all.) We do not know what existed before literature that made literature come to be possible, and thus cannot recognize the relationship between its archaic “grammar” and its expressive novelty. Literary study remains the mandarin pursuit of a leisured minority, despite the pervasive importance of the arts of words in the lives of all human beings.

Even the *analogy* of a unifying paradigm in natural science is productive, in that it suggests requirements for a working body of knowledge that have been neither exacted nor met in literary criticism. Perhaps, indeed, the analogy should not be taken too far. Literary criticism is a field of humane studies, not a science.

But to the extent that the achievements of evolutionary theory in biology provided that discipline with the humblest commonsense rational virtues—consistency, unity of language, fertility of hypothesis, clear criteria of significance—the stricture implicit in the analogy should not be rejected. Perhaps literary criticism should never be an exact quantified science. But then, neither should biology: life, after all, is itself a survival strategy of finesse against the cold numbers of entropy, complexifying the molecular game, raising the stakes, delaying the payment of physical debt, changing the rules so as to keep ahead of the literalistic determinism of thermodynamics. Evolutionary theory did not falsify by reduction the complex and qualitative richness of the biosphere: rather, it helped us to reveal it.

Several characteristics qualify the oral tradition to be the Galapagos Islands,<sup>1</sup> so to speak, where a unifying literary theory may begin to take shape. First, its antiquity: the roots of oral tradition reach back as far as our scholarship can trace. Second, its association with ritual, a kind of behavior which we share, in part, with other animals and which appears to be fundamental to human nature. Third, its association, in practice, with pleasure, on which there is now an increasing body of neurophysiological research. Fourth, its use of psychic technologies such as rhythmic driving and mnemonics. Fifth, its cultural universality, which points to a shared human inheritance. Sixth, its nature as a tradition of *performance*: an activity now increasingly recognized as having its own rules and structures, which may in turn cast light on the literary arts in general. Seventh, its complex and profound involvement with speech acts and performative utterances, forms of language which linguistic philosophy has recently begun to explore and which are in turn connected to the most fundamental questions of truth, reality, and being.

The oral tradition is the one branch of literary studies which reaches back far enough in time to invite a consideration of that crucial period in human prehistory when biological evolution overlapped with cultural evolution. During this epoch the physiological adaptations which produced modern Homo Sapiens were not complete; but according to paleoanthropology, there is unmistakable evidence that quite complex behaviors, including speech, were already in place and in process of further development. The length of this period is a matter of vigorous controversy among anthropologists, archaeologists, and human

ethologists. The shortest estimates, however, are in at least hundreds of thousands of years; many authorities would say millions.<sup>2</sup> A large proportion of those physical characteristics which are uniquely human and which mark us off from the other primates evolved during that period of overlap; and—most significantly of all, though the natural divisions between subdisciplines have obscured it until recently—those human characteristics of body and brain must have evolved under the strong influence and selective pressure of the earliest forms of culture. In other words, the human brain and body are at least as much the product of human culture as human culture is the product of the human body and brain! We are a domesticated species—self-domesticated, or, better still, domesticated by culture even before we had what we might truly call a human self. There was ample time for *cultural* requirements to become genetically embodied in human tissue: and thus, of course, we are hairless, oversexed, brainy, long-lived, infantile, and artistic. Thus also, perhaps, we like stories and poetic rhythm. Of this more later.

The point is that we can no longer look at human cultural activity—especially the very ancient kind, like oral performance—as simply arbitrary in form and structure. There are, so to speak, real artistic rules, just as the classical critics maintained (though for different reasons). Our brains and bodies will be happy, facile, vigorous, and inventive—radiant and porous, as Virginia Woolf (1957) puts it—when they use one kind of artistic structure, and not when they use another kind. We are better at telling stories than at saying concatenations of utterances that won't make some kind of story. Babies prefer nursery rhymes to other kinds of sounds. We are better at reciting three-second chunks of language than eight-second chunks. And perhaps the “rules” of human art are quite exact and complex, and are discoverable, and may form the basis of a coherent literary criticism.

The oral tradition is linked to one of the most fundamental of human activities: ritual. Indeed, it would be hard to think of an occasion in which a traditional oral performance would not itself be part of a ritual occasion, and nearly as difficult to imagine a ritual without some kind of traditional oral performance. However, the significance of this relationship has not been entirely clear, largely because the oral tradition has been the province of folklorists and literary scholars, while ritual has belonged to anthropology, religious

studies, and ethology. Furthermore, it is only fairly recently that certain aspects of ritual have come to light, which have very exciting implications for the oral tradition as well.

Ritual, until the last few years, was often regarded as little more than superstitious, repetitive, neurotic, backward, and conservative behavior, beneath the notice of humane scholars, and discussed by social scientists as part of the flummery by which the harsh economic realities of society were disguised. Now, however, ritual is increasingly considered as one of our most vital, creative, and healthy activities. Three new discoveries have helped bring about this change. First, in anthropology and religious studies, it became clear that ritual, far from being a mindless activity, is often—indeed in many societies, exclusively—the place where society stands back from itself, considers its own value system, criticizes it, and engages in its profoundest philosophical and religious commerce with what lies outside it, whether divine, natural, or subconscious. In ritual, human beings decide what they are and stipulate that identity for themselves, thereby asserting the most fundamental freedom of all, the freedom to be what they choose. The great life-crisis, calendrical, sacrificial, celebratory, and mystical rituals propose counter-structures to the normal structures of society, as Victor Turner has argued, and thereby constitute a large part of a society's evolutionary and adaptive potential (espec. V. Turner 1968, 1969). Like the recombinations of genes which take place in sexual reproduction, they introduce variability and hybrid vigor into their society. What Turner calls "communitas"—the recognition of human siblinghood—comes to the fore in rituals and is reinvigorated for the sake of social cohesion. Rituals, moreover, are by no means static and unchanging, but are continually reinvented at that fertile interface between the individual and the collectivity. Students of the oral epic and the ballad will be quite familiar with this process.

Second, it is becoming obvious that human ritual is not entirely unique but belongs to a set of ritualized behaviors to be found among many species of higher animals. The great ethologists, Huxley, Lorenz, and others, have shown how pervasive is that marvelous counterfactual activity we call ritual among our fellow inhabitants of the planet (Eibl-Eibesfeldt 1975, Lorenz 1962, Huxley 1966). One of the chief priorities of contemporary anthropology is to *avoid* drawing the obvious analogies between human and other animal rituals. Mating, aggression, territory,

home-building, bonding, ranking, sexual maturity, birth: all have their ritual behaviors, human and animal. In fact the only major aspects of the life of an animal which are ritualized by human beings but not by other animals seem to be time and death.

But there is another, much greater difference between human and animal ritual. Animal rituals are passed down from one generation to another by essentially genetic means. The specific "fixed action patterns" that act as mutual triggers in ritual interaction are either expressed automatically in a healthy animal or lie ready to be released by some stimulus (such as hearing the species-specific birdsong of a conspecific). The inborn ritual instincts of animals can be distorted by natural or artificial interference, but such distortions can only lead to permanent changes in a species' ritual if the new behavior has a genetic basis and that genetic alteration confers a selective advantage upon the breeding individuals that possess it.

Human ritual, on the other hand, is passed down, in its particular details and even in many of its large structures, by means of tradition: a process of teaching and learning which need not wait for genetic changes to produce real novelty from one generation to the next. It may seem strange to describe tradition as a means of rapid change: but compared to genetic evolution, tradition is a positive hotbed of newfangledness. Some animals—the classical example is the Japanese macaques (see Imarishi 1957, Frisch 1959, Kawai 1965, Itani 1958) which invented the art of potato-washing and spread it through the whole population—can pass down simple technological innovations from one generation to another by means of tradition. But only humankind does so with ritual.

This does not mean that humankind does not inherit a genetic predisposition to ritual behavior in general: its universality and its evident psycho-physiological basis attest to an important genetic element. Further, there are many particular behaviors and forms which seem to be common to much human ritual and which are no doubt related to inherited anatomical, neural, and behavioral features of our species: rhythmic chanting, body decoration, *communitas*, tripartite structure, storytelling, and so on. But the crucial point is that we do not genetically inherit particular rituals, as other animals do, but rather a disposition to ritual in general and a fundamental grammar and lexicon of ritual elements with which we can generate an infinite variety of rituals. Moreover, we

can very rapidly change the rituals we already possess, through that reflexivity that the anthropologists have observed in ritual practice.

All the foregoing of course applies to the oral tradition. Beneath the oral tradition we can dimly make out its roots in more general primate and mammal ritualization; and if we look carefully we may begin to discern the inherited grammar and lexicon that we unconsciously use to make oral performances, and perhaps to make literary art.

Thus at the heart of human artistic performance we find an archaic genetic armature of mammalian/primate ritual. Surrounding this core we find a layer composed of the new, genetically-transmitted grammar and lexicon of human ritual performance, created by the interplay of biological and cultural evolution. Next, we find the oral tradition itself: culturally evolved but directly reliant on the genetic structures which it itself imposed by selective pressure upon the species. Next above that is the recorded tradition, in which the limits of human memory are transcended by the technology of writing and print. Finally we encounter the realm of exegesis, criticism, and metacriticism, activities themselves conducted within the subtle ritual space of literature. This structure which I have described here is also the record of a historical development of increasing reflexivity, and at each point the leap from a more archaic system to a more sophisticated and reflexive one takes place through the needs and pressures of performance. The performance of the ancient genetic rituals led to their imitation, with variation, by the young, and the birth of the ritual tradition. The performance of the traditional rituals exerted selective pressure on the nervous systems of our ancestors—those who could not perform the rituals would not get a mate or even survive—which ingrained the performance “grammar” into the genes. In turn the demand of the priest-actors for external memory storage of complex ritual dramas led to the development of literary recording; and the performance of literary productions led to the need for exegesis and criticism, as recorded directorial notes to the actors, so to speak.

From this perspective it becomes clear that the arts should properly be regarded as the most fluid, sophisticated, and reflexive subset of the broad general category of ritual performance, and the oral tradition as one of the crucial areas connecting the arts with the rest of the ritual continuum. The implications of this way of

looking at the arts are especially striking for literary criticism, as we shall see.

The third exciting development in the study of ritual has been the recognition that ritual activity is tuned to observable mechanisms in the human brain and nervous system. The pathbreaking book *The Spectrum of Ritual: A Biogenetic Structuralist Perspective* (d'Aquili et al. 1979) has explored ritual trance and the massive cognitive, emotional, perceptual, somatic, and social changes it involves, and shown that it performs indispensable functions for the human individual as well as the group. Further, the book describes specific ritual techniques by which the trance state—whether light and barely noticeable or heavy and obvious—is brought about; the varieties of types of trance ranging from meditation to frenzy; and their characteristics in terms of brain chemistry, brain rhythms, and the functions of the ergotrophic, trophotropic, sympathetic, and parasympathetic systems, and the left and right hemispheres of the brain. Most interesting of all, perhaps, for our purposes, are two points: the close resemblance between the subjective effects of ritual trance and aesthetic pleasure; and the observation that the rhythmic driving of an endogenous brain rhythm by a synchronized external beat is one of the chief means by which those changes in brain state are produced. I and Ernst Pöppel, the German psychophysicist, have investigated the curious fact that all human poetry possesses regular lines that take roughly three seconds to recite, and have recently published our findings in an article entitled “The Neural Lyre: Poetic Meter, the Brain, and Time” (Pöppel and Turner 1983). We concluded that poetic meter is a way of inducing much larger regions of the brain than the left-brain linguistic centers to co-operate in the poetic process of world-construction, and that one of the chief techniques of that world-construction is the creation and maintenance of a hierarchy of temporal periodicities which makes sense of past events and is powerfully predictive of future ones. Recent work on the preferences of babies for nursery rhymes has confirmed our findings (Glenn and Cunningham 1983).

One of the most interesting questions in the contemporary study of the biology of aesthetics concerns the biological basis and evolutionary necessity of pleasure in general and aesthetic pleasure in particular. We participate in oral performances, just as we look at sculpture or listen to music, not primarily to be informed or edified, but to be delighted. To an evolutionary biologist pleasure,

like any other activity of an organism, serves an adaptive function; in this case, reward. The neuropsychologist James Olds (1976) and others (Routtenberg 1980, Snyder 1977, Guillemin 1978, Konner 1962) have begun a close study of the reward systems of the brains of higher animals, with special attention to human beings. Other investigations in the same field, such as Lionel Tiger (1979; see also Willer et al. 1981), have discovered an extensive group of very large peptide molecules which the brain can produce and in turn take up, and which are associated with the various subjective sensations of pleasure, ranging from high arousal to deep relaxation. These peptide molecules are large enough—only one step removed from the proteins—to carry information on their own account. Like most great scientific discoveries, this one was in a sense obvious, but only once it was pointed out. All it took was the question “Why do opium derivatives, cocaine, and other drugs produce such great pleasure?” Obviously our species could derive no adaptive advantage from consuming the resins of certain oriental poppies or South American shrubs, nor were they available to most members of the species. Thus the presence of the specific receptors in the brain which respond so sensitively to these chemicals cannot have anything to do with poppies or coca as such. They must then be designed to respond to internally generated chemicals which are crudely mimicked in structure by those herbal resins.

It soon became obvious that the internally generated brain rewards were more powerful, by many orders of magnitude, than the conventional motivators proposed by crude materialists and behaviorists. Rats will ignore the pangs of extreme hunger and thirst, and the presence of strong sexual stimuli, in order to press a bar which will either deliver the chemicals of delight or electrically stimulate their own brains to do so. If even rats do not live by bread alone, *a fortiori* neither do humans.

It is becoming clear that the “higher pleasures” of creative mental effort, of beauty, of goodness, of truth are indeed independent pleasures of their own and not merely perverted or sublimated versions of sexual or nourishment drives. The endorphins, as the endogenous brain chemicals are called, are clearly involved in aesthetic pleasure. Let us now return to our earlier question: what is the adaptive significance of aesthetic pleasure? Why should we be designed to appreciate beauty, and to enjoy it with an intensity which is potentially much greater than that of hunger or lust?

One clue is afforded us by the fact that the “pleasure-chemicals” are by no means “sure-fire” in their effect. Indeed they can even apparently be painful if administered without warning and without the control of the subject (Valenstein 1974). Thus these pleasures must be associated with the autonomy, the power over the future, and the predictive capacities of the organism. Yet the sense of beauty is not the same as the exultation of power, though it can resemble it. We associate beauty with a certain set of perceived objects, and with a certain manner of perception, cognition, and emotional comprehension, but not necessarily with action as such; some of our strongest experiences of beauty take place in response to our own endogenous imagery of dream, fantasy, or memory. The feeling of beauty, then, is a reward for a certain autonomous activity of the brain, one which gives the brain a grip on the future, which is, however, not necessarily involved with immediate external actions to change the environment. We are rewarded powerfully by the pleasures of taste and sex, for the metabolically expensive activities of foraging and reproducing ourselves; otherwise we might not bother. But the creation and appreciation of beauty is much more metabolically expensive, and is rewarded by a pleasure which, according to neurochemistry, is fifty times stronger than heroin, for which in turn human beings will happily neglect the delights of sex and eating. What activity can be so much more important than nourishment and reproduction?

The answer to this question necessitates an understanding of the ethological term *Umwelt*, in the special sense that Von Uexkull (1909) used it when describing the behavior and perception of animals. Every animal has a species-specific world, a set of relevant factors in its environment which its receptors—its senses—are designed to detect and its effectors—its limbs and other active organs—to act upon. Outside that world, that *umwelt*, nothing exists as far as that animal is concerned: for instance, visual phenomena have no existence for an eyeless species, nor subterranean ones for an animal not equipped for digging. For those animals with simpler nervous systems, the *umwelt* is a crude one containing only a few unrelated elements: there is a fairly direct link between stimulus and action, without much intermediate interpretation of the various sensory inputs. For advanced species, on the other hand, with a much higher ratio of nervous tissue to body weight, and with complex cortical development, the evidence

from many receptors is continuously integrated into a coherent universe of enduring objects in motion relative to each other and to the organism, with their own smell, sound, taste, and touch and their own sensitivity to each other and to the organism that perceives them. Now nowhere in physics is it asserted that such entities as enduring objects exist. They come into existence, as far as we know, as the highly elegant constructs of the brains of higher animals: physics knows only a complex interplay of the four fundamental forces at various intensities, wavelengths, and vectors. The concrete universe of objects as we, the higher animals, know it is just the most parsimonious, ordered, powerful, coherent, and comprehensive hypothesis that will reconcile our inherited expectations with our experience.

When we encounter words like “elegant,” “parsimonious,” “ordered,” “powerful,” “coherent,” and “comprehensive,” we are already in aesthetic territory. There is no reason, logical or empirical, why the world should be elegantly and economically organized, nor is it necessarily better, in a moral sense, that it should be. It is simply more beautiful that way; and can therefore be more efficiently dealt with. Before a species can reproduce itself or even eat, it must enter a consistent working relationship with its world, its *umwelt*, which will generate confirmable or deconfirmable predictions. Such a relationship is the harder to maintain, the more information an organism is capable of absorbing, and the more it is capable of doing—the human brain uses about one-third of the body’s oxygen and nutrients. Thus this world-constructing, cosmogenetic activity must be provided with a very powerful inducement and motivation. World-creation is hard work, and has high rewards.

Now what distinguishes artistic performance from ritual in general is that the sense of beauty, the aesthetic, is more directly and specifically involved in the former. Thus we may say of oral performance, which lies toward the artistic end of the ritual spectrum, that it is a cosmogenetic activity, perhaps vital to the maintenance of the human *umwelt*. Further, we might speculate that because the human *umwelt* is itself much more learned than inherited—though we inherit a predisposition to learn a complex *umwelt*—the activity of world construction is for humans much more vital, much more difficult, and much more highly rewarded than it is among the other animals, whose *umwelt* is relatively more inherent in their genes. Thus the tradition of oral

performance may be much more closely tied to our survival as a species than we think, since it is our specialization to create worlds to be tested against sensory experience, as it is the mole's to dig and the bird's to fly.

It should, moreover, be stressed that "world-creation" is not a metaphor, or rather not a metaphor *only*. As we know from quantum physics, the precise characteristics of the fundamental constituents of the physical universe are not decided until they are registered or measured by some other system that is selectively sensitive to those characteristics themselves (Wheeler 1977, Finkelstein 1982). This in fact follows, as does relativity theory, from the basic scientific principle that the only things that can be said to exist are those things which are measurable. All entities selectively measure each other, and thus we can say that the universe is exactly and only what its constituents appear to each other to be. Thus human world-construction is a perfectly genuine activity, with as much ontological legitimacy as the reaction of any particle to any other particle: indeed, more, because human perception and cognition sifts out much more severely than does an elementary particle any phenomena that are not highly probable and mutually confirming. Of course, human world-construction is more effective if it has already, by scientific observation and experiment, canvassed the reactions of a good sample of non-human entities and placed itself in a position which can be construed as being in agreement with them, or at least not in contradiction. But anything about which the universe is not already in agreement with itself is not yet decided: and there remains an infinite number of topics which have not yet come up for consideration. Human ritual, performance, and art are ways of setting the stage, creating the frame, arranging the agenda, and picking the topic in such a way as to give human beings a home ground advantage in making the ontological contract. Much human art and ritual does not even need, and would be embarrassed by, confirmation by non-human participants: fiction is explicitly counterfactual as are the phantom antagonists in the triumph-ceremony of the geese; and a congregation would be rightly horrified to find the contents of the chalice to be arterial red, sticky, and liable to swift clotting.

But how exactly are the brains of individuals prepared and synchronized with each other to work the marvelous transubstantiation of artistic and ritual performance? Here the

study of oral tradition is especially valuable.

We have already touched on the power of rhythmic repetition as a psychic technology. Perhaps the fundamental characteristic of the oral tradition is its use of rhythmic language. At its crudest level, chanting is a form of rhythmic driving, affecting the limbic system of the brain. A strobe light tuned to a 10 cps period can produce trance states and even epileptic-like seizures, by “driving” the brain’s alpha rhythm. Likewise, as Pöppel and I (1983) discovered, the three-second period of chants and poetry is tuned to the largest periodicity in the hearing-system: the subjective present, the basic “chunk” in which the auditory cortex digests and processes acoustic information. The effects of this “driving” stimulation include trancelike feelings, joy, peace, harmony, certainty, a coherent mood, and even mystical elevation. More interesting still was the use of rhythmic variation within the three-second unit: when the line differs in rhythm from the metrical expectation, that difference itself carries information (as a carrier-wave is distorted by the message it transmits). But the kind of information it carries is not linguistic, and is not accessible to left-brain linguistic/temporal processing. Instead, it is registered and interpreted in the right-brain mode, as a gestalt, like a musical melody or a pictorial image. Thus metered poetry and chanting force the brain to operate in a “stereo” mode, so to speak, integrating left and right brain channels of information and translating them into each other. Rhythmic metered language—“numbers” as the neoclassicists were wont to say—brings to bear not only the limbic system but also the right brain on its verbal, left-brain content. There are two consequences of these effects. One is social: it enables a community to become synchronized, “on each other’s wavelength” as we say, or “in synch,” so that significant variation is instantly perceived as meaningful by all participants; and the feelings of pleasure and love produced by the endorphin reward help weld the individuals together. The other is spiritual: by extending the region of the brain that is at work on its integrative, cosmogenetic functions, it prepares us for that active inventive imposition on the world of our own cultural *umwelt*, our own construction of it.

There is increasing evidence (Levy 1974, 1984, forthcoming) that it is the exchange of information between right-brain and left-brain modes which constitutes what various researchers have called the human “cognitive imperative,” the “aha” or “eureka”

moment, "monocausotaxophilia," or the "what is it" syndrome: the human capacity to make sense of the world. At present fascinating research is being done by Colwyn Trevarthen, Robert Turner, and others, using new Nuclear Magnetic Resonance Scanning techniques to examine the myelinization (that is, the activation of neural fibers by acquisition of a coating of myelin) of the corpus callosum, the body that connects the left with the right side of the brain. This research may show how acculturation actually changes the structure of the brain, wiring together various brain elements across the commissure.

But the cooperation of left and right brain which is sponsored by rhythmic language not only makes us more intelligent and creative, but also enormously increases the power of our memory. Here we may note a remarkable convergence between the work of the psychophysicists on the bilateral asymmetry of brain function, the brilliant investigations of traditional mnemonic systems by Frances Yates and others, and the pathbreaking work of Parry, Lord, and their modern followers on methods by which illiterate epic poets are able to perform thousands of lines of poetry.

Yates (1969) describes the Renaissance system as essentially a mapping of the discourse to be remembered onto the interior of a large house with many rooms, upon each of whose walls there are niches (or places, the "commonplaces" of a common-place book) which contain objects associated with the topics of the discourse. By imaginatively walking around this "memory theater" in a particular order of rooms, an orator can recall a highly complex series of points with great exactness, and even be able to retrace his steps or take a different route.

A brain scientist would instantly recognize this procedure as a way of translating left-brain temporal sequence, for which we have a very poor memory—telephone numbers are only seven digits long because any more would overload our short-term memory buffer—into the right-brain spatial gestalt mode. We can remember very complex locations and images, and with some subjects, for instance dwelling-places, our powers of recall and recognition of spatial patterns are astonishing. Thus mnemonic systems remedy the deficiency of left-brain memory by means of the pattern-recognition talents of the right brain.

Oddly enough, the procedure of memorizing a sequence by mapping it onto a series of rooms in a house has also been

described to me independently by a flamenco guitarist and a jazz musician, when asked how they remember musical compositions. On the other hand, a composer has told me that he sometimes records a musical phrase in his memory by associating it with the rhythm of a quotation from the Bible that he knows by heart. Here a right-brain pattern is remembered by its connection with a left-brain sequence. Perhaps the fundamental point is that any memory is safer if kept in both modes, left and right. We might go so far as to say we only *know* something truly when we have translated it back and forth between the two sides of the brain a few times. The great authority on lateral brain function, Jerre Levy, has indeed said just this (1984: 31-33).

Do we not find a similar basic strategy in the techniques of the oral epic (see Parry 1971 and Lord 1960)? Homer and the Yugoslav epic poets evidently strung formulaic half-lines upon the melodic gestalt geography of a plotline, reinforcing the mnemonic properties of their words by poetic rhythm, calling into play by the “driving” mechanism the affective capacities of the midbrain, and activating the right brain by means of significant metrical variation. The muses may indeed be daughters of memory, in this sense.

In such a perspective plot, or story, becomes crucially important. The “unity of action” Aristotle talks about—the homecoming of Odysseus, the wrath of Achilles, the avenging of Agamemnon—functions as a sort of connected series of rooms, containing places for memory storage. Plot, moreover, with its capacity to organize large units of time, extends the harmonious patterning of temporal periodicities that we find in poetic meter to larger and larger scales, organizing a voluminous body of material and broadening the temporal horizon of memory and expectation. The “now” or present moment of a story (if “now” is, say, Odysseus’ journey home) can cover a length of many years. Once the “now” of a story reaches out to include even the death of the hero or heroine, tragedy, and the highest forms of literary art, become possible. What makes us human, what enables us to transcend the worldviews of other animals, is our greater capacity to organize and comprehend time (see Fraser 1975). Perhaps this is the reason why rituals of temporality and funeral are unique to human beings.

Plot not only unites right-brain pattern recognition with the left-brain capacity to deal with large units of time; it also connects

these cortical functions in turn with the limbic system and its powerful rewards. It does this by the process of identification. If the self is the governing subset of mental relations, including a set of symbols reflexively representative of that subset, then other persons whom I know, including characters in a story or drama, are smaller subsets with their own symbol clusters. The integrative activity of relating those subsets with each other and especially with one's self-subset is rewarded neurochemically by the subjective feelings of love, sympathy, insight, pity, or satiric triumph. Further, the self is the focus of those sensations of fear, desire, anger, and so on with which the organism responds to its environment, sensations under the control of the limbic system. Identification, as we all know who have followed the fate of a character in an adventure with bated breath, makes us feel the character's emotions as if they were our own. Thus plot promotes and exercises the relations between cortical world-construction and limbic reward. We shall return to the issue of plot later on, in a literary-critical context; suffice it to say here that the modernist tendency to dispense with or demote plot may have been a grave mistake.

The fact that comprehension and memory demand the literal cooperation of both sides of the brain, and that the cortex as a whole is motivated and rewarded by the limbic system, may afford us fascinating insights into the nature of symbolism. The arts inherited the technique of symbolism from earlier forms of ritual, where it served a purpose not unlike that of rhythmic meter. On the cortical level a symbol evidently acts as a connective between a left-brain linguistic proposition, or network of propositions, and a right-brain image or image cluster. This may explain why the more obvious forms of allegory and emblem are sometimes tiresome, unmemorable, and insipid, for they connect only linguistic with linguistic, left-brain with left-brain information, and do not possess the fertile suggestive tension and memorability which comes about when the corpus callosum must translate, with only partial success, from one mode to the other.

Symbols also, as Victor Turner has pointed out (1967), connect the higher brain with the lower. Symbols possess two poles: ideological (cortical) and orectic (limbic). The great ritual and artistic symbols are reward systems of their own, relating pleasurable emotion or sensation with the higher values, and priming the pump of self-reward.

In a memory system symbols correspond to the suggestive objects which are to be found in the niches or places of the memory theater. From the analysis it follows that mere images in themselves, without a left-brain discursive component, will be insignificant and insipid; and that symbolism only makes sense when it is set in the context of a comprehensible and reproducible sequence of places, rather than jumbled up together as in much modernist literature. To the extent that symbolists and imagists abandoned argument, plot, and discursive reason, to that extent they broke the mysterious and fertile connection between left cortex, right cortex, and limbic system. Eliot's phrase in *The Wasteland*, "a heap of broken images," is very apt: and we may now see this poem, despite the disorganizing interference of Ezra Pound, as an attempt to restring those images together upon the primeval sequences of ancient myth. And to turn from heroic pathology to heroic health, consider the Shield of Achilles passage in the *Iliad*, or even the whole of the *Divine Comedy*, as a memory theater within which symbols, themselves memorably uniting left with right and higher with lower, are in turn memorably and significantly positioned in a varied metrical medium along a temporal plotline and within a spatial, gestalt geography. These passages are summative statements of the healthy and productive human psyche, and also of the cosmos that is generated by the performative fiat of such a psyche, and apparently they have delivered to generations of reader/performers the sweet shock of endorphin reward.

It may be that modern literary criticism, by treating literature as if it were merely a linguistic left-brain art—with the authority, one might speculate, of Lessing's *Laocoön*, which insisted on purity of medium in the arts—was doing literature a grave disservice. Once literature becomes only a pattern of "differences," of words translating other words, and the left brain is cut off from the right and from the limbic system, then the way is open to the vacuity and anti-cosmos that the deconstructionists perceive at the heart of all literary art. It is interesting that this was also the period in which the poetic narrative was replaced by more exclusively left-brain prose genres, the plotless "new novel" replaced the traditional "page-turner" of Austen and Tolstoy and free verse replaced metered poetry. Story and rhythm, plot and image, image and rhythm, were increasingly separated. Meanwhile, in the visual arts the Renaissance dictum *ut pictura poesis*—a

bilateral epigram—was set aside, as, in modernist music, tonality, melody, recognizable rhythm, and articulated temporal structures were often abandoned. Even in modern architecture there has been what almost seems to be a conspiracy to detach the left brain from the right, by creating spatial structures which are so uniform and repetitious that pattern-recognition becomes impossible and we are reduced to counting to find our way through them. And “functionalism” sometimes appears to be a way of denying the viewer the comfortable and organic rewards that are provided to the limbic system. No wonder, perhaps, so many of the younger generation turned to artificial substitutes for the endorphins.

The neurological perspective also offers insights into the matter of discursive argument and logical persuasion in literature. In Plato’s *Dialogues*, which at points are little removed from the philosophical exchanges in Sophocles and Euripides, we can clearly see that the origins of argument and discourse may be found in plot and story. Argument is basically a kind of story, the story of a war of words between heroic verbal antagonists. As such it possesses the integrating properties, in neural terms, that I have already described. Like a story, a good argument is memorable, and transcends, because of its hierarchical organization of larger and larger temporal units, the left-brain weakness in recalling mere lists (the limitation that the spatial mapping of the memory system is designed to overcome). What follows from this analysis is that when the treatise succeeds the dialogue we have stepped away from the integrative properties of a plotline. We only hear one side of the story, so to speak; and unlike Plato, Aristotle must replace the gestalt structuring of plot with a sort of geometrical structure of logical dependence. Aristotle, without the continuing story of the actors in the dialogue, cannot afford those delightful wayward changes of subject which we find in Plato, unless he has already prepared a logical place for the new block of discursive masonry. Yet even the stonemason Socrates, the oral philosopher, is one step away from the agonistic story of the Atreides.

The lessons to be learned for literature, if we are to preserve its ancient ritual powers of psychic and cosmic integration, are that discursive argument has a vital place in literature, as long as it preserves its primal ties with story, or else replaces those ties with powerful integrative symbolism.

It might be argued that despite evolution, ethology, and brain chemistry, the study and practice of oral performance does not

necessarily require a “deep grammar,” a set of natural classical rules, an explanatory evolutionary paradigm, such as I am postulating here. However, a serious consideration of the matter from a cross-cultural perspective reveals, across a wide range of human activities and types of culture and social organization, an extraordinary unanimity of cultural forms that points to a powerful and significant common inheritance. I quote a remarkable list, compiled by the anthropologist George Peter Murdock (1968: 231) “of items . . . which occur, so far as the author’s knowledge goes, in every culture known to history or ethnography”: “. . . age-grading, athletic sports, bodily adornment, calendar, cleanliness training, community organization, cooking, cooperative labor, cosmology, courtship, dancing, decorative art, divination, division of labor, dream interpretation, education, eschatology, ethics, ethnobotany, etiquette, faith healing, family, feasting, firemaking, folklore, food taboos, funeral rites, housing, hygiene, incest taboos, inheritance rules, joking, kin-groups, kinship nomenclature, language, law, luck superstitions, magic, marriage, mealtimes, medicine, modesty concerning natural functions, mourning, music, mythology, natal care, pregnancy usages, property rights, propitiation of supernatural beings, puberty customs, religious ritual, residence rules, sexual restrictions, soul concepts, status differentiation, surgery, tool making, trade, visiting, weaning, and weather control.”

Murdock would probably not object if we added to this list the additional cultural forms of combat, mime, friendship, lying, love, storytelling, murder taboos, and poetic meter; and it would be tempting to propose that a work of literary art can be fairly accurately gauged for greatness of quality by the number of these items it contains, embodies, and thematizes. They are all in the *Iliad*, *The Divine Comedy*, *King Lear*, and *War and Peace*; and most of them can be found in relatively short works of major literature, like Wordsworth’s Intimations Ode, or Milton’s Nativity Ode, or even—very compressed—in Yeats’ “Among School Children.” These topics indeed virtually exhaust the content of the oral tradition; taken together they constitute a sort of deep syntax and deep lexicon of human culture. It is the function of the oral tradition to preserve, integrate, and continually renew this deep syntax and lexicon, while using it to construct coherent world-hypotheses. Literature, which is to the oral tradition as the oral tradition is to ritual, extends these functions by means of that

greater reflexiveness and sophistication obtained by the technological prosthesis of script and books, so that those world-hypotheses gain in power, predictiveness, and beauty.

The relative universality of a given theme or form in human linguistic art can serve to test its legitimacy as a correct usage of the genetically inherited cultural grammar and lexicon. If we find a story (the descent into the underworld, say) or a technique (metrical variation, for instance) which is repeated in hunter-gatherer, peasant, city-state, and technopolitan cultures, then we know that we have encountered a paradigm declension or definition of a pan-human verbal artistic element. Further, as artists, and even as critics searching for a way to describe an unusual literary work, we can use the rich variety of types in human verbal art as a storehouse of sound, handy, and vital ideas. Cultural universals are to our new ontological criticism what Darwin's voluminous collection of examples of adaptation in nature were to his theory of natural selection.

For instance, the study of poetic meter conducted by Pöppel and myself showed the three-second line (or rather, lines of about 2-4 seconds, with a strong peak at three) in English, Anglo-Saxon, Celtic, French, German, Spanish, Italian, Hungarian, Ancient Hebrew, Chinese, Japanese, New Guinea Eipo, Ancient Greek, Latin, and African Ndembu poetry. Syllable-counts suggest the same for Finnish, Russian, and some Amerindian cultures. More remarkable still, I am informed by Deborah Wasserman, the authority on mime, that a phrase or beat in mime is usually about three seconds long, a fact which suggests either that the three-second period is the "specious present" not only of the auditory information processing system, but also of human temporal information processing in general; or that mime is paradoxically a partly, if implicitly, linguistic art. An interesting test would be to time the intervals between pauses in congenitally deaf users of standard American Sign Language, using as controls signers who were once able to hear, and signers with perfect hearing.

What a poet or critic will learn from this is that very probably the peculiar benefits of metered poetry will be lost if the line is too long, too short, or too irregular in length. And since every example of verse studied by us has metrical features—rhyme, assonance, syllable count, stress pattern, tone pattern, even syntax—repeated from line to line, even free verse in three-second lines would not retain the qualities created by strict adherence to

the deep syntax of poetic meter.

Perhaps we can see the same phenomenon at work in the remarkable similarity of mythic story elements from all over the world. Joseph Campbell's magisterial new atlas of human mythology extends his earlier important work on "the hero with a thousand faces" to many other mythic ingredients than the hero (1983). James Frazer (1911), Claude Lévi-Strauss (1969), and David Bynum (1978) have explored in depth yet other themes. Perhaps the instinct of some of the greater modernists—Yeats, Joyce, Eliot, Lawrence, Mann—to seek in ancient myth the coherence that the modern world did not seem to offer, was a wise one. However, it seems to me that the kind of grasping for a mythic lifebelt that we find, say, in "Sweeney Among the Nightingales" is not entirely healthy. The ebullient mythopoeia, the easy and cavalier luxuriance of mythic invention, that is characteristic of the better contemporary science fiction, such as Lindsay's *Voyage to Arcturus* (1920), Herbert's *Dune* (1965), Wolfe's *New Sun* tetralogy (1980-81), and Le Guin's *Left Hand of Darkness* (1969) is to my mind the sign of a much-healed culture. Like the classical Greeks, late medieval Florentines, and Renaissance Elizabethans, such writers naturally and confidently adapt the old mythic grammar and lexicon to new uses. Science-fiction has its own vocabulary of critical terms, one of which is "time-binding." The phrase is almost untranslatable into ordinary critical language, but it is unmistakably referring to the mapping of left-brain temporal modes of understanding onto right-brain spatial gestalt modes, and vice versa.

But we need not even go out into ancient or foreign cultures to find rich sources of insight into the "deep language" of human word art. The oral tradition continues in our own culture in at least two realms: liturgy and theater. Liturgy and theater can serve the same function for our new ontological theory of criticism that the practices of domestication and selective breeding served for Darwin's theory of evolution. They are, as it were, a vast experiment lying close at hand, familiar to all, and even a warrant in advance of the practical applications of the theory. And when we consider in these contexts the practice of rehearsal, the relationship between script (whether a text or a verbal tradition) and performance, the structure and articulation of a performance, the relationship between actor and audience, priest and congregation, the special uses of dramatic and liturgical language,

the nature of dramatic and liturgical suspense, the relationship between actor and role, the changes in mental state during performance, the relationship between actuality and possibility in church or theater, and between theme and variation, we may see many elements which have remained unchanged since prehistoric times and which can serve as a framework and animating principle for a truly ontological criticism.

The crucial idea here is *performance*. It was pointed out earlier that it is performance that drives the reflexive, innovative, and evolutionary tendency of human ritual and art. And now that we are privileged to have had a half-century of subtle research into the nature of performance, by such figures as Stanislavsky (1936), Jerzy Grotowski (1968), Richard Schechner (1977, 1981), and Victor Turner (1974, 1981), we possess the materials for a new integration of literary criticism based on the very definite structures, effects, and requirements of successful performance.

Perhaps the most prosaic requirement for effective performance is the fundamental triadic structure, described by Aristotle as beginning, middle, and end, and by Victor Turner as the ritual sequence of separation-liminal period-re-aggregation. Simple as this structure seems, it has profound implications. One is that if an audience, or even a single reader, is not introduced into a work by a proper beginning, conducted out of it by a satisfactory ending, or given a space in between and matter to play with in that space, the grammar of human art is being violated, the carrier-wave of significant communication is swamped with noise, and the endorphin reward is aborted.

More interesting still, the sequence implies motion into, through, and out of a concentric entity, a passing through, a trial, a risk. The Latin *periculum*, from which we get “peril,” is related to “experience,” and “experiment”; the word is cognate with the Germanic “fear.” The beginning and the end are the gates into and out of a realm which, by definition, cannot be of this world, and may be dangerous, but which is essential to our sentient life. We find the threefold structure elaborated in the five acts of a Shakespearean play, and in the sevenfold divisions of Greek tragedy; and the concentric pattern is repeated in the architecture of the arenas, stupas, temple-plots, shrines, and theaters where the performance event takes place. The Globe Theater is paradigmatic. We find it also in the mandala, a visual instrument of meditation analogous to chanting, which is the corresponding acoustic

instrument. Walt Disney's Magic Kingdoms in California, Florida, and Tokyo have the same concentric labyrinthine shape. The deep meaning of this shape is, I believe, reflexivity: the beginning and the end are like mathematical parentheses, or better, quotation marks, that distinguish the unreflexive "use" of a word from the reflexive "mention" of it, as the philosophers would say. One of the earliest strategies of living matter was to envelop itself with a membrane of lipids which were hydrophobic at one end and hydrophilic at the other, and which attracted each other at the sides, thus constituting a cell. The cell is a sort of parenthetical comment on the rest of physical reality, containing a controlled environment isolated from the world by a semipermeable skin. The "three-act" structure is a full experience of what life is, a passing through from the outside to an inside and thence back to the outside; or it might even be more accurate to say that the beginning and the end of an imaginative performance are where we pass out of the common world and return into it. To the extent that we are not our environment, each person is a little piece of not-world, of counterfactuality guarded by a membrane, a seven-gated city with armed warriors—teeth or antibodies or critical reason—on guard at the gates. Art can be a passport, or the branch of golden leaves, that allows us to enter and to leave.

But to stand outside the wall and consider it as we are doing now is to constitute ourselves as another outer wall, surrounding the inner wall. What does this new outer wall look like from the outside? If we back up to see, we make yet another wall beyond; the "I" that contemplates the "myself" is in turn reduced to a "myself" that is contemplated by a new "I." Thus concentric structures tend to multiply themselves, as two mirrors will when confronted with each other. If one mirror is square and one is round, the shape one sees when one is in between is the shape of the mandala, which possesses hypnotic qualities: the city is surrounded by many walls, the living organism by a richer and richer integument of membranes, which include senses, limbs, and nervous system. Or perhaps the elaboration of skins takes place in an inward direction, and the neocortex is the innermost skin of all. Consciousness is the moment-by-moment accumulation of memory of one's previous self, a continuous growing of new rings; and subjective time is simply the experience of that growth. From the point of view of the hearing system, each "ring" is three seconds thick, the length of a moment, of an iambic pentameter.

These last two paragraphs might be taken as a kind of gloss on the statement “all the world’s a stage.” There is a deep paradox in this statement which points us to another universal element of performance, another rule of human artistic language. Simply put, we cannot detach the sense of “act” as “pretend, counterfeit” from the sense of “act” as “do.” To really do something is by definition not to merely counterfeit something; and yet there is a terrifying wisdom in the stubborn resistance of the word “act” to being claimed, as it were, by either of its two senses and thus losing its strange logical tension. To do, says the word “act,” always involves a pretense, just as to win a kingdom is first to be a pretender to the throne. Any true act we do is a pushing out into the realm of the unaccustomed (otherwise it would not be an act but merely part of our regular being); it is to step out of our previous identity and into another. The same ambiguity is found in the word “perform”: “I pay you for performance, not to put on a performance.” So also a plot, a story, is also always a deceptive conspiracy. The free play of a system, when it is doing what naturally is proper to it, is after all only “play.” Every real stage we go through is only a stage. The person is a mask; the character is only what is scratched or engraved onto a surface to make it mean something it did not mean before. The *agon* is an agony; *agere* means both to drive and to do; an agent is not necessarily the real doer of a legal deed. To make something is to make it up; its makeup or constitution is perhaps only makeup or cosmetics. “Art” itself implies artifice, even wiles and charms.

What we learn from this relentless pattern of lexical paradoxes is that to pretend to be something is to go a long way toward becoming it. St. Paul uses the normal word for dressing-up when he says “Put ye on Christ”; by putting Him on the Christian becomes his Christ, a becoming garment indeed. And all action involves a risk of deception, or even a perilous loss of self. The “passing through” of experience is perhaps a proper cause for fear. For the literary artist or critic one consequence is plain: a completely honest literary art cannot exist, if honesty implies no fiction, no “making up,” no departure from the self as it is up to now. Literature is not a record of experience, but an experience, if literature is true to its roots in performance. To take us into it, a literary work must deceive us, take us in. The lyric poem which honestly and accurately sets down the poet’s sensations or feelings without artifice is not in this sense art, or

poetry (which means, literally, “making up”), at all. And “real life” is the same: the only way one attains a real autonomous self, if these linguistic paradoxes are accurate, is to assume one, to play or act or play-act oneself so convincingly that like the First Player in *Hamlet* one forces one’s soul to one’s own conceit (Greenblatt 1980).

In this way the old Romantic problem, the conflict between spontaneity and self-consciousness, is exploded. Consciousness, or reflexivity, if it is actively affecting the very person that is generating it, always immediately loses itself and becomes spontaneous in the amplifying reverberations of its own feedback system. It is the attempt to cling to an unreflexive “natural” self that is paralyzing; and this, not excessive consciousness, is the real source of the malaise that Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Keats complain of. The highest kind of “flow,” to adopt the language of Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1975), who contrasts the spontaneity of “flow” with the reflexiveness of “frame,” occurs when reflexivity itself has reached its specific “speed of light” and is so total that it has lost the awkwardness of ordinary self-consciousness. Stage actors describe this experience as being like flying, and insist that it occurs only and essentially in performance (O’Brien 1985). Yet readers too report the same near-breathlessness, the slight rising of the hair and gooseflesh, the pricking of incipient tears, the mixture of total control with total freedom as the limits of one’s consciousness-system are reached, transcended, and re-created. Is reading, at its best, a kind of performance, then? If so, our critical theory must be largely overhauled.

Theatrical or ritual performance usually involves the cooperation of a relatively more active priest or artist, and a relatively less active congregation or audience (though both are necessary). What kind of a performance, then, is reading?

Literature is not usually referred to as a “performing” or “lively” art at all. But the perspective we have developed here would deny that distinction. If literary art is truly descended from the oral tradition, then indeed it is performed. The performer in this case is two persons: the writer and the reader; the critic is the virtuoso performer, whose criticism is a sort of master-class.

Given the conception of reader as performer, another central element of performance becomes crucially important. What Stanislavsky showed was that an actor must have a clear, single objective (even if it is a very profound one) in order to perform

convincingly. Modern literary criticism, with its love of ambiguity, multiple meanings, dialectical hermeneutics, and deconstructive unraveling of contradictory significance, has provided every work of literature, *as a text*, with a divine plenum of viable interpretations. The text is an infinite and eternal set of possibilities. Like an electron before it is detected, which can only be described as a finite (if usually infinitesimal) likelihood of an electron-type event spread throughout the entire universe from its beginning to its end, with a strong peak of probability in a particular region, the text for a modern critic is essentially indeterminate, unactualized, and perhaps unactualizable.

But a reading—like a reading on an instrument designed to make an electron declare itself—if it is a true performance, must choose an objective and must sacrifice the divine indeterminacy and infinitude of possibility for the tragic and concrete finitude of actuality. It is simply impossible to perform a reading and keep the text of the modern critic. The text dies into its reading as the divine incarnate victim dies into the eucharistic sacrament. The honor, the sadness, and the glory of true theatrical performance lies partly in the consciousness of all the participants that the work of art is dying with each reverberation into the air at the very moment that it is actualized.

What are the implications for the critic? Perhaps if he or she is a virtuoso performer, it is to give so lucid, so definite a reading that the work is actualized and made concrete before us, and reincarnated into the deepest idiom and costume and dialect of our own time.

Perhaps ambiguity is less of a virtue than we thought it was. The universe began as a soup of chance, and its evolution into the exquisite forms of life and intelligence was a cumulative process of greater and greater lawfulness, definiteness, and certainty, carrying with it, of course, greater and greater gradients of possible fall-back into the ambiguous chaos of its origins (Eigen and Winkler 1981). Anything ordered, beautiful, actual, and concrete stands tragically high above the precipice of undifferentiated “hermeneutic richness.” Great literature is the achievement of an unmistakable clarity and intelligibility in the teeth of the proclivity of every word, every sentence, to collapse entropically into divine indeterminacy. The only legitimate use of ambiguity in literature is perhaps as part of a finesse toward greater actuality of coherent meaning: as sandcastle makers may, to achieve greater compactness,

wet the sand they use with the very element that will destroy their creation when the tide comes in. In a performance multiple meanings only work if they redundantly resonate the carrier wave of its lawfulness; the proper contradictions of literary language, like the ones implicit in Shakespeare's use of the word "act," are like the facing mirrors in a laser that organize the plenum of wavelengths and phases in a light beam into a coherent pulse of energy. Only with such an instrument can truly three-dimensional images be wrung like ghosts from the plot, rhythm, symbolism, and argument of a literary work, as a laser beam can actualize the image implicit in the grooves of a hologram.

Recent developments in the philosophy of language lend unexpected confirmation to the theory of criticism that is implied here. Modernist philosophy was based on the brilliant skepticism of the seventeenth century: Bacon's, which resulted in empiricism, and Descartes', which resulted in rationalism. It is beginning to look now as if even that skepticism itself was a presumptuous and implicitly metaphysical act of faith. The kind of certainty which that skepticism found so disappointingly absent in the traditional view of reality now appears meaningless and nonsensical, for instead of a world of objects and a world of knowledge about them (which should correspond) we now confront a world in which knowledge is another kind of object, and objects are made up of the knowledge other objects have of them.<sup>3</sup> Descartes' and Hume's powerful critiques of empirical knowledge have been seconded by Karl Popper, who defines empirical knowledge, as such, as knowledge which is falsifiable (1959). We deal regularly in physics with events which would have been quite different had we come to know them in a different way (Heisenberg 1958). The neurological description of the brain as a damped, driven feedback system whose capacity for enormous variation resulting from minuscule differences in initial conditions, and whose active role in the construction of reality makes impartial objective observation impossible, is profoundly subversive to the requirements of empirical knowledge. The very complexity of the brain, with its ten to the billionth power possible brain states (Fraser 1980:153), exceeds the theoretical computing capacity of the rest of the physical universe; thus no objective check on the legitimacy of its activities could be carried out.

This is not to say that empirical knowledge, knowledge by experience and the evidence of the senses, is invalid. But its

validity cannot be sought within itself: if we know something empirically, we cannot empirically know that we know it. Strangely enough, the same kind of problem arises even for rational knowledge, that inner sanctum of certainty to which Descartes retreated. I oversimplify, but I shall here take rational knowledge to be the same thing as logical truth, truth by definition, or analytic truth. An example is that a plane triangle contains 180 degrees in its interior angles. Another is that bachelors are unmarried. But the problem with rational knowledge is, as Gödel (1962) showed, that there is no system of axioms which is capable of proving the truth of its own axioms. Every system of logic rich enough to make meaningful propositions will contain a proposition of this form: "This statement is not provable": a statement which is true but not provable, and which therefore distinguishes truth from provability within the system. One must leave the system in order to be able to assert the proposition's truth. In doing philosophy in language, for instance, where do we stand when asked to give a definition of the word "definition"?—or of the word "refer"?

Thus the twin foundations of modern knowledge seem to be no longer foundations at all, but perhaps, like the seeming-solid planet earth itself, in free fall. What kind of knowledge can we believe in for sure? Is the "knowledge" model of language-use the most accurate one anyway? Suppose language-use were conceived less as a collection of cognitive propositions, and more as a set of actions?

The philosopher J. L. Austin (1962) identified an interesting group of utterances which he characterized as "performative" statements, which are closely related to speech acts, in which the speaker performs an action by what he or she says, rather than states a belief or a piece of knowledge. Performative utterances rely neither on an unreliable correspondence with empirical fact, nor on the unreliable truth of a set of unprovable axioms. My own favorite example is the dealer in a poker game who stipulates that in the game she is dealing, red threes will be wild. Once she makes this statement, red threes are indeed wild; yet they are in no sense wild by definition (another dealer could choose one-eyed Jacks instead), nor would her statement yield to empirical falsification. No player could check his hand and complain that he had a red three that happened not to be wild. A poker chip could conceivably fall upward, as a result of some extraordinary

cosmological freak of gravity or quantum-statistical freak of probability; or a whole group of poker players might hallucinate it falling upwards. But the red three is wild.

In other words, performative truth can be more reliable than empirical or logical truth in certain situations. Those situations are often very important: though the stipulation of game-rules may be the purest example, promising and contract-making are also performative, as are marrying, legislating, religious invocations and sacraments, and perhaps even the scientific decision to base a system of measurement upon a particular type of question asked of the physical universe. An instance here is the stipulation of radioactive cesium decay as the basis of time measurement, replacing astronomical measures.

In what circumstances can a performative statement legitimately be made? First of all, there must be what I shall call a “performative community”: a universe of beings *for* whom a performative utterance shall be true. Performative truth pays for its certainty by giving up its claim to apply to entities outside its community. Secondly, the utterer must be empowered by that community to make the performative stipulation. Third, the performative utterance can stipulate reality only where previous legislation within the performative community and still in force is not declared to be in contradiction with it. These limitations introduce an intriguing feature of performative truths: they are always certain, but they can vary in strength and effectiveness, depending on the size of their performative community. To win and keep a large community, a performative must be in a relation with the past constitution of its universe that is parsimonious, consistent, coherent, powerful, predictive, and elegant—in a word, beautiful. Beauty is the fourth requirement of performative truth.

At this point we may see how empirical truth and logical truth find a place within a broader framework of performatives which restores to them much of the legitimacy they have lost to rigorous twentieth-century analysis. (Ironic that Reason, inductive and deductive, must be rescued by an appeal to the fundamental principle underlying the medieval ideas of faith, authority, and revelation!) Empirical observation and experiment can now be seen not as an independent source of truth value, but as a way of enlarging the performative community so as to include not only persons but also non-personal and non-living organisms; and of establishing what kind of utterance can be true for them.

Newton's inverse square law of gravitation relied on the establishment of a performative community including the moon, the planets, apples, and dropping cannonballs, which had a language in common. In a sense it did not matter how the law itself was proposed: in any case it would have constituted a definition of space. Newton wished to keep space flat and Euclidean: so he made the gravitational attraction proportional to the inverse square of the distance. Einstein, on the other hand, preferred to make the gravitational attraction constant and vary the curvature of space. Which explanation we choose depends finally on how beautiful—as already defined—the resulting universe game is.

Rational or logical truth also finds a place within the performative universe. When we state an axiom we are in fact making a performative utterance. “A straight line is the shortest distance between two points” cannot be tested for logical consistency with its axioms: it *is* an axiom. If we are in the performative community of the geometer, we accept his dictum here; and what persuades us to join and remain in that community is partly the beauty of the universe generated by that axiom. By their fruits, not their grounds, we shall judge them: for there are no grounds. The universe, our cosmologists tell us, began in chaos and nonexistence, so the final ground of any appeal is utterly unreliable (Guth and Steinhardt 1984:128); and the world won its way to such consistency as it has through a long and bitter process of selection by consequences. In this light the American pragmatist tradition of philosophy is quite consistent with the performative view of truth: we make, or even make up, the truth and keep it if it works. William James' conception of the “will to believe” (James 1979; see also Thayer 1983), in which he defends ungrounded faith by arguing that it can bring about the reality it stipulates, is essentially a performative one.

Perhaps those quantum measurements of electrons, which force them to declare their position or energy, and the use of polarizing filters to make photons “make up their mind” which orientation they are vibrating in, are performative communications with nature. Indeed, there is an element in any coherent scientific experiment which consists of a declaration of ground-rules, a delimitation of the region of significant events. Though science is a process of questioning, it is scientists who decide what questions to ask (Kuhn 1962).

It should already be clear that there is a close relationship

between performative utterance and performance in literature, in the oral tradition, and in ritual, human and even animal. Mating rituals among animals stipulate not previously existent beings (the “enemy” in the triumph ceremony) and bring into being a real entity, the pair bond, as well as a new individual of the species. At a Catholic mass, the bread and wine performatively *are* the body and blood of Christ (for the faithful, that is one of the things that the word “Christ” means, and they after all have a right to decide what a word means for them). When a storyteller says “Once upon a time” or “I sing of that man skilled in all ways of contending,” the subjunctive world is welded to this one and becomes part of it, yielding up its divine infantile indeterminacy as an electron does when it is measured. When a poet writes and an actor speaks the line, he “gives to airy nothing/A local habitation and a name” (*A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, V.i.16-17)—he performs new being into existence.

Toward the end of *The Origin of Species* Darwin permitted himself a metaphor—that of the branching tree of life, whose every twig was a species and whose branches represented ancient genera, families, classes, and kingdoms (1962:121). Freud, too, illustrated his theory of the psyche in society with a myth: that of the primal horde (1961:46-48). Socrates began the practice, perhaps, and it is originally on his authority that a sort of *Gedankenexperiment* or myth is offered here.

The function of the myth is to bring together the various perspectives explored in this essay: human evolution’s role in the development of the linguistic arts; ritual as the root of the oral tradition and ultimately of literature; the adaptation of brain chemistry, structure, and function to the forms and substance of those arts; their cultural universality; their essential nature as types of performance; and their philosophically performative validity. The myth is also intended to dispel any suspicion that the theory proposed here is a reductionist one—that is, behaviorally or biologically determinist. At the same time the myth rejects the opposite view, which has in fact cooperated with the reductionist view in preserving a sterile dualism: that is, the conception of literary art as *sui generis*, without connection with the vital history of our species. The myth also takes up anew the fertile Renaissance debate about the relationship between nature and art which was aborted in the seventeenth century by the rise of Reason, rational and empirical, and in the nineteenth by the

romantic idea of Nature as innocent and unreflexive; but the debate is now enriched by the greater effectiveness of our technology, by the collapse of epistemology and ontology in quantum theory, and by the full elaboration of the theory of evolution.

*Once upon a time, then, there was a clever race of apes. Like many other species of higher animals, they possessed a sophisticated though instinctual system of vocal communication; they engaged in play activity when unoccupied; they possessed elaborate instinctual rituals, especially surrounding the functions of reproduction; their ranking system promoted wide variations in reproductive success; and like other higher primates they used rudimentary tools and passed their use down to the next generation by instruction as well as by genetic inheritance.*

*It took only one individual to combine these capacities in such a way that the Word became incarnate as a seed of culture and began to mold its host species into a suitable soil for it to flourish in. The competition for mates was intense, a competition which in other species had evolved structures as impractical as the antlers of the giant elk and the feathers of the peacock, and behaviors as contrary to survival as the mating dance of March hares or the courtship of the blue satin bowerbird. At the same time the border between play behavior and mating behavior was paper-thin. One individual, then, discovered that the desired mate responded favorably to playlike variation in the instinctual mating ritual: it was an improved lovesong that began the human race, for their mating ritual already involved a prominent vocal element.*

*This first pair was imitated by others, and those which did so achieved greater reproductive success. They were in turn imitated by their young, which had inherited a slightly improved capacity to override the genetic hardwiring of their ritual inheritance by playlike variation on it. (This contrast between inherited norm and playlike variation will be preserved later in the general information processing system of human beings, where a regular carrier wave is systematically distorted to carry meaning; and specifically where a regular poetic meter is tensed against the rhythm of the spoken sentence, or musical meter is stretched or compacted by rubato, or even where visual symmetry is partly broken by the pleasing proportions of the golden section.)*

*Thus was born what we might call the Freedom and Dignity Game; for as it became elaborated, it developed vocal forms which,*

*like the phantom opponent of the triumphal geese, had at the time no referents: Honor, Soul, Purpose, Good, Love, the Future, Freedom, Dignity, the Gods, and so on. But those vocal forms were performative utterances, and so for the performative community of the tribe those mysterious entities actually came into existence, in the fashion that the knight's move in chess came into being by fiat. As if they were real all along, those abstract entities became independent sources of active determination, even though the medium of their being and of their continuity was no more than a communal convention. But after all, our bodily structures are maintained as realities not by themselves but by a mere arrangement of genes.*

*The ritual game indeed rapidly evolved. It developed cells of active reflexivity and self-criticism. Each generation altered it competitively, introducing new complexities: kinship classification, decorative art, food taboos, hygiene, household conventions, law, storytelling, and all the rest. And in turn these complexities exerted irresistible selective pressure upon those wise apes. They developed an adolescence, with special hormones to promote rebellion against the traditional ritual. Infancy was protracted, to help develop and program the huge brain that was required to handle the complexities of the ritual, and lifespan was prolonged to accommodate the extra programming-time. A massive sexualization took place in the species, so that male and female were continuously in heat, females experienced orgasm like males, and they copulated face to face, thus transforming sex into a form of communication. The reward system of the brain was recalibrated to respond most powerfully to beauty, which is the quality which characterizes the ritual's dynamic relationship of stability and increasing coherent complexity. Body decoration and clothing banished body hair. The hands turned into expressive instruments. The otolaryngeal system was elaborated into an exquisitely sensitive medium of communication and expression. The two sides of the brain became specialized, one for recognizing and holding an existing context in place, the other for acting upon it and transforming it in time. The indeterminacy of the world was lumped together into a new concept, the Future, which was carried by the dissonance between right brain pattern and left brain sequence. The Present was born, as the realm of the Act.*

At a certain point in the Neolithic, the performative began to expand beyond the limits of the genus—which we may already recognize as Homo. Certain plants and animals—emmer,

dogs—had joined the performative community in subordinate roles, their gene structures changing in response to the human ritual game. It was, in comparison with the five million years the ritual had existed, but a moment before large regions of physics, chemistry, and biology had joined the human game and had been taught by scientific experimentation and instrumentation to speak the same language as we. Contemporary technology is the concrete continuation of the performative fiat with which we began.

But the moment that other, non-human entities began to join the game, the selective pressure it had exerted upon its performative community ceased, for the bookkeeping function which the game had relegated to the genes could now be taken up by our servants the plants, the animals, and the minerals. Reproductive success no longer depended on proficiency in the game, and eventually there arose a celibate priesthood which entrusted its entire informational inheritance not to its genes but to the prosthetic seeds—semen, semantics—of music, writing, and the visual arts.

Our genetic inheritance, then, was frozen at the point it had reached in the Neolithic, and thus its fundamental grammar must be ours. For us to use the marvelous instrument of our brains properly we must find that grammar out. And when we have done so we may be able to reinvigorate that pallid, decadent, and degenerate—but most direct—descendant of the Great Ritual, literature, with an infusion of the wild stock. We may do so partly by the mediation of the oral tradition, a healthy strain even in advanced technological culture, partly by breeding from our own performance and performative genres, and partly by hybridization with the ritual play of other cultures all over the world.

Nor will this work be only a recuperation, an attempt to recover in part what has been lost. Rather, it will represent a new phase of evolution in the Great Game, the phase in which it contemplates itself as a whole with the most meticulous scholarship, and directly guides its own development using what it has learned. In so doing it will have taken to itself the powers once allocated in hope and terror to uncontrolled deities which were neither kind nor humane, and will have begun to fulfill the promise of many religions, of the incarnation of the Word as reality rather than just as a seed. Nor need we fear that the process of the spirit will become tame and commonplace, for the more we know ourselves, the more radically the knower is thrust

into the unfathomable mystery surrounding the cosmos, in the attempt to step back to get a better view. There is no conflict between consciousness and spontaneity; it is only the consciousness which holds back from full commitment that is impotent.

What are the immediate consequences for literary criticism of the new theory of the word arts as it emerges?

First, perhaps, a dethroning of the text as the central locus of the act of literary art. Thus hermeneutics loses its specific relationship to literary studies and becomes a branch of the general process of analysis as it is used in the sciences, the social sciences, engineering, linguistics, and so on. Hermeneutics remains a useful but unprivileged technique among others in the study and appreciation of literature. But the emphasis will shift to literary performance; in non-oral literature, that performance is curiously divided between the writer and the reader, and the text that connects them floats in a limbo of potentiality. The interest that the text may possess as a complex structure in itself may be great, but it is of no different kind than the interest that a living cell, a complex polymer, or an atomic nucleus possesses. The interesting involution of structure may in fact have little to do with its actual value as a work of literary art: *Finnegan's Wake* is surely more complicated, and a lesser work of art, than the *Iliad*; *The Faerie Queene* than *King Lear*. Instead of the text we shall be most interested, as literary folk, in the instantiation of the work in performance. One good sign that a person truly possesses a work of literature is that he remembers, without having consciously memorized them, large passages of the work, and that those passages occur to him at those moments in his life when they can make it more lucid and meaningful. The capacity to go through the work and do a hermeneutic or structural analysis of it may have nothing to do with this real possession of it.

An aspect of literary study which has been largely ignored by the theorists becomes important here: oral performance. One activity which really fastens a work of literature to a human life is reading it aloud, and learning to do that well may be more important than the technique of critical analysis (though good recitation will surely involve, as a subordinate activity, some analysis). Literary activity takes place largely in the classroom: there is no harm in this, but given our altered view of literature, the classroom situation appears in a new light. The classroom is to the literary ritual as the temple or shrine is to religious ritual,

or as the theater is to drama. The place should ideally be festively and solemnly prepared, even if only by the respect shown to it that a member of a martial arts school will show to the practice-ground. The teacher should recognize that something of the probity of a priest and the charisma of the actor is required of him. The class should enter into the spirit of comedy when a comedy is the subject, and there should be in the classroom that slight touch of danger, of the possibility of personal transformation that one finds in real performances and ritual action. When Paulina in Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*, about to bring the statue to life, says "Those that think it is unlawful business I am about, let them depart," the full force of that statement should be felt in the classroom as it should be in the theater. It ought to be dangerous to bring the dead to life; and the real drama is doing precisely that, by performative fiat, just as in the eucharist the bread performatively becomes the flesh of Christ.

More, the reading of literature in the classroom ought to be explicitly related to the life values of the individuals present, and of the community as a whole. The performances of Aristophanes and Sophocles at the feast of Dionysus in Athens, which implicitly joined the debate about the Peloponnesian War, are models in this sense.

This is not to say that the other half of the performance—the writer's own strange quiet frenzy over the page—should be ignored. A large part of literary study should be reconstructive, that is, it should most carefully enter the imaginative world of the author and reconstruct, with him, the work of literature as he composes it, just as a priest at a Mass will reenact the movements and words of Jesus as he broke the bread, or as the priest/actor in an Indonesian ritual drama will take on the role and actions of Hanuman the Monkey-God, or even as the Dalai Lama is all previous Dalai Lamas reincarnated. Standing where Shakespeare stands in the original composing and performing of *The Tempest* or where Woolf stands delivering *A Room of One's Own* will do more to help us comprehend them than any amount of hermeneutics, though hermeneutics may be one way of helping us get to that place. But even the word "comprehend" is not entirely right. One does not necessarily "comprehend" one's own eye or one's own hand, and a great work of art can be as valuable, as intimate, an organ.

Another consequence of the new view of literature applies

especially to us who are the heirs of modernism. Great literary art calls us back to the work of making ourselves human and remaking the world so that it more richly expresses itself. Religion, literature, legislation, science, and technological choice are all parts of the same world-constructing activity. We modernists, like angry, indolent, rebellious adolescents, have neglected that work for many decades, and have gone after anything which did not seem as if it might be of enduring human value. The result has been a systematic deprivation of the inner pleasures, those brain rewards that are associated with cosmogenesis. Perhaps, on a mythological level, we have turned to narcotics and to nuclear weapons for exactly the same reason: to provide by artificial means the sense of crucial value, value worth sacrificing for, that we gave up when we rejected the human ritual and the oral tradition. It is indeed part of our heritage that we should rebel, that we should alter the ritual, generation by generation. But the illumination occurs when both sides of the brain, so to speak—the innovative and the pattern-holding—are mutually translated, when the new material of the world is grafted so cunningly with the old than the seam cannot be detected.<sup>4</sup>

We are on the verge of a new classicism, what I shall call “natural classicism,” based upon the deep lexicon and syntax of human artistic nature as we are now coming to understand it. That new classicism, unlike the old, will not conceive of standards as an eternal and ideal perfection which can only asymptotically be approached, but rather as an aura, a mysterious and ghostly scaffold that precedes the growing edge, the concrescence of the world as it is performed into actual being. But there will be standards; and they will not be either relative or pluralist in their fundamental character, though they will be so richly generative that they will perhaps appear to exemplify pluralism and relativism. Consider the myriad musics, poetries, and paintings of the world’s cultures: how wholesome they are in the main; how recognizable they are, as human, to an anthropologically educated person; how they obey the deep laws of proportion, color, meter, and tone; and how they embody those essential human interests, in kinship, cookery, and the soul, yet how diverse they are. The new classicism will be a single house, but a house of many mansions. And it will be also a house which is growing, to which wings are continually being added; it will be hierarchical, but the hierarchy of its values and genres will not signify a static Chain of Being but a

dynamic evolutionary tree of life.

One of the unifying principles in natural classicism will be the use of poetic meter as a way of breaking the monopoly of the left temporal lobe in literature. The new investigation and use of the integrative relationship between biological and mental life will involve a re-innervation of the limbic system, and even of the body as a whole, by the conscious cortex, and a re-innervation of left with right sides of the brain. We shall reach back to ancient technologies such as meter, as well as forward to the science of neurology and the technology of prosthesis, to accomplish this act of enlightenment. But we must recognize that like an athlete or an adept at meditation, a skilled reader of verse requires training and discipline: training and discipline of which our children have been increasingly deprived.

We shall, perhaps, reconcile ourselves to the fact that there is no substitute for plot and story in literary art. If our valuation of character, symbolism, imagery, theme, and imitative form replace our concern for the fundamental value of plot—if we dismiss story as having been exhausted—then we have taken a step toward relinquishing that mastery over time which makes us peculiarly human. We know how to go on being a conscious person, how to construct a moral existence, how to win meaning from the fact of change, because we have stories that we can use as control-tests to sift out significant variation in experience, and, even more important, to resonate with significant constancies. Some writers, notably Deleuze and Guattari (1972), suggest that freedom consists in abandoning the coherence of self and of cosmos, and destroying the future as a significant conception. Perhaps when we are no longer in danger of destroying the entire species by such attitudes we can try them out. Voluntary prefrontal lobotomy would be a good start, for it would abort our natural tendency to make sense of the world. Meanwhile, we need stories to keep us alive, as David Bynum (1978:27) puts it:

I know the chief use or function of fabulous narrative traditions everywhere is to make men adaptable in their minds, to enlarge the scope of their mental lives beyond the confines of their actual experience socially, psychically, and in every other way. I am so far persuaded of this that I have come to think of fabulous story-telling, and even of the stories so told in tradition, as proper aspects of human biology. . . .

We shall rediscover the value of the genres, as embodying anciently-tested constellations of rules, whole syntaxes in themselves, tuned to the human nervous system. We will no longer dismiss as technological coincidence the independent rediscovery of epic, for instance, by the authors of *Gilgamesh*, the *Iliad*, the *Mahabharata*, the *Heike*; or of tragic drama by the Japanese, the Chinese, the Indonesians, the Greeks, and Aztecs. We shall perhaps, as literary folk, take up once again the responsibility for singing the world into being; and now our capacity to do this has been immensely strengthened by the scientific and technological enlargement of our performative community to include large areas of nature. An ontological criticism implies an ontological literary art: our stories will be histories, our metaphors will be concrete realities, our acting will be action.

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#### Notes

<sup>1</sup>I refer, of course, to Darwin's study of the flora and fauna of the Galapagos Islands, especially the finches, which he undertook during the voyage of the *Beagle* and which demonstrated to him the effects of adaptation within a closed system.

<sup>2</sup>For instance, depending on whether we confine the term "human culture" to *Homo erectus* and beyond, or include the pithecines, Lancaster (1975:53) would date the "overlap" from either one or five million years ago to about 12,000 years ago when the agricultural revolution began. Eccles (1979:94) estimates that the period extended from one million to 100,000 years ago. Hallowell (1961) proposes a protocultural stage of evolution, in which some but not all the cultural features of modern humanity were in place, well before the major expansion of the brain, among the early hominids. This could, according to some estimates, be as much as 25-50 million years ago. Sapir (1921) and De Laguna (1963) believe that language and thus, *a fortiori*, culture were co-original with tool use, which would give us a period of up to 15 million years. But Foster (1978) disagrees, placing the origin of language only 50,000 years ago. But she does not rule out the possibility of prelinguistic culture. Debetz (1961), the Soviet anthropologist, dates the origin of human culture to the origin of tool-making, rather than tool use, which might give us three million years. Wilson (1980) also argues that tool-making implies genuine human culture, and regards *Homo habilis* (1.9-3 million years ago) as fully human in this sense. Perhaps the clearest and most unambiguous description of the origin of distinctively human culture is Howell (1972). He asserts that the genus *Homo* is coterminous with human culture, which would give about 3-5 million years of overlap between the final phases of human biological evolution and the early ages of cultural evolution.

<sup>3</sup>The history of this change is nicely charted in the evolution from Wittgenstein 1933 to 1953.

<sup>4</sup>See Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*, IV.4.72-103.

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## **The Oral Traditions of Modern Greece: A Survey**

**Roderick Beaton**

### **Description**

There are several overlapping but distinct traditions whose medium is the modern Greek language and which can lay claim to consideration as “oral.”<sup>1</sup> The most widely known and studied of these traditions is undoubtedly that of oral song, conventionally known in Greek as *dimotiká tragoúdia*, and variously rendered by outsiders literally as “demotic songs,” “folk poetry” or “folk song,” “*chansons populaires*,” “*Volkslieder*,” and so forth. This tradition of oral song, which I have elsewhere labeled “the demotic tradition” (Beaton 1980:2-3), comes closest to fulfilling the Parry/Lord criteria for oral poetry: it is composed of formulas and a finite range of themes in variable combination; until collected and published in the nineteenth century the “texts” of this tradition had no existence outside of performance; and composition and transmission have so far as one can tell never been the special prerogative of professional “minstrels.” Although signs of interaction with literary tradition exist (and are thought by some to go back to the literature of antiquity), there is no indication of *direct* literary interference at any earlier point in the tradition. That is to say, although the subject matter of books has often enough been assimilated into the corpus of orally composed material, there is no sign that writing as a technique or the concept of the fixed text played any part in the development of the tradition prior to the circulation of printed editions and the spread of education in the last one hundred and fifty years.

The modern Greek “demotic” tradition differs from the

Parry/Lord model in two important respects: songs rarely exceed a hundred lines in length and in consequence elude the definition of “epic narration,” and the same thematic and formulaic corpus is equally employed in lyrical and in narrative genres. Modern Greek oral song is in many respects comparable to the ballad and lyrical traditions of other cultures, but lacks an epic genre. Narrative songs of the ballad type evoke a heroic milieu, either specifically that of the social bandits (*klefts*) of the Ottoman centuries (*kléftika tragoúdia*) or more sporadically recalling memories of Byzantine-Arab conflict in the Middle East between the ninth and eleventh centuries (*akritiká tragoúdia*); alternatively they may move in a more domestic world, in which indications of time and place are absent altogether, to dramatize conflicts within the family group, often abnormally accentuated by the involvement of the supernatural (*paraloyés*). The demarcation between narrative and lyrical genres is frequently blurred: many songs of the klefts are in the form of laments, as are all of the small group of songs conventionally known as “historical” (*istoriká tragoúdia*) which take the form of laments for the loss of cities to the Ottomans—and chiefly of course the loss of Constantinople in 1453. In all of these, it has often been noticed, a dramatic structure takes the place of a narrative line, with frequent use of stylized dialogue in order to set a scene, and juxtaposition of highly-drawn tableaux or vividly depicted episodes taking the place of narrative transition.

Songs whose function is primarily lyrical are devoted to three central preoccupations—love/sexuality, exile, and death; and one reason for the surprising homogeneity of a tradition spanning different genres and subjects is a parallelism and a range of mutual allusion among these three themes which apparently goes very deep in Greek culture.

A second and generally separate tradition, which like the “demotic” tradition of oral song seems to have lived until recently exclusively in the realm of oral performance, is the folktale (*paramýthi*). Although verse fragments are frequently worked into these oral narratives, the world of the Greek folktale is far removed from that of the songs. The human setting is neither one of warfare nor one of domestic conflict, but belongs rather to the familiar fairytale world of handsome princes and beautiful princesses, of magical transformations and encounters with supernatural beings. Some of these, like the tale of the Cyclops, seem at first sight to emanate directly from the ancient world, but

closer inspection reveals an interaction with the world of the book (which, like that encountered in the demotic” tradition of song, does not necessarily interfere with the oral style or technique of narration).

Closely related to the folktale is the topical, superstitious, or historical legend (*parádosi*, pl. *paradóseis*). As regards the absence of fixed form or influence of a narrative technique based on writing, the Greek *paradóseis* do not differ from the folktales. But there is a clear distinction to be drawn both in function and in genre. The *paramýthi* begins with an invitation (often in verse) to relax and enjoy an amusing story, and ends with a delightful variant of the “happily ever after” formula: “So they lived happily and [may we] be even happier; I wasn’t there myself and you shouldn’t believe it either!” The *parádosi*, on the other hand, is always much more concise in form, being limited to a relatively straightforward statement of what is regarded as fact, stating or explaining a local custom or belief. The following “legend” explaining the activities of the French archaeological team at Delphi in the nineteenth century aptly illustrates both the inventive power of this tradition and its difference from the folktale:

The milords aren’t Christians, because no one’s seen them make the sign of the Cross [i.e., in the Orthodox manner]. They’re descended from the old pagan people of Delphi, who kept their treasures in a castle and called it Adelphi [brothers], after the two princes who built it. When the Holy Virgin and Christ came to these places, and everyone all around became Christian, the Adelphians reckoned they would do better to go away; so they went to the West [*Frankiá*] and took all their wealth with them. The *milords* are their descendants, and have come now to worship those lumps of stone.

(Politis 1904:no. 108)

We frequently find some overlap in content between the “demotic” tradition of oral poetry and these legends, but none with the folktales.

The Greek shadow-puppet theater, named after its hero Karagiozis, must also be mentioned as an oral tradition. This form of humor has probably not had a very long tradition in Greek—its

immediate origin is the Turkish puppet-theater of Karagöz, and it is probable that the Greek plays go back no further than the nineteenth century—but it has acquired a distinct character and style of its own and was for about a hundred years enormously popular with audiences. Texts attributed to famous players (in prose, with some incidental songs) began to be recorded and published in the early years of this century, but the art of the Karagiozis performer remains one of extempore oral performance, and written texts have never served as the basis for performing. In the Karagiozis tradition, the sly underdog of the Ottoman Empire has become the sly *Greek* underdog, who like his Turkish counterpart always manages to win through despite, or even because of, an outrageous disregard for authority. The Greek Karagiozis has also developed a large cast of character parts, based on the idiosyncrasies of regional dialects, styles of dress and even songs; and some of the plots, like that of “Alexander the Great and the Accursed Snake,” draw their inspiration from oral *paradóseis* and a centuries-old tradition of popular (written) literature.

Each of the traditions described so far can be regarded as “oral” in the sense that writing and (sub)literary techniques have played no part in its formation or transmission. That is to say, each tradition already existed fully formed when it was first committed to writing, and that committal to writing was entirely extrinsic (in the end even perhaps harmful) to the continued development of the tradition. With these traditions, however, there coexist others which possess oral features but do not seem to be wholly independent of writing or recording in their composition and transmission. These are: the folk songs of semi-professional itinerant minstrels who were once active in Crete (*rimadóri*) and still are in Cyprus (*piitárides*) which I have elsewhere described as comprising a “historical” tradition of folksong (Beaton 1980:151-78); the urban folk songs of the Ottoman and later Greek cities (*rebétilka*); and some of the many partisan songs of the Second World War and Civil War in Greece (1940-49) which draw on the “demotic” tradition of oral poetry rather than on contemporary popular song (*andártika*).

The principal characteristics of the “historical” tradition which differentiate it from the “demotic” are the evidence for personal composition, linked to a semi-professional or entrepreneurial status of the composer-singer, and the use of rhyme, from which is

derived the name by which these songs have been known in Crete: *rimes*. We also find the practice, of which the first known instance is in Crete in 1786 and which is still common among the *piitárides* of Cyprus, whereby the non-literate poet *himself* commissions a written transcription of his work, which today he may sell printed in the form of a broadsheet (*ylládio*). These “historical” poems are lengthy narratives on subjects of topical or local importance, sometimes of important events (such as the Cretan “Daskaloyannis” which tells in over 1,000 lines the story of the abortive revolt of the Sfakioti of western Crete against their Ottoman rulers in 1770), but more often not (such as the lingering death of a young man called Christofoudis from the village of Lefkara in Cyprus from an accidental gunshot wound, recorded in 318 lines in a manuscript of 1803). Generally these texts aim at (or ape) historical precision in the frequently awkward attempt to versify the precise date of an occurrence, and their narrative style is quite different from that of the oral songs of the demotic tradition, in that, in place of dramatic juxtaposition, direct speech, and tersely presented scenes, it tells “one thing after another,” often interspersed with remarks by the narrator/singer himself.

The tradition of urban folk song (*rebétiko*) also places considerable importance on personal composition. It originates in the cities of the Ottoman Empire and the community in which it arose can better be defined as a social stratum than on the basis of race or creed. Doubly disreputable in Greek eyes for its low social origins and its easy assimilation of vocabulary, musical styles, and general attitudes assumed to be the distinct prerogative of Turks, the *rebétiko* escaped the attention of scholars until quite recently, and its history can only be retraced through commercial phonograph recording, which at the same time distorted whatever purely oral tradition had been in existence before. The themes of the *rebétiko* are the gangster-heroism of *mánges*, whose individualistic code of honor owed much to that extolled in “demotic” songs of the klefts and other heroes out of a remoter past like Diyanis and Mikrokostantinos; and the evocation of a variety of depressed states, their antidote in hashish, and the prison regimen which forms the final link in this vicious circle (and is presented in terms that little differentiate it from life in the outside world).

Partisan songs of the Second World War and Civil War (*andártika*) do not really represent a distinct category of oral

tradition. Those songs, among a substantial corpus, that reflect the themes and styles of older kleftic ballads effectively belong with them in the “demotic” tradition, while the bulk of partisan songs undoubtedly belongs with popular song, and many were composed on the initiative of political groups as propaganda, to be sung to well-known military and popular tunes.

Finally, mention must be made of attempts that have recently been made to identify the processes of oral tradition at work in late medieval Greek texts written in the vernacular. The actual oral component in the composition and/or transmission of these texts is still very uncertain, but it is highly probable that during the twelfth to sixteenth centuries, when the modern language was first tentatively being exploited for literary purposes, the oral traditions of that time exercised a formative influence on writers who had no other models of poetic composition in the vernacular on which to draw. Oral tradition may in this way have played a part in creating the epic/romance *Digenes Akrites* (twelfth century?), the comic begging poems attributed to the prolific Byzantine man of letters Theodore Prodromos (twelfth century), and the Greek version of the *Chronicle of the Morea*, the long verse narrative of the Frankish conquest of southern Greece, written by an ardent opponent of the Byzantines in a language and style relatively free from their learned influence. More directly linked to the oral tradition of its time is the heroic “Song of Armouris,” little more than a ballad in length and style, and recorded in two manuscripts of the fifteenth century, although the world it depicts had vanished some four centuries earlier.

### Collections

1. *Oral song.* The collecting of *Volkslieder* or *chansons populaires* in Greek goes back to the very beginning of the nineteenth century, with the abortive collection of Von Haxthausen abandoned in 1820 (=1935), and that of Claude Fauriel (1824, 1825). Neither of these collectors ever visited Greece and their informants were educated Greeks who had left the Ottoman Empire, often permanently, to live abroad. The same seems to be true of Niccolo Tommaseo’s collection (1842) and the floridly entitled contribution of a Greek expatriate living in St. Petersburg (Evlampios 1843). The first collector to engage in any kind of direct field work, and also the first to publish a collection within

the geographical area of Greece, was Andonios Manousos (1850), a friend and disciple of Greece's "national poet" Dionysios Solomos. Landmarks in the sizeable bibliography of folksong collections in the second half of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth are Passow 1860, in which the findings of several predecessors are collated (and surreptitiously conflated), and several regional ones, notably by Sakellarios from Cyprus (1868, 1891), Ioannidis from Pontos (1870), Jeannarakis from Crete (1876), and Aravantinos from Epiros (1880). In 1883 the Historical and Ethnological Society was founded in Athens by, among others, the leading folklorist of his day, Nikolaos Politis, and folksongs as well as other ethnographical material were published from then onwards in its journal (*Deltión tis Istorikís kai Ethnologikís Etaireías*, 1883-), and later in the periodical *Laografía* (1909-), which was founded by Politis alone. The initial phase of collecting and publishing oral poetry comes to an end with the publication of Politis' *Selections from the Songs of the Greek People* (1914), a meticulous collation and misguided conflation of the entire recorded corpus up to that date. This edition is still regarded as authoritative in Greek schools, although its fundamental shortcomings were pointed out more than fifty years ago (Apostolakis 1929).

The founding of the journal *Laografía* a few years before, however, sets the stage for twentieth-century collecting of oral material. Its volumes from that time up until the present contain an enormous treasury of regional material, scrupulously recorded, and for the first time with the features of the regional dialect intact. Regional collections in this century have followed this lead, with variable but generally increasing fidelity to the oral "text" as performed (Kriaris 1920; Michailidis-Nouaros 1928; Baud-Bovy 1935, 1938). Little new material has been added since the Second World War to that already known, although substantial archives of unpublished material are housed by the Academy of Athens (*Laografikón Archeón*, *Leofóros Syngrou*, Athens) and by departments of Folklore (*Laografía*) at Greek universities.

Several excellent editions have appeared in recent years, presenting a sampling either of the whole corpus or of a specific part of it, but without perpetuating the editorial shortcomings of Politis. The best in quality is Academy of Athens (1963), but unfortunately the promised second volume, which is to contain the lyrical songs, has still not appeared (although the third volume containing a rich body of musical texts, was published as long ago

as 1968). Other such “sampling” editions are D. Petropoulos (1958, 1959), Ioannou (1966), and Mastrodimitris (1984). Excellent editions of particular types of song are by Ioannou (1970) for the narrative ballads (*paraloyés*); by A. Politis (1973) for the songs of the klefts; and by Guy Saunier (1983) for the songs of exile. Of all these modern editions only those of the Academy of Athens (1963) and Saunier (1983) collate older published versions with unpublished archival material.

2. *Folktales*. Serious interest in folktales seems to have begun later than in folk poetry, and even today the bibliography of Greek oral prose is much less substantial. The German expatriate J. G. von Hahn, from Ermoupolis on the island of Syros, seems to have been the first to make a systematic collection, which, however, he published only in translation (1864), as did Schmidt after him (1877). Jean Pio, working from von Hahn’s posthumous papers, published the first Greek collection in Denmark in 1879, soon to be followed by Marianna Kambouroglou in the first volume of the journal of the Historical and Ethnological Society in 1883 (=1924), but the great majority of collected folktales were recorded in periodicals and regional publications around and after the turn of the century. In many respects the most remarkable is that of Dawkins (1916), in which Greek dialect texts from the interior of Asia Minor were recorded and discussed only a few years before the catastrophic Greek military defeat of 1922 that uprooted the entire Christian population permanently and effectively annihilated many of the smaller Greek dialect communities. Good modern collected editions are by Megas (1962) and Ioannou (1973). Folktales have fared better than their verse counterparts in English translation (Dawkins 1953). The standard collection of legends (*paradóseis*) remains that of Politis (1904).

3. *Karagiozis*. It would only be a slight exaggeration to say that the oral “texts” of the Karagiozis shadow-puppet theater have hardly been collected at all. No records survive of shadow-puppet plays before 1921. In that year the French scholar Louis Roussel published two volumes of texts that he had taken down from the then-veteran player Andonis Mollas, which he published in Athens with a French introduction and glossary. Three years later Mollas’ contemporary, the Cretan Karagiozis player Markos Xanthos, rushed into print with a “broadsheet” version of one of his plays, and in the next eight years, up to his death in 1932, Xanthos

seems to have published versions of no less than forty-six of his performances. In this practice he was followed by other players between the wars, so that a modest archive of these poorly produced texts, clearly conceived by illiterate or semi-literate players in the hope of selling them at performances, now exists. But there is no evidence that any of the Karagiozis players have been fully literate, and with the exception of the texts dictated by Mollas to Roussel, we have only the work of doubtfully qualified amanuenses, produced under the cheapest possible conditions. A modern edition of several of these has been compiled by Ioannou in three volumes (1971), and some of the same material had earlier been published in German translation by Jensen (1954). There is a sizeable bibliography on the Turkish Karagöz: a recent volume of texts (in Turkish) is edited by Kudret (1968-70); and two Turkish texts in Greek translation are published with a substantial introduction by Mystakidou (1982). An important archive of Karagiozis performances on tape is housed in the Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature at Widener Library, Harvard University, and the first scholarly edition of Karagiozis material, from this collection, is currently being undertaken.

4. *The “historical” tradition.* In the collections this material is not strictly segregated from the oral poetry of the “demotic” tradition, and we find personal compositions on topical and historical themes co-existing with the shorter ballad and lyrical pieces from the second volume of Fauriel’s collection (1825) onwards. The oldest, and the longest, Cretan text has been published in a separate critical edition (Laourdas 1947). The Cretan material is principally to be found in Jeannaraki (1876) and Fafoutakis (1889), the Cypriot in Sakellarios (1891) and Farmakidis (1926). More recent developments of these local “historical” traditions are mainly to be found in Detorakis (1976) and Kapsomenos (1979), for Crete; and for Cyprus in Yangoullis (1976). Unpublished material, much of it belonging to this tradition, was collected on tape by James Notopoulos and D. Petropoulos in 1953, and is housed, along with the Karagiozis archive, in the Milman Parry Collection at Harvard.

5. *Urban folksong and partisan songs.* The principal source for the study of the *rebétko* was until very recently 78 rpm gramophone records, and these have provided almost exclusively the

basis for the modern editions. In addition to these editions (I. Petropoulos 1968; Schorelis 1978-82; and Gauntlett 1983, Appendix), a further and often overlapping source of material has been the copious "autobiographies" of retired exponents of the tradition, which were in fact dictated, and contain the texts of many songs as recalled by their "authors" (for example, Vamvakaris 1973).

Several collections of partisan songs (*andártika*) have appeared since 1974, when the lifting of a thirty-year ban on Communist Party membership and activity in Greece for the first time made the publication of most of them a legal possibility. Adamou (1977) presents a substantial sampling, with introduction; and a scholarly thesis on the subject by Riki van Boeschoten (University of Amsterdam) is nearing completion.

6. *Medieval vernacular texts.* The medieval Greek texts in which the influence of oral tradition has been suspected scarcely belong in this section, as they are only known to us in literary form. Suffice it to say that extracts from all of them, with notes and further bibliography, may be found in L. Politis (1975), with the exception of the "Song of Armouris," which is printed in Kalonaros (1941:vol. 2, pp. 213-17).

## Discussions

The history of scholarly interest in Greek oral traditions has been well covered, from widely differing standpoints, by three recent publications: Kyriakidou-Nestoros 1978; Herzfeld 1982; A. Politis 1984. Kyriakidou-Nestoros gives a straightforward and factually full account of the intellectual interests of the first collectors and students of Greek oral material in the nineteenth century, which she categorizes as "pre-scientific" and strongly colored by the then current equation of oral traditional lore with "popular antiquities"; this was followed by a "proto-scientific" period inaugurated by the meticulous, if sometimes misdirected, scholarship of Nikolaos Politis, whose career spans the period from 1870 to his death in 1921. It is to Politis that we owe the first really systematic collections of a wide range of ethnographic material, and the first attempt to apply the methods of comparative mythology to Greek material. He too, as was natural at this time, sought to define modern Greek culture in terms of continuity with its ancient past, but to this end he

was assiduous in comparing it with an impressively wide range of contemporary material from outside Greece. The second half of Kyriakidou-Nestoros' book is then devoted to the career of her father, Stilpon Kyriakidis, who succeeded Politis to the chair of *Laografía* in Athens. The cornerstone of Kyriakidis' achievement, she rightly argues, is to be found in the historical approach to ethnography. While still not seeking to detach modern Greek ethnography from its putative forebears in the ancient world, he set out systematically to discover the historical factors that had determined the course of such a long transmission. His conclusion was that the direct origin of modern oral material, particularly songs, was not to be sought in the classical or even pre-classical world (see, for example, Lawson 1910 as a classic of this approach), but in two well-defined historical epochs: the time of the late Roman Empire, and the highpoint of Byzantine-Arab confrontation in the Middle East, between the eighth and eleventh centuries. (The most important essays in which this position is developed have been republished as Kyriakidis 1979). Kyriakidou-Nestoros is broadly prepared to endorse these conclusions, although her own interest clearly lies more in the synchronic approach of structural anthropology. Kyriakidou-Nestoros perhaps wisely stops short of assessing the achievements and shortcomings of her immediate predecessors and contemporaries, but makes the point, which I believe to be justified, that her father's work between the wars represents the last time that Greek ethnologists have turned to the outside world and endeavored to relate their own findings to wider theoretical perspectives.

Alexis Politis (1984), dealing with the earliest interest in Greek folk song by Greeks and especially by foreigners in the period culminating with the appearance of Fauriel's Collection (1824, 1825), extends the perspective backwards in time and places the discovery of Greek folk song, at the turn of the nineteenth century, in the context of European ideological developments of the period.

The other work which provides a partial overview of scholarship on Greek oral material (Herzfeld 1982) has been widely reviewed (e.g., Mackridge 1983; Lambropoulos 1983; Beaton 1984; Sanders 1984) and need not be discussed in detail here. In dealing with the period from about 1800 to 1922, it covers only the ethnographical pursuits of Greeks (who do not represent a majority of those active in the field for all of the period). However, the book is a stunning exercise in the "anthropology of

anthropologists," and seeks to demonstrate not just that Greek ethnography in the nineteenth century was crucially dominated by the necessity of the newly formed Greek state to acquire and buttress a national identity, but further how any culture in the attempt to define itself must simultaneously distort the very evidence on which that definition is based.

The academic study of oral traditions in Greece has changed relatively little since the retirement of Kyriakidis in the early 1960s. None of the oral traditions described here is the object of a special branch of study in Greek academic institutions, but all are subsumed together under the heading of *Laografía* (roughly "folklore" or "ethnology"). The scope of this study is well indicated by Loukatos (1978), and is traditionally divided into "monuments of the word" (a term that rather prejudgetes the nature of the oral traditions to which it refers), rituals, customs and beliefs, and what we would call physical ethnography. The curriculum is very large; but as outlined by Loukatos it leaves little room for anthropological method or, with limited exceptions, for comparative study of similar material from outside Greece. This situation is now rapidly changing in some (but not all) Greek universities.

Until relatively recently the different oral traditions described here were either not consistently distinguished or, in some cases, even ignored by the ethnographers. In the last few years this picture has changed considerably, so that a sizeable bibliography now exists devoted to each tradition. A brief guide to that bibliography follows.

1. *Oral song (the "demotic" tradition).* This has always proved the most attractive field for scholars and amateurs alike, and most of what has already been said applies primarily to this tradition. In Greece Kostas Romaios has published a seminal study of a specific formal property of this tradition (1963) and has also written, less convincingly, on the historical and mythological roots of particular types of song (1968), while Georgios Megas, champion of the Finnish School in Greece, has subjected a single ballad, "The Bridge of Arta," to exhaustive examination of more than three hundred recorded Greek variants, which he then compares with a wide range of Balkan counterparts (1976). Although this study stands out in its meticulous attention to detail, the conclusion offered—that the Balkan ballad originated among Greeks

of Asia Minor in the sixth century A.D.—seems scarcely worthy of the laborious effort involved.

Outside Greece Michael Herzfeld was the first to apply computer techniques to analysis of Greek oral songs, and the first to advocate a specifically structuralist methodology in the field (1972). Beaton (1980) looks at the whole field of “folk poetry” (including the “historical” tradition and modern offshoots) in terms of the Parry/Lord oral-formulaic theory and of the ideas on myth and symbolism of, respectively, Claude Lévi-Strauss and Dan Sperber; and M. Alexiou (1983) makes a major contribution to the study of “domestic” ballads (*paraloyés*) in terms of myth and synchronic function, to which the description of these songs above is indebted. A “contextual” approach has been proposed by Herzfeld (1981) and Caraveli (1982), the latter persuasively arguing that meaning in songs is derived from performative context, implicit allusions to received tradition, and social and local determinants, as well as from internal factors. Most recently post-structuralist perspectives on this tradition have been launched by Herzfeld and Alexiou (both forthcoming).

2. *Folktales*. The appropriateness of the Aarne-Thompson classification was quickly recognized, the more so since all the oral prose narratives which by their specifically local character are likely to fall outside of it have been classified, ever since Politis (1904), as *paradóseis* (legends). I know of no specific studies of the latter, although they continue to be used as evidence for many sorts of inquiry. However, the style, performance, and status of these “factual” statements deserve some consideration in their own right. On the folktales proper, Dawkins’ commentaries (1916) and introduction (1953) are of considerable interest, but relatively little of substance has been published more recently. The principal exception is Meraklis (1973), which provides a good general introduction to folktale studies and discusses the style, content, and origins of specific Greek folktales with scholarly sensitivity. Alexiadis (1982) is not unrepresentative of the present state of the art, in its scholarly but unimaginative application of historical-geographical methodology to the Greek versions of a single tale-type.

3. *Karagiozis*. Since Roussel’s pioneering publication and discussion of the Greek shadow-puppet theater (1921), quite a large

bibliography, mostly of journalistic articles and enthusiastic encomia, has built up, and the best guide, which links this bibliography to worldwide studies of shadow-theater, is to be found in Mystakidou (1982). The same volume offers the most restrained and informed account of the relation between the Greek Karagiozis and Turkish Karagöz. (In an expensively produced and enticingly illustrated publication, Fotiadis [1977] had attempted to claim that the true origin of the Greek shadow-theater lay in pre-Aristophanic performances in Greece, to which all its near and middle eastern manifestations are ultimately linked.) Much useful information is contained in the “Memoirs” of the consummate player Spatharis (1960), who died in 1974, and analytical accounts of the technique of the Karagiozis player and the content of the plays from an anthropological perspective are to be found in, respectively, Myrsiades (1976) and Danforth (1976). There is as yet no study devoted to the specifically oral techniques of composition and performance in the Greek shadow-theater (but see Kiourtsakis [1983], Sifakis [1984], and the exhaustive bibliographies of Puchner [1978, 1982] in which 435 items have so far been listed).

4. *The “historical” tradition.* This designation, like that of the “demotic” tradition, is proposed and explained in Beaton (1980). As such the term “historical tradition” can therefore only have provisional standing, but the recognition that the material described under that heading forms a distinct body is already present in folk terminology, which refers to *rimes* (rhymes/rhymed poems) in Crete and *piímatá* (poems) in Cyprus, while the oral poems of the “demotic” tradition are always known simply as *tragoúdia* (songs). Nikolaos Politis devoted a lengthy article to this tradition (1915), in which he contrasted it with the anonymous products of what we should today call the oral tradition, and thereafter commentators are (not without justice) inclined to be scathing about the artistic merits of these poems. It was Farmakidis (1926) who first introduced the notion that these longer, semi-professional compositions constituted an *epic* tradition, and this possibility was embraced with enthusiasm by the American scholar and pupil of A. B. Lord, James Notopoulos. The Notopoulos archive at Harvard is said to contain about a thousand items collected on tape in the 1950s, and it was songs of this tradition that Notopoulos was particularly anxious to collect (1959).

Notopoulos' untimely death prevented his completing a book-length study of what he regarded as an oral epic tradition, on the lines of that studied by Parry and Lord in Yugoslavia, in modern Greek. Subsequent work has shown this position to be untenable, at least in the manner in which Notopoulos formulated it in his published articles (Yangoullis 1976, 1978; Beaton 1980; Papadopoulos 1976, 1977, 1980), but it remains true that Notopoulos's proposal first revived interest in an undervalued area of Greek oral tradition. And although it now seems impossible to see, in the Cretan and Cypriot itinerant minstrels, analogs of pre-Homeric epic versifiers, recent studies nonetheless suggest that they might have useful things to tell us about the vexed theoretical questions of the "transitional" text, in that oral and written features seem to coexist in this tradition (Eideneier 1984; Beaton forthcoming).

5. *Urban folksong (rebétko)*. Until the end of the 1960s almost a taboo subject, on account of its association with anti-social behavior and its shared features with its counterpart in Turkish culture, the *rebétko* became the object of a vigorous revival in the 1970s. At one level this may have been prompted by the initiative, and unparalleled success, a decade earlier of the popular composers Hadzidakis and Theodorakis, who transplanted something of its musical style into a distinctive form of popular art-music; but the serious craze for *rebétko* really begins with Ilias Petropoulos (1968). Petropoulos seems to have conceived this publication as itself an anti-social act, in the spirit of many of the songs, and took care to include some obscenities in his introduction which the military censors of that time could not ignore. In this way the rebetic revival can be seen as a child of the Greek junta of 1967-74.

Petropoulos' book was followed, after 1974, by a spate of publications and gramophone records, and various claims were put forward about the nature and history of this tradition, with little scholarly basis. Against this background Damianakos (1976) stands out as a serious attempt to treat the song texts as sociological evidence, and Gauntlett (1983) provides the first exhaustive analysis of them, in relation to theories of oral tradition and in their historical development from the beginning of the twentieth century when they are first attested. Gauntlett (1982-83) makes a concise attempt to define *rebétko* in terms of genre, and Conway Morris (1980) couples important historical background with a properly

compiled contribution to discography.

6. *Medieval vernacular texts.* It has generally been supposed since the late nineteenth century that the epic ballad, the “Song of Armouris,” which deals with conflict between Greeks and Saracens such as existed during the eighth to eleventh centuries, and which is preserved in two manuscripts of the fifteenth century, is a product of oral tradition. The same has often been claimed for the epic or romance *Digenes Akrites*, which undoubtedly draws on popular (and at this date one may assume therefore oral) tradition, although today it seems most probable that the texts we possess derive from a consciously literary type of composition, in the eleventh or twelfth century. The relation of both these texts to oral tradition is discussed in L. Politis (1970), Beck (1971), and Beaton (1980, 1981a, and 1981b), where relevant bibliography can also be found. A. B. Lord published some quantitative results of formula analysis of different versions of *Digenes* in the Appendix to *The Singer of Tales*, and has returned to the subject more recently (1977), but avoids the categorical conclusion that any of the versions represents a recording from oral tradition as he has defined it.

It was Constantine Trypanis, in a brief and rather sweeping article (1963), who first made the suggestion that the vernacular literature of the last centuries of Byzantium *as a whole* constituted the remnants of a once thriving oral tradition. Then Michael and Elizabeth Jeffreys (1971) proposed that the wide variations in the manuscript tradition of a vernacular romance text could be explained in terms of oral performance and the operation of memory. In a series of articles since then, they have elaborated a proposal, initiated by a quantitative formula analysis of a 12,000-line text using computer techniques, that the style of all this “popular” (or vernacular) literature derives from the conditions of oral composition and transmission, although they leave open the question of how the text as we possess it in each case came to be created, or re-created, in writing (M. Jeffreys 1973, E. Jeffreys 1979, E. and M. Jeffreys 1979).<sup>2</sup>

In a parallel endeavor, Hans Eideneier (1982, 1983, 1984) has proposed criteria for distinguishing between written and oral transmission in the manuscript tradition of these texts, and concludes that all of them circulated in a form of oral transmission much more restricted than the Parry/Lord model (followed by the

Jeffreys), and only came to be collected in written form when the oral tradition began to decline. He too leaves open the question of an “original” form behind these orally circulated poems, although he hints that they may have been popular paraphrases of texts conceived in the learned language.

### Prospects

It is not by any means assumed by all commentators that the emergence of Greece as a modern nation alongside its partners in the European Economic Community necessarily spells the end of its once thriving oral traditions. Profound changes have of course occurred. And it is probably a general truth, wherever oral traditions are recorded and studied and their productions published as texts, that the traditions themselves will be radically affected. In Greece the “demotic” tradition of oral poetry scarcely functions any longer as a process of re-composition in performance, and the length and coherence of recorded variants indicate a real deterioration. On the other hand, the function of preservation once performed by the techniques of formulaic composition and the acuter memory of the non-literate performer is now fulfilled by published anthologies, by tapes and records. The urge to sing the songs remains, although the special creative property of performance without reference to a fixed text has transferred itself to other media—to literature in one direction, and to the thriving art of extemporizing rhymed distichs in the other. The same can broadly be said of the other traditions mentioned; and one should not forget the continuing debt of modern Greek literature and music at all levels to these oral traditions.

The prospects for future scholarship are more open still. There is probably little “traditional” material that has not yet been transcribed in some form, but the probability of oral traditions developing their own futures implies a need for continued recording. Almost all the recorded material so far is deficient in indications of context and the non-verbal aspects of performance, and there is room for work in this direction. Judiciously selective use could undoubtedly also be made of the many texts in archives still unpublished, and a major contribution in the future should be the publication, in some form, of the sound archives of an earlier period, such as the Melpo Merlier Collection in the Centre for Asia Minor Studies in Athens (recorded in 1930) and the Notopoulos

Collection at Harvard (recorded in 1953), on which a start is only now being made.

Otherwise, it would be foolhardy to predict, and presumptuous to attempt to prescribe, the directions which future studies of Greek oral culture might take. Closer integration of ethnographic studies in Greece with the aims and methods of scholars in other countries is an obvious desideratum, and there are signs of increased momentum in this direction in Greece today. It is now perhaps for those of us whom Greek scholars have in the past mistrusted or found indifferent, to demonstrate how highly we value the oral material and the intellectual insights which they are in a position to contribute to the understanding of a phenomenon which is truly universal, namely oral tradition.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup>“Modern Greek” is assumed to mean not just “belonging to the Greek state,” whose birth was heralded by the revolution against the Ottomans of 1821, but to include everything that pertains to speakers of the modern languages wherever they may live or have lived, and going back to the period from which that language is first continuously attested in written records, that is, to the twelfth century.

<sup>2</sup>For a thorough discussion of this work and its background, see the Jeffreys’ “The Oral Background of Byzantine Popular Poetry,” to appear in a future issue of *Oral Tradition*.

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## **The Alphabetic Mind: A Gift of Greece to the Modern World**

**Eric A. Havelock**

Up until about 700 years before Christ the Greek peoples were non-literate. About that time they invented a writing system conveniently described as an “alphabet,” the Greek word for it. The use of this invention in the course of 300 to 400 years after 700 B.C. had a transformational effect upon the behavior of the Greek language, upon the kind of things that could be said in the language and the things that could be thought as it was used. The transformation, however, did not substitute one language for another. The Greek of the Hellenistic age is recognizably close kin to the Greek of Homer. Yet the degree of transformation can be conveniently measured by comparing Homer at the upper end of the time-span with the language of Aristotle at the lower end. The earlier form came into existence as an instrument for the preservation of oral speech through memorization. This memorized form was not the vernacular of casual conversation but an artificially managed language with special rules for memorization, one of which was rhythm. The later form, the Aristotelean one, existed and still exists as a literate instrument designed primarily for readers. It preserves its content not through memorization but by placing it in a visual artifact, the alphabet, where the content can survive as long as the artifact and its copies survive also. The transformational effect made itself felt slowly in the course of 350 years. It was a complex process. What precisely was its nature? Its complexity can be summed up variously as on the one hand, a shift from poetry to prose as the medium of preserved communication; or again as a shift in literary style from narrative towards exposition; or again as the creation of a new literate syntax of definition which could be superimposed upon the oral

syntax that described action. Or again we discern the invention of a conceptual language superimposed upon a non-conceptual; or alternatively a creation of the abstract to replace the concrete, the invention of an abstract version of what had previously been experienced sensually and directly as a series of events or actions.

If one uses such terms as “concept” or “abstraction” to indicate the end result of the transformation, one has to clear up some basic confusions in the use of these terms. Critics and commentators are fond of calling attention to the presence of what they call abstractions or abstract ideas in Homer. This at bottom is a mistake, the nature of which can be clarified by giving an example of what the abstractive process in language involves, as opposed to Homeric idiom.

The poet Homer begins his *Iliad* by addressing his Muse: “Sing I pray you the wrath of Achilles, the wrath that ravages, the wrath that placed on the Achaeans ten thousand afflictions.” Suppose we render these sentiments into prose and translate them into abstract terms; they would then run somewhat as follows: “My poem’s subject is the wrath of Achilles which had disruptive effects and these caused deep distress for the Achaeans.” A series of acts signalled in the original by appropriate transitive verbs and performed by agents on personal objects is replaced by abstractions connected to each other by verbs indicating fixed relationships between them. Instead of a “me” actually speaking to another person, i.e., the Muse, who in turn has to perform the act of singing aloud, we get “my *subject* is so and so;” an “is” statement with an abstract subject has replaced two persons connected by an action. Instead of the image of wrath acting like a ravaging army, we get the “effect” created by this instrument; instead of a bundle of woes being placed like a weight on human shoulders, we get a single impersonal abstraction—“deep distress”—connected to a previous abstraction—“disruptive effects”—by a causal relationship—“these caused.”

In a pre-alphabetic society like that of Homer, only the first of these two alternative modes of describing the same phenomenon was available. Why this was so I will explain later. A literate critic, that is a “literary” critic, analyzing the substance of the story will use terms of the second mode in order to understand the language of the first. Too often all he manages to do is to introduce misunderstanding. He undercuts the active, transitive, and dynamic syntax of the original which is typical of all speech in

societies of oral communication and particularly of preserved speech in such societies.

The second mode, which I will call the conceptual as well as the alphabetic, had to be invented, and it was the invention of literacy. Such a statement as "my subject is the wrath" would in orality represent something to be avoided. As a type it represents the kind of analytic discourse which does not meet the requirement of easy and continuous memorization.

I call your attention in particular to the formal announcement: "my subject is the wrath." The clue to the creation of a conceptual discourse replacing the poetic one lies in the monosyllable "is." Here is the copula as we call it, the commonest version now of the verb "to be" familiar in daily converse, let alone reflective speech, connecting two conceptual words, "subject" and "wrath." "Wrath" is linked to "subject" as its equivalent, but also as an alternative definition of what this subject "is." To give a simpler and even more commonplace example: when in modern speech A remarks to B "your house is beautiful," the copula assigns a property to an object which is not abstract but which by the copula usage is attached to the "attribute" beauty (or in the new practice of analytic discourse it is "implicated"). In ancient Greek as it was spoken down to Plato's day, the "is" would be omitted.

These illustrations bring out a fundamental fact about the language of the conceptual mind: clues to its nature are not to be found by isolating mere nouns as such and classifying them as abstract or concrete. It is the syntax in which they are embedded that betrays the difference. The word "wrath" could if you so choose be viewed as a kind of abstraction, a psychological one. But it is not a true abstraction because it is an agent which performs, in the course of three lines (only two of which I have quoted), no less than four perfectly concrete actions: it ravages; it picks up a burden and puts it on the shoulders of the Greeks; it catapults human lives into Hades; it converts men into things for animals to eat.

Complete "conceptuality" of discourse (if this be the appropriate word) depends not on single words treated as phenomena *per se*, but on their being placed in a given relationship to one another in statements which employ either a copula or an equivalent to connect them. The growth of abstractionism and conceptualism in the Greek tongue is not

discoverable by a mere resort to lexicons, indexes, and glossaries, common as this practice has become. Single words classifiable as abstract like "justice" or "strife" or "war" or "peace" can as easily be personified as not. What is in question is the ability of the human mind to create and manipulate theoretic statements as opposed to particular ones; to replace a performative syntax by a logical one.

Homeric and oral discourse often resorts to a personification of what the literate critic is tempted to call abstractions. But considered as abstractions they fail the syntactical test; they are always busy, performing or behaving. They are not allowed to be identified categorically as terms under which the action is arranged and classified. They are never defined or described analytically; they are innocent of any connection with the copula which can link them to a definition, give them an attribute, link them to a class or kind. They never appear in what I shall call the "is statement."

Let us revert again to Homer's preface to his *Iliad*. The story is ignited so to speak by a quarrel between Achilles and his commander-in-chief. The poet asks rhetorically "and pray then which one of the gods combined these two together in contentious strife to fight?" The Homeric name for this kind of strife is *eris*. Later in the narrative it acquires a capital letter (to use an anachronism). It becomes "personified," as we say, as a kind of feminine principle, though again the term "principle" is wholly anachronistic. "Her" behavior is evoked in a rich variety of imagery: "she" can be discovered "raging ceaselessly, a little wave which then extends from earth to heaven, throwing contested feud into the throng, enlarging agony"; or again "painfully severe (a missile) discharged by Zeus, emplacing might and strength in the heart"; or again "bewept and bewailed"; or again "keeping company with battle noise and ravaging fate"; or again "arising in force, rousing peoples to rage, as the gods mingled in battle." Nowhere is the term given either social or psychological definition: we are told what "she" does, we are never told what "it" is.

A modern poet or writer of fiction might choose imagery for his subject which allowed equal freedom. But behind his imagery in the language of his culture there lurks in parallel an alternative type of language which could be chosen to define or describe analytically what he is talking about. In oral cultures, for reasons to be explained later, no such language is available.

In dealing with the history of human civilizations, the terms "Western" and "European" are used loosely to draw a definition of culture based on geography. The counter-cultures are those of Arabia, India, China, or sometimes the "Near East" and the "Far East." The geographic distinction is supported by drawing a parallel religious one, which refers to the differences between a Judaeo-Christian faith on the one hand and Islam or Buddhism or Confucianism on the other. These stereotypes are in common use. The classification I am proposing, one which has more operational meaning, is that between the alphabetic cultures and the non-alphabetic ones, with the qualification that in the present crisis of modernity, with technological man increasingly dominant over traditional man, the alphabetic culture shows increasing signs of invading the nonalphabetic ones and taking them over. That is to say, written communication world-wide, as it is used to preserve and re-use information, is tending increasingly to be alphabetized. This can be viewed as an effect of the superior military and industrial power wielded by the alphabetic cultures. But I would argue that this power itself, as it originally emerged very slowly in antiquity, and as it has gained rapid momentum since the end of the eighteenth century of our era, is itself an alphabetic phenomenon. Power has been derived from the mechanisms of written communication. Communication is not merely the instrument of thought; it also creates thought. Alphabetic communication, which meant literate communication, brought into existence the kind of thinking which remodels the dynamic flow of daily experience into "is statements," of one sort or another. This permits a conceptual analysis of what happens in the environment and in ourselves and creates the power not merely to reason about what happens but to control it and to change what happens. This power is not available in oral cultures.

Those familiar with the history of the alphabet will be aware that by alphabetic cultures I mean those that use either the original Greek form, or its common Roman adaptation which I am using at the moment, or its Cyrillic version as used by the Russian state and some other peoples.

I throw out another suggestion, merely as an aside to my present argument, that one of the causes of the profound unease that exists between the Soviets and the "West," to use the convenient term, is not merely the result of competing social systems. It has some seat in the unlucky accident that the

Russian Cyrillic script seems somehow alien to western habit; it constitutes an extra barrier to be surmounted on top of the formidable one created by language. The barrier is of this peculiar sort that a script is something you can *see*, an *object*, not simply a noise heard like language. Man even today does not live merely in a tower of linguistic Babel, he lives also in a Babel of competing scripts. This competition and collision is an unnoticed element in the evolution of modern societies. Here is a theme which I predict will have to be taken up one day by historians of culture.

Support for some rather sweeping affirmations as I have made them lies originally in the Greek story. It was in ancient Greece that it all started. The alphabetic mind is the Greek mind as it in time became, but not as it originally was. Greece created it, but Greece also preserved the oralist mind. The history of Greek culture is the history of the confrontation of these two minds, or more accurately their creative partnership as it developed over three and one-half centuries to the point of their amalgamation—something which has endured in the alphabetic cultures that inherited the Greek invention.

In the Greek case, the intrusion of conceptual language and thought into oral language and thought and the replacement of one by the other can most easily be measured as it occurs in the changing Greek descriptions of human behavior, particularly what we style “moral” behavior. Moral philosophy, as understood in the West and as usually taught in the classroom under the rubric of ethics, is a creation of alphabetic literacy which came into existence in the last half of the fifth and the first half of the fourth centuries B.C. in the city of Athens.

By the term “moral philosophy” I intend to indicate any system of discourse, and by extension of thought, in which the terms right and wrong or good and bad are assumed from a logical standpoint to be not only formally speaking antithetical but mutually exclusive of each other and from a referential standpoint to define all human behavior as divided exhaustively into two categories, right and good and wrong and bad. Thus positioned in human discourse the terms right and wrong, good and bad supply norms by which to classify what is done or thought as right or wrong, good or bad.

In popular speech these terms are frequently reinforced by substituting the words “moral” and “immoral.” It is assumed that these denote universals which can be used unambiguously to guide

choices we have to make as between the two types of action. They provide foundations for moral judgments which theoretically are final. Different linguistic formulas have been employed to designate the overall nature of the right or the good; one thinks of the moral imperative of Kant or the intuited indefinable goodness of G. E. Moore or a theory of justice as proposed by John Rawls. But always the existence of such a norm in the full formal sense of the term is assumed as fundamental to the human condition. What I am proposing here is that the mental process we identify as forming a moral judgment has not always been a necessary component of the human condition but had its a historical origin in late fifth-century Athens. Its effectiveness depended upon a prior ability of the human mind to conceptualize the rules of behavior as moral universals, an ability which emerged only as the oral culture of Greece yielded to an alphabetic one.

To test this assertion let us turn to the earliest extant discussion in Greek of the term "justice." This occurs in a poem composed soon after Homer's day but long before Plato, namely, the *Works and Days* attributed to Hesiod. The style of composition reveals the beginning of a transition from a poetry of listeners towards a poetry which might be read—but only the beginning. One of the component parts—the whole poem runs to over 800 lines—is a discourse of less than 100 lines, a poem within a poem, which possesses an identity of its own, addressing itself as it does with considerable concentration to the single Greek term *dikē* which we normally translate as "justice." Let us observe the syntax in which this term of moral "reference," as we normally think of it, is employed. My translation, which selects those statements where the syntax emerges, will hew as close as possible to the sense of the archaic original (*Works and Days*, 214 ff.):

O Perses, I pray you: hearken to (the voice of)  
justice nor magnify outrage . . . justice over  
outrage prevails having gotten through to the  
goal. Even a fool learns from experience; for  
look! Oath is running alongside crooked  
justices. Uproar of justice being dragged  
away where men take her—. . . she follows  
on weeping to city and dwelling places of  
people clothed in mist carrying evil to man-  
kind, such as drive her out and they have not  
meted her straight.

They who to stranger-guests and demos-dwellers  
give justices (that are) straight and do not  
step across out of justice at all—for them  
the city flourishes merry and the people in it  
blossom . . . nor ever among men of straight  
justice does famine keep company . . .

O lords I pray you: Do you, even you, consider  
deeply this justice. Near at hand, among mankind  
being-present, the immortals consider all who with  
crooked justices inflict attrition on each other  
regarding not the awful word of gods. Present  
are thrice ten thousand upon the much-nourishing  
earth, immortal guards of Zeus, of mortal men,  
who keep guard over justices and ruthless works clothed  
in mist going to and fro all over the earth.

Present is maiden justice, of Zeus the offspring  
born, both renowned and revered of the gods who  
tenant Olympus, and should one at any time disable  
her, crookedly castigating, straightway sitting  
beside father Zeus the Kronian she sings the  
non-just intention of men till it pay back . . .

The eye of Zeus having seen all and noted all  
intently, even these (things) should he so wish  
he is looking at nor is (it) hidden from him  
what kind of justice indeed (is) this (that) a city  
confines “inside . . .

O Perses I pray you: cast these up in your thoughts:  
hearken to (the voice of) justice and let violence  
be hidden from your sight. This usage for mankind  
the Kronian has severally ordained, for fish and  
beasts and winged fowl to eat each other since  
justice is not present among them, but to mankind  
he gave justice which most excellent by far comes-to-be.

Granted that these statements focus upon a term which in our alphabetic society has become central to moral philosophy, what do we learn from them about its nature? Surely the account of it is from a modern standpoint anomalous. What is one to make of a discussion which can make free, both with a “justice” in the singular, which we might try and squeeze into the guise of a “conception” of justice, and with “justices” in the plural, intermingling and interchanging them without apology, as though

the “concept” on the one hand, if we can call it that, and the specific applications of the concept on the other, if that is what they are, were indistinguishable? Worse still; what can we make of a term which at one time symbolizes what is straight and good and at another can symbolize what is crooked and obviously “wrong”?

The problem receives some illumination when we notice that whether in the singular or plural this word symbolizes something which is spoken aloud, pronounced, proclaimed, declared or else listened to, heard, and remembered. Personified it can scream or sing, and become the recipient of verbal abuse, and is disabled by oral testimony which is false. In this guise it becomes a procedure conducted in oral exchange. The constant imputation of crookedness probably refers to crookedness of speech (rather than unfair manipulation of boundary lines in property, as has been suggested).

In short this is that kind of justice practiced in an oral society not defined by written codes. But having got this far, any further attempt to define what justice really is fails us. “She” or “it” or “they” are Protean in the shapes they take and in the actions performed. “She” becomes a runner in a race and is then reintroduced as a girl dragged along in distress; and then becomes a girl now travelling to town in disguise before being thrown out. When transferred to Olympus, the scene reveals a personal justice complaining to Zeus that men are unjust, apparently to get him to intervene. “She” is then replaced by Zeus himself looking down on a justice confined inside a city until at last in the conclusion, “she” is given some universal color by being described as a gift assigned to mankind by Zeus.

Let us recall the Homeric behavior of that personification styled *eris*, the symbol of contentious strife behaving in a similar variety of configurations. Here is no “concept” or “principle” of justice, no analytic definition, no attempt to tell us what justice is. Such a statement is still beyond the poet’s capacity, even though his assemblage of instances and examples marks an attempt to mobilize the word as a topic, a chapter heading, a theme. In going this far, the poet is composing visually as a reader for readers. He is trying to break with the narrative context, the storytelling that oral composition has required, but which his written word does not require. But his break is only partial. His justice is still something that acts or behaves or becomes, not

something that “is.” The language of reflective philosophy, let alone moral philosophy, is not yet available.

It was becoming available perhaps two centuries later, and a little later still can be observed at work in the written word as it is composed by Plato. Here is a documented discourse which no longer needs to be phrased in specifics or in images. It can be, of course, if the composer so chooses, but it can tolerate in increasing quantity something that orally preserved speech cannot, namely, statements of “fact” or statements of “universals,” statements of “principles” rather than descriptions of “events.” That is, it can state that something always “is so and so” rather than that something “was done” or “occurred” or “was in place.” In Platonism these linguistic objectives have been achieved. They are woven into the syntax of argument, appearing there casually without exciting attention from a literate readership which is used to using them in its own discourse. Here, for example, is how the term “justice,” after being created as a topic by Hesiod, makes its first appearance in the Platonic text which deals with it demonstratively, namely, Plato’s *Republic* (I. 331 C):

Now take precisely this (thing) namely justice:  
Are we to say that it is truthfulness absolutely  
speaking and giving back anything one has taken  
from somebody else or are these very (things) to  
be done sometimes justly and at other times  
unjustly?

This sentence, occurring near the beginning of the first book of the treatise, introduces the concept with which the remaining books are to deal. The syntax which identifies justice as truthfulness meets a complex requirement. First, the subject is non-personal. Second, it receives a predicate which is non-personal. Third, the linking verb becomes the copula “is.” In the alternative definition that is then posed, the same verb “to be” is used to connect a neuter pronoun with a predicate infinitive, an abstraction. These are characteristics of Plato’s argumentative text which we normally take for granted.

To cite another example, which is more professionally stated with profuse use of the neuter singular to express abstraction (*Euthyphro*, 5 C-D):

So now I implore tell me that which you  
insisted just now you thoroughly knew:

What kind (of thing) do you say the pious is,  
 and the impious, in the case of manslaughter  
 and so on; surely the holy in all action is  
 identical itself with itself; whereas the  
 unholy is completely the opposite of the holy,  
 something always resembling itself having one  
 specific shape completely in accordance with  
 unholiness, whatever the unholy *turns out to be*.

This passage makes plain the kind of syntax now available and necessary for didactic argument and the particular reliance of the Platonic method upon this syntax: the subjects have to be impersonals, the verbs must take copulative form, and the predicates have to be impersonals.

It is convenient to identify Plato as the discoverer of the necessity of this syntax in its completed form and therefore as the writer who completed the process of linguistic emancipation from the syntax of oral storage. For good measure it is possible to cite some less perfect examples from thinkers who preceded him, from both the pre-Socratic philosophers and the “sophists” as they are usually styled. The language of the fifth century as it was employed by intellectuals exhibits a gradual acceleration of the abstractive process.

It is equally to the point to notice that Plato’s relationship to orality is still intermediate. He can use language that hovers between oral and literate discourse, that is, between the syntax of narrative and the syntax of definition. Thus, as Plato approaches the task of defining justice in its political dimension, he indulges himself in a passage like the following (*Republic* IV. 432 B-D):

The time has come for us to behave like huntsmen  
 encircling a thicket concentrating on preventing  
 justice from slipping through and disappearing.  
 Evidently it is present somewhere around here.  
 So keep looking, be ready to catch sight of it,  
 and if you happen to sight it before I do point  
 it out to me—I wish I could, but you will make  
 quite adequate use of me if, instead, you use me  
 as a follower who can look at what is shown to  
 him—Then follow and let us both pray for luck.  
 I will; you just go ahead—Well here we are;  
 this place by the look of it is hard to get

through; it is cut off from the light, it presents  
itself dark in fact and scarcely to be  
tracked through. However let's go in—yes  
let's go—whereupon I caught sight of some-  
thing and shouted: Glaucon, we probably are onto  
a track; I don't think (the object) will quite  
succeed in getting away—That's good news!

The quarry sought is justice, but this kind of dramatic interchange is going to lead up to a quite different type of discourse in which it will be proposed what justice really is, namely “doing one’s own thing.” It will lead up to an argument which is analytic and conceptual. Yet one observes the continued effort to conciliate the reader who is still close to his oral inheritance. By letting the discourse relapse into a syntax which narrates the activities of living subjects and objects we are invited to join a hunt in a forest for a quarry. Will it slip through the thicket? No, the hunters have spotted it. This is “Homeric,” not philosophic, prose.

By way of contrast to this intermediate style of discourse occasionally adopted by Plato—intermediate between oralism and literacy, between the pre-conceptual and the conceptual—I quote a passage taken at random from the beginning of David Hume’s *Treatise on Human Nature*:

I perceive therefore that though there is in general a great resemblance betwixt our *complex* impressions and ideas, yet the rule is not universally true, that they are exact copies of each other. We may next consider, how the case stands with our *simple* perceptions. After the most accurate examination of which I am capable, I venture to affirm, that the rule here holds without any exceptions, and that every simple idea has a simple impression, which resembles it, and every simple impression a correspondent idea.<sup>1</sup>

The Platonic passage expresses awareness that the act of conceptualizing justice and defining it axiomatically in entirely abstract terms requires from his reader an extraordinary effort, a new order of thinking, an order of intellection. To reach to this order, the passage reverts to the simpler language of orality: huntsmen are closing in on their quarry hidden in a thicket, ready to catch sight of it and so forth. Hume’s exposition prefers to present statements as the result of perception, consideration,

examination, affirmation. Over the 2,000 years since Plato wrote, these terms have become commonplaces of description of intellectual processes which are analytical, the purpose of which is to construct statements which are either analytic or synthetic.

The predicates in Plato's text do not describe fixed relationships between entities, but describe linkages which are achieved through action as it is performed: encircling, slipping through, "we have to get through," "we are cut off," "this is hard to be tracked," "it will get away." The corresponding linkages in Hume's text are conveyed in statements of being, that is, of relationships which are permanent, and therefore require the copula in order to be described. "There *is* in general; the rule *is* not universally true; they *are* exact; how the case *stands*; the rule here *holds*; every simple idea *has* a simple impression." These are expressed in the present tense—the timeless present and not the "historic" present—such "tenses" are not really tenses at all. They do not refer to a present moment of a narrated experience now recalled as distinct from other moments. The verb "is" shares with the verbs "hold" and "have" the predicative function of presenting a "state of the case" as determinate fact, not as a fleeting moment of action or response.

This is the language which Plato himself strives after through all his written works. It had to be fought for with all the strenuousness of the dialectic which he inherited from Socrates. The need he still feels to conciliate his oralist reader by reviving the epic oral syntax would not occur to Hume, still less to Kant or any modern moralist.

Hume's discourse is that of a professional philosopher and most of us are not philosophers. We normally avoid involving ourselves in discussion of such abstract problems. But we can drop casually into Hume's kind of language, in personal converse. Conspicuous and noticeable examples are furnished today in the vocabularies of the bureaucracies that manage our affairs for us; not least the military ones. Names of actions which are specific and concrete, and which would be described as such in oral language, are perversely translated into abstractions; to kill a group of villagers becomes a liquidation of opposition, to demand more tax money becomes "enhancement of revenue resources." There now exists a whole level of language which is basically theoretic, and it did not become possible until after language became alphabetical.

Side by side with it, in much of our daily life, we drop back into the concrete realistic dynamism of oral converse, as we prepare to eat breakfast or get the children off to school or mix a drink after a tiring day, and most of all when we make love or quarrel or fight. There is a basic honesty inherent in the oral medium—Homeric honesty that calls a spade a spade—which is transcended in the conceptual version and converted into a linguistic medium which often requires a degree of hypocrisy. It creates a distance between the oral language which simply registers and the language which categorizes it.

However, to point out certain disabilities which have arisen in the way we use speech, in the course of our conversion from orality to literacy, is one thing. To focus on these as though they were central to the discussion, in the manner of a George Orwell, is something else and quite misleading. We can allow for the greater directness of the oral medium, and its historical importance, and its continuing presence in our culture, whether in formal poetics or informal converse. But it is a mistake to romanticize it, as though Homer represented the language of a lost Eden; a mistake also to hail its apparent revival in the voices and images of the electronic media (as described by Marshall McLuhan) replacing what is described as linear communication.

The fact is that conceptual syntax (which means alphabetic syntax) supports the social structures which sustain Western civilization in its present form. Without it, the lifestyle of modernity could not exist; without it there would be no physical science, no industrial revolution, no scientific medicine replacing the superstitions of the past, and I will add no literature or law as we know them, read them, use them.

Quite apart from its specialized use in works of philosophy, of history, of science, this syntax has penetrated into the idiom of narrative fiction—precisely that idiom which had been Homer's peculiar province, the province of all speech as it had been preserved orally within the pre-alphabetic cultures. Here is a quotation from the two opening paragraphs of a famous novel, Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell To Arms*:

In the late summer of that year we lived in a house in a village that looked across the river and the plain to the mountains. In the bed of the river there were pebbles and boulders, dry and white in the sun, and the water was clear and swiftly moving and blue in the

channels. Troops went by the house and down the road and the dust they raised powdered the leaves of the trees. The trunks of the trees too were dusty and the leaves fell early that year, and we saw troops marching along the road and the dust rising and leaves, stirred by the breeze, falling and the soldiers marching and afterward the road bare and white except for the leaves.

The plain was rich with crops; there were many orchards of fruit trees and beyond the plain the mountains were brown and bare. There was fighting in the mountains and at night we could see the flashes from the artillery. In the dark it was like summer lightning, but the nights were cool and there was not the feeling of a storm coming?<sup>2</sup>

Ernest Hemingway would not be considered a conceptual writer. His proven power lies in the direct simplicity of his images, the narrative force of his descriptions, the dynamism of his style. His style would seem to be preeminently in this way an oral one, and the present example is no exception. The paratactic "and" recurs eighteen times in this short excerpt. Parataxis has been rightly noted as basic to the style of orally preserved composition, basic that is to its narrative genius, as required by mnemonic rules. The conjunction "and" is used to connect a series of visually sensitive images, themselves linked together by the resonance of echo: house-house, river-river; trees-trees-trees; leaves-leaves-leaves; dust-dust; marching-marching; plain-plain; mountains-mountains; night-night. The vocabulary, following oral rules, is economical and repetitive.

And yet, the original oral dynamism has been modified and muted. Language which might have described actions and events as such, as doings or happenings, has been translated into statements of "what is." The syntax of the verb "to be" has become sovereign, joining together visions which for all their sharpness are etched in temporary immobility:

In the bed of the river *there were* pebbles and boulders . . . the water *was* clean and swiftly moving . . . the trunks of the trees *were* dusty . . . The plain

*was* rich in crops . . . there *were* many orchards . . . the mountains *were* brown . . .  
There *was* fighting . . . it *was* like summer lightning.

Students of Greek (or Latin) drilled in prose composition (now a lost art) learn the habit of converting such expressions back into the dynamics of the ancient tongues, a dynamics orally inspired. Verbs of action or situation have to replace definitive descriptions, as in the following version:

Pebbles and boulders were lying scattered in the depth of the river . . . the water flowed rapid and sparkling and showed the depth below . . . the trees as to their trunks were covered by dust . . . the plain indeed flourished bountifully with rich crops and many orchards, but behind appeared mountains shadowy and barren . . . and there soldiers were fighting with thrown spears which flashed in the dark like the bolts of Zeus.

The Hemingway version favors a presentation of the scene as a series of “facts”; the Greek, as a series of episodes. Here is a confrontation between the genius of literate speech preserved visually in the alphabet, and oral speech preserved acoustically in the memory. Narrativization of experience was not an idiom or idiosyncrasy of ancient tongues (though it was often treated as such in the instruction I received sixty years ago). It is an essential ingredient of all speech preserved orally in all the tongues of the world.

The Greek alphabet came and took this over and remolded it to give us a new universe of language and of the mind; a universe of principles and relationships and laws and sciences, and values and ideas and ideals. These now ride on top of our immediate sensory apparatus and on top of the orality in which this apparatus finds readiest expression. A visual architecture of language has been superimposed upon restless acoustic flow of sound. This has been the fruit of the literate revolution in the West, whether for good or for ill.<sup>3</sup>

Yale University (Emeritus)

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>David Hume, *Treatise on Human Nature*, ed. and introduction by D. G. C. Macnabb (Cleveland: World Publishing Company, 1962), p. 47.

<sup>2</sup>Ernest Hemingway, *A Farewell to Arms* (New York: Scribner, 1929 et seq.), p. 3.

<sup>3</sup>An earlier version of this paper was delivered at the Third Axial Age Conference, held under international auspices, at Bad Homburg in West Germany between July 15 and 19, 1985.

## About the Authors

*Roderick Beaton* (King's College London) has carried on fieldwork on Greek oral poetry in many parts of Greece and Cyprus and is the author of *Folk Poetry of Modern Greece* (1980). He has researched and published extensively on Greek literature dating from the twelfth century to the present and on modern Greek folk music. His current research project is a book entitled *The Medieval Greek Romance*.

*Robert Culley*'s interest in oral tradition and Biblical studies began with his dissertation, later published as *Oral Formulaic Language in the Biblical Psalms* (1967). In addition to the general problem of the applicability of this approach to the Bible, he has touched on similar areas in *Studies in the Structure of Hebrew Narrative* (1976) and plans further commentary in a Proppian study of narrative action now underway. He is presently Professor of Religious Studies at McGill University.

In 1963 *Eric Havelock*'s landmark book *Preface to Plato* revolutionized the way we read both Homer and other ancient Greek literature by making the case for the "oral encyclopedia" of cultural attitudes, values, and beliefs that was "published" in oral performance. A collection of his seminal writings, *The Literate Revolution in Greece and Its Cultural Consequences* (1982), has since appeared, as has a fascinating study of the Presocratics (1983). He is Sterling Professor of Classics (Emeritus) at Yale University.

*Burton Raffel* (University of Denver), author of some forty books on an enormous variety of literary subjects, has given us classic translations of some of our most cherished works, such as *Beowulf*, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, and many more. He is a practicing poet, literary critic, fiction writer, and editor, and spent some years as a lawyer on Wall Street. Among his present projects are a verse translation of Chrétien's *Yvain and Readings and Documents in the History of Prosody*.

*Frederick Turner* (University of Texas, Dallas), former editor of the *Kenyon Review*, is at home in anthropology and modern science as well as literary studies. He also is a well-published poet, whose book-length epic poem *The New World* appeared in 1985. His essays range from an examination of reflexivity in Thoreau to a study of space and time in Chinese verse, and on to the collection entitled *Natural Classicism* (1985).

## Meetings and Professional Notes

Some of the meetings summarized below will receive fuller treatment in subsequent issues of *Oral Tradition*. Readers are encouraged to write to the editor about notices and reports of conferences they attend.

*July 22-25, 1985*

### ORAL TRADITION AND LITERACY: CHANGING VISIONS OF THE WORLD, University of Natal, South Africa

- Albert B. Lord (Harvard University), "Words Heard and Words Seen"
- R. Whitaker (University of Natal), "Oral and Literary Elements in Homer's Epics"
- W. J. Henderson (Rand Afrikaans University), "Oral Elements in Solon's Poetry"
- T. J. Gasinski (University of South Africa), "Oral Tradition in Early Russian Literature"
- L. Peeters (University of Pretoria), "Syntax and Rhythm in the *Song of Roland*: Evidence of a Changing Vision of the World?"
- P. Buchholz (University of South Africa), "The Devil's Deceptions: Pagan Scandinavian 'Witchdoctors' and Their God in Medieval Christian Perspective"
- A. E. Stewart Smith (University of Cape Town), "Non-aristocratic Poetry: The World Beyond *Beowulf*"
- M. P. Bezuidenhout (University of Port Elizabeth), "Oral Tradition in Medieval Church Songs, with Special Reference to Manuscript Gray 64 in the South African Library"
- B. S. Lee (University of Cape Town), "Margery Kempe: An Articulate Illiterate"
- J. Neethling (Rand Afrikaans University), "From 'Griot' to Folk-tale: The Tales of Amadou Koumba by Birago Diop"
- A. Wynchank (University of Cape Town), "From the Spoken Word to the Book—A Study of the Oral Tradition in A. Kourouma's Novel, *The Suns of Independence*"
- B. J. Soko (University of Malawi), "Translating Oral Literature into European Languages"
- E. R. Jenkins (Vista University), "Marguerite Poland and the Tradition of Anthropomorphism in Animal Stories"
- D. M. Moore (University of Fort Hare), "Oral Testimony and a Community in Transition"
- C. de Wet (Rhodes University), "Perceptions of Village History (1880-1950)"
- R. Thornton (University of Cape Town), "Bleek's Recording of the 'Hottentot' and Later Bushman Literature"

- D. Dargie (Lumko Missiological Institute), "Problems of Music Literacy: Gains and Losses"
- G. J. M. Hutchings (University of Transkei), "Home-made Furniture: The Oral Tradition in English and Academic Attitudes"
- F. Moto (University of Malawi), "From Oral Tradition to the Written Word: The Malawian Experience"
- J. Opland (University of South Africa), "The Transition from Oral to Written in Xhosa Literature"
- A. T. Cope (University of Natal), "Literacy and the Oral Tradition"
- R.. Belcher (University of Natal), "From Literature to Oral Tradition and Back: The Griqua Case-History"
- Elizabeth Gunner (School of Oriental and African Studies, London), "'The praises I have spoken for you are written in our great book at Ekuphakameni': The Word, the Book, and the Zulu Church of Nazareth"
- J. Hodgson (University of Cape Town), "Fluid Assets and Fixed Investments: 160 Years of the Ntsikana Tradition"
- V. Erlmann (University of Natal), "Colonial Conquest and Popular Response in Northern Cameroun, 1896-1907. How Literature Becomes Oral Literature"
- P. McAllister (Rhodes University), "Conservatism as Ideology of Resistance among Xhosa-Speakers: The Implication for Oral Tradition and Literacy"
- K. Tomaselli (University of Natal), "From Orality to Visuality"
- Bruce Merry (University of the Witwatersrand), "Graffiti Wall Markings as an Alternative to Literacy and the Book"
- C. S. de Beer (University of Zululand), "Nature, Culture, Writing"

This conference also included a performance of Nguni oral poetry by the Xhosa imbongi David Manisi and an explanation of the performance by Drs. Cope, Lord, Opland, and Gunner.

*July 29-August 1, 1985*

#### QUESTIONS OF ORALITY AND LITERACY: A TRIBUTE TO WALTER J. ONG, S. J., Rockhurst College, Kansas City, MO

- Thomas J. Farrell, S. J., "Father Ong and the Paschal Sense of Life"
- Walter J. Ong, S. J. (St. Louis University), "Opening Remarks about Orality and Literacy"
- Eric A. Havelock (Yale University, Emeritus), "The Discovery of Orality"
- Bruce A. Rosenberg (Brown University), "The Oral Tradition"
- James M. Curtis (University of Missouri/Columbia), "Coming of Age in the Global Village"
- Paolo Valesio (Yale University), "Listening: A Central Category for Renewal of Rhetorical Study"
- William J. Kennedy (Cornell University), "'Voice' and 'Address' in Literary Theory"
- Randolph F. Lumpp (Regis College), "Catholicity, Literacy, and Commerce: Change and Invention"

- H. G. Haile (University of Illinois/Urbana), "From Humanism to Humanity: The Early Modern in Germany"
- John Miles Foley (University of Missouri/Columbia), "Preliterate Education: Oral Epic Paideia"
- John G. Rechtien, S. M. (St. Mary's University), "The Ramist Style of John Udall: Audience, Logic, and Social Formation"
- Albert B. Lord (Harvard University), "Characteristics of Orality"
- Robert Kellogg (University of Virginia), "The Harmony of Time in *Paradise Lost*"
- Thomas J. Farrell, S. J., "Early Christian Creeds and Arianism in the Light of Orality-Literacy Studies"
- Frans Jozef Van Beeck (Loyola University of Chicago), "Dogma and Rahner's Treatment of Dogma in the Light of Orality-Literacy Studies"
- Elias L. Rivers (SUNY at Stony Brook), "Two Functions of Social Discourse"
- Thomas J. Steele, S. J. (Regis College), "Orality and Literacy in Matter and Form: Ben Franklin's Way to Wealth"
- Harold M. Stahmer (University of Florida), "Speech Is the Body of the Spirit: The Oral Hermeneutic in the Writings of Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy"
- Deborah Tannen (Georgetown University), "Literate Genres and Their Relationship to Oral Language"
- Werner H. Kelber (Rice University), "The Authority of the Word in St. John's Gospel"
- Dennis P. Seniff (Michigan State University), "Orality, Literacy, and the Rise of Castilian Narrative: 1200-1500"
- Ruth El Saffar (University of Illinois/Chicago), "Stylistic and Structural Implications of the Presence of the Feminine in Cervantes"
- Walter J. Ong, S. J., "Orality-Literacy Studies and the Unity of the Human Race"

Many of the papers from the Ong Symposium will appear in a special Festschrift issue of *Oral Tradition* in January 1987 (volume 2, no. 1).

*September 8-6, 1985*

INTERNATIONAL FOLK EPIC CONFERENCE: A COMMEMORATION OF  
KALEVALA 1835-1985, University College, Dublin, Ireland

This conference also marked the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the Irish Folklore Commission.

- Felix J. Oinas (Indiana University), "Elements of Eastern Origin in the *Kalevala*"
- H. T. Norris (University of London), "Folk Epic in the Wilderness: Arabia and the Nordic World"
- Isidore Okpewho (University of Ibadan), "Once Upon a Kingdom: Benin in the Heroic Tradition of Subject Peoples"
- Caoimhin Ó Nualláin (University College Dublin), "The Functioning of Long Formulae in Irish Heroic Folktales"

- Ahmet Edip Uysal (Middle East Technical University, Ankara), "The Use of the Supernatural in the Turkish Epics of Dede Korkut and Koroglu"
- Mortan Nolsøe (Academia Faroensis), "The Heroic Ballad in Faroese Tradition"
- John Miles Foley (University of Missouri/Columbia), "Formula in Yugoslav and Comparative Folk Epic: Structure and Function"
- Albert B. Lord (Harvard University), "The *Kalevala*, South Slavic Epic, and Homer"
- Stuart Blackburn (Dartmouth College), "A Folk *Ramayana* in South India: Textual Transmission and Local Ideology"
- Jan Knappert (University of London), "The Metre of Epic Poetry"
- John Smith (Cambridge University), "Use of Formulaic Language in Indian Oral Epic Verse"
- Robin Gwyndaf (Welsh Folk Museum, Cardiff), "The Welsh Folk Epic Tradition—Continuity and Function"
- Lauri Honko (University of Turku), "Kalevala—History and Myth"
- Olli Alho (Finnish Film Archive, Helsinki), "Kalevala's Cultural Background in the Finland of 1835"
- Heinrich Wagner (Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies), "The Origins of Finno-Ugric Poetry"
- Dáithí Ó hógáin (University College Dublin), "Magical Attributes of the Hero in Fenian Lore"
- Joseph Falaky Nagy (University of California/Los Angeles), "Fenian Heroes and Their Rites of Passage"
- Proinsias Mac Cana (University College Dublin), "The Evolution of the Finnaíocht in pre-Norman Times"
- John Mac Ines (University of Edinburgh), "Twentieth-century Recordings of Scottish Gaelic Heroic Ballads"
- Derrick Thomson (University of Glasgow), "MacPherson's 'Ossian'—Ballads to Epics"
- Donald Meek (University of Edinburgh), "Development and Degeneration in Gaelic Ballad Texts"
- Alan Bruford (University of Edinburgh), "Oral and Literary Fenian Tales"
- Rolf Baumgarten (Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies), "The Role of Placenames in the Structure and Development of the Finn Cycle"
- William Gillies (University of Edinburgh), "Heroes and Ancestors: Some Thoughts on the Status of the Fenians in Gaelic Tradition"
- Pádraig Ó Fiannachta (St. Patrick's College), "The Development of the Debate Between Patrick and Oisín"
- John Mac Queen (University of Edinburgh), "Epic Elements in Early Welsh and Scottish Hagiography"
- Svetozar Koljević (University of Sarajevo), "Formulaic Anachronisms and Their Epic Function"
- David Erlingsson (University of Iceland), "Prose and Verse in Icelandic Legendary Fiction"

The papers from the Dublin conference will be published in *Béaloideas: The Journal of the Folklore of Ireland Society* in late 1986.

*September 10-15, 1985*

XV MEDJUNARODNI NAUČNI SASTANAK SLAVISTA U VUKOVE DANE  
(XV INTERNATIONAL SCHOLARLY CONFERENCE OF SLAVISTS  
IN COMMEMORATION OF VUK KARADŽIĆ)  
Beograd, Priština, and Tršić, Yugoslavia

Fully 85 scholarly papers were scheduled to be read at this conference, which had as twin themes (a) “The Dependent Clause in the Serbo-Croatian Language (from both Synchronic and Diachronic Perspectives)” and (b) “Processes and Forms of Narration in Oral and Written Literature.” I list below only a few of the papers that are of special interest for our readership.

- Maja Bošković-Stulli (University of Zagreb), “Fluidity of Form in Oral Narration”  
Novak Kilibarda (University of Nikšić), “The Artistic Structure of the Folktale *Epo s onoga svijeta”*  
Nada Milošević-Djordjević (University of Belgrade), “Oral Expression in an Early Notation on the Battle of Kosovo”  
Imola Kiloš (Budapest), “Oral Tradition and Peasant Literacy”  
John Miles Foley (University of Missouri/Columbia), “Indo-European Meter and the Serbo-Croatian *Deseterac*”  
Svetozar Koljević (University of Sarajevo), “Parodic Forms of Epic Narration in the Tales of Petar Kočić”

All papers will be published in the annual series, *Naučni sastanak slavista u Vukove dane* (University of Belgrade).

*October 16-20, 1985*

AMERICAN FOLKLORE SOCIETY, Cincinnati, OH

Symposium: *Oral Tradition: Current Issues and a New Journal*” (mod. John Miles Foley)  
Featured Speakers: D. K. Wilgus and Eleanor R. Long (University of California/Los Angeles)

*December 27-30, 1985*

MODERN LANGUAGE ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA, Chicago, IL

“*Oral Tradition: Current Issues and a New Journal, I*” (mod. John Miles Foley)  
Albert B. Lord (Harvard University), “Oral Literature: Comparative Perspectives”  
Joseph F. Nagy (University of California/Los Angeles), “Orality in Medieval Irish Narrative”  
Susan Blader (Dartmouth College), “Storytelling in China”

“*Oral Tradition: Current Issues and a New Journal, II*” (mod. John Miles Foley)  
 Burton Raffel (University of Denver), “On Translating Oral Literature”  
 Ward Parks (Louisiana State University), “Oral-Formulaic Studies and Middle English  
 Literature”  
 Alain Renoir (University of California/Berkeley), “New Directions in Oral-Formulaic  
 Studies”

“The Oral Context of Medieval Literature” (mod. Betsy Bowden)

Papers:

Eric Rutledge (U.C. Berkeley)  
 Eliza M. Ghil (University of New Orleans)  
 Linda S. Lefkowitz (Lehigh University)  
 Stephen O. Glosecki (University of Alabama)  
 Wendy Pfeffer (University of Louisville)  
 William A. Quinn (University of Arkansas)

Discussants:

Stanley J. Kahrl (Ohio State University)  
 Martin Stevens (Baruch College, CUNY)  
 Robert P. Creed (Univ. of Massachusetts)  
 Joseph Duggan (U.C. Berkeley)  
 John Miles Foley (U. of Missouri/Col.)

“Oral Discourse” (selections)

(mod. Donald M. Lance)

Anne R. Bower (University of Pennsylvania), “Temporal Order and Turn-Taking in  
 Oral Narrative”

Barbara Johnstone Koch (Indiana and Purdue Universities), “Contextualization in  
 Spontaneous Story-Telling: Shared Structures and Individual Structuring”

Violeta Kelertas (University of Illinois/Chicago Circle), “Features of Oral and Written  
 Discourse”

Winifred Bryan Horner (Texas Christian University), “Time and Place in Written and  
 Spoken Language”

Michael S. Macovski (Dartmouth College), “Oral vs. Written Discourse: The Orality  
 of the Written Text”

*March 13-15, 1985*

CONFERENCE ON COLLEGE COMPOSITION AND COMMUNICATION,  
 New Orleans, Louisiana

“Theories of Oral Composition and the Teaching of Writing” (mod. Leslie C. Perelman,  
 Tulane University)

### Books Received

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- \_\_\_\_\_, and Alan Dundes, eds. *The Wisdom of Many: Essays on the Proverb*. Garland Folklore Casebooks, 1. New York: Garland, 1981.
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