

March 21-25, 1987

***AN INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON VUK STEFANOVIĆ
KARADŽIĆ: ORAL TRADITION AND LITERARY ART,***
University of Missouri,
Columbia, Missouri

The symposium commemorated the two-hundredth anniversary of the birth of the great Serbian ethnographer, linguist, and collector of oral tradition.

- Slobodan Markovuč (Belgrade), "Early Serbian Realism and Oral Creation-Patterns"
Mary P. Coote (San Francisco), "On Women's Songs"
Miroslav Marcovich (Illinois), "Decasyllabic Variations: Meter and Formula"
Barry B. Powell (Wisconsin), "How Homer Was Written Down: A Preliminary Report"
Barbara Wallach (Missouri), Response to Prof. Powell's paper
Zdeslav Dukat (Zagreb), "Smailagić Meho and Peleus' Achilles"
David E. Bynum (Cleveland State), "On Epic Meters"
Svetozar Petrović (Novi Sad), "Vuk Karadžić's Singers: Phenomena and Implications"
Albert B. Lord (Harvard), "Twentieth-Century Singers: Sounds and Implications"
Franc Zadavec (Ljubljana), "Vuk Stefanović Karadžić and the Slovenian Literary Program"
Joseph Conrad (Kansas), "Structure and Content of Serbo-Croatian Magical Charms"
Nada Milošević-Djordjević (Belgrade), "Oral and Literary Art in Vuk's 'Serbian Folk Tales'"
John Miles Foley (Missouri), "Tradition and Aesthetics in Songs Collected by Vuk Karadžić"
Barbara Kerewsky Halpern and Joel M. Halpern (Massachusetts), Film of *Life in a Serbian Village* (showing and discussion)
Svetozar Koljević (Sarajevo), "Repetition as Invention in Karadžić's Collections"
John S. Miletich (Utah), "The Vuk Canon and the Eclipse of South Slavic Traditions"

April 13-15, 1987

THE SECOND GREENBANK COLLOQUIUM: HOMER 1987
Greenbank House,
University of Liverpool

- Gregory Nagy (Harvard), "The Epic Cycle"
M.J. Alden (The Queen's University of Belfast), "pseudea polla etumoisin homoia"

Tracey Rihll (Leeds), "The Power of *basileis*"

John Miles Foley (Missouri), "The Problem of Aesthetics in Oral Traditional Texts"

Kevin O'Nolan (University College Dublin), "Some Thoughts on the Poetics of Oral Composition"

M. M. Willcock (University College London), "Nervous Hesitation in the *Iliad*"

J. Pinsent (Liverpool), "The Odysseized *Iliad*"

July 6-9, 1987

THE STUDY OF ORAL TRADITION AND THE SOUTH SLAVS:
A SYMPOSIUM

School of Slavonic and East European Studies,
University of London

Svetozar Koljević (Sarajevo), "Vuk Karadžić and the Achievement of His Singers"

Nada Milošević (Belgrade), "The Poetics of the Oral Tradition of Vuk Karadžić"

Vilmos Voigt (Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest), "Primus inter pares: Why Was Vuk Karadžić the Most Influential Folklore Scholar in South-East Europe in the Nineteenth Century?"

Hannes Sihvo (Joensuu), "Reflections of Serbian Oral Poetry in Finnish Literature"

Celia Hawkesworth (London), "The Study of South Slav Oral Poetry in English"

Marija Kleut (Novi Sad), "The Classification of Serbo-Croat Epic Oral Songs Into Cycles: Reasons and Consequences"

John S. Miletich (Utah), "The Tradition of Croatian 'Folk' Poetry of the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries Collected in Gradišće [Burgenland]: Notes for the Comparative Study of Literature"

Hatidža Krnjević (Belgrade), "The Collections of Oral Lyric (Women's Songs) Assembled and Published by Vuk Karadžić: The Earliest Ritualistic Layers"

Jelena Saulić (Belgrade), "Serbian Proverbs in the Karadžić Collection"

Thomas Butler (Oxford), "'Hasanaginica' and its European Reception"

Ivan Lozica (Zagreb), "Favoured and Neglected Genres in Oral Tradition"

Radmila Pešić (Belgrade), "Popular Epic Songs of the Oldest Period"

Anna-Leena Siikala (Helsinki), "Mythical History in Oral Epic"

Jovan Deretić (Belgrade), "The Oldest Song Cycles: Fact and Fancy"

Arthur Hatto (London), "What is an Heroic Lay? Some Reflections on the Germanic, Serbo-Croat, and Fula"

Felix Oinas (Indiana), "Finnish and Yugoslav Epic Songs"

Lauri Harvilahti (Helsinki), "Epic Poetry Cultures and the Use of Formula Technique: Some Problems of Definition"

- John Miles Foley (Missouri), "South Slavic Oral Tradition in a Comparative Context"
- Karl Reichl (Bonn), "Parallelism in South Slavic and Turkic Epic Poetry: Towards a Poetics of Formulaic Diction"
- Roderick Beaton (King's College London), "Modern Greek and South Slavic Oral Tradition: Specific Contrasts and Theoretical Implications"
- David E. Bynum (Cleveland), "Reflexes of Indo-European Myth in the South Slavic Tradition of Oral Epos"
- Jan Knappert (London), "The Collection of Oral Literature in Africa"
- Senni Timonen (Helsinki), "The Cult of the Virgin Mary: The Meeting of Great and Little Tradition in Karelian Oral Poetry"
- Munib Maglajlić (Sarajevo), "The Singer Selim Salihović as Representative of the Living Tradition of Moslem Folksongs in Bosnia"
- Leea Virtanen (Helsinki), "Singers on Their Songs: The Act of Singing as Perceived by Singers in the Setu Region (Estonia) Today"
- Elizabeth Gunner (London), "The Dynamics of Singer and Audience in Contemporary Zulu Praise Poetry"
- Said S. Samatar (Rutgers), "Oral Poetry and Political Dissent in Somali Society: The Hurgamo Series"
- Slobodan Marković (Belgrade), "Aspects of Oral Creation during the Second World War"
- Peter Levi (Oxford), "The Translation of Oral Epic: The Challenge of Marko the Prince"
- R. Cockcroft (Nottingham), "The Concepts of Marginality and Centrality, and their Application to the Study of Heroic Narrative"
- Seppo Knuuttila (Joensuu), "'The Blind Homer of the North': Educated/Elitist Metaphor in Descriptions of Folk Singers"
- Michael Branch (London), "The Invention of a National Epic"
- Alan Dundes (Berkeley), "Vuk Stefanović Karadžić's 'Zidanje Skadra' and the Measure of Meaning of a Ballad of the Balkans: From National Beginnings to International Ends in the Study of Folklore"
- Albert Lord (Harvard), "Vuk's Impact on the Tradition: The Importance for Homer"

Popular Music in the Middle East, South Asia, and Southeast Asia

A Conference at the Society for the Humanities, Cornell University
April 25-26, 1986

Philip V. Bohlman
University of Illinois at Chicago

The study of popular music has long struggled to overcome the unpopularity accorded it by the Academy. Defined more by what it is not than what it is, popular music has been relegated to an unhappy realm, beyond the pale of tradition, oral or written, and wanting the discursive legitimacy of folk, art, or religious musics. Accordingly, popular music has too

often been the collective wastebasket into which were tossed styles of music ephemeral in content and barren of lasting value. A strange fate for a genre of music whose very name bespeaks a rather different judgment from that segment of society whose concerns lie more with practice than with theory.

With a shroud of questionable legitimacy surrounding popular music, it might seem a strange and thankless undertaking for the Society for the Humanities at Cornell University to sponsor a conference devoted to "Popular Music in the Middle East, South Asia, and Southeast Asia." But it was not the goal of the conference to redress some previous violation of sacred turf. Quite the contrary, the speakers at the conference, as representatives of different disciplines and area studies, interpreted the question of musical and geographic territory expansively, tugging at previously pejorative boundaries and in the end supplanting these with more auspicious confines, which at least proffered the possibility that a more concerted and comparative study of popular music may remove it from scholarly limbo in the foreseeable future.

It is hardly surprising that a conference of this scope avoided potentially restrictive definitions. Definition existed only in the form of example, and if example were to be taken as a criterion for the existence of popular music in the Middle East and Asia, it had to take into consideration a tremendous variety of popular repertoires. Thus, whereas the popular genres of one area might be very different from those of another, there was never any question that popular music was a noteworthy aspect of each region examined. Speakers, in fact, seemed to agree that popular music was a pervasive and worldwide phenomenon, one that transcended social stratification and failed to attend modernization and technological advancement in the slavish manner argued by critics of the cassette industry or the aural colonialism of the BBC World Service. Popular music has been and will continue to be a fact of musical life in remote village and urban center alike.

Diverse repertoires and styles admitted from the outset, most speakers at the Cornell conference chose to address their topics comparatively, contrasting popular music with specific genres that were generally not regarded as popular. Inevitably, this led to a recognition of changing musical styles, with popular music serving as an *avant-garde* for that which might subsequently emerge as traditional. In their studies of the Hili epic traditions of Egypt, Dwight Reynolds and Susan Slyomovics used as the traditional underpinning of newly emerging popularity a genre of oral epic poetry known at least as early as the Islamic middle ages, when the fourteenth-century historian Ibn Khaldūn heard it among the tribes of North Africa. In contemporary Egypt, Hili epic performances are at once traditional and popular. In Slyomovics's study, "The Poet as Outsider: Upper Egypt and Oral Epic Performance," the border between the traditional and the popular was clearly marked by a boundary between the singer and his audiences: he was by definition (and behavior) an outsider, whereas the epic he performed was essential to the audience's sense of its own extensive history and that of North Africa. In a paper entitled "Epic-Singing in Egypt: From Village to Studio and Back Again," Reynolds described a different performer-audience confrontation that has come to characterize the Hili epic tradition, namely that between traditional epic singers and the Egyptian cassette industry. Although he admitted that the cassette industry necessarily effected change—for example, a version of many hours compressed to fit a few compact tapes—Reynolds stopped short of claiming that commercialization would suffocate tradition. Instead, the Hili epics had spawned a new vitality, attracting the attention of new audiences and an international community of scholars while retaining their

essence as a “hopelessly folk” tradition. Other speakers, too, treated the cassette industry more kindly than is customary in ethnomusicology. Philip Yampoisky, surveying the industry in Indonesia, summarized the thoughts of many, claiming that recordings do not in themselves engender popularity, but instead become no more than the vehicle for a musical style that immanently has the potential to reach a broad audience.

Although Western notions, bombarded by the evanescence of hits and the ever-shifting Top-40, generally equate popular music with rapid change, the Middle Eastern and Asian genres examined by the speakers demonstrated a remarkable ability to check, if not mediate, certain types of change. The several types of Indian popular music, for example, embodied broader concerns for the rapprochement of religious differences and the quelling of sectarian violence. In his paper, “The Popular Expression of Religious Syncretism: The Bauls of Bengal as Bards of Brotherhood,” Charles Capwell urged a historical assessment of this power of popular music, illustrating his case with the repertoires of a Bengali mendicant sect, the Bauls. Whereas their songs had once called for peace between Hindus and Buddhists, the Bauls of recent centuries have redirected their music toward Hindus and Muslims, and the social schism caused by the caste system. The massive Indian film industry, the largest in the world, used popular music to achieve similar ends. Alison Arnold’s “Popular Music in the Indian Cinema” explored the conflation of Hindu and Muslim themes and musical genres within the same films, using as an exemplary text a screening of Amar Jeet’s 1961 film, *Hum Dono* [“The Two of Us”]. Daniel Neuman elaborated on ideas posed by Arnold in his “The Impact of Popular Music on Other Genres,” arguing that it was popularity itself that became traditional in Indian popular music, investing it with widespread power to influence classical and folk music in India.

Religious genres made various appearances as popular music throughout the conference; by the conclusion, indeed, there was general consensus that orally-transmitted religious music aspired toward the popular. Virginia Danielson’s discussion of the late Egyptian singer, Umm Kulthūm, attributed one aspect of the singer’s immense popularity to her knowledge of *tajwīd*, proper recitation of the *Qur’ān*. Kay Kaufman Shelemay focused on the stability of Hebrew prayer texts in the Syrian-Jewish performance of the Jewish paraliturgical tradition known as *pizmon*, which melodically drew from the popular music traditions most familiar to the practitioners. Prior to the departure of most Jewish communities from Syria in the 1940s, this meant the Arabic popular melos; in immigrant Syrian-Jewish communities, such as those Shelemay has studied in Brooklyn, the melodic superstructure might transform completely, with the performance of *pizmonim* functioning no differently in the community. In a contrasting case, Martin Hatch illustrated the ways in which Islamic religious dictum in Malaysia prescribed what popular music could not be, rechanneling the impulse for popularity into national styles, which in turn could more successfully abrogate ethnic differences in this pluralistic nation.

A final theme integrating the conference seemed to suggest that “the popular” was not really musical at its core, but derived from patterns of behavior and the ways music functioned with other cultural activities. Stephen Blum recalled from his research in Iran that informants often described popular musicians in relation not to specific repertoires, but to the ways they interacted with the public. Comparing descriptions of popular music from the fourteenth-century Maghreb and Middle East with more recent historical trends in Asia, Philip Bohlman concurred with Blum’s situation of the popular in behavioral patterns, noting further that such patterns are not

limited to one region or historical period. John Pemberton, in contrast, chose as a case study the failure of twentieth-century Indonesian concert behavior—audiences sitting quietly in orderly chairs—to suit the popularity of traditional *gamelan* performances. Hiromi Lorraine Sakata, describing musical life among Afghan refugees in the United States, illustrated the power of popular music to centripetalize the shared behavior of even the most attenuated community.

The rich and diverse panoply of musical genres discussed during this conference shared one rather significant feature: they were neither wholly oral nor were they entirely written. Indeed, the various speakers seemed to posit that one possible approach to understanding popular music was to regard it as a musical interface for orality and literacy. The historical tenor of many papers, moreover, revealed that the interaction between oral and literate components of tradition was continuous. Traditional texts often receive oral performances; the inscription of oral versions through technology might only disseminate written versions, which then find new audiences and follow new traditional paths; literacy might undergird a popular genre during periods of rapid social change, deferring to orality during periods of more moderated musical change. This understanding of popular music as an interface that brings together diverse texts and contexts may well do more to explain why popular music is popular than have previous models insisting that popular music was somehow social aberration or aesthetic pablum. The traditional basis of popular music, too, might no longer appear to be simply dysfunctional; rather, the model of tradition suggested by popular music is a complex aggregate that refracts and shapes many traditions. In the end, the diverse perspectives brought to popular music by the speakers addressing the Cornell conference projected an unusually positive role for popular music, for it was a role that fitted the transmission, practice, and reception of all musics, wherever they might be traditional.

Variability in Oral Literature

Minna Skafte Jensen
University of Copenhagen

Les secondes journées d'étude en littérature orale were held in Paris, 23.-26.3.87, arranged by *Les Archives de la Littérature Orale Africaine* in collaboration with *The International Society for Folk Narrative Research*. Director of the congress was Veronika Görög-Karady of the ALOA.

The overall theme of the conference had in the preparatory papers been divided into the following subsections: variability and oral performance, variability and sociocultural context, historical dimensions of variability, variability and genres, from oral to written, and variability and analytical methods. The theme had called forth almost 50 contributions from 14 different countries in Europe, Africa, and America, and roughly a hundred and fifty persons attended. The conference was arranged so that most of the time two or even three papers were read simultaneously—a perhaps necessary but unsatisfactory procedure: when a conference is centered on a single topic one wants to attend all the papers. As a whole, however, the arrangement was a great success, with stimulating papers and lively discussions, and the very

abundance of contributions evoked a pleasant feeling of richness of both material and scholarly approach.

When research concentrates on variability, the tradition as such gets out of focus while each version of a story, a poem, etc., is analyzed for its meaning to the person who tells it and his/her audience. Lauri Honko (Turku) said: "People produce meaning, not versions" — thus stressing that any version has the right to be analyzed in its specific context, and not just as a more or less precise memorization of transmitted material. Thus synchrony, or even achrony, dominated many papers, while diachronic analysis, which was once so important (e.g. in the Finnish historical method), was almost non-existent at this conference. Of the papers I attended only one treated the development of a story in a classical stemmatological way, that by Claude Bremond — of all persons! And, as Giovanni Battista Bronzini (Bari) pointed out in the ensuing discussion, even his lecture could hardly be called historical.

Some of the most interesting papers discussed variability in direct relation to a specific corpus of texts. Thus, Christiane Seydou (Paris) gave us a brilliant interpretation of tales she collected among the Peul of Central Africa. She drew attention to the fact that among the recurrent motifs some exist in parallel male/female versions. To illustrate this, she discussed in detail a story about a father/a mother and his/her daughter, giving a lucid semantic analysis of both of these two main versions. The story, whatever its variants, is concerned with the life-experience of storyteller and audience, even if it takes place "once upon a time." The story pattern and the system of values involved were clearly distinguishable between the two sexes. The immediately following paper, by Bengt Holbek (Copenhagen), analyzed fairy tales collected in Denmark, most of them by Evald Tang Kristensen around 1900, and drew conclusions that in many respects confirmed Christiane Seydou's. Lutz Röhrich (Freiburg) even gave us two texts, a German story collected in Greifenhagen in the nineteenth century, and an African one recently collected from an Akan storyteller (Ivory Coast). Despite great differences in sociocultural context and morality, the two were clearly versions of the same type. Röhrich pointed out in detail how each version suited its cultural context, thus illustrating the flexibility of a traditional story.

The merits of the individual performer were programmatically underscored in William F. H. Nicolaisen's paper (Binghamton), which met with almost overwhelming agreement. Nicolaisen also emphasized a related theme, the rebellion against romantic and nationalistic trends. These perspectives, which were so important in the formative period of folkloristic research, seem now to have been unanimously discarded: Nicolaisen even put it as a paradox that in various collections in the world there are wonderful archives of folklore, collected for reasons that now seem all wrong. And in her paper, Linda Dégh (Bloomington) used "nationalistic" and "serious" as mutually exclusive terms.

There were, however, protests from some of the African participants; in the younger states of this formerly colonial part of the world, the interest in oral traditions is often very much concerned with origins and historicity, precisely the questions that are now disappearing from European and American studies. The reason is close at hand: in Africa the oral traditions are vitally important to the maintenance of local cultural identity against foreign influence; it is easy to be highbrow about nationalism if one lives in a culture that is firmly established as such. What to most white scholars is an object of disinterested research can be of such direct national importance in a

culture fighting to survive that a scholar cannot disregard the quest for origins.

In general, one of the most interesting features of the conference was the presence of African scholars studying their own traditions. Karim Traore (Burkina Faso, but at present Bayreuth) had critical remarks on the elegiac mode in the poetry of Léopold Sédar Senghor and maintained that even if the contradictions in the modern cities of Africa are such that they are hard to reconcile, African intellectuals have to accept the reality of their world and try to make the best of it. He spoke of the "second orality," that of the modern media, and suggested that African culture might pass directly from genuine, immediate orality to tape recorder and television, without necessarily having to pass through the printing press, which has been so dominant in the last four centuries of European culture.

For the folklorists of the conference, an overall concern appeared to be that of how to define their material: what texts are folk texts? In what ways are they distinguished from all other kinds of texts? Tekla Dömötör (Budapest) had a pregnant expression for the criteria to be used: "nowadays orality is out, anonymity is out, what counts are three factors: variance, importance of the community, and the fact that people do it for themselves, not for money."

There was also an ongoing discussion between scholars working with living traditions and those studying archival material. Since my own concern is with ancient Greek epic that is not even preserved in archives, it was difficult for me to understand why these groups of scholars could not simply find inspiration in each other's work in order to understand both types of texts better. And I was impressed by the glimpses that the conference allowed into the richness of epic traditions in Africa; thus to me, an especially interesting paper was that by Jean Dérivé, describing Dioula traditions from the Ivory Coast—there seems still to be wonderful possibilities of studying living epic traditions on a scale comparable to that of Homer.

Finally, I shall point to a couple of themes that were significantly absent: Marxist analysis and studies concerned with formulae. I do not think the word "formula" occurred at all, and the name of Marx was mentioned, I believe, only by Bronzini. Scholarship, like other aspects of Western culture, has its fashions!

The next congress of The International Society for Folk Narrative Research will take place in Budapest, 11.-17.6.1989. Its theme will be *Folk Narrative and Cultural Identity*. The following items are suggested as possible topics for papers: forms and social functions of folk narrative in history; modern storytelling; the aesthetics and poetics of folk narrative; typology of classification; and UNESCO's program for supporting folklore.