

Lord of the Singers

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In *The Singer of Tales* Albert Lord presents a description not so much of oral poetry as of oral *traditional* poetry. The concept of tradition permeates his presentation of the singer, the formula, the song, the theme, the effect of writing on the oral poet, and much else besides. Indeed, in Lord's special understanding of the terms, "oral poets who are not traditional do not exist" (1960:155). Hence, Lord expresses disappointment with the "first singing" of a song (100),

because the singer has not perfected the song with much practice and by the test of repeated performance. Even after he has—and it may change much as he works it over—it must be accepted and sung by other singers in order to become a part of the tradition, and in their hands it will go through other changes, and so the process continues from generation to generation.

In his notes Lord quotes an example of the one song Parry collected in 1934 that was composed and sung for the first time in his presence, a song that was "coaxed out of Salih Ugljanin, about Parry and Nikola and the collecting" (286), and Appendix VI contains a song "about Parry or in his honor, written by Milovan Vojičić and given to him" (288). Presumably, Lord consigns such texts to appendices and footnotes because they are not traditional; he offers as justification the fact that "the songs made up about collectors are not very good examples because collectors and collecting are not inspiring nor proper subjects for epic!" (286). To be sure, Lord himself receives short shrift in these songs. Vojičić's effusive poem in honor of "Professor Milman Parry the glorious" and his journey from America to Yugoslavia, composed as it was in 1933, makes no mention of Lord, who first accompanied Parry on his second trip in 1934; and, as he prepares himself to sing about Parry, Ugljanin expresses his intention to ignore Parry's student assistant (287):

Salih: What's the name of the boss? Nikola: Milman. S: Milman?
 N: Yes. S: And you're Nikola? N: Yes. S: As for the other let
 him...[Lord is referred to here in the next room at the recording
 machine.] N: What? What did you say? S: We won't include him,
 you know, but only you two. Parry: All right, as you like.

Now in South Africa, it is indeed traditional for Xhosa oral poets to produce spontaneous poems in praise of dignitaries, whether they be local chiefs or visiting professors from America, and indeed on his recent visit to South Africa Lord formed the subject of poems produced orally by three Xhosa poets. The presentation here of the texts of the poems Lord heard performed in South Africa and that were sung for the first time in his presence, serves to confirm that Albert Lord has graduated from his position "in the next room at the recording machine"; in 1934 Salih Ugljanin judged Lord to be neither an inspiring nor a proper subject for celebration in song, but by 1985, after the passage of 50 years, Lord had become a collector fit in his own right to inspire poems of praise.

Lord travelled to South Africa in 1985 at the invitation of the Medieval Society of Southern Africa to participate in a conference on "Oral Tradition and Literacy: Changing Visions of the World" in Durban from July 22 to 25.¹ I had agreed to participate in an evening of performances of Xhosa and Zulu poetry on the second night of the conference by introducing David Livingstone Phakamile Yali-Manisi, the foremost living exponent of the traditional art of Xhosa oral poetry.² On Sunday July 21 I drove from Johannesburg to Queenstown, and early on Monday morning drove to Manisi's home in the Matyhantya location about ten miles from Queenstown across the Transkei border on the road to Lady Frere. Together we drove to Durban, arriving in time to catch the closing minutes of the opening session of the conference. Manisi attended most of the conference sessions during the four days that followed. On Tuesday evening, under the chairmanship of Trevor Cope, two Zulu poets were introduced by Elizabeth Gunner. The first was a neophyte oral poet who had written out his poem in advance, but who in performance diverged slightly from his prepared text; the second was a retired school teacher who read from a poem he had written in traditional style. In introducing Manisi, I referred to the role of poetry in Xhosa society, its generic characteristics (unlike the narrative Yugoslavian poetry, Xhosa poetry is praise poetry, a genre common in Africa³), and Manisi's career. I particularly stressed the tendency in Xhosa poetry toward improvisation, as distinct from Zulu poetry, which is apparently primarily memorial.⁴ Manisi then stood up in the university lecture hall and declaimed the following poem:

Yasuka yahlala intaka yamahlathi
 Ngu Wothsethe ke lowo
 Usibunu sentaka yimilenze

The bird of the forest grows restless,
 One who never refuses when sent, that one,
 The bird that squats when it sits,

- 5 Kub'ithi yakuchopha bathi yahlala
Bathi yakusuka bathi yagidima
Bhotani mabandlandini
Ndibon' iimpuluswa zamadoda
neentokazi
Ndibon' ucwamb' oluhle lokhanyo
Iintw' eziingqondo zikhany'
iinkwenkwezi kwakunye
nenyanga
- 10 Kuloko namhla zingxamel' ukubamb'
ilanga
Kulok' isuke le nkwenkwez' ilanga
Ibhantsuze ngobushushu
Aqal' amadod' asemhlabeni abe
zizithwanyula
Bhotani mabandlandini
- 15 Bhotani makhosazana
Bhotani madun' amahle
Mathol' oonyawo zabezolo
Iint' ezingoyki kufa
Ezawel' ulwandle zisimelela ngenkanunu
nemfakadolo
- 20 Iint' ezaluwel' ulwandle ziqikatha
Zafik' i Afrika zayiphunzisa
Kuba kwakudiban' entilini
Yalal' imikhuthuka macal' omabini
Kodwa hay' imfakadolo yaseMlungwini
- 25 Yamqengqa yamqungquluzis' umAfrika
Xa kulapho ke sinivile nithetha
nitwatyula
Nayihlakanisa nada nayihlakahleza
Intetho neelwimi zezizwe
Nibonis' imbadu kwakunye nebuda-
ndimunye
- 30 Kodwa naxa kulapho sibulela ntonye
Kub' anizishiyang iimbali zomz'
oNtsundu
Ndithetha ngabakwaZulu nabakwaXhosa
Nakub' andivanga nto ngoMshweshwe
noSekroma
Kub' iintetho zenu ziye zagxininisa
kwabaseBunguni
- 35 Andazi nto ngesiSwayile
Kha niphakame ntondin' ezibuchopho
Buphaphama kwakunye neenkwenkwezi
nenyanga
Niphakame nithabath' iintonga
Khe niphengulule niqongqothele
- 40 Niyek' ukuphikisana ngokwenziwa
kweensomi
Niphikisane ngokudaleka kweentetho
- When it perches they say there it stays,
When it takes off they say there it goes.
Greetings, you crowds of people.
I see neat and tidy men and women,
I see the beautiful radiant cream,
Things with minds aglitter with the stars and
the moon:
So today they rush to grab the sun,
But in the end this star the sun
Overpowers them with its heat
So that the men of the earth lie stunned.
Greetings, you crowds of people.
Greetings, ladies.
Greetings, handsome gentlemen,
Sons of heroes of old,
Things who didn't fear death,
Who crossed the sea leaning on cannon and
breechloader,
Things who crossed the sea enthusiastically.
They came to Africa and raped it,
For when they met in battle
The warriors fell on both sides,
For oh the breechloaders of the whites
Laid the African low and defenseless!
So, then, we've heard you covering every-
thing in your speech,
Probing and prizing
The lore and tongues of nations,
Showing how they come into being and fall
by the wayside.
But even then we're thankful for one thing,
That you've included stories of blacks.
I'm talking of the Zulu and the Xhosa—
Although I've heard nothing of Mshweshwe
and Sekroma
Because your talks stressed the Nguni
languages
(I know nothing about Swahili).
Please arise, you things with brains
That fly 'mongst the stars and the moon,
Arise and take up arms
So that you do research with vigor
And stop splitting hairs over trivial folktales:
Rather split hairs over the origin of
languages.

Siyabelula thina basemaXhoseni Ngokufika kweento zooRose nezooBheni	We're thankful, we of the Xhosa, For the arrival of men like Ross and Bennie
45 Ukuz' amaXhos' avulek' ingqondo Kulo mhla yaqal' ukubhalwa le ntetho	Who ignited the mind of the Xhosa On the day they first wrote down the language,
Intethw' engqongqotho yasemaXhoseni Ncincilili	The unshakable language of the Xhosa. I disappear!

The first line of the poem, in which he refers to himself as a bird, leads Manisi into the next four lines, which he commonly uses in reference to Kaiser Matanzima but here applies to himself. He then greets the audience of academics before him (lines 6-9) in terms similar to those he employed in greeting similar audiences at an Arts Festival in Grahamstown in 1977 and at an exclusive private school in 1979, using celestial imagery, as he often does, to connote intelligence and education; but, as is often the case in Manisi's poetry, there are ominous undertones that suggest turmoil and confrontation in South Africa (lines 10-13). He returns to greeting his white audience, and once again praise yields to criticism, for they are descendants of nineteenth-century imperialists who deprived blacks of their rights through unequal (or, often, deceitful) military conflict (lines 17-25), a common trope in Manisi's poetry. He then refers to the conference, where he has heard papers on traditional literatures; he praises the inclusion of the Zulu and Xhosa traditions, though he notes the omission of other black South African traditions (line 33: Mshweshwe was the founder of the Sotho nation, and Sekroma was the father of Khama, the founder of the Tswana nation). In the traditional role of the Xhosa oral poet (*imbongi*), Manisi turns next to exhortation (lines 36-41), urging those involved in the conference to undertake research into matters of significance; folktales, the province of women, are relatively low in literary status and unworthy of attention, Manisi suggests. Then in conclusion he praises some pioneering missionaries like John Ross and John Bennie (line 43) who, unlike the destructive militarists of their generation (lines 19-25), took up symbolic arms (line 38) to engage the educational struggle for systematically transcribing and printing the Xhosa language for the first time.

After Manisi's performance, Lord offered some remarks and observations before Cope invited questions from the floor. As it turned out, the final question of the session came from one of the organizers of the conference, Edgard Sienaert, who expressed doubt about the element of improvisation in Manisi's performance. Manisi had known in advance that he would be producing a poem at the conference, he had spent the previous day driving to Durban in a car with me, and had spent a full day at the conference: surely he must have had sufficient time to prepare a poem?

... at least over the last three days, when he came from Queenstown, he knew while he came here, he knew the subject of the conference, he knew the theme, and then he arrived here,... so he has been building up this in his mind. Now I don't see any difference between this and actually jotting down a few notes on a piece of paper. If you write it on paper, or you write it in your mind, or you think it in your mind, it's the same thing. So improvisation—we must know exactly what we are talking about.

Sienaert spoke from the back of the auditorium in a French accent, so I leaned over and repeated the question to Manisi. Taking the question as a slight on his creative abilities by a foreigner who did not understand the culture, Manisi rose immediately to quash the imputation.

To be sure that the poem I sang here was from my mind, I can sing another one now:

	Xa kulapho ke Nkunz' edl' eziny' iinkunzi dla libhavuma Wathetha ngentetho yakwaXhosa nakwaZulu Uyamaz' uZulu noXhosa?	So then, Bull that eats other bulls, that eats while mumbling, You speak of the languages of Xhosa and Zulu: Do you know anything at all about Zulu and Xhosa?
5	Uvela phi na, kub' ezakowenu ziyabasind' abakokwenu Wayeken' amaXhosa noZulu Ahlale nesiNguni sawo Kuba lo mhlab' uxakekile Sasiqibele sibantu	Where do you come from? For the affairs of your people are your own affairs: Leave the Xhosa and Zulu alone To look after the Nguni languages, For this country's in trouble. Once we were people
10	Kodwa hay' ishwangusha lethu Lokufika kooyihl' amadun' asentshonlanga Basidlavula besibhulusha Kub' amaNges' asigantsinga Ay' amaBhulw' esiqunyuya	But oh our misfortune Brought by your fathers, the gents of the west! They shattered and scattered us, For the English ground us underfoot, While the Boers blunted our horns,
15	Ay' amaFulan' esifulathela Namhlanje sijanyelwe ngamaJamana	And the French turned their backs, Today the Germans just watch us.

Manisi addresses Sienaert, who controlled the conference proceedings, metaphorically as the top bull and asks whether he has the right to speak about Xhosa or Zulu traditions, for he is a white, and a foreigner to boot. Again the recurrent trope appears: the country is in trouble because black dignity has been destroyed by whites. Specifically, the whites responsible are Sienaert's European ancestors (line 11). In much the same phrasing, lines 12-16 appear in a number of Manisi's poems in my collection, and connote anger at the indifference of the international community to the plight of South African blacks. Sienaert expressed doubts about Manisi's ability to compose spontaneous poetry; in his spontaneous poetic response, Manisi draws on familiar formulations, formulaic expressions whose connotations are in

harmony with his emotions of anger and resentment at European culpability, whether active or passive, in the subjugation of black South Africans.

This response evoked warm enthusiasm in the audience, and Cope closed the proceedings on that note. On Wednesday Manisi and I transcribed and translated the two poems. That night a dinner was held in a local restaurant. I sat at a table with the Principal of the University, Lord, Gunner, Sienaert, and others, and Manisi sat at another table. During the meal one of Manisi's table companions came up to me and said "David says he wants to do it." I sent back a message that it would not be appropriate for him to perform an oral poem in a public restaurant (at which we were not the only patrons), but that he would have an opportunity to express himself the next day. During one of the closing sessions on Thursday I presented the texts to the conferees as models of oral poems that would require techniques of explication different in some respects from those required for written productions. After Sienaert had closed the conference, Manisi rose to claim the final word:

	Lugaga luyagongqoza; Ndiphuma kwiintab' ezimahlath' amnyama AkwaRharhab' akwaNgubengcuka, kwaGcaleka;	This dried oxhide rustles! I come from the mountains with dense forests Of Rharhabe, Ngubengcuka and Gcaleka
5	Ndiphuma kwimilamb' ephuphuma Kwiinzonzobila zolwandle; Kuba ndiyayithand' iNciba, Ndiyawunqul' uMbhase. UMthatha likaya. Nto zimmnandi hay' ukudwekesha;	I come from the rivers that overflow Into the depths of the sea, Because I love the Kei, I worship the Bashe, Umtata's my home. Things are good, but oh idle chatter!
10	Nto zimmnandi hay' ukutheth' ugaphendulwa; Kodwa nto ziyoyikeka hay' ukuxoka. Nto ziyaxoka hay' iimbongi; Kodwa iimbong' azixoki, Zilawul' amathongo njengokw' evela	Things are good, but oh to speak and get no reply! Indeed, things are frightening, but oh to lie! Things tell lies, but oh iimbongi! But iimbongi do not tell lies. They reveal visions from the ancestors as they are revealed.
15	Ndixakiwe nini bantundini, Kuba ndithetha ulwimi Oluxakisa iingqondi nezazi; Ngekuba ndiyanithuma, Ndithi yitshoni nonke,	I have a problem with you people, For I speak a tongue That presents problems to sages and experts; I would be asking you Saying, all of you exclaim
20	Nibulise kwitno kaLodi Nithi Aa! Dumakude! Bayawandixaka k'abantu baseMlungwini Bedibene nengququ yomqhutsapela wabantu abaNtsundu. Sikunk' igama nto kaLodi	And hail the son of Lord Saying, Hail, World-renowned! I have a problem with white people As well as the dusty horseshit of the blacks.
25	Ath' amaXkosa, Aa! Dumakude! [Opland: Aa! Dumakude!] Yitshoni nonke, Aa! Dumakude! [many voices: Aa! Dumakude!]	We give you a name, son of Lord, The Xhosa say, Hail, World-renowned! [Opland: Hail, World-renowned!] All of you exclaim Hail, World-renowned! [many voices: Hail, World-renowned!]

- Yiyo le le nkosi yan yaseMlungwini,
Igwangq' elimehlw' aluhlaza
Ngokwale ngada ivel' ehlathini
30 Yint' eentonga zimnyama
Zilel' echwebeni leAtlantikhi;
Ichwechwe ixel' uNozakuzaku
Esis' intomb' emzini.
Washiy' iAmerika wez' emaxelegwini.
- 35 Gxeb' akhon' amaxelegw' eAmerika,
Kulokw' akabhengezwanga.
Kub' inyala laseAmerika
Lihleli phansti kweengubo,
Lay' eloMzantsi Afrika
40 Liqhashumba njengokwekhozho lombona
Litshiswa lilahl' ezikweni lomlilo.
Uxakekil' uMzantsi Afrik',
Uz' uyibike loo nto.
Uzivil' iintetho ziwe kakuhle,
45 Awanga-wangis' amathokazi,
Engqinelana kwakunye namaduna,
Zadibana kwNtizitshil' esibhaka-
bhakeni
Yayintetho nolwimi yayingxube xuxu
yevange
Siyabulela nto kaLodi, ngwev'
emthuqwa
50 Eyayidla yayidla, gxebe yayitya
Yada yayityekeza le mfundo.
Ukuxelelwe ngubani
Ukuba iilwimi zale Afrika
Zingaphezulu kwamakhulu-khulu?
55 Ntondin' ohla ngasentla uvuke ngezantsi

Uthi wakufika phakath' udal'
izaqwenga.
Siyakubulela thole leenkunzi
Ezimaphiko-phiko zakuloEyisenhawa;
Uz' umxelele noRigene
60 Ukuba besibek' ithemba kuye,
Kodw' asikaboni nt'itsitsayo.
Sibonile ngoRusfelthe;
Bathe bakuzibeth' iintonga noSimati
Bedibene kunye noTshetshili,
65 Yaqal' iJamani yasuz' izichamela.

Yombela ntombazana kuyagodukwa,
Kuba lo mhlab' uxakekile.
Xa kulapho ke,
Ntomb' ezintle zoMzanti Afrika,
70 Madun' aququbalayo,
Nto zithunywa ziye zingatshijili.
Siyabulela, lith' elokugqibela,
- Here is this chief of mine of the whites,
Dun-colored one with grey eyes,
Like a wildcat emerging from the forest.
He's one bearing black sticks
That are kept hidden in the Atlantic shore.
He sneaks out like a go-between
Sending a bride to her new home..
You left America and came to the rough-
necks.
By the way, there are roughnecks in America
But they're not readily seen,
For American abomination
Lies concealed under blankets,
While that of South Africa
Explodes like popcorn
Heated on the embers of a hearth.
South Africa's in trouble:
Be sure to say so.
You've heard the well-rounded speeches,
Ladies presenting balanced views,
Reaching agreement with men,
Meeting together in that faraway land in the
sky.
The range of speeches and cultures
perplexed and confused me.
We thank you, son of Lord, tan-skinned
elder,
Who ate and ate, indeed you ate so much
That you burped up this education.
Who told you
That the tongues of this Africa
Exceed hundreds and hundreds in number?
You start in the north and come down to the
south
And when you return to the center your
knowledge is boundless.
We thank you, noble son of the bulls,
Garnerers of the land of Eisenhower:
Make sure you tell Reagan
That we put our trust in him
Be we haven't seen anything flowing.
We saw something in Roosevelt's time
When he stood alongside Smuts
And they came together with Churchill:
Then the Germans farted and pissed
themselves.
Sing, girl, it's time to go home,
For this land's in trouble.
So then,
Lovely daughters of South Africa,
Diligent gentlemen,
Things who when sent do not hesitate,
We thank you, this is the last word,

	Godukani kuba kugqityiwe, Godukani besishiy' amakhaya exakekile.	Go home, for it's over, Go home, for we left our troubled homes behind,
75	Godukani nokubikel' abasemva, Ukuba niyihlinzile le nkomo, Nasitya nesibindi sayo Nayitya nada nayishwabanisa namanqin' ayo. Ncilili-i-i!!	Go home, and report to those who stayed That you have flayed this beast And you ate up its liver And you ate on right up to the hooves. I disappear!

In his introduction to this poem, Manisi refers to himself as the skin of a drum, and identifies himself with the physical features of the country of the Xhosa, Thembu, and Gcaleka peoples. Lines 9-14 are constructed on the rhetorical principle of statement: denial, or (in line 11) statement: intensification. Thus there are good things (lines 9 and 10), but idle chatter or receiving no response to talk is not good; there are frightening things, but lying is especially frightening; there are lies, but *imbongi* do not tell lies, for they are inspired. Each line leads into the next, and the whole passage (lines 9-14) leads into the next (lines 15-26): as an *imbongi*, Manisi has a problem, and his problem is that he is speaking Xhosa, a language most of his audience does not understand, even though they are “sages and experts” (line 17). Thus he knows that as an *imbongi* it is his duty to greet Lord with a royal praise name, but he does not expect his audience will understand what he is doing and respond as a traditional Xhosa audience should by repeating the praise name after him: this is why it is not good to “speak and get no reply” (line 10). As an *imbongi*, Manisi would be asking his audience to follow him in exclaiming *A! Dumakude!* (the praise name he has given Lord: lines 18-21). When he does utter Lord’s praise name (line 21) and in fact receives no reply, he then blames both whites *and* blacks in his audience for their reticence (lines 22-23): he repeats the praise name a second time (line 25), and only on the third occasion (line 26) elicits a satisfactory response from his audience. He then proceeds to refer to Lord in animal imagery (the grey eyes signify age, the wildcat is not often seen). Black sticks (line 30) represent things of value, which Lord brings across the Atlantic, building bridges of communication (like a marriage broker) between Americans and South Africans. The roughnecks of line 34, as always in Manisi’s poetry, are white social predators who victimize blacks in South Africa, but America too has its share of roughnecks, for racism lies concealed in America, unlike South Africa’s explicit racism (lines 35-41). South Africa is in a state of conflict (line 42: cf. line 8 of Manisi’s reply to Sienaert); this is the message Lord should carry back to America. Manisi then praises Lord for undertaking his extensive research trip and for participating in the conference (lines 44-56), but urges him to carry a message home (lines 59-65): in Roosevelt’s time Americans and South Africans joined the British effectively to defeat the Germans, but

the Reagan administration's talk of action in support of South Africa's blacks produces no effective action to alleviate their distress. Manisi repeats the essential message he wants Lord to convey to the Americans: South Africa suffers under apartheid (lines 66-67). Manisi then calls the conference to a close (lines 68-78), for the matters under debate have been debated entirely.

After the conference, Lord stayed on at the University of Natal, and Manisi and I drove up to Johannesburg, where we spent a week working on material in my collection. Then we traveled back to Durban to collect Lord for a brief field trip. On Wednesday, July 31 we checked into the Holiday Inn in Umtata, the capital of Transkei. This field trip took place during the state of emergency declared by the South African government; we could not travel freely off the major roads, so I was forced to attempt somewhat clumsy arrangements in advance to bring oral poets I knew to rendezvous with us. I had written to Melikaya Mbutuma and Nelson Mabunu to ask them to meet us at the Holiday Inn, but received a response only from Mbutuma. Late that afternoon, Mbutuma and his second son, Lord, Manisi, and I gathered in my hotel room. Mbutuma had always been an outspoken critic of the President of Transkei, Kaiser Matanzima, and an ardent supporter of his opponent, Sabata Dalindyebo.⁵ In 1980 Matanzima finally succeeded in destroying Sabata politically; although he was paramount chief of the Thembu people and Matanzima's senior, Sabata was tried and found guilty of an offense under the Public Security Act and the Constitution Act, which prohibit a violation of the dignity or injury to the reputation of the state president, and went into exile in Zambia. Mbutuma's fortunes had also changed since I last saw him: he was now a Member of Parliament, having been elected as a representative of Matanzima's party. I asked him about his change in status and also his apparent change in loyalties. He had stood for election to parliament, he said, because he saw that as the most effective way of helping the people of his district, and this entailed a voluntary muzzling of his true feelings about Matanzima. What about his oral poetry, I asked, in which, as a spokesman of the people, he had consistently voiced criticism of Matanzima for acting in a manner detrimental to the interests of the people? Mbutuma replied that he had stopped performing poetry in public, for if he did, he would not be able to restrain himself from praising the exiled Sabata and decrying Matanzima, and this would no longer be politically expedient. Mbutuma had in fact demonstrated considerable personal loyalty to our relationship by coming to meet us; he had recently been informed that one of his sons had been shot by the police in Cape Town (he was offered no explanation of the circumstances) and had only just returned from the funeral.⁶ Shortly after our meeting with Mbutuma in the Holiday Inn in Umtata, Chief Sabata Dalindyebo died in Zambia, and was returned to Transkei for a funeral stage-managed by Kaiser Matanzima in 1986.

In the hotel room, after introductions and the exchange of news, Mbutuma

responded immediately to my request for a poem by praising Sabata, as it turned out the last of an extended series of oral poems in honor of his paramount chief he produced during Sabata's lifetime. Later on in the conversation, I told Mbutuma that Lord was interested in the *imbongi's* ability to compose poetry with no premeditation.

Opland: You've met Professor Lord now; you've known him for one hour.

Mbutuma: Yes. Opland: Can you *bonga* him? Mbutuma: Definitely.

	Liggala lendoda	He's a man of experience,
	Intw' eyinwele zihlwitheke zahlwitheka	One whose hair's been lost to learning,
	ngenxa yemfundo	
	Intw' emehlw' angongo-nzongo	One with keen-sighted eyes,
	Kuba yajonga yajongisisa	For he peered and peered intently.
5	Umagobhoz' ezincwadini	Authority in the world of books,
	Ayokuphumela ngaphesheya	Even overseas
	Bamnik' imixhaka	They showered him with honors
	Kwathi kwada bathi yiprofesa	Until they called him professor.
	Nditsho kuwe nkosi yaseminzini	I refer to you, honored guest,
10	Nditsho kuwe silo esakhangela	I refer to you, beast who searched and
	sakhangela	searched
	Saze safungel' ukunced' abantu	Until you determined to help others,
	Nditsho kuwe sizaka-zaka sendoda	I refer to you, piercing spear of a man,
	Umazimela ngemfundo	Who hides behind his education
	Bade bakhal' abantu bathi wenze ntoni na	Till people exclaim saying "What is it
		you've done?"
15	Hayi zizidanga zaseMlungwini	Oh, these are awards from the whites!
	Ndibon' abafazi behlahlamba	I see women crying loudly,
	Bathi yeyani na le mihombiso	Asking, "Why all these decorations?"
	Hayi yeyabuprofesa nobugqirha	Oh, they're for professors and doctors!
	Hayi zizidanga zasemfundweni	Oh, these awards are for education!
20	Ngubani n' othethayo xa ndithetha	Who speaks when I speak?
	Nditsho ngawe gqala lendoda	I refer to you, man of experience,
	Nditsho kuwe kaloku	I refer to you, of course,
	Wen' uvela ngaphesheya kwamanzi	You who come from across the sea
	Ukuz' uzokwazi ukugqala	In order to pursue research,
25	Ucakaz' izinto ngezinto	To distribute all sorts of things
	Bakwaz' ukuphila abasezayo	For the benefit of those who come after.
	Ibindim ndenze ntoni na	What is it that I've done?
	Ndee ncam nkelele	That's it! I'm stopping now!

Mbutuma's spontaneous tribute to Lord concerns itself with his physical qualities and his educational achievements. Mbutuma is impressed by Lord's bald head sporting tufts of hair (line 2) and by his eyes (lines 3-4). He is a richly honored scholar from overseas whose work benefits others (line 11), but who wears his learning lightly (line 13) though he has received "decorations" for scholarship (lines 15-19). In conclusion, Mbutuma recapitulates: Lord is an eminent scholar from overseas whose books distribute knowledge to his successors (lines 21-26). The last two lines are

Mbutuma's favored poetic closure, just as Manisi prefers the more common *Ncincilili*.

Our meeting with Mbutuma ended soon afterwards, and we drove on to meet another eminent *imbongi*, Chief S.M. Burns-Ncamashe, in King William's Town.⁷ The following morning, August 2, in Lord's hotel room, Manisi and I together translated in Lord's presence the last poem he had produced at the conference. Then we took Manisi home and drove on to Johannesburg, where Lord spent a week teaching at the University of the Witwatersrand. On Thursday August 8, I drove Lord to Pretoria for a guest lecture at the University of South Africa, where I was employed in the Department of African Languages. One of my colleagues was Peter Mtuze, the most versatile and prolific Xhosa author.⁸ Mtuze had been introduced to the ideas of Lord as a student of mine at Rhodes University a few years earlier, and we had discussed Manisi's performances at the conference in Durban when Manisi and I called on him after the conference but before the field trip, while Lord stayed on at the University of Natal. Mtuze had produced oral poetry as a boy, but only recently started performing in public once again. He had been asked to prepare a poem in honor of our colleague Professor Rosalie Finlayson, which he recited from his prepared text as she entered the hall to deliver her inaugural address on June 27, 1985. Shortly thereafter, at a ceremony to honor Professor C.L.S. Nyembezi at a conference in Pietermaritzburg, inspired by a Zulu poem that Professor D.B. Ntuli had written for Nyembezi and had just read in his presence, Mtuze started jotting down some ideas but abandoned them as he leapt to his feet and declaimed a spontaneous poetic tribute in Xhosa. Now, six days before Lord was scheduled to deliver his guest lecture at the University of South Africa, he had been asked to compose and recite a poem in honor of Professor Lord.

Mtuze prefaced his recital, which was intended to welcome Lord to the University in traditional fashion, with a few comments he had written about his poem. He read these from his text, then read his poem in traditional style, adding the last line (not in his prepared text) as he yielded the floor to Lord. These are Mtuze's written texts, with the translation added:

Explanatory Comments

1. I needed inspiration which could not come until late last night.
2. Had to imagine myself performing in front of some audience.
3. Stumbled in the beginning until I decided on what line of action to take—I must welcome Professor Lord and give him an African Salutation name *A-a Dumakude* (Hail you whose fame knows no limits).
4. From this point things started moving more smoothly. I could work on his fame and his contribution to oral literature esp. with regard to *The Singer of Tales*.
5. On several occasions I had to fall back on my African background for inspiration—reference to the Winterberg where my great and grandfather

- were buried, and to Africa as a whole.
6. The poem ends by invoking an African tradition of meeting foreign visitors—a pipeful of tobacco and a few drinks from what remained from the visitors’ personal provisions.
 7. Then only we can be ready for the big *indaba* [conference].

Elokwamkela into kaLothe

<p>Ngxatsho ke makad’ eneth’ engenabhathi, Ngxatsho ke sinunza-nunza sasemzini, Ndimel’ ukukunik’ isikhalelo sakwaNtu,</p> <p>Ndikwamkelele kumzi kaNtu noweUnisa,</p> <p>5 A-a Dumakude! A-a Dumakude!</p> <p>NguDumakude into kaLothe bafondini,</p> <p>NguDumakude njengeNkonkobe kubaThembu. Ngubani n’ ongayaziy’ iNkonkobe yiWinterberg? Ngubani n’ ongamaziyo uAlbert kaLord?</p> <p>10 Nkosi yam, Lord, iyakwamel’ iAfrika, Nkosi yam, Lord, iyabulis’ iAfrika, Nkosi yam, Lord, ith’ iUnisa huntshu! Ithi mandith’ izivil’ izithonga zakho, Ithi mandith’ izivil’ izinqi zokuthetha</p> <p>15 Kwendod’ eyaz’ iimbongi zezwe lonke,</p> <p>Int’ eth’ ihlomla kubabethi-gusle EYugoslavia itshil’ itshotsh’ itshatshela.</p> <p>A-a Dumakude! A-a Dumakude!</p> <p>Sithululele ke ntondini kuloo mava, 20 Sibhulele ke Lawundini kuloo ngxowa, Sicikelele okubona kwezakokweth’ iimbongi, Kodwa phambi kokub’ uthethe nal’ isiko Rhol’ indarha kaloku siqhumise ntondini, Rhol’ ihamb’ idlani silungis’ imilomo</p> <p>25 Sizokudl’ imbadu sisul’ iinyembezi Ngeenyembezi zikaVitoliya, uyayazi mos. Kwaqal’ ukuqaqamb’ umqal’ omaqoq’ aliqela, Ihamb’ idlani mfondini—padkos.</p>	<p>OK then, you who’ve been through the mill, OK then, dignified guest, I stand here to grant you a praise name from Ntu’s place, To welcome you to the home of Ntu and Unisa: Hail, World-renowned! Hail, World- renowned! He’s World-renowned the son of Lord, gentlemen, He’s World-renowned, like Nkonkobe to the Thembu: Who doesn’t know Nkonkobe’s the Winterberg? Who doesn’t know Albert Lord? My Lord, Lord, Africa welcomes you, My Lord, Lord, Africa greets you, My Lord, Lord, Unisa shouts “Hooray!” Saying it noted your outstanding deeds, Saying it noted the eloquent speeches Of a man familiar with the poets of the world, Who can allude to <i>gusle</i>-beaters Of Yugoslavia and hold his audience spellbound. Hail, World-renowned! Hail, World- renowned! Pour out for us, fellow, from that wisdom, Thresh for us, mate, from that bag, Choose for us from what you see of our poets, But before you speak, here’s a custom— Haul out a joint and light up, fellow, Haul out the booze and wet our whistles So we can make merry and dry our tears: That’s the tears of Victoria, as you well know. The many-notched throat begins to ache: Haul out the booze, my man—food for the way.</p>
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A-a Dumakude! A-a Dumakude!	Hail, World-renowned! Hail, World-renowned!
30 [Ndikugqibile Lawundini!]	[I've finished with you, mate!]

Mtuzé's poem is more colloquial, more witty, and more puckish than those of Mbutuma and Manisi. He starts by greeting Lord with the praise name Manisi had accorded him in Durban to welcome him to the University of South Africa (Unisa) and to the black community (descendants of the eponymous Ntu). Lord's reputation as a student of oral poetic traditions preceded him to Unisa (lines 12-15); he has earned a reputation as an authority on those Yugoslavian singers who played the *gusle* for him (lines 16-17). Mtuzé urges Lord to study and report on South African poetic traditions for their benefit (lines 19-21). But, as Mtuzé explains in his sixth prefatory note, first there should be deference to the tradition of smoking and drinking together (Victoria's tears are liquor; *padkos* is Afrikaans for a food hamper for travellers).⁹

During his visit to South Africa, Lord was thus able to witness a series of Xhosa performances, reflecting both similarities and dissimilarities with the features of the tradition of narrative song he observed in Yugoslavia. Here was praise poetry as distinct from narrative, poetry within a tradition that accepted as normal the poet's ability to compose original poetry on the spur of the moment, spontaneous poetry that exploited to a greater or lesser extent words and techniques common to the tradition; here was a literate poet writing and declaiming a poem in traditional style. Scholars are able to perceive the outline of problems requiring detailed investigation because of the pioneering work of Albert Lord. Just as the two South Slavic poems do for Parry, these poems reflect the response of Xhosa poets to a meeting between a foreign scholar and their tradition. They express admiration for Lord, respect for his achievements, and gratitude for his interest in their traditional craft. All students of oral poetry join the chorus with Manisi, Mbutuma, and Mtuzé in exclaiming

A! Dumakude! Hail World-renowned, the son of Lord!

Vassar College

Notes

¹ For a report on this conference including a description of Manisi's performance on the Tuesday evening, see Whitaker and Sienaert 1986a. An edited videotape of the evening's Zulu and Xhosa performances, introduced and discussed by Trevor Cope, Elizabeth Gunner, myself, and Albert Lord, is available as *Zulu and Xhosa Oral Poetry Performed and Explained* from The Secretary, Department of French, University of Natal, King George V Avenue, 4001 Durban, Republic of South Africa. For the full proceedings of

the conference, see Whitaker and Sienaert 1986b.

² On Manisi, see Opland 1975, 1984b:105-16 and *passim*, 1984a, 1987.

³ On praise poetry in Africa (sometimes referred to as panegyric or eulogy), see the excellent comparative study in Finnegan 1970: ch. 5. On some differences between Yugoslavian and Xhosa poetry, see Opland 1976. See also Nagy 1986.

⁴ It is clear that the poetry of the Xhosa *imbongi*, or tribal poet, is primarily improvisational, while that of the Zulu *imbongi* is primarily memorial (although this salient difference needs to be tested further through an examination of performances in context), but in the poetry of ordinary individuals about themselves, about others or their clans, the two traditions might well prove to be closer to each other with regard to the relative incidence of improvisation and memorization. On the Zulu tradition, see Cope 1968 and Gunner 1984.

⁵ On Mbutuma, see Mafeje 1963, 1967; Opland 1974, 1984b:99-105 and *passim*.

⁶ This is the son whose poems I recorded on January 9, 1971: see Opland 1974:13.

⁷ On Ncamashe, see Opland 1974, 1984b:96-99 and *passim*.

⁸ At last count, between 1966 and 1984, excluding works then in press, Mtuze had published three novels, two anthologies of poetry, a collection of poetry, a collection of short stories, a collection of essays, and an autobiography.

⁹ I am grateful to Thamie Nyoka for his assistance in the translation of Mbutuma's and Mtuze's poems, and to the Committee on Research at Vassar College for funding the translations. I am also grateful to David Manisi for checking the transcription and translation of his and Mbutuma's poems. Mtuze approved a draft translation of his poem, offering suggestions that have been incorporated into the translation presented here.

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