Volume 32, Number 1 March, 2018

Volume 32 March 2018 Number 1

Founding Editor
John Miles Foley (†)

Editor
John Zemke

Managing Editor
Katy Chenoweth

Editorial Assistants
Elise Broaddus
Evelyn Yamoah

Please direct inquiries to:
Center for Studies in Oral Tradition
University of Missouri
21 Parker Hall
Columbia, MO 65211 USA
+573.882.9720 (ph)

journal@oraltradition.org

E-ISSN: 1542-4308

Each contribution copyright © 2018 by its author. All rights reserved.

The editors and the publisher assume no responsibility for statements of fact or opinion by the authors.

Oral Tradition (http://journal.oraltradition.org) seeks to provide a comparative and interdisciplinary focus for studies in oral tradition and related fields by publishing research and scholarship on the creation, transmission, and interpretation of all forms of oral traditional expression. In addition to essays treating certifiably oral traditions, *OT* presents investigations of the relationships between oral and written traditions, as well as brief accounts of important fieldwork, and occasional transcriptions and translations of oral texts. In addition, issues will include the annual Albert Lord and Milman Parry Lecture on Oral Tradition. Submissions should follow the list-of-reference format (http://journal.oraltradition.org/files/misc/oral_tradition_formatting_guide.pdf) and may be sent via e-mail (journal@oraltradition.org); all quotations of primary materials must be made in the original language(s) with following English translations. If appropriate, please describe any supporting materials that could be used to illustrate the article, such as photographs, audio recordings, or video recordings. *Oral Tradition* publishes such materials online in an eCompanion designed to supplement the texts of articles. Most contributions will be reviewed by at least one specialist reader and one generalist reader before a final decision is reached.

Oral Tradition appears twice per year, in March and October. The current issue and all back issues from 1986 onward are available open-access and free-of-charge at http://journal.oraltradition.org.

EDITORIAL BOARD

Mark C. Amodio
Vassar College
Old and Middle English

Patricia Arant
Brown University
Russian

Samuel Armistead (†)
University of California/Davis
Hispanic, Comparative

Richard Bauman
Indiana University
Folklore, Theory

Dan Ben-Amos
University of Pennsylvania
Folklore

Mark Bender
Ohio State University
Chinese

Mary Ellen Brown
Indiana University
Folklore, Balladry

Jonathan Burgess
University of Toronto
Ancient Greek

Chogjin
Chinese Academy of Social Sciences
Mongolian, Chinese

Bridget Connelly
University of Cal./Berkeley
Arabic

Robert P. Creed
Univ. of Mass./Amherst
Old English, Comparative

Robert Culley (†)
McGill University
Biblical Studies

Thomas DuBois
University of Wisconsin
Scandinavian

Casey Dué
University of Houston
Ancient Greek

Joseph J. Duggan
Univ. of Cal./Berkeley
French, Spanish, Comparative

Alan Dundes (†)
Univ. of Cal./Berkeley
Folklore

Mark W. Edwards (†)
Stanford University
Ancient Greek

David Elmer
Harvard University
South Slavic, Ancient Greek

Larry Evers
University of Arizona
American Indian Literature

Ruth Finnegan
Open University
African, South Pacific

Joxerra Garzía
University of the Basque Country
Basque

Andrew Gerstle
University of London
Japanese Theater, Performance Literature

Terry Gunnell
University of Iceland
Old Norse, Drama

Thomas Hale
Penn. State University
African

Lee Haring
Brooklyn College, CUNY
African

Joseph Harris
Harvard University
Old Norse

Lauri Harvilahti
Finnish Literature Society
Russian, Finnish, Altai

Holly Hearon
Christian Theological Seminary
New Testament

Lauri Honko (†)
Turku University
Comparative Epic

Dell Hymes (†)
University of Virginia
Native American, Linguistics

Bonnie Irwin
Eastern Illinois University
Comparative Medieval Arabic

Martin Jaffee
Hebrew Bible
Univ. of Washington

Minna Skafte Jensen
Odense University
Ancient Greek, Latin

Werner Kelber
Rice University
Biblical Studies

Françoise Létoublon
Université Stendahl
Ancient Greek

Victor Mair
University of Pennsylvania
Chinese

Peter Middleton
University of Southampton
Contemporary Poetry Performance

Nada Milošević-Djordjević
University of Belgrade
South Slavic

Stephen Mitchell
Harvard University
Scandinavian

Gregory Nagy
Harvard University
Ancient Greek, Sanskrit, Comparative

Joseph Falaky Nagy
Univ. of Cal./Los Angeles
Old Irish

Susan Niditch
Amherst College
Hebrew Bible

Walter J. Ong (†)
St. Louis University
Hermeneutics of orality and literacy

Tom Pettitt
University of Southern Denmark
Folklore, early Literature

Shelly Fenno Quinn
Ohio State University
Japanese

Burton Raffel
Univ. of Southwestern Louisiana
Translation

Karl Reichl
Universität Bonn
Turkic, Old and Middle English

John Roberts
Ohio State University
African-American

Joel Sherzer
University of Texas/Austin
Native American, Anthropology

Joseph Sobol
East Tennessee State University
Storytelling

Timothy Tangherlini
University of California-Los Angeles
Scandinavian Studies

Dennis Tedlock
SUNY/Buffalo
Native American

J. Barre Toelken
Utah State University
Folklore, Native American

Ronald J. Turner
Univ. of Missouri/Columbia
Storytelling

Andrew Wiget
University of New Mexico
Native American

Paulu Zedda
Università di Cagliari
Sardinian

This page is intentionally left blank.

Contents

Editor's Column 1

Paul Battles and Charles D. Wright
Eall-feala Ealde Sæge*: Poetic Performance and*
"The Scop's Repertoire" in Old English Verse 3

Duncan Poupard
Between the Oral and the Literary:
The Case of the Naxi Dongba Texts 27

Maria Vivod
The Fairy-Seers of eastern Serbia:
Seeing Fairies—Speaking through Trance..53

Virginia Blankenhorn
A New Approach to the Classification of Gaelic Song.................................71

Mary Knight
Oral Features of the Qur'ān Detected in Public Recitation.......................141

Michael D. C. Drout and Leah Smith
A Pebble Smoothed by Tradition:
Lines 607-61 of Beowulf *as a Formulaic Set-piece*...................................191

About the Authors...229

This page is intentionally left blank.

Editor's Column

With this issue *Oral Tradition* returns to its customary miscellany format, offering half a dozen essays that examine as many strands in humanity's complex of verbal traditions: a previously overlooked theme in Old Germanic poetry; a pictorial system for representing narratives devised by the Naxi *dongba* in southwestern China that conjugates the oral and the literary in the same vehicle; an illustration of contemporary shamanistic augury and communication with the dead practiced by women from the Vlach minority community in eastern Serbia; an account of genre classification schemes for Trans-Atlantic Gaelic song traditions; and, finally, the debut in the pages of *Oral Tradition* of "lexomics," an analytic tool that is brought to bear on a passage of *Beowulf* to suggest that its antecedents belong to a highly-formulaic unwritten source.

First up, we feature an essay from Paul Battles and Charles D. Wright that identifies "The Scop's Repertoire" as an Old English traditional theme, one that associates verse-making with three motifs: *copiousness*, *orality*, and *antiquity*. Close analogues in Old Saxon, Old and Middle High German, and Old Norse poetry suggest that "The Scop's Repertoire" theme originates in an oral Germanic tradition of versification. Thus, the theme sheds light on the myth of the oral poet, depicted either as divinely inspired or bearer of tradition.

Douglas Poupard's essay examines the orality of ritual texts written in the Naxi *dongba* script in southwest China. Historically, the inherent orality of these texts was largely overlooked by scholars who instead conceived of them as visual "hieroglyphics." Here, the author makes the case that the Naxi texts represent an intermediary stage between the "oral" and the "written," and calls into question the reality of any sort of stark divide between orality and literacy, that is, the so-called Great Divide theory.

Maria Vivod reports on her fieldwork among the fairy-seers of southeastern Europe, usually women, who are able to communicate with the invisible realm of the fairies. The fairy-seers sometimes fall into trance-like states to establish communication with the fairies. During the trance, the fairy-seers can prophesy future events and bear messages to the living from their deceased relatives. The author's essay relates case studies of two such women belonging to the Vlach community of eastern Serbia.

The essay by Virginia Blankenhorn illustrates the importance of songs and singing in traditional Gaelic society. Revisiting earlier attempts to classify Gaelic song genres, she examines whether or not constructing such typologies remains a worthwhile scientific objective. Finally, the author characterizes the place and role that singing occupies in contemporary Gaelic, particularly in the light of the contextual and aesthetic changes shaping Gaelic song performances in the current commercially-driven "world music" environment.

Mary Knight offers a thorough examination of textual features of the Qur'ān that appear to emerge more prominently as a result of hearing the text recited aloud. Such features that may enhance insights that listeners gain during slow or silent readings of the text. Comparison with

ancient Greek oral works, such as Homer, and an examination of Classical memory methodologies provide support for the communicative efficacy of some of the oral features identified. In particular, the author analyzes a series of linguistic devices regarding structure, meaning, diction, syntax, and sound.

Drout and Smith deploy new "lexomic" methods of computer-assisted statistical analysis to identify a concentration of unusual lexical, metrical, grammatical and formulaic features in lines 607-61 of *Beowulf*, in which Queen Wealhtheow passes the cup of friendship to the assembled warriors. Although the passage contains a number of proper names, the authors demonstrate that it is highly formulaic and adaptable, and conclude that the *Beowulf*-poet drew on an unwritten, highly traditional source for these lines.

This issue of *Oral Tradition* arrives in virtual space thanks to the combined efforts of a much reduced staff of the Center for Studies in Oral Tradition—Elise Broaddus, Katy Chenoweth, managing editor, and Evelyn Yamoah. Mark Jarvis, who transforms the edited essays into electronic files available around the world, continues to excel in his new-old role of indispensable consultant.

Finally, as is my custom, I recognize and draw your attention to the colleagues who referee submissions for *Oral Tradition*—especially deserving of *kudos*, even in anonymity. Their expertise and judgment embody sage guidance controlling editorial decisions. Their counsel undergirds the Center for Studies in Oral Tradition's aspiration to continue the standards of scholarship established by the journal's founding editor, John Miles Foley. Professor Foley worked tirelessly to bring attention to the value of humankind's verbal arts and to ensure that *Oral Tradition* would offer a venue for sustained and serious discussion. For 32 years his efforts have borne fruit. The endeavor has been generously supported by the College of Arts & Sciences of the University of Missouri, and I wish to thank Dean Okker for sustaining that support even under difficult circumstances.

In closing, let me encourage you to contribute to the ongoing dialogue about the world's oral traditions. To that end, I invite you to share your knowledge and insights with the readers of *Oral Tradition*. Submissions are evaluated in a double-blind review process: specialist and generalist referees report on the quality and suitability of submissions and their reports are dispositive to the decision to accept, return for revision, or decline a submission. That decision is generally reported to prospective authors within a trimester of receipt of a submission. Published online and in open access format, *Oral Tradition* is consulted by more than 20,000 readers in 200 countries and territories. *Sarva Mangalam* (Sanskrit, "May all be auspicious").

John Zemke
Editor, Oral Tradition

Oral Tradition, 32/1 (2018):3-26

Eall-feala Ealde Sæge: Poetic Performance and "The Scop's Repertoire" in Old English Verse[1]

Paul Battles and Charles D. Wright

Scenes depicting the recitation of verse, particularly in *Beowulf*, are among the most memorable and closely studied passages in Old English poetry. *Beowulf* repeatedly depicts the making and performance of poetry (Hill 2002), and it is the *swutol sang scopes* ("the clear song of the scop," *Bwf* 90a) that first draws the monster Grendel's attention to Heorot and sets in motion the major events of the first part of the poem.[2] In *Beowulf*, the creation of new stories is inextricably linked with the recitation of ones already known, so that the poem "aligns itself with a poetics where transmission and composition are co-dependent, indivisible aspects of the same act" (Jones 2009:486). A different but equally famous depiction of the scop emerges in the Venerable Bede's account of Caedmon, wherein divine inspiration supersedes tradition as the source of poetic creativity. Of course, these and similar accounts concerning the making and performance of Old English verse cannot be taken as straightforward portraits of the Anglo-Saxon "singer of tales": after all, Hrothgar's scop is Danish and Bede's Christian poet is entirely ignorant of traditional song. Moreover, since *Beowulf* and other narratives depicting vernacular poets—such as *Widsith* and *Deor*—are fictional accounts set int he Migration Age, some critics have gone so far as to deny that they can tell us anything at all about the Anglo-Saxon scop (Frank 1993).[3] Yet in the words of John D. Niles, such a position seems "to represent a veritable ecstasy of skepticism" (2003:37).

Niles usefully characterizes oral poetry as both a living tradition in pre-Conquest England and also as a "cultural myth whose long process of construction was set in motion as soon as the first missionaries from Iona and Rome introduced the arts of writing to Britain in a systematic way" (38). Fictional portraits of the scop, then, combine elements of poetic practice with a deeply-felt nostalgia for an imagined ancestral past (see Trilling 2009). While not straightforwardly reflective of reality, neither are they completely divorced from it. Even

---

[1] We would like to thank our colleagues Joseph Harris and Lori Garner, as well as the anonymous readers for *Oral* Tradition*,* for their valuable comments and corrections on a draft of this paper. Naturally, we are responsible for errors that remain.

[2] *Beowulf* is cited from Fulk et al. (2008) and other Old English poems from Krapp and Dobbie (1931-42). Throughout, Old English texts are cited without vowel length marks. Unless otherwise noted, translations are by the authors.

[3] Of course, the evidence for Anglo-Saxon vernacular poets is not all literary, see Opland (1980a). Thornbury (2014) usefully juxtaposes depictions of vernacular and Anglo-Latin poets such as Aldhelm and Alcuin.

fictional portraits of the making and performance of poetry can tell us much about Anglo-Saxon poetics. Several studies have shown that depictions of poetic performance throughout the corpus incorporate several recurrent thematic patterns supported by common lexemes; in turn, these patterns – traditional themes[4]—are the product of a tradition that has its roots in the oral recitation of verse. Among the Old English themes depicting the recitation of verse are "The Singer Looks at His Sources," (see Creed 1962; Renoir 1981); "Joy in the Hall," (see Opland 1976; Foley 1983) and the "Poet-patron" see Maring 2011). Like other commonplaces of "heroic" life[5]—such as feasting, fighting, and voyages by sea or land—in Old English poetry the performance of poetry is articulated through a nexus of conventional ideas, images, and verbal expressions.

In this essay we identify and discuss a previously unrecognized theme relating to poetic performance, which we will call "The Scop's Repertoire." This theme, which stages or describes the making of verse, associates that process with three motifs: *copiousness*; *orality*; and *antiquity*. *Copiousness* references the performer's knowledge of many poems or songs, and implicitly or explicitly links this vast repertoire with the ability to skillfully and quickly weave new texts. *Orality* means that these texts take the form of spoken, not written, words; they are variously described as spoken tales, as poems, and/or as songs accompanied by instruments. Finally, *antiquity* adumbrates the power of tradition, characterizing either the texts known to the poet and/or their subject matter as ancient and therefore venerable. As we shall see, "The Scop's Repertoire" takes two forms: in one all three motifs are explicitly present; in the other, the motif of *antiquity* is absent or displaced. These two variants of "The Scop's Repertoire" articulate different models for what it is that poets do: in the *tradition* model, they accumulate a store of ancient songs, and learning these endows poets with the ability to create their own; in the *inspiration* model, by contrast, the poet's skill comes directly from God, even if his subject matter may also derive from ancient (Christian) narratives, themselves understood to be the product of divine inspiration. Here the theme participates in competing discourses about poesis that cut across generic and linguistic boundaries in Anglo-Saxon literature, from vernacular verse such as *Beowulf* and *Widsith*, which describe the poet as bearer of a tradition learned by training and perpetuated by imitation, to Anglo-Latin prose narratives such as Bede's account of Caedmon, which depicts a poet lacking any training or repertoire as having been inspired by God.

"The Scop's Repertoire" is significant for several reasons. First it articulates some basic principles of the Anglo-Saxons'conception of poetry, including its nature, origin, transmission, and purpose. Second because the theme undergoes various modifications in form, particularly in

---

[4] Walter Arend (1933) introduced the term "typical scene" (later shortened to "type-scene") for such recurring passages. Milman Parry and Albert B. Lord (1971) preferred "(oral) theme"; see especially Lord (2000:68-98). More recent work has stressed the traditional aspect of themes, which are also found in written texts; see, for instance John Miles Foley (1990:38-39, 239-58). For this reason, we will call these patterns "(traditional) themes."

[5] On the association of poetry with martial, aristocratic life, see, for example, Hill (2002). The most complete Germanic lyre found to date, the Trossingen lyre, was "decorated by an incised frieze of warriors," evidence for its "association with the warrior class" (Fulk et al. 2008:121 note to line 89b). On the question of whether the Anglo-Saxon *hearp* refers to a harp or a lyre, see Fulk et al. (2008:glossary, *s.v. hearpe*).

overtly religious texts, it illustrates some ways in which the poetic tradition as a whole evolves in response to cultural innovations ranging from writing to religion. Finally, identification of the theme clarifies the intertextual relationship among certain passages that employ it.

Before undertaking a more detailed analysis of "The Scop's Repertoire," it is necessary to address the vexed question of verbal repetition in Old English themes. As has long been noted, these do not display anywhere near the same degree of formulaic density that characterizes many South Slavic themes. Concerning the latter, Albert B. Lord has written that, although the different instances of a theme (1995:10):

> will not be word-for-word alike, there will be at least a sufficient degree of similarity of wording to show that the singer is using a unit of story that he holds already more or less formed in his mind . . . the kind of composition reflected in [such passages] could not be described as "free improvisation." On the other hand, [the themes] could not be described as memorized passages either . . .

While there has been some debate about how much formulaic repetition characterizes the themes of other traditions, such as Homeric poetry,[6] it is nevertheless clear that Old English themes contained far less verbatim or near-verbatim repetition than Homeric or South Slavic poetry. That is not to say that the Anglo-Saxon themes lack repetition, but rather that the repetition that does occur differs in kind from in the other two traditions.

The underlying reason for these differences has been convincingly explained by John Miles Foley in his comparative study of the three traditions. According to Foley, the lack of formulaic repetition in Old English themes stems from the fact that the prosodic structure of Old English verse, as well as its dominant stylistic feature—variation—do not encourage *thrift* (Foley 1990: 354-55). Thrift derives from the rigid phraseological requirements of Greek hexameter and the Serbo-Croatian epic decasyllable, metrical constraints that encourage the use of formulas to cope with a highly patterned form; essentially, it means that these traditions tend to evolve one way of expressing any idea in a given metrical position. Without such strict demands of phraseology, which do not exist in Old English, there is no need to habitually express traditional ideas in an identical way—and thus thrift is not a salient characteristic. In fact, two of the most important stylistic features of Old English verse, alliteration and variation, demand the *opposite* of thrift. An Anglo-Saxon poet must be able to express the same idea in several *different* ways, depending on the alliterating stave, so that the word-hoard is filled with lexical items that can express identical ideas with different initial sounds in the same metrical position. For example, there are several synonyms for "man" that have similar metrical values, but different initial sounds: *mon*, *wer*, *secg*, *rinc*, *eorl*, and so on. Like alliteration, variation encourages not thrift but *copiousness*; to take a well-known case, the nine lines of *Cædmon's Hymn* contain eight different epithets for God, connected chiefly by variation. Alliteration and variation discourage the development of a one-to-one correspondence between set expressions and what Milman Parry called "essential ideas" (1971:272); instead, they encourage the formation of versatile

[6] Mark Edwards states that "verbal repetition between different instances of a type-scene may or may not occur; Lord's later definition of the "theme" [requiring a high degree of repetition] . . . does not apply to Homeric type-scenes" (1992:285).

substitution systems that can accommodate the demand for synonyms. Hence, one cannot expect a significant percentage of recurring formulas in Old English themes. As Foley (1990:357) states:

> If the essential ideas embodied in the narrative design have no consistently focused, one-to-one relationship with the elements of traditional diction that serve as their expressive medium, then the theme simply cannot recur with formulaic repetition marking its various instances.

A lack of recurring formulas does not, however, necessarily translate to a lack of verbal repetition. Foley (1990:340) further explains:

> what we can logically expect as thematic data are highly variable half-lines that may have in common only their stressed cores. What verbal correspondence exists will thus appear to take the form of *single morphs*, that is, of roots of words whose systemic context is metrically (and therefore lexically and syntactically) highly variable [emphasis added].

These observations have been confirmed in a number of subsequent studies, which have found abundant morphemic but limited formulaic repetition in Old English traditional themes (see, for instance, Battles 2000, 2011, and 2015).

This pattern also obtains in "The Scop's Repertoire." Just as the theme "Sleeping after the Feast" is often, but not always, announced by the collocating morphemes *swefan* ("to sleep") and *symble* ("feast"), so some, but not all, "The Scop's Repertoire" passages feature a cluster[7] of repeated word roots that articulate its three motifs: *copiousness* (*eall* "all"; *fela*, "many"), *orality* (*gesegene* "saying"; *sæge* "tale"; *secgan* "to tell"), and *antiquity* (*eald* "old"). These markers are useful for identifying the theme, but their presence is not obligatory, and we also encounter lexical substitutions within each motif, such as *worn* ("many") instead of or in addition to *fela*.

With these considerations in mind, we now turn to an analysis of the theme. We begin with the passages that feature all three motifs, which thus depict the poet as bearer of tradition. These include *Beowulf* 867b-76a; a pen-trial in London, British Library MS Harley 208, fol. 88r; the Proem to the *Meters of Boethius*; and *Andreas* 1487b-91.

Beowulf employs "The Scop's Repertoire" in one of the work's most frequently discussed passages, the song in praise of Beowulf composed after the hero's victory over Grendel. First, many retainers, both old and young, remark that Beowulf is the greatest hero alive; then one of Hrothgar's retainers commemorates his exploit in verse (867b-876):

Hwilum cyninges þegn,
guma gilphlæden, gidda gemyndig,
se ðe **eal fela** **ealdgesegena**

[7] On the "cluster" in Old and Middle English poetry, see especially Ritzke-Rutherford (1981). Kintegen (1977) calls these groups of collocating morphemes "sets." See also Foley (1990:211-12). This differs from Anita Riedinger's definition of a formulaic "set": a group of verses usually sharing the same function and system in which one word, usually stressed, is constant, and at least one stressed word may be varied, usually synonymously, to suit the alliterative and/or narrative context"(1985:306). However, formulaic sets in Riedinger's terms often involve collocating morphemes within the same half-lines (Wright 2013). A General discussion of formulas, collocation, and other kinds of verbal repetition in Old English verse is to be found in Tyler (2006).

worn gemunde, word oþer fand
soðe gebunden; secg eft ongan
sið Beowulfes snyttrum styrian
ond on sped wrecan spel gerade,
wordum wrixlan; welhwylc gecwæð
þæt he fram Sigemundes secgan hyrde
ellendædum, uncuþes fela . . .

At times a thane of the king, well-supplied with words of praise and knowledgeable in songs—one who recalled an abundance of old tales—composed new words, correctly linked; then he began to artfully recite the exploit of Beowulf, skillfully reciting fine verses with varying words. He related everything that he had heard said concerning the heroic deeds of Sigemund . . .

The passage is explicitly metapoetic, that is, "a scene wherein the poet looks back, as it were, on one of his imagined predecessors in the old oral tradition" (Fulk et al. 2008:165 n. to 867b-915), and it has been read as a kind of self-portrait, a cameo appearance of the *Beowulf*-poet at Hrothgar's court (Creed 1962; Opland 1980b); Renoir 1980). Recently, however, scholarly consensus has moved toward the position that this depiction is either wholly or predominantly fictive, so that the editors of *Klaeber's Beowulf* conclude that "nothing in this scene should be taken to reflect upon the poet's own poetic practice" (Fulk et al. 2008:166). It would be rash, indeed, to read the passage as a kind of Anglo-Saxon poetic self-fashioning—one doubts that the Anglo-Saxon poet composed his magnum opus on horseback, for instance—but to state categorically that *nothing* in this scene resembles what the *Beowulf*-poet is doing seems hyper-skeptical. Though this passage owes more to literary conventions than to actual performances, those conventions—including "The Scop's Repertoire"—nevertheless encode some basic assumptions of Anglo-Saxon poetics.

Fundamentally, the poet functions here as bearer of tradition, and composition cannot be separated from recollection. The professional skill that enables the poet to draw on his copious repertoire is invoked by the the adjective *gemyndig* ("mindful") and verb *gemunan* ("to remember") in the second and fourth lines of the passage. Knowing and recollecting old poems and stories enables the scop to create new ones. Songs of famous heroes who lived long ago, such as Sigemund the Wælsing, inspire the creation of new poems—in this case, a *spel* concerning *sið Beowulfes* ("Beowulf's exploit"), a recent event for the fictional poet, but an ancient one for the *Beowulf* poet. The fictional poet, who recalls *eal fela ealdgesegena* ("an abundance of old tales") draws on these to create one of his own. This cluster economically evokes "The Scop's Repertoire." The words *eal fela* designate *copiousness*, while *antiquity* and *orality* are expressed in the compound term *ealdgesege* (literally, *gesege* denotes something that is *said*). Moreover, the Old English narrator includes himself in this chain of transmission, for tales about Beowulf are invoked throughout the work as the source for the poet's own knowledge of what happens, including just before the passage wherein Hrothgar's thane sings about Beowulf: *Ða wæs on morgen mine gefræge / ymb þa gifhealle guðrinc monig* ("In the morning there was many a warrior near the gift-hall, as I have heard," 837-38). How could the narrator have "heard" about this, if not through stories? Past and present blend together in a way that

makes it almost impossible to determine where one ends and the other begins. Indeed, the passage itself enacts a mingling of stories about Sigemund, Heremod, and Beowulf, making it difficult to tell which narrator is speaking when (Amodio 2005). And this is surely no accident. All of these voices, including that of the author of *Beowulf*, share in the textual transmission of *eal fela ealdgesegena*.

A second instance of "The Scop's Repertoire" occurs in a single verse written in the bottom margin of London, British Library, Harley MS 208, fol. 88r: *Hwæt! Ic eallfeala ealde sæge* ("Listen! I very many old tales . . .").[8] Discussion of this pen-trial has long focused on the question of whether it alludes to *Beowulf*'s *eal fela ealdgesegena*, with most critics answering in the negative.[9] Indeed, some have suggested the resemblance to be illusory. Donald Scragg, for instance, notes that "*eall* and *eald* regularly alliterate in the two halves of a verse line," and concludes that the resemblance "may be no more than coincidence" (2016:178). In the nearly 150 verse lines containing any form of *eald*, alliteration with any form of *eall* in fact occurs only five other times:

> Eald is þis eorðsele, eal ic eom oflongad (*Wife's Lament* 29)
> Eald æscwiga, se ðe eall geman (*Bwf* 2042)
> ealde and geonge ealle ætsamne (*Paris Psalter* 148.12)
> ealde ge giunge, ealle forhwerfde (*Meters of Boethius* 26.86)
> wæron ure ealdfind ealle on wynnum (*Descent into Hell* 89)

Of these, the example in *Wife's Lament* is not strictly comparable, since *eal* there is an adverb. *Beowulf* 2042b is interestingly similar to *Beowulf* 869a in that it characterizes someone who has a prodigious memory, but in the case of the warrior who whets a young man to seek vengeance by identifying his father's sword in the hands of a former enemy, he remembers "all" because the warrior himself is "old." The examples in *Paris Psalter*, *Meters of Boethius*, and *Descent into Hell*, all with *ealle* in the same position in half-lines of the same scansion, are as similar to each other as they are different from the three attestations of "The Scop's Repertoire." In none of these other lines is *eall* linked with *fela.* Rather than suggesting that the resemblance between *Beowulf* 869 and the pen-trial in MS Harley 208 is coincidental, comparison with the few other lines alliterating *eall* and *eald* actually strengthens it. In our view, the connection between the texts is not due to the Harley scribe's knowledge of *Beowulf*, but derives from both *Beowulf* and the pen-trial independently invoking the traditional theme of "The Scop's Repertoire."

---

[8] The pen-trial is item 229 in Ker (1990:304). Ker dates the "scribble" "s. x/xi (?)"; the manuscript was written in Saint-Denis in the first half of the ninth century but was presumably in England by the time the pen-trial was entered (the manuscript's provenance is York). See Gneuss and Lapidge (2014:341 [no. 417]). For a facsimile with paleographic analysis see DigiPal s.a.

[9] Ker notes the parallel without comment: "cf. *Beowulf*, l. 869" (304). Robinson calls the connection "very tenuous" (1971:254). Also skeptical are Poussa (1981:286) and Stokes, who states that "no direct link between the two [texts] has yet been found" (2014:180). Orchard entertains the possibility that "this pen-trial represents . . . evidence that *Beowulf* was known and remembered in Anglo-Saxon England" but concludes that "without more texts to be recovered or inferred, we can never really know" (2009:309).

The pen-trial takes the form of the first line of a poem in which the narrator references the source of the text's subject matter. This is the most common opening formula in Old English poetry (Battles 2014; Chernis 1992; Foley 1991; Weiskott 2016), also indicated here by the initial attention-marker, "*Hwæt!*" ("Listen!"). Since medieval scribes commonly employed the first-lines of familiar Latin poems (notably the opening lines of Virgil's *Eclogues* and of the *Disticha Catonis*) as pen-trials (Lindsay 1923:29-30), it seems very likely that Jeff Opland is correct in arguing that the pen-trial in MS Harley 208 represents the beginning of a now-lost "memorised . . . secular poem or song" (1980a:186). We cannot, of course, rule out the possibility that the line was composed by the scribe,[10] but either way it instantiates "The Scop's Repertoire," with all three motifs present: *copiousness* is evoked by *eallfela*, *antiquity* by *ealde,* and *orality* by *sæge*. The line's tantalizing reference to *ealde sæge* ("ancient tales") lacks a governing verb, but comparison with the passage in *Beowulf* and with other instances of "The Scop's Repertoire" makes it likely that this orphaned line would have been followed with one containing some verb of *hearing* (*gefrægn*) or *telling* (for instance, *secgan hyrde* in the *Beowulf* verse cited above, 875b).[11] Any of these would develop "The Scop's Repertoire" in greater detail, but even in its present abbreviated state the pen-trial economically evokes the theme.

Two poems based on Latin sources show that the "The Scop's Repertoire" was not limited to secular tradition, yet both adapt the theme's constituent motifs of *orality, copiousness*, and *antiquity* in ways consistent with their religious subject matter. *Andreas* prefaces its concluding fitt(s)—depicting the saint's triumph—with the following passage (1478-91):

Hwæt, ic hwile nu haliges lare,
leoðgiddinga, lof þæs þe worhte,
wordum wemde, wyrd undyrne
ofer min gemet. Mycel is to secganne,
langsum leornung, þæt he in life adreag,
eall æfter orde. Þæt scell æglæwra
mann on moldan þonne ic me tælige
findan on ferðe, þæt fram fruman cunne
eall þa earfeðo þe he mid elne adreah,
grimra guða. Hwæðre git sceolon
lytlum sticcum leoðworda dæl
furður reccan. Þæt is **fyrnsægen**,
hu he **weorna feala** wita geðolode,
heardra hilda, in þære hæðenan byrig.

Listen! For some time I have proclaimed with words in verse songs the story of the saint—praise for what he did, his well-known exploits, beyond my capacity. There is much to tell (requiring

[10] O'Keeffe describes this as "formulaic reading" (1990:*passim*). Doane (1994) prefers the term "scribal performance"; Thornbury refers to "scribal composition" (2014:69).

[11] *Secgan hyrde/hyrdon* also occurs in *Christ I* 73b*, Partridge* 1a, *Descent into Hell* 83b, *The Metrical Preface to Wærferth's Translation of Gregory's Dialogues* 26b, as well as other passages in *Beowulf* (273b, 582b, 1346b).

> lengthy study) about everything that he endured in his life, one thing after another. It would take some man more learned than I consider myself to find these stories in his memory, all the grim encounters—everything from the beginning—that that he endured with courage. Nevertheless, we must further recount a portion of words of verse in short episodes. It is said of old how the saint suffered many punishments—fierce encounters—in that heathen city.

This passage combines the usual motifs and morphemic elements of "The Scop's Repertoire." In particular, the closing lines echo the morphemic cluster found in *Beowulf* and the pen trial: compare 1490a *weorna feala* (*copiousness*) with *eal fela* and *worn* (*Beowulf* 869a and 870a) and *eallfeala* (*Pen trial*), and 1489b *fyrnsægen* (*antiquity*, *orality*) with *ealdgesegena* (*Beowulf* 869b) and *ealde sæge* (*Pen trial*). *Andreas* merely employs *weorn* rather than *eal* and *fyrn* in place of *eald*. Of course, the deeds of Andreas are *fyrnsægen* in a different way than stories about Sigemund and Heremod, and likewise *weorna fela* refers to the many episodes of hardship endured by the saint rather than to poems or stories known to the poet.[12]

The narrator here strikes a very different stance from the one usually adopted by Old English fictive scops, who take pride in knowing even the most obscure details of a hero's biography. (The Danish poet in *Beowulf* incorporates *uncuþes fela,* 872b, "many things not widely known," into his song about Sigemund.) In *Andreas*, *copiousness* is expressed in the poet's awareness of a great many stories about Andreas' deeds and sufferings, but undermined by learned topoi emphasizing the inexpressibility of those stories as well as the poet's own modesty as one whose poor skill and wit are surpassed by the mighty theme of his tale.[13] So far from claiming mastery of a vast repertoire, he claims only to have learned fragments of it; and so far from implying that either the copiousness or the antiquity of those stories endows him with poetic mastery, he apologizes (disingenuously, of course) for his incompetence. He professes that it would take a man more learned than he (*æglæwra mann*) to relate the entire hagiographical dossier of the apostle Andrew from start to finish. This would require lengthy reading or study (*langsum leornung*), and the narrator suggests that this is beyond him—and also, presumably, beyond the audience's patience,[14] for he promises that the concluding section will be brief; to paraphrase, "There are just a few short bits left to go." Still, the *Andreas* poet does posit "a more learned man" who might be capable of mastering that copious repertoire and retaining all those stories in his mind—precisely the kind of scop that the *tradition* variant of the theme typically

[12] In their recent edition of *Andreas*, Richard North and Michael D. J. Bintley, comparing *ealdgesegena* and *fyrnsægen*, regard this passage as an allusion to *Beowulf* (2016:62). In their note to *Andreas* 1489, they also compare Cynewulf's description of Judas as *fyrngydda frod* (*Elene*, 542). They further suggest that *leoðgiddinga* and *wyrd undyrne* are allusions to Cynewulf's *Fates of the Apostles* 97b and 42 (58-59); and that *Mycel is to secganne . . . adreag* is a reference to *Guthlac A* 531-32 (61-62). Given the formulaic nature of Old English poetry and the notorious difficulties in establishing the authorship and provenance of individual poems, the problems in constructing even a relative chronology of the longer poems, and the fragmentary nature of the corpus, it is problematic to construe such parallels as literary allusions.

[13] On inexpressibility topoi and "affected modesty" in medieval literature see Curtius (1953:159ff). According to Curtius, "Included among the 'inexpressibility topoi' is the author's assurance that he sets down only a small part of what he has to say (*pauca e multis*)" (1953:160); compare the *Andreas* poet's *lytlum styccum*.

[14] As Curtius notes, "Among modesty topoi also belongs the assurance that the author wishes to spare his audience satiety or boredom (*fastidium*, *taedium*)" (1953:85).

invokes.[15] For all its embellishment with topoi derived from learned Latin models, then, the *Andreas* poet's allusion to "The Scop's Repertoire" is evident.

A rather different kind of adaptation of the constituent motifs of "The Scop's Repertoire" occurs in the *Meters of Boethius*. Two passages in this work employ the theme: the Proem in its entirety and the opening verses of *Meter 2*. The Proem begins with a fascinating portrayal of the (royal) Christian poet's art:

Ðus Ælfred us **ealdspell reahte**,
cyning Westsexna, cræft meldode,
leoðwyrhta list. Him wæs lust micel
ðæt he ðiossum leodum leoð spellode,
monnum myrgen, **mislice cwidas**
þy læs ælinge ut adrife
selflicne secg, þonne he swelces lyt
gymð for his gilpe. Ic sceal giet **sprecan**,
fon on fitte, folccuðne ræd
hæleðum **secgean**. Hliste se þe wille!

Thus Alfred, king of the West Saxons, recounted the ancient tale for us, displaying his art and skill in making verse. He greatly desired to recite poetry—various lays to delight men—lest tedium should drive away the self-satisfied man who in his pride takes small account of such things. I must yet undertake to proclaim in words, speaking in verse, wisdom known to many nations. Let who will, listen!

Beginning with the motif of *antiquity*, the Proem depicts its religious subject matter as an "ancient tale" (*ealdspell*)—as of course it was, since Boethius had written his *Consolation* centuries before. *Copiousness* is lexicalized in *mislice cwidas*, a phrase that literally denotes "a variety of sayings" but in context likely refers to the whole miscellany of poems that follows. Finally, *orality* is invoked by a variety of expressions: *-spell*, *cwidas*, *sprecan*, and *secgean*.
These elements recur, though differently configured, at the beginning of *Meter 2*. Here the narrator sings (1-4a):

Hwæt, ic **lioða fela** lustlice geo
sanc on sælum, nu sceal siofigende,
wope gewæged, wreccea giomor,
singan sarcwidas

Listen! Before, I gladly sang many songs in a state of happiness; now, lamenting and weighed down by sorrows, I, sad wretch, shall sing songs filled with sorrow.

---

[15] North and Bintley regard this as the *Andreas* poet's homage to Cynewulf (2016:60).

Here *copiousness* (*lioða fela*, "many songs") and *orality* (*sanc,* "sang," *singan*, "sing", *-cwidas*, "sayings" or "songs") are evident, but not the *antiquity* thematized by the Proem. To be sure, *Meter* 2 is itself (a poetic translation of) one of the "ancient songs" mentioned in the Proem, and *Meter* 2.1-2 does highlight chronology, but *geo* ("formerly") and *nu* ("now") merely contrast the speaker's own happy past in relation to his sorrowful present—a shift in reference prompted by the autobiographical burden of Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*. These deictic terms reflect the telescoping of the motif of *antiquity* created by the duality of poetic voices. Boethius is the originator, not the bearer, of the poetic tradition of the *Meters* inherited by Alfred, and what was "now" for Boethius is "formerly" for Alfred.

In highlighting the poet's wisdom, the *Meters of Boethius* points the way to the second group of poems that employ "The Scop's Repertoire." These do not invoke the motif of *antiquity* because they depict the poet not as bearer of tradition, but as an inspired artist whose "gifts"—in a very literal sense—come from God. *Orality* and *copiousness* still remain prominent in these passages, and the passages are connected by a network of traditional diction, which shows that they are drawing on the same underlying theme. All the poems that feature this version of "The Scop's Repertoire"—*Christ II*, *Maxims I*, and *The Gifts of Men*—treat poetry as one of the "gifts-of-men."

Before discussing these poems, it is worth pausing to examine perhaps the most famous passage in early English letters depicting a poet as divinely inspired artist, Bede's story of Caedmon. The anecdote tacitly assumes the reader's familiarity with the bearer-of-tradition model. Before Caedmon receives the gift of song from God, he leaves a gathering where the guests pass around a harp and recite poems. As Andy Orchard has pointed out, "The later Old English version . . . adds the detail that he left 'for shame' (*for scome*); the implication seems to be that it was expected that adult Anglo-Saxons would carry round in their heads a store of song" (2009:294). Furthermore, there is a clear link between knowing existing songs and being able to compose new ones. Bede regards Caedmon's gift of poetry as unique because he is the exception to the rule: *Et quidem et alii post illum in gente Anglorum religiosa poemata facere temtabant, sed nullus eum aequiperare potuit. Namque ipse non ab hominibus neque per hominem institutus canendi artem didicit, sed diuinitus adiutus gratis canendi donum accepit* ("It is true that after him other Englishmen attempted to compose religious poems, but none could compare with him. For he did not learn the art of poetry from men nor through a man but he received the gift of song freely by the grace of God"; Colgrave and Mynors 1969:414-15). Instead of learning old stories from other professional poets or from popular oral narratives, at Hild's command Caedmon is instructed by the brethren in the "whole course of sacred history" (*iussitque illum seriem sacrae historiae doceri*, *ibid.*:418-19), which provides Caedmon with a copious and ancient subject matter that replaces and improves upon the inherited tales of the traditional poet's repertoire.

Though Bede depicts Caedmon's case as unique, gnomic verse routinely categorizes poetry as one of the "gifts-of-men" that God bestows upon humankind. Cynewulf's *Christ II* offers a good example in a passage that evokes "The Scop's Repertoire" (659-70a):

> Ða us geweorðade se ðas world gescop
> godes gæstsunu, ond us giefe sealed.

Sumum wordlaþe   wise sendeð
on his modes gemynd   þurh his muþes gæst,
æðele ondgiet.   Se mæg **eal fela**
singan and secgan   þam bið snyttru cræft
bifolen on ferðe.   Sum mæg fingrum wel
hlude fore hæleþum   hearpan stirgan,
gleobeam gretan.

To one man He sends into mind a wise eloquence in words—a noble faculty—through the spirit of His mouth. One to whom wisdom of mind has been granted can sing and relate very many things. One can play the harp well and loudly before heroes, stirring its strings with fingers.

In this passage, *copiousness* and *orality* are expressed in a morphemic cluster (*eal fela / singan and secgan*) that closely resembles those found in *Beowulf* (*eal fela ealdgesege*) and the Harley pen trial (*eallfeala ealde sæge*). There are differences as well: *secgan* takes the form of a verb rather than noun (-*gesege*, *sæge*); and the cluster occurs in a b-verse/a-verse sequence rather than a-verse/b-verse one. In addition to deploying traditional language, the passage also features some unusual and striking imagery. God's gift comes *þurh his muþes gæst*, "through the breath (spirit) of his mouth"—a verse that suggests the operation of the Holy Spirit but also echoes God's creation of humankind (*Genesis A* states in lines 999b-1000 that *Adam wearð / of godes muðe gaste eacen*, "Adam was animated by the spirit of God's mouth") and of the heavens.[16] Of course, poets are not uniquely gifted; Cynewulf states that God distributes talents widely so that no one group can grow too proud of its gift. Still, the fact remains that poets and harpers are mentioned first—ahead of even those who know how to interpret scripture—and so may lay claim to the title of *primi inter pares*.

While the motif of *antiquity* (usually lexicalized by *eald*) is missing in Cynewulf's articulation of the theme, it is very much present in the surrounding context. Both preceding and following the *sum*-catalogue Cynewulf himself quotes three biblical "songs," thus representing the Bible as a repository of traditional poetry that he has mastered (and re-performed in his own formulaic diction). In lines 618b-26, Cynewulf versifies Gen. 3:16-19, which he characterizes as a *cwide* that was formerly sung (*se þe ær sungen wæs*, 618b). In lines 650b-53, he versifies a psalm mash-up (apparently conflating Pss. 8:2, 18:10, and 47) as something "sung" by the wise man (*Bi þon se witga song*). And in lines 712-19, he versifies Song of Songs 6:9, introducing it as having been "sung" by Solomon, *giedda gearosnottor* "very skillful in poems." Cynewulf would have known that in the original Hebrew both the Psalms and the Song of Songs were in fact poems, but he could hardly have believed that of God's condemnation of Adam and Eve in Genesis (though he would undoubtedly have regarded God's direct discourse as elevated

[16] For instance, Psalm 32:6, *verbo Domini caeli firmati sunt et spiritu oris eius omnis virtus eorum* ("By the word of the Lord the heavens were established; and all the power of them *by the spirit of his mouth*," emphasis added), is translated *Worde drihtnys hefynys getrymyde synd & gaste muðys his eall mægyn heora* in the Old English interlinear psalm gloss. The Vulgate is cited from Weber (1983), with punctuation added, and the translation is from Challoner (1989). The Old English interlinear gloss is cited from Wildhagen (1910). Cynewulf mentions the creation of human beings and of the heavens in the lines immediately preceding "The Scop's Repertoire," suggesting that the allusion is deliberate.

language). By rendering all these passages into Old English verse and claiming that they had been sung by wise men from biblical times, Cynewulf has effectively transformed them into vernacular *ealdgesegena*, with which he frames his invocation of "The Scop's Repertoire."

The motifs and language of *Christ II* find a close echo in several verses in *The Gifts of Men*. In the latter poem, the gifts of poetry, harping, and song are separated from one another by intervening lines, nevertheless its resemblance to Cynewulf's version is striking. To appreciate this resemblance, the two versions are presented below, with repeated morphemes in italics:

Ða us geweorðade   se ðas world gescop
godes gæstsunu,   ond us *giefe* sealed.
Sumum wordlaþe   wise sendeð
on his modes gemynd   þurh his muþes gæst,
æðele ondgiet.   Se *mæg* **eal *fela***
singan and secgan   þam bið snyttru *cræft*
bifolen on ferðe.   *Sum mæg* fingrum wel
hlude fore hæleþum   *hearpan* stirgan,
gleobeam gretan
(*Christ II* 659-667a)

Then the One who created the world, God's son, honored us, giving us gifts. To one man He sends into mind a wise eloquence in words—a noble faculty—through the spirit of His mouth. One to whom wisdom of mind has been granted can sing and relate very many things. One can play the harp well and loudly before heroes, stirring its strings with fingers.

Sum biþ woðbora,
giedda *gif*fæst. . . .
Sum mid hondum *mæg*   *hearpan gretan*,
ah he *gleobeames*   gearobrygda list. . . .
Sum cræft hafað   circnytta ***fela***,
mæg on lofsongum   lifes waldend
hlude hergan,   hafað healice
beorhte stefne.
(*Gifts of Men* 35b-36a, 49-50, 91-94a)

One is a poet, gifted with songs. . . . One knows how to play the harp, making its strings vibrate skillfully. . . . One has skill in many church-services; he can loudly praise the Lord of life in songs of praise, having a bright, excellent voice.

Both passages contain *sum* catalogues detailing as gifts: the skills of versifying, singing, and playing the harp. Harping, in particular, finds expression in very similar phraseology: compare *Sum mæg fingrum wel / hlude fore hæleðum hearpan stirgan, / gleobeam gretan* (*Christ II*) with *Sum mid hondum mæg hearpan gretan, / ah he gleobeames gearobrygda list* (*Gifts of Men*). *The*

Gifts of Men handles the motif of *copiousness* somewhat differently from *Christ II*, taking the form of the singer's versatility in performing church services (*Sum cræft hafað circnytta fela*)—and thus praising God in a manner that parallels Caedmon's poetry (*Nunc laudare debemus auctorem regni caelestis* . . .). Meanwhile, *orality* is synonymous with vocality, and the primary quality of a good voice is that it is *hlud*, "loud." Loudness also appears as a positive quality in the *Christ II* passage, though there attributed to harping.[17] If one imagines the conditions of performance in an Anglo-Saxon mead-hall (or monastic refectory), it is not difficult to see how the ability to sing and play loudly would be a major asset. In both passages, God's gift to the poet expresses itself not just in a mastery of the poetic arts—forming and singing verses as well as playing the harp—but also in the *variety* of the scop's repertoire.

The same point is made explicitly in the third gifts-of-men passage that employs "The Scop's Repertoire," *Maxims I* 165-71. This poem articulates simple truths concerning a whole host of phenomena, expressing their essential nature through their most easily recognizable associations: "a king is eager for power" (58b, *cyning biþ anwealdes georn*), "frost must freeze" (71a, *forst sceal freosan*), "fire consumes wood" (71b, *fyr* [*sceal*] *wudu meltan*), and so on. What, then, characterizes the poet? *Maxims I* answers this in two passages, first stating that *god scop [geriseþ] gumum* (127a, "the good scop [belongs] among men"), then elaborating further (165-71) that :

> Wæra gehwylcum wislicu word gerisað,
> gleomen gied ond guman snyttro. . . .
> Longað þonne þy læs þe him con **leoþa worn**,
> oþþe mid hondum con hearpan gretan;
> hafaþ him his gliwes giefe, þe him god sealde.
>
> Wise words are becoming to everyone—a poem to the minstrel, prudent speech to the man. . . . One who knows many songs or can play the harp with hands will experience the less longing because of it; he has the gift of entertaining others, which God has given him.

Line 167b, *þe him con leoþa worn*, is another way to express the *copiousness* of the scop's repertoire. The motif of *orality* is implicit in the allusion to playing the harp, and the social nature of poetry—"the good scop belongs among men," "one who knows many songs will not be lonely"—presupposes an oral performative model in the sense that the poet communicates to an audience through spoken or sung words, not in isolation and through writing. This passage shares with *Christ II* and *The Gifts of Men* the central conceit that poetry is a gift from God, a catalog list-structure, and also specific formulas that describe, for instance, playing the harp: compare *mid hondum con hearpan gretan* to *Christ II, mæg fingrum wel / . . . hearpan stirgan, / gleobeam gretan,* and *Gifts of Men, mid hondum mæg hearpan gretan*. These intertextual links suggest that the three passages form their own sub-type of "The Scop's Repertoire"—one which depicts the poet as inspired by God, not as bearer of tradition.

---

[17] Compare *Widsith* 103-05a: *Ðonne wit Scilling sciran reorde / for uncrum sigedryhtne song ahofan, / hlude bi hearpan* ("Then Scilling and I lifted up with bright voice a song before our lord, singing loudly to the harp").

To better understand what these two variants of "The Scop's Repertoire" can tell us about Anglo-Saxon vernacular poetics, it is necessary to inquire about the theme's likely origin and development. To begin with the bearer-of-tradition passages, the idea that creating poetry essentially consists of *hearing* and *saying* is deeply embedded in Old English poetic formulas. As Ward Parks has pointed out, the ubiquitous "I heard" formulas—for the verbs *hyran* and *gefrignan* alone, he tallies 90 instances in 30 poems—"invoke legendary tradition and a body of 'sayings' orally transmitted" (1987:51).[18] Parks concludes that the ubiquity of such formulas provides an important clue as to how the pre-Conquest English conceived of poetry and poetics (1987:61):

> It suggests that the concept of poetry as something told, remembered and told again belonged to the very root Anglo-Saxon understanding of what narrative acts were. So deeply embedded was this notion that reference to the world of hearing and things heard occurred as the first thought and reflex of the poet whenever he disengaged for a moment from the actual material of his discourse to reflect upon himself as a teller. These phrases may thus provide us with an indicator of an unarticulated yet widely pervasive Anglo-Saxon poetic inherited from oral tradition .

Parks's point could be extended by noting that the same poetic—which connects an iterative process of *hearing* and *saying* with the creation of poetry—obtains not just in Old English verse, but also in other early Germanic alliterative verse. In Old High German poetry, for instance, the *Hildebrandslied* famously begins with *Ik gihôrta dat seggen* ("I have heard it said that . . ."), while the *Wessobrunner Gebet* opens *Dat gafregin ih mit firahim firiuuizzo meista* ("I have heard among men as the greatest marvel that . . ."); the opening of *Muspilli* is lost, but in line 37 the narrator introduces a passage with *Daz hôrtih rachôn dia uueroltrehtuuîson* ("I have heard people of the right faith say that . . .").[19] In other words, three of the four surviving Old High German narrative poems in the inherited alliterative meter prominently employ the same *hearing-saying* conceptual framework that is so prevalent in Old English poetry.

Furthermore, "The Scop's Repertoire" has a precise analogue in the opening stanza of the best-known Middle High German alliterative poem, the *Nibelungenlied* (de Boor 1979):

> Uns ist in alten mæren wunders **vil geseit**
> von helden lobebæren, von grôzer arebeit,
> von fröuden, hôchgezîten, von weinen und von klagen,
> von küener recken strîten muget ir nu wunder **hœren sagen**

[18] Similarly, Frederick Klaeber remarks that the *gefrægn* formulas of *Beowulf* hold special interest because they "unmistakably point to the 'preliterary' stage of poetry, when the poems lived on the lips of singers, and oral transmission was the only possible source of information" (1950:lxvi). Compare Rumble (1964). Nelson (2009) focuses on the rhetorical effects of these formulas.

[19] Old High German texts are cited from Braune and Ebbinghaus (1979). The meaning of *Muspilli*'s *uueroltrehtuuison* is disputed; it is usually glossed "men learned in secular law," but Mohr and Haug (1977:41-42) suggest "people of the right faith."

> In old tales we are told of many marvels; of heroes' noble deeds, of great hardship, of joys and feasts, of weeping and wailing, of daring warriors' battles, you may now hear wonders told.

This stanza opens and closes with references to *oraltiy* in hearing and telling, to *antiquity* in the evocation of the tales of the past and their connection with the story of the present, and to *copiousness* in the specification of the great many *wunder* ("wondrous things") known by the poet: line 1 states that "we have been told" (*geseit*) many marvels in old tales, and line 4 informs the listeners that "you will now hear [*hœren*] wonders told [*sagen*]." These three basic components of "The Scop's Repertoire" also find expression in cognate morphemes: Old English *fela*, Middle High German *vil*; Old English *eald*, Middle High German *alt*; and Old English *gesegene*, *sæge*, *secgan*, Middle High German *geseit*, *sagen*. The Old and Middle High German passages all invoke the bearer-of-tradition model.

An example of "The Scop's Repertoire" in the Old Saxon *Heliand*, like the Old English *Andreas* and *Meters of Boethius*, creatively adapts the theme to its particular needs. The *Heliand*-poet redefines the motif of *copiousness* and invokes *antiquity* by the poet's historical distance from the evangelists whose near-contemporary accounts he is translating centuries later. The poem opens with a statement describing how many wise men wished to praise Christ's deeds, but only four were chosen by God (lines 1-31). It continues (lines 32-37, Behagel 1996:8):

> That scoldun sea fiori thuo fingron scrîƀan,
> settian endi **singan** endi **seggean** forð,
> that sea fan Cristes crafte them mikilon
> gisâhun endi gihôrdun, thes hie selƀo gisprac,
> giuuîsda endi giuuarahta, uundarlîcas **filo**,
> sô manag mid mannon mahtig drohtin…

> Those four were to write with their fingers—to set it down, singing and reciting—what they had seen and heard about Christ's great power, many wondrous things that he himself said, proclaimed, and performed among men, the mighty Lord . . .

This paraphrases the initial section of Tatian's gospel harmony, which at this point follows Luke chapter 1 verses 1-4:[20]

> Quoniam quidem multi conati sunt ordinare narrationem quae in nobis conpletae sunt rerum, sicut tradiderunt nobis qui ab initio ipsi viderant et ministri fuerunt sermonis, visum est et mihi assecuto a principio omnibus diligenter ex ordine tibi scribere, optime Theophile, ut cognoscas eorum verborum de quibus eruditus es veritatem

> Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a narration of the things that have been accomplished among us; according as they have delivered them unto us, who from the

[20] For the sake of convenience, Tatian is cited from Sievers (1872). The translation is from Challoner (1989). The punctuation and capitalization of both passages has been slightly emended for ease of reading

> beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word: it seemed good to me also, having diligently attained to all things from the beginning, to write to thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, that thou mayest know the verity of those words in which thou hast been instructed.

In paraphrasing this passage, the Old Saxon poet adds two of the three elements that define "The Scop's Repertoire," namely *orality* and *copiousness*: the evangelists "sing and say (recite)" (*singan endi seggean*) the "many wondrous things" (*uundarlîcas filo*) that Christ performs. The former phrase also occurs in *Christ II* (662a *singan* and *secgan*), while the latter is paralleled by the *Nibelungenlied*'s opening verse (*wunders vil*). Although the source passage represents itself as Luke's eyewitness testimony, *antiquity* is implied in that for the *Heliand* poet the testimony of the evangelist is now by definition removed into distant past.

"The Scop's Repertoire" occurs in North Germanic poetry as well. The opening of *Oddrúnargrátr* ("The Lament of Oddrún") provides a close parallel to the West Germanic passages cited above (lines 1-2, Neckel 1983:234):

> Heyrða ec **segia** í sǫgom **fornom**,
> hvé mær um kom til Mornalanz
>
> I have heard it said in ancient tales how a maiden came to Mornaland.

Orality is thematized in the first half-line (*heyrða ek segia*, "I have heard it said"), *antiquity* in the second (*í sǫgom fornom*, "in ancient tales"). *Copiousness* is not separately lexicalized in this passage though it is signaled in an indirect and attenuated way through the plurality of *sǫgom fornom*. *Oddrúnargrátr* exemplifies the bearer-of-tradition variant of "The Scop's Repertoire."

Moreover, a passage in *Hyndluljóð* ("The Song of Hyndla"), though not directly instantiating "The Scop's Repertoire," nevertheless constitutes an analogue to the "poetry as gift from god" variant of the theme. The third stanza of *Hyndluljóð* catalogues the various talents given to men by god (in this case, Odin), including poetry (Neckel 1983:288):

> Gefr hann sigr sumom, enn sumom aura,
> mælsco mǫrgom oc manvit firom;
> byri gefr hann brǫgnom, enn brag scáldom,
> gefr hann mansemi mǫrgom recci.
>
> To some he gives victory, to others gold, to many eloquence, and wisdom to men; fair winds he gives to heroes, and likewise verses to poets; he gives bravery to many champions.

Since these verses do not lexicalize any of the three constituent motifs of "The Scop's Repertoire," the passage cannot be regarded as exemplifying the theme. It does, however, articulate the basic idea of the *inspiration*-model of the theme, that making poetry is a divinely given skill, and it features two secondary elements persistently associated with the Old English "poetry as gift from god" variant of "The Scop's Repertoire": the motif of the *gift*, which appears as noun (*giefu*) in *Christ II* and *Maxims I*, an adjective in *The Gifts of Men* (*giffæst*, "gifted

with"), and a verb in *Hyndluljóð* (*gefa*, "to give"); and the form of the *catalogue* headed by the word *sum*. The general similarities in content and form between the Old English and Old Norse "gifts-of-men" passages have not escaped critical notice. Notably, Geoffrey Russom (1978) has argued that these and similar lists draw on Germanic concepts of nobility, while Elizabeth Jackson (1998) has shown that they use identical structural principles of list-making. To these general observations, we can add that *Hyndluljóð* parallels two particular motifs found in the Old English "poetry-as-inspiration" variant of "The Scop's Repertoire."

Given that the "The Scop's Repertoire" is attested in each of the major Germanic verse traditions—Old English, Old and Middle High German, Old Saxon, and Old Norse—it seems reasonable to postulate a Germanic origin for this theme. It is beyond the scope of the present essay to inquire into a possible Indo-European connection, though both the notion that poetry is a divine gift and that poets are bearers of tradition are well-attested in a variety of Indo-European traditions (Watkins 1995, West 2007). The salient parallels in motifs, diction, and rhetoric shared by the Germanic passages are summarized in **Table 1** below. (For the sake of convenience, the two passages from the *Meters of Boethius* appear in a single column. Although *Hyndluljóð* does not exemplify our theme, its parallels with the Old English gifts-of-men passages are included here.)

"The Scop's Repertoire" evinces remarkable longevity and stability as a poetic theme. The evidence surveyed here suggests that the theme has roots in preliterate Germanic poetic tradition, and it persists down to the tenth- or eleventh-century Harleian pen trial (and, on the Continent, to the thirteenth-century *Nibelungenlied*). Even poets such as Cynewulf or the *Andreas* poet, whose actual mode of composition seems to have had little in common with the practices of the singer of tales, continue to depict the poet as an oral performer whose excellence is defined by a copious repertoire of songs, while, simultaneously, also accommodating the theme with learned Christian elements such as modesty *topoi* and the workings of the Holy Spirit. The myth of the oral poet persisted even in literate contexts, just as the cultivation of traditional poetics in Anglo-Saxon England persisted down to the very eve of the Norman Conquest. And just as literate authors performed the role of scop, so they employed the traditional poet's diction and narrative devices in their writings. "The Scop's Repertoire" both instantiates one such convention and also metonymically conveys its very essence through the motifs of *orality*, *copiousness*, and *antiquity*. That is, the theme depicts the creation of poetry through the passing on of traditional tales, and it is itself a bit of poetry (or the conceptual framework for fashioning such) that has been passed on from poet to poet. In addition, the distinct versions of the theme illustrate two different Anglo-Saxon poetics: the *tradition* model, in which poets accumulate a store of inherited songs, and learning these endows them with the ability to create their own; and the *inspiration* model, where the artist's skill comes from God. Finally, "The Scop's Repertoire" clarifies the intertextual relationships between the various passages that employ the theme, particularly *Beowulf* line 869 and the pen trial in MS Harley 208; these are part of a widely-disseminated network of traditional diction that not only includes various Old English texts but also Old and Middle High German, Old Saxon, and Old Norse poems. Far from having nothing to say about the making and performance of Anglo-Saxon verse, traditional themes such as "The Scop's Repertoire" tell us what Anglo-Saxon poets themselves believed were the wellsprings of their craft.

	Poet as Bearer of Tradition							**Poetry as Gift from God**			
Motif	***Beowulf***	***Harley Pen-Trial***	***Andreas***	***Boethius, Proem / Meter 2***	***Nibelung-enlied***	***Heliand***	***Oddrúnar-grátr***	***Christ II***	***Gifts of Men***	***Maxims I***	***[Hyndlu-ljóð]***
Antiquity	*eald*gesegena	ealde	*fyrn*sægen	*eald*spell	alten		fornum				
Copious-ness	eal fela worn	eallfeala	feala weorna	fela	vil	filo		eal fela	fela	worn	
Orality	eald*gesegena*, secgan hyrde	sæge	fyrn*sægen*, secganne	secgean	sagen hœren	seggean gihôrdun	segja heyrða	secgan			
Attention marker		hwæt	hwæt	hwæt							
Poetry as gift								giefe	*gif*fæst	giefe	gefr
Catalog marker								sum	sum		sumum
Playing harp								hearpan gleobeam gretan	hearpan gleobeames gretan	hearpan gretan	

Table 1. Salient parallels in motifs, diction, and rhetoric shared by Germanic passages.

Hanover College and University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

References

Amodio 2005 — Mark C. Amodio. "Re(si)sting the Singer: Towards a Non-Performative Anglo-Saxon Oral Poetics." In *New Directions in Oral Theory: Essays on Ancient and Medieval Literatures*. Ed. by Mark C. Amodio. Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 287. Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance. pp. 179-208.

Arend 1933 — Walter Arend. *Die typischen Scenen bei Homer*. Berlin: Weidmann.

Battles 2000 — Paul Battles. "*Genesis A* and the Anglo-Saxon 'Migration Myth.'" *Anglo-Saxon England*, 29:45-68.

Battles 2011 — _______."'Contending Throng' Scenes and the *Comitatus* Ideal in Old English Poetry, with Special Attention to *The Battle of Maldon* 122a." *Studia Neophilologica*, 83:41-53.

Battles 2014 — ______. "Toward a Theory of Old English Poetic Genres: Epic, Elegy, Wisdom Poetry, and the 'Traditional Opening.'" *Studies in Philology*, 111:1-33.

Battles 2015	______. “Dying for a Drink: ‘Sleeping after the Feast’ Scenes in *Beowulf*, *Andreas*, and the Old English Poetic Tradition.” *Modern Philology*, 112:435-57.
Behagel 1996	Otto Behagel, ed. *Heliand und Genesis*. 10th ed. Rev. by Burkhard Taeger. Altdeutsche Textbibliothek, 4. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer.
Braune and Ebbinghaus 1979	Wilhelm Braune and Ernst A. Ebbinghaus. *Althochdeutsches Lesebuch*. 16th ed. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer.
Challoner 1989	The Holy Bible Douay-Rheims Version: Translated from the Latin Vulgate. Rev. Bishop Richard Challoner. Rockford, IL: Tan Books.
Cherniss 1992	Michael D. Cherniss, “The Traditional Opening Theme in the Poems of Cynewulf.” In *De Gustibus: Essays for Alain Renoir*. Ed. by John Miles Foley. New York: Garland. pp. 40-63.
Colgrave and Mynors 1969	Bertram Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors, ed. and trans. *Bede’s Ecclesiastical History of the English People.* Oxford: Clarendon Press.
Creed 1962	Robert P. Creed. “The Singer Looks at His Sources.” *Comparative Literature*, 14:44-52.
Curtius 1953	Ernst Robert Curtius. *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*. Trans. Willard R. Trask. New York: Harper Torchbooks.
De Boor 1979	Helmut de Boor, ed. *Das Nibelungenlied nach der Ausgabe von Karl Bartsch*. 21st ed. Rev. by Roswitha Wisniewski. Deutsche Klassiker des Mittelalters. Wiesbaden: F. A. Brockhaus.
Digipal s.a.	*DigiPal: Digital Resource and Database of Palaeography, Manuscripts Studies and Diplomatic*. www.digipal.eu/digipal/hands/787/
Doane 1994	A. N. Doane. “The Ethnography of Scribal Writing and Anglo-Saxon Poetry: Scribe as Performer.” *Oral Tradition*, 9:420-39. http://www.journal.oraltradition.org/files/articles/9ii/12_doane.pdf
Edwards 1992	Mark W. Edwards. “Homer and Oral Tradition: The Type-Scene.” *Oral Tradition*, 7:284-330. http://journal.oraltradition.org/files/articles/7ii/6_edwards.pdf
Foley 1983	John Miles Foley. “Literary Art and Oral Tradition in Old English and Serbian Poetry.” *Anglo-Saxon England*, 12:183-214.

Foley 1990 ______. *Traditional Oral Epic: The* Odyssey*,* Beowulf*, and the Serbo-Croatian Return Song.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Foley 1991 ______. *Immanent Art: From Structure to Meaning in Traditional Oral Epic*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Frank 1993 Roberta Frank. "The Search for the Anglo-Saxon Oral Poet." *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester*, 75:11-36.

Fulk et al. 2008 R. D. Fulk, Robert E. Bjork, and John D. Niles, eds. *Klaeber's Beowulf*. Toronto: Toronto University Press.

Gneuss and Lapidge 2014 Helmut Gneuss and Michael Lapidge. *Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts: A Bibliographical Handlist of Manuscripts and Manuscript Fragments Written or Owned in England up to 1100*. Toronto: Toronto University Press.

Hill 2002 John M. Hill. "The Social and Dramatic Functions of Oral Recitation and Composition in *Beowulf*." *Oral Tradition*, 17:310-24. http://journal.oraltradition.org/files/articles/17ii/hill.pdf

Jackson 1998 Elizabeth Jackson. "'Not Simply Lists': An Eddic Perspective on Short-Item Lists in Old English Poems." *Speculum*, 73:338-71.

Jones 2009 Chris Jones. "Where Now the Harp? Listening to the Sounds of Old English Verse, From *Beowulf* to the Twentieth Century." *Oral Tradition*, 24:485-502. http://journal.oraltradition.org/files/articles/24ii/13_24.2.pdf

Ker 1990 Neil R. Ker. *Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Anglo-Saxon*. rev. ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Kintgen 1977 Eugene R. Kintgen. "*Lif*, *Lof*, *Leof*, *Lufu*, and *Geleafa* in Old English Poetry." *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 78:309-16.

Klaeber 1950 Frederick Klaeber, ed. *Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*. 3rd ed. Boston, MA: D. C. Heath and Co.

Krapp and Dobbie 1931-42 George Philip Krapp and Elliott van Kirk Dobbie. *The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records*. 6 vols. New York: Columbia University Press.

Lindsay 1923 W. M. Lindsay. *Palaeographica Latina Part II.* St. Andrews University Publications 16. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Lord 1995 — Albert B. Lord. "Oral Composition and 'Oral Residue' in the Middle Ages." In *Oral Tradition in the Middle Ages*. Ed. by W. F. H. Nicolaisen. Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 112. Binghamton, NY: MRTS. pp. 7-29.

Lord 2000 — ______. Albert B. Lord. *The Singer of Tales*. 2nd ed. Stephen Mitchell and Gregory Nagy, eds. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press

Maring 2011 — Heather Maring. "Bright Voice of Praise: An Old English Poet-Patron Convention." *Studies in Philology*, 108:299-319.

Mohr and Haug 1977 — Wolfgang Mohr and Walter Haug. *Zweimal Muspilli*. Untersuchungen zur deutschen Literaturgeschichte, 18. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer.

Neckel 1983 — Gustav Neckel, ed. *Edda: Die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern*. 5th ed. Rev. by Hans Kuhn. Vol. 1. Heidelberg: Carl Winter.

Nelson 2009 — Marie Nelson. "Prefacing and Praising: Two Functions of 'Hearing' Formulas in the *Beowulf* Story," *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 110:487-95.

Niles 2003 — John D. Niles. "The Myth of the Anglo-Saxon Oral Poet." *Western Folklore*, 62:7-61.

North and Bintley 2016 — Richard North and Michael D. J. Bintley, eds. *Andreas: An Edition*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.

O'Keeffe 1990 — Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe. *Visible Song: Transitional Literacy in Old English Verse*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Opland 1976 — Jeff Opland. "*Beowulf* on the Poet." *Mediaeval Studies*, 38:442-67.

Opland 1980a — ______. *Anglo-Saxon Oral Poetry: A Study of the Traditions.* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Opland 1980b — ______. "From Horseback to Monastic Cell: The Impact on English Literature of the Introduction of Writing." In *Old English Literature in Context*. Ed. by John D. Niles. Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield. pp. 30-43.

Orchard 2009 — Andy Orchard. "The Word Made Flesh: Christianity and Oral Culture in Anglo-Saxon Verse." *Oral Tradition*, 24:293-318. http://journal.oraltradition.org/files/articles/24ii/03_24.2.pdf

Parks 1987 — Ward Parks. "The Traditional Narrator and the 'I Heard' Formulas in Old English Poetry." *Anglo-Saxon England*, 16:45-66.

Parry 1971 — Milman Parry. *The Making of Homeric Verse: The Collected Papers of Milman Parry*. Ed. by Adam Parry. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Poussa 1981 — Patricia Poussa. "The Date of Beowulf Reconsidered: The Tenth Century?" *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 82:276-88.

Renoir 1981 — Alan Renoir. "Oral-Formulaic Context: Implications for the Comparative Criticism of Mediaeval Texts." In *Oral Traditional Literature: A Festschrift for Albert Bates Lord*. Ed. by John Miles Foley. Columbus, OH: Slavica Publishers. pp. 416-39.

Riedinger 1985 — Anita Riedinger. "The Old English Formula in Context." *Speculum*, 60:294-317.

Ritzke-Rutherford 1981 — J. Ritzke-Rutherford. "Formulaic Microstructure: The Cluster." In *The Alliterative Morte Arthure: A Reassessment of the Poem*. Ed. by K. H. Göller. Arthurian Studies, 2. Cambridge and Totowa, NJ: D. S. Brewer. pp 70-82.

Robinson 1971 — Fred. C. Robinson. Rev. of *Continuations and Beginnings: Studies in Old English Literature*. Ed. by E. G. Stanley. *English Studies*, 52:252-55.

Rumble 1964 — T. C. Rumble. "The *Hyran-Gefrignan* Formula in *Beowulf*." *Annuale Mediaevale*, 5:13-20.

Russom 1978 — Geoffrey Russom. "A Germanic Concept of Nobility in *The Gifts of Men* and *Beowulf*." *Speculum*, 53:1-15.

Scragg 2016 — Donald Scragg. "Old English in the Margins." In *Textiles, Text, Intertext: Essays in Honour of Gale R. Owen-Crocker*. Ed. by Maren Clegg Hyer and Jill Frederick. Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell. pp. 171-80.

Sievers 1872 — Eduard Sievers, ed. *Tatian: Lateinisch und altdeutsch mit ausführlichem Glossar*. Bibliothek der ältesten deutschen Literatur-Denkmäler. Paderborn: Verlag von F. Schöningh.

Stokes 2014 — Peter A. Stokes. *English Vernacular Minuscule from Æthelred to Cnut, c. 990–c. 1035*. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer.

Thornbury 2014 — Emily V. Thornbury. *Becoming a Poet in Anglo-Saxon England*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Trilling 2009 — Renée R. Trilling. *The Aesthetics of Nostalgia: Historical Representation in Old English Verse*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Tyler 2006	Elizabeth M. Tyler. *Old English Poetics: The Aesthetics of the Familiar in Anglo-Saxon England*. York: York Medieval Press.
Watkins 1995	Calvert Watkins. *How to Kill a Dragon: Aspects of Indo-European Poetics.* New York: Oxford University Press.
Weber 1983	R. Weber, ed. *Biblia Sacra iuxta Vulgatam versionem*. 3rd ed. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft.
Weiskott 2016	Eric Weiskott. *English Alliterative Verse: Poetic Tradition and Literary History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
West 2007	M. L. West. *Indo-European Poetry and Myth*. New York: Oxford University Press.
Wildhagen 1910	Karl Wildhagen, ed. *Der Cambridger Psalter*. Bibliothek der angelsächsischen Prosa 7. Hamburg: H. Grand.
Wright 2013	Charles D. Wright. "An Old English Formulaic System and Its Contexts in Old English Poetry." *Anglo-Saxon England*, 40:151-74.

This page is intentionally left blank.

Oral Tradition, 32/1 (2018):27-52

Between the Oral and the Literary: The Case of the Naxi Dongba Texts[1]

Duncan Poupard

"...it is not the case that words are one thing and the rite another.
The uttering of the words itself is a ritual."

(Edmund Leach 1966:407)

Shafts of sunlight stream through the crooked rafters, piercing the heavy smoke from the fire. Before you sits a *dongba* ritualist. He reads from the beautifully written manuscript in his hands, singing of the Naxi ancestors and their encounters with spirits—good and ill. He closes his eyes, lost in memory. He has stopped reading, but he keeps on singing. This dongba ritualist, unlike the Tibetan paper singers, is fully literate; and unlike a priest reading a sermon from the Bible, he is versed in the craft of oral poetry. The book in front of him can, unlike the prop of the paper singer, be read, for it is a receptacle of the written word; but unlike the Bible, it can never be read with the same two combinations of words.

Research into oral traditions has long been centered on contrasting what is perceived to be "oral" with the "literary," as if the two stand on opposite sides of some unbridgeable chasm. This began in earnest with the work of Milman Parry,[2] who divided literature precisely into these two forms: "the one part of literature is oral, the other written" (1933:180). Even today, after Derrida's opening up of the oral versus written dichotomy, and in spite of research on living oral traditions in cultures that use writing for other social interactions, the two forms are still perceived as essentially separate. They can co-exist, but can they co-exist within the same text? If so, how? And what if there was a tradition of literature that could be shown to bridge this divide?

It is my argument that not only can the ritual texts of the Naxi[3] people of southwest China be proven to be demonstrably oral in nature, but that they also exist in a realm of potentiality that occupies the uncontested territory between the two extremes of oral and written: they are truly

---

[1] This essay is mainly derived from the second chapter of my Ph.D. dissertation, "Rescued into Extinction? The Case of the Naxi Texts in translation." See Poupard (2017).

[2] Although it was Friedrich August Wolf in his *Prolegomena ad Homerum* (1795) who first argued that Homer was a non-literate bard who could not have composed the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* as we know them today.

[3] One of China's 56 ethnic groups, the Naxi are a 310,000-strong people who live in and around the Lijiang basin in the southwestern Chinese province of Yunnan.

transitionary texts. Oral literature, in terms of Parry's Oral-Formulaic Theory,[4] has traditionally been identified by its repeated phrases or "formulas," and this formulaic nature is key to its composition. In comparison, written texts have fewer repeated phrases, with unique lines and unusual words employed to non-standard effect. Parry's work has come to be regarded by a number of modern scholars as an outmoded phase in Homeric scholarship (and in the field of oral tradition that sprung from it). Some say that oral theory itself is a "myth," because the Homeric hexameter is dependent upon the written alphabet (Bellamy 1989:307), others that we can "put a pen in" Homer's hand (Shive 1987:139). This understanding does not resolve our problem: if "oral epics" are written and not oral, then we are no closer to discovering an in-between stage, texts that are demonstrably both oral *and* written.

The debate as to whether much literature that is perceived of today as "oral" was in fact orally composed is always hampered by the fact that we are reading and analyzing the texts in their written form. In essence, the pen is *always* hypothetically in Homer's hand. As Parry himself said: "If one wishes to think that Homer composed his poems orally, and then sat down and wrote them out, there is little that can be said in disproof, and little that needs to be said" (1930:144). The question we are asked to ponder here is whether or not Homer used the technology of writing to compose his epic poetry, and what effect might this have on our understanding of oral vs written composition. On this point, Merritt Sale has argued, "we may think it improbable, but an oral poet could have learned to write" (1996:375). But why is it improbable in the first place that a ("primitive") oral poet could write? It is our chirographic bias that teaches us so.

Jakobson and Bogatyrev made the famous claim that oral works of folklore exist only "potentially" as "as a skeleton of actual traditions," while a literary work exists "concretely apart from its reciter" (1971:91-92). If this fixity, this concreteness, is the primary marker of literary texts, then the real difference between oral and written might be discovered in the relationship between sound and written word. After all, ever since the birth of Saussurean linguistics the written word has been seen as a secondary sign, a written codification of spoken language that acts as what Ong calls a "commitment of the word to space" (2002:7). The notion that writing systems represent what is said has been challenged by Olson, who makes the case that "writing is not the transcription of speech but rather provides a conceptual model for that speech" (1994:89). But this model only supplies the illusion of completeness, for as much as writing represents, there may be just as much that it does not represent. Perhaps to better understand the relationship between orality and literacy, or between sound and word, we need to go beyond the texts and intertexts of the usual discourse in oral traditions, beyond Homer and the Finnish or South Slavic epics, to a culture at the foothills of the Himalayas.

This essay analyzes the ritual texts of the Naxi people of Lijiang and its environs, the majority of which are written in the logographic dongba script and performed by the Naxi ritual

[4] It was Oral-Formulaic Theory that first compared living oral epic traditions of the former Yugoslavia to Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, indicating that the Homeric poems were once oral poetry.

practitioners, known as dongba.[5] First a note on terminology, for at this juncture the question "How can a *text* be oral?" may justifiably be asked. Here I use the word text to refer to a kind of cultural performance. Oral texts are voiced performances, while written texts are chirographic ones. The historian and philosopher Walter Ong associates the word "text" with the root meaning "to weave," which does not make it incompatible with oral utterances, despite the fact that the term oral literature is for Ong anachronistic and self-contradictory (because it etymologically refers to "letters," *literae*) (2002:13). Foley warns us against the "slippery slope" thinking "if letters, *littera*-ture," saying that the invention of literacy in a culture does not necessarily indicate libraries full of books (*ibid.*:25). The Naxi texts are not normally written word for word, but are rather a complex amalgam of characters, many of which act as metonyms that recall traditional allegories. They can be read, but only by those who have been initiated into the dongba cultural tradition, and generally only as part of a sung oral performance. Chinese scholars have referred to them as texts written according to a "reminding" form of shorthand (*tixing jushi* 提醒句式), (see Niu 1999); while western scholars usually settle for the adjective "mnemonic" to describe them.[6] They can only be read by those who already know the "story," as the texts themselves are predominantly ritualized narratives that contain the epic poetry and folklore of their culture.

Here a link could be established between musical notation and dongba writing: in his 1958 article, Charles Seeger (184) identified the difference between prescriptive and descriptive music writing (prescriptive being a notation intended to be read during a performance, and descriptive being a written record of a particular performance), and dongba texts could be said to embody a kind of "prescriptive notation" intended for a performance.[7] As musical notation tends to be incomplete, leaving out certain aspects of tonal and rhythmic functions, so the dongba texts are incomplete, leaving out certain words and, perhaps, sentences that are supplied by memory. Of prescriptive musical notation, Seeger says (1958:186):

> Yet no one can make it sound as the writer of the notation intended unless in addition to a knowledge of the tradition of writing he also has a knowledge of the oral (or better, aural) tradition associated with it—i.e., a tradition learned by the ear of the student.

This is our direct link to the oral textual traditions of the Naxi.

---

[5] Dongba (the Chinese for the Naxi, *dobbaq* [to˧ mba˧˩], which probably derives from the Tibetan *stonpa*, ("teacher") also serves as the name of their logographic script (dongba script, *dongbawen* 东巴文) and their local culture (dongba culture, *dongba wenhua* 东巴文化).

[6] Reminding, of course, is different from "mnemonic." A mnemonic is a device that aids the memory, a reminder is used in place of it. In Plato's *Phaedrus*, Thamus tells the God of writing, Theuth, the following about his invention: "You have invented an elixir not of memory but of reminding" (North 2005 [1914]:563). Those who cultivated the art of memory in the classical world, such as the author of the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, would have probably looked down on any method of written mnemonics.

[7] More accurately, a prescriptive notation such as a lead sheet supplying only the essential elements of a performance, as might be used in jazz, upon which the jazz performer builds and improvises.

The Orality of the Naxi Texts

To support my claim that the Naxi texts are in fact "transitionary," belonging neither entirely to oral or written tradition, we must understand just how oral, and just how literary, they are. Because of our chirographic bias, orality is always harder to prove; especially when, as in our case, we have at hand a corpus of authentic written compositions. Our first task is to present them as essentially oral in their performative nature, and to do this I will first look for evidence of a kind of specialized oral language within them: the language of epic singing. Parry laid the groundwork for scholars of oral tradition with his identification of the oral formula in Homer, famously defining the formula as "a group of words which is regularly employed under the same metrical conditions to express a given essential idea" (1930:85). His work was continued by Albert Lord who also believed that "the fundamental element in constructing lines is the basic formula pattern" (2003:36). For Parry and Lord, the Homeric hexameters are composed of identifiable formulas, of which the epic poets had a vast vocabulary that they then combined in various ways to create their traditional epics.

The traditional method for indicating whether a text is "oral" or "literary" is that of formula analysis. It is assumed that an oral text will contain a large number of easily identified oral formulas, while the remainder will be to some extent "formulaic," with a "small number of non-formulaic expressions" (Lord 2003:130). Since Parry, formula analysis has been applied to the epic poetry of over a hundred cultures beyond those of ancient Greece, including the *Shijing* (sometimes translated as the "*Book of Odes*") in China.[8] As Foley has said, "virtually every single one of the fifty-five officially recognized national minorities in the People's Republic of China, for example, possesses a thriving oral poetry" (2002:25); indicating that there is a wealth of distinct oral traditions within China itself, of which the Naxi tradition is but one small part. While a full quantitative analysis of formulas in the Naxi ritual texts is beyond the scope of this article;[9] I believe that suggesting their formulaic nature (and roots in oral composition) by the presence of identifiable formulas is eminently possible.

If a formula is employed under strict metrical conditions, then we must first identify the metre of the Naxi ritual texts. The texts are mostly comprised of units of five, seven or nine syllables, and can be sometimes longer. Each line, as scholars such as He Jiren have noted, is comprised of "an odd number of syllables" (2006:4), and this is the primary metrical requirement. While the metre is not as linear as the Homeric hexameters, the dongbas use formulas to ensure that their utterances are predominantly five, seven or nine syllables in length.

What are we looking for in a formula analysis? Common sense dictates that the names of the protagonists, the mythic folk heroes, and the adverbial expressions of time and place, will be the most frequently used. These are the "common ideas of poetry" (Lord 2003:34). The Naxi ritual texts as they are written seem to follow the pattern of oral formulas in that the majority of the words are the names of the "actors," their actions and the time and place of their occurrence.

---

[8] See Wang (1974). More recently, scholars such as Eugene Eoyang have suggested that there is no need to ask whether or not the *shijing* belonged to an epic tradition; its innate orality as "ancient oral Chinese song" is self-evident (Eoyang 1993:204).

[9] A "torturous way" of tabulation and charting of statistics, in the words of C. H. Wang (1974:126).

In terms of the names of epic heroes, Naxi ritual texts often employ simple adverbial epithets. The four syllable name of the Naxi creation hero, ʦʰo˧˩ ze˧ ɭɯ˥ ɣɯ˧ (Naxi pinyin Coqsseileel'ee[10]) is often written ʦʰo˧˩ ze˧ ɭɯ˥ ɣɯ˧ ɣɯ˧[11] with an extra final syllable, ɣɯ˧, to make the name fit into one whole intonation unit of five syllables (a "line" of Naxi poetry). The reduplicated final syllable (ɣɯ˧, meaning "good" in Naxi) in this instance emphasizes the worthy, virtuous nature of the post-flood ancestor; a mini-epithet that turns the name into an oral formula.

Fig. 1. Naxi dongba script for the creation hero, Coqsseileel'ee (Fang 1981:363).

The opening line of the majority of the Naxi ritual texts is perhaps the tradition's most famous and easily identifiable oral formula. It is uttered in a unit of either five syllables, *a˧ la˧ mə˧ ʂər˥ ŋi˧* or its variant, *ə˧ ŋi˧ la˧ ʂər˥ ŋi˧*, or the seven syllable *a˧ la˧ mə˧ ʂər˥ be˧ ʈhu˧ ɖʐɯ˧*. The formula is usually represented in the written text as a tiger's head.

Fig. 2. Naxi dongba script for tiger (Fang 1981:186).

He Jiren explains the whole unit simply as meaning "before," and the tiger as representing the ancient Naxi pronunciation for "and," *la˧*. His word-for-word translation of the five syllable phrase is "yesterday and the day before yesterday" (2006:3). In fact, the single character of the tiger, *la˧,* acts as a textual metonym for the formula; a part (*la˧*) standing for the whole (*a˧ la˧ mə˧ ʂər˥ ŋi˧*). For Naxi scholar Fu Maoji, the tiger represents the seven-syllable Naxi phrase *a˧ la˧ mə˧ ʂər˥ be˧ ʈhu˧ ɖʐɯ˧,* which means "in the very beginning." Fu (2012:20) also believed the tiger's head to have the symbolic meaning of suppressing evil spirits. Joseph Rock explains the seven-syllable phrase as such (1937:7):

> A is merely an exclamation, la-ancient, muan=nothing or void, sher-distinct, ba=do, t'u=that, dzhi=time. A is equivalent to the Tibetan letter ཨ (A) and the meaning is implied that in the beginning, before there was anything, there was A. The sentence must be understood to mean "when there was no one to do anything," or in other words "in the beginning of time.

In Rock's words, "nearly all books commence with this phrase, and the head of the tiger, often colored, precedes all other pictographs" (1937:7). This utterance is clearly an oral formula, used to fit a particular metrical pattern, and can be likened to the oral formula still found in fairy tales today—"once upon a time." Other examples of formulas common ito the Naxi texts are *zɿ˧ ʥə˧˩ la˧ lər˧˩ dy˩˧*, meaning the lush green earth, or just, "the earth", used in place of *dy˩˧*, ground; and *mɯ˧ ʨər˧˩ ʦ'e˧˩ ho˥ ty˧,* meaning the eighteenth level of heaven, where the gods are said to reside, or just "the heavens," used in place of *mɯ˧,* sky. These five syllable phrases are frequently used as units that form enjambment unto themselves in the spoken text.

Perhaps because what I have identified here as formulas are usually depicted with a single or a compound dongba character, the oral utterances could be said to be "bigger words" in

---

[10] Naxi pinyin is a system formulated by Naxi scholar He Jiren alongside a team of Naxi language investigators in 1958. Naxi pinyin records the tonal features of Naxi with the final consonants q and l, unlike the tone diacritics of Hanyu pinyin

[11] See, for example, the *Annotated Collection of Naxi Dongba Manuscripts* (DWYS 1999 vol 80:42).

terms of Foley's definition of "functional vocabulary items within the language of epic singing" (2002:18)— for the dongba, words are not strings of letters separated neatly by white spaces, for there is no unified utterance; they cannot be directly compared to the orthographic unit as we understand it. Hence the tiger's head could be read "*a˧ la˧ mə˧ ʂər˥ ŋi˧*" or "*a˧ la˧ mə˧ ʂər˥ be˧ ʈhɯ˧ ɖʐɯ˨*," and either would mean "once upon a time." However it is read, it operates as a single unit, a "bigger word."[12]

Another recurring feature of oral composition is that it is additive rather than subordinative. To highlight the additive oral style, Ong uses the example of the Genesis creation narrative, which he claims is a text that preserves "recognizable oral patterning." He quotes the Douay version (1610), as sticking particularly close to the additive original in Hebrew: "In the beginning God created heaven and earth. And the earth was void and empty, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the spirit of God moved over the waters." Here the oral patterning is clear: a distinct lack of subordination, clauses simply placed one after the other in a non-periodic additive style, with no traces of the narrative flow that we might expect from modern literature. The beginning of manuscript MEB 481-4 from the Naxi manuscript collection at the Museum of World Cultures in Barcelona, a retelling of the Naxi people's genesis myth, shows perhaps a starker additive orality. The text begins with the opening formula we have already discussed, shared by most ritual texts "*ə˧ ŋi˧ la˧ ʂər˥ ŋi˧,*" "a long time ago," and continues with sixteen parallel units of increasing metrical length (five syllables to nine syllables to eleven syllables), but all sharing the base grammatical structure (noun, negation, verb, adverb of time), telling us that this time was so long ago that the universe as we know it had not yet been formed, and detailing each natural feature in a manner so copious that it would be a struggle for the modern reader of a written text to finish:

o˥ --- ə˧ ni˧ la˧ ʂər˥ ni˧ o---e ni la sherl ni,	Oh…Long, long ago,
mɯ˧ mə˧ t'v̥˧ tɯ˧ dʐɯ˧˩ mee me tv tee rheeq,	When the sky had not appeared,
dy˧˩ mə˧ t'v̥˧ tɯ˧ dʐɯ˧˩ ddiuq me tv tee rheeq,	when the earth had not appeared,
bi˧ mə˧ t'v̥˧ tɯ˧ dʐɯ˧˩ bbi me tv tee rheeq,	when the sun had not appeared,
le˧˩ mə˧ t'v̥˧ tɯ˧ dʐɯ˧˩ leiq me tv tee rheeq,	when the moon had not appeared,
kɯ˧˩ mə˧ t'v̥˧ tɯ˧ dʐɯ˧˩	when the stars had not appeared,

[12] Naxi researcher Yang Jiehong (2015:18) has recently called for the adoption of oral tradition methodology, including the concept of "bigger words," in studies of dongba ritual performances.

geeq me tv tee rheeq,

za˧˩ mə˧ t’v̥˧ tɯ˧ dʐɯ˧˩
ssaq me tv tee rheeq,
when the comets had not appeared,

ʥu˧˩ mə˧ t’v̥˧ tɯ˧ dʐɯ˧˩
jjuq me tv tee rheeq,
when the mountains had not appeared,

lo˧˩ mə˧ t’v̥˧ tɯ˧ dʐɯ˧˩
loq me tv tee rheeq,
when the valleys had not appeared,

ʥu˧˩ mə˧ t’v̥˧ i˧ lo˧˩ mə˧ t’ˠ˧ tɯ˧ dʐɯ˧˩
jjuq me tv yi loq me tv tee rheeq,
when the mountains and valleys had not appeared,

sə˞˧ mə˧ t’v̥˧ tɯ˧ dʐɯ˧˩
ser me tv tee rheeq,
when the trees had not appeared,

lv̥˧ mə˧ t’v̥˧ tɯ˧ dʐɯ˧˩
lv me tv tee rheeq,
when the stones had not appeared,

ʥi˧˩ mə˧ t’v̥˧ i˧ k’æ˧ mə˧ t’v̥˧ tɯ˧ dʐɯ˧˩
jjiq me tv yi kai me tv tee rheeq,
when the waters and ditches had not appeared,

ʥu˧˩ na˥ zo˥ lo˧ la˧ mə˧ t’v̥˧ tɯ˧ dʐɯ˧˩
jjuq nal ssol lo la me tv tee rheeq,
when the sacred mountain had not appeared,

hæ˧˩ i˧ ba˧ da˧˩ ʥə˞ la˧ mə˧ t’v̥˧ gə˧ tɯ˧ dʐɯ˧˩
haiq yi bba ddaq zzerq la me tv gge tee rheeq,
when the sacred tree had not appeared,

mɯ˧ lɯ˥ da˧ ʥi˧˩ hɯ˥ la˧ mə˧ t’v̥˧ sɯ˧ tɯ˧ dʐɯ˧˩
mee leel dda jjiq heel la me tv see tee rheeq,
when the sacred lake had not appeared

ʦe˥ ʦe˧ hæ˧ lv̥˧ me˧ la˧ mə˧ t’v̥˧ sɯ˧ tɯ˧ dʐɯ˧˩
zeil zei haiq lv mei la me tv see tee rheeq.
and when the sacred stone had not appeared.

In the written text, the whole passage quoted above is depicted with just 41 dongba characters (beginning in Fig. 3 with the tiger's head in the second panel from the top left, and ending with the panel before the chicken's head in the bottom right.)

Fig. 3. Naxi creation myth from the sacrifice to the wind ceremony (MEB 481-4 p. 29).

The first line after the opening formula (in fact all the following lines could be said to be formulaic, if not recognizable formulas) is *mɯ˧ mə˧ t'v̥˧ tɯ˧ dʐɯ˧˩* (sky / not / appear / that / time). The following lines follow the same structure, with more syllables added for the more complex nouns. It should also be noted that modal particles are added in places where the syllable count would otherwise end up even, such as *ʥɯ˧˩ na˥ zo˥ lo˧ la˧ mə˧ t'v̥˧ tɯ˧ dʐɯ˧˩*, the modal "*la˧*", here an emphatic, is appended to holy mountain *ʥɯ˧˩ na˥ zo˥ lo˧* to make the line nine syllables instead of eight.

Because the formulas or "bigger words" are not always equal to whole lines, the "lines" are perhaps better understood as enjambing units most recognizable for their rhythmic effect. Each unit builds on the last in a flow of addition. We can see that there is no formal punctuation in the written texts, merely boundaries where larger speech units come to a natural end. In translation and transcription, a wealth of punctuation marks must be added.

Alongside more recognizable formulae, then, we have intonation units, not "sentences" as we know them. The units in the dongba texts are, as we have seen, composed with an odd number of syllables, usually five, seven or nine in length. The intonation unit is linked to consciousness and memory, and can be understood as the verbalization of the amount of information that can be stored in the short-term memory, or what Chafe terms the "focus of consciousness" (Chafe 1994:140). The five to seven syllable units that comprise the majority of Naxi ritual texts are these intonation units. Bakker suggests that these intonation units, grouped together primarily for their metrical value, together with their ideal length, make for "the basic ingredients of epic discourse" (1999:39).

Ong expands the oral poet's reliance on formula to something of a definition of oral culture as a whole. He posits oral formulas as "incessant" in oral cultures, "forming the substance of thought itself," and that without them, "thought in any extended form is impossible" (2002:35). This cements the duality of the oral versus written worldview, the "great divide" as Foley (2002:26) puts it. Nuanced, non-formulaic thought becomes something unattainable for the oral culture. Of course, if words are signs that work on the memory, then all words are to some extent formulas. The distinction would be that oral formulas as we are to understand them in oral literature are more elaborate groupings.

While we can demonstrate that the Naxi texts are oral in nature, adhering to the tenets of oral composition as we understand them, we are still left with the problem of writing. They are still "read" by dongba and are still translated into complete texts in Chinese and other languages. So how oral can these texts really be? Walter Ong, a scholar who was at the spearhead of the oral turn in anthropology, comes out in defense of the divide between orality and literacy; a divide widened by perceptions that "primary oral" cultures are somehow more primitive than literate

cultures. Ong argued that the word "primitive" shares with "illiterate" the sense that something is lacking, highlighting a deficiency in culture (2002:170). In the west, a more nuanced, more positive understanding has now replaced these outmoded views. Nevertheless, the Chinese discourse still paints traditional Naxi culture as "primitive," and the writing of the Naxi is also viewed as more primitive than the Chinese writing system, which is, at face value, more divorced from its pictographic roots.[13] One indicator of the script's primitivity is its status as a form of "picture writing" and an apparent lack of one to one representation of written characters to phonemes in the written texts. If we are to say that Naxi ritual tradition is primarily oral in nature, then the spectre of "primitivity" must be addressed. In fact, the ritual traditions of the Naxi, just like ritual traditions of other cultures around the globe, are a complex unity of parts performed by what Rothenberg would call "technicians of the sacred:"[14] what we might simply conceive of as a poem belonging to an epic tradition that has been put to ritual use is not just a poem and a performer, but in fact a unity of man and world, world and image, image and word, word and music, music and dance, and dance and dancer. This unity of unities can be interrupted or dismantled by analytical appraisals. Where poetry and ritual are concerned, primitive can mean complex.

Ong explains how Lévi-Strauss suggested that the term "primitive" be replaced by "without writing" (2002:170). For Ong, this is still too negative, and he suggests the more neutral "oral." Even with this adoption, I would argue there still exists a chirographic bias in Ong's work (*ibid*.). He goes on to say that "literacy opens possibilities to the word and to human existence unimaginable without writing" and "I have never encountered or heard of an oral culture that does not want to achieve literacy as soon as possible" (2002:171). The dualism between "with writing" and "without writing" here is stark. But we should be aware that "orality" cannot totally define a culture, just as "with writing" cannot completely define our own. Rothenberg (1985:iv) has suggested the need to explore "the universality of writing/drawing as a primal form of language," an exploration that might put an end to the "oral/written" dichotomy, and one that seems especially relevant when dealing with a culture whose script is logographic, and developed from rudimentary pictograms.

Here I align myself with the modern paradigm of research into oral tradition, with Foley, Bakker, and Honko, in calling into question the idea that oral and literate composition are mutually exclusive. Rather than employing a strict oral/written dichotomy, it would be better to understand "oral" as Bakker does, as a continuum, not necessarily incompatible with literacy. Writing, in Bakker's model, can also be understood as a continuum between our modern sense of literate discourse, called composition, and a conceptually oral discourse, which can be called transcription. The distinction is one between the physical act of writing, of transcribing a text, and the written composition of a text, where the physicality is often taken for granted and in the modern world frequently not even necessary.

Of course, we must place the Naxi texts somewhere in this continuum, but where Naxi is

---

[13] In 1959, a group of Chinese researchers described the Naxi logographic script as *yuanshi de xiangxing wenzi* 原始的象形文字, "primitive pictographs" (YMMWLD 1959:36).

[14] The preface to Rothenberg's anthology (first published in 1968, revised and expanded for the 1985 edition), *Technicians of the Sacred*, expounds his view of the complexity of oral literature.

concerned, oral and written intertwine in the texts, they are performed orally and partially written down. Instead of two parallel continua of oral versus literate, transcription versus composition, we might have to understand the model as more of a double helix, as the orality bleeds into the composition and the oral formulas become written formulas. The failure to truly resolve the oral vs written dichotomy is the failure to find a text that exists both "concretely" and "potentially." The problem researchers of orality have encountered thus far is their inability to conceptualize a text that can be written down but does not represent a codification, a concrete, objective record of literary textuality. Many scholars (such as Havelock 1963 and Finnegan 1970) have hinted at the existence of a transitionary text that bridges the "great divide," but none have shown it.

Wang asserted that there are "good reasons for us to assume a "transitional period" in the making of *Shi Ching,*" a period of transmission from an oral formulaic stage to what we are presented with today: "a version coloured with scribal alterations and emendations" (1974:31). He suggests that the poetry labelled as *shi* 诗 signified a lettered composition from an author, whereas the word *ko* 歌 signified the act of singing, with no specific poet as composer (*ibid*.:15). Nevertheless, the transitional period can only be assumed, and not resurrected in its original form. Similarly, in texts he investigated to see if they were "transitional," Lord (2003) found that although written in the style of oral epic, they were still written texts, like Andreaija Kačić Miošić's Razgovor songs, written in rhymed couplets.

Despite these scholars' search for a "transitional category" of a written text that carries what Lauri Honko calls the "anterior speech" (the internalized epic register) of orality, the very nature of writing *as we understand it* still represents "a codification of text" (2000:7). Honko labels tradition-oriented written epics "semiliterary" precisely because they contain "anterior speech"(14).[16] But it is hard to argue that they are still not "literary," in that we can all pick up and read a modern rendition of *Beowulf*, for example. I propose that Naxi ritual texts are "semi-oral," a truly transitional category of text that does not just contain "anterior speech"; they simply cannot be read without knowledge of the oral tradition (in the same way that a lead sheet can only be interpreted by a competent performer). The texts cannot exist in complete form independently of their reciter.

Writing, But Not as We Know It

Writing is, empirically a communicative technology that denotes a system of inscriptions on a material substance. It is, at least superficially, "something permanent and stable, better suited than sound to constitute the unity of language throughout time" (Saussure 1961:25). Similarly, the formulaic patterns of orality are used in oral literature as a means of creating stability in tradition without writing. I would argue however that there is no exclusivity between orality and the mnemonic process of writing something down. If oral culture relies on intonation

---

[15] "In view of the fact that shih诗 instead of ko 歌is mentioned in the four poems containing the author's names (191, 200, 259, 260), these poems are lettered compositions, though they also have formulaic influences" (Wang 1974:30).

[16] See the introduction of Honko (2000) for a discussion on "anterior speech" and semiliterary texts.

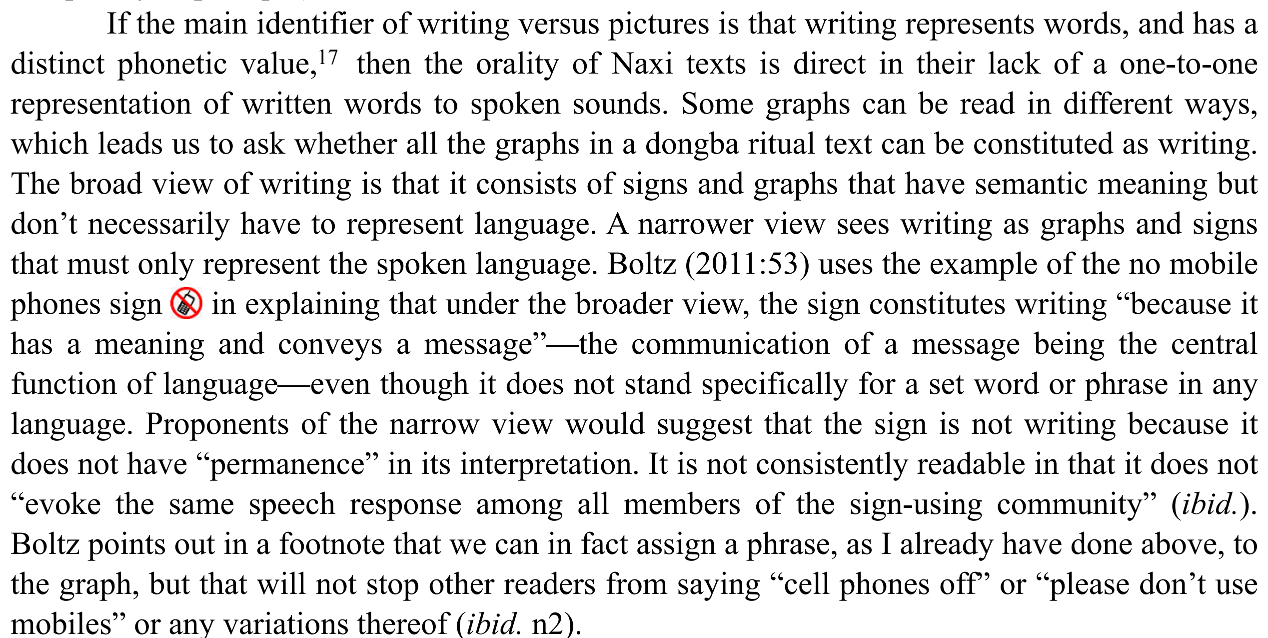
units that serve a mnemonic function, then surely the mnemonic function of writing, of written signs that recall sound sequences in our minds, is not vastly different.

So what does the introduction of writing mean for the oral culture? In the minds of western scholars, it means fixity of form, of recording the oral utterances of the poet. For example, Lord states (2003:128):

> The use of writing in settling down oral texts does not per se have any effect on oral tradition. It is a means of recording. The texts thus obtained are in a sense special; they are not those of normal performance, yet they are purely oral, and at their best they are finer than those of normal performance. They are not "transitional," but are in a class by themselves.

When we normally talk of writing down oral texts, we are referring to the transcription of the performance. These are not transitional texts, but, rather, merely written records of an individual performance (Seeger's "descriptive notation," 1958:192). The fact that the written texts of the Naxi are composed before the performance links them with the universality of the tradition; they do not fix the tradition in any one concrete form. This means that the texts can be re-created in each performance, not simply mechanically reproduced.

One of the major differences in oral versus written tradition is the change from "stability of essential story, which is the goal of oral tradition, to stability of text, of the exact words of the story" Lord (2003:138). For Lord, the fixity of text spells the "death" of the oral tradition (137). This stability of text, the of fixity of tradition, marks the transition from an oral society to a written one. Fixed texts are representative of a written society. To prove that the Naxi ritual texts are still oral, we must show that even in their written form they are not fixed (albeit nor completely impromptu).

If the main identifier of writing versus pictures is that writing represents words, and has a distinct phonetic value,[17] then the orality of Naxi texts is direct in their lack of a one-to-one representation of written words to spoken sounds. Some graphs can be read in different ways, which leads us to ask whether all the graphs in a dongba ritual text can be constituted as writing. The broad view of writing is that it consists of signs and graphs that have semantic meaning but don't necessarily have to represent language. A narrower view sees writing as graphs and signs that must only represent the spoken language. Boltz (2011:53) uses the example of the no mobile phones sign  in explaining that under the broader view, the sign constitutes writing "because it has a meaning and conveys a message"—the communication of a message being the central function of language—even though it does not stand specifically for a set word or phrase in any language. Proponents of the narrow view would suggest that the sign is not writing because it does not have "permanence" in its interpretation. It is not consistently readable in that it does not "evoke the same speech response among all members of the sign-using community" (*ibid.*). Boltz points out in a footnote that we can in fact assign a phrase, as I already have done above, to the graph, but that will not stop other readers from saying "cell phones off" or "please don't use mobiles" or any variations thereof (*ibid.* n2).

Zeng Xiaopeng (2013), in his discussion of the dongba writing in Eya in western

[17] "[Phoneticization] is the crucial step that distinguishes writing from non-writing" (Boltz 2000:6).

Sichuan, notes how Li Lin-Ts'an (1953:xiv) observed in certain dongba texts the usage of the character for a hand bell (*za laq* [tsæ˧ læ˧˩]) or a conch shell (*seei* [fv̥˥ ze˧]), which represents the fact that at that point in the recitation the dongba should ring the bell or blow the conch. In this case, Li says that the two characters are not writing, but symbols, because they are not "phonetically marked" (*ibid.*). Zeng takes the broader view of writing, saying (2013:93):

> Deciding whether or not [these characters] are writing, should not be based on whether or not they are read out; like how a secretary writes a speech for their superior, and includes the phrase "pause for applause." This serves the same function as the hand bell or the conch in the dongba text. You can't say that because the characters are not read out means they aren't writing. In fact, many officials will read out these sections in their speeches, leading to an amusing moment for the audience.

The situation is not analogous to "pause for applause,"[18] as there is only one accepted reading for these three words. The dongba character could be read simply as hand bell, or in its actual meaning "here the cymbal must be rung," or may even be interpreted in a specific context as "ring the cymbal three times," depending on the text in question.

A sign becomes writing at the moment when "it changes from being non-phonetic to phonetic," and the change has to be "permanent" and "conventional," in the words of Elizabeth Hill Boone (2004:313). If, leaving the possible definitions of "conventional" aside, we take this assertion as true, the above graphs are not writing—their phonetic values are neither permanent nor conventional. Boltz (2011:54), for his part, calls the visible marks that serve as the tangible signs of writing—both broad and narrow—"graphs," and abbreviates this as "G." Boltz attempts to circumvent the distinction between broad and narrow, both interpretations that he sees as valid and useful, but not useful enough to debate ad nauseam each time we want to talk about writing. To do this, he goes on to distinguish between glottographic and non-glottographic writing (*ibid.*). Graphs that represent spoken language are glottographic, and graphs that represent the broader sense of writing are non-glottographic. All these graphs have a semantic value {+S}, but they may or may not have a phonetic value {+P} or {-P} (Boltz 2011:55).

{S} and {P} are two independent binary variables that can describe a graph, G. This provides Boltz with the four-way distinction (2011:56):

1. G: {-P, -S}, non-writing
2. G: {-P, +S}, non-glottographic writing
3. G: {+P, +S}, glottographic writing type I (morphemic or logographic)
4. G: {+P, -S} glottographic writing type II (syllabic or alphabetic)

Obviously, English as an alphabetic writing system belongs to the fourth type, while Chinese belongs to the third. The dongba script has been previously conceived of as the second type (as a form of picture writing), but in fact it has been shown to be more conclusively logographic. What

[18] The original Chinese here reads "此处有故障，稍停," literally, "[at] this point there is applause, short pause."

is interesting about the dongba script is that it can frequently be seen to cross these boundaries. The hand bell mentioned earlier can be simply a drawing of a hand bell and not represent any kind of writing (type 1), or it could be non-glottographic in that it serves to mean "ring the hand bell three times" or any number of variations (type 2), or it could be glottographic in that it is read as "*tsæ˧ læ˧˩*" and means hand bell in spoken Naxi (type 3). Fang's dictionary provides an entry to support this, giving us an exact pronunciation and a definition: "hand bell, made from copper" (1981:348).

Alongside the existence of graphs that have no fixed phonetic value are the missing words, or words that are read out and not written down. The text cannot function as desired without these gaps being filled in. The "empty" grammatical[19] words are often missing. One of the early Chinese scholars to study the Naxi, Li Lin-Ts'an , called the missing words "gaps in the texts," making the semantic process of reading them word by word "incomplete" (1953:xiv). Only a dongba practitioner can "fill in the gaps" via oral recitation, getting to the full meaning of the texts. The gaps mean that a dongba might not be able to read a text from a tradition outside of his own experience. Let us take the two sentences from Rock's translation of *The Romance of K'a-mä-gyu-mi-gkyi*: "To put your trousseau into the bridal trunk, I will not come and bring your dowry." Explaining how these two sentences are represented in the written text by just two Naxi characters, Rock says: "The first symbol represents a woman carrying the *ts'an* or dowry, the phonetic *2ts'an* is in the container on her back; the negation *2muan* is to the right above. The first two sentences are represented by these two symbols only, the remainder must be supplied by the reader (who must know, of course, the text or the story)" (1939:37).

Often, one character or group of written characters in a Naxi ritual text can be used to express several ideas at once, a whole part of a story, or even a story in itself. The breadth of meaning in each character gives rise to a breadth in interpretation. Command of this range of meaning is what sets the learned dongba apart from the poorly trained dongba, and this gives the skilled dongba room to utilize his literary and artistic creativity as an oral composer. If we are to claim that the ritual texts are in fact primarily oral, then we would expect that they are not "fixed." That is, there should be no accepted version of the text, and each "performance" of the text will be in some way unique. Anthropologist and Naxi studies scholar Anthony Jackson tells us that "there is no such thing as a standard rite, as each dto-mba [dongba] had his own version —hence the proliferation of rites and texts and the seeming enormity of some rituals" (1979:26). Mu and Yang claim (2003:3):

> At the ritual altar, by the fireplace, the same text, the same story, can become vibrant and moving when it emerges from the lips of a skilled dongba, captivating the hearts of the audience, turning one volume into two. A less skilled dongba can only read what is in front of him, adding no flourishes or touches of his own. Turning two volumes into just one.

This textual variation is possible because the ritual text merely gives the dongba an outline, the

---

[19] One of the earliest western commentaries on a Naxi text asserts that the verbs are not present —"ideographic characters . . . merely convey notions of realistic objects without being capable of expressing the verb" (Laufer 1916:277); in fact, the main verbs and nouns are almost always represented in the text. Articles, adverbs and other particles are generally missing.

recitation in fact comes from memory, hence the texts themselves have been referred to as mnemonic: "little pictures (like the paintings used in Tibetan ritual) were employed to denote the important items and to jog the memory" (Jackson 1979:72). The characters are not pictures per se, as they have phonetic value, but they do serve to jog the memory.

Mu and Yang (2003) give us a startling example of the non-linear relationship between oral and written. They describe a commonly-occurring episode in Naxi myth, where the Naxi creation hero Coqsseileel'ee uses his bow to shoot a magpie for the three flax seeds it holds in its mouth. This episode forms part of the Naxi creation story. Here is the story as Mu and Yang tell it (3):

> On the next day, the magpie had to rest, and rested on the fence. Coqsseileel'ee picked up his bow and arrow and took aim, but couldn't aim straight. Ceilheeqbbubbeq, sitting at the loom, took out the shuttle and then touched Coqsseileel'ee's arm, he fired his arrow and hit the magpie. From the magpie's throat came three flax seeds.

Fig. 4. Story episode: "Coqsseileel'ee shoots the magpie" (Mu and Yang 2003:3).

The original passage in dongba script contains twenty-one characters, but when read in Naxi, Mu and Yang claim it can become 116 phonemes. In their Chinese translation it is some 85 characters (in the above I have translated it into 66 English words). But Mu Lichun goes on to inform us that "If [the extract] was read by a highly-skilled dongba, it could be even longer and contain even more sentences" (2003:4).

It might be wise to try and test the hypothesis. This episode can be found in many of the Naxi ritual texts used in a number of different ceremonies. If we study the different versions of this episode that have been published (mostly from the 100 volume corpus of Naxi texts, entitled *An Annotated Collection of Naxi Dongba Manuscripts* (纳西东巴古籍译注全集),[20] hereafter referred to as the "*Collection*"), we can find evidence of great disparity in the number of characters written down and the number of words read out, and no discernable correlation between the two. This comparison is made possible because the texts are usually reproduced alongside a transcribed "performance" with each phoneme carefully noted down. The presence of Chinese translations introduces a third number, although the translations tend to be based upon the Naxi word-for-word notation. Nevertheless, the fact that the translation is itself akin to a written performance can be seen in the varying amount of information carried over.

[20] The work was completed over two decades at the end of the twentieth century, during which Chinese scholars at the Institute of Dongba Cultural Studies in Lijiang translated over 1,000 ceremonial texts.

Table 1: Comparison of retellings of the episode “Coqsseileel’ee shoots the magpie”

Text	Source Characters (dongba script)	Read Syllables (Naxi)	Translation character count (Chinese)
Chuangshiji (1950) (unpublished manuscript) Zhou Rucheng (trans.)	12	n/a	51
Naxi Dongba Guji Yizhu (He L. and He Y., 1986:215-21) He Yuncai (reader) He Fayuan (trans.)	14	82	94
Avoiding disasters brought about by disagreement (DWYS, vol. 35:372-74) He Yunzhang (reader) He Pinzheng (trans.)	10	68	106
Cleansing ritual (DWYS, vol. 39:192-95) He Jigui (reader) Li Ying (trans.)	12	64	72
Closing the doorway to the realm of the dead, (DWYS, vol. 53:133-36 He Kaixiang (reader) Li Lifen (trans.)	9	72	99
Delivering the souls of the dead (DWYS, vol 56:180-82) He Shicheng (reader) He Fayuan (trans.)	12	50	108
Sacrifice to the wind, (DWYS, vol. 80:42-45) He Jigui (reader) He Baolin (trans.)	9	74	101

Dongba Gushiji (1994:2), Mu Lichun (trans.)	21	116*	85

*suggested length of oral performance, not recorded within text.

A comparison of the number of written characters with the number of read syllables will help show the non-fixed nature of these texts, and thus their inherent performability. For example, one of the shortest extracts in terms of number of written characters (nine), the episode in the *Sacrifice to the wind* ceremony (vol. 80) has one of the lengthier Naxi notations (74 syllables). When compared to the very similar passage found in the *Closing the doorway to the realm of the dead* ceremony (vol. 53), we can see the exact same number of source characters, but 72 syllables in the transcription. The extra two syllables in the *Sacrifice to the wind* version are a repetition of "seeds" in the final sentence:

lər˥ tɕ'y˧ sɪ˥ ly˧ t'ɣ˥ le˧ ʦ'ɪ˧˩
lerl qiu sil liu tvl lei ciq
[and he] plucked three seeds [from it]

More tellingly, the same dongba, He Jigui, is credited as reading two different versions of the same story episode. For the lengthier written text (12 characters) he reads ten fewer syllables. The story that these written texts show is essentially the same, but he recalls a different version, with more detail, when asked to read the same passage from a different ritual text (DWYS 1999:lxxx, 42).[21] While the structure of the passage remains entirely formulaic across all versions, there are slight variations in terms of the amount of extra information expressed. Interestingly then, Mu and Yang's chosen extract (they do not provide a source for the passage) contains by far the most source characters, and their proposed 116 syllable recitation (they do not offer a transcription) would also be the longest of all the equivalent extracts. Their suggestion that a skilled dongba may lengthen even this is, while plausible, unlikely—especially given their translation, which contains no more or no fewer words than the majority of the other translations.

The shortest oral performance here is the 50 syllable transcription of a twelve-character source passage, and this is notable for several reasons. Mu and Yang assert that an unskilled dongba turns "two volumes into one" (2003:3), and indeed this particular performance is not only brief in that it reflects merely what is written in the dongba script and nothing more; it also contains a number of inaccuracies. The passage opens in recital with the phrase "*mɯ˧ sɪ˥ ə˥ mɯ˧ ŋə˥*," which translates to "in the morning, at first light," but the dongba script here clearly tells us that it is in fact the second day, "*so˧˩ ŋi˧ la˧ mɯ˧ sɪ˥*" ("on the morning of the next day"), as can be found in the other versions. There is some variation across the versions here as to which five syllable oral formula for "tomorrow morning" is used, but "second" is unequivocal given that the dongba characters "two" (11) and "day [sun]" (⊕) start the passage (see below). The translator renders this phrase as "on the morning of the next day," seemingly glossing over the discrepancy

[21] This is presumably because oral poets do not repeat performances "word-for-word" as we would understand it. "Oral textualization is unattainable after its performance and there is no guarantee that a later appearance will manifest itself in the same form" (Honko 2000:14).

introduced by either the dongba or the transcriber.

Fig. 5. Coqsseileel'ee shoots the magpie, *Delivering the souls of the dead* (DWYS 56:180).

We can see an additional discrepancy in this extract. The "three seeds" of the story are referred to in the transcription as "*ŋi*˧ *ly*˧" (DWYS 56:181), "two seeds," despite the three seeds being clearly represented at the end of the written extract (see Fig. 5 above). If this is not simply an error in transcription—which though possible, would seem unlikely—what we are presented with is strong evidence for the primacy of the role of oral composition. The shorter recited texts, or those with such inaccuracies, are indicative of what Seeger calls an "unskilled" performer who cannot fill in the "gaps" between the notes: "The almost infinite variety of this interplay between and within beats defines more closely the fault so often found with the unskilled performer: that he rendered the notes correctly but 'left out what should have come between them'" (1958:192).

The dongba reciting the extract in Fig. 5 is not necessarily "reading" the ritual text in a literal, word-for-word sense. Rather than reading out the "second day" or the "three seeds" that anybody can see, literate in dongba or not, he is guided instead by what he knows from his memory. The written passage merely acts as a frame of reference for him to recall the story as he knows it, not too far removed from how Tibetan paper singers might use a white sheet of paper or a page of newsprint during an oral performance, upon which to visualize the story of King Gesar as it is performed. For the Tibetan paper singer, the "text" is used as a talisman; it does not literally encode the story being sung.[22]

The use of the written text as a reference tool would appear to lend credence to Mu and Yang's assertion that a dongba of greater or lesser proficiency can lengthen or shorten the text as it is performed, "turning one volume into two" or vice versa (2003:3). Even further, we have clear evidence that the texts are not fixed, no two written versions are exactly the same (despite the variance in number of characters written down, they are also all hand-written), and no two transcriptions (or "voiced performances") are the same, either. From the comparison we can see how Naxi folklore tales might be composed in performance. The fact that we can see individual episodes such as this recurring with slight variations within different ritual texts used in a variety of different ceremonies and adapted to fit the different ritual purposes of each, suggests that the entire episode is formulaic; a building block of the larger text. The rituals and ceremonies as a whole are composed of these formulaic building blocks—Jakobson and Bogatyrev's "skeleton of

[22] For more on Tibetan paper singers, see Foley (2002:2-3).

actual traditions" (1971:91).[23] Story episodes, common to many ritual traditions, are pieced together. Many story episodes are like individual elements that are lined up next to each other, and come together with other elements to make new stories. These elements have slight differences depending on the stories in which they appear, and can be made more complex or simplified.

In the *Sacrifice to heaven* ceremony, the Naxi forebears give birth to three sons, the progenitors of the three different races (Tibetan, Han Chinese and Naxi), because they conducted a sacrifice to heaven. In the *Sacrifice to the god of victory* ritual, the same story is recited, only the object of the sacrificial ritual is changed. The same story appears in different rituals, but with alterations depending upon the different purposes of the ritual in question. The largely mnemonic building blocks of the Naxi ritual texts are threefold: We have traditional Parry formulae, expanded into intonation units[24], and then formulaic episodes.

We are now breaking down some of the assumptions about writing versus orality. Lord believes that when writing enters the equation, the formulaic method of composition is compromised (Lord 2003:130):

> The oral singer thinks in terms of these formulas and formula patterns. He *must* do so in order to compose. But when writing enters, the "must" is eliminated. The formulas and formula patterns can be broken, and a metrical line constructed that is regular and yet free of the old patterns .

I suggest that this thinking is a byproduct of conceptualizing writing along the lines of Saussure, who narrowed his definition of writing to encompass only two forms (2013:30):

> 1)The ideographic system, in which a word is represented by some uniquely distinctive sign which has nothing to do with the sounds involved. This sign represents the entire word as a whole, and hence represents indirectly the idea expressed. The classic example of this system is Chinese.
> 2)The system often called 'phonetic', intended to represent the sequence of sounds as they occur in the word. Some phonetic writing systems are syllabic. Others are alphabetic, that is to say based upon the irreducible elements of speech.

Saussure does not account for a system of writing where some words are not represented at all. Even Boltz's divide along the lines of glottographic and non-glottographic does not fit the Naxi dongba script, which traditionally operates more contextually, outside of the boundaries of glottographic and non-glottographic representation. The tiger's head, as we have seen, can be read in a multitude of ways— literally, as a tiger, *la*, as a metonym for the phrase "in the beginning," *a la*, or as a metonym for the whole sentence "in the long and distant past," which

---

[23] Lauri Honko would call these "multiforms," essentially repeated expressions, such as "Episodic elements . . . which vary in length, degree of embellishment and emphasis" (2000:19), while Lord called the longer units "themes."

[24] An example from our own story episode would be the two such units that appear in (almost) every single version: *k'æ˥ bɯ˧ sɪ˥ lər˥ lər˥, mə˧ bɯ˧ sɪ˥ lər˥ lər˥* "[Tsozee] aims three times and doesn't fire, [and] cannot decide whether to fire or not to fire"; two rhythmic units that are very formulaic in structure but not recurrent enough to count as formulas.

itself has different readings. All of these are, in fact, conventional phonetic renderings for the same character in Naxi, and context will let the reader understand which convention is being recalled.

I would argue that the Naxi texts themselves straddle the with/without writing divide. They are at once with and without. In Derridean terms, the "gaps" we have looked at previously do not mark a lost presence, but rather the potential impossibility of presence altogether; a breakdown in the system of signification that words represent. This is the "potentiality" of the texts, the potential of making it longer or shorter, that is lost with direct representation of each syllable. The only way to reclaim these "gaps" in our normal conception of literality is to introduce them through poetry, or in prose, under erasure. In the dongba texts the erasure is taken for granted, as whole sentences might exist between the (metaphorical) lines. The writing is present, but it is not at the mercy of the phonetics like our modern texts. Here is writing, freed from the tyranny of the spoken word.

And now to deal with the myth of fixity. Lord also believed that the oral poet "has no idea of a fixed model text to serve as his guide. He has models enough, but they are not fixed and he has no idea of memorizing them in a fixed form" (2003:22). -Again there is room for nuance here, for a continuum of oral composition and written composition. Oral scholar Peter Friedlander has revealed the lack of fixity in Indian traditions, where the panca-vani and the sarvangi manuscripts "were never precisely fixed…every manuscript had slightly different contents" (2015:193). This suggests, in his words, a "continuous interplay between oral and written traditions," wherein songs enter the written tradition from oral beginnings, with written versions showing how the songs were re-arranged, whole stanzas disappearing and verses changing in order (*ibid*.). But even here the oral and written are conceived of as two separate traditions. With the Naxi ritual texts we cannot separate the two. Of course, fixity even in modern literature as we usually understand it is something of a chimera, with editors, publishers, authors and translators revising texts long after their first publication.

In further conceptualizing written versions of oral performances, Lord hypothesized a kind of shorthand notation: "The resulting text might not have the exact niceties of odd forms or phonetic peculiarities that a more accurate method would provide, but a word-for-word text could be gotten in this way" (2003:125). The dongba do in fact employ a form of shorthand, but it is not *a posteriori* transcription—their texts are *composed* first in shorthand notation *prior* to their being performed.[25] We have already seen how a word-for-word text is not possible from this shorthand. We can get close, but there will always be variations, as one would expect from oral composition. The Naxi texts are not fixed, but the basic, traditional narrative model is, and this serves as a guide to the oral performer.

The idea of non-fixed manuscript traditions is not exclusive to the dongba, but theirs is the tradition where the exact same written manuscript can be "read" or "recalled" differently

[25] The dongba's "shorthand," or "reminding" writing, has more in common with the Greek mnemonic writing of shorthand symbols, a kind of "inner stenography" that probably formed the basis of the Tironian notes, than modern shorthand transcription. The Greek method of "inner writing" involved the memorization of every word. Out of this the Medieval tradition of *Ars Notoria* may have been born, a magical art that involved the practitioner gazing "at figures or diagrams curiously marked and called 'notae' whilst reciting magical prayers" (Yates 1966:43).

each time, as if it contained different words, because the interplay between oral and written skews more to the oral nature of the ritual. Nevertheless, the characters on the page do indicate a certain fixity of structure. Unlike the written texts primarily studied in oral tradition—where the orality is implicit in its being residual, and the texts are passed down in (more-or-less) fixed written forms—with the Naxi texts there is an explicit interplay between oral and written tradition within a single manuscript.

As Foley observes, all of the misconceptions we have identified are engendered by an insistence on "a Great Divide model, from setting oral versus written" (2002:36). Close reading of the Naxi ritual texts, especially "imperfectly" copied texts, reveals the final untenability of the binary "written versus oral" position. If we return to ritual manuscript MEB 481-4, on page 23 we see the author employ word-for-word dongba writing (mostly phonetic loan characters) to complain that a hand ailment is impeding his writing. He switches from oral composition to fully written composition, then just as swiftly back to oral composition.

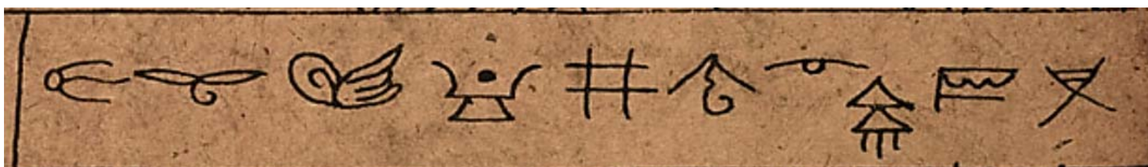


Fig. 6. A dongba writes about his ailing hand (MEB 481-4, p. 23).

The ten characters are read in Naxi pinyin thusly:

> ə˧ iə˧, la˧˩ k'ua˧˩ gu˧˩ ʂɯ˧ mə˧ t'a˥ hɯ˧ me˧
> e ye, laq kuaq gguq shee me tal hee mei!
> Oh / Ah / hand / bad / pain / death / not / OK / particle / particle
> Oh, how my poor hand ails me!

This line presents one character per syllable, in a non-metrical aside that cannot be read in any other way than the above, a clear-cut case of written composition as we normally understand it today. Here there are none of Li's "gaps," there is an even number of syllables, and no formulas to speak of. This is not a transcription of a performance, not a line meant for recital, but instead a written comment meant for the literate reader.

The text in the passage directly preceding this reads in oral mode, with only three compound characters representing the utterance:

Fig. 7. The dongba wishes good fortune on the household (MEB 481-4, p. 24).

i˧ da˧˩ tʂ’ɯ˧ dɯ˧ dʑi˧˩, zɯ˧ ʂə˞˧˩ ha˥ i˧, k’o yu˧˩ he˧ hɯ˧˩, dʑi˧ i˧ də˞˧ ʂə˞˧
“yi ddaq chee ddee jjiq, ssee sherq hal yi, ko yuq hei heeq, jji yi dder sherl”

[May] the master’s household (first character), live long in prosperity, hear good sounds (second character), [and may their] waters be full (third character).

A well-trained dongba, according to dongba He Guowei who participated in the translation of this manuscript, would add the phrase *gv̥˧ be˧ ho˥* “*ggv bbei hol*,” meaning “good wishes” (at the end), and perhaps *le˧ nɯ˧˩ le˧ o˧˩, le˧ hɯ˧˩ le˧ tʂæ˧˩* “*lei neeq lei oq, lei heeq lei zhaiq*” (have happiness and plenty) at the beginning, none of which are present in the written text.

The dongba writes his word-for-word composition one character after the other, left to right, which differs from the somewhat more aesthetically balanced graphic composition of the passages in oral mode, where characters are often placed atop one another to fill in space. From the same page:

Fig. 8. An example of vertical composition. MEB 481-4 (24).

The example in Fig. 6 is of note for two reasons: while we know there are texts written in the dongba script that show word-for-word phonetic representation, with one character per syllable, these are mostly either secular texts such as land contracts, or ritual texts written either in transcriptions of Tibetan chants, or in the syllabic Geba[26] script. This text, dated to the late Qing dynasty, thus marks an early usage of complete phonetic representation within a dongba ritual text. Secondly, this is one of the only examples (that I have come across) in which the author breaks from epic, oral composition associated with the ritual texts to fully written, modern composition, like a jazz musician switching to prescriptive notation.

Such a passage may be seen as a flaw in the text, in that it interrupts the reciter’s flow (and the narrative of the story). The texts chosen for translation tend to be as “complete” as possible, and a text such as this would not be found in any official Chinese translated volume, such as the *Collection*. Most importantly, this text constitute solid proof that there is middle ground between the oral and written, that even if we put the pen in Homer’s hand, he can still be an oral poet. The dongba have bamboo pens, they have their own process of paper production, and they can write their own script with these tools, and yet, as has been shown, they are still oral poets.

Lord asked a question that I believe is worth recalling in full (2003:129):

---

[26] A syllabic script unique to the Naxi language that borrows glyphs from the Yi script, as well as Chinese and dongba characters. Geba manuscripts are always phonetically “complete.”

> It is worthy of emphasis that the question we have asked ourselves is whether there can be such a thing as a transitional text; not a period of transition between oral and written style, or between illiteracy and literacy, but a text, product of the creative brain of a single individual. When this emphasis is clear, it becomes possible to turn the question into whether there can be a single individual who in composing an epic would think now in one way and now in another, or, perhaps, in a manner that is a combination of two techniques.

Not only can we show the existence of a "transitional" text, between oral and written style, but we can see that the dongba ritualists are capable of combining both techniques. They can think in one way and in the other, even as they compose their texts, further blurring the line between written and oral, and perhaps suggesting that writing as we know it did not emerge "fully formed" in the head of the first literate author.

This is a vivid example of the intersection between writing as a metonymic, mnemonic aid, and writing as a substitute for memory. The development of the dongba script can be said to have progressed from oral mnemonic texts to full written composition,[27] but the ritual texts preserve perhaps a transitional state. The missing link is the oral composer that can be shown to *write* both kinds of text: written and oral compositions, and that is what I believe the dongba are: oral composers writing down a literary composition that is still oral in nature, and able to segue into both forms at will. In the dongba ritual texts, the oral formulas are still present in both the text as it is written, *and* the text as it is performed. The dongba can draw from the wellspring of both oral and written tradition in the composition of their texts, and in all the guises of their performance. Bakker has suggested that "writing in the Greek archaic period must have been so different from our notion of writing, so "oral", in fact, that the simple dichotomy between orality and literacy breaks down" (1999:36). Could Naxi dongba texts offer us a glimpse of what this early writing may have been, a form akin to the ancient mnemonic shorthand, and how it might have preserved its orality in the face of the written word? It is a final irony that the Han Chinese translations that have supplanted the Naxi originals, creating standard "fixed texts," may be responsible for preserving the semi-oral nature of the original Naxi literature as it exists in performance even today.

Chinese University of Hong Kong

References

Bakker 1999 — Egbert Bakker. "How Oral is Oral Composition." In *Signs of Orality: The Oral Tradition and Its Influence in the Greek and Roman World*. Ed. by Anne MacKay. Leiden: Brill. pp. 29-47.

Bellamy 1989 — Rufus Bellamy. "Bellerophon's Tablet." *Classical Journal*, 84.4:289-307.

[27] See for example He (2007), which contains a variety of examples of modernized dongba texts, with one written character per read syllable.

Boltz 2000 William G. Boltz. "The Invention of Writing in China." *Oriens Extremus*, 42:1-17.

Boltz 2011 ______. "Literacy and the Emergence of Writing in China." In *Writing and Literacy in Early China: Studies from the Columbia Early China Seminar*. Ed. by Li Feng and David Branner. Seattle: University of Washington Press. pp. 51-84.

Boone 2004 Elizabeth Hill Boone. "Beyond Writing." In *The First Writing*. Ed. by Stephen D. Houston. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. pp. 313-48.

Chafe 1994 Wallace Chafe. *Discourse, Consciousness and Time: The Flow and Displacement of Conscious Experience in Speaking and Writing*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Derrida 1976 Jacques Derrida. *Of Gramatology*. Trans. by Gayatry Spivak. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

DWYS 1999 Dongba Wenhua Yanjiusuo. *Annotated Collection of Naxi Dongba Manuscripts*. Vols. 35, 39, 53, 56, 80. Kunming: Yunnan renmin chubanshe.

Eoyang 1993 Eoyang, Eugene Chen. *The Transparent Eye: Reflections on Translation, Chinese Literature, and Comparative Poetics*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

Fang 1981 Fang Guoyu and He Zhiwu. *Naxi Xiangxing Wenzipu*. Kunming: Yunnan renmin chubanshe.

Finnegan 1970 Ruth Finnegan. *Oral Literature in Africa*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Foley 2002 John Miles Foley. *How to Read an Oral Poem*. Champaign: University of Illinois Press.

Fowler 2005 [1914] Harold North Fowler, trans. *Plato's* Phaedrus. Cambridge, MA.: Loeb Classical Library.

Friedlander 2015 Peter Friedlander. "Kabīr: Oral to Manuscript Transitions." *Oral Tradition*, 29.2:187-202. http://journal.oraltradition.org/files/articles/29ii/04_29.2.pdf

Fu 2012 Fu Maoji. *Naxizu tuhua wenzi "Baibianfu qujingji" yanjiu*. Beijing: The Commercial Press.

Havelock 1963	Eric Havelock. *Preface to Plato*. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
He J. 2006	He Jiren. *Minzu Yuwen Lunwenji*. Kunming: Yunnan minzu chubanshe.
He L. and He Y.1986	He Limin and He Yunzhang. *Naxi Dongba Guji Yizhu*. Kunming: Yunnan minzu chubanshe.
He L. 2007	He Limin. *Tongsu Dongbawen*. Guangzhou: Guangdong keji chubanshe.
Honko 2000	Lauri Honko. "Text as Process and Practice: The Textualization of Oral Epics." In *Textualization of Oral Epics*. Ed. by Lauri Honko. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter. pp. 3-56.
Jackson 1979	Anthony Jackson. *Na-khi Religion, An Analytical Appraisal of Na-khi Ritual Texts*. The Hague: Mouton.
Jakobson and Bogatyrev 1971	Roman Jakobson and Petr Bogatyrev. "On the Boundary between Studies of Folklore and Literature." In *Readings in Russian Poetics*. Ed. by Ladislav Matejka and Krystyna Pomorska. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press. pp. 91-93.
Laufer 1916	Berthold Laufer. "The Nichols Mo-So Manuscript." *Geographical Review*, 1.4:274-85.
Leach 1966	Edmund Leach. "Ritualization in Man in Relation to Conceptual and Social Development." *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London B*, 251:403-08.
Li 1953	Li Lin-Ts'an. *A Dictionary of Mo-So Hieroglyphics*. Hong Kong: Shuowen-she.
Lord 2003	Albert B. Lord. *The Singer of Tales*. 2nd ed. Ed. by Stephen Mitchell and Gregory Nagy. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
MEB 481-4	Undated dongba manuscript, author unknown. *Naxi Manuscript Collection*. Barcelona Museum of World Cultures.
Mu and Yang 2003	Mu Lichun and Yang Zhonglu, ed. *Dongbajing Gushiji*. Kunming: Yunnan renmin chubanshe.
Niu 1999	Niu Gengqin. *Shenmi de Naxi Dongba Gushi*. Lijiang: Zhengxie Lijiang Naxizu Zizhixian Weiyuanhui.

Olson 1994 David Olson. *The World on Paper: The Conceptual and Cognitive Implications of Writing and Reading*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Ong 2002 Walter Ong. *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word.* New York: Routledge.

Parry 1930 Milman Parry. "Studies in the Epic Technique of Oral Verse-Making I: Homer and Homeric Style." *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, 41:73-147.

Parry 1933 ______. "Whole Formulaic Verses in Greek and Southslavic Heroic Song." *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association*, 64:179-97.

Poupard 2017 Duncan Poupard. "Rescued into Extinction: The Case of the Naxi Texts in Translation." Unpubl. Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Hong Kong, Pokfulam, Hong Kong SAR.

Rock 1937 J. F. Rock. "Studies in Na-khi Literature." *Bulletin de l'Ecole française d'Extrême-Orient*, 37.1:1-120.

Rock 1939 ______. "The Romance of K'a-mä-gyu-mi-gkyi." *Bulletin de l'Ecole française d'Extrême-Orient*, 39.1:1-152.

Rothenberg 1985 Jerome Rothenberg, ed. *Technicians of the Sacred: A Range of Poetries from Africa, America, Asia, Europe and Oceania*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Sale 1996 Merritt Sale. "In Defense of Milman Parry: Renewing the Oral Theory." *Oral Tradition*, 11.2:374-417.

Saussure 2013 [1983] Ferdinand de Saussure. *Course in General Linguistics*. Trans. by Roy Harris. London: Bloomsbury.

Seeger 1958 Charles Seeger. "Prescriptive and Descriptive Music Writing." *The Musical Quarterly*, 44.2:184-95.

Shive 1987 David Shive. *Naming Achilles*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Wang 1974 C.H. Wang. *The Bell and the Drum: Shih ching as Formulaic Poetry in an Oral Tradition*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Wolf 1985 [1795] Friedrich August Wolf. *Prolegomena to Homer.* Trans. by Anthony Grafton, Glen W. Most, and James E.G. Zetzel. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Yang 2015 — Yang Jiehong. “Yishi daci: koutou chuantong yu yishi xushi guanxi tanxi—yi Naxizu “zhezuo” (tʂər˥ dzo˧˩) wei ge’an.” *Qiannan minzu shifan xueyuan xuebao*, 25.1:18-26.

Yates 1966 — Frances A. Yates. *The Art of Memory*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

YMMWLD 1959 — Yunnansheng Minzu Minjian Wenxue Lijiang Diaochadui. Naxizu wenxueshi (chugao). Kunming: Yunnan renmin chubanshe.

Zeng 2013 — Zeng Xiaopeng. *The Naxi Language and Characters Study of Tuodi Village in Eya*. Beijing: Guangming ribao chubanshe.

Oral Tradition, 32/1 (2018):53-70

The Fairy Seers of Eastern Serbia: Seeing Fairies—Speaking through Trance

Maria Vivod

The Fairy-Seer

The fairy-seers of southeastern Europe are (mostly) women who are able to communicate with women-like creatures from the supernatural world. Sometimes the fairy-seers induce a trance state in order to establish communication with these creatures. During their communication with the fairies the fairy-seers can prophesy about future events. The fairy-seers can also deliver messages to the living on behalf of their deceased relatives. Similarly, they advise about how to heal an ill individual or the treatment of that individual can proceed after consulting the fairies. These illnesses are usually a form of so called "fairy-illness"—a disorder that has its origins in a curse or a spell wrought by fairies offended by that individual. In the narratives of fairy-seers, fairies are described as three young, beautiful longhaired women, dressed either in white or in black. The women who can see and speak to the fairies have been chosen by them early on, usually in their childhood or adolescence. By dancing and singing on special days of the orthodox Christian calendar, these women fall into a trance state and then communicate with "their sisters," as these invisible creatures are called by these women.

The fairy-seers are called numerous names in various languages across southeastern Europe. The semantic field of these varying designations is far from identical: sometimes the seers need not enter into a trance to see them, sometimes they fight (nocturnal) battles in the sky to ensure good crops for their region, where they live and work as any normal human being. But there is one common denominator to all of them: they undergo a process of initiation (prompted by these creatures) and the invisible creatures with whom they communicate are females. I choose to use this term in an attempt to cover and to depict a vast range of more or less similar phenomena across the Balkans with an English term, with the goal of creating an "umbrella term" in the English language (nowadays a *lingua franca*) for working purposes.

The Context

The phenomenon of individuals capable of communication with creatures of the invisible world—*vilarka*s ("the ones from the fairies"), *padalica*s ("the ones who fall"), *vilenica*s ("the ones from the fairies")—and of doing good in their communities of birth in southeastern Europe

has been scientifically analyzed over the past five or six decades from several perspectives. First, as fragments of pre-Christian belief-systems that were mostly to be found in historical documents such as witch-hunt trials (see Ginzburg 1966 for Italy; Klaniczay 1983, 1984, and 2006 for Hungary; Henningsen 1993 and Čiča 2002a for Croatia). Second, as remnants of still existing complex popular belief systems about witches and fairies and the syncretism between these two female benevolent/malevolent creatures (for instance Pòcs 1986 and Zentai 1976 for Central Europe; Bošković-Štulli 1953 and 1960 for Croatia; Đorđević 1952 for Serbia and Yugoslavia). Third, from the ethnomedical standpoint as vestiges of traditional holistic beliefs about human health and its connection to nature and divinities (for Serbia see Tucakov 1965; Radenković 1996; Vivod 2014).Traces of this phenomenon, such as the texts of charms or fairy-tales, were often analyzed as bits and pieces of the local folklore (for Serbia see: Zečević 1981; Radenković 1996; Šešo 2003; Đorđević 1989).

Oral tradition studies was one of the main fields that produced a detailed description of and provided the most abundant bibliography about fairy-seeing individuals. The texts of charms and songs and healing procedures were one of the topics to which some of the best scientific pieces were consecrated (see Pócs 1985 for the Hungarian speaking region or Radenković 1996 for the South-Slavic population). Majzner (1921), Luka Šešo (2003) and Bošković-Štulli (1953 and 1960) provided actual descriptions and collected narratives from individuals who either knew a fairy-seeing person or someone who consulted a fairy-seer. The phenomenon was usually elaborated from the point of view of the creatures as the most picturesque elements of oral literature and folklore. Described as fate-determining beings, deities, and dead souls who died without proper rites-of-passage, traces of these creatures remain in numerous tales, songs, and charms. The other angle—the one about the communicators—was, and still is, usually approached by ethnomedical studies from the angle of traditional healers and seers (see Pòcs 1971; Pòcs 1989; Radenković 1996). These studies covered either the illnesses the creatures inflicted on humans, the healers as mediators, or the nature of healers (the taxonomy of a healer) and the origins of the powers a healer claimed to have. Due to the numerous names, denominations of illness, creatures, healers, and areas in which the phenomena used to appear, these researchers covered a vast field that sometimes intermingled with other research interests (for instance Christianity, popular culture, or ethnobotanics, among others). In some regions the word for the healer is the same as the word used to name these creatures (for instance, *samovila* in Serbian) (Radenković 1996:14),[1] and it is this detail—that they communicate with the invisible female creatures—that distinguishes them from other healing and divination methods in the region.

[1] The creatures and their mediators—or their "representatives" among the humans, or the healers against "their" illnesses—often have the same names, the same denominations. For instance, the female creatures (in Serbian popular beliefs) who attacked pregnant, parturient women, newly delivered, nursing mothers and infants are called with the same term as the midwife, or as the illnesses they bring to their victims: "*babice*" (see Zečević 1966 and Vivod 2008). Or the *rusalia*s (singular, *rusalja,* and plural, *rusalje*) who are the creatures—sometimes the deceased humans who died before accomplishing an important "stage" in their life (baptism, marriage, successful childbirth) or are the female invisible creatures who can bring either health or illness to a community, or the individuals who see them and communicate with them by embodying them (see Radenković 2014; Majzner 1921; Taloş 2002; Gueorguieva 1990).

Earlier studies were done mainly from a diachronic perspective. That research relied chiefly on the investigation of historical documents such as documents from witch-hunt trials, archives, or, in the best case, ethnographic monographs or ethnographic collections of narratives given by individuals who themselves were not fairy-seers but who had the occasion to hear about a particular fairy-seer or visited or consulted one. In most of these cases, the research was based on second-hand and even third-hand testimonies or official documents, reflecting an etic perspective. More recent synchronic studies examine New-Age versions of once existing practices. Often "new traditions"—essentially re-created practices of older beliefs and practices —offered a more or less contemporary examples of once living customs (see Kis-Halas 2012; Vivod 2015).

My present aim is to analyze two actual, contemporary cases from the Vlach community[2] of eastern Serbia, where I had the opportunity to observe two women known to be "fairy-seers." The fieldwork basis for this article was done in the spring and summer of 2015 in the region near the city of Majdanpek.[3] The two women live in separate but neighboring villages and purposefully fall into trances on special days of the orthodox Christian calendar. Each has her own "technique" to deliberately achieve a trance state: one by dancing and singing, the other by lying down and reciting and singing. During their trance they communicate with their "sisters"—non-living creatures described as beautiful young women—who are invisible to other humans. Through their "sisters" both women can also communicate with deceased people.

In their main characteristics both cases are similar to the wider phenomena of "fairy-seers" throughout central and southeastern Europe.[4] These seers are usually women who fall into a trance state by dancing or singing on special days under certain circumstances. After their communication with the fairies, the seer can proceed to treat individuals suffering from spells or from some kind of "fairy-illness" (Radenković 1996:48-50). Fairy-illnesses are emotional and/or physical disorders similar to states described in narratives as being under a spell or an evil-charm. Such states are induced by means of magic and can only be healed or treated through magic. Yugoslav ethnographers who described 1950s era communities in which fairy-seers regularly practiced their skills stressed they were vanishing and forecast the imminent disappearance of the fairy-seers as incompatible with the new, socialist era (see Knežević 1967; Tomić 1950). This essay first describes the notion of the "fairy-seer," then reviews the usual appellations found in various Slavic and non-Slavic languages across southeastern Europe given to the phenomena of individuals, mediators with the world of fairies. I aim to explore the conditions of the trance and of initiation according to the first-hand testimony of two fairy-seers:

---

[2] Vlach language—a daco-rumanian dialect has about 100,000 speakers and is spoken by the Vlach community of eastern Serbia, known by the endonym *limba română*; more: http://lacito.vjf.cnrs.fr/ALC/Languages/Valaque_popup.htm

[3] Fieldwork was done during April, May, and July 2015; the methodology used was ethnography, observation, participant observation, informal interviews (the languages used were Vlach and Serbian) with the inhabitants of the villages : Crnajka, Kulma Topolnica, and Rudna Glava, in the region of the city of Majdanpek. During the trance of Ivanka, photographs and video footage was made (April 2015). All the relating visual material can be found in the archive of the University of Pécs, Hungary.

[4] I tackled the topic of healers claiming to be able to communicate with invisible (female) creatures in a couple of previous papers from other angles (Vivod 2014, 2008a, 2008b, and 2006).

the circumstances of their initiation—the moment when they started seeing these creatures—and the settings of their fall into trance in their own words.

The Concept

First, one must point out that the term "fairy-seer" is a term coined to incorporate the expressions and the notions found in various languages of southeastern Europe where the phenomenon of individuals who can communicate with women-shaped creatures existed or survived. The coined term aims to cover a multitude of expressions in various languages of this region (Croatian, Serbian, Vlach, Albanian, Bosnian, and so on). The names used to identify the individuals who are mediators with invisible female creatures depends in part on whether the ability to communicate is combined with the ability to heal. The creatures with whom the communication is established are called: (Serbo-Croatian-Bosnian-Montenegrin in the singular): *vila* ("fairy"), *diva* ("fairy"), *tetka* ("aunt"), *vilinica* ("small fairy"), *rusalja* ("water fairy"), *rusalka* ("water fairy"), *ona* ("she")*, lepa* ("the pretty one"), and so on.

While the healer—or the one who communicates with these creatures—is called (Serbo-Croatian-Bosnian-Montenegrian) in singular: *padalica* ("the one who falls")*, samovila* ("fairy," "the one who can communicate with fairies")*, samodiva* ("fairy," "the one who can communicate with fairies")*, vilenica* ("fairy," "the one who can communicate with fairies")*, vilenjak, vilovita* ("the one who can communicate with fairies"), *bajalica* ("enchantress"), *rusalja* ("water fairy"), and so forth.

I am aware that the English term "fairy-seer" can potentially be understood as an attempt to equate the various terms and phenomena they designate, that is not my intent. My intent is to offer researchers unfamiliar with local, dialectal expressions and denominations a workable English umbrella term for the purpose of comparative studies. Therefore I first define the characteristics of who can be called a "fairy-seer." The fairy-seers of central and southeastern Europe are usually women who are able to communicate with women-like creatures from the invisible world. In order to establish a successful communication they sometimes need to fall into a self-induced trance state , this is accomplished in several different ways. To describe the fairy-seers and their forms of practice I present an inventory of basic characteristics with the caveat that it is not exhaustive; the absence of one or more enumerated features does not indicate a fairy-seer of lesser status. The list is derived from descriptions provided by several ethnographical studies (see Pòcs 1971;[5] Radenković 1996; Bošković-Štulli 1953; Čiča 2002a and b; Zentai 1976; Henningsen 1993; Eliade 1975, among others) and corroborated by fieldwork done in 2015.

These are individuals who can see creatures from the invisible world—sometimes in the bibliography described as demons in the spirit of Christian demonology (Pòcs 1989; Radenković 2014:14-17)—and who can communicate with them, meaning they can speak and also hear them. These creatures are described as female. They can be benevolent and helpful but can also

[5] Éva Pocs (1986:184) produced a very detailed list for the Balkans organized by the country where the scholar worked.

be harmful to humans sometimes. They are usually described as beautiful and young, long-haired, and dressed either in white or in black. They live in the nature (lakes, forests, mountains) in a parallel world. The fairy-seer is obliged to transmit the "messages" she receives, and should she fail to do so she can be "punished" by these creatures for the omission. The punishment usually comes in the form of some accident or illness. The punishment is often described as a temporary incapacity to move or speak.

Customarily, their first contact with fairies occur in childhood. They may have been kidnapped and spent time in the fairy world or it arose through an illness: the symptoms of the seer's childhood illness are described as similar to a state of being under a charm or a spell.

The ability to see and communicate on a regular basis, on precise days, with these creatures is usually possessed by a woman. There are, nevertheless, recorded ethnographically described cases of men who receive messages from the female-like creatures.

In order to become a "fairy-seer" one must undergo an initiation. These initiations are described as "ecstatic" in the literature (see Klanizcay 2006; Čiča 2002a and b), and the leitmotif of climbing a mountain or climbing to the top of a tree (interestingly, it is often a pear-tree) is frequent. Alternately, the narrative may mention falling into a deep abyss in the mountains. The creatures choose the individual to be initiated. The chosen ones are the only one who can be initiated and who, from that point on, see and hear these creatures. The initiation happens in an imagined group: the individual is alone with several of the creatures and the atmosphere is described as festive: there is much singing of specific songs and dancing in a trance-like state. The initiated individuals become "family-bound" with these creatures. The appellation of "sisters" is a recurrent leitmotif in the verbal communication the seers address to these creatures.

The non-initiated may encounter these creatures at special places in nature: a special tree, a lake or a stream. Trees are particularly propitious places for such encounters. Although "normal" individuals cannot ordinarily see or hear these special creatures, they can trespass on their territory. The uninitiated can become ill as a sort of punishment if they trespass into a special place belonging to these creatures.

Communication between the initiated and the fairies takes place on specific days of the year (once or twice a year; rarely more often) that are foreseen in advance of that day; healing a fairy-illnesses may, nonetheless, occur throughout the year. The trance that enables communication must be induced at specific time of the special day: either in the early-morning or in the late-afternoon. Certain prohibitions obtain on preparing for the communication: absolute silence is required before the trance; certain articles of clothing must be worn (for instance, certain belts or light-colored clothes); the communicator has to be bodily "clean" (not menstruating; freshly washed). The mediator's clients—either those wanting to consult the creatures or those healed during the past year—reward the seer for the communication adduced with presents (traditionally certain objects or more often money).

During the trance different emotional states are expressed: the communicator is crying, begging, or ecstatically happy. The emotional states are also "messages" about what the individual witnesses in the creature world or they anticipate information that is transmitted to the world of the living.

In the narratives given by the communicators or by those individuals who have heard or encountered them first-hand, the most recurrent leitmotif is that of climbing a tree and witnessing

what the fairies do, how they live, and how they look. Sometimes the creatures escort the initiated individual on a journey. In journey narratives falling into an abyss, or flying in the sky above the mountains are frequent motifs. The creatures have individual names: Ilona, Helena, Elena, Diana, Sinziana, Maria, *Muma*, *Majka Prečasa* ("the honorable/the most clean Mother").

The communications are of various natures: a prediction about the future (future of a person who came for a "consultation" or a predilection about a whole region or country); advice about how to heal a person (a recipe of curative herbs or a charm against a spell); communication with the deceased relatives the fairy-seer's clients. The seeing of hidden treasures during trance is possible. The act of seeing is strongly connected with the capacity of charming and spell-casting. The individuals who can see these creatures can also heal illnesses, particularly spells and ill-charms by means of spell-casting and charming.

Fairy-seeing is a group-phenomenon in two respects. The initiated are initiated by a group of creatures and they are aware of the existence of other initiates in their region. The initiated "know" each other, and can recognize familiar faces while in a trance state. The initiated can foresee the "coming" of a future initiate. And, finally, they maintain contact between themselves, often in their dreams. On the day of a trance event, people from the region flock to where the individual in question induces the trance in order to witness the trance and the divination. In that sense, the communities (village, region) of the fairy-seer are also active participants in a group phenomenon in which the trance-performer stands in one dimension while "public," the observers and the consultants, stand in another.

Šojmanje, Šojmanka, Šojmanosa[6]

In a 1950 paper the Yugoslav ethnographer Persida Tomić conveys detailed descriptions of the fairy-seeing phenomena from Central Serbia among the ethnic minority of the "Vlach Gypsies" (*vlaški cigani* in Serbian), as I call them. She also refers to the fairy-seers as *šojmanose* (Vlach term) or the *vilarka*s (feminine form of a Serbian term) or *vilar*s (masculine form of a Serbian term). Zoran Čica (2002a and b) mentions this particular word *šojmanosa* in a book whose topic is the phenomenon of fairy-seeing individuals from a historical perspective, particularly during the witch-hunting period of the seventeenth and eighteenth century. Čiča writes about the Christian "contamination" of it; he particularly examines the Christian savant perspective on nightly gatherings of women initiates in practices of healing and charming that were labeled as the witches Sabbaths. He notes that Persida Tomić does not specify whether the *šojmanka* are the women (otherwise called *vilarka*-s or *vilar*-s in Serbian) who can see the women-like creatures—in the article termed "fairies" (*vile*)—or if this name can be also applied to the creatures who are seen by them. His excellent book deals precisely with the topic of fairy-seeing, fairy-communicating individuals while using the terms *vilenica*-s and *vilenjak*-s, which are the usual terms in Croatian speaking regions. In his study based on historical documents (mostly witch trials in Croatia), *vilenica*-s and *vilenjak*-s (Croatian terms) are identified as individuals who treated the sick and mediated between the human world and the invisible world.

---

[6] I use the Serbian transcription of the term relating to this phenomenon.

Čiča calls the phenomenon of "*vilenica* and *vilenjak* the remnants of a pre-Christian cult" (Čiča 2002a). In both cases, Tomić and Čiča do not dwell on the signification of the Vlach term *šojmanka*. It is treated as if this were the Vlach term for the same "fairy-seeing" phenomenon.

Nevertheless Tomić provides a detailed account of fairy-seeing related events that she witnessed in 1946 and 1947. She describes the main characteristics of the *šojmanka*s, employing the term in parallel with the Serbian *vilarka* (feminine) and *vilar* (masculine). The fact that the healing and the communication happens in a state of the trance invites comparison of this phenomenon with another Vlach phenomena, the *rusalje*s of Duboko (*dubočke rusalje*—Serbian term, also known in Vlach and Romanian) village. These women regularly fall into a trance on specific days of the year. But she omits other characteristics of the *rusalje*s that fall outside her interests.

The foregoing list of fairy-seer characteristics is valid for the *šojmanke* in Central Serbia studied by Tomić as well. Three female "fairies" (*vile*) are seen by women who regularly fall into trance each year on specific days when fairy induced illnesses are treated by the *vilarka*s. Tomić notes that the fairy-seeing women usually have some physical impairment that, by her account, makes these women more suitable for an otherwise solitary profession. Tomić also traces the eighteenth-century migration of this Gipsy community from Romania, from the region where the Vlach communities originate. The name of the *šojmanke* isn't elaborated. It is an unknown term from the Vlach language that I do not speak or understand.

Although Tomić's study became a classic in Serbian ethnography, a "must-read" for all the Serbo-Croatian speaking ethnographers working in the field of fairy-seers or fairies, it has come to criticism specifically because of this detail. One of the main reasons the study of Vlach customs and communities in Serbia is difficult is the language. Vlach is a dialect of Romanian, thus Serbs, Croatian, Bosnians, or Montenegrans carrying out fieldwork require the services of an interpreter who may or may not recognize the importance of certain items in the nomenclature she is translating. According to a Serbian Vlach ethnographer whom I consulted,[7] most of the "mistakes" in ethnographic descriptions and analysis of Vlach customs stem from Serbian ethnographers who are not fluent speakers of this eastern Romance language and confuse the Serbian Christian calendar with the traditional "Vlach calendar," which is based on pre-Christian beliefs and calendar (see Durlic 2010). This same deficiency figures in Tomić's article: she was not a Vlach speaker and did not query informants about word meanings or referents. The word *šojmanka* is unknown in Vlach.[8] Eastern Serbian Vlach communities know and use the term *šojmanosa*; though its origin is unknown, it denotes the creatures a fairy-seer perceives. According to Es Durlić, the Vlach term *manosa* means "abundant," but *šoj* is entirely unknown.[9] In Temnić and Belica, the villages Tomić described, the "Vlach Gypsy" population became a

---

[7] Paun Es Durlić, a native speaker of Vlach, is a retired ethnographer who worked in the Museum of Majdanpek, Serbia and has written widely about Vlach language and culture in eastern Serbia. For his publications, online Vlach dictionary, and ethnographic collections, see http://www.paundurlic.com.

[8] Personal conversation with Paun Es Durlić.

[9] My ongoing research points toward a clairvoyance-custom widespread in the Hungarian-speaking area of Transylvania, present day Romania. The word *šoj* probably derives from the Hungarian word *sólyom* "falcon."

"Gypsy" population and the Vlach language fell into disuse.[10] Since the 1950s the practice of *šojmanje* has disappeared.

Fifty years after the paper written by Persida Tomić, a monograph dedicated to the description and the analysis of the *vilenica*-s (feminine) and the *vilenjak*-s (masculine) appeared (Čiča 2002a and b) that presents a more complete image of the fairy-seers and healers. Modeled on a table created by Ginzbourg (1996), Čiča furnishes a list of pan-European terms for healers or seers who, potentially, engage in nocturnal heavenly combat against malevolent seers who would plague their home region (Klaniczay 1991). These opponents are termed *benandanti* from Friul, the *armiere* from Ariège, the *punchiaduri* from Switzerland or the *krešnik*/*krsnik* from Istria (Ginzburg 1966; Klaniczay 1986; Bošković-Stulli 1960). The Croatian (Bosnian) *vilenica* or *vilenjak* also found among these common mortals who see and communicate with female creatures from the invisible world. Čiča's table depicts the variegated abundance of terms and notions for this phenomenon of fairy-seeing healers. But *šojmanka* and *šojmanosa*, as well as the *rusalia*s, are not represented there. The abundance of various ethnolinguistic groups in this region and the profusion of languages and dialects impede broadening of the chart.[11] There is a multitude of expressions, designations in various languages for a more or less similar phenomenon in a relatively small region (the Balkan Peninsula). There are at least a dozen languages spoken here and each language has no less than 5-6 dialects. The semantical field of each expression (idiom) covering a "fairy-seer" can be vast because it covers various kinds of "seers": those who communicate with these creators and are able to fight with them by going up in the sky, or those who can communicate with them and heal through them, or those who are only able to see them, or those who communicate and predict the future through them. A detailed chart should hence encompass all the languages, all of their dialect and all the possible "types" and "subspecies." Such research is doable, but its prerogative will be mastering all the languages and their dialects. Ginzburg created a table naming the phenomenon of the fairy-seeing individuals various languages of different regions (Central Europe, the Balkans . . .); while Čiča adopted Ginzburg's table and supplemented additional details and specifications to it. Ginzburg's-chart and Čiča's table cover a vast geographical area identifying numerous names and variants. This article attempts to complement those two tables with contemporary findings on the already existing material and charts. My goal is to add just one detail to the Ginzburg-Čiča table: it is basically a detail which is both old and new. Persida Tomić's paper the term *šojmanosa* is usually mentioned in the academic publications—as a reference to her paper and as an expression which could fit in the Ginzburg-Čiča table. However, since Tomić's paper no traces have been found on the ground of the š*ojmanosa* as described by her. My paper builds upon her work and demonstrates that the *šojmanosa*–the *šojmanka* still exist, and has its place in the Ginzburg-Čiča table**.** This same holds for the term *padalica* (Serbian feminine noun, "the falling-one"), which is found in the literature and in the field, too. It is probably a euphemistic

[10] Second hand testimony (summer 2015) from villagers in Temnić and Belica. An acquaintance of mine—a social worker (initials B. M.), who worked with people from these villages, made this enquiry for me: no one speaks Vlach anymore in these villages; the Roma population speaks Roma and Serbian.

[11] In my research I have encountered some 20 different expressions for fairy-seeing. What makes the task difficult is that the expressions often do not belong to a congruent semantic field. There are individuals who can communicate and fly with fairies, other who cannot, and some who join them in their battles.

designation for those healers and/or communicators who fall into the mandatory trance. This term can also lead the researcher on the topic astray. Pronouncing the true name of these creatures is usually taboo (Čajkanović 1994:46), hence euphemisms multiply, increase the stock of names, and compound the conundrum about the abundance of denominations. *Padalica* is found in Central Serbia and even in eastern Serbia, thus among the Vlach speaking community of eastern Serbia. Coincidentally other practices structurally similar to the mediation with women-like creatures are known in Central Serbia. Srebrica Knežević (Knežević 1967) described one such ritual, euphemistically termed in Serbian as *slava tetkama,*"feast of aunts." Description of the "aunts" coincides with that of the *šojmanje*: long-haired, beautiful women, who fly in the sky, and can be either benevolent or malevolent towards humans. This ritual is a group practice and involves no inducement of a trance state. It is performed by married adult women in the village who communicate with the "aunts," these sometimes arrive in groups of three. This collective feast is held on special days at a "special" place outside the village, for instance, under a big tree, in a place the creatures prefer to linger. The feast serves to placate the aunts, and prevent them from visiting illness on the community.

The Case-Studies

Ivanka (1956), a Vlach farm woman from eastern Serbia, lives on an isolated farm with her husband and a grown-up son on top of ta mountain called Pojenj near the village of Kulma Topolnica. She has three children and is twice married. The first husband left her , according to her words, he "disappeared." His disappearance coincided with her initiation into the world of her "sisters." In spite of being a *šojmanka* ("the one who is able to communicate with fairies" or the Vlach term for her social status) and a *padalica* she has managed to marry a second time, to her "great surprise" as she says. She says that she could never have imagined that she would have two husbands. When she was about 20-21 years old she was initiated. Her mother-in-law found her on top of a pear-tree, where she was singing in a stupefied state oblivious to her surroundings, and her two daughters became frightened by their mother's behavior. She regularly sees what she describes as beautiful young long-blonde-haired women dressed in white whom she has named Sinziana, Maria, and Majka Prečasa. They appear to her on specific days and speak to her, then she must transmit their messages and instructions to the living. Initially, she tried to avoid the fairies by hiding herself in a haystack to evade them but she says they always found her, physically punished her, and brought her to the top of a pear or cherry tree. They punished her transgressions by taking away her voice, paralyzing her or beating her. She reports that the beatings the creatures meted out left her with black and blue marks on her body. She reports: "[she] had to obey them." While in the trance state she is oblivious to herself and the (human) world around her, seeing only the world these creatures inhabit: beautiful pastures and fields covered with flowers. She sings a particular song to induce the trance state: "In a field covered with flowers I climb, climb, with my sisters on the Krš up, up. In a field covered with flowers I go down with my sisters to the pear tree; my sisters make me climb the pear tree. And

they are young, my sisters. In a field covered with flowers I climb, I climb with my sisters on the Krš up, up.[12]"

She asserts that anyone who wants to see the creatures can, it is only a matter of will. Her "special" days—when she has to submit herself to the will and the demands of these creatures—are three specific days of the Christian orthodox calendar: Epiphany (*Bogojavljanje*—Three King's Day), Palm Sunday (*Cveti*), and St. Peter's Day (*Petrovdan*). On every occasion the "sisters" advise her as to when they will next appear.

The ritual of trance starts at dawn. Ivanka avoids working in the stables on the farm in order to stay clean. The creatures abhor filthy, unclean clothes, people, and places. She also washes herself, avoids speaking (the fairies prohibit her from speaking before the ritual) and she dresses in light-colored clothes. She leaves the house and stands in the yard facing east, then she closes her eyes. In her right hand she holds three branched basil (Lat. *Occimum basilicum*) that she continues holding during her trance and during consultations. She also has to be "clean" (not menstruating) and so too the women who attend the ritual or who come to consult her three sisters through her mediation. Her husband related two cases when women were sent away because they were "unclean" though the women did not admit they were menstruating. The period of her trance state varies: some days it lasts an hour, but four hour long trances were also witnessed. Ivanka sings "her" song, dances, shouts, whistles, and calls her sisters invoking their coming and whistles in turns. To those present, some from other regions come to consult the *šojmanje* or t *vlva*s (Vlach, "fairy"), she communicates what she is witnessing in their world. She describes a feast-like atmosphere that precedes the fairies' arrival. First, she foretells the future of the region, giving accounts of future accidents, future sudden deaths or forthcoming misfortunes or imminent great events in the country. For instance, in 2006 she predicted the election of a president in the mold of Josip Broz Tito.

When she is completely "taken"—possessed by her sisters— she asks to be taken into her house, assisted, usually, by a neighbor-woman. The house must be clean, particularly the chair where she will sit that day. Seated in her bedroom with eyes closed, she receives her visitors one by one. The consultation initially addresses "the living" (Srb. *za žive*): Individuals or families ask the fairies about their personal or their family's future. When this consultation ends, another "tour" begins: one by one, the guests re-enter and consult Ivanka about their deceased relatives. For this phase,"for the dead" (Srb. *za mrtve*), flowers and candles—the number of candles must equal the number of dead asked about— are brought. Along with her sisters, Ivanka, too, sees and speaks with the dead. The dead send the living requests: a visit to the grave site, flowers, candles or a commemoration bringing new clothes or a favorite food and drink to the dead at their graves, a *pomana* in Vlach.

The biggest "feast" (*slava* or *praznjik*) of the year when Ivanka sees her sisters is *Cveti* (Palm Sunday). Perched atop a mountain, Pojenj, her house is difficult to reach from outside. To navigate the muddy road that leads to her house in early spring required renting a jeep. At Epiphany, in winter, when the snowfall may reach to the knees and blankets the muddy road coming and going to her house is especially difficult. Ivanka's trance states sometimes last for

---

[12] There is a short documentary created with the video material filmed during the fieldwork (April 2015). It's actually a partial recording of the trance. The documentary is to be presented at the Kratovo Ethnological Film Festival in September 2016. The documentary can be seen at: http://www.imdb.com/video/wab/vi796439833/

hours and all the while she sings loudly, dances, whistles, and shouts out prophecies—activities that necessitate a tremendous amount of energy. I had the chance to observe Ivanka "fall" for the very last time in spring 2015. In the autumn of that same year Ivanka turned sixty years old. She revealed to me that only women between the ages of six to sixty can see the fairies. She would continue to heal people made ill by charms and spells, "fairy-illnesses," but she would no longer transmit messages from her "sisters," nor foresee the future, nor see the *šojmanje.*

Another female—*padalica* in the region is Mila was born in 1944. She lives in the village of Crnajka, about 15 kilometers from Kulma Topolnica. The two women know each other and they refer individuals/clients who seek to consult the *šojmanje* to one another. Ivanka even sent her son to Mila for a consultation. Because he has a speech impairment, is single and over the age of 30, Ivanka's son passes for the village idiot. Her husband, too, is mocked and considered a bad person by the villagers.

Mila was married at the age of 15 and has one living son, having lost infant two children. She is a daughter of an unmarried mother. This personal circumstance adds to her reputation as a successful *padalica* because of the beliefs in the magical performances and characteristics of individuals born out of wedlock. This attitude is widespread in the Vlach community (for more see Durlić 1995). Their hair or nails are believed to have magical virtues and are components of talismans or magical beverages. Children born out of wedlock are believed to be born "from love" (*iz ljubavi* in Serbian) and not out of "obligation" (*moranje* in Serbian), which is a characteristic of children born in a marriage. Children born in a marriage are born "out of duty" (for more about this belief see Durlić 1995). Questioned about her parents, Mila answered that she never knew her father and he could have been anyone. Although this fact is advantageous for her professional reputation, answering this question slightly discomfited her.

Mila is illiterate: she can't read or write. She said her marriage was a happy one, but when I met her in 2015 she had already been a widow for several years. Her husband actively supported her fairy-seer calling. In her youth Mila would fall into trance on 44 of the Vlach feast-days (*slava* or *praznjik*—this terms differs from Serbian orthodox *slava,*—for more see Durlić 1998). Her trance inducement technique differs from that of Ivanka: Mila lies down in her bedroom and coaxes herself into a trance by speaking and singing to her sisters. Like Ivanka, Mila sees three beautiful long-haired young women whose names she refused disclose. In fact, she suspected me of being a "seer" (*i ti vidiš nešto* in Serbian). She also falls into a trance in private. Once in a trance she receives her visitors one by one. A Vlach ethnographer convinced Mila's son to hide a tape-recorder in the room where Mila, assisted by her husband, was abed, and secretly recorded her in trance state making recitations and singing.

Mila's initiation also occurred in the top of a tree (pear tree). At 12 years old she first saw her sisters. She also tried to avoid them, hiding herself away from them. She also transgressed, disobeying the fairies, and was punished. The fairies paralyzed her, she could neither speak nor move. As she grew older, her "falls" became less frequent; nowadays she "falls" only a few times a year: on Epiphany, like Ivanka, and on Pentecost, too. She induces the trance in the evening because the day of the *slava* is considered started with nightfall.

Both women are respected in their community. Described as a gentle, kind woman, Ivanka is particularly loved and considered a good person. Mila is described as an ambiguous woman, people say that she engages in fairy-seeing for the money. In a way both are liminal

individuals: Mila is born out of wedlock, Ivanka was abandoned by her first husband, married a "strange" grungy second husband and has a son who is the laughing stock of the village. Both women fall into trance in different settings, both fear their sisters and the sickness and pain that ensue if they refuse to "fall" and "perform" in public. For Ivanka, trance inducement is particularly difficult. Sometimes she must achieve a trance state while outside in the cold standing in deep snow; in her mountainous region even spring temperatures can be quite cold.

During the year Ivanka as a *bajalica*, a Serbian term for "charmer" or *baca zrnevlje*, Serbian for"throwing seeds of corn from which she reads the future and the past and can detect a bad charm." In the region, foretelling the future is done by the use of grains of corn. Since her "duty" to the *šojmanje* ended in spring 2015, she will remain a *bajalica* for the rest of her days. Mila is also known as a charmer: she "lifts" charms, reads cards and grains of corn. Mila's *gatanje* (Srb. "act of divination") via Hungarian cards or Tell cards, which are unusual in eastern Serbia, is in part disapproved of in her community.[13] An older *gatalica* (Srb. "clairvoyant") from the region declared that playing cards are the "devils" work, and that "the real ways" lie in"reading from the grains (of corn)."[14]

Both Mila and Ivanka stated that there is a third "fairy-seer" in this region: Crnajka-Topolnica, who is "expected" in the future. Both women predicted the (be)coming of a new *padalica*. In the village of Rudna Glava I asked about a possible third fairy-seer. It was rumored that a schoolgirl about age 12 or 13 "had fallen" while in the primary school building. Her parents and the community at large first interpreted it as a seizure, until they perceived the fairy-seeing pattern. She was not, contrary to what her parents and teacher thought, "talking gibberish," rather, she was speaking to the fairies. In her early twenties she married and moved away from the region. I requested an interview but she answered that her father-in-law had forbidden her "falling"; she was unwilling to speak with me. Presumably, she is the "third" fairy-seer, the "new one," who is expected to continue, now that Ivanka is "done with her duty" and Mila is growing older.

To my question, what is going on during the trance?, Ivanka and Mila replied with the same answer: they simply do not know what is going on. Both explained that they are oblivious to what is actually happening to them or what is going on around them. They are "taken" (*uzmu me pod svoje*). Mila moreover added: "you don't what is happening to you when you faint, do you? It is the same for me. I don't know what is going on." The motivation both women consistently cited for continuing to "fall" is fear of the punishment the fairies mete out for transgressing, for eluding the obligation to mediate and transmit messages, and attend the fairies' feasts. Fear of some physical accident, or illness, or certain misfortune obliges them to

---

[13] Various individuals from the region, neighbors, and so on, have told me that Mila "is in this" (in divination and fairy-seeing) for the money (fieldwork performed during spring and summer of 2015 in the villages of Topolnica, Crnajka, and Rudna Glava).

[14] There is a third woman in the region (near the village of Crnajka) who is the oldest among these three women (born 1938). Her name is Desanka and she is known not only in the region for her gift of divination. She is using grains of corn to predict the future, to see the past. She is also good in "lifting evil charms." She stated that her gift of clairvoyance comes from three female angels that she saw as a child in the orchard of her parents' house. She is not a *padalica* though. She is not falling into trance in order to communicate with the "angels." She states that Mila's divination with cards comes from the devil.

fall into a trance state. Even without a prompting question, "what happens if you refuse to fall"?, they usually mentioned and described in great detail past instances of such punishment. These appear to be a *sine qua non* experience of novice seers until they establish themselves as "career" fairy-seers. Material gain acquired from the practice is, indisputably, a factor, but only a secondary one.

Despite her protestations to the contrary, the desire for material gain is patently clear in the case of Mila. I once observed her receiving gifts of a key-holder and a jewelry-box from a client. She registered obvious disappointment by rejecting the gift with great disdain and disgust (although her words remained candid).

She is also one of the *padalica*s in the region who accepts money in a manner characterized as the traditional modus operandi of the *bajalica* (Dimkova 1980 cited in Radenković 1996:13). The *bajalica* asks that the money be placed on the ground then places one foot on it, thus avoiding "directly" touching the money, but rather claiming it "indirectly" (with her foot), a symbolic way to show disregard for money and financial gain.

There is a strong, often repeated, belief that a *bajalica* will lose her clairvoyant powers and charm if her motivation is pecuniary. In Ivanka's case, on the day of her fall, I twice consulted her, once "for the living" and once "for the dead," both times placing a Serbian dinars bill worth about 5 euros in her apron in recognition of her services—as custom requires. The second time, she returned the bill to my cameraman, whom she believed to be my husband, telling him it was "for the fairies and he should give it to them when he sees them."

In the case of the third fairy-seer in the region, the young woman whose father-in-law had prohibited her from practicing this activity, the "door was left open": she didn't say that she cannot see the fairies, she said that it was prohibited for her to practice. This potentially means that sometime in the future she might engage in the activity, should her father-in-law die, or should divorce or some other imponderable develop.

The preliminary conclusion, then, regarding the fairy-seers' main motivation for engaging in the trance activity, a public event that for the usually shy Ivanka is very challenging, would be that fear of physical harm in a form of illness, temporary paralysis or a physical accident.

Disappearing Phenomenon and Form of Shamanism

The Vlach clairvoyants are particularly admired in Serbia for their gift of clairvoyance and talent of "lifting evil charms" (Srb. *skidanje crne magije*). People from other regions of Serbia travel to the Vlach region to seek out help for their problems and doubts. In the region of the villages Rudna Glava—Topolnica—Crnajka there are at least four individuals, three women and one man, who are known for their gift of clairvoyance and regularly foretell the future, lift evil charms, and treat fairy induced illnesses. In of three of four these cases, the individuals claim to see, communicate, and obtain gifts from "three beautiful young women." But only in two cases can we speak of *padalica*s, trance-induced divinations and communications that come through ecstatic initiation, not through illness. In that sense these two existing cases of "fairy-seers" or "fairy-communicators" belong to the scholarly tradition that examines the remnants of a pre-Christian fairy-cult that has its roots in a cult of dead and the worship of ancestors.

The study of diverse seers who communicate with invisible female creatures or of healers who in childhood were felled by some mysterious illness visited on them by invisible creatures roaming in nature who are compelled later to engage in healing activities to assure their own health are numerous and have been done in many forms. Mostly as singular cases in case studies or monographs or as comparative studies of similar phenomena in neighboring countries. In that sense the studies referenced abov**e** were in a diachronic perspective and were based on archival documents or monographs that provided ethnographic descriptions. The phenomenon of individuals who, following an experience of ecstatic initiation, claim to see three fairies who endow them with the power to predict the future and heal illness has "survived" in the Vlach region of eastern Serbia. The phenomenon certainly serves some practical function other than the economic advantage it gives these individuals living in a remote and poor region (Durlić 1999). The fact that it persists, and that the practitioners cannot conceive of it lapsing, indicates it performs another function, that the fairy-seers offer their community something significant. The y bring additional revenue into the community through the clients who seek food and lodging in the villages and the communities are proud of the women and the tradition they represent. It is possible that this phenomenon has persisted in a very authentic form because the Vlach community engages in complex, extremely meticulous burial rites, commemoration of the dead, and ancestor worship[15] involving food, clothing and special ritual-bread sacrifices called *zakoni*[16] (Durlić 1995). The entranced fairy-seers enables communication with deceased relatives. This cult of the dead and ancestor worship element that make this hypothesis probable. The regular practice ensures a special social status to the practitioners that these women enjoy, making them a sort of intersection of the communities in which they live and act where individual problems, events, and, ultimately, secrets are treated and resolved. The persistence of the fairy-seeing goes beyond the limits of closely linked practices such as healing, charm-lifting, and ancestor worship, which still remain for analysis.

It may appear that the above described phenomenon share common characteristics with shamanism. This might be the case if we examine the general contours of the *šojmanka*—phenomenon. Preliminary and unverified findings indicate—beginning with the etymology of d *šojmanka* from the Hungarian word *sólyom,* "falcon," the phenomenon originated in a medieval Transylvanian divination practice in which individuals could foresee the future and "claimed to be able to fly as the falcons" (Durlic told me this in conversation butI have not yet corroborated it). The etymology of *šojmanka* might indicate a distant relation with some form of shamanism. The ability to "fly in the sky" and divine is one of the central and most frequently encountered characteristics of shaman-experiences. Features fairy-seers share with shamanism include the self-induced trance state, the ability to "climb to the sky," initiation through illness, connection and mediation with the world of the dead, divination, and healing powers (Hoppàl 2010, Hamayon 1990). Yet, the institution of *šojmanka* is marked by strict time-related constraints: healing and divination may be sought and offered throughout the year, but the *šojmanka* falls into

[15] See, for instance, the dance of commemoration (*kolo za mrtve; priveg; krai*): https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=kolo+za+mrtve; or *pomana* ("commemoration:) https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=vlaska+pomana.

[16] This is not the Serbian word "*zakoni*," which means "laws" in English.

a trance state only on specific days.These special days vary from one *šojmanka* to another. Similarly, the self-induced trance techniques vary: Ivanka sings, dances, whistles, speaks while Mila lies in bed, speaks and sings only occasionally. Also, the individuals who consults the fairy-seer do not experience their trance state. Finally, the "shaman-accessories" typical of Siberian or Vietnamese shamanism (drum, feathers, hats, special clothes, and so on) are absent in this case. All this indicates that the practice has loose forms and its articulation depends on the specific individual. Some elements of the *šojmanka*-phenomenon and of shamanism are similar, but any exact connection between them remains to be determined.

Research Laboratory "Dynamics of Europe," UMR 7367, Strasbourg, France

References

Bošković-Stulli 1953 _______."Splet naših narodnih praznovjerja oko vještice i popa." *Bilten Instituta za proučavanje folklora, Sarajevo*, 2:327-42.

Bošković-Stulli 1960 Maja Bošković-Stulli. "Kresnik—Krsnik, ein Wesen aus der kroatischen und slovenischen Volksüberlieferung." *Fabula*, 3:275-99.

Čajkanović 1994 Veselin Čajkanović. *Iz srpske religije i mitologije 1910-1924.* Vol. 1. Beograd: Srpska Književna zadruga.

Čiča 2002a Zoran Čiča. *Vilenica i vilenjak, Sudbina jednog pretkršćanskog kulta u doba progona vještica*. Zagreb: Etnografija.

Čiča 2002b ______. "Vilenica and Vilenjak: Bearers of an Extinct Fairy Cult." *Narodna umjetnos*, 39.1:31-63.

Đorđević 1952 Tihomir R. Đorđević. *Vampir i druga bića u našem narodnom predanju*. Vol. 4. Skup Odeljenja Drustvenih Nauka SAN 11-IV-1952. pp.147-255.

Đorđević 1989 ______. "*Veštica i vila u u našem narodnom verovanju i predanju*. Beograd: Narodna Knjiga.

Eliade 1975 Mircea Eliade. "Some Observations on European Witchcraft." *History of Religions*, 14.3:149-72.

Eliade 2007 ______. *Le chamanisme et les techniques archaïques de l'extase*. Paris: Payot.

Es Durlić 1995 Paun Es Durlić. Kult mrtvih kao osnova za odredjenje religije Vlaha. *Etno-kulturološki zbornik*. Vol. 1. Svrljig. pp. 232-40.

Es Durlić 1996 ______. Pokladni priveg. *Etno-kulturološki zbornik.* Vol. 2. Svrljig. pp. 110-15.

Es Durlić 1998 ______. Slave, zavetine i druge srodne proslave Istočne Srbije i susednih oblasti. *Etno-kluturološki zbornik.* Vol. 4. Svrljig. pp. 253-62.

Es Durlić 1999 ______. "Magijska statistika i alibi—dva aspekta dugovečnosti magije kod Vlaha 'Za zdravlje.'" *Zbornik radova*. Zaječar: Museum of Zaječar. pp. 281-88.

Es Durlić 2010 ______. *Sveti jezik vlaškog hleba*. Beograd: Balkankult.

Ginzburg 1983 Carlo Ginzburg. *The Night Battles: Witchcraft and Agrarian Cults in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*. Baltimore, MD: Johns.

Gueorguieva 1988 Ivanitchka Guerguieva. "La représentation de l'enfant dans les traditions bulgares." *Ethnologies d'Europe et d'ailleurs 2*, 37.2:43-53.

Gueorguieva 1990 ______. "Rêver sous le dictame (Bulgarie)." In *Les plantes et les Saisons, Calendrier et Représentations*. Ed. by Marianne Mesnil. Brussels: Institut de Sociologie de l'Université Libre de Bruxelles. pp. 213-28.

Hamayon 1990 Roberte Hamayon. *La Chasse à l'âme: Esquisse d'une thèorie de chamanisme siberien.* Nanterre: Société d'ethnologie.

Henningsen 1993 Gustav Henningsen. "The Ladies from Outside." In *Early Modern European Witchcraft: Centres and Peripheries.* Ed. by Bengt Ankarloo and Gustav Henningsen. New York: Oxford University Press. pp. 191-215.

Hoppál 2010 Mihály Hoppál. *Sámánok világa*. Budapest: Püski Kiadó.

Kis-Halas 2012 Judit Kis-Halas. "A wiccától a cyberboszorkákig: Újboszorkány kultuszok a 20. Században." *Boszorkányság, mágia, lélekutazás*, 1. *Rubicon*, 16.7:56-61.

Klaniczay 1983 Gàbor Klaniczay. "Benandante-kresnik-zduhač-táltos. Samanizmus és boszorkányhit érintkezési pontjai Közép-Európában." *Ethnographia*, 94:116-34.

Klaniczay 1984 ______. "Shamanistic Elements in Central European Witchcraft." In *Shamanism in Eurasia.* Ed. by Mihály Hoppál. Göttingen: Herodot. pp. 404-22.

Klaniczay 2006 ______. "Shamanism and Witchcraft." *Magic, Ritual, Witchcraft*, 1:214-21.

Knežević 1967 Srebrica Knežević. "Slava tetkama—arhaični ritual za zaštitu zdravlja." *Razvitak*, 7.6:72-77.

Majzner 1921 Milan Majzner. *Dubočke rusalje. Poslednji tragovi iz kulta Velike Majke bogova u Srbiji,* Knjiga XXXIV. Beograd: Izdanje Čupićeve zadužbine, Štamparija Davidović. pp. 226-57.

Pòcs 1971 Éva Pòcs. *Elök és holtak, làtok és boszorkànyok—Mediàtori rendszerek a kora ùjkor forràsàba.* Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadò.

Pòcs 1985 ______. *Magyar ràolvasàsok.* Vol. 1. Budapest: Magyar Tudomànyos Akadémia, Néprajzi Kutatocoport, Akadémiai Könyvtàr.

Pòcs 1986 ______. *Tündér és boszorkàny Délkelet- és Közép Europa hatàràn*. Folklór, folkorisztika es etnologica, 135. A Magyar Néprajzi Tàrsasàg Folyòirata, XCVII. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadò.

Pòcs 1989 ______. *Tündérek, démonok, boszorkànyok.* Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadò.

Popova 1988 Assia Popova. "La naissance des dragons." *Ethnologies d'Europe et d'ailleurs 2*, 37.2:55-85.

Šešo 2003 Luka Šešo. "O krsniku: od tradicijske pojave u predajama do stvarnog iscelitelja." *Studia ethnologica Croatica*, 14-15:23-53.

Radenković 1996 Ljubinko Radenković. *Narodna bajanja kod južnih Slovena*, Beograd: Prosveta; Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts.

Taloş 2002 Ion Taloş. *Petit dictionnaire de mythologie populaire roumaine*. Grenoble: ELLUG, Université Stendhal.

Tomić 1950 Persida Tomić. "Vilarke i vilari kod vlaških Cigana u Temniću i Belici." *Zbornik Radova*, SANU, 4.1:237-62.

Tucakov 1965 Jovan Tucakov. *Psihosugestivni elementi u narodnoj medicini svrljiškog Timoka*. Beograd: Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts.

Vivod 2006 Maria Vivod. "Les guérisseuses de la Voïvodine, Serbie-Monténégro." *Cahiers de Publications Doctorales de l'Université Marc Bloch de Strasbourg*, 7. Strasbourg: Presses Universitaires. pp. 129-40.

Vivod 2008a _____. "A szerb *babice*-k—női démonok vagy mediátorok?" In *Démonok, látók, szentek: vallásetnológiai fogalmak tudományközi megközelítésben*. Ed. by Eva Pocs. Budapest: Ballassi Kiadò. pp. 204-09.

Vivod 2008b ______. "Die Beschwörerin (*Bajalica*) Biljana aus Budisava, Wojwodina. Rekonstruktionsversuche einer ethnischen Identität im postsozialistischen Nachkriegsserbien." *Curare,* 30.2-3:153-62.

Vivod 2014 ______. "Radmila—the Fairy-clairvoyant. Rethinking Ethnopsychiatry—a Case Study from Serbia." *Curare*, 37.1:55-64.

Zečević 1966 Slobodan Zečević. "Zla porođajna mitska bića." *Referati sa XIII Kongresa Saveza Folklorista Jugoslavije u Dojranu.* Dojran: Zdruzenie na folkloristite na SR Makedonija. pp. 333-38.

Zečević 1981 ______. *Mitska bića srpskih predanja*. Beograd: Vuk Karadžić, Etnografski muzej.

Zentai 1976 Tünde Zentai. "The Figure of the "Szépasszony" in the Hungarian folk belief." *Acta Ethnographica* 25:251-74.

Oral Tradition, 32/1 (2018):71-140

A New Approach to the Classification of Gaelic Song

Virginia Blankenhorn

A good deal of water has flowed under the bridge since James Ross published "A Classification of Gaelic Folk-Song" in 1957.[1] Ross's study was typical of a time when scholars favored a clinical and taxonomical approach to oral traditional culture, before modern theories about text, context, and genre began to raise good questions about the application of scientific methods to the analysis of cultural activity. The search for answers to these questions has greatly advanced the way ethnographers and ethnomusicologists understand culture, including the cultures of the Gael.[2] After six decades, it seems fitting to revisit Ross's classification system, and to examine whether the effort of constructing such a system is still worthwhile or not.

In *The Anthropology of Music*, Alan Merriam (1964:209) suggests that we understand musical activity by considering the uses and functions that music serves within a given culture:

> In the study of human behavior we search constantly . . . not only for the descriptive facts about music, but, more important, for the meaning of music. We wish to know not only what a thing is, but, more significantly, what it does for people and how it does it.

Merriam defines the *uses* of music as "the ways in which music is employed in human society . . . the habitual practice or customary exercise of music either as a thing in itself or in conjunction with other activities" (210), suggesting that the *uses* of music can be understood in terms of how musical activity is manifest in daily life—in what social contexts it occurs, and to what utilitarian purposes it is deployed. *Function*, on the other hand, "concerns the reasons for

---

[1] I owe a deep debt of gratitude to a number of colleagues whose help and advice have sustained me in pursuing this rather tricky project. My thanks to the organizers of the 2012 Rannsachadh na Gàidhlig conference in Glasgow, who provided a platform for work-in-progress; to colleagues in Celtic and Scottish Studies, University of Edinburgh, including Drs. John Shaw and William Lamb, both of whom were kind enough to comment upon a revised draft of this paper; to Dr. Cathlin Macaulay, Archivist of the School of Scottish Studies Archives, for offering guidance about the use of archive recordings; to Dr. Heather Sparling of Cape Breton University, who read and commented on an early draft; to Dr. Dòmhnall Uilleam Stiùbhart of the University of the Highlands and Islands, who provided help with the subject of Gaelic bawdry; and to Dr. John MacInnes, who has allowed me to pick his brains and mine his memory on occasions too numerous to count. I would also like to thank the two anonymous reviewers assigned to read the original draft of this paper on behalf of *Oral Tradition*. Their queries, objections, and suggestions have, I hope, greatly strengthened the arguments advanced here, and saved me from many a clanger. *Tapadh leibh uile*.

[2] For background to genre studies and its applicability to folklore topics, see Bakhtin (1986), Ben-Amos (1976), Bascom (1954), Finnegan (1991), Bascom (1954), and Finnegan (1991).

[music's] employment, particularly the broader purpose which it serves" (*ibid*.). He contrasts a song's express utility—what it is used for by and within the community, how the people put it to conscious use—with its meaning for that community, how its members feel about that song, and what it says about their life together. He writes (*ibid*.):

> Function may not be expressed or even understood from the standpoint of folk evaluation. . . . The sense in which we use these terms, then, refers to the understanding of what music does for human beings as evaluated by the outside observer . . .

As Merriam suggests, these "functional" concepts may go without saying within the community itself. Indeed, John Shaw's Cape Breton experience seems to indicate as much. Shaw (2010:22) recalls what his informants said when he asked them why they sang:

> [W]ithout exception the singers regarded it as a non-question and registered a degree of polite confusion as to what was intended by it. The only really coherent answer, that of my friend Dan Allan Gillis of Broad Cove, stated the shared cultural perception concisely enough: "Singing songs? Well, I don't know. People have been singing songs since the world began." The underlying message coming from a people whose favorite pastime is to speculate, usually with great eloquence, on anything encountered in their daily experience, is that singing is a fundamental property of creation along with humankind, the natural environment or the passage of time. In the world-view of their community it doesn't need explaining.

Similarly, Thomas McKean (1997:139) observes of his subject, song-maker Iain MacNeacail of Skye, that while he might classify his compositions as nothing more than pastimes:

> song-making, learning and singing were such a part of daily life that they also functioned on many other levels. . . . MacNeacail, as part of the community, may not see some of the other ways the songs work; he is unable to gain an objective perspective (and it probably does not occur to him to try).

Even so, the gradual transformation of the *Gàidhealtachd*, the decline of traditional work and leisure contexts, and the increasing influence of the dominant culture have long prompted Gaels to think carefully about their community's legacy of traditional song and lore, and the role that legacy played in the life of the community, in the lives of their parents and grandparents. As a consequence, our understandings of both *use* and *function* in the native context of Gaelic song are enriched not only by the observations of non-Gaels, but also by the "eloquent speculation" and considerable insights of Gaels themselves. Indeed, the distinction between etic and emic in the present case needs to be made with care, given the fact that the native Gaelic-speaking populations of Scotland and Canada no longer live in relatively isolated traditional communities, and have not done so for some time. Only the elderly can personally recall a way of life that has been in steep decline since the nineteenth century, and has virtually disappeared by now. The insights of today's Gaels are, therefore, to a large extent based upon recollections rather than

direct experience, and mediated by the same dominant-culture world-view that those of Gaelic heritage now share with non-Gaels.

Merriam's ideas have found considerable favor, not least among scholars of Gaelic and Irish song. They provide the foundation of Breandán Ó Madagáin's (1985) influential study of Irish traditional song in the nineteenth century and Lillis Ó Laoire's (2007) examination of singing and song-culture in Tory Island; they inform Thomas McKean's (1997) profile of Skye bard Iain MacNeacail and John Shaw's (2000) presentation of the life and repertoire of Cape Breton singer and tradition-bearer Lauchie MacLellan; and they support the arguments of Maighread Challan (2012) in her recent examination of oral traditional culture in North Uist in the first half of the twentieth century. These form the background to this study.

Classification: What are the Options?

In the world of science, a taxonomy is intended to be a straightforward and intuitively comprehensible instrument. The system devised by Carl Linnaeus (1707-78) for the classification of natural phenomena starts with a question so simple that it has become the basis of a guessing-game: "Is it animal, vegetable, or mineral?" Having obtained the answer "animal," for example, the questioner can then systematically narrow the choices to determine what phylum the creature belongs to (chordates, sub-phylum vertebrates, and so on) to class (mammals), order (primates), family (*hominidae*), genus (*homo*), and species (*homo sapiens*). Other questions then reveal the age, gender, cultural background, and name of the *homo sapiens* in question. This sort of system is generally known as a rank-based scientific classification.

Another science-based taxonomic system, known as *cladistics*, groups items according to unique characteristics suggestive of a common ancestor. Each division (*clade*) consists of a family tree tracing each item's descent from this shared ancestor. For example, DNA evidence has proven that the family *canidae* contains two clades: *canini*—that includes domestic dogs and are descended from wolves—and *vulpini*, descended from foxes. While a rank-based taxonomy is purely descriptive, a cladistic system provides a means of focusing on historical/genealogical relationships. Such a system provides a helpful tool for understanding evolution, not only in the natural world but also in fields such as linguistics and paleography in which researchers seek to identify the original form of a linguistic feature, or the earliest of several related manuscripts.

Either of these models might provide a starting-point for the classification of Gaelic song, depending on what questions the researcher wished to answer. A cladistic model might be used to trace thematic correspondences between Gaelic verse and that of other European cultures. A rank-based model might help sort out the multitude of refrain-types in Gaelic song, or describe the hierarchy of poetic elements of which the verse is composed. Cladistic models are useful for analyzing relationships and derivations over a long period; rank-based models, being more purely descriptive, are suited to understanding differences between items at a particular moment. So at the outset one must have a clear objective in mind, as it will have implications for the type of catalog that will be most useful in achieving that objective. As in linguistics, where researchers are careful to distinguish between diachronic and synchronic investigation of

language, our present topic requires us to define our parameters with care. Before we do so, however, a brief review of previous approaches is in order.

One of the most ambitious attempts at a science-based taxonomy of human singing is undoubtedly that of Alan Lomax (1915-2002). While Merriam and his followers recommended starting with an understanding of the society in question and seeking to enrich that understanding by examining musical activity within that context, Lomax approached the problem from the opposite end, seeking to generalize conclusions about human society by comparing singing practices across a wide spectrum of cultures. Lomax's *cantometrics* (1959 and 1968) attempt to define a statistically-rigorous and globally-consistent classification system for traditional songs capable of revealing relationships between the stylistic features of sung performance and various aspects of culture in human societies worldwide. Examining variables such as voice-quality, posture, singing technique, and various gender-based characteristics, Lomax attempts to arrive at universal truths about human society by correlating stylistic features of song with specific societal characteristics. He includes Hebridean song-styles in his profile for what he calls the "Old European" area, where "singing and dancing are basically choral and cooperative" (1959:936). Quite apart, however, from problems inherent in such a vast undertaking, Lomax's approach does not facilitate close examination of any individual song-culture. So while the stylistic features Lomax identified may help to illuminate some aspects of Gaelic singing for those interested in performance style and practice, they are unlikely to provide a useful model for a catalog of Gaelic song.

While Lomax tried to base a classification system on the stylistic elements characteristic of sung performance, another approach—so far untried in the context of Gaelic song—would build upon musical criteria, for example, specific rhythmic and melodic characteristics, stanzaic structures, refrain elements, and the like. Gaelic song illustrates a number of interesting musical features: its use of modal and pentatonic scales (Tolmie 1911:150-55; Gillies 2005:xxvi-xxvii); the occurrence of what William Matheson called the "variable third" (1955:77-78); the fact that, while many of its tunes reflect the binary and rounded-binary forms common in other European cultures, many others do not; the mix-and-match, motif-based circularity of many of its melodies, which creates subtle variety out of scant material (Kennedy-Fraser and MacLeod 1909:xxxi); the fact that melodic structure and verse structure are often at variance within the same song (Blankenhorn 2013c:76-80); the undoubted existence of "tune families," however difficult these are to define and pin down in practice (Bayard 1950); the syncopation ("wrenched accent") that, in some sorts of songs, brings musical rhythm into conflict with that of the text (Gillies 2005:xxviii-xxxi). But while these are all interesting subjects, they do not immediately suggest a classificatory method that would reveal anything significant about the society that employed this musical language. Indeed, just as the phonemic elements of spoken language are meaningless out of context, the sonic components of Gaelic music do not themselves tell us anything remarkable about Gaelic society, or about how musical practices reflect the culture of the Gael. A classification system, in my view, needs not just to help us understand the various parts, but also to offer a glimpse of the whole organism. I cannot imagine how a system that defined its categories on the basis of tonality or rhythm or melodic structure would help us understand how musical behavior reflects the humanity, or the world-view, of Gaeldom. But perhaps the best reason of all to avoid basing a classification system on musical criteria is simply

that, as John Shaw and others have observed, in Gaelic tradition, as "[i]n most unlettered song traditions, words and music are conceived as a single unit . . ." (2000:24). A music-based taxonomy of Gaelic song would therefore seem to require an analytic habit not widely cultivated among Gaels themselves.

Clearly, devising a system of classification for an aspect of human culture like song is no straightforward matter, because human culture is dynamic, and any categories we construct must be able to accommodate this protean quality. The evolution of tradition is a fluid phenomenon, and Gaelic tradition is no exception. Whether we are talking about the texts of laments, love songs, and rowing songs preserved in the waulking-song tradition;[3] or Fenian narrative poems re-purposed as *duain Challainn*; or *puirt-à-beul* used to teach tunes to young fiddle-players (as they have been in Cape Breton; see Shaw 1992/93:47), it is clear that some items can potentially occupy multiple categories. Unlike Linnaeus, we have to deal with a world in which a single entity—a song—may occupy multiple taxonomic positions reflective of its changing use and function in society over time.

Take for example *Cumha Sheathain* ("The Lament for Seathan"), which has come down to us as a waulking-song. In terms of its textual content this song is a lament, and one which reflects interesting historical and mythological elements (Campbell and Collinson 1977:40-45, 196-200). As a waulking-song, it receives appropriately robust treatment when performed in the waulking context (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/24170/1); but must we therefore assume that its original composer composed it as such, given the searing grief expressed in the text? Must we assume that its lively tempo and its choral refrain, both so characteristic of waulking-songs, were intended from the start? What are we to make of performances such as this one (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/94370/1), by Vatersay singer Nan MacKinnon, which was clearly recorded outside the work context and thus freed from the rhythmical constraints imposed by that context? Does her performance hearken back to an earlier time when such laments would have been performed in more contemplative fashion by a solo singer? Does its style arise out of some aspect of Nan MacKinnon's personality, or of her living circumstances, or of her long standing as one of James Ross's most prolific informants? Are our expectations colored by the fact that we are accustomed, in our own culture, to laments receiving slower and more contemplative treatment in performance? Finally, should our system of classification account for the historical and/or mythological elements noted by Campbell and Collinson, assuming that these were indeed important to the society in which the song was first composed?

Writers concerned with Gaelic song in particular have, by and large, sought to situate our understanding of the songs within the culture that composed and sang them. We have already named some of these scholars, and this may be a good point to examine their work more closely. Because James Ross' "A Classification of Gaelic Folk-Song" (1957) represents the only focused attempt at a taxonomy, we shall deal with it in detail at the end of this review. In the meantime, a number of other writers and collectors—Gaels as well as non-Gaels—have found it expedient to

[3] Waulking-songs are work songs performed to facilitate the fulling of handwoven woolen cloth; see Note 24 below.

group Gaelic songs into categories, and in so doing have helped shape our understanding of the social contexts in which they were performed.[4]

In 1911 Frances Tolmie (1840-1926) published her collection of *105 Songs of Occupation* in the *Journal of the Folk-Song Society*. Valuable for any number of reasons, it is important not least because Tolmie's organizational structure suggests that she was thinking in terms of taxonomical divisions. She divides the songs into five categories, the first two of which are based on social function, and contain sub-headings: Songs of Rest and Recreation (cradle songs; nurse's songs; vocal dance music); and Songs of Labour (waulking songs of four different types; a reaping song and four rowing songs, which she states were also used for waulking; and milking songs). The last three categories, by contrast, are differentiated by theme: Ancient Heroic Lays; Songs to Chiefs and Others; and Laments, Love-Lyrics, Etc. The collection is in fact a more comprehensive catalog than its title would suggest, and is not limited to songs performed in a work context. It is enriched throughout by Tolmie's observations about the social context in which the songs would have been sung, and her implicit understanding that the categories she proposed were subject to revision.

Margaret Fay Shaw (1903-2004) began collecting songs in the 1930s in South Uist. Her collection *Folksongs and Folklore of South Uist*, first published in 1955 and still in print, includes 109 songs gathered from 22 informants, of whom nine (eight women and one man) supplied the vast majority of the items. Like Tolmie before her and others afterwards, Shaw uses a variety of organizing principles—theme, social function, cultural reference—to construct her chapter-headings, although it may be said that these form less a catalog than a list. Songs identified by theme include seven groupings: songs in praise of Uist, sailing songs, songs of war, an exile's song, laments, songs about hunting, and songs of love. A further five are defined by the social context in which songs are sung, including: vocal dance music, milking songs, spinning songs, waulking songs, and clapping songs. The list is completed by three additional rather vague categories—songs of the fair, little songs, and fairy songs—the latter of which we shall see again when we examine James Ross's catalog. *Duain*—Ossianic narrative verse (including the fragments chanted at Christmas and Hogmanay)—Shaw differentiates from songs, and lists instead under the heading "Ballads."

Longtime Reader in Celtic at the University of Edinburgh, William Matheson (1910-95) exerted a formidable influence on scholarship relating to Gaelic song. As a native Gaelic speaker from North Uist, a collector, and a singer himself, Matheson was heir to the living tradition; as a Celticist, he made a lifetime's study of how that tradition revealed the aesthetic values of past centuries. As a performer, he was not averse to combining these two preoccupations and performing his own versions of songs—texts and melodies thoughtfully reconstructed from print and manuscript sources as well as from oral tradition—as he liked to think they would have been heard in the courts of the Gaelic chieftains and elsewhere (Blankenhorn 2013a). Speaking to an

[4] There is no denying the importance of emic terminology in Gaelic or any other culture. Unfortunately, we have found ourselves unable to rely upon a native taxonomy, perhaps because so few Gaels have seen fit to give thought to such a matter, while those who have done so have themselves been influenced by foreign models. John Shaw told me that "in trying to find Gaelic terms for various kinds of songs from singers, my own efforts did not take me all that far" (personal communication). Of those whose work is summarized here, three—Frances Tolmie, William Matheson, and James Ross—were born and brought up in Gaelic-speaking communities.

audience in Mull, Matheson suggested a four-part hierarchical catalog of Gaelic song based upon his understanding of traditional terms applied to poets from medieval times onward (Matheson n.d.). This hierarchy included the professional court poets (*filidh*) of Gaelic Scotland and Ireland, whose poetry (*dàn*) was composed in syllabic meters and performed to harp accompaniment on high ceremonial occasions; the bards, whose *bàrdachd* included formal eulogies and elegies composed in accentual meters; and the musicians or minstrels (*luchd-ealaidh* or *luchd-theud*), who composed and sang songs (*amhran*/*òran*) in a wide variety of accentual meters. At the bottom of the hierarchy Matheson added a fourth group of poetic practitioners: the unnamed multitude of (largely women) poets responsible for the waulking-song repertoire. Matheson's catalog is unique in being based not upon thematic or social contextual criteria, but upon undoubtedly emic distinctions, albeit ones that had fallen out of use among ordinary people by the time he wrote about them.

Although Alan Bruford (1937-95) published many works in an academic vein, his articles on "Gaelic Song" in *Folk Review* (1978-79) were written for a general readership. Even so, they reflect the author's long-term scholarly preoccupations with the historical development of poetry and song in Gaelic Ireland and Scotland. Focusing for the most part on the songs' textual content, poetic style, and historical antecedents, Bruford relies upon a mixture of typological criteria to organize his material. Of his ten different song-groupings, four include sub-categories: narrative songs (Fenian ballads; songs embedded in stories; translations of Child ballads; songs about battles; songs about voyages); work songs (waulking songs; rowing songs; harvest songs; quern songs; churning songs; spinning songs; carding songs); mouth music (pibroch songs; *canntaireachd*;[5] drinking songs; comic and nonsense songs); and political themes (Jacobite songs). The remainder—love songs, lullabies, laments, bardic themes, religious songs, and psalm-singing—are listed separately. It is unclear whether Bruford intends this catalog—if that is what it is—to describe the distant past, the immediate past, or the present day, as he devotes considerable time to the medieval origins of certain song-types, the applicability of Matheson's distinction between *dàn* and *amhran*, and the possible impact of the Norman French *amour courtois* on Gaelic song.

A more up-to-date approach is that of John Shaw who, in a long career on both sides of the Atlantic, has focused on the oral traditions of Scotland and of Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, where he lived for many years and collected traditional tales, songs, and lore from the people. A number of Shaw's works are cited here, but his major contribution is *Brìgh an Òrain* (2000), in which he presents a selection from the repertoire of Lauchie MacLellan (1910-91) of Broad Cove, Cape Breton. We shall have more to say about this collection presently; for the moment, we may note that Shaw groups Lauchie MacLellan's songs in seven categories: love songs, sailing songs, waulking (milling) songs, local songs, war songs, fairy songs, and drinking songs.

In his examination of the songs composed by Iain MacNeacail of Skye, Thomas McKean (1997:130-41) suggests a catalog based on *function*—but not in the term's usual sense of a song's importance for the community as a whole; rather, McKean describes function from the bard's point of view, specifically, the sorts of circumstances that would spur him to composition in the

---

[5] The mnemonic system of tuition used by pipers, which employs a unique set of syllables corresponding to specific notes and note-values; see §5.3.1 below.

first place. The outline includes: songs improvised in response to a specific circumstance, for amusement, more or less at the drop of a hat (1997:131-32); songs composed at the request of another person (133-34); songs composed in response to adversity, including songs of public retaliation (135); songs of protest, composed in hope of change or simply "as a record of discontent" (135); satirical songs composed as revenge or therapy, "more of a catharsis and a 'laying to rest' of a grievance than a real retribution or punishment" (136-37); songs composed in response to a formal challenge or competition (137-38); songs composed to simply pass the time (138-39); and songs composed to express the song-maker's individual vision and point-of-view —or as MacNeacail put it himself, "That's how I was, just putting it in my own way" (139). McKean (139) explains:

> The songs have a more central role in MacNeacail's internal life than he has been letting on and, by extension, in the life of the community of which he is a part. . . . To the poet, this vision will have its own internal logic, reference and validity. . . . It is this internalized model we are trying to understand through examining MacNeacail's songs and his world in such detail. I believe that this perspective is the core of the folkloric study of context; it is as central to the artist's view as an outsider can get.

While McKean recognizes that these categories are not mutually exclusive, and while he is describing the output of a single song-maker at a particular place and time, his insights may provide useful guidance in the larger context we are addressing here.

A well-known performer and popularizer of Gaelic songs, Anne Lorne Gillies published many of her favorites in *Songs of Gaelic Scotland* (2006), an anthology designed for Gaelic-speakers, Gaelic-learners, and singers. Songs are grouped thematically under five headings: songs of the sea; songs of clan and conflict; songs of land and longing; songs of love; and songs of courtship and conviviality. In the introduction, Gillies describes her approach to the classification of Gaelic song, acknowledges the work of Ross and others, and provides contextual and musical notes; a separate note on "Gaelic work-songs" describes the work-context of songs cataloged by theme. More generalist than scholarly in its orientation, Gillies' collection is reminiscent of the many nineteenth-century collections of Gaelic songs popular with upwardly-mobile Gaels whose families had left the traditional way of life behind, but who wished to preserve some aspects of Gaelic culture in their lives.

James Ross (1923-71) was a native of Skye, and as a researcher at Edinburgh University's School of Scottish Studies in its early years he collected and deposited many hundreds of items in what was to become the School's sound archive. His article "A Classification of Gaelic Folk-Song" appeared in the first volume of *Scottish Studies* in 1957. Because it was his stated objective to provide a typology of Gaelic song, we need to examine this work closely. His system is summarized below:

I. SONG THEME

1.1 Songs with an inter-sexual aspect
- 1.1.1 Love songs (general)
- 1.1.2 Matchmaking songs
- 1.1.3 Night visit songs
- 1.1.4 Pregnancy songs
- 1.1.5 Tàmailt (complaints)

1.2 Songs relating to the physical environment
- 1.2.1 Hunting songs
- 1.2.2 Homeland songs
- 1.2.3 Topographical songs

1.3 Panegyric
- 1.3.1 Eulogy
- 1.3.2 Elegy
- 1.3.3 Lament

1.4 Satire
- 1.4.1 Aoir
- 1.4.2 Flyting

1.5 Songs of miscellaneous themes
- 1.5.1 Religious songs
- 1.5.2 Bacchanalia
- 1.5.3 Jacobite songs
- 1.5.4 Merry songs

II. SONG STRUCTURE

2.1 Ballads
- 2.1.1 Heroic ballads
- 2.1.2 Sailors' ballads (place-name songs)
- 2.1.3 Soldiers' ballads

2.2 Macaronics

2.3 Pibroch songs

2.4 Puirt-à-beul

III. FOLK ÆTIOLOGY

3.1 Fairy songs

IV. SONG FUNCTION

4.1 Songs associated with ritual
- 4.1.1 Duain Challuinn (Hogmanay songs)
- 4.1.2 Eòlais (charms and incantations)

4.2 Occupational songs
- 4.2.1 Cradle songs
- 4.2.2 Milking songs
- 4.2.3 Orain basaidh (palming/ clapping songs)
- 4.2.4 Rowing songs
- 4.2.5 Spinning songs

The most awkward feature of Ross's catalog—and one that has reappeared in subsequent publications—is his use of dissimilar criteria in its construction. While each of these elements—song theme, song structure, folk aetiology, function—is interesting in the context of Gaelic song and singing, the fact that they are used to construct a classification system is misleading. Do the songs categorized by structure or function not have themes? Do love songs, hunting songs, Jacobite songs, and all the others lack structure? What does "folk aetiology" mean in this context? Noting that Ross wrote some years before Alan Merriam suggested a new meaning for *function* in the context of traditional song, we cannot expect Ross's catalog to reflect that definition.

Not only are Ross's four categories far from being mutually exclusive, they are not even defined in similar terms. "Song theme" concerns itself with textual content; "song structure" deals with matters of metrical and (potentially) musical design; "folk aetiology"—a cladistic criterion—refers to songs embedded in, or closely related to, stories of a supernatural character; and "song function" distinguishes types of songs according to the social utility of their performance—closer to what Merriam would have called "use." There is considerable overlap between these categories, especially as regards items in the "song function" category, whose texts reflect many of the themes listed under "song theme."

Most strikingly, Ross fails to include one of the most important bodies of song known in Gaelic: waulking songs. He himself explains (1957a:96):

> Although one hears the term frequently used in discussions about traditional Gaelic song, [the waulking song] has not been given generic status in this classification because of the wide variety of themes and structures which are found in this tradition.

In this fashion Ross acknowledges that he has created a catalog that manages to exclude one of the largest and most interesting bodies of song in the Gaelic language.

Perhaps the greatest failing of Ross's typology, however, is that he fails to articulate an overarching rationale for proposing it in the first place. Why do we need such a thing? What understanding is the catalog meant to facilitate? The closest he comes to answering this question is this (Ross 1957a:95):

> One of the major barriers to the analytic discussion of any folk-song culture is the lack of a definitive terminology. There has been very little objective study in this field over the last fifty years and it has not been possible to use a previous classificatory system as a model. This state of affairs contrasts sharply with the great progress that has been made in the systematic study of the folk-tale. Antti Aarne published his *Verzeichnis der Märchentypen* forty-six years ago, setting forth a classification of tales which set the pattern for all future catalogues up to the present time.

It would appear that Ross sees a need for a cataloging system for Gaelic song for the simple reason that such a system has already been invented for folk-tales. Indeed, Ross was writing at a time when the classification of texts, both oral and written, in imitation of scientific models was part of the scholarly landscape (Sparling 2008:405). He does not, however, envision how it will advance the understanding of future scholars to know that a given song, in and of itself, exhibits particular thematic or structural characteristics.

Ross's article has been widely referenced. It contains many valuable insights about Gaelic song-texts, and raises important issues for further study. The choice of differing criteria has allowed Ross to explore his material from different angles, in the process of which he has richly illuminated some aspects of the song heritage of Gaelic Scotland. But because the parameters of his classification system are insufficiently clear, and because it fails to guide the user in dealing with its multiple non-mutually-exclusive categories, Ross's schema is unconvincing as a classification system *per se*. If the purpose of such a system is to guide its users in placing new or unfamiliar items into a context that will facilitate fuller understanding of those items, then Ross's system creates a difficulty for such users. Whether we can devise a system that will avoid this difficulty is debatable; but it is from that debate that deeper understanding may eventually emerge.

Ross's system equips us to sort individual Gaelic songs into named categories, and it has proven to be handy enough for this purpose. What it fails to do, however, is tell us what these labels actually mean, how these song-categories support the social identity of the communities that sing the songs, or what emotional significance the songs have for the people themselves, how singing helps them to make sense of their lives. Assuming that we want a classification of

Gaelic song to help us gather such information, we need to design our parameters with that purpose in mind. But because—as we saw with *Cumha Sheathain* and shall see with other songs and song-types—"re-purposing" poses a common conundrum and cultural change is a constant, any classification system devised today is likely to be out-of-date tomorrow. So why bother? I believe there are at least two good reasons.

First, by closely examining how things stood at one period in history, we can more easily begin to assess how things have changed. As Heather Sparling has noted, "because genres are not static and definitions change over time, genre analysis can provide the ethnomusicologist with a potential tool for assessing musical change . . . " (2008:402).

Second, such an enterprise allows us to explore the lives of people vastly different from ourselves—and not so different at all. While societies past and present have differed greatly in terms of their values, their ethos, and their organizing principles, all societies are composed of human beings in whose physical, emotional, and spiritual needs we can find reflections of our own. By examining the cultural manifestations of others, we can better understand the development of culture in our own society, and how it continues to evolve around us.

Defining the Parameters

The classificatory tool described below is intended to help us understand how song functioned both at a societal and a personal level in a traditional Gaelic-speaking community, by providing a means of sorting the songs themselves in a manner that reflects their social and emotional significance both for those who sang, and for those who listened. But before we describe it, some defining boundaries must be stated.

1. Time frame

Our approach is broadly synchronic, if such a term can be applied to a time frame as long as a century. Our period extends roughly from 1850—events in the latter half of the nineteenth century being well within the recall of many informants in the sources cited here—to about 1960, when the effect of two world wars, changes in rural work-practices and housing-stock, the coming of mass communications, and the growing importance of a money economy had at last undermined the age-old mutual dependency of neighbors, and effectively brought about the demise of traditional Gaelic communities on both sides of the Atlantic. Beyond that date, traditional ways may have lived on for a time among older people, but they were increasingly ignored by the younger generation.

This approach is not hard science; it is a judgement call. We cannot create a catalog for all ages, however interesting it might be to speculate about the "original" use or function of a given song, based on the evidence of its text or of its musical form. A song like *Cumha Sheathain* may have been composed as a contemplative lament, but it has survived into our own day as a consequence of its use as a lively waulking song, and for that reason it will be included in our catalog as a waulking song. (Indeed, if one looks carefully at the texts of waulking songs, one finds that a great many reflect sorrowful themes and narratives—the common threads of

women's lives for centuries.) This is not to say that it was never heard in other contexts—Nan MacKinnon's recording for James Ross proves otherwise—but that it has most often been identified by those who sang and recorded it as a waulking-song—that is, a song performed in a specific work context.

2. Sources

An important source for our study is recordings contributed by living informants during the twentieth century in the *Gàidhealtachd* areas of Scotland and in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia. Many of these contributors were middle-aged or elderly people, recorded at a time when the living context for the traditions they had inherited was fading fast. They wanted to ensure that an item they knew—a song, a story, a bit of local history—was not lost forever, and it was on that transactional basis that they welcomed the researchers and field-workers into their homes, and participated eagerly in what both sides clearly regarded as an eleventh-hour salvage operation. The Sound Archive of the School of Scottish Studies at Edinburgh University, the Gaelic Folklore Project Tape Collection at St Francis Xavier University in Antigonish, Nova Scotia, the Gaelic recordings held in the BBC Sound Archive, and various other audio collections, public and private, are the result of these endeavors. They contain waulking-songs sung solo by informants of both genders, lullabies recalled in old age, Fenian lays sung by elderly women, tweed-waulkings re-enacted by mature ladies who had participated in the real thing in their youth, Cape Breton milling-frolics re-defined as Gaelic heritage festivals, and many recordings of people gathered together in reminiscence, reminding themselves of what they used to hear all around them decades previously. Many of these informants were passive tradition-bearers, not people who themselves would have performed such material in its natural environment, but who had nonetheless learned it through repeated hearings. Many—perhaps all—of the recording situations were artificial to a greater or lesser extent; and it must be acknowledged that, for both Scotland and Gaelic Canada, determining the *use* and *function* of a song or song-type has become a matter of historical research rather than direct observation. This situation is far from ideal, but it is what we have.

Because collectors and informants alike were focused upon the items of song and lore themselves, rather than upon the social circumstances in which they would have traditionally featured, many of these archival recordings contain less information about those contexts than we might wish. Indeed, the fact that the most productive collectors in Gaelic-speaking areas were themselves Gaels must have mitigated against the gathering of such details: as one of them—Dr. John MacInnes, who worked at the School of Scottish Studies for some 40 years—told me, "People would have thought it odd for me to ask questions I could answer myself."

So it is safe to say that the examples of Gaelic songs preserved in the various archives are not what might have been recorded a hundred years earlier, assuming an invisible collector could have stolen in with a recording device and turned it on without anybody noticing. (The distancing effect of the microphone and of the presence of strangers is clear in many of these recordings.) Even so, the fact that so many informants were older people meant that they could share detailed memories of much earlier times, and their own informed speculations about their communities' traditions contribute hugely to what we can learn from these recordings.

In addition to the sound and video archives, a number of published collections draw from the same well. While we have already mentioned some of these in our typological review, a few additional details may be helpful.

Frances Tolmie's collection of *105 Songs of Occupation* (1911) is important because of its early date and because it broke new ground in recording texts and tunes from the same informant.[6] It includes items collected from 23 named people, 19 women and four men, some of whom were born before 1800. Of the 109 songs and variants attributed to named individuals, the vast majority—some 91 items—were collected from only eight singers. Of these, 24 were songs Miss Tolmie herself recalled from childhood, and 36 were recorded from a single informant, Mary Ross from Kilmaluag in Skye, a member of the Tolmie household from 1882. While Tolmie and all of her informants had learned their songs in their traditional contexts, it is important to remember that her collection was published in retrospect, when she had been living outside the *Gàidhealtachd* for some years. In addition to the song-texts and airs, the volume includes an introduction by the journal's editor, Lucy Broadwood, setting Tolmie's collection in context for the early twentieth-century reader (1911:v-xiv); Tolmie's own personal reminiscence of her own life (1911:143-46); a summary account of Mary Ross's girlhood memories of Skye (1911:147-49); and "a note on the modal system of Gaelic tunes" by Annie G. Gilchrist (1911:150-53).

Frances Tolmie also contributed some 45 songs to Keith Norman MacDonald (1834-1913), who published 28 of them in the second and third editions of *The Gesto Collection of Highland Music* (1997 [1895]), where they appear in appendices. In his *Puirt-à-Beul—Mouth Tunes: or Songs for Dancing* (1931 [1901]), MacDonald included a further 13 of Tolmie's songs, most of them not *puirt-à-beu*l. Tolmie's contribution to these works has been studied by Ethel Bassin (1977:80-3) and by William Lamb, whose 2012 re-edition of the latter work has been an important resource for this study. Lamb describes the contents of MacDonald's *Puirt-à-Beul* thus (2012:17):

> In this collection, there are 116 songs where words and music are printed together, and 85 of these are *puirt*. Amongst these *puirt*, there are 47 reels (55% of the total), 30 strathspeys (35%), 4 jigs (5%) and 4 miscellaneous dance melodies (5%) . . . . There are also 12 *puirt* printed without music and 22 alternative verses dotted throughout the collection.
>
> The other types of song in the collection include: waulking songs, children's songs and rowing songs (11 in total); piping songs and *canntaireachd* (5 in total) and, perhaps surprising, song melodies from the Faroe Islands (3 in total). All in all, although it is primarily a collection of *puirt-à-beul*, roughly 15% is devoted to other types of song.

Lamb's introduction, annotations, and other scholarly apparatus provide an excellent overview of the *puirt-à-beul* genre, including its origins and its role in providing music for dancing in *Gàidhealtachd* communities.

---

[6] Nineteenth-century song collections often paired a text collected from one informant with an air collected from someone else—even someone from a different locality. Informants often went unnamed; and airs were frequently altered to suit accompanied performance by trained singers; see, for example, Campbell (1816) and Dun (1848).

Doubtless the most controversial of the twentieth-century collectors was Marjory Kennedy-Fraser (1857-1930), whose expeditions to the Hebrides began in Eriskay in 1905. The first volume of *Songs of the Hebrides* appeared in 1909, two years before Tolmie's collection, and it was followed by four more, the last of which appeared only a year before Mrs Kennedy-Fraser's death (Kennedy-Fraser and MacLeod 1909, 1917, 1921 and 1925; also Kennedy-Fraser 1929). This is not the place for a discussion of her heavily-critiqued concert arrangements of Gaelic song, nor of the Celtic Twilight-infused verse fantasies of her Gaelic-speaking collaborator, the Rev. Kenneth MacLeod (see Blankenhorn forthcoming). It is, however, worth noting that the introductions to these volumes, the first two in particular, include rich and vivid observation of the social context for Gaelic song at the turn of the century. These passages, along with Kennedy-Fraser's transcriptions of tunes as she actually heard them (as opposed to the concert arrangements), and her keen insights into their melodic structure and tonal character, provide valuable information that supports what we have from other sources, and adds a unique voice to that discussion.

In 1929 a young American, Margaret Fay Shaw, made her way to the island of South Uist. Familiar with Kennedy-Fraser's arrangements, she wanted to hear Gaelic songs in their native environment. Shaw's collection *Folksongs and Folklore of South Uist* (1955) includes 109 songs gathered from 22 informants, of whom nine (eight women and one man) supplied the vast majority of the items. In the introduction—which is enriched by a selection of her own photographs—Shaw illustrates the outsider's advantage in documenting a way of life that, at the time, an insider might have taken for granted.

In 1935 Margaret Fay Shaw married John Lorne Campbell (1906-96), whose own careful scholarship and ardent advocacy on behalf of Gaelic culture is widely acknowledged to have launched the field of Scottish Gaelic ethnology into its modern trajectory. Many of his field-recordings, now owned by the National Trust for Scotland, can be accessed through the Sound Archive of the School of Scottish Studies and the website *Tobar an Dualchais* (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/). His collection of songs from Nova Scotia, *Songs Remembered in Exile*, includes sixty items that he recorded from 12 singers during a visit to Cape Breton and Antigonish County in 1937. A diary of his visit, given as an introduction to the volume, notes a number of differences between how songs were sung in Canada and in "the old country" (an *Seann-Dùthach*, as Cape Breton Gaels refer to Scotland).

Perhaps the best-known of Campbell's works, however, is his three-volume collection of waulking-songs, *Hebridean Folksongs* (1969-81). The first of these comprises an edition of songs collected in 1893 by Donald MacCormick in Kilphedir, South Uist, in which tunes recorded by Campbell and Shaw were matched with song-texts from MacCormick's manuscript. The two subsequent volumes contain transcriptions of texts and tunes collected by Campbell; and all three volumes include musical transcriptions in staff notation by his collaborator Francis Collinson. According to Campbell's own summary (1981:13):

> the three volumes of *Hebridean Folksongs* contain 135 different waulking and clapping songs, many in more than one version; there are 225 tune transcriptions in all. Forty-two women and eight men singers are represented in the following proportions: Barra, 15 women and 4 men;

> South Uist, 15 women and 4 men; Benbecula, 6 women; Eriskay, 3 women; Vatersay, 2 women; Cape Breton, 1 woman.

Extensive introductory essays and critical apparatus provide descriptions of the waulking process; notes on verse meter and features of musicological interest; brief biographies of the singers and notes about the recording process; full Gaelic texts with translations and references; and historical commentary.

Finally, we must include three collections that reflect more recent ethnological principles in casting light not just upon the songs as cultural artifacts, but upon their importance in the lives of the singers and their communities. As noted above, John Shaw's book *Brìgh an Òrain* (2000) examines the life and repertoire of the late Lauchie MacLellan of Broad Cove Parish, Cape Breton, Nova Scotia. The volume includes 48 songs, chosen from over 150 that Shaw recorded from Lauchie MacLellan, along with nine short folktales and MacLellan's own account of his life, over nearly two decades beginning in 1964. Shaw describes how the focus of his field-work gradually changed over that period (2000:xxii):

> When we first embarked on the work of recording, the emphasis was on the preservation of song texts with their airs, along with narratives. As recording progressed, however, our conversations turned increasingly towards the role of family and community in singing, and the need to regard song in its social context became one of the main strands in the present work.

Each song is transcribed (both text and music), translated, and contextualized by the singer's own account of it, and full documentation of other sources is provided. Shaw's wide-ranging introduction focuses upon the social contexts for singing in Broad Cove during a period in which the Gaelic language, and the community that spoke it, were in steady decline; his descriptions will be of substantial use in what follows.

Thomas McKean's book *Hebridean Song-Maker* (1997), also noted earlier, examines the life and songs of Iain MacNeacail (1903-99) of Skye. In this case, the 31 songs included in the volume are those of MacNeacail himself, a bard whose verses reflect a broad range of themes and concerns, including love, exile, elegy, satire, and songs about local and even national events. Recorded by McKean beginning in 1988, the songs are embedded in the bard's life story, as told in his own words. The collection thus presents the art of this local poet in his own person and from his own lips, while also scrutinizing his life, his songs, and his community from an etic perspective.

Fonn: The Campbells of Greepe (2013) is a collection of songs, *puirt-à-beul*, and reminiscences from three generations of this influential Skye family.[7] Lavishly supported by photographs, geographical information, and local and family history, the heart of the volume consists of 118 items, with texts in Gaelic and English, transcripts of the tunes in staff-notation, and a CD of 30 recordings made by researchers from the School of Scottish Studies, by the BBC, and by family members. While the focus throughout the book is on the songs themselves, the

[7] The distinction between "songs" and "*puirt-à-beul*" is important to the Campbells, or at least to the editor of the musical notes, Mary Ann Kennedy, who stresses that *puirt* are dance-tunes first and foremost (Campbell 2013:111).

contextual material more than justifies the subtitle: *Music and a Sense of Place in a Gaelic Family Song Tradition*. Like Lauchie MacLellan and Iain MacNeacail, the Campbells are able to place their sung heritage in its traditional context. Additionally, their experience shows how that heritage has been, and continues to be, transformed to reflect the experience and outlook of today's Gaels.

3. The Gàidhealtachd

Our study focuses on songs sung in two distinct Gaelic-speaking areas. As regards Scotland itself, most of our sources draw from Hebridean traditions, as Gaelic was already in steep decline as a community language when researchers from the School of Scottish Studies and elsewhere began to record living informants. There are, to be sure, plenty of recordings in the School of Scottish Studies Sound Archive from mainland tradition-bearers, and many printed sources—especially nineteenth-century collections of songs, stories, and lore—contain anecdotal evidence of mainland Gaelic culture; but I am aware of no broad-based investigation of the differences between mainland and island Gaelic culture in our time-period that would contribute a meaningful dimension to this study. As regards Gaelic culture in maritime Canada, we shall depend upon the sources named above, and endeavor to point out the significant differences between the two *Gàidhealtachd* areas as we go. I should acknowledge that I have no personal experience of Cape Breton's Gaelic-speaking community, beyond those Canadian Gaels I have met when they happened to be visiting Scotland.

In recent years, several scholars have contributed to our understanding of how prevalent song was in Gaelic-speaking communities. In a comprehensive study of a Scottish *Gàidhealtachd*, Maighread Challan examines North Uist Gaelic-speaking communities and their culture in the first half of the twentieth century.[8] She describes a society in which singing and all other aspects of what she calls *beul-aithris* were not regarded simply as entertainment (although entertainment undoubtedly came into it), but as essential to the community's sense of itself (2012:14):[9]

> . . . *[B]eul-aithris* in Gaelic can be defined as the verbal arts of the people—what Herskovits (1961:165) called "these verbal aspects of the people"—which came down through the generations on people's lips. It includes any sort of information that revealed the knowledge and philosophy of the community: stories, songs, fenian ballads, history, proverbs, riddles, figures of speech, and the language itself. It also comprises the practices and ceremonies, from birth to death, which accompanied such recitation.

John Shaw explains that these verbal arts formed an important part of the structural framework of people's working lives, and a great part of what gave their lives meaning both at a societal and an individual level (2010:22):

---

[8] *Air Bilean an t-Sluaigh: Sealladh air Leantalachd Beul-Aithris Ghàidhlig Uibhist a Tuath* (2012) is in Gaelic. A review in English (Blankenhorn 2013b) contains a summary of Challan's arguments.

[9] Translated from Gaelic by the present writer.

> Recent ethnographic observation together with written accounts from the Highlands reaching back as far as the seventeenth century attest that a wide range of activities in the daily lives of Gaels were permeated with song. In both the Old World and New World *Gàidhealtachds* (Gaelic-speaking districts) it was usual practice for people to accompany even the most mundane of rural chores with singing, and commonplace for passers-by on the road to hear songs emanating from the crofts or farm holdings. Otherwise monotonous chores accompanied by singing included milking; churning; women's gatherings for spinning thread; weaving on the family loom (often a solitary activity carried out during the winter months); waulking or milling the woolen tweed; the singing of hymns and psalms by men in the Protestant settlements [of Nova Scotia] as they hauled lumber out of the woods, or marked the boundaries between properties; Hebridean labourers in Scotland's industrial belt sang when they gathered in the public houses; the cheerful singing of Nova Scotians returning in the winter on their sleighs from making purchases in the town could be heard over a considerable distance as they approached those at home in their rural parishes; and people would sing frequently when they ceased their daily routine activities for a few minutes to catch their breath. And it was by no means rare for people to sing when alone. The result, shared by virtually everyone in the community, was one whereby song with its perceptions, social messages, affective content and historical associations made up a central part of a person's inner verbal activity for most of the day.[10]

It is worth highlighting the contrast between this situation and what we, in contemporary western society, are used to. Nowadays, when singing and story-telling are largely restricted to carefully-structured occasions and are increasingly professionalized, and when most of us would be terrified at the very idea of singing for others, such intense integration of song into everyday life is difficult to imagine. Our cultural ethos could not be more different.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, living conditions in North Uist were challenging (Challan 2012:18-19). Multiple generations lived in cramped and uncomfortable conditions under a single roof. To feed themselves, the people depended upon fishing, livestock, a few basic crops, and whatever they could catch when the gamekeeper's head was turned; they harvested peat for fuel, and kelp for fertilizer; they drew water from lochs, streams, and wells; they sheared their own sheep, and processed the wool from fleece to fabric. Commerce with the mainland played only a very small part in their way of life. Up until the Second World War, Gaelic remained the language of daily life, despite education policies that, from 1872 onwards, required schoolchildren to be taught through the medium of English.

In Canada, Gaelic immigrant families had more rights to the land than they had enjoyed in Scotland: John Shaw notes that "the system of land grants promoting small family holdings . . . produced a rural society markedly less hierarchical than the vertically ordered world left behind, with its lairds, tacksmen, tenant farmers, and landless poor" (2000:5). Even so, their

---

[10] As illustrations, see Calum Johnston's description of singing a particular song as he collected a bag of peats from the peat-stack as a schoolboy in Barra (*Tocher* 13:180); also Duncan MacDonald (Dunnchadh Mac Dhòmhnaill 'ic Dhunnchaidh) of Peninerine, South Uist, describing how his father "would never stop singing songs all evening. When there was no-one in but himself and my mother, with nobody visiting the house, if you went near the house you would hear the song through the door, with him singing it for all he was worth, and at the same time twisting heather ropes, or else ropes of bent. He was never idle" (*Tocher* 25:6-7).

lives were no easier for that. Charles Dunn (1953:28-32) describes how, having once cleared the land of timber (no small task), the settlers resumed familiar patterns of farming, animal husbandry, and fishing. They supplemented their diet with game (in Canada, they did not have to worry about gamekeepers). As in Scotland, women were responsible for providing the household clothing. The ever-present spruce replaced peat as a source of fuel; and timber replaced stone and thatch as the primary building material. Gaelic remained the community language until economic change forced people to look for supplementary work away from home; national educational policies, along with the inescapable sense that Gaelic was not helpful to those seeking employment in the wider world, also played a significant role in the language's decline. In all of their activities, members of the community continued to depend upon kinship and community relationships to sustain them in good times and bad.

Indeed, being able to depend upon neighbors was essential to survival (Challan 2012:78-81). In North Uist, relationships were nurtured wherever people gathered in the course of a day's work: at the smithy, the grinding-mill, the post-office, the local shop; at the quay and on boats at anchor—and any such gathering might provide an opportunity for a song, or a yarn, or a bit of oral genealogy (*sloinneadh*). Some types of work could only be accomplished collaboratively: work on the land, such as cutting and gathering peats, planting and harvesting crops; working with wool, which included a number of specific tasks; work with livestock, such as milking, herding, and transhumance; and work related to fishing and seafaring. Visiting tradesmen—masons, carpenters, shoemakers, tailors, the vet, the man with the stallion—often brought songs and stories with them (Challan 2012:35-46). In Cape Breton, communal work-parties or "frolics" provided not only the context for such tasks as spinning and tweed-milling (waulking), but also a welcome focus for social gatherings and entertainment, particularly during the autumn and winter months (Shaw 2000:15-16).

Ceremonial occasions also brought people together, and the singing and other oral traditions shared at these gatherings reinforced their importance for those present, reminding people of their shared history and kinship. Betrothals and weddings; death-customs and obsequies; church-going and religious observance—all of these gave structure to life, marked important events, and strengthened the community's sense of solidarity (Challan 2012:47-58).

In both Scotland and Cape Breton, the best-known locus for the transmission of *beul-aithris* was the *taigh cèilidh*—the *cèilidh*-house—a house in the community where people would gather after the day's work was done, or break their journey home from town, or wait for the tide to turn. Some *taighean cèilidh* became known for a single specialty such as storytelling or instrumental music, while others welcomed visitors with varied interests (Challan 2012:20-35; Shaw 2000:15). Such variety was an essential ingredient of the *cèilidh*, John Shaw (2010:24) argues, not least because it reinforced the linkages between genres:

> Within the folklore context, a notable feature of *cèilidh* gatherings (and one not unique to Gaelic culture) is the extent to which the performed genres reinforce each other.Thus in addition to genres such as storytelling, song, and instrumental music (to whatever extent they are distinct), the tradition also provides "intermediary" genres that serve as bridges to link the major ones. Instrumental music and storytelling, for example, are linked by a repertoire of piping stories concerning famous performers or the origins of particular tunes, legendary or otherwise. Song and

> instrumental music likewise find mutual reinforcement through the singing of "mouth music" (*puirt-à-beul*): verbal renditions of tunes either containing words or semantically empty vocables which serve to retain and transmit tunes, and can even be danced to.

The *taighean cèilidh* were important not only for their role in preserving tradition, but also for their function as a community safety-valve. As Thomas McKean puts it (1997:98):

> The exchanges characteristic of the *taighean cèilidh* were the life-blood of the village and reflected a living community. News was passed, people gently ribbed and satires exchanged, relieving many of the pressures that build up in a small self-contained community—essential in a society that relies on cooperation for survival. Curiously enough, in many small rural communities there is no anonymity, no hiding from the public eye, no personal "space" to cool off, as there is in a large city. Social pressures must therefore be released before devastating feuds and libellous gossip arise that could severely damage crucial interpersonal relations.

On both sides of the Atlantic, Gaelic communities were conservative. Because people living in near-isolation from mainstream society had to depend upon those nearest to them, they had little inclination to stick their necks out. Colin MacDonald (1943:112-16) recounts how, as a young agricultural advisor sent to work in the Outer Hebrides in the early years of the twentieth century, he attempted to persuade some crofters to raise pigs. The conditions were good for pigs, and there was profit to be made from them; but the people had never raised pigs, and were reluctant to adopt any new idea that their neighbors might ridicule. There is even a Gaelic word for this phenomenon, *coimhearspa*, which reportedly means "waiting for the other man to do it first" (McDonald 1958:78).

Challan (2012:80) notes that the same life-philosophy that kept people from making improvements in their way of life for fear of appearing to compete with their neighbors was also what strengthened people's regard for the old practices and ways of thinking. Thus a young person learning a song was enjoined to learn it properly—singing the right words, maintaining the correct air, keeping the verses in the right order, and gaining a proper understanding of the background to the song—before singing it for others (Shaw 2000:37-38). People took pride in their powers of memory, of being able to deliver a song or a story just as they had learned it from the previous generation, and the community as a whole disapproved of gratuitous changes (Challan 2012:88; McKean 1997:178).

Reflecting the ideas of Merriam and others, Challan emphasizes the multi-functionality of song in North Uist's Gaelic-speaking communities. In addition to helping to lighten various kinds of work, it also entertained both singers and listeners, and served as an emotional catharsis and comfort, helping people express and share feelings that they might otherwise have no opportunity to explore. Singing also acted as an "aid in the integration of society" (2012:116). At a *cèilidh*, the chorus would encourage the soloist and confirm the solidarity of the group; in this way passive tradition-bearers were essential to the activity, helping to keep the singers on track with the text, and in discussing the song afterwards. Here is how Eric Cregeen (2004:108-09) summarized the importance of music and singing in *Gàidhealtachd* life:

> Music in all its forms—piping, fiddling, psalm-singing, unaccompanied —was much more than recreation. It was a necessity of life, indulged in not only on special occasions but at all times. Songs are crucial to understanding life at all times in the Highlands and Islands . . . for they mirror the concerns of everyday life—the courtings and weddings, feuds and disasters, work and recreations, evictions and clearances which people experienced personally. Songs consoled them in their daily hardships, and were continually being sung in the home, among neighbours and at work. . . . One old man told me, "In the old days that's the only thing they had, songs, and the old ones was learning the young ones."

Songs of Introversion and Extroversion

Singing is, above all else, an emotional activity. It allows people to distill emotion and articulate feelings in ways that words alone cannot do. Together, music and words support the emotional and mental health of the community as a whole and of the individuals within it, allowing people to acknowledge, affirm, and share the delights and the pains of life. It is this emotional element that also, I believe, has the power to convey something of the human experiences of one community to listeners from another, however different their ways of life.

Because singing in Gaelic society occurred in so many different contexts and involved so many people, it fulfilled a number of different functions within those contexts. Keeping in mind that in many cases songs could perform multiple functions, and be sung in multiple contexts, we can say that the classificatory structure outlined below is based upon the social context with which particular songs were most frequently identified, and upon the social and emotional functions they would have performed within that context. We shall see that while the presence, absence, or character of certain structural features—repetition, use of vocable syllables, refrain structures, rhythm, melismatic ornament, choral participation—can offer clues to the appropriate classification of an item, they should not be regarded as diagnostic. Other intrinsic features, including theme and poetic meter, may be useful in describing various subsets within our classifications:

GAELIC SONG

Songs of Introversion	Songs of Extroversion
1. Songs to express subjective emotion	2. Songs to accompany domestic life
	3. Songs to facilitate group labor
	4. Songs to lift the spirits
	5. Songs to inform/teach
	6. Songs to affirm community identity

The terms "introversion" and "extroversion" express a basic fact about human personality and interaction, a fact reflected in the songs created and sung in the Gaelic community, as in communities everywhere. The terms are not meant to suggest that the singers need to "be" extroverts or introverts; nor that songs of introversion are always sung in solitude. Rather, they describe the mood that these songs create, the emotions they evoke in listeners.

Songs of introversion seek to establish an intimate emotional connection with listeners. They may be sung for a very few people, for a child or animal, or as emotional release in solitude. Many of them are also sung in larger gatherings, where they have the effect of turning listeners' thoughts inward, and of promoting a reflective, serious mood:

SONGS OF INTROVERSION

1. Songs to express subjective emotion

1.1 Love songs

1.2 Songs of loss

1.2.1 Laments

1.2.2 Songs of exile and nostalgia

1.3 Worship

1.3.1 Psalms

1.3.2 Religious songs

By contrast, songs of extroversion are ones in which the singer seeks the appreciation and even the participation of others. They require collaboration between singer and listeners, whether to facilitate a job of work, to indulge high spirits, or to focus attention on an important story or aspect of community life. While they may be sung in solitude or simply to pass time, their real reason for being is to be sung in company, when refrains can be sung in chorus, comments and encouragement passed, and conversation and banter exchanged:

SONGS OF EXTROVERSION

2. Songs to Accompany Domestic Life

2.1 Lullabies

2.2 Songs of occupation

2.1.1 Milking songs

2.1.2 Spinning songs

2.1.3 Quern songs

3. Songs to Facilitate Group Labor

3.1 Waulking / Milling songs

3.1.2 Clapping songs

3.2 Rowing songs

4. Songs to Lift the Spirits

4.1 Children's songs

4.2 Hogmanay ritual songs

4.3 *Puirt-à-beul*

4.3.1 Dance-songs

4.3.2 Tongue-twisters

4.3.3 Pseudo-*canntaireachd*

4.3.4 Diddling

- 4.4 Drinking songs
- 4.5 Humorous songs

5. Songs to Inform / Teach

- 5.1 Narrative songs
  - 5.1.1 Ballads
  - 5.1.2 Religious narratives
  - 5.1.3 Historical narratives
- 5.2 Cante fable
  - 5.2.1 Songs of the supernatural
  - 5.2.2 Pibroch songs
- 5.3 Didactic songs
  - 5.3.1 *Canntaireachd*
  - 5.3.2 Religious songs

6. Songs to Affirm Identity

- 6.1 Clan panegyric, satire, and complaint
- 6.2 Homeland and nature panegyric
- 6.3 Political panegyric, satire and complaint
- 6.4 Panegyric, satire and complaint about local events, characters
- 6.5 Religious panegyric and evangelism (hymns)

We must acknowledge that "extroversion" and "introversion" are not mutually-exclusive categories, and some items will end up on both sides of the divide, depending upon the social context in which they are sung. As we have seen, "re-purposing" goes on all the time: how else can we explain Presbyterian hymns being sung by Gaelic loggers in the Canadian forest? Fenian lays used as lullabies? Because a person is free to sing anything at any time, in solitude or in company, the distinction between songs of introversion and songs of extroversion is nothing as clear as "animal, vegetable, or mineral," and songs in any category—especially when sung in solitude—can easily qualify as songs of introversion.

It must also be stated that judging the emotional significance of a song or a performance from field-recordings that are half-a-century old, many of them made by outsiders in circumstances very different from their traditional settings, is far from straightforward. There is not—and nor should there be—anything hard-and-fast about any of this. Indeed, the difference between songs of introversion and songs of extroversion is not exactly a bright boundary, and the "correct" placement of an individual song must rely upon whatever is known of the style and circumstances of its performance on any given occasion, rather than upon any intrinsic evidence derived from the text or tune.

At the same time, some conclusions regarding a song's emotional significance can be drawn from considering its textual content, the style in which it is performed, the account the singer gives of it, and the social context in which it is performed, or in which informants say they performed it, or heard it performed, in earlier days. But while the effort to understand the emotional impact of a particular song or performance may be doomed to failure (at least in

categorical terms), it is, I believe, nonetheless crucially important that it be made, if we are to have a hope of understanding what it might have been like to live in Gaelic society. We may not be able to experience the Gaels' traditional way of life or their cultural ethos, but we can have no doubt that their emotional lives bore at least some semblance to our own.

Group 1: Songs to Express Subjective Emotion

1.1. Love Songs

James Ross (1957:100) notes the difference between "love songs" and what he calls the "sub-literary eulogy." In respect of the latter, he points to its "objectivity . . . its tendency to describe and attribute qualities to the subject, as distinct from the more emotional, subjective tendency" of the love song. This crucial difference explains why we have placed love songs in Group 1, and clan panegyric (including eulogy, elegy, and satire) in Group 6. The same distinction is also made in the case of laments, with the "sub-literary" clan elegy included in Group 6 and the more personal songs of lamentation, like other songs of loss, included in Group 1. This is not to say that there are not intimations of deep feeling among the clan eulogies and elegies, but rather to argue that those songs were primarily intended to serve the more formal purpose of creating a sense of group solidarity based upon a leadership figure. For this reason they belong with other songs of extroversion.

In one sense, Ross is clearly correct to describe as love songs "women's songs from the early modern period which have survived through the waulking culture" (1957:99). The texts of many waulking/milling songs speak vividly and movingly of love from the woman's point-of-view, and as I believe Ross originally set out to classify Gaelic songs in terms of their thematic content, his inclusion of waulking-song texts under the heading "love songs" makes sense. Indeed, many waulking-song texts may have originally been composed as love songs, and only later—possibly for metrical reasons—adopted for use in the waulking context. If this is the case, however, this adoption occurred well before the modern period of which we have certain knowledge, and the texts are known to us today only because they have been preserved in waulking songs. Because waulking songs clearly require group participation and coordination, they are included in Group 3. While we may imagine that these texts may have once been performed in a more contemplative fashion—indeed, Nan MacKinnon's performance of *Cumha Sheathain* for James Ross suggests that such a possibility survived down to our own time—the fact that they are generally identified as waulking-songs by the singers themselves leads us to classify them as such for the purposes of the present study, which seeks to describe a classification based on documented practice in the modern era.[11]

In addition to the introspective, deeply-felt love songs included in Group 1, there are of course songs dealing with other aspects of the relationships between men and women—what Ross calls "songs with an inter-sexual aspect" (1957:96 *et passim*). Some of these—night-visiting songs, comic songs of the *malmarié(e)*—are clearly intended to entertain, and should be

[11] The only one of our categories not so documented is that of rowing songs; see below, §3.2.

included among the humorous songs in §4.4; others, including those of the "complaint" type in which a lover describes the ill-treatment he or she has received, are included here in §6.4.

1.2. Songs of Loss

Songs of lamentation and loss are unsurprisingly well-attested in Gaelic Scotland, given the Gaels' experience of dispossession and emigration over many centuries. Songs in this category range from personal laments following the loss of a loved one to songs describing the hardships of the emigrant's life, homesickness, and nostalgia for the homeland. The genre has been productive down to our own time: John Shaw notes that in Cape Breton, "laments were routinely produced for the locality, or sung within a family as a means of reinforcing its own history" (2000:17).

One of the most famous Gaelic laments, *Cumha Ghriogair Mhic Griogair à Gleann Sréith* (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/94452/1), more commonly known as *Griogal Cridhe*, was composed in the form of a lullaby by a young widow lamenting the murder of her children's father by members of her own family. While evidence collected in the past century suggests that *Griogal Cridhe* has probably survived to this day because of its functionality as a lullaby, the quality of the verse indicates that it must have served an additional, probably primary, function for the woman who composed it and for many in succeeding generations, namely, that of giving voice to the poet's strong feelings of love, lamentation, anger, and desire for vengeance.[12]

Curiously, the Skye variant (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/90459/1) of *Griogal Cridhe* that has become standard at Mòd competitions and on commercial recordings appears in Frances Tolmie's collection (1911:196-214) in the category she terms "Waulking Songs: Slow Type" along with a half-dozen other laments, including *Cumha Sheathain*. How such songs figured in the tweed-waulking process she does not tell us (no other commentator, to my knowledge, separates waulking-songs into four separate categories as Tolmie does); nor does she explain why she has included them as waulking songs rather than under the heading, "Laments, Love Lyrics Etc." with which her collection ends. All of the items she lists as "slow waulking songs," however, in one way or another reflect the female perspective, and are thus characteristic of the waulking-song repertoire generally.[13] This situation illustrates how the difficulty of categorization becomes more complex the further back in time one tries to go, especially if one wishes to reflect how the people themselves thought about their own culture.

---

[12] Barbara Hillers (2006) has discussed this duality, in acknowledgement of which we have included *Griogal Cridhe* here under both Laments (§1.2.1) and Lullabies (§2.1). The poem survived for over 240 years between its probable date of composition and its first appearance in written form; for a thorough discussion of its background and oral transmission see MacGregor (1999) and Blankenhorn (2014).

[13] Also included in this group is *Cumha Mhic-Leòid*, an elegy by Màiri nighean Alasdair Ruaidh for MacLeod of Dunvegan, which we would assign to §6.1 below.

1.3. Songs of Worship

Religious worship is a crucially important aspect of life in the *Gàidhealtachd* and, as we shall see, the expression of religious belief occupies important space among songs of extroversion as well as songs of introversion. Religious songs that fall into Group 1 are those whose overt function is to communicate with the Almighty and not primarily with other people. The emotional character of Gaelic religious song is intense—perhaps nowhere more so than in the singing of the psalms. Although generally undertaken in company, psalm-singing is an individual act, where each worshipper attempts to express his or her emotional commitment to God by interpreting the psalm text in song. It is emphatically not a choral performance—in fact, it is not a "performance" at all in the usual sense of the word. It is rather a way in which people attempt to address God as individuals in a manner that transcends normal speech or even prayer. Notwithstanding their communal use—the fact that they are performed in concert, with singers sufficiently aware of one another to follow the precentor's lead—the psalms clearly belong in Group 1 because of the inward focus and intense emotional commitment of each individual worshipper. As North Uist poet Mary MacLean asserts (Challan 2012:116, cited from Neat 1999:47; see also Ó Madagáin 1985:135-36, 144):[14]

> in the midst of a committed congregation, responding to the lead of a good precentor, a sense of spiritual ecstasy can come, at once overwhelming and sublime, yet totally within one's comprehension and control.

At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that communal psalm-singing also expresses the solidarity of the group that sings in this way. The act of coming together in worship confirms the ethos of the society, and the psalms allow the congregation to worship God both individually, as they interact with the text and the melody given out by the precentor, and as a community engaged together at a specific place and time.[15]

Also included in this group are certain religious songs of a contemplative character, some of which may be described as hymns, of which Presbyterian Scotland has produced many in both Gaelic and English. Murdina MacDonald explained that these were not sung in church, but were "Godly pieces—[people] putting into verse their feelings" meant for singing at home.[16] While

---

[14] One of the School of Scottish Studies' most extraordinary informants was Murdina MacDonald of Ballantrushal, Barvas, Lewis, who recorded at least 175 spiritual songs, hymns, and (predominantly) psalms for various researchers from the School, including *Salm 71* and *Tha do Rìoghachd Làn do Ghlòir*, both of which are among the examples listed below. Although women were not allowed to lead the psalms in church, they clearly did so in the context of family worship at home, and Murdina MacDonald's mastery of the art of presenting was unparalleled. It is of interest that, although she was clearly familiar with the secular repertoire of her area, she refused to record secular songs for any of the School's researchers.

[15] In the past few years a group called "The Lewis Psalm Singers," from the village of Back, have taken psalm-singing on the road—partly out of a spirit of evangelism, no doubt, but also in acknowledgment that, largely through its dissemination through the media and recordings, this form of worship has now found a more worldly audience. The group has performed at the Edinburgh Festival (2009) and at Celtic Connections (2014), among other venues.

[16] Interview with Abby Sale in 1968 (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/44185/1).

such spiritual songs and hymns would often have been heard in the context of family worship (that is, in company), they would also have been sung in solitude, as an element of prayer. It must be acknowledged that religious songs are difficult to classify, and we have also included a number of hymns—those of a more panegyric, didactic or proselytizing character and thus suggestive of a need for an audience—in Groups 5 and 6 below.[17] In addition to these contemplative songs, a very few religious narrative songs—both Protestant and Roman Catholic communities have produced these—are included in Group 5.

Examples

Many of the song-types mentioned here have been illustrated in previous studies, and the descriptions are not intended to replace or refute those of earlier scholars, but simply to suggest a new way of understanding the social and emotional role of songs in a traditional Gaelic-speaking community, and thus to explain their placement in the classification system outlined here.

The availability of the website *Tobar an Dualchais* now makes it possible for anyone with access to a computer to hear many of the field-recordings made in the last century by researchers at the School of Scottish Studies, by the BBC, and by Dr. John Lorne Campbell of Canna and his wife Margaret Fay Shaw, whose recordings are held by the National Trust for Scotland. Examples used for illustration of these categories (in the lists below) have been chosen from the *Tobar an Dualchais* collection, which contains approximately twenty-five percent of the recordings held in the School of Scottish Studies Archive. Because song is a living art whose emotional impact only becomes apparent in performance, we have chosen not to provide transcriptions of either texts or airs, but simply to encourage readers to listen to the performances for themselves, keeping in mind that many of them were recorded outside the social context in which they would have originally been heard. Recording dates and singers' names are supplied on the website, along with references to source material—verse anthologies, song collections (with music), historical background—containing information about individual items; additional resources are suggested at the end of this essay:

GROUP 1: SONGS TO EXPRESS SUBJECTIVE EMOTION

1.2 Songs of Loss

1.2.1 Laments

Agus hò ged a tha mi 'm ònar (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/100209/1)

Air feasgar Diciadain (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/31919/1)

Bà, bà mo leanabh (Griogal Cridhe) (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/94452/1)

Cadal cha dèan mi (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/93905/1)

Tha thìde agam èirigh (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/101432/1)

Mo rùn geal òg (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/20100/1)

Cumha Sheathain (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/94370/1)

[17] We have already noted the phenomenon of Presbyterian hymn-singing by logging-crews in Canada (Shaw 2010:22). Unfortunately Shaw does not tell us anything about the hymns chosen for this purpose, or whether the choice mattered.

Òran na h-*Iolaire* (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/42423/1)

1.2.2 Songs of Exile and Nostalgia

'S e fàth mo mhulaid (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/90607/1)
Nuair a thilleas ruinn an samhradh (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/2721/1)
Soraidh leis an àite (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/3386/1)
'S a haoi hó 's na ho gó ri ri (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/7846/1)
Tha mi duilich, duilich, duilich (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/88983/1)
Chaidh maille air mo lèirsinn (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/40809/1)

1.3 Worship

1.3.1. Psalms

Adhradh Teaghlaich (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/70135/1)
Dèanamaid Adhradh (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/26290/1)
Salm 30 (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/66846/1)
Psalm 118 (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/66578/1)
Salm 116 (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/66796/1)
Salm 71 (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/73862/1)

1.3.2 Religious Songs

An Neamhnaid Luachmhor (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/80978/1)
Nach mithich dhomh bhith tòiseachadh (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/94629/1)
O cuin thèid mi null ann? (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/33709/1)
Tha do Rìoghachd Làn do Ghlòir (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/105997/1)

Group 2: Songs to Accompany Domestic Life

The circumstance that brings these types of songs together is that they would most likely have been sung in a domestic setting. Because the jobs of milking a cow, spinning thread, grinding meal, and particularly that of lulling a cranky child fell to the woman's lot, many of these songs were sung exclusively by women, often to an audience consisting solely of an infant or, indeed, a cow. Sometimes there were, however, other listeners and even other participants in these songs apart from the principal singer; and it is for this reason—the presence of a lively audience and the possibility of group performance—that we have classed these domestic songs as songs of extroversion.

2.1. Lullabies

In terms of their function, some lullabies occupy two categories. While most lullabies—for example, *Crodh an tàilleir* and *Hó ho bhó, leadaidh bheag* in the sample here—have simple, repetitive texts that reflect the child's circumstances and the parent's hopes, others such as

Griogal Cridhe, discussed above, reflect more complicated themes, and illustrate how the lullaby genre provided women a rare opportunity of expressing strong feelings in a manner that was not too disruptive of the male-dominated society in which they lived. Of course, any song could be used, in a pinch, to lull a child; indeed, there is evidence that both milking songs and Ossianic lays were used as lullabies (Challan 2012:71). In Cape Breton, "songs used for this purpose were not restricted to the genre; often a singer would choose a favourite song delivered in a soothing manner…and some singers would extemporise verses" (Shaw 2000:17).

Frances Tolmie (1911:157-91) groups 37 items—over a third of her collection—under the heading "Songs of Rest and Recreation." Of these, the first 22 she calls "cradle songs"—presumably lullabies—and the remaining 15 "nurse's songs." The difference between these two sub-groups is not clear, although the quicker tempo indicated for many of the latter suggests that they might be more entertaining than soporific—thus dandling songs rather than lullabies. Ten of the "cradle songs" and two of the "nurse's songs" contain supernatural references, and for this reason we would include these in §5.2.1 below.[18] Nonetheless, it is important to note that Tolmie places the social context for such songs at home, where they played an important role in the rearing and enculturation of children.

2.2. Songs of Occupation

While the types of occupation with which we are concerned here—milking a cow, spinning yarn, grinding meal—all involve rhythmical movement, the songs identified with these sorts of work display nothing like the essential correlation between singing and manual labor that is found in the waulking/milling songs.[19] While there is a natural rhythm to such tasks, they do not fundamentally require musical accompaniment, but can be performed in silence, or while the worker converses with others. By contrast, the tweed-waulking process required the rhythmic regulation of song, and could not proceed without it. Thus we may describe the songs in Group 2 as pastimes—a means of accompanying the task—rather than as essential, in practical terms, to getting the work done.

While such tasks would often have been performed alone with only an infant or an animal for audience, they were also undertaken in company. There are accounts of young women gathering to milk their cows—at the sheilings, certainly, and probably at home as well—and their choice of songs and style of performance would no doubt have reflected their enjoyment of each

---

[18] Including *An Cùbhrachan* (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/89261/1), *Òran Tàlaidh na Mna-Sidhe, Buain na Rainich* (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/101935/1), four versions of *Uamh an Òir* (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/54755/1)—usually classified as a pibroch song—and three songs about the *each uisge* (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/99707/1)—the kelpie or "water horse." The "nurse's songs" category includes *Maolruainidh Ghlinneachain* and *Colann gun Cheann* (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/85507/1).

[19] Other household tasks such as carding and knitting, while not innately rhythmical, might be accompanied by song (Shaw 2000:37); Alasdair Boyd, a highly-regarded singer from Iochdar, South Uist, "learned songs connected with pibroch from his uncle's wife, Annie MacDonald—Anna nighean a' Phìobaire—who sang all the time as she knitted or sewed" (*Tocher* 3:84). Churning, undeniably rhythmical, often called for a rhyme or charm rather than a song (Bruford 1978e:7-8). SCRE (1964) includes rhymes related to milking, churning, lambing, spinning, warping of cloth, sowing and harvest, hunting, and other activities. No tunes are given.

other's company.[20] In addition, the singing had a practical value in calming the cows, as Mrs Anne Morrison, from Milton in South Uist, explained (*Tocher* 7:219):[21]

> *Bha buaile an uair ad ann . . . agus bha 'n cuman ri bhith agaibh, 's bha sibh a' suidh' aig a' bhoin 'ga bleoghain 's bha sibh a' tòiseachadh air an òran, 's cho fiadhaich 's gum bitheadh i, dh'fhanadh a' bhó ribh 'nuair a bha i 'cluinntinn an òrain. . . . 'Nuair a rachadh iad dhan bhuailidh bhiodh òran air choireigin aca dha na beothaichean 's na beothaichean gan imlich. Ach an diugh chan fhaigh iad ach breab. Chan eil guth air òran.*
>
> There used to be a cattle-fold in these days . . . and you had to have a pail. And you sat by the cow milking her and you started to sing the song and no matter how wild she was, the cow would stand still for you when she heard the song. . . . When they went to the fold they always had some song or other for the cows and the cows used to lick them. But today all they get is a kick. There's no word of a song.

Similarly, spinning thread could well have been—and in many households probably was—a solitary occupation; but evidence shows that, in Cape Breton, spinning "frolics" brought women together to lighten the work. Dan Allan Gillis of Broad Cove described one of these (Shaw 2000:15):[22]

> They used to sing fairly lively songs [at spinning frolics]. . . . I remember one spinning frolic that my mother attended; I took her up and came to get her in the evening. And there was one old woman at the frolic. . . . I can almost see her. "Faill ill ó, faill ill ó" was the song she sang and she would keep spinning the wool in time to the song air. The air suited, and so did the cheerfulness of the song. And when you saw something like half a dozen spinning wheels turning—all the women singing the chorus, then the old lady singing the verse—it was quite a pretty thing to watch. We'll never see anything like it again.

Likewise, the grinding of grain at home using a stone quern was a heavy and monotonous task with a certain rhythm to it; some querns (big circular flat stones driven by a wooden handle) required the efforts of two people (Pennant 1774-76:29). Alexander Carmichael's description (1900a:254) of the process reveals not only the rhythmical coordination between the work and the singing, but also that even such a lowly performance could command an appreciative audience:

---

[20] John Shaw (2000:13) records that in Cape Breton "at least one township recalled special songs sung while milking."

[21] Recorded in 1964. Tolmie's collection (1911:240-44) includes five songs she identifies as "milking songs."

[22] It is unclear whether spinning made use of specific songs, or whether songs used for spinning were ones that women simply employed for this purpose, or whether the practice varied from one locality to another; see Challan (2012:70 and n.279) and Shaw (2000:15). A spinning song in which the spinning-wheel itself provides accompaniment was recorded in 1951 by Alan Lomax; it appears on his compilation LP *Heather and Glen*, now reissued: Acrobat #ACRCD 309 (2008).

> The quern songs, like all the labor songs of the people, were composed in a measure suited to the special labor involved. The measure changed to suit the rhythmic motion of the body at work, at times slow, at times fast, as occasion required. . . . Having fanned the grain and swept the floor, the woman spread out the sheepskin again and placed the quern thereon. She then sat down to grind, filling and relieving the quern with one hand and turning it with the other, singing the while to the accompaniment of the whirr! whirr! whirr! birr! birr! birr! of the revolving stone. Several strong sturdy boys in scant kilts, and sweet comely girls in nondescript frocks, sat round the peat fire enjoying it fully, and watching the work and listening to the song of their radiant mother.

Our catalog must reflect the fact that these domestic occupations were carried out in diverse circumstances—sometimes alone, sometimes in company. It is for this reason that these occupational songs are listed separately from waulking/milling songs and rowing songs, which required the company's active participation in both the singing and the work:

GROUP 2: SONGS TO ACCOMPANY DOMESTIC LIFE

2.1 Lullabies

Mo ghaol, mo ghràdh, is m' eudail thu (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/75243/1)
Bà, bà, bà mo leanabh/Crodh an Tàilleir (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/98765/1)
A hù a hó, crodh an tàilleir (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/75240/1)
An cluinn thu, an cluinn thu, an cluinn thu, Iain? (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/39142/1)
Ho ho bhó, leadaidh bheag (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/43244/1)

2.2 Songs of Occupation

2.2.1 Milking Songs

Gaol a' chruidh, gràdh a' chruidh (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/39147/1)
Till an crodh, faigh an crodh (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/26715/1)
'S e m' aghan fhìn thu (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/26788/1)
A bhólagan, a bhó chiùin (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/43635/1)
Fire, faire, ho ro ho (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/43981/1)
Hòro fianach bheag hò ro èileadh (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/85511/1)

2.2.2 Spinning Songs

Cuir car dhìot mo chuigeal (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/8932/1)
Mi 'm ònar am buail a' lochain (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/102203/1)
Theann e staigh rium (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/79413/1)
Hug òireann ò 's ì 'n aighear i (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/85928/1)
A Mhòr, a Mhòr, till rid mhacan (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/99707/1)
Ho o ho hao Nighean Donn (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/72413/1)

2.2.3 Quern Songs

Brà brà bleith (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/25903/1)
Iomaiream Ò (recited) (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/61113/1)
Agus hò Mhòrag (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/60270/1)
Casag an Èisg (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/95516/1)

Group 3: Songs to Facilitate Group Labor

3.1. Waulking/Milling Songs

As James Ross and many others have understood, waulking songs are impossible to classify according to theme, as texts of many kinds—love lyrics, clan panegyrics, Fenian ballads, lullabies, even religious verse—have found their way into the waulking-song repertoire. Dr. John MacInnes tells me that women he spoke with in the course of research and collecting for the School of Scottish Studies, when asked if a particular song were known as a waulking song, frequently replied, in effect, "Well, it could be used for waulking, right enough" (personal communcation). Frances Tolmie (1911:234-39) notes the same phenomenon when she describes a reaping song and four rowing-songs as having been "also used for waulking." The category was clearly a flexible one right up until the hand-fulling of tweed gave way to mechanization. What can be said is that many waulking-song texts, as well as the musical forms they accompany, survived into the twentieth century largely because they met the needs of the hand-fulling process.[23]

Waulking songs are characterized above all else by strong, regular rhythm. It is this quality that makes them suitable for the work of the waulking women, who must pass a length of wet, heavy wool cloth from hand to hand around a table, each woman thumping the cloth vigorously against the table in order to raise the nap of the newly-woven tweed, thereby shrinking the fibers sufficiently to tighten the weave into a fabric that will provide a suitably weatherproof garment. This is not light work.[24]

Any understanding of the structure of waulking songs must encompass the totality of the performance, not just the structure of text or musical elements. This structure is flexible: the woman leading the singers can choose, for example, whether not to employ chain-linking, a practice that effectively doubles the amount of text available to be sung; and she can also choose whether or not to repeat refrain elements in different ways in order to lengthen or shorten the

[23] John MacInnes (2006c:248ff and 2007:418-09) has argued persuasively that the musical form and structure of the waulking song may ultimately derive from—or at the very least be related to—medieval choral dance forms. I myself believe that the waulking song structure may reflect an even older dance tradition, possibly of Scandinavian origin (Blankenhorn 2013c:80-87).

[24] For detailed description of the waulking/milling process, see Kenneth MacLeod, writing in Kennedy-Fraser and MacLeod (1909:22); Tolmie (1911:148-9); Campbell and Collinson (1969:3-16); Bassin (1977:11-12); and Lauchie MacLellan as reported in Shaw (2000:16-17, 80-83).

song to fit the needs of the work.[25] What can be said, however, is that the structure involves a more-or-less elaborate call-and-response pattern, and that the "response" portion—the refrain—often takes up more time than the "call"—verse elements—sung by the soloist. Refrain segments may be both interlinear, that is, occurring between lines or couplets of text, and intralinear, occurring at the mid-point of the line; both of these further stretch the text. Reflecting the length and demanding physical nature of this process, many of the waulking songs recorded during the past 60 years tend to be long in the performance.[26]

Many waulking-song texts, as we have them today, appear to combine verse from different sources whose only common feature may be that of verse-meter. For this reason, they often display a disjointed character which may only be acknowledged in performance by a change in the refrain vocables, or by a break in the chain-linking at the point where the junction of two texts occurs. Another hindrance to textual intelligibility is the fact that, because of the need for a regular beat, rhythmic subtleties in the verse are often obliterated by the beat falling on a syllable that would normally be unstressed—the "wrenched accent" syncopation referred to earlier. All of these features obscure the emotional content of waulking-song texts, and render them difficult for the uninitiated to follow or appreciate.

While the breaking of text into short phrases, the insertion of vocable refrain elements, and the rapid interaction between chorus and soloist mitigate against the text being comprehensible to bystanders, these same features render the song singable by women who are simultaneously engaged in a physically demanding act of work. Indeed, evoking an emotional response in bystanders is of no importance to the singers, as bystanders (especially men) appear to have been banned from the waulking itself, and were invited in only when the bolt of cloth had been rolled up and the evening celebration was to begin.[27]

All of the comments above can be taken to apply equally to the waulking process as it was carried forward in the New World, with a couple of interesting differences. In Cape Breton, the English translation of *luadh* (in Scotland, "waulking") is "milling," and the event itself is known as a "milling frolic." At some point, men became involved as full participants in the work —a development that brought about changes to the repertoire: "women might have felt some of their songs would be inappropriate to sing in front of men. . . . Meanwhile, the men did not know

---

[25] Waulking-song texts are normally presented in writing as extended paragraphs with no stanzaic marking. By making use of *chain-linking*—connecting lines of text in a pattern such as *ab bc cd de ef* and so forth—the singer restructures the text as a series of couplets, making it twice as long in performance as it appears on the page. John Shaw's informant Lauchie MacLellan referred to a waulking song that employed this device as an *òran fillte* or *òran dùbailte*—a "woven song" or "doubled song" (Shaw 2000:395). Whether Lauchie's terms comprise both the chain-linking feature and the embedded refrain elements is unclear—or perhaps one of them does so, and the other does not. Bassin (1977:12 and n.20) observes that this "overlapping of couplets" is also a feature of other song traditions.

[26] Longer, generally, if the singer is in company with others who can take up the refrain, especially if a waulking is being simulated. We must remember that many recordings of waulking-songs were made outside the work context by people who were recalling the songs in old age; in such cases, repetitive elements such as chain-linking and choral repetition of text and refrains were often minimized.

[27] The importance of these occasions to the men is revealed in the song *Mo chridhe trom* (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/7931/1), in which a henpecked husband laments that his wife will not let him go to the *taigh luaidh,* the waulking-house.

the traditional milling songs and instead sang songs from other contexts, such as sailing songs, at the table" (Sparling 2008:410).[28]

Today, milling frolics continue to be important events in the life of the Cape Breton Gaelic community—not as occasions for the hand-fulling of woolen cloth (which now, as everywhere, takes place in textile mills), but rather as community heritage events, showcasing Gaelic culture to outsiders, and affording Gaels themselves an opportunity to maintain an important locus of community pride and solidarity.[29] The songs performed at milling frolics include both Old World waulking-songs and songs from the greater Cape Breton repertoire that were adapted for the purpose (Shaw 2000:15-16).[30] In Scotland, the appearance of the menfolk would have coincided with the "clapping" of the tweed, to which we now turn.[31]

3.1.1. Clapping Songs

A subset of waulking songs, clapping songs are performed at the end of the waulking process, when the tweed has been rolled up and the bolt of cloth is laid lengthwise on the table, where it is struck or "clapped" by the women as they sing. In Gaelic Scotland, clapping songs are recently attested for Uist and Barra only, but were undoubtedly more widespread at one time. Lauchie MacLellan provided a lively account of a milling frolic in Broad Cove, Nova Scotia which includes the following (Shaw 2000:17):

> After the milling had gone on for two songs the woman of the house would come up and measure the length of her middle finger . . . to determine whether the web had been milled enough, or whether another song was required. Usually it would take three songs, and the folded-over web was passed [sunwise] around on the milling surface. When this was completed, it was usual to sing three "striking songs" (*òrain bualaidh*) or "clapping songs" (*òrain basaidh*) as some prefer to call them, and these were happy, cheerful songs.

Sung at a quicker pace than the waulking songs, many clapping songs are improvised to include the names of men in the community who might be considered interesting marriage

---

[28] While it is accepted that, in Scotland, the *luadh* was women's work, there is occasional evidence of men participating. A 1965 Skye account describes how single men used to participate in the singing along with the women (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/29172/1); and for another example, see Macintosh (1861:37).

[29] For an example, see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XHax-NPP2vo

[30] In both Scotland (Pennant 1774-76:329) and Cape Breton there is evidence that foot-waulking (*luadh-chas*) was also practiced, but no one recorded in Cape Breton claimed to have actually witnessed it (Shaw 2000:16). In Scotland, Roderick Campbell of Bragar, Lewis, told Hamish Henderson in 1954 about seeing foot-waulkings in his young days (*Tocher* 43:59-61); a search for "foot waulking" in *Tobar an Dualchais* provides a number of oral accounts, and songs that people associated with the practice; see also MacLeod (2013:45-62).

[31] In addition to dividing waulking-songs into two categories by tempo, Frances Tolmie (1911:196-226) identifies a further two types: "tightening" songs "for wringing the cloth" (227-30) and songs of the "improvisatory type" (230-34). The "tightening" songs accompanied "the last process of waulking…in a varying measure, expressive now of leisure, and now of urgent haste" (228). Songs of the "improvisatory type" were doubtless the clapping songs, discussed below, §3.1.1.

prospects (or not) to the female participants. Charles Dunn describes the "putting-up" songs sung in Canada, discussing how "the more knowing matrons would pair off the various girls present with the men who were destined to be their husbands. There were many forms of this 'pairing' song and many ingenious impromptu modifications of each form" (1953:40-41). Indeed, many of these songs have a humorous, rowdy, even bawdy character, eliciting whoops and encouragement from bystanders. Frances Tolmie (1911:231) describes one such as "a fragment of one of the ridiculous songs, imagining the rescue of some favored youth from the waulking-tub"—a large vat of stale urine in which the cloth to be waulked is first soaked—suggesting the sort of ribald humor common in these songs.[32]

3.2. Rowing Songs

As indicated earlier, rowing songs constitute the one genre for which we do not possess context-specific recorded evidence. There can be no doubt, however, that songs were sung as accompaniment to rowing, and that they would have facilitated the labor, especially when it required the coordination of two or more rowers. Alexander Smith's 1865 account of a summer spent in Skye includes several references to oarsmen singing at their work; the most detailed is the following (84):

> The wind came only in intermitting puffs, and the boatmen took to the oars. The transparent autumn night fell upon us; the mainland was gathering in gloom behind, and before us rocky islands glimmered on the level deep. To the chorus of a Gaelic song of remarkable length and monotony the crew plied their oars . . .

Elsewhere, Smith applies the adjectives "many-chorused" and "melancholy" to the songs sung by these Skye boatmen (1865:124, 134).

While it may be possible that many songs used for rowing passed into oblivion with the mechanization of sea travel, it seems clear that some of them are preserved within the waulking-song repertoire (Tolmie 1911:236-39). Certainly the work requirements of both tasks—steady rhythm, call-and-response structure, flexible length—would have been comparable. The waulking women did not confine themselves to texts dealing with the fulling of tweed, and it seems probable that rowing songs, like waulking songs, also covered a wide range of sentiment and subject matter. The songs listed among the examples here were identified as rowing songs by the informants who recorded them.[33]

Rowing-boats still ply the coastal waters of the *Gàidhealtachd*, and the tradition of singing at sea appears to have survived the transition to motorized craft. John MacInnes tells me

---

[32] According to Lauchie MacLennan, "warm, soapy water" was the preferred liquid in Cape Breton's Gaelic community (Shaw 2000:17).

[33] Annie Gilchrist, in a pair of comments included in Tolmie's text, speculates that "the slow and solemn character of several of these rowing-measures appears in some instances to be due to the fact that they were also of the nature of laments, being chanted by the rowers conveying the remains of chiefs across the western seas to Iona" (Tolmie 1911:236); also "in the rhythmic rise and fall—the ocean swing—of its well-marked choruses, this song possesses considerable resemblance to a sea-chanty . . . " (Tolmie 1911:237).

of hearing a boatman singing at his oars in the 1940s (MacInnes was aboard at the time); he also recalls hearing the sound of singing above the *put-put-put* of a motorized dinghy entering the harbor at Cheese Bay in North Uist. Rowing, like milking and the grinding of meal, is an intrinsically rhythmical activity; but it seems clear that once a boat could be handled by a single oarsman, singing became more of a pastime than a necessity.

A number of stylistic features typically characterize songs in this group, including: call-and-response alternation of soloist and chorus; strong, regular rhythm; prominent use of refrains, often two or more refrains of different structures (interlinear, intralinear); flexible performance structure, reflecting the immediate needs of the work; "wrenched stress"—rhythmic emphasis on what would normally be an unstressed syllable. In many cases, textual disjuncture in the middle of the song (where one textual theme or thread gives way to another) reflects the fact that the texts of such songs are considered vehicles for performance, rather than performance being a vehicle for the text:

GROUP 3: SONGS TO FACILITATE GROUP LABOR

3.1 Waulking Songs

Bidh an deochs' air làimh mo rùin (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/14203/1)
Coisich a rùin (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/30240/1)
Chailin òig a stiùireamaiche (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/15031/1)
'S minig a chuala e nach do dh'innis e (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/24170/1)
A' bhean eudach (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/72077/1)
No chaora cheannfhionn [34] (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/14192/1)
Tàladh Dhòmhnaill Ghuirm (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/14178/1)
Clò nan gillean (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/99831/1)
A Bhradag Dhubh (1)[35] (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/52742/1)
A Bhradag Dhubh (2)[32] (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/25913/1)
'S muladach mi 's mi air m' aineoil [36] (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/24946/1)

3.1.1 Clapping Songs

Hò mo leannan hè mo leannan (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/14638/1)
Chaidh mo lothag air chall (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/24178/1)
O cò bheir mi leam air an luing Èireannaich? (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/25007/1)

---

[34] The title should be *Mo chaora cheannfhionn*, but is given here as it appears on the website.

[35] Variants of the flyting *An Spaidsearachd Bharrach* (the "Barra Boasting Song") go by a number of titles, including *A Bhradag Dhubh* and *Cha téid Mòr a Bharraidh bhrònach* and *A Dhia! 's gaolach liom an gille.* See Campbell and Collinson (1977:112-21, 124-8 and notes 226-39); for a traditional telling of the story behind the song, see Nan MacKinnon's in *Tocher* 12 (Winter 1973:134-39).

[36] Another flyting, also known as *M' eudail mhòr Mac 'ic Ailein*; see Campbell and Collinson (1969:112-15 and 180-81).

Leannan do mharaich mi sheasadh ri cruadal (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/49533/1)
Latha siubhal beinne dhomh (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/24174/1)
Nighean Bàillidh à Loch Bhraoin (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/100868/1)

3.2 Rowing Songs
Iomairibh eutrom hò hò (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/21645/1)
An t-iorram Niseach (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/22290/1)
Iomaiream ò thèid i dh'aindeoin (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/58816/1)
Alla bharra bò choisinn cò bheag (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/103479/1)

Group 4: Songs to Lift the Spirits

When asked why singing was such an important part of people's lives in their community, John Shaw's Cape Breton informants often told him (2000:19):

> *"Bha i toirt togail-intinne dhaibh"* (it raised people's spirits). . . . Singing could help relieve the tedium of solitary chores, liven up a wedding, lend some perspective on the wiles of politician, or prove a reliable focus for conviviality among neighbours. An aspect of singing often advanced by Gaels themselves, and one of major importance in all *Gàidhealthachds* is that of simple entertainment.

It is clear that, whatever else they might be doing at the time, people took delight in singing and in hearing songs. It seems safe to say that song was a vital medium of everyday communication in the community, a means of expressing thoughts and observations as well as feelings—a use for song that people in our own society would associate with musical theatre rather than real life. The entertainment value of song cannot be overstated, and many songs, including those in this category, appear principally designed to entertain.

4.1. Children's Songs

Neither *Tobar an Dualchais* nor any other collection of traditional song distinguishes usefully between songs sung to children by adults and those sung *by* children for their own recreation; and because all of the songs recorded in recent years are recollections from childhood by elderly informants rather than recordings of children at play, it is difficult to judge how and in what circumstances children themselves actually sang.[37] Exceptionally in this regard, Keith Norman MacDonald's *Puirt-à-Beul: The Vocal Dance Music of the Scottish Gaels* contains a short section that includes descriptions of "Gaelic singing games" associated with four *puirt*, and identifies the participants specifically as children (Lamb 2012:142-3); two of these—*Thuirt an*

[37] The valuable collection of traditional rhymes *Aithris is Oideas* (SCRE 1964) includes some that are featured in children's games, but unfortunately it contains no tunes, nor does it indicate which, if any, of the items would have been sung.

luchag as an toll and *Cò ach Anna mo nighean*—are included among our examples. Of the others, *M' iteagan is m' eòin is m' uighean* seems to be a tongue-twister, while the rest rely more on repetition and simplicity of text. The version of *Na trì eòin* sung by the late William Matheson is, by his own account, something of a reconstruction: a version of the song appears in Tolmie (1911:85), and a fuller text in *The MacDonald Collection of Gaelic Poetry* (1911:337). Matheson's version consists of a refrain, which he says he learned from a traditional source, to which he added a number of stanzas from printed sources.

4.2 Hogmanay Ritual Songs

Duain Challain (Hogmanay lays) are closely related to the preeminent Gaelic narrative genre, that of the Ossianic ballads or Fenian lays. Like the narrative ballads, *duain Challain* are performed in a chant-like fashion, and (apart from the usual opening and closing formulae) their texts are borrowed directly from Ossianic balladry; indeed, it is reckoned that it is through their use as *duain Challain* that many of the Ossianic ballad texts survived into the twentieth century. On thematic and structural grounds, therefore, the obvious place for them in this catalog would be in Group 5 below. In terms of their social function, however, these Hogmanay chants are not so much narratives as passwords—a sort of "open-sesame" rigmarole designed to entertain the people inside the house so that they will open the door and let the singers in. Measured against these criteria, these songs clearly belong in Group 4.

4.3 Puirt-à-beul

Nowadays, the lively rhythmical songs with short, simple texts that form such a large part of the corpus of Gaelic song are generally referred to as *puirt-à-beul* ("mouth music"), and are explained as having provided music for dancing at times when musical instruments—and musicians able to play them—were unavailable. While a great many *puirt* were indeed used for this purpose, others are clearly intended as entertainment in and of themselves.

4.3.1 Dance-Songs

While the connection between *puirt-à-beul* and instrumental music-making is a strong one, William Lamb argues persuasively that some communities actually preferred mouth-music to instrumental music, and that this fact reflects a fondness for dancing that undoubtedly predated the invention of musical instruments. "It is almost inconceivable" he writes, "that Gaelic speakers only began to dance socially upon the widespread acquisition of modern instruments and the filtering down of customs from the upper classes" (2012:24). Whether performed by one singer, two singers (a practice that allowed one to carry on while the other caught his breath), or by the dancers themselves, *puirt-à-beul* are a centrally-important genre in the larger context of Gaelic song.

While the majority of *puirt* support dances are still popular today, there were other dance forms, including many "ancient character dances" that, Keith Norman MacDonald explains, were popular "long before the days of country dances and waltzes . . . all [of which] would have been

danced to the *puirt-à-beul*" (Lamb 2012:133). Lamb also suggests (2012:17) that *puirt* served other purposes as well as that of supplying dance-music, including dandling a child on one's knee (§2.1 above), or providing jocular cover for criticism of a neighbor (§6.4 below). John Shaw (1992/93:47) notes the use of *puirt* for didactic purposes in Cape Breton, where young fiddlers were encouraged to learn them as an aid to remembering tunes, in the same way that pibroch songs and *canntaireachd* were used in the training of pipers (§5.3).

Most dance-songs are sung to instrumental marches, jigs, reels, and strathspeys to which syllables have been added—normally short, repetitive texts, often with choruses of semantically-meaningless syllables "chosen as much for their sound as for the message that they conveyed" (Lamb 2012:17). This instinct for textual playfulness may, indeed, reinforce an important and rarely-mentioned aspect of many *puirt-à-beul*: their earthiness.[38] The most cursory browse through MacDonald's *Puirt-à-Beul* reveals a wealth of metaphors for both male and female genitalia and their deployment in a wild variety of imagined circumstances. Notwithstanding W. J. Watson's (1976:xxv-xxvi) well-known declaration about the general suitability of Gaelic verse *virginibus puerisque*, a recent compilation of what the editors call "transgressive" verse (MacKay and MacPherson 2016) reveals that even the greatest Gaelic poets—the likes of Sìleas na Ceapaich (c. 1660-1729) and, pre-eminently, Alexander MacDonald (Alasdair Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair, c. 1698-1770)—were happy to call a spade a spade.[39] As the editors point out, such poetry belongs "to a long and healthy tradition—or counter tradition or subculture—of bawdry, erotic or love poetry that stretches as far back as the age of Ossian" (MacKay and MacPherson 2016:35). We have already noted that many of the clapping songs (§3.1.1) tended to be ribald; indeed, the same subversive tendency is to be found in many waulking-songs and in other songs relating to the lives of women, such as songs relating to the social life of the sheilings (many of the latter seemingly composed by men). In the main, such poetry relies upon gentle suggestion, upon double-entendre—principally, upon listeners' familiarity with what we might term a "lexicon of love," a set of images and figures-of-speech that mean one thing and imply another.[40] Many poems can indeed be given a clean bill-of-health on one level, and be heard as blue by those in the know. Once heard through such a filter,

---

[38] Given the bawdiness of many *puirt,* it is remarkable that so many of them are regularly performed by choirs of children on the family-friendly platform of the National Mòd. Compare the 1981 performance of *Am Muileann Dubh* (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/90463/1) by the Nicholson Institute Gaelic Choir to that of *Tha nead na circe fraoiche* (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/34892/1) by Margaret Fay Shaw's informant Peggy MacRae, recorded in 1948. The "black mill" of the title is not a snuff-mill, as the children and their parents may have been assured, but is, according to Maclagan's lexicon (1907:346), a term of endearment for the female genitalia. The text is available in the Campbells' anthology (2013:210-11) and in Lamb (2012:57-58).

[39] Of the latter, the editors write: "[W]hen assessing MacDonald it is impossible to avoid the fact that much of his poetry was avowedly, exuberantly, excessively rude, (porno)graphic, and blue" (MacKay and MacPherson 2016:33).

[40] At a 2013 conference on "Sex and Sexualities in the Celtic World," Domhnall Uilleam Stiùbhart suggested that it would be useful to compile a "pornographic code" of such images, a starting-point for which would doubtless be the collection of "Gaelic Erotica" collected by Edinburgh surgeon Robert Craig Maclagan and published in 1907 in the French periodical *Kryptadia* (1907:295-367). Re-publication of such material might not be in good taste even today, but it would surely help to expose the layers of meaning presented to us in Gaelic tradition, and thus reveal the Gaels to be fully-rounded human beings like ourselves, rather than two-dimensional figures from the irrevocable past.

however, *puirt-à-beul* in particular reveal much about how the Gaels dealt with the earthy side of life, their attitudes to sexuality, and the fun both men and women were inclined to poke at the opposite sex.

4.3.2. Tongue-Twisters

Here we have a subset of *puirt* consisting of songs that may not have been danced to, but which would certainly have amazed listeners by their cross-rhythmical subtlety. *Bainis Iain 'ic Uisdein*, also known as *Ruidleadh nam Pòg*, alternates sections of steady rhythm and foursquare predictability with sections whose rhythmic character catches the listener off-balance. Likewise *Thuirt an gobha fuirichidh mi*, while starting out as a reel (that is, two measures in 2/2 or "cut time"), wrenches the rhythm into groups of three eighth-notes (and other configurations) before returning to a single bar in cut time at the very end; matters are made even more interesting by the insertion of a run of *canntaireachd*-like syllables in the middle of the text. A version of this song recorded from Calum Johnston of Barra has inspired modern groups specializing in the music and song of Gaelic Scotland and Ireland.[41] As tongue-twisters, such songs resemble *M' iteagan is m' eòin is m' uighean* (§4.1), and clearly the emotional intent is the same: to astonish and entertain listeners with the singer's command of syncopation, verbal dexterity, and dash.

4.3.3 Pseudo-*canntaireachd*

Unlike the majority of *puirt-à-beul*, which rely upon actual words and a familiar repertoire of vocable syllables for their texts, pseudo-*canntaireachd* draws upon the syllables used as mnemonics for the teaching of piping.[42] Josh Dickson (2013) has shown that the sort of *canntaireachd* practiced by female singers in the Hebrides—the most famous being Mrs Mary Morrison (Màiri Eoghainn Mhóir) of Ersary, Barra—is not so different in terms of tonal accuracy and rhythmic essentials from the sort used by (male) pipers in the learning and transmission of their art. But because women were, until quite recently, barred from studying piping formally, those who learned *canntaireachd* growing up in piping households generally used it to entertain, selecting tunes from the *ceol beag* repertoire—marches, jigs, reels, and strathspeys—as opposed to the formal pibroch literature. This sort of *canntaireachd*, based on dance music, also served the same purpose as other *puirt* in supporting dancing in the absence of a musician (Dickson 2013:46). Not only was the vocal performance of *ceol beag* by women of undoubted entertainment value, but it also reflects the importance of women as bearers of the *ceol beag*

---

[41] For example, Anúna's performance, which appears on their album *Celtic Origins,* probably derives from The Bothy Band's of a generation earlier; both are available on YouTube at this time of writing. Calum Johnston's version (*Am Bothan a bh' aig Fionnghuala*) can be heard on *Music from the Western Isles*. Johnston's performance is not on *Tobar an Dualchais*, but our list includes an equally good one recorded in 1948 from Peggy MacRae of South Uist (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/42367/1).

[42] The term "pseudo-*canntaireachd*" appears in the long-form booklet of notes supplied with *Music from the Western Isles,* where it is applied to an example sung by Mary Morrison. The heading provided for Side 1, Band 6 on this LP, "Puirt-à-Beul," lends legitimacy to the sub-categories identified here, as it includes four items drawn from the first three of them. For discussion of formal *canntaireachd* used by pipers*,* see below (§5.3).

repertoire. Indeed, we must also consider the likelihood that they played some role in the transmission of that repertoire to young pipers in their own households (see §5.3 below).

4.3.4 Diddling

Finally, diddling—the lilting of dance-tunes using syllables that are as much at home (or more so) in the non-Gaelic parts of Scotland and Ireland as in the *Gàidhealtachd*. These syllables are derived neither from *canntaireachd* nor from the sorts of vocables (*hó hì rìri ù*, and so on) found in the refrains of waulking songs and elsewhere. In fact, the name used for them—diddling—describes them pretty well: *diddlum-doo oh didle-um* are typical. Although this lexicon surely infiltrated the *Gàidhealtachd* through contact with itinerant musicians from non-Gaelic-speaking areas, the fact that the Scottish Studies Archives contain quite a few examples of diddling from *Gàidhealtachd* areas suggests that diddling has been a common feature of Gaelic singing for some time. Indeed, examples like *Chuir iad mise dh'an a' chladach* and *Han an an dò, mo chuilean mìn* suggest that diddling, like *canntaireachd*, was an important element in the song-maker's arsenal. As with other sorts of *puirt*, diddling is used among musicians to remind themselves of how a tune goes, and is also used to accompany dancing.

Whatever else one may say about *puirt-à-beul*, there is no doubt that they constitute a distinct genre. Mary Ann Kennedy notes that the Campbells of Greepe regard *puirt* as quintessentially different from other types of Gaelic song (Campbell 2013:111); Heather Sparling (2008:416-17) argues that *puirt-à-beul* occupy a lower status among latter-day performers of Gaelic song because they are easier to learn and thus more readily accessible to Gaelic learners than are the high-status "heavy" songs that rely upon deeper knowledge of the language (see below, Group 6); and Michael Newton affirms the view of many scholars that *puirt* "were recognized as a distinct genre of such a low register as not to be classified as *bàrdachd* 'poetry' at all, but as a kind of playful doggerel which remains separate from older song types" (2013:67). Even so, there is no denying the ubiquity of the genre among Gaelic speakers on both sides of the Atlantic. Whether the uniqueness of these *puirt* resides in their textual fearlessness, their use as dance-music (dancing being another of the devil's inventions, according to some), their use as a didactic short-cut by musicians, or simply their embodiment of fun and *joie-de-vivre*, they reveal much about the Gaelic view of life.

4.4 Drinking Songs and Toasts and 4.5 Humorous Songs

While we have chosen to list examples of drinking songs/toasts separately from those of humorous songs here, the two types have much in common in terms of structure, performance style, and social utility and function.[43] These songs are generally structured in quatrains, and refrains, where present, tend to consist of meaningful text rather than vocables. They are characterized by strong rhythm (drinking-songs typically in triple rhythm), reflecting their breezy good-humor. Refrains may either be sung in full between each pair of stanzas, or may be sung in

[43] Many songs in *Tobar and Dualchais* are described as "humorous songs" or "drinking songs," but it is unclear how this distinction is made, as not all those identified as drinking songs refer to drinking, while many of the songs labeled humorous do so.

full at the beginning and then in abbreviated form (that is, the first line only) at the end of each stanza. While it is tempting to think that the decision to sing a refrain in full, or to abbreviate it, might depend on the presence of others, this distinction is not borne out in the small sample cited here; indeed, the singer of *Hùg sibh air nighean donn nam meall-shùil* sings only the first line of the refrain, despite being joined by the company, whereas the singer of *Gun òlainn slàinte Theàrlaich*—a Jacobite-era toast also included in §6.3 below—gives the refrain in full each time, despite her only audience being the fieldworker. As we saw in the case of waulking songs, flexibility regarding the performance of refrains seems generally to reflect the social dynamic of the occasion, rather than an intrinsic and inalienable fact about the textual structure of such songs; but even this rule is certainly not hard-and-fast.

Two examples further illustrate the fluidity of our genre boundaries. *O Fiollagan Gòrach* is a satirical song about a confirmed bachelor and his unlikely marriage prospects, sung at a leisurely pace in a swinging 3/4 rhythm.[44] A livelier variant in 9/8, *Hòro Fhiollaigein Ghòraich*, calls to mind the Irish slip-jig; whether it also resembles a dance known in the Hebrides or in Cape Breton I lack the knowledge to say. A third version of the song, *Saoil a Mhòr am Pòs Thu*, sung by a children's choir, identifies it as "mouth music," although it contains more stanzas than usually feature in *puirt-à-beul*. Similarly, *Bainis Móir Chamroin* is also sung to a jig-tune, suggesting that it also may have done occasional duty as a port. Clearly, hairsplitting is an occupational hazard for those seeking to create catalogs, and the best we can do is acknowledge the ambiguity.

And when is a drinking song more than a drinking song? When it is a *Jacobite* drinking song, like *Gun òlainn slàinte Theàrlaich*; or when it praises a clan leader, like *Faigh anuas dhuinn am botul*; or when it is a toast to people who emigrated, like *Airson na tìm a bh'ann o shean*; or when it raises a glass to the place from which they emigrated, like *Deoch-Slàinte nan Càirdean a dh'Fhàg Sinn air Tìr*; or, for that matter, when it proposes a health to any place, or boat, or dog, or horse, or gun. Indeed, we must admit that many drinking songs—especially toasts—belong among other panegyrics in Group 6, in addition to their placement here.

Our examples also illustrate the habit, common among song-makers, of borrowing: in the drinking-song *Hùg sibh air nighean donn nam meall-shùil* the singer begins with the refrain, and the song is in jovial triple rhythm; *An cuala sibh gu lèir mar a tha e*—a humorous song about (of all things) a dead sheep—uses the same refrain and a close variant of the air, but the singer subtly alters the rhythm, and omits the initial iteration of the refrain at the beginning of the song. From such examples it is clear that a tune used for one song was considered fair game for others, and the refrain would simply travel along with the air. Thomas McKean points out that this practice was a time-honored one, and served a distinct purpose (1997:178):

> In a society accustomed to song, the use of verse, as opposed to prose, alerts the listener that he is receiving a distilled message. The custom that most traditional song-makers follow, of using a familiar tune for a new composition, may actually allow easier access to this message, for the listener need not come to terms with the melody before taking in the content. . . . [T]he melody

[44] This song is in print in Gillies (2006:414-16) and elsewhere, and a magnificent rendition of it by Lewismen Murdo MacLeod and John Murray appears on *Music from the Western Isles* but not, unfortunately, on the *Tobar an Dualchais* website.

> (and possibly form) is selected (consciously or subconsciously) by the song-maker because of its associations. The audience is therefore predisposed to the tenor of the poet's message.

In this respect, song-making practice offers another reflection of what John MacInnes (2006:275) has described as the "panegyric code" used by court poets and bards in the composition of Gaelic poetry. These elements produce (*ibid*.):

> a densely woven texture of imagery in which every phrase, indeed almost every word, is significant. Even the shortest utterance sets off a train of memories of linked epithets . . . [and] evoke different sets of new images interlocking with each other in the same way. . . . [T]he ramifications of the system eventually extend throughout society.

In this fashion, a poet's use of a familiar image—or, as here, the appropriation of a familiar refrain and air—resonates with listeners, bringing to mind the whole universe of other poems and songs and stories in which that image, or tune, or refrain has occurred, linking the new song with what had gone before, and connecting it firmly to the living organism that was Gaelic tradition. We shall have more to say on this topic in connection with Group 6 below:

GROUP 4: SONGS TO LIFT THE SPIRITS

4.1 Children's Songs

M' iteagan is m' eòin is m' uighean (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/26780/1)
Tobar tobar sìolaidh (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/25901/1)
Clach mhìn mheallain (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/25899/1)
Na h-eòin bhùchainn air tràigh bhàchainn (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/39144/1)
Na trì eòin (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/95473/1)
Thuirt an luchag as an toll (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/36825/1)
Cò ach Anna mo nighean (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/33618/1)

4.2 Hogmanay Ritual Songs

Òran na Callainn (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/59748/1)
Duan na Callaig (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/26598/1)

Group 5 : Songs to Inform/Teach

If communicating the meaning of a song's text may be of secondary importance in the case of waulking songs, it is of primary importance to the songs in Group 5. Whether they tell a story through song, invoke the the memory and mystery of a story, help someone learn the bagpipes, or teach people how to lead a Christian life, the songs in this group all imply the existence of an audience willing to be engaged and informed.

5.1. Narrative Songs

Thomas McKean points out that in Gaelic tradition, "songs . . . about issues and events . . . are usually not narrative songs in the Anglo-American ballad sense. There is a story behind each song . . . but [the songs] largely depend on the audience knowing the story and the characters already" (1997:131). Emphasizing the importance of the *taighean cèilidh*, John Shaw makes a similar point (2010:24):

> Of greatest interest to the present discussion . . . are the song narratives that link song with storytelling. These are in the form of generally brief stories associated with a particular song, and may consist of the naming of the bard followed by a short anecdote, often revealing of his or her character. Alternatively the narratives may provide a background to the entire text of the song, explaining to the uninitiated the reasons or circumstances of its composition. Such explanations, usually offered as a preface to performing the song, help the first-time listener to decode the often subtle allusions in the verses, and to appreciate the composer's skillful use of language in the deployment of memorable imagery or social nuances.

There are, however, some exceptions to the general rule that the story-behind-the-song would only be told if the presence of the "uninitiated"—the "first-timers"—required it. This category comprises two major sub-groups of narrative songs. The first of these includes songs that themselves contain narrative elements, while the second includes songs that provide a climax to, or commentary upon, a spoken narrative. In the first case, the story is intrinsic to the song; in the second, the framing story may either be told aloud, before the song is sung, or omitted if the singer knows that listeners are already familiar with it. In other words, these are songs whose function is to convey a sense of a series of events—to tell a story.

5.1.1. Ballads

When researchers from the School of Scottish Studies began recording oral tradition in the *Gàidhealtachd*, they were fortunate to find a number of people who remembered some of the Ossianic (Fenian) ballads or "heroic lays," the oldest surviving form of sung narrative in Gaelic oral tradition (Thomson 1974:99-106). These narratives, which chronicle the exploits of Fionn MacCumhaill (Finn MacCool) and his warriors, have been comprehensively collected from the sixteenth century onwards, and were mined for narrative material by James MacPherson, who based his own poem, *Ossian*, upon stories drawn from them (Ross:1952:127, 145 n.75). There are, in addition, a very few examples of Arthurian ballads in Scottish Gaelic; the example here is *Am Bròn Binn* (Gowans 1992). As all of the examples demonstrate, performance of these poems is characterized by a distinctive chant-like style, with one syllable per note, and rhythm dictated by the stress of normal speech. A quatrain, consisting as a rule of heptasyllabic lines, is sung to an air consisting of four corresponding phrases. On some occasions, however—the performances of *Am Bròn Binn and Laoidh an Fhir Mhóir* for example—there is evidence of chain-linking, with the final couplet of one quatrain being repeated at the beginning of the next. A further departure is notable in the case of the second performance of *Laoidh Fhraoich* which, although

fragmentary, appears originally to have used an air that encompassed two quatrains of text rather than one. Readers wondering why the *duain Challain*, Hogmanay ritual ballads, are not listed here are reminded that we included the *duain* above (§4.2), as their function in our period has tended to subordinate their narrative content to their social context as part of the Hogmanay visiting custom.

5.1.2 Religious Narratives

A few songs based upon Biblical narratives have emerged from both the Roman Catholic and the Protestant communities in Gaelic Scotland. In form and style of performance the song *Laoidh Mhoire Mhaighdeann*, from the Catholic tradition, strongly resembles that of the Ossianic ballads, and even suggests by its title that such a resemblance was acknowledged by the community.[45] This song relates the story of the life of Jesus from his birth to his crucifixion, and employs a stressed meter, rather than the heptasyllabic meter of the Ossianic ballads. It also employs the same air as several other songs in Group 5 and one in Group 6; we shall have more to say about this fact presently.

The other religious narrative song included here, *Am Mac Stròdhail*, comes from the Protestant tradition, and tells the story of the Prodigal Son. Stylistically, it is more in keeping with other didactic hymns from this tradition, and one could argue that it belongs in §5.4 below; we have included it here solely on the basis of its narrative content. In form it consists of a series of quatrains composed of lines containing three stresses, each quatrain followed by a refrain which (one assumes) would have been taken up by listeners.

5.1.3. Historical Narratives

In defining this sub-category, we have distinguished between songs which arise from historical events and those which actually narrate them. Group 6.1 below contains a number of songs of the former type, including a number of Jacobite songs which obviously concern events of tremendous importance, but which do not so much narrate as comment upon them.

Like the two religious *laoidhean* just discussed, some historical narrative songs bear clear stylistic resemblance to the Ossianic ballads in being sung to a chant-like air that is governed by the natural rhythm of speech. Indeed, *Blàr na h-Olaind*, *Blàr na h-Eaglaise Brice*, and *Òran a' Chogaidh*—a First World War-era song—employ the same poetic meter and are sung to the same air as the one used for *Laoidh Mhoire Mhaighdeann* and *Laoidh a' Phurgadair.*[46] It seems clear

---

[45] Another song to the same air, *Laoidh a' Phurgadair*, is not a narrative, but requests prayers for the redemption of souls in Purgatory (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/46026/1). The singer on this track, Fanny MacIsaac, on that occasion follows her singing of *Laoidh a' Phurgadair* by singing *Laoidh Mhoire Mhaighdeann*, so it may be that the two were considered parts of the same song; alternatively, it may simply be that, on the occasion of the recording, singing the first reminded her of the second, so she sang it as well.

[46] This air appears to be a distant cousin of a famously peripatetic tune, one of whose (many) variants in Ireland is "The Star of the County Down." A variant of this air is also associated with the panegyric *Alasdair à Gleanna Garaidh* (see §6.1 below) and a number of other songs which have appeared in print with the indication that they were sung to the tune of *Alasdair à Gleanna Garaidh.*

that certain airs, having become associated with songs of a particular character—in this case, solemn songs about war—provided a metrical and musical model upon which other songs of a similar character could be based.[47] It was as if the people who sang these songs, whose cultural heritage they formed, recognized that certain songs belonged to certain categories, and—consciously or unconsciously—sorted them in their minds accordingly. Not all songs carrying a narrative thread are of this character, however, and the last two in our list illustrate that other modes of performance were possible for narrative songs.

5.2 Cante Fable

To understand this category, we must slightly reinterpret the term cante fable, which *A Dictionary of English Folklore* defines as "a technical term for spoken prose narratives interspersed with short songs conveying crucial information (for example, magical utterances, riddles, threats, and so on)" (Simpson and Roud 2003). In the Gaelic tradition, what has latterly remained are the sung elements, the stories in which these songs were originally embedded no longer an essential component of performance. Even so, an understanding of the background to the song—the narrative component—is essential to an understanding of many of these songs, particularly those in which the supernatural world plays a part. Seemingly the community assumed such an understanding, and dispensed with the actual telling of the story in those social contexts where everyone was already familiar with it.

5.2.1. Supernatural Songs

James Ross states that items in the category he called "fairy songs" are "difficult to isolate" in terms of any particular textual, metrical or musical type; rather, a "fairy song" is "merely the song a fairy sang in a certain situation, and for this information we depend upon a traditional account of its origin which is given by the singer of the song" (1952:134). We have enlarged Ross's definition here to include not just songs in which the fairy is actually singing, but more particularly songs in which supernatural agency plays any part, and—most crucially—to which some thread of the original narrative still clings as a means of explaining the mystery of the song. Indeed, mystery is at the heart of these songs, and a sense of mystery is the primary effect that these songs evoke. Texts of such songs tend to be limited, and to contain lots of repetition; airs tend to be simple and generally through-composed.

Although we have included these songs among other songs of extroversion, it must be noted that these are not gregarious songs. They were probably sung at home by parents and grandparents more frequently than at noisier gatherings, and it would have been at home that children would have first learned the stories connected with them. Indeed, one of the informants tells the collector that she learned the song *A Mhòr, a Mhòr, till rid mhacan* at home because she

[47] The Skye bard Calum Ruadh Nicholson, from Braes, composed a number of songs on historical themes and recorded many of them for the School of Scottish Studies. The recordings reveal Calum's overwhelming fondness for the chant-like style mentioned here. Some of his own compositions can be sung to the air of *Alasdair à Gleanna Garaidh*, while he chants others in a flexible improvisatory style to airs seemingly of his own composition.

heard her mother using it as a spinning-song; and were it not for the associated narrative details, this song would have been assigned to §2.2.2.[48]

On the other hand, three of the songs listed in this category—*A nighean nan geug*, *A phiuthrag 's a phiuthar*, and *Sealgair a' choilich bhuidhe*—are, in terms of form, verse-meter and refrain structure, reminiscent of waulking songs. Given the fact that waulking-song texts are so thematically variable, it seems at least possible that these three songs may at some point have been used as accompaniment for some such rhythmically-regulated activity. In the performances here, however, they sound like anything but waulking songs; and we have classed them as supernatural songs because of the narrative element that is central to them.

Finally it is worth noting that this category should be admitted as unabashedly "etic" in its construction. John MacInnes tells me that, in his childhood, the natural and supernatural worlds were not separate, but that supernatural explanations were given and accepted as part of the way things were. Modern children learn to distinguish "fairy tales" from more fact-based narratives at an early age, but it is worth remembering that other societies have not always done so.

5.2.2. Pibroch Songs

Pibroch songs are associated with the tradition of *pìobaireachd*, the formal, classical music of the Highland bagpipes (Ross:1952:131-33). Some pibroch songs are associated with the circumstances in which the original pibroch was composed, while others may lack this dimension; some of them are recognizable melodic variations on the pibroch air, while others cannot be traced in this way. All of them, however, display certain qualities in common: textually, they are simple and undeveloped, incorporating a good deal of repetition; musically, they have slow, deliberate melodies reminiscent of the *ùrlar*—the principal theme—of a pibroch composition, with some of them moving on to a slightly quicker second strain. Many of these songs were no doubt composed by pipers themselves for mnemonic purposes, and are clearly derived from specific *pìobaireachd* compositions; additionally, they may have been further inspired by the circumstances in which a piper found himself—*Cha till Mac Cruimein* is an example—or by some other aspect of the story. The fundamental relationship between pibroch songs and their instrumental background—both music and text—has been a source of fascination to many, including pipers themselves.[49]

The important fact about pibroch songs for our purposes is that there is very often a story associated with them, a fact which justifies their placement among songs of extroversion. Like

[48] After the song, the following conversation ensues between the collector, John MacInnes, and the singer, Mrs Annie Arnott: *"An ann aig ur màthair a chuala sibh an t-òran a tha sin . . . ?' ''S ann.' 'Agus . . . cha bhiodh i a' tàladh . . . ?" "Cha bhiodh, cha bhiodh i idir ris." "Cuin a bhiodh i ga sheinn, ma-tha?" "Bhiodh i ga sheinn nuair a bhiodh i a' snìomh!" "Seadh, dìreach."* ["Was it from your mother that you heard that song?" "Yes." "And . . . she wouldn't be using it as a lullaby . . . ?" "No, not at all." "When did she sing it, then?" "She used to sing it when she was spinning!" "I see."]

[49] The well-known piper Allan MacDonald (1995) has explored this issue in considerable detail. For a study of some of the legends and other materials associated with *Cha till Mac Cruimein* in particular, see Blankenhorn (1978).

the supernatural songs, however—and many pibroch songs contain supernatural elements—these songs are contemplative in mood: they are not showy, they are easy to grasp both textually and musically, and they could serve as accompaniment to any number of domestic tasks if required, resembling the sorts of songs in §2.2 in all these respects.

The fact that pibroch songs are associated with specific narratives—about the composition of the pibroch, or the fate of the piper—links them with the considerable group of supernatural songs as well as other songs that explicitly or implicitly involve the use of narrative. Such songs are indeed incomplete apart from the enfolding narrative that gives them their reason for being; and because narrative involves storytelling—an inherently extroverted activity—all types of narrative songs are included in Group 5.

5.3 Didactic Songs

Songs in this category are not necessarily narratives, but they are ones that require an explicit verbal context. Their function is to underline and reinforce a specific lesson that the listener—child or adult—is being asked to learn and take to heart.

5.3.1 *Canntaireachd*

We have already included what we called pseudo-*canntaireachd* in this catalog (§4.3.3). There remains the original didactic *canntaireachd*—the formal system of “oral notation” developed and used by pipers in recording their compositions and in passing on their art to their students. Unlike the lively context in which pseudo-*canntaireachd* is to be found, the formal teaching of *ceòl-mór*—the “big music” of the pipes, *pìobaireachd*—is most likely to take place in a private setting, one-on-one. The *canntaireachd* associated with formal piping instruction is therefore unlikely to function as entertainment *per se*, except possibly in a gathering of piping *cognoscenti*.

The *pìobaireachd* genre is inherently introspective, requiring focused concentration on the part of both player and listeners. There is no dancing, no foot-tapping—nothing gregarious or extroverted about it. At the same time, the didactic use of *canntaireachd* unquestionably involves explanation, discussion, audience (that is, pupil) participation, and other aspects of two-way communication. While there is no narrative being communicated, there is an important “text” that is, that of the piping notation, and through it, the music of the *pìobaireachd*, which the pupil is expected to learn by heart. For these reasons we have included this sort of *canntaireachd* here.

5.3.2 Religious Songs

Finally, this group of songs includes a number of Protestant hymns whose primary purpose is to teach believers about important aspects of Christian life. Themes of the songs listed as examples include the importance of avoiding drunkenness and other forms of sinful behavior, of appreciating Christ’s sacrifice, of coming to terms with one’s own mortality, and of contemplating the Day of Judgement. They are included here because of their didactic character—they often address their audience directly, as in *Rùn don Fhear Ùr*, where the second stanza

begins, *Éistibh sibhse a chlann òg* ("Listen, young people")—and it is taken for granted that a song intended to teach or inform others about something is a song that must be sung before an audience. This is not to say that they could not have been sung in solitude, similarly to those contemplative religious songs in §1.3.2; but because they were designed for an explicitly didactic purpose, they are included here.

The importance of songs in Group 5 lies in their texts, and the clear communication of textual meaning—whether the text is intended to tell a story, to underscore the mystery of a story told in prose, or to teach some specific content—is the singer's principal duty. The performance of these songs can vary considerably, from the chant-like recitation of the *duain* and historical narratives, to the simple and repetitive singing of the supernatural and pibroch songs. In all cases, however, necessary attention is paid to conveying the meaning of the text. For this reason, they share a number of stylistic features. All of these songs are generally performed (sung or chanted) by a soloist at a tempo approximating that of ordinary speech. Narrative songs do not generally feature refrains, and repetition occurs only where chain-linking is employed. Texts and airs of supernatural and pibroch songs tend to be simple and repetitive, and where refrains are present, others join in:

GROUP 5: SONGS TO INFORM / TEACH

5.1 Narrative Songs

5.1.1 Ballads

Laoidh Fhraoich (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/17302/1)
Laoidh Fhraoich (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/46105/1)
Bàs Oscair (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/58590/1)
Duan na Cèardaich (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/24519/1)
Duan na Muilidheartaich (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/41016/1)
Laoidh Dhiarmaid (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/43734/1)
Laoidh a' Choin Duibh (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/24539/1)
Am Bròn Binn (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/5769/1)
Laoidh an Fhir Mhòir (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/45580/1)

5.1.2 Religious Narratives

Laoidh Mhoire Mhaighdeann (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/26401/1)
Am Mac Stròdhail (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/33725/1)

5.1.3 Historical Narratives

Sa mhìos dheireannach dhen fhoghar (Blàr na h-Òlaind) (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/34588/1)
Òran air Blàr na h-Eaglaise Brice (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/93669/1)
Òran a Chogaidh (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/87461/1)
Tha mi fo chùram ar cùlaibh Èireann (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/93937/1)
Madainn Dhomh 's Mi Sràidearachd (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/10998/1)

5.2 Cante Fable

5.2.1 Supernatural Songs

Ille bhig, 'ille bhig shunndaich ò (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/79470/1)
A Mhòr, a Mhòr, till rid mhacan (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/99707/1)
'S olc an obair do theachdaire… (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/27084/1)
A Mhòr a ghaoil (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/100670/1)
A nighean nan geug (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/45003/1)
A phiuthrag 's a phiuthar (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/40841/1)
Sealgair a' choilich-bhuidhe (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/85533/1)
Cailleach Bheinn a' Bric (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/61456/1)
Pilliù Pillililileòghain (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/24917/1)
Dh'fhàg mi 'n seo 'na shìneadh e (An Cùbhrachan) (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/89261/1)
Buain na Rainich (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/101935/1)
Uamh an Òir (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/54755/1)

5.2.2 Pibroch Songs

A Cholla mo Rùn, Seachainn an Caol (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/22608/1)
Fàilte Dhruim Fionn (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/21236/1)
Aodann Corrabheinn (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/44677/1)
Chaidh Donnchadh dhan bheinn (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/43797/1)
Cha Till MacCruimein (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/92099/1)
Uamh an Òir (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/54755/1)
Mo ghlùin fodham (Uamh an Òir) (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/21509/1)
Fraoch à Rònaigh (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/18986/1)

5.3 Didactic Songs

5.3.1 Canntaireachd

Crònan na Caillich sa Bheinn Bhric (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/78399/1)
A' Ghlas Mheur (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/58273/1)
Cherede Che o Dro O (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/86976/1)
Cille Chrìosd (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/75819/1)

5.3.2 Religious Songs

A' Mhisg (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/98520/1)
'S mi 'm shuidh' aig an uaighe (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/19933/1)
Rùn don Fhear Ùr (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/3779/1)
Òran na h-Eaglaise Saoire (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/75238/1)
Latha a' Bhreitheanais (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/94644/1)
Och Mar Tha Mi 's Mi san Fhàsaich (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/48937/1)

Group 6 : Songs to Affirm Identity

Songs in this category are all, in one way or another, conscious declarations of identity. Because they affirm what sort of people the Gaels understand themselves to be, what lies at the heart of their value-system, they are given pride of place by Gaels themselves in their song repertoire. In Scotland, this category includes the so-called *òrain mhóra* ("big songs") that occupy the big stages in Mòd competitions, songs of high prestige and considerable antiquity. Heather Sparling (2008:412) received an email from a Mòd correspondent that described them as having their basis in panegyric poetry:

> Mainly of a classical content, they describe, for example, battles, praise clans/nobility, lament death or are sad lullabies, or songs of intense love. Generally they are quite difficult to sing and normally consist of eight lines or more per verse. They are heavy and sad and it is rare that you would come across a new song that would be considered to be an *òran mòr*.

In Cape Breton, such songs are labeled "heavy" (*trom*) or "deep" (*domhainn*). Sparling explains (2008:411):

> [They] consist of eight-line strophes (although the number of lines can vary) and generally do not have a chorus. The lack of a chorus marks heavy songs as songs for listening, rather than songs for participating. . . . The rhyme schemes and meters tend to be complex, and the lyrics tend to be in a high linguistic register. . . . Although the quantity of heavy songs in Gaelic song publications suggests that they were once commonly heard in Cape Breton Gaelic communities . . . [t]heir length, complexity, and high register Gaelic makes them difficult to access for all but fluent Gaelic speakers.

As we shall see, our categorization takes some liberty with these descriptions. We have already discussed lullabies, laments, and "songs of intense love" elsewhere (see §§1.1, 1.2, and 2.1 above). So while Group 6 includes many examples that could be labeled as *òrain mhóra* or "heavy" songs, it includes others that might not.

The panegyric impulse lies at the heart of Gaelic poetry: whether explicitly or by implication, the people, places, animals, boats, natural phenomena, and events that appear in song-poetry are subject to the judgment of the poet, who expresses the judgment of the community upon them. The form of that judgment is expressed through what Dr. John MacInnes (2006:265-66) has termed a "panegyric code," to which we earlier referred (§4). As MacInnes has persuasively argued, this code is more than a summary of the rhetorical system found in the poetry. It describes a state of mind, a frame of reference that encompassed all aspects of life in the *Gàidhealtachd* and gave form to the belief that despite centuries of harsh experience it was nonetheless worthwhile to promote the notion of a unified Gaeldom (*ibid*.):

> The primary function of *bàrdachd* is to be found in clan panegyric, where the stress is on the survival of the group of warrior-hunters at the top of society. The diction is codified in sets of conventional images, most densely concentrated in the heroic elegy composed at the point of crisis

> brought about by the death of a leader—in other words, when it was most necessary to reaffirm the traditional values of the community.
>
> . . .
>
> The attempts on the part of poets to preserve at least a conceptual Gaelic unity were successful up to a point, but at the price of developing panegyric not only as a form but as a pervasive style. The style in turn reflects an attitude to the world, which is regarded intellectually in terms of praise versus dispraise. It extends to love poetry and to nature poetry, in the latter evoking a sense of friendly or unfriendly territory: in short, it bears the Gaelic sense of social psychology, of history, of geography.

All of the songs in Group 6—whether songs of praise, songs of dispraise, or songs of complaint—reflect the central importance of this panegyric impulse (and its opposites) in establishing the Gaelic world-view. Thematically, the five categories within this group differ only in their subject matter. They are included among songs of extroversion because, to a very important degree, they express the public persona of the Gael, reaffirming that persona in the minds of the Gaels themselves—what Finnegan has termed "a mythical or sociological charter for a society" (1977:242)—and providing its purest expression to the minds of others. The songs in Group 6, especially those in §§6.1 and 6.2, express pride in one's country and one's people—in other words, they are patriotic songs, even if the *patria* exists largely in the mind.

Many of these songs are by known authors, poets whose service to chieftains ensured that their works survived in manuscripts of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as well as in the memories of the people. Nearer our own time, the songs of local bards like Màiri MacPherson (Màiri Mhór nan Òran), Calum Ruadh Nicholson, Iain MacNeacail, and many others have expressed the views of countless Gaels who remember and sing them.

Texts of these songs tend to be complex, and often present an argument. Performance by a solo singer tends to be moderate-to-slow, and repetition is uncommon, except where chain-linking occurs. Refrains are less common, but not unheard of in these songs; when a refrain is present, and the song is sung in ordinary company (that is, not from a platform), people are likely to join in.

A number of these songs inhabit multiple categories in this catalog. Some have narrative tendencies, and could as easily be listed in Group 5; three of the Jacobite songs listed here could also function as waulking-songs; and the presence of toasts already included in §4.4—a genre which, come to think of it, would naturally include songs of praise—further demonstrates the slippery character of human culture, as opposed to biology or physics.

6.1. Clan Panegyric, Satire, and Complaint

The panegyric model doubtless has its origin in clan panegyric, which was for centuries essential to maintaining the standing of those at the top of the Gaelic world. Whether practiced by professional hereditary poets on behalf of the chieftain and his family, or by vernacular bards both prior to and following the disintegration of Gaelic society, the composition and dissemination of such poetry not only reinforced traditional relationships and allegiances, but was also crucial to maintaining Gaels' sense of their identity in the world.

Because this is such an important category, I have included more examples than I have done for other genres. Although the majority of them are sung by only two singers—Calum Johnston of Barra and Duncan MacDonald of South Uist—I feel that there is unlikely to have been a great deal of variation in the performance, understanding, and social context of such songs from one part of the *Gàidhealtachd* to another.

As in Group 5, the expression of textual content and meaning is of paramount importance in these songs that are sung slowly and deliberately, enabling the listener to grasp both the words themselves and the solemnity of their meaning. In terms of melody, airs are generally non-repetitive within the stanza, with the music of the refrain (in the four items where a refrain is present) echoing that of the stanza. Chain-linking, which occurs in seven of the examples, allows the listener more time to follow the song's argument. As regards meter, most of the songs included here consist of regular stanzas, with one of them—*Duan do dh'fhear de Chlann 'Illeathain*—composed in heptasyllabic lines and chanted by Duncan MacDonald in the style of the other *duain* we have examined (see §5.1.1 above). Other metrical forms include quatrains and couplets of four- or five-stress lines, and stanzas in so-called "strophic" meter, in which the last line of each stanza contains one more stressed syllable than in preceding lines.[50]

6.2. Homeland and Nature Panegyric

Songs in this section describe the poet's homeland, the goodness of the people who live there, and the beauty and bounty of the countryside. As in all panegyric, the comprehensibility of the text is of utmost importance. Unlike the songs in §6.1, however, two-thirds of the songs in this section are sung to melodies suggestive of rounded-binary form, either AABA or ABBA. The last two songs are chanted, and the second of these—*Ghabh mi suas gu àirigh luachrach*—is sung to the same air that we saw earlier employed for the two historical narrative songs in §5.1.4, for *Laoidh Mhoire Mhaighdeann* in §5.1.3, and for *Alasdair à Gleanna Garaidh* in §6.1.

6.3 Political Panegyric, Satire, and Complaint

As one might expect of a people who have long found themselves at the sharp end of political developments, Gaelic poets have not been short of material for songs about the events in which Gaels have been caught up. From the Jacobite period and the Clearances to the great wars of the twentieth century, some of Gaeldom's greatest songs are those that offer comment upon political matters.

Although the structure of three of the Jacobite songs listed among our examples—*Agus hò Mhòrag*, *An fhideag airgid*, and *Smeorach Chlann Raghnaill*—suggests their probable use as waulking-songs at some time in the past, our recordings show that the singers valued them for textual reasons and gave them appropriately serious treatment. Indeed, many waulking-songs

[50] The late Rev. William Matheson made a lifetime's study of poetry in strophic meters and how it should be performed; see Blankenhorn (2013a). Recordings of his singing of clan panegyric in both strophic and other meters, most of them reconstructed from his study of manuscript and printed sources in light of his deep knowledge of tradition, are an important resource. These items are not included in *Tobar an Dualchais*, but are available on the Scottish Tradition CD *Gaelic Bards and Minstrels*.

preserve Jacobite themes, as a search for "Jacobite" songs in *Tobar an Dualchais* will reveal. Similarly, we have already noted that *Gun òlainn slàinte Theàrlaich* is, as its title indicates, a drinking-song (§4.4); at the same time, its hearty praise for Prince Charles Edward Stuart reflects the fact that the panegyric impulse infused Gaelic poetry of all kinds.

6.4 Panegyric, Satire, and Complaint about Local Events and Characters

This category has been a productive one up to modern times, and is well represented among the works of local bards on both sides of the Atlantic.[51] The first three songs listed here are all panegyrics; *Deoch-slàinte nan gillean* takes the form of a drinking-song and is also listed in §4.4. The next three are satires—the best-known being Alasdair Mac Mhaighistir Alasdair's *Diomoladh Mòraig*; and the remaining five are songs of complaint.

All such songs were designed to make a strong point, and thereby to reaffirm the values and social conventions that held the community together. For the most part, they sought to do so without causing too much offense. John Shaw's observation about Cape Breton can equally be well applied to the Scottish *Gàidhealtachd*. Topical songs, he says (2000:32):

> can be placed on an ascending scale of directness and force, beginning with . . . affectionate and entertaining portrayals . . . and extending to undisguised verbal attacks. . . . In their social commentaries the songs frequently call attention to the less flattering characteristics present in a community—excessive pride, vanity, pretension, malice—by devices such as putting words in the mouths of local characters. . . . [And] a village bard in a local setting can use innuendo and indirect imagery contrasted with direct bawdry to address such delicate issues as female vanity, aging, and sexual mores.

Satire was, however, a sharp weapon whose use could have grievous consequences. In a tight-knit community, the direct expression of ridicule and contempt carried risk not just for the target, but for the poet.[52] While some poets appear to have cared less than others about these social conventions (Alasdair mac Mhaighistir Alasdair comes to mind), there is no doubt that the social opportunities for satire and bawdry were fewer than for other types of song.

6.5 Religious Panegyric and Evangelism (Hymns)

Of the relevance of the panegyric model to the composition of religious verse, John MacInnes writes (2006:318, emphasis added):

> [T]he crumbling of the traditional rhetoric of Gaelic poetry, involved a crumbling of Gaelic identity also. In this connection, it is to be observed that, apart from the transference of loyalty to

[51] John Shaw (2000:17-18) notes that, from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, poets born in Nova Scotia began to compose panegyrics, political songs, and other songs commenting on current events and situations, similar to those composed by so-called "village bards" in Scotland.

[52] Cape Breton poet Donald (Dòmhnall Thormaid) MacDonald discovered that the composition of even gently satirical verse could have adverse consequences for himself (Shaw 2000:42-43).

> the British Army and Empire . . . the only system which introduced a competing psychology, and therefore offered a new identity, was the intense, evangelical Presbyterianism which took root in most of the Gaelic area only after 1745—in fact, in the later eighteenth century and throughout the nineteenth—that is to say, when the older social system had been conspicuously broken. . . . [This new psychology] affected but failed to displace the older intellectual order: indeed, although *the panegyric code can be traced even in some of the hymns of the Evangelical Revival*, the two systems remained on the whole in mutual hostility.

The six hymns given here as examples illustrate MacInnes' point. Three are sung to melodies that contain no repeated element, and three to tunes using some sort of rounded-binary form (ABAC, ABCA). All are composed in four-line stanzas; two of the songs employ refrains that are also in four-line stanzaic form.[53]

As was the case with songs in Group 5, the *raison d'être* of these panegyric songs is to impart a significant text. In asserting the virtues of clan, country or religious belief, the poet has crafted his verse—and the singer must sing it—in order that the proud sentiment it embodies be clearly communicated, understood, and appreciated by others. Those songs that represent the antithesis of panegyric—the satires and, most commonly in modern times, the complaints—uphold the rules of virtuous behavior by showing what happens when those rules are flouted. In either case, it is the affirmation of the community's core belief in such virtues that constitutes the essential message of such songs:

GROUP 6: SONGS OF PRAISE AND DISPRAISE

6.1 Clan Panegyric, Satire, and Complaint

Alasdair à Gleanna Garadh (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/32209/1)
O Iain Ghlinne Chuaich (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/40814/1)
Duan do dh'fhear . . . (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/25198/1)
Alasdair a laoigh mo chèile (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/57810/1)
Faigh a-nuas dhuinn am botal (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/40740/1)
Tàladh Iain Mhùideartaich (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/40742/1)
An Dubh Ghleannach (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/24913/1)
Cumha Chailein Ghlinn Iubhair (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/78250/1)
Fhuair mi naidheachd as ùr (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/24898/1)
Mo chiad iomagain . . . (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/98591/1)
Òran do dh'Iain Breac MacLeòid (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/78251/1)
'S cian 's gur fhada mi 'm thàmh (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/78247/1)
An deicheamh latha de thùs a' Mhàirt (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/25482/1)
Fhuaras naigheachd an-dé (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/35326/1)

---

[53] Cape Breton's largely Catholic population preferred the *òrain matha* or *laoidhean* (religious hymns), but "even the oldest singers only recall hearing them infrequently" (Shaw 2000:18).

Tha mulad, tha mulad (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/97615/1)
Chaidh a' chuibhle mun cuairt (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/7229/1)
Latha Inbhir Lòchaidh (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/19929/1)
O gur mise a tha air mo chràdh (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/76181/1)

6.2 Homeland / Nature Panegyric and Complaint

Allt an t-Siùcair (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/88148/1)
'S toigh leam 's toigh leam… (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/23897/1)
Eilean mo ghaoil (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/25288/1)
Ma shaoileas sibh uile gur bàrd mi (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/44471/1)
O gur toil leam hè gur toil leam (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/4249/1)
Òran Choire a' Cheathaich (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/42426/1)
Gur moch a rinn mi dùsgadh (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/97270/1)
'S e mis bhith fada bho thìr m' eòlais (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/64526/1)
Ghabh mi suas gu àirigh luachrach (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/28416/1)
Moch 's mi ag èirigh . . . (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/44335/1)
Eilean a' Cheò (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/68000/1)

6.3 Political Panegyric, Satire, and Complaint

Agus hò Mhòrag (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/94100/1)
An fhìdeag airgid (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/22363/1)
Smeorach Chlann Raghnaill (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/73077/1)
Gun òlainn slàinte Theàrlaich (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/3120/1)
Cabar Fèidh (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/33325/1)
Ged tha mo cheann air liathadh (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/30131/1)
Beinn Lì (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/45313/1)
Cha mhòr nach coma leam . . . (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/79197/1)
Tha rìoghachdan an t-saoghail seo (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/19143/1)
Thàinig bàta air tìr dhan àite (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/42378/1)

6.4 Panegyric, Satire, and Complaint about Local Events and Characters

Deoch-slàinte nan gillean (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/65751/1)
Fàilte ort Uilleim (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/77784/1)
Òran Iain 'illEaspaig (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/25887/1)
Aoir Sheumais Bhàin (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/69800/1)
Diomoladh Mòraig (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/103601/1)
Aoir a rinn Iain MacIllEathain . . . (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/59833/1)
Ach 's e an t-Èireannach a bh' ann (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/8921/1)
Hoa gur mise tha fo mhì-ghean (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/13287/1)

Òran mu Niall Mac Dhonnchadh . . . (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/61453/1)
'S diumbach mi do mhuinntir . . . (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/19631/1)
'S gann gun dìrich mi a-chaoidh (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/1897/1)

6.5 Religious Panegyric and Evangelism (Hymns)

Tìr an Àigh (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/75377/1)
Is e gràdh fir-saoraidh (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/71779/1)
Tha fhios agad gur toil leam thu (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/72625/1)
Tha tìr ann a tha nas deàlraiche na là (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/44878/1)
Long an t-soisgeil, long an àigh (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/33616/1)
Sona gu bràth an àireamh . . . (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/34547/1)

Gaelic Song Today

As should be obvious, this essay has made no attempt to deal with, much less categorize, Gaelic song as it is manifested in mainstream western society. What seems clear is that, however much some of us may wish to describe today's performance of Gaelic song in terms of a seamless continuum, as part of a traditional process of incremental change, the time has come to acknowledge the watershed that exists between the Gaelic society that regarded singing as a part of everyday activity, and the society—our own—that regards singing for other people as something requiring professional expertise. This is not to say that today's Gaels do not value Gaelic song for many of the same reasons that their ancestors did. For people of Gaelic heritage (and for an increasing number whose Gaelic heritage, if any, is based on research rather than personal upbringing), songs in Gaelic still have great power to charm and entertain; they evoke longing, pride, nostalgia, and patriotic fervor; and they provide a focus for personal and group identity in a world that many perceive as inimical to such differentiation.

But there are important differences; and it is in these that the bright line, the undeniable difference between our world and that of the traditional Gael, must be acknowledged. For one thing, our appreciation of Gaelic song today cannot possibly be as nuanced as that of our forbears. When we hear a song in Gaelic, very few of us can accurately visualize the places and people named in it; we will not be instantly reminded of an older song—and all that that older song signified—when we hear a newly-composed one; we are unlikely to take for granted the notion of a Gaelic *patria,* what John MacInnes called "conceptual Gaelic unity"; and most of us have not borne anything like the daily hardships—never mind the shameful indignities—endured by generations of Gaels on both sides of the Atlantic. Sorley MacLean, in his bitter and sustained attack on the works of Marjory Kennedy-Fraser in the 1930s, complained about the unequal power relationship between Gaeldom and the dominant culture (Mac Gill-Eain 1985:20):

> . . . [W]ith the kind of people who call Mrs Kennedy-Fraser's travesties of Gaelic songs "faithful reproductions of the spirit of the original," I have no dispute. They are harmless as long as ignorance and crassness are considered failings in criticism of poetry. They have had their hour in the drawing-rooms of Edinburgh and London; they have soothed the ears of old ladies of the Anglo-Saxon bourgeoisie: they have spoken after dinner, hiding with a halo the bracken that grew with the Clearances . . .

The Clearances? No one today longs to experience the life lived by people, isolated in every way imaginable, who had no rights to the land they farmed and every likelihood of being victimized by their supposed leaders. All of today's Gaelic-speakers are bilingual; and because the dominance of the Anglophone world is so overwhelming, it is hardly surprising that our understanding, appreciation, and latter-day performance of Gaelic song are largely informed and shaped by unconscious aesthetic expectations, associations, and assumptions that have their origins in the dominant culture, and have little to do with the Gaelic world we have been describing here.

If we are truly to understand how Gaeldom regarded song and singing, we must fully comprehend the essential conservatism of the Gaels. As we have seen, Gaels were conservative because they had to be: in order to preserve their communities and their way of life, they needed to pull together, and individual innovation was frowned upon. John Shaw observed that when musical instruments (piano, pump organ, violin) began to be used to accompany Gaelic songs in Cape Breton, "the results occasionally elicited emotional reactions from older singers: '*Carson fo Dhia nach cum thu suas an cleachdadh a bh'againn?*' (Why in God's name won't you keep up the way that we had?)" (2000:14). Margaret Fay Shaw, acknowledging that the tunes she transcribed in South Uist would lend themselves to harmonized arrangements for part-singing, explained why she would not present them as such: "The traditional songs of the Hebrides are never accompanied nor sung in parts" (1955:72). Thomas McKean, describing how poets selected tunes for their compositions, noted that the choice was often made because the existing tune provided not just a suitable melody in metrical terms, but also a set of associations that would enrich listeners' experience of the new song by helping them fit it into an appropriate cultural context. A newly-composed air would not do this, and would ring false for another reason as well (McKean 1997:178):

> To demand a fresh melody for each song would be to apply a modern "art" music aesthetic and to imply that a song is primarily an artistic rather than a functional, emotional and communicative creation. In order to communicate at this level, the message must be sung . . . in the register in which such communications are expected to be coded.

To the Gael, songs—how they were composed, and how they were performed—affirmed the essential unity of the community. Anybody could compose a song, and anybody could sing; but when they did so, they knew that they were giving voice not just to their own personal emotional reality, but to that of their neighbors and of their community as a whole. As McKean (1997:97) learned from Skye bard Iain MacNeacail, the primary purpose of a new song was to express something about a particular moment, and to bring people together in that moment:

> Between the wars Iain often made a new song, sang it at a céilidh or two and then it would be forgotten as it ceased to be topical or a new issue presented itself; "They were for the time being, just." Since the topics were usually ephemeral, a song often had a short working life.

McKean (1997:129) later expands upon this point:

> One of the crucial features of these songs was their transience, a concept that is hard for most Western Europeans to grasp, used as we are to the permanence of the written word. They were oral both in use and in nature and were never meant to be written. By being transcribed, they have been so divorced from their function that they are transformed into different entities and judged by inappropriate criteria.

Even when a song became popular and spread abroad, it was the song itself that survived, not necessarily the name of the bard who composed it.

The social changes that have led to today's "contemporary traditional music" have not come about overnight.[54] John Shaw (2000:51) recounts how, at the beginning of the twentieth century, Gaels in Cape Breton declined to adopt the innovations advanced by the Mòd in Scotland, and how in Scotland itself:

> the effects of acculturation in the form of imposed settings and performance standards were being remarked on as early as 1905, when Amy Murray during her collecting visit to Eriskay noted Father Allan Macdonald's dismay at songs being "spoiled" and altered in their performance "as though you were to fit a statue in a box by taking off the nose and ears" (Murray 1936:89-91).

Describing how he himself learned songs, Lauchie MacLellan contrasts his own experience with how he sees the situation today (Shaw 2000:75):

> In those times a song meant something. If you were going to sing it you had to know it. It would do you no good to start in on the verses just to sing something that neither you nor anyone else could understand. You had to sing the song with the verses in order. I can remember learning this from [my uncle] Neil: "Now Lauchie," he said, "you're going to be telling a story. And you must go ahead with one verse following the other."

Such descriptions suggest that what traditional Gaels themselves felt had been lost is understanding, what Cape Breton singer Dan Allan Gillies called *brìgh an òrain*—the "central proposition of the song," an understanding that "extends beyond performance into the realm of what constitutes a good song, and is also central to the process of learning a song" (Shaw 2000:24). This loss is reflected in the distinction expressed by Heather Sparling's informants between *puirt-à-beul* and so-called "heavy" songs, and the Cape Bretoner's higher regard for the latter as requiring greater understanding and nuance from the singer, while the *puirt* were

---

[54] The phrase—whose meaning clearly depends upon one's point-of-view—is discussed by Ian Olson (2007).

dismissed as being the choice of outsiders, of people who didn't have much Gaelic and who "did not really understand Gaelic culture" (2008:404, 416-17). The same distinction, expressed in more personal terms, seems to underlie Calum Johnston's preference for the "big songs" (*òrain mhóra*), as he explained to field-worker Thorkild Knudsen in 1967 (*Tocher* 13:180):

> . . . I sing [the big songs] to myself because I know that people nowadays, very few . . . like the old big songs, but say fifty or sixty years ago, there were plenty of people who did enjoy that type of song and they would prefer it to anything else that you sang. Nowadays they're much lighter in their choice. You see, it's this "diddles" that they like. . . . It's just the way things have gone. The present generation, they seem to have lost taste for all these things. . . . [T]he old songs have gone, because nobody has any interest in them. They're too difficult for them to learn and they don't like them in any case. And it's a new generation, as you might say, that has grown, and you can't do anything to stop it.

Such objections gathered force on both sides of the Atlantic during the twentieth century, and even today many lament the changes—linguistic, social, economic, aesthetic—that brought an end to traditional Gaelic communities and the well-integrated culture they embodied.

Nowadays, we expect newly-composed songs to showcase the poet or singer-songwriter's unique voice. We expect singers and musicians to explore the printed collections and on-line resources like *Tobar an Dualchais*, to stamp their own style upon the old songs, and to copyright the result. But even with such a wealth of material at our disposal, there is no doubt that the breadth and variability of the repertoire of Gaelic song has been considerably narrowed, not only because few singers these days attempt the *òrain mhóra*, but also because as singers learn from recordings and from printed sources, certain versions of songs become canonical, enshrined in the Mòd songbooks and in the recordings of successful professionals, pushing aside the less-well-known variants. We must also acknowledge that, when instruments are used, the needs of a unified ensemble tend to smooth out the rhythmical irregularities and tonal ambiguities characteristic of unaccompanied Gaelic singing;[55] and that song-texts are often obscured by the instrumental backing, or by unwonted ornamentation, or (with rising frequency) by the singer's uncertain grasp of Gaelic pronunciation.

But for those who flock to the National Mòd, or Glasgow's Celtic Connections, or the innumerable "trad" festivals such purist objections are unimportant. For these audiences, the performer's exuberant talent, voice quality, persona, and the atmosphere created by the performance are more important than the content of the songs themselves. For them, what intensifies the emotional (introverted) response to a lament sung by a longhaired young woman in an ethereal, breathy style to harp notes, or raises an (extroverted) eruption of delight and pride as a set of accompanied *puirt* is brought to a fiery finish is that the performance of a Gaelic song

---

[55] Morag MacLeod, describing the difficulty of transcribing the singing of Margaret MacKay of Scarp, Harris, notes: "Any attempt at an accurate representation of Margaret MacKay's use of rhythm, particularly in this song, would make for irksome reading, with far too many changes of time signature. . . . She does not, however, distort the overall rhythm of the verses in the song: this is, rather, one of her subtle ways of 'conveying the changing moods and drama of it'" (*Tocher* 22:213).

is an important symbol of identity.[56] In this fashion, Gaelic song still functions as an important means of reinforcing the audience-community's sense of itself, of demarcating its difference from other audiences, and of justifying its own reality. It matters little that we, the audience-community, are consumers rather than active participants in the music-making, and that we reside on the far side of the proscenium arch.[57]

Conclusions

> How does one define a genre (and *who* defines a genre)? How does one know where one genre begins and another ends? How does one make sense of songs that seem to fit more than one genre? How does one decide whether a particular song is an exception to a given genre, or whether it is better understood as belonging to a separate genre category? (Sparling 2008:401)

This essay has attempted to address two questions. First: is the construction of a categorical system for Gaelic song still a worthwhile project, given our awareness that song must be understood within its social context, rather than apart from it? And second: is the construction of such a system even possible, given the protean nature of human culture?

As we have seen, constructing a generic system for Gaelic song is not a straightforward matter. Category boundaries are permeable; re-purposing is common; and genre labels must always, with time, be subject to revision. Likewise, while emic category distinctions may shed light on how a community thinks about its song repertoire at a given moment, they may not reflect the longer perspective of a well-read and experienced observer, Gael or otherwise.[58] The guiding distinction, used here, between songs of introversion and songs of extroversion can, I believe, provide useful insight, but it can take us only so far.

For example, it would have been easy enough to conclude that the supernatural songs and the pibroch songs belonged among the songs of introversion, as I believe that these would for the most part have been sung in an understated and thoughtful style, as is common with such songs. But because they would have been sung to an audience—probably an audience of children—to tell a story and impart a sense of the unknowable, and because an audience, however young, is

[56] "Identity" is one of those terms whose meaning must be in dispute in this connection, as today many regard their identity (or even identities) as a matter of personal choice, rather than a fact of life over which they have no control. In this we see yet another difference between traditional Gaeldom and our own diverse world.

[57] This altered social context, along with the decline in singing standards and the change in aesthetic values, is well described in Shaw (2000:52-53).

[58] Sparling notes that "even with ethnographers increasingly focusing on emic labels and taxonomies rather than imposing outside systems, the ethnographer must be sensitive to the fact that not all of a culture's taxonomies will be fully developed, coherent, or explicit" (2008:408).

expected to react to what it hears, these songs are clearly songs of extroversion, and we have placed them among the Songs to Inform, Group 5.[59]

We have already mentioned the considerable overlap between some of the drinking songs (§4.4) and various types of panegyric songs (Group 6). Likewise, it is difficult at times to find the right category in which to place the various types of religious song: should one grant primacy to their emotional content (introversion) or to their evangelical fervor (extroversion)? In many cases, religious songs display both qualities. The question of where to put a given song is one that can only encourage further exploration and discovery, and the appropriate placement of religious songs may offer such an opportunity.

Another question meriting further exploration is how far one might go in cross-cataloging waulking songs. As James Ross (1957:97-98) noted, these songs cover such a wide range of themes that he found himself unable to create a single category for them. While we have done so, there is no doubt that waulking songs reflect many of the themes listed here, including love, loss, narrative, the supernatural, clan panegyric, and satire—all from a woman's point-of-view. They include Gaelic examples of flytings, a combative genre attested in Norse, Anglo-Saxon, English, and Scots tradition since medieval times that involves the ritual exchange of (sometimes profane) insults. Subtle bawdry is well-attested in waulking-songs; and they also—and we think of clapping-songs particularly—take the same rich delight in the skillful use of language as is evident in many *puirt-à-beul*.

There are also significant historical questions which, had this exercise been undertaken, say, two centuries ago, would surely have led to some different conclusions. The use of song to lighten various types of work (for example, reaping, weaving) might have led to more sub-categories being included in Group 2; and the use of choral song in other social contexts such as weddings, where both men and women participated, could have enlarged our understanding of what we now refer to as the waulking-song genre (MacInnes 2007:419-20). We would certainly have been able to record rowing-songs in an actual seagoing context.

In undertaking this study, I have been aware that the whole issue of genre has been a topic of academic debate for some time. The thematic- and structure-based understanding of genre assumed by James Ross has rightly given way to an awareness that the social context of performance can tell us a great deal more about how the participants themselves understand what they are doing, and that their choice of what to sing, and of how and where to sing it, reveals the category to which they would assign that song, assuming they thought of classifying it at all. As Heather Sparling puts it, "In this case, location, vocabulary, gestures, and audience behavior all become significant factors when determining genre" (2008:407).

In light of these arguments, I believe that the framework proposed here offers a useful tool for exploring Gaelic traditional song—its emotional depth; the breadth of its subject-matter and of its reach into people's lives; its social usefulness; its emotional importance for the people, both as individuals and as communities; its capacity to teach, to comfort, and to amuse; its role in affirming the Gaels' consciousness of the world and their place in it. The existence of a catalog

[59] Maighread Challan (2012:92) points out that such songs, along with rhymes and proverbs, may have functioned to warn children about the danger of doing certain things; certainly children who heard the legend of *Uamh an Òir* might be less inclined to wander into a cave, in case they—like the piper—might fall prey to the green fairy dog.

such as ours in no way negates the validity of applying thematic, metrical, historical, musical or other criteria to Gaelic song, and the examination of song in light of these can only be illuminating, so long as we do not expect any such criteria to yield a taxonomy that will account uniquely for every item in the corpus.

In the end, however, it is not the eventual placement of an item in a particular category that is of value, but rather the effort of careful listening and discernment required to make a choice. This is not a scientific taxonomy, for the simple reason that human culture never stands still long enough to allow such a thing. The categories we have suggested should not be thought of as labels; names by themselves tell us nothing interesting. Rather they should be regarded as lenses that invite us to inspect a song from a singular perspective, in the full understanding that a different lens trained on the same song will probably reveal something else of interest. All we can claim is that we have attempted to suggest working categories that are wide enough to be useful, but narrow enough to be meaningful, and that we have managed to avoid resorting to a "miscellaneous" category for items that fit nowhere else. Indeed, there could never be such a category, because in song as in all of its other manifestations, the culture of the Gaels was a tightly-woven, strong and seamless fabric that—like the *clò mór* when it emerged from the waulking board—protected and gave color to the way of life and the world-view of those who created and sustained it for centuries, even up to our own time.

The University of Edinburgh

References

Bakhtin 1986 — Mikhail M. Bakhtin. "The Problem of Speech Genres." In *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays: M. M. Bakhtin*. Ed. by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Trans. by Vern W. McGee. Austin: University of Texas Press. pp. 60-102.

Bascom 1954 — William R. Bascom. "Four Functions of Folklore." *Journal of American Folklore*, 67:333-49.

Bassin 1977 — Ethel Bassin. *The Old Songs of Skye: Frances Tolmie and her Circle.* Ed. by Derek Bowman. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Bayard 1950 — Samuel P. Bayard. "Prolegomena to a Study of the Principal Melodic Families of British-American Folk Song." *Journal of American Folklore*, 63.247:1-44.

Ben-Amos 1976 — Dan Ben-Amos. "Introduction." In *Folklore Genres.* Ed. by Dan Ben-Amos. Austin: University of Texas Press. pp. ix-xlv.

Blankenhorn 1978 — V. S. Blankenhorn. "Traditional and Bogus Elements in 'MacCrimmon's Lament'." *Scottish Studies*, 22:45-67.

Blankenhorn 2013a ______. "The Rev. William Matheson and the Performance of Scottish Gaelic 'Strophic' Verse." *Scottish Studies*, 36:15-44.

Blankenhorn 2013b ______. "Review of Maighread A. Challan, *Air Bilean an t-Sluaigh: Sealladh air Leantalachd Beul-Aithris Ghàidhlig Uibhist a Tuath*." *Scottish Studies*, 36:140-44.

Blankenhorn 2013c ______. "Verse-Structure and Performance in Scottish Gaelic Vernacular Poetry." In *Rannsachadh na Gàidhlig 6: Papers read at Rannsachadh na Gàidhlig 6 held at the University of Aberdeen 23-26 August 2010.* Ed. by Nancy R. McGuire and Colm Ó Baoill. Aberdeen: An Clò Gàidhealach. pp. 53-92.

Blankenhorn 2014 ______. "'Griogal Cridhe': Aspects of Transmission in the Lament for Griogair Ruadh Mac Griogair of Glen Strae." *Scottish Studies*, 37:6-36.

Blankenhorn forthcoming ______. "*Songs of the Hebrides* and the Critics." *Scottish Studies*, 38.

Broadwood 1927-31 Lucy E. Broadwood. "Twenty Gaelic Songs." *Journal of the Folk-Song Society*, 8:280-303.

Bruford 1978e Alan Bruford. "Gaelic Work Songs." *Folk Review*, October:4-8.

Campbell 2013 The Campbells of Greepe. *Fonn: Music and a Sense of Place in a Gaelic Family Song Tradition.* Stornoway, Isle of Lewis: Acair.

Campbell and Collinson 1969 John Lorne Campbell, ed. and trans., and Francis Collinson. *Hebridean Folksongs: A Collection of Waulking Songs Made by Donald MacCormick in Kilphedir in South Uist in the year 1893.* Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Campbell and Collinson 1977 ______. *Hebridean Folksongs II: Waulking Songs from Barra, South Uist, Eriskay and Benbecula.* Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Campbell and Collinson 1981 ______. *Hebridean Folksongs III: Waulking Songs from Vatersay, Barra, South Uist, Eriskay and Benbecula.* Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Carmichael 1900 Alexander Carmichael. *Carmina Gadelica.* Edinburgh: T. and A. Constable.

Challan 2012 Maighread Challan [Margaret Callan]. *Air Bilean an t-Sluaigh: Sealladh air Leantalachd Beul-Aithris Ghàidhlig Uibhist a Tuath.* Belfast: Queen's University Press.

Collinson 1961 Francis Collinson. "The Musical Aspect of the Songs of Nan MacKinnon of Vatersay." *Scottish Studies*, 5:40-42.

Collinson 1966 ______. *The Traditional and National Music of Scotland.* London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Cregeen 2004 Eric R. Cregeen. *Recollections of an Argyllshire Drover and Other West Highland Chronicles*. Ed. by Margaret Bennett. Edinburgh: Birlinn.

Dickson 2013 Josh Dickson. "Piping Sung: Women, *Canntaireachd* and the Role of the Tradition-Bearer." *Scottish Studies*, 36:45-65.

Dun 1848 Finlay Dun. *Orain na 'h-Albain: The Vocal Melodies of Scotland.* Edinburgh: Wood & Co.

Dunn 1953 Charles W. Dunn. *Highland Settler: A Portrait of the Scottish Gael in Nova Scotia.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Finnegan 1977 Ruth Finnegan. *Oral Poetry.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Finnegan 1991 ______. *Oral Traditions and the Verbal Arts: A Guide to Research Practices.* London: Routledge.

Gaelic Folklore 2006 *Cape Breton Gaelic Folklore Collection.* St Francis Xavier University, NS. http://gaelstream.stfx.ca/greenstone/cgi-bin/library.cgi?site=localhost&a=p&p=about&c=capebret&l=en&w=utf-8

Gillies 2005 Anne Lorne Gillies. *Songs of Gaelic Scotland.* Edinburgh: Birlinn.

Gowans 1992 Linda Gowans. *Am Bron Binn: An Arthurian Ballad in Scottish Gaelic*. Eastbourne: Manor Park Press.

Herskovits 1961 Melville Herskovits. "The Study of African Oral Art." In *Folklore Research Around the World.* Ed. by Richard M. Dorson. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. pp. 165-70.

Hillers 2006 Barbara Hillers. "Dialogue or Monologue? Lullabies in Scottish Gaelic Tradition." In *Literature & History: Papers from the Second Conference of Scottish Gaelic Studies, Glasgow 2002*. Ed. by Thomas Owen Clancy and Sheila Kidd. Glasgow: Department of Celtic, University of Glasgow.

Kennedy-Fraser 1929 Marjory Kennedy-Fraser. *More Songs of the Hebrides.* London: Boosey.

Kennedy-Fraser and MacLeod 1909, 1917, 1921 Marjory Kennedy-Fraser and Kenneth MacLeod. *Songs of the Hebrides.* 3 vols. London: Boosey & Co.

Kennedy-Fraser and MacLeod 1925 ______. *From the Hebrides: Further Gleanings of Tale and Song.* Glasgow: Paterson's Publications, Ltd.

Lamb 2012 William Lamb, Ed. *Keith Norman MacDonald's Puirt-à-Beul: The Vocal Dance Music of the Scottish Gaels.* Breakish, Isle of Skye: Taigh-na-Teud.

Lamb 2014 ______. "120 Years of *The Gesto Collection*: Celebrating the Collaborations of Dr Keith Norman MacDonald and Miss Frances Tolmie." Lecture delivered at the Skye Book Festival, Portree, September 5, 2014. https://www.academia.edu/12120856/120_Years_of_The_Gesto_Collection_Celebrating_the_Collaborations_of_Dr_Keith_Norman_MacDonald_and_Miss_Frances_Tolmie

Lewis 1977 I. M. Lewis. *Social Anthropology in Perspective.* New York: Penguin.

Lomax 1968 Alan Lomax. *Folk Song Style and Culture.* New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books.

MacDonald 1995 Allan A. MacDonald. "The Relationship Between Pibroch and Gaelic Song: Its Implication on the Performance Style of the Pibroch Urlar." Unpubl. M.Litt. Dissertation, University of Edinburgh.

MacDonald 1943 Colin MacDonald. *Highland Journey.* Edinburgh and London: The Moray Press.

MacDonald 1997 [1895] Keith Norman MacDonald. *The Gesto Collection of Highland Music*. Burnham-on-Sea, Somerset: Llanerch Press Ltd.

MacDonald 1931 [1901] ______. *Puirt-à-Beul—Mouth-Tunes: Songs for Dancing.* Alexander MacLaren & Sons: Glasgow.

MacDonald and MacDonald 1911 A. MacDonald and A. MacDonald. *The MacDonald Collection of Gaelic Poetry*. Inverness: Northern Counties Newspaper and Publishing Co. Ltd.

Mac Gill-Eain 1985 [1934] Somhairle Mac Gill-Eain. *Ris a' Bhruthaich: The Criticism and Prose Writings of Sorley MacLean.* Ed. by William Gillies. Stornoway, Isle of Lewis: Acair. pp. 15-47.

MacGregor 1999 Martin MacGregor. "'Surely One of the Greatest Poems Ever Made in Britain': The Lament for Griogair Ruadh MacGregor of Glen Strae and its Historical Background." In *The Polar Twins.* Ed. by E. J. Cowan and D. Gifford. Edinburgh: John Donald. pp. 114-53.

MacInnes 1966 John MacInnes. "Gaelic Songs of Mary MacLeod." *Scottish Gaelic Studies*, 11.1:3-25.

MacInnes 2006a ______. “The Choral Tradition in Scottish Gaelic Songs.” In *Dùthchas nan Gàidheal*. Ed. by Michael Newton. Edinburgh: Birlinn. pp. 211-29.

MacInnes 2006b ______. “The Panegyric Code in Gaelic Poetry and its Historical Background.” In *Dùthchas nan Gàidheal.* Ed. by Michael Newton. Edinburgh: Birlinn. pp. 265-319.

MacInnes 2006c ______. “Gaelic Song and the Dance.” In *Dùthchas nan Gàidheal*. Ed. by Michael Newton. Edinburgh: Birlinn. pp. 248-64.

MacInnes 2007 ______. “*Òrain Luaidh* and Other Work Songs.” In *Scottish Life and Society: a Compendium of Scottish Ethnology, Vol. 10: Oral Literature and Performance Culture*. Edinburgh: Birlinn. pp. 412-26.

MacInnes 2013 ______. “Reminiscences of the School of Scottish Studies of the University of Edinburgh.” In *‘A Guid Hairst’: Collecting and Archiving Scottish Tradition.* Ed. by Katherine Campbell, William Lamb, Neill Martin, and Gary West. Maastricht: Shaker Verlag. pp. 229-38.

Macintosh 1861 Peter Macintosh. *A History of Kintyre.* Campbelltown: J. & E. Ralston.

Mackay and MacPherson 2016 Peter Mackay and Iain S. MacPherson, eds. *An Leabhar Liath: 500 Years of Gaelic Love and Transgressive Verse.* Edinburgh: Luath Press.

Maclagan 1907 Robert Craig Maclagan. “Gaelic Erotica.” *Kryptádia*, 10:295-367.

MacLeod 2013 Morag MacLeod. “Foot-Waulking—*Luadh Chas.*” In *‘A Guid Hairst’: Collecting and Archiving Scottish Tradition.* Ed. by Katherine Campbell, William Lamb, Neill Martin, and Gary West. Maastricht: Shaker Verlag. pp. 45-62.

MacLeod and Creighton 1964 Calum I. M. MacLeod and Helen Creighton. *Gaelic Songs in Nova Scotia.* Dept. of the Secretary of State, Canada.

MacNeacail 1975 Calum MacNeacail. *Bàrdachd Chaluim Ruaidh*. Glasgow: Gairm.

Matheson 1955 William Matheson. “Some Early Collectors of Gaelic Folk-Song.” *Proceedings of the Scottish Anthropological and Folklore Society*, 5.2:69-82.

Matheson 1970 ______. *The Blind Harper: The Songs of Roderick Morison and his Music.* Edinburgh: Scottish Gaelic Texts Society.

Matheson 2010 ______. *Gaelic Bards and Minstrels.* School of Scottish Studies Scottish Tradition Series, 16. Greentrax CDTRAX9016D.

Matheson n.d. ______. "Three Traditions of Gaelic Song: The Evidence from Mull." Unpubl. lecture. National Library of Scotland MS Acc. 9711, Box 13/19.

McDonald 1958 Father Allan McDonald. *Gaelic Words and Expressions from South Uist and Eriskay.* Ed. by John Lorne Campbell. Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies.

McKean 1997 Thomas A. McKean. *Hebridean Song-Maker: Iain MacNeacail of the Isle of Skye*. Edinburgh: Polygon.

Merriam 1964 Alan Merriam. *The Anthropology of Music*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.

Murray 1936 Amy Murray. *Father Allan's Island.* Edinburgh: The Moray Press.

Music from the Western Isles 1992 [1971] *Scottish Tradition 2: Music from the Western Isles.* LP ed. and documented by Peter Cooke *et al.* Tangent Records TNGM 110; reissued Greentrax CDTRAX9002.

Neat 1999 Timothy Neat. *The Voice of the Bard: Living Poets and Ancient Tradition in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland.* Edinburgh: Canongate.

Newton 2013 Michael Newton. "'*Dannsair air ùrlar-déile thu'*: Gaelic Evidence about Dance from the Mid-17th to the late-18th Century Highlands." *International Review of Scottish Studies*, 38:49-78.

Ó Laoire 2007 Lillis Ó Laoire. *On a Rock in the Middle of the Ocean: Songs and Singers in Tory Island.* Indreabhán: Cló Iar-Chonnachta.

Olson 2007 Ian A. Olson. "Scottish Contemporary Traditional Music and Song." In *Oral Literature and Performance Culture: A Compendium of Scottish Ethnology, Vol. 10*. Ed. by John Beech, Owen Hand, Fiona MacDonald, Mark A. Mulhern, and Jeremy Weston. Edinburgh: Birlinn. pp. 379-404.

Ó Madagáin 1985 Breandán Ó Madagáin. "Functions of Irish Song in the Nineteenth Century." *Bealoideas*, 53:130-216.

Pennant 1774-76 Thomas Pennant. *A Tour in Scotland and Voyage to the Hebrides, 1772.* 2 vols. Chester, England: John Monk.

Ross 1953 | James Ross. "The Sub-Literary Tradition in Scottish Gaelic Song-Poetry." *Éigse*, 7.4:217-39.

Ross 1956-57 | ______. "Further Remarks on Gaelic Song Metres." *Éigse*, 8:350-58.

Ross 1957a | ______. "A Classification of Gaelic Folk-Song." *Scottish Studies*, 1:95-151.

Ross 1957b | ______. "The Sub-Literary Tradition in Scottish Gaelic Song-Poetry, Part 2." *Éigse*, 8.1:1-17.

Ross 1961 | ______. "Folk Song and Social Environment: A Study of the Repertoire of Nan MacKinnon of Vatersay." *Scottish Studies*, 5:18-39.

SCRE 1964 | Scottish Council for Research in Education. *Aithris is Oideas (Traditional Gaelic Rhymes and Games).* London: University of London Press.

Shaw 1992-93 | John Shaw. "Language, Music and Local Aesthetics: Views from Gaeldom and Beyond." *Scottish Language*, 11-12:37-61.

Shaw 2000 | ______, ed. and trans. *Brìgh an Orain: A Story in Every Song. The Songs and Tales of Lauchie MacLellan*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press.

Shaw 2007 | ______. "Gaelic Oral Poetry in Scotland: Its Nature, Collection, and Dissemination." *Folklore Fellows Network Bulletin*, 33:3-11.

Shaw 2010 | ______. "What Gaels Communicate through Song and Singing." *In Laulu Kulttuurisena Kommunikaationa / Song as Cultural Communication: Proceedings from the Runosong Academy Jubilee Seminar, 8-10 October 2010.* Ed. by Pekka Huttu-Hiltunen, Janne Seppänen, Eila Stepanova, Frog, and Riikka Nevalainen. Kuhmo, Finland: Juminkeko.

Shaw 1955 | Margaret Fay Shaw. *Folk Songs and Folklore of South Uist.* London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Simpson and Roud 2003 | Jacqueline Simpson and Stephen Roud. *A Dictionary of English Folklore.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Smith n.d. | Alexander Smith. *A Summer in Skye*. London: Samson Low, Marston & Co. Ltd.

Sparling 2008 | Heather Sparling. "Categorically Speaking: Towards of Theory of (Musical) Genre in Cape Breton Gaelic Culture." *Ethnomusicology*, 52.3:401-26.

Stiùbhart 2013 — Dòmhnall Uilleam Stiùbhart. “Some Sex and Sexualities in Scottish Gaelic.” Unpubl. lecture delivered at conference on “Sex and Sexualities in Celtic Cultures” at the University of Edinburgh, November 1-3, 2013.

Thomson 1974 — Derick Thomson. *An Introduction to Gaelic Poetry.* New York: St. Martin’s Press, Inc.

Tobar an Dualchais — *Tobar an Dualchais / Kist o’ Riches.* www.tobarandualchais.co.uk.

Tocher — *Tocher: Tales, Songs, and Traditions from the School of Scottish Studies Archives.* In-house publication of the School of Scottish Studies, University of Edinburgh. Nos. 1-59 (1971-).

Tolmie 1911 — Frances Tolmie. “105 Songs of Occupation.” *Journal of the Folk-Song Society*, 16:143-276.

Watson 1976 — William J. Watson. *Bàrdachd Ghàidhlig: Gaelic Poetry 1550-1900.* Inverness: An Comunn Gàidhealach.

This page is intentionally left blank.

Oral Tradition, 32/1 (2018):141-190

Oral Features of the Qur'ān Detected in Public Recitation

Mary Knight

Introduction

The first audience for the Qur'ān did not receive leaves with writing on them (98:2),[1] nor something on parchment they could touch (6:7), nor a book from the sky (4:153). They heard it. The Qur'ān arrived orally, piecemeal, and, significantly, each piece of which was heard before it was written down. Within a quarter of a century the pieces were collected, their order standardized, and uniform copies of the whole soon became available. At that point, believers could access it by ear or by eye (and by heart for those portions they had memorized).

This complementarity of hearing and reading, a bimodal approach to verbal comprehension, has endured within Muslim communities to this day, but for many scholars in the West, the primary interaction with the work has been in its printed form, as a text read, usually silently. But since the words are the same whether read or heard, what difference does it make?

This essay examines some of the textual features of the Qur'ān that emerge more prominently when listening to it, features that may enhance insight gained during slow or silent reading sessions. A comparison with ancient Greek oral works, such as those of Homer, highlights features of orality in both, demonstrating that both are meant to be heard. An examination of Classical memory methodologies reveals how rhetorical figures and other linguistic devices facilitate transmission and continuing presentation of works such as these in an "audiome" (sound-rich environment or one in which communication by sound predominates, whether in preliterate or literate societies), as well as their preservation in written text. Figures and devices involving structure, meaning, diction, syntax, and sound are sampled from the Qur'ān so readers might recognize their aural power and thus their significance within the text.

All translations are by the author, unless indicated. The rudimentary translations of Quranic material provided herein by the author (best translation of the Qur'ān into English to date is that by Abdel Haleem 2004) are intended to convey as much as possible the original word order so that the sequence of ideas flows as original listeners would have heard them in Arabic; however, this order may not account for the emphasis words normally have in a statement because of the language's typical relative placement of Topic and Focus (see Edwards 2002:9-13). Citations from the Qur'ān

[1] A pair of numbers separated by a colon in parentheses refer to sura and *āyah* (division of a surah, analogous to a verse of the Bible) numbers respectively in the Qur'ān.

are from the *riwāyah* of Ḥafṣ, given in the form [sura number: *āyah* number], and appear in parentheses without other attribution.[2]

Qur'ān and *Kitāb*—and Some Homer

The work orally received and orally transmitted by Prophet Muhammad is called by Muslims and non-Muslims alike the *Qur'ān*, the "much-recited," whose Arabic root means "to recite or read aloud." The name *Qur'ān* is far and away more common than the work's second most popular name, *al-Kitāb al-Karīm*, "the generous book," with the root of the word for book, *kataba*, meaning literally "he has written, he wrote," but because it is the simplest form of the verb it is used as the dictionary entry and thus as shorthand for "to write." The Qur'ān was received in segments, not as a single whole, because the pieces came in response to events (Madigan 2001:63). While the idea of the Qur'ān as a "single whole" (25:32: جُمْلَةً وَٰحِدَةً jumlatan wāḥidatan) is most appropriate to writing, and the piecemeal origin of the book suits its oral reception and the oral style of the text, the Qur'ān is no less a book because of its oral character.[3]

In fact, there is no great divide between orality and literacy, nor an easy diagnostic tool to classify this or that work as strictly oral or strictly literate. To ignore either literate or oral interpretative approaches, however, will fail to provide sustainable perspectives and a growing enrichment of our understanding of the Qur'ān. Indeed, the complementarity of Qur'ān and *Kitāb* highlights for us how much this sacred work includes both "oral" and "literate" (written) stylistic elements in one perfect, seamless blend, though the preference for the term *Qur'ān* suggests that believers are meant to "hear and obey" (5:7)—to listen to the words, understand them, and reflect and act on the meaning of what is recited to them. As one early translator noted, the suras that make up the Qur'ān "were intended not for *readers* but for *hearers* . . . they were all promulgated by public *recital*" (Rodwell 1909:4).

Perhaps it was the introduction of the Qur'ān into the West as a text in 1143 CE, in the medieval era of *disputationes* between Christian and Muslim clerics, that impeded an appreciation of the natural oral character of the Qur'ān. This lack of attention to the work's oral nature as expressed in public recitation has slowed readers from adding crucial insights to what they already have learned from the printed page.

The Western reception of the Qur'ān is similar to that of Homer's epics during the Renaissance and the rediscovery of Classical Greek and Latin literature; readers knew that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were oral (Wolf 1795), but nonetheless evaluated them along strictly literate (that is, written) criteria. Scholars weren't even certain how Greek sounded in the past, and so Homer's epics were more read than heard. Yet even without an authentic pronunciation key, the style of the epics is such that students working through the Greek text can soon sightread relatively large passages with facility. And yet again, even after Milman Parry's ground-breaking research in the opening decades of the twentieth century, to "hear" those ancient voices we strain more than when trying to decipher whispers at a far distant remove.

[2] The author formally acknowledges with sincere gratitude the expert advice and support provided by the reviewers as well as their patience in correcting the author's lapsi qalami in transliteration. Their generous direction has resulted in significant improvement in this work.

[3] See Madigan (2001:53-77); and for a succinct, thorough overview of the codification of the Qur'ān as a single book, see Schoeler (2010).

One consequence of a literate approach is that a written work, by its very existence, raises the question of its origin, its composition, its author. While the question of authorship could not be conclusively resolved in terms of the Homeric epics (the "Homeric Question"; see Fowler 2004:220-32), Parry and his successors convincingly demonstrated that the poems are traditional. By contrast, the Qur'ān has not been shown to be traditional, and it is unlikely that it is. Although the Homeric Question can be reframed around the Qur'ān (who composed it and how?), however one answers such questions for either work, eventually the argument about who and how "becomes tiresome because there will never be any way of verifying one position or another, and everyone's opinion requires an act of faith" (Beye 1987:296).

Leaving the questions of who and how aside, we find several stylistic similarities between the Qur'ān and Homer's epics that reveal their orality, their necessity to be heard. In all other respects, these works cannot be compared; for example, the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are metered poems, whereas the Qur'ān is not poetry, though its rhyme and rhythm are apparent even to new learners of Arabic. Similar oral features found in both the Homeric epic and the Qur'ān include the following:

(1) Both represent an "authoritative sacral speech-act" (González 2013:185) designed for recitation by mantic authority (indicated in the Homeric epic by commands from the Muse [sing!] and in the Qur'ān by a similar command from the angel Gabriel [say!]; see González 2013:179-87, 642; Stewart 2011:327).

(2) Recitation of both works is for the public at large, not for a priestly caste or some other select group of privileged individuals. Thus, both transmit cultural information that increases the cohesion of the recipients.

(3) As a result of (1) and (2) both the epic and the Qur'ān have instilled in their admirers a desire to retain the whole in memory who, after a certain point in time, began to use the written text as a guide.

(4) Both are meant to be heard; because they are inspired speech (1), their declamation is traditionally in relatively simple melodic recitation[4] that, by modern standards, is neither sung nor spoken. That declamation needs to be well ordered and distinct: κατὰ κόσμον (*Od*. 8.489), تَرْتِيلًا tartīlan (73:4).

(5) Both contain a large proportion of direct speech: About two-thirds of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are in direct speech, compared with approximately 31 percent of the Qur'ān, by a conservative estimate (the latter figure rises to about 57 percent if we include direct address, where *you/your* is used, but exclude statements of the first person, *I/my/me* and *we/our,* that are not properly in direct speech).

(6) Related to (5), deictic pronouns and other pointer words are common in both, a feature considered to be a means of engaging a listening audience (Martin 1989:4).

(7) Related to (6), both have prominent rhetorical speech (see *Iltifāt,* below).

(8) Both employ an archaic diction that is somewhat artificial.

(9) The lexicon of both includes many hapaxes: on average one hapax legomenon occurs in the *Iliad* every 9 or 10 verses; in the Qur'ān the ratio is ~1 per 17 *āyah*s.

[4] There is a difference of opinion on how the epics were originally recited; diachronically there may have been more or less melodic approaches (including perhaps some instances of instrumental accompaniment), but the evidence is inconclusive (see González 2013:343ff., espec. n.44, p. 343f.). The same historical uncertainty exists for the Qur'ān. In both cases, reciters learned from reciters (see infra).

(10) In both many utterances are repeated, suggestive of "formulas." Although the Qur'ān lacks "Parry-perfect" hallmarks of oral tradition (that is, verbatim formulas under the same metrical conditions that reflect an economy of expression), even readers of translations (for example, Dundes 2003:23-54) readily recognize numerous repeated phrases and their variants that are analogous to strict formulas.

(11) Some phrases in both almost demand a hearing, so strong are their mimetic sound effects: For example, from the *Iliad* (1.34), πολυφλοίσβοιο θαλάσσης polýphloísboio thalássês ("of the loud-sounding sea"; genitive); Here the words mimic the sound of waves striking the shore. From the Qur'ān (29:41), وَإِنَّ أَوْهَنَ ٱلْبُيُوتِ لَبَيْتُ ٱلْعَنكَبُوتِ wa-inna awhana l-buyūti la-baytu l-'ankabūti ("indeed the weakest of houses is the house of the spider"); here the clustering of *n, b, t,* and *k* sounds echo the light, plucking sounds of the spider's movement on its web.

(12) Most sentences in both are paratactic (because oral speech is segmented; Rubin 1995:69), and word order is important for emphasis (Edwards 1987:55-60), since both languages are inflected.

(13) Both are relatively long: The two-volume Oxford edition of Homer's *Iliad* occupies 552 pp. with a total number of 15,692 lines (in dactylic hexameter); the standard Ḥafṣ edition of the Qur'ān has 604 pages of text with 8804 lines of text, roughly half the number of lines in the *Iliad*. Admittedly this is not a precise comparison, but it is perhaps closer to the real verbal space of the words—a count of the number of words in each would produce a very inaccurate comparison of respective lengths, since Arabic subsumes most personal pronouns and common words, such as "and," "so, and "like," that are independent in Greek and are combined with other parts of speech and written solid in Arabic (*wa-*, *fa-*, *ka-*).

(14) Both works begin in medias res, with listeners expected to recognize the scene: The *Iliad* opens in the 10th year of the Trojan War, as the anger of Achilleus at Agamemnon's theft of his war prize has led to a divinely imposed plague. After the opening invocation (sura 1), the Qur'ān delves immediately into a contrast, or possibly an argument, between believers and non-believers, and especially hypocrites, without any background explanation (Madigan 2001:70). The first words of sura 2 are often translated as "This is the book. . . " because this accords with the majority of commentators. Among currently popular translations, only Khalidi (2008:3) recognizes the strong rhetorical force of the opener, which he translates as "Behold the book!" Even more rare is a reciter who suggests the break in syntax that the words represent (literally "That book—"), because nearly all listeners today are aware that the book is the well-known and honored Qur'ān.

(15) The audiences who first heard these works for the most part were not literate, at least not in the modern sense of the term, since literacy is not a "single uniform skill" (Thomas 1989:15-16). The very first people who heard the Homeric epics may have been familiar with the concept of writing (the σήματα λυγρά, or "murderous symbols," found ἐν πίνακι πτυκτῷ, "on a hinged, or folding, tablet"; *Il*. 6:168f.), and even a later, fifth-century Athenian citizen of the democracy may not have been able to do much more than scratch out his name on a shard of pottery (Thomas 1989:18). The Arabs of Makka during the time of Prophet Muhammad knew of books, but literacy was, nonetheless, limited (Stein 2010).

A final comparison, however, can *not* be made: The ancient tradition of reciting the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* long ago ceased. Originally, most ancient Greeks received the poems that way, first

hearing them as children, even before they could read, and memorizing passages. As students we memorized 50 lines to experience the flow of the poetic line, the life of the epic, but none of us—in fact no living human being—is a native speaker of ancient Greek. Most of us who have studied the poems still wonder: how could anyone memorize so much? How was it to know the poems from childhood and then to hear them recited at special times of the year—would it change your understanding of them? Is it like listening to a favorite tune whose words you've memorized, only a lot bigger, or is the response more elusive but, if you get it, incomparable?

By contrast, the Qur'ān today can be read or heard. A number of people who recognize the importance of oral aspects of the Qur'ān have shown particular interest in its recitation, which certainly should be a starting point for discovering the Qur'ān's orality: unlike the situation for students of Homer today, Quranic recitation represents a living, unbroken tradition connecting reciter to reciter back to Prophet Muhammad. The companions of the Prophet and the first believers learned their recitation from the Prophet himself and they in turn taught the next generation directly, who taught the next, and so on to the present; not until recent times, when tapes and other recordings became popular, would anyone attempt to learn to recite except from someone who was trained by one who had learned from another who was part of that traditional chain of reciters.[5] Perhaps because of the emphasis on the rules of recitation according to that tradition, most studies of the practice of recitation examine proper recitation technique, putting almost all of the emphasis on the reciter, with only relatively few remarks on the listeners. Some of these studies, however, are insightful; the best in English are Denny (1989) and Nelson (2001 [1985]). Notwithstanding their importance for understanding the orality of the Qur'ān, these scholars do not address the question of whether hearing the Qur'ān provides listeners with an added dimension to their understanding from what they read privately from the same book.

This essay includes some of the results of an informal experiment I conducted over the course of a number of years. After learning enough of the language to read the Qur'ān in Arabic, I attended live recitations and listened; the goal was to discover whether I would learn something that I would or could not have learned had I simply stayed "on the page." And could this "heard" knowledge in turn elucidate understanding of the Homeric epics in any way?

The Utility of Memory

Apart from *kitāb*, the Qur'ān uses *ḏikr* self-referentially (for example, 15:6, 9; Raġib Iṣfahāni [2014]:328). The basic verb form related to *ḏikr* is the everyday word that means "to remember." But, depending on context, the word *ḏikr* may be appropriately interpreted as remem-

[5] The evidence from Xenophon (*Smp*. 3.5) suggests that in similar fashion ancient Greeks who wanted to learn to recite Homer learned from rhapsodes, who likewise learned from older reciters, perhaps back to an original Homer. Socrates included the listener in this chain, when he compared the divine inspirational force to a magnetic stone and the poet (or prophet) to an iron ring, held in suspense by that stone; the poet in turn attracts other "rings" into a magnetic chain, especially the succession of rhapsodes who pass on the inspired words. And οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ θεατὴς τῶν δακτυλίων ὁ ἔσχατος, ὧν ἐγὼ ἔλεγον ὑπὸ τῆς Ἡρακλειώτιδος λίθου ἀπ᾽ ἀλλήλων τὴν δύναμιν λαμβάνειν . . . . ὁ δὲ θεὸς διὰ πάντων τούτων ἕλκαι τὴν ψυχὴν ὅποι ἂν βούληται τῶν ἀνθρώπων "the spectator is the last [of the rings], as I was saying, to take their interlinked power from the magnetic stone . . . . Through all these, the God pulls the souls of people in any direction he might wish . . . " (Plato, *Ion* 535e).

bering, reminder, reminding, remembrance, admonition, warning, lesson, or even as message or revelation. Most of these equivalents have in common the recall of something already in one's mind or that may readily be construed by a reasonable mind. The Qur'ān states:

> (54:17, 32, 40) وَلَقَدْ يَسَّرْنَا ٱلْقُرْءَانَ لِلذِّكْرِ فَهَلْ مِن مُّدَّكِرٍ (wa-la-qad yassarnā l-qur'āna li-ḏ-ḏikri fa-hal mim muddakir), "We have made the Qur'ān easy for *ḏikr*, so is there any *muddakir*?"

Quickly taken in, the first clause suggests that the Qur'ān by its nature is easy to remember, though the second clause, "so is there any *muddakir* (a form VIII active participle of the same verb as *ḏikr*, meaning "one who remembers or reminds oneself"), shifts the meaning of *ḏikr* toward taking a lesson from hearing or reading the Qur'ān, thus: "We have made the Qur'ān easy for *ḏikr*, so is there anyone who is reminded (that is, learns and takes the advice)?"

Although most native speakers acknowledge that the entire statement is about taking lessons on right vs. wrong from the Qur'ān, many appreciate a quick-fire response to the first half of it, because they say the Qur'ān is actually easy to remember, or memorize. So, how is it easy to remember? The Qur'ān suggests one key element is to hear it. A passage mentions the story of the Flood and the ark so it might serve as a reminder (again, a lesson about good and evil):

> (69:12) وَتَعِيَهَآ أُذُنٌ وَٰعِيَةٌ wa-ta'iyahā uḏunun wā'iyah, "and (so that) ears might store it in memory."

Hearing and repeating the words many times is the approach taken by the *kuttāb* (Qur'ān school for children), where even toddlers may be enrolled. The size of the work, its availability in print, and its self-endorsement as a book speaks favorably for a reading copy to guide accuracy and consistency in memorization. Furthermore, a unified text of the Qur'ān permitted many people, young and old, to learn and to recite the entire work from memory.

Again, there is a comparison with Homer: it was common in the post-Peisistratid period (last quarter of sixth century B.C. and later), when a written text was popularized, for people to memorize the entire Homeric corpus (the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are the most common works represented in the papyri, which reflected popularity of the works). For example, according to Xenophon (*Smp.* 3.5), one young man at a banquet attended by Socrates boasted of his proper education saying to the philosopher: Ὁ πατὴρ ὁ ἐπιμελούμενος ὅπως ἀνὴρ ἀγαθὸς γενοίμην ἠνάγκασέ με πάντα τὰ Ὁμήρου ἔπη μαθεῖν· καὶ νῦν δυναίμην ἂν Ἰλιάδα ὅλην καὶ Ὀδύσσειαν ἀπὸ στόματος εἰπεῖν "Father, taking care that I become a good man, compelled me to learn Homer by heart, and now I am able to recite the entire *Iliad* and *Odyssey*" (cf. Plato, *Lg.* 810e, ὅλους ποιητὰς ἐκμανθάνοντας). A written text thus in no way overrode the oral reception of the work by the next generation of young people, who normally learned it by heart at a very early age from guides and teachers who taught them orally. In fact, in antiquity, there was fear that reliance on a written text might dull a young person's ability to learn and think critically, if Plato's Socrates may serve as a reliable witness. In his tale of the invention of writing by Thoth, the ancient Egyptian god of wisdom and learning, Socrates relates pharaoh's warning to Thoth: τοῦτο γὰρ τῶν μαθόντων λήθην μὲν ἐν ψυχαῖς παρέξει μνήμης ἀμελετησίᾳ, ἅτε διὰ πίστιν γραφῆς ἔξωθεν ὑπ' ἀλλοτρίων τύπων, οὐκ ἔνδοθεν αὐτοὺς ὑφ'αὑτῶν ἀναμιμνῃσκομένους "For this (invention) will produce forgetfulness in the minds of learners through the lack of practice of the memory because of that trust in the external impressions

rather than on those within themselves" (Plato, *Phdr.* 275a), a statement that reflects the belief that learning by memory left a graven record on the soul.

Modern cognitive psychologists who specialize in memory have contributed greatly to our understanding of how a large work, such as a Homeric epic (or the Qur'ān), could be memorized; in terms of the epic poems, which are traditional, memorizers have a certain degree of slack in their memorization program—they didn't need to reproduce the poems literally word for word, but perhaps strong memory resources permitted greater creativity during their traditional re-creation of the poem in performance. Of course, in every time there are individuals with photographic or audiographic memories, but they are few and it is not known how many of them would also have the vocal qualifications necessary to perform a recitation competently.

Depending on the kind of material to be memorized, best strategies for memorizing vary (many of them are cited by ancient rhetoricians in their handbooks on rhetoric, since memory was considered an integral part of the ability to speak publicly). It should be noted that terminology is not consistent; a term couched in the context of cognitive psychology may not have the same meaning to a philologist. Generally speaking, most people can rely on logic to memorize material that may be classed as "linear," for example, narratives and scenes that develop sequentially (such as the typical arming scenes of the *Iliad*); one's experience can aid and direct memory in such linear sequences. That is, one may keep the structural framework of a narrative in mind, and the words and phrases should come naturally in order. That the structure of such material is consciously or intuitively internalized may be supported by common errors made by skilled reciters of the Qur'ān. Most of the time, in typical narratives, the only error one hears is the dropping out of a portion within the sequence, either a phrase or an *āyah*; by contrast, transposition of phrases is rare.

A subtype of linear narrative material is the extended description (for example, the *ekphrasis* of the shield of Achilles in the *Iliad* 18.478-616), in which tradition imposes an ordered sequence of qualities of an object (for Homer's epics, this sequence is "summary, description, material, workmanship, feature, size/weight/value, and history," Minchin 2001:112f.) A comparable sequence type in the Qur'ān has not been detected (at least not in recitation).

A second type of sequential material is the chiasmus (Gk. "marking with diagonal lines like the shape of the Greek letter *chi,* X"; Ar. al-binā' al-ma'qūf [aw aṣ-ṣalībī] li-l-jumlah), the crosswise arrangement of contrasted pairs to give alternate stress, for example, A-B-B′-A′, and larger "ring compositions" (for Homeric epics) recently described as "symmetries" (for Qur'ān), patterns of composition that proceed with elements in a "forward" direction and then in "reverse," for example, topics A–B–C–D. . . D′–C′–B′–A′. Such rings are characteristic of orality and are considered intuitive by cognitive psychologists, based on their studies of natural storytelling (see, for example, the discussion of the ring in Homer as a "natural" narrative device that is also typical of everyday storytelling, Minchin 2001:183-98). The methodology for remembering a ring is like any other linear sequence except one needs to make the return in the same, but reversed order. Although rings and symmetries are thought *not* to be artificial per se, memorization of the order of the elements may require a mnemonic system, such as the ancient practice of attaching *loci* (Latin "places," sometimes translated as "backgrounds") to items in the sequence. Images attached to each item in the sequence are visualized in separate places along a path, and the memorizer imagines moving along that path and passing each of the places where s/he sees the items. This method was known to be in use at least as early as the fifth century BC by Greeks, although the

most complete extant description of the strategy is found in a work attributed to the first-century BC orator, politician, and philosopher Cicero (*ad Her*. 3.16.28-3.24.40; see also Quintilian, *Inst. orat*. 11.2.11-26).

One of the larger rings in the Qur'ān that can readily be heard in recitation is sūrat Yūsuf (sura 12); its *loci* are not defined by the text but by the reciter. That is, a reciter in performance may bring to prominence the *loci*, labeled A–F in Fig. 1, and their complementary returns or may choose other items in the narrative for his *loci*. Classicists hypothesize from the evidence surrounding the ancient Greek experience of the Homeric epics that listeners heard the rings attentively and that this method of oral composition was much loved (the entire *Iliad* has been analyzed as a ring composition: see Whitman 1958, espec. foldout chart), but whether any or all component rings are heard in any performance depends entirely on the reciter. Outlined in Fig. 1 is what I heard in performance more than 15 years ago (and, significantly, before I was aware that anyone had recognized the ring using a literate approach: see Cuypers 1995; Farrin 2014:34-43). For example, there are reciters who intuitively intone their *loci* distinctly (whether or not they are consciously using the *loci* system), while others ignore this narrative-building tool, which is useful not only for prompting the reciter's memory but also for maintaining the audience's attention (and in the case of sura 12 of climaxing at the central core; Fig. 1).

A second category of material is the list, or catalog, with no clear rational sequence, no natural ordering of its objects. Included in this type is an unordered list of names of persons, people, objects, or qualities (for example, the catalog of ships in the *Iliad* 2.494-877). Examples of the unordered list in the Qur'ān include: the kinds of men and women meant for each other (24:26); attributes of Allah (59:23-24); characteristics of good people (9:112), both men and women (33:35); and lists of prophets (6:84-86) and those who rejected their *rusul*, prophetic messengers from God (50:12-14).

The unordered list poses the greatest difficulty for memorization, because there is no underlying logic. Typically, people memorize them by rote, hearing and repeating the words again and again. But, here too, *loci* imagery can offer a solution almost guaranteed to work (Rubin 1995:46-48). Professor Rubin (1995:47), a cognitive psychologist—not a professional mnemonist—routinely engaged his students in a memory experiment to demonstrate the effectiveness of the *loci* technique: each student named an item for him to memorize, 40 in all, and "after lecturing for a half-hour, I recall the list in the order given, typically without error." The technique was described to the students, and they in turn were quickly able to successfully memorize unordered lists.

These two broad content categories (ordered sequences and unordered lists) constitute a large proportion of the material of the epic and the Qur'ān, and both content categories often rely on memorization through imagery and visualization techniques, such as the *loci* method. In antiquity the visualization of the written source itself was also recognized as a method for memorizing passages verbatim (Quintilian, *Inst. orat*. 11.2.32)[6]; by comparison, there is general agreement that early written copies of the Qur'ān (in whole or part) were employed as an aide-mémoire, not just as a prompt for something forgotten but as a visual image to fix the words in memory, while the *parole recitée* was the guide to the "real" words of God (Schoeler 2002:41).

Another class of material may be neither ordered nor enumerated in a list, but surface features may permit the exploitation of tongue and ear to retain the sound of the expressions in memory. These features include rhyme, which is exploited by humans as well as nonhuman

[6] *Illud neminem non iuvabat, iisdem quibus scripserit ceris ediscere* ("One thing will assist everyone, to memorize [a passage] from the very same wax tablets on which he has written it").

mammals (specifically, whales; see Guinee and Payne 1988), indicating the primordial appeal of this approach both for memorization and for composition. From such surface features rhetorical sound patterns developed, which account for most of the rhetorical figures, and the art of style and rhetoric. A host of aural surface features make the Qur'ān especially easy to memorize: alliteration, assonance, rhythm, *insijām* (the inclusion of metered poetic phrases within an *āyah* that is primarily "prose"), *saj'* (a type of rhyme specific to Arabic), and *jinās* (a kind of word play), the size of which usually accords well with the "intonation units" that are constantly refreshed in the short-term memory (Rubin 1995:68). These surface sound effects complement structure and style to facilitate steady, easy, consistent, and managed flow of memorized content.

The imagistic and sequential material types may play their largest roles in compositional structure, like the scaffolding of a building buried beneath a surface façade. But on the façade hang a host of rhetorical figures and themes that—while they may not convey meaning in themselves—facilitate long-term memory, which would be especially useful in a preliterate and early literate setting. These aural surface features also enrich a recitation performance because select items can be highlighted in an individualistic way to more securely convey in the moment a particular interpretation by a given reciter.

The Recitation Environment

There is only one contemporary description of the recitation of the ancient Greek epic (*Odyssey*, Book 8), that is offered by a fictional counterpart to Homer: the reciter, or rhapsode, named Demodokos, is considered an excellent singer in part because the god gave him song, that is, she inspires him to recite with a sweet voice, and he can choose what he would like to recite (*Od*. 8.44-45). He sits on a chair in the midst of the audience (*Od*. 8.65, 472-473); a *phorminx* (a kind of lute or lyre) is hung above his head (*Od*. 8.67-68), though we do not know whether he uses it in his epic recitation. There are breaks for eating (*Od*. 8.473-478); for dancing, accompanied by Demodokos on the *phorminx* (*Od*. 8.266-267); and for athletic games. Another session of recitation follows, then more activities and a return to recitation, with a selection chosen by an audience member (*Od*. 8.487-498). Whether this was typical of the first recitations—before a written text was available—is unknown. The earliest historically attested rhapsode, Kynaithos of Chios, was the first to perform the poetry of Homer in Syracuse in 504–501 BCE (González 2013:492f.), and we know the names of several other rhapsodes, but biographical details and notes on his performance program are scant (González 2013:491-518).

In Classical Greek practice, apart from sessions with a tutor and in-home readings, the primary venues in which people heard the Homeric epics were festivals, especially the annual Panathenaic festival, when they were recited in their entirety by a succession of rhapsodes (Plato, *Hipparch*. 228b; see also González 2013:382-92 for the evidence for *hypolepsis,* the "relay" method of successive reciters); it seems likely that this was the only regular public performance of whole works. The festival had both religious and festive aspects (Parke 1977:34f.), and in this regard, there are superficial similarities to public recitation of the Qur'ān during Ramadan.

Hadiths describe early reciters of the Qur'ān, but they fail to indicate how their recitations actually sounded. As in the case with the earliest reciters of epic, we know the names of the pri-

mary reciters of the Qur'ān and their successors (handbooks of *tajwīd*, proper methods of reciting, often provide a list or even a chart, for example, 'Abd al-Ḥamīd 2010:22), but biographical details are relatively thin. These reciters are often known for their memory (pronouncing all the words correctly and leaving nothing out), and for a strong, pleasing voice. But, significantly, there has been no break in the chain of reciters since the earliest years of Islam, and that may be because the text was codified so soon after the death of Prophet Muhammad.

The Qur'ān, as noted, may be learned in a *kuttāb*, and there are also regular public lessons in recitation in many mosques, but often people hire tutors so their children can memorize accurately as much as possible. Sunni Muslims who are native Arabic speakers traditionally hope their children will memorize at least part 30 (*al-juz' al-'amma*), or suras 78 through 114, with girls now expected to memorize the same as their brothers. In homes, there are a variety of occasions for reading the Qur'ān in groups, for example, each participant reading a *juz'* (a 30th part of the Qur'ān) with lips moving and audibly, though perhaps very softly ("To an Arab. . . reading always means reading aloud," Pedersen 1984:17), but these private venues are not truly public performances, even when a reciter graces a special event with a recitation of some portion(s) of the Qur'ān. Significantly, the memorization is verbatim, with 95 percent of the world's Muslims learning the *riwāyah* (textual transmission of a noted early reciter's method of reciting the Qur'ān) of Ḥafṣ, but the vocal line is not fixed.[7] The text is thus a framework for some degree of vocal individualization and interpretation by the reciter.

The most prominent recitation performances by professional reciters are the *ṣīwān* (literally, "tent, pavilion"; a memorial service for the dead) and *tarāwīḥ* (literally, "refreshment [for the heart and spirit]," recitation during the nights of Ramadan). Both require the reciter to perform from memory, without the aid of a text. In the former, family and friends of the deceased sit in rows facing each other, with small tables nearby for refreshments in a room (or makeshift room with canvas walls like a large tent), while listening to the reciter; there are separate areas for men and women in those places that provide for female attendance. There is a time for condolence and a time for recitation; the reciter performs for perhaps 15–20 minutes, and then takes a break (or performs in the room for the opposite gender), and then returns for another cycle of recitation. The recited sections are often suras chosen by the deceased, if s/he had indicated some preference in life, or by the decedent's family or the reciter, but they are performed primarily for the comfort of the family and their guests. People sometimes talk, albeit quietly, during the recitations, as they sip their drinks. That is, the listeners may not give total attention to the words they are hearing. The entire event may take an hour or two.

For the purpose of listening to large portions of the Qur'ān in sequence, *tarāwīḥ* is essential, because it is an event especially for listening to the Qur'ān (held over the nights of the month of Ramadan and often the entire Qur'ān will be recited over the course of these nights). Listeners normally try to stand during the recitation (*tarāwīḥ* is also known as *ṣalāt al-qiyām*, "the standing prayer") so they can better focus on the words they are hearing. This is in accord with the encouragement given in the Qur'ān to believers to listen with attention: (7:204) وَإِذَا قُرِئَ ٱلْقُرْءَانُ فَٱسْتَمِعُوا۟ لَهُۥ

[7] Traditionally, there has been "resistance to associating the Qur'ān with the musical art in any way" (Nelson 1985:32) because of music's capacity to enchant. But everyone recognizes the vocal elements of recitation—the text is not recited aloud like conversational speech, but rather has a vocal, even melodic "line" as one would find in musical expression (for an exploration of the topic see Nelson 1985:32-51).

وَأَنصِتُواْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُرْحَمُونَ wa-iḏā quri'a l-qur'ānu fastami'ū lahū wa'anṣitū la'allakum turḥamūn "And when the Qur'ān is recited, listen to it and be silent so that you may receive mercy."

It is not unusual to find one person reciting the entire Qur'ān over 29 or 30 nights of *tarāwīḥ*, but more commonly two, three, or even more share in the nightly performances, and this sharing may involve alternating during each night's performance after regular breaks, or alternating nights for each reciter, or some other agreed-upon scheme. If only one reciter performs the whole program or the bulk of the program, there is greater opportunity for the audience to take the work in as a whole within a single interpretative framework. But not all members of the audience attend the entire program of 30 nights; many people skip one or more nights or come only occasionally, while others visit a number of different mosques over the course of Ramadan. It is important to note that many mosques in the Arabic-speaking world favor the recitation of at least one *juz'* per night, but because the prayers that accompany the recitation are not obligatory, many mosques offer shorter programs to accommodate the busy schedules of people who would like to complete the *tarāwīḥ* prayers, but do not have time to listen to the lengthy recitations. Performances may also be arranged around a particular topic, or theme, for example, *šifā'* ("cure, a healing"), with all recited selections including at least one reference to the topic (such as 9:14, 10:57, 16:69, 17:82, 26:80, 41:44). The atmosphere of *tarāwīḥ* is usually both solemn and festive because, for many, this it the only time in the year certain portions of the Qur'ān are heard in live recitation by a skilled and experienced *qāri'* (reciter). It is normally the only time in the year when anyone can hear the entire Qur'ān recited live publicly.

The reasons why anyone today recites or comes to listen to that recitation may be strikingly different from the reasons that Prophet Muhammad and the first Muslims had for reciting and listening to the Qur'ān. For the Prophet there was an imperative to convey the message and its meaning clearly and distinctly, without garbling words, and without ambiguity that could result in erroneous meaning and ridicule. The goal was to persuade and attract people to the faith, by making compelling, for example, the Qur'ān's historical narratives that instruct or that distinguish truth from falsity, good from evil.

By contrast, the audience for *tarāwīḥ* today usually already believes and is familiar with much of the underlying meaning (sometimes they read along), so the reciter often seeks to convey his interpretation. This can be imparted through a variety of intonations, with muted but true emphasis, on a variety of words and phrases, just as one can do in the course of everyday speech. He can also exploit some of the rules of *tajwīd* (the proper way to pronounce and recite), for example, by repeating a portion of an *āyah* because he took a breath before a permissible stop (see any manual of *tajwīd*, such as 'Abd al-Ḥamīd 2010:291ff.).

In these times one may hear a reciter emphasize a phrase or an *āyah* for political reasons, and he (and the reciter is normally male except in the rare mosques that cater exclusively to women) may want to express the words as beautifully as his voice permits—though technically he must not actually sing the words—to impart to the audience a sense of awe, wonder, delight, or spiritual transcendence. Because non-Arabic speakers may experience these emotion-driven responses to a recitation as easily as native speakers, there may be some ground for superficially comparing the recitation of the Qur'ān with that of the Avestan *Gathas* or the Sanskrit *Vedas*,[8] but when non-Arabic speakers submit to the length of a typical *tarāwīḥ* event (often more than two

[8] These works might all sound much the same in recitation, but there are fundamental differences as well. For example, the *Vedas* are recited to a set melodic line whose intonation is critical so the reciter can maintain the stability of the universe; as a result there is secrecy around at least some of the ceremonial and sacrificial recitations (Bake 1979:199-201).

hours), they try to follow along with a translation. Even among Arabic speakers not everyone has the same level of comprehension, but this situation probably closely parallels that of the typical ancient Greek audience for recitations of Homer's epics: some members of the audience are highly educated and have memorized portions (or even the whole) and studied with a reciter while others have merely listened to the recitations many times over their lifetimes, gradually absorbing the meaning through prolonged contact and a native's understanding of the language, albeit a different form of that language (see Scodel 2002:10-11, who explains how "popular" is not the same as "fully understandable" in terms of oral works).

Certainly at many points members of the *tarāwīḥ* audience may simply listen without thinking about the words or they may feel some kind of peace in the mellifluous or "chantlike" line. But it is misleading to apply the word *chant* to the simple monodic vocal line of Quranic recitation because chant has since ancient times connoted singing as well as enchantment, akin to the Arabic word *ṭarab*—properly against the rules of *tajwīd*. It may seem like splitting hairs to Western ears to claim it is not chant, but properly Quranic recitation strives for thought and contemplation and as an act of worship, and so is recited *tartīlan*, in a slow and distinct manner (73:4). *Tartīl* comes from a root meaning "to be well arranged and distinct" and the word describes the careful reciting of the Qur'ān in a clear and distinct manner without exceeding bounds of propriety, so both reciter and listener may readily understand the words and meaning. By contrast, chant, like magic, does not prioritize the communication of meaning, whereas for recitation the message is critical.

Many people enjoy the recitations and their satisfaction in them cannot be compared to other activities that have a spiritual component. It's not surprising to find *tarāwīḥ* has occasionally been trendy among the youth, especially since it's an opportunity to dress up and the event is free. Some habitués report they attended regularly when they were young (before marriage), and then stopped, years passed, and now again they've returned. A certain cohesion or unity among congregants forms during recitations when an entire *juz'* is heard, perhaps because of the listening atmosphere, but also conceivably because of the conviviality and the sweet drinks, snacks, and conversation shared during breaks. Nevertheless, even some of the people who come for the communal interaction are attentive to the interpretation that they are hearing. In addition, a remarkable number of women at the longer-style *tarāwīḥ* events of at least a *juz'* have memorized the entire Qur'ān (and all such women I've encountered are literate). Finally, the reciter is responsible for sensing how his audience is responding, and even though he recites with his back to the crowd of listeners, he must strive mightily with only his voice to keep their attention on the words they hear.

Oral Features of the Qur'ān

Although the audience may hold the book and read along, the reciter must work from memory. To maintain focus and humility (or perhaps to better visualize the page being recited in the mind's eye), most reciters keep their eyes closed as they recite. Typically works that are transmitted orally rely on linguistic patterns or intonation units of learned phrases and ideas that assist the reciter in retaining the work in memory; in traditional poetry, such as Homer's epics, the most distinctive such patterns include formulas and a meter that can echo normal speech, even if that speech is elevated or atypical (for example, not necessarily conforming to a single dialect).

Thus, Homer's epics reveal prominent use of epithets within appropriate portions of the dactylic hexametric line, drawing expressions from an artificial dialect that mixed primarily Aeolic and Ionian irregularly. The meter provides the mnemonic support for the verbal formulas' sounds, which adopt dialectally appropriate words to accompany the meter.

Meter is not unique in offering mnemonic support, however. As Stetkevych has observed (2010:212):

> virtually all the linguistic features that we classify as "poetic"—rhyme, meter, assonance, alliteration, antithesis, parallelism, "poetic diction"—and in particular those figures of speech that we term "rhetorical devices"—metaphor, simile, metonymy, antithesis—are originally and essentially mnemonic devices that serve to stabilize and preserve the oral "text."

The Qur'ān is not poetry, it does not have regular meter, and should not properly be described as poetic, but many of the features Stetkevych cites as "poetic" also operate outside of strict poetry, where rhythm performs the function of regular meter. In addition to those features we should classify as rhythmic, we should include *saj'*, whose frequent use in the Qur'ān is often noted (for an overview in English, see Stewart 1990; and samples below, under Sound). But the Qur'ān is not entirely in *saj'*, nor are passages in *saj'* always consistently observing its established patterning within a pattern.

A host of figures, including the rhetorical devices that Stetkevych mentions, complement the rhythmic features of the Qur'ān and do more than preserve and stabilize the text. In preliterate and early literate societies, figures functioned like a net to which various ideas would adhere and cohere, coalescing into larger connected units in the minds of listeners. What follows is a sampling of figures in the Qur'ān that may demonstrate how they, by either their distinctive or memory-worthy character or their repetition, can create for the listener a larger fabric of interconnected ideas. Broadly classified these figures involve structure, meaning, diction, syntax, and sound. I have heard all of them, on one occasion or another, accentuated in recitation, though in most cases the figures are stressed not from the conscious marking of a figure as a figure but rather they emerge as part of the natural "conversation" with the listening audience, as a way to mark important points in the text and to convey a reciter's interpretation.

Structure

Several linguistic features that are sometimes classed as rhetorical figures or stylistic devices involve the structure of a work as a whole or, more often, smaller units of thought within the whole. Much has been made of the numerous symmetries of the Qur'ān, the chiasmus and the larger ring composition (alluded to above, The Utility of Memory); see Farrin 2014; Cuypers 2015. But into this category we might include the narrative generally (for example, the story of Yūsuf, but also brief narratives of prophets individually or in groups), as well as the "hymn" pattern (explored by Neuwirth 2010). While these structures can indeed be heard in recitation, often they disappear behind more strikingly apparent features. That is, structural devices, which may come to the surface only after numerous listening sessions, serve as scaffolding to a façade of more recognizable aural types of rhetorical figures, but both "scaffolding" and "façade" enable easy memorization and comprehension.

Chiasmus and ring composition are two symmetric ways of structuring expressions that are frequently found in pre- and early literate oral works. As noted above, chiasmus is the crosswise arrangement of contrasted pairs to give alternate stress, for example, A-B-B-A. By this figure both the extremities (A- -A) and the middle elements (B-B) are correlated, or "matched," in words, themes, or ideas. For listeners, the appeal of chiasmus is that it presents a satisfying mental symmetry, and in preliterate antiquity even large examples of chiasmus were enjoyed, perhaps because they challenged the mind to remain attentive. For example:

> (22:61) بِأَنَّ ٱللَّهَ يُولِجُ ٱلَّيْلَ فِى ٱلنَّهَارِ وَيُولِجُ ٱلنَّهَارَ فِى ٱلَّيْلِ bi-anna llāha yūliju l-layla fī n-nahāri wa-yūliju n-nahāra fī l-layl, "because Allah causes the night to merge with the day and the day to merge into the night."

Element A (night) is followed by B (day), then B repeats and is followed by A. Another example is found at 3:106-107:

> (106) يَوْمَ تَبْيَضُّ وُجُوهٌ وَتَسْوَدُّ وُجُوهٌ ۚ فَأَمَّا ٱلَّذِينَ ٱسْوَدَّتْ وُجُوهُهُمْ أَكَفَرْتُم بَعْدَ إِيمَٰنِكُمْ yawma tabyaḍḍu wujūhun wa-taswaddu wujūh. fa-ammā l-laḏīna swaddat wujūhuhum a-kafartum ba'da īmānikum. . . /, "On the day some faces will be bright [with the light of Truth and happiness] and some faces will be dark [in misery and despair]. Then as for those whose faces are dark [it will be said]: 'did you reject your faith after (accepting it)?'. . . /

> (107) وَأَمَّا ٱلَّذِينَ ٱبْيَضَّتْ وُجُوهُهُمْ فَفِى رَحْمَةِ ٱللَّهِ هُمْ فِيهَا خَٰلِدُونَ wa-ammā l-laḏīna byaḍḍat wujūhuhum fa-fī raḥmati llāhi hum fīhā ḵālidūn. "And as for those whose faces are bright, then in the mercy of Allah they will be forever."

First are mentioned (A) the bright faces, then (B) the dark ones; again (B) the dark ones, and then (A) the bright ones (A–B–B–A).

The ring composition is a large chiasmus (see The Utility of Memory, above), which consists of more than two topics mentioned in consecutive order and then in reverse order; there may be a central core that contains a main point to be highlighted in recitation. As with the chiasmus, "matching" topics need not be congruent in length; the symmetry can be completed without segments of the same length for each topic, because one member of the pair may require greater (or lesser) exposition than the other in context. Notably, one element of a pair may also have a smaller ring set within it that is not found in its sister element in the pair.

It often seems amazing to modern readers and listeners that preliterate people could almost immediately hear and grasp the structure of a ring composition of a large work (such as the whole of the *Iliad* or smaller stories such as sura 12 on Yūsuf), especially since even people alive today who have memorized the entire Qur'ān but who are based in a literate world often do not grasp the ring structure of sūrat Yūsuf until it is pointed out to them. But it is clear that ancients not only could detect the ring structure very quickly, but they also found this style of composition both entertaining and pleasing to the ear.

Sura 12 (Yūsuf) is a superb example of a ring composition with a central core (12:37-40) that carries the most important point of the story, the *tawḥīd*, or Oneness, of God and a profession

of faith. Fig. 1 roughly maps out major topics that form the ring of sura 12. There are many "topics" that can be identified in this sura; the illustration represents only one way of selecting topics in the first half of the story to be paired with counterparts in the second half. Another analysis might be more "fine-tuned," with more or different pairs detected, but overall the selected clusters of ideas represented in the diagram illustrate the flow of topics in one direction and then, after the central core (marked in the diagram with an asterisk), a flow in reverse.

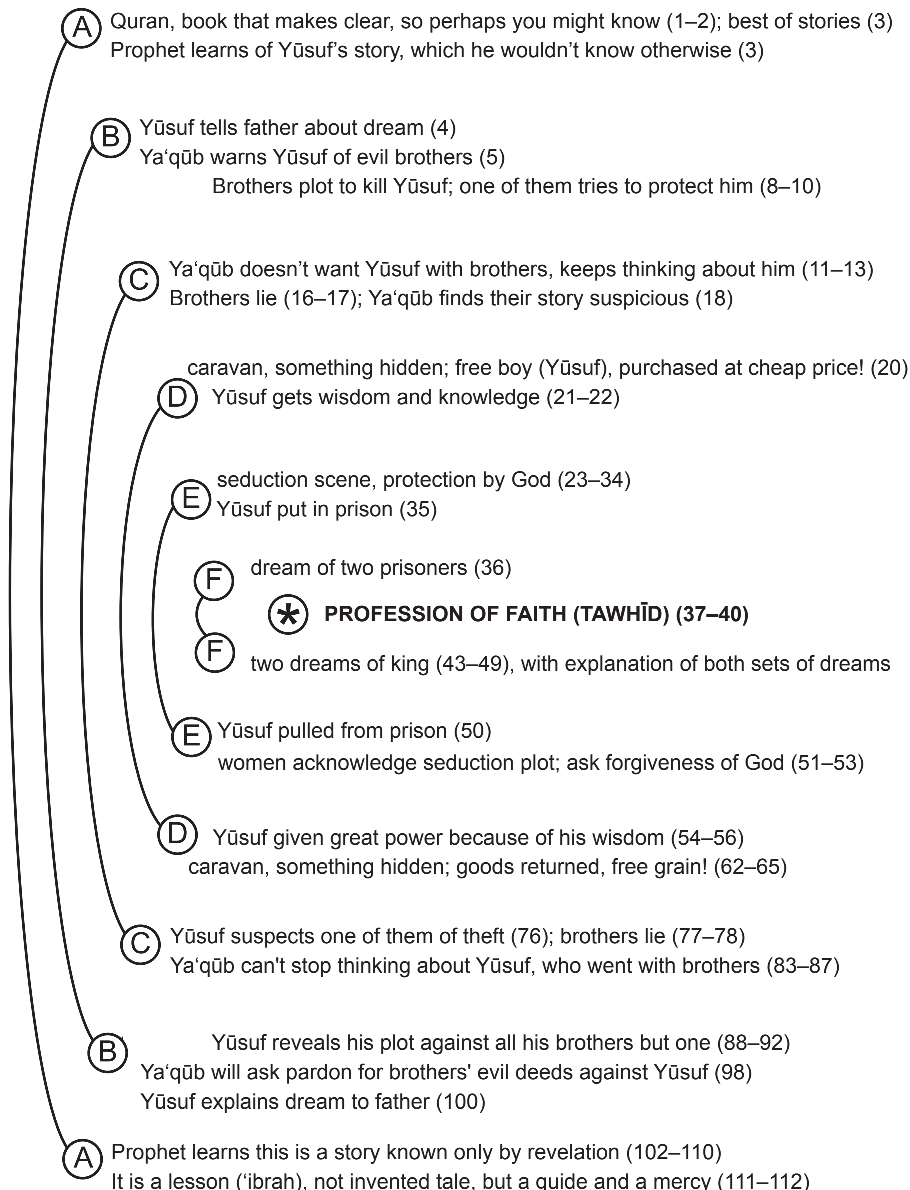


Fig. 1. Outline of sura 12: Yūsuf (ring composition).

Thus, topic A relates to the sura's description of itself as part of a book that clarifies things, that is, that makes the truth clear, distinct from the false (12:1; and at the end, 12:111-12). Moreover, one of the goals of the sura is that, maybe, you will come to know, understand, and be guided (12:2; at end, 12:111). In line with this is a statement that the story of Yūsuf is revealed to the Prophet, who

did not know it before this time (12:3; at the end, 12:109-10); these same component ideas recur in reverse order at the end of the sura (as noted in parentheses). Topic B here is a cluster that describes Yūsuf as he related his dream to his father, Ya‘qūb (12:4; and at the end, its explanation, 12:100), and the warning Yūsuf's father gives him not to trust his brothers (12:5; and at the end, the father's vow to pray for their forgiveness for the wrongs they committed: 12:98). When the opportunity arises for the brothers to rid of Yūsuf, Ya‘qūb protests that he doesn't want him to go with them, fearing some harm will come to him (12:13; and at the end, Ya‘qūb can't stop thinking about the loss of Yūsuf after he went off with his brothers: 12:83-87).

The topics develop sequentially in forward and then in reverse order, ultimately forming a kind of "ring," in this case with a "central core" topic that is the primary message of the sura, namely, a profession of faith by Yūsuf and his declaration of his firm belief in a single deity. The matched elements on the other side of this profession of faith successively tie up each thematic thread introduced before that profession.

Meaning

A variety of stylistic features play off the meaning while they increase the listeners' interest and facilitate memory. These include the epithet, the rhetorical question, direct speech, the simile and related figures such as metaphor and catachresis, as well as irony, Classical paronomasia (that is, defined by ancient Greek understanding of the term), metonymy, and *kināya* (a kind of allusion specific to Arabic).

The epithet (Gk. "something applied or added") is a short description that distinctively identifies a person, place, or thing, and in most cases is added to the proper name. Rhetorically, epithets may function to: convey quickly someone's attributes and character by means of a condensed phrasing; make the passage more stately through the heroic style of expression; or fill out a line, either metrically (for epic poetry like the *Iliad*) or rhythmically (for nonpoetic expressions, as in the Qur'ān).

Epithets are especially characteristic of heroic epics (for example, "Achilles, fleet of foot"). Examples of heroic epithets include: (89:10) وَفِرْعَوْنَ ذِى ٱلْأَوْتَادِ wa-fir‘awna ḏī l-'awtād "And Pharaoh (gen., after the preposition *bi* of 89:6), possessor of the stakes" (that is, the mountains out of which ancient Egyptian rulers cut tombs and extracted stones for temples and pyramids) and (89:7) إِرَمَ ذَاتِ ٱلْعِمَادِ irama ḏāti l-‘imād "Iram, possessor of the high pole (or column)." Possibly because heroic epithets are associated with the world of gods and demigods, the heroic formulation of name and description tends to be applied to tyrants and other worldly leaders humbled by Allah.

The rhetorical question is a statement in the form of a question where no answer is expected because the reply is obvious. Even when an answer is supplied, because of the self-evident nature of the reply, it is still considered a rhetorical question. Rhetorical questions, either one or several in a series, have a variety of purposes; they may: prove a point or make an argument for or against something more cogent or understandable; express amazement or indignation at some fact or event; target opponents to show contempt for them, to humiliate them in their ignorance, or to stop them from pretending not to understand; or ask something that is impossible to deny (these may overlap). In all cases these questions provide interest for the audience against a background primarily of narrative and simple statements, but they may also be persuasive, provocative, and/or instructive:

(2:13) أَنُؤْمِنُ كَمَآ ءَامَنَ ٱلسُّفَهَآءُ a-nu’minu kamā āmana s-sufahā’, “should we believe as fools believe?”

(4:125) وَمَنْ أَحْسَنُ دِينًا مِّمَّنْ أَسْلَمَ وَجْهَهُۥ لِلَّهِ وَهُوَ مُحْسِنٌ وَٱتَّبَعَ مِلَّةَ إِبْرَٰهِيمَ حَنِيفًا wa-man aḥsanu dīnam mim-man aslama wajhahū li-llāhi wa-huwa muḥsinun wa-ttaba‘a millata ibrāhīma ḥanīfā, “and who is better in faith than the one who has submitted wholly (literally, his face) to Allah, who does good and follows the religion of Ibrāhīm rightly guided?”

A series of rhetorical questions (7:97-99) asks: “did the people of the town feel secure that our severity would not come while they were sleeping? / Or did the people of the town feel secure that our severity would not come at dawn while they were playing? / Then did they feel secure against the plan of Allah?”

Another powerful series of rhetorical questions closes Fuṣṣilat (41:52-53), in this instance with an exclamatory reply (at 41:54) “ah truly! they doubt the meeting with their Lord?! ah, truly, He knows and holds everything!” Similarly, a large list of rhetorical questions in sūrat an-Naba’ (78:6-16) make up an introduction to the main theme of the sura, the Day of Judgment, and this section, with its series of questions, serves as a counterweight to the rest of the sura that describes that day on which no unanswered questions remain.

Direct speech (or dialog) is the use of statements made by persons in a work without any change to their words, keeping them verbatim. The use of direct speech in oral works is often cited as a typical feature. Conversations proceed much as they do in “live” speech—without a narrator interjecting identifications of each speaker in turn, especially when the conversation is between two persons.[9] We thus find passages marked by the alternation of *qāla* “he said” and *qālū* “they said” (for example, 2:30-33), but the change between speakers may not always be clear to readers when the speakers can both be identified with the masculine singular *qāla* (as at 18:67, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78). In the latter instance, the shift between speakers may not be apprehended by a reader as quickly as by a listener. The identification of speakers at the beginning of each respective remark is rare, though such marking does occur (for example, 14:9-13; *wa-staftaḥū* at the beginning of 14:15 can refer to either party, that is, either the messengers asked assistance or the rejectors forced a judgment against themselves).

Closely related is reported speech that quotes a long series of original statements verbatim with only the addition of a marker (such as the particle *an* in Arabic) to show that it is a report of someone else’s speech, for example, at 72:2-19. Long passages of direct speech and reported quoted speech are characteristic of traditional oral works. Because the Qur’ān is not composed by tradition, examples of such direct plus reported speech are not common, though they do exist (for example, 12:43 quoted exactly at 12:46).

Direct speech makes reports of events livelier than straight narratives, which may account for its predominance in works based in orality. But because one person’s way of speaking differs from another’s, direct speech also serves to characterize individuals in place of descriptive passages. Thus, Mūsā’s (Moses’) speech is distinctive from that of Ya‘qūb (Jacob) and both are distinct from that of Ibrāhīm (Abraham), and so on. In all cases, direct speech adds to the

[9] Cf. Parry’s remark “The hearer already has the speaker in mind as the natural subject of the sentence, and there is no place for the second use of the name” (1937:59).

picture one has of the speaker. For example, Mūsā is self-deprecating, saying he is not a good speaker (20:27-28; 26:13; 28:34) and therefore needs Hārūn (Aaron), but directly quoted statements show that, on the contrary, he is a very good speaker (though notably these well-turned statements tend to occur after Allah has granted him verbal facility, as at 20:36). At 17:101-02 he mimics Pharaoh's speech with wit and sarcasm, disarming the tyrant with his response: Pharaoh has just concluded his insults with "indeed I think you, Mūsā, are *masḥūrā* (bewitched)" and Mūsā replies "Indeed I think you, pharaoh, are *maṯbūrā* ("doomed"). Pharaoh's style of speaking is consistent with his speech at 28:38 and 40:37 ("indeed I think he is a liar"); he insults Mūsā saying, "he's scarcely articulate," at 43:52, showing both his own irritation at Mūsā's vexing quality of speaking strongly to him and perhaps a desire to humiliate the prophet on a trait about which he is self-conscious.

Direct speech also makes lists of instructions that one normally finds in religious works more vivid; for example, we find Luqmān advising his son (31:17-19):

> (17) يَٰبُنَيَّ أَقِمِ ٱلصَّلَوٰةَ وَأۡمُرۡ بِٱلۡمَعۡرُوفِ وَٱنۡهَ عَنِ ٱلۡمُنكَرِ وَٱصۡبِرۡ عَلَىٰ مَآ أَصَابَكَۖ إِنَّ ذَٰلِكَ مِنۡ عَزۡمِ ٱلۡأُمُورِ yā-bunayya aqimi ṣ-ṣalāta wa-'mur b'il-ma'rūfi wa-nha 'an il-munkari wa-ṣbir 'alā mā aṣābak. inna ḏālika min 'azmi l-umūr, "Oh my son, perform prayers regularly, prescribe good behavior and prohibit bad (irregular) behavior, and be patient in what happens to you. Indeed that's the way to discharge your affairs."

> (18) وَلَا تُصَعِّرۡ خَدَّكَ لِلنَّاسِ وَلَا تَمۡشِ فِي ٱلۡأَرۡضِ مَرَحًاۖ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ كُلَّ مُخۡتَالٍ فَخُورٍ wa-lā tuṣa''ir ḵaddaka li-n-nāsi wa-lā tamši fī l-'arḍi maraḥā. inna llāha lā yuḥibbu kulla muḵtālin faḵūr, "And don't twist your cheek awry to people or walk about insolently on the earth; indeed Allah does not love boastful upstarts."

> (19) وَٱقۡصِدۡ فِي مَشۡيِكَ وَٱغۡضُضۡ مِن صَوۡتِكَۚ إِنَّ أَنكَرَ ٱلۡأَصۡوَٰتِ لَصَوۡتُ ٱلۡحَمِيرِ wa-qṣid fī mašyīka wağḍuḍ min ṣawtik. Inna ankara l-aṣwāti la-ṣawtu l-ḥamīr. . . ., "Be moderate in your way of walking and keep your voice low; indeed the most horrible voice is that of the donkey. . . ."

A string of declarative sentences in place of these imperatives would be dull and flat (prayers should be performed, good behavior encouraged and bad behavior avoided, and so on). Moreover, for ancient listeners, direct speech was a mark of the truth and authenticity of the content and of the high intelligence of the person providing the report.

The simile (Ar. *tašbīh*), a comparison that uses a word equivalent to "like" or "as" or "as if" (for example, *ka, maṯal, ka'anna*), is common in oral woks, such as the epics of Homer. In the oral setting similes help listeners visualize a comparison in a concrete form. The use of words meaning *like* or *as* make the simile an accessible, instructive figure of speech and it is one of humanity's oldest. Similes have been classed into two broad types, simple, short ones, and extended ones; the latter are often considered a "hallmark of epic" because of their prominence in Homer's poems (Scott 1974:vii). Both types appear in the Qur'ān.

The simple ones are often linguistically close to clichés, such as "he pounced like a lion," though it should be noted that expressions we consider overused or trite were once new, and in the setting of rapid recitation, the images may be more vivid to the listener than to a reader many centuries

after their first appearance. Occasionally we find short similes that are repeated with slight variation, for example, (16:77) كَلَمْحِ ٱلْبَصَرِ ka-lamḥi l-baṣar, "like the twinkling of an eye" (similar at 54:50); (55:24) ٱلْجَوَارِ ٱلْمُنشَـَٔاتُ فِى ٱلْبَحْرِ كَٱلْأَعْلَٰمِ ul-jawāri l-munša'ātu fī l-baḥri ka-l-a'lām, "ships (nom.) smooth-sailing through the sea like long mountains" (similar at 42:32); (37:49) كَأَنَّهُنَّ بَيْضٌ مَّكْنُونٌ ka-annahunna bayḍum maknūn, "as if they were eggs well-guarded" (pearls used in place of eggs at 52:24 and 56:23). Sometimes, of course, even a short simile can be evocative, for example, (37:65) طَلْعُهَا كَأَنَّهُۥ رُءُوسُ ٱلشَّيَٰطِينِ ṭal'uhā ka-annahū ru'ūsu š-šayāṭīn, "Its fruits are like the heads of Šayāṭīn (= devils)." This simile is also an example of catachresis because it pushes the concept of a plant, the food of the inhabitants of hell, well beyond the sphere of normal, earthly plants. Images are mixed up and merged with the same speed and energy they have as they flash successively through the mind of one who is unable to reduce the multiple images to a single idea. Because it engages the dynamism of oral speech to propel it forward, catachresis is often conspicuous in oral works; consider for example, the forceful words of Achilles in addressing Agamemnon as a "dog-eyed wine-sack with the heart of a deer" (*Il*. 1.225). The blend may not appeal to purists, but the expression conveys succinctly and intensively that Agamemnon is an erratic leader of the Greeks assembled against Troy, like one drunk on power, who rabidly bullies and attacks others in his ranks, while at the same time shying away from personal combat on the battlefield. Just so, the simile of hell's fruit conveys a complex of thoughts: the fruit persuades one to eat of it, like a devil who lures with seductive temptations, but it is horrible in taste—and can also bite back or burn the one who tries to eat it.

While there is no such thing as an extended simile that is diagnostic of orality, longer similes from works based in orality often share a number of linguistic and structural elements: (1) it is frequently possible to delete them from their surrounding contexts without any loss of substantive meaning (that is, they are self-contained); (2) they are often built up to "epic" proportions by parataxis; and, finally, (3) similes and other figurative imagery in works with an oral character often present vistas that provide a contrasting backdrop to the larger themes surrounding them (Edwards 1987:102-03). For example, the pair of similes that run consecutively from 2:17-20 could be removed without any effect on the surrounding meaning, satisfying element (1). Both before and after the similes, the context encourages belief in and worship of one God, and just before the similes there is a description of hypocrites who pretend to believe but, when they are alone together, belittle believers and their belief. The similes give two comparisons of the situation of these hypocrites as people who have light momentarily (from a kindled fire and lightning, respectively), after which they are in even greater darkness. With regard to element (2), the structure of the statements in both similes is paratactic. Finally, with regard to element (3), the imagery presented in the two similes helps listeners grasp the point of the similes because of their experience with the natural world, where fire is a source of light and lightning brings both fear and promise of life-giving rain, and in contrast to the scenes of faithful messengers sent by God to obstinate people (paratactic structure shown with slashes):

> كَمَثَلِ ٱلَّذِى ٱسْتَوْقَدَ نَارًا فَلَمَّآ أَضَآءَتْ مَا حَوْلَهُۥ ذَهَبَ ٱللَّهُ بِنُورِهِمْ وَتَرَكَهُمْ فِى ظُلُمَٰتٍ لَّا يُبْصِرُونَ (17)
> ka-maṯali llaḏī stawqada nāran / fa-lammā aḍā'at mā ḥawlahū / ḏahaba llāhu bi-nūrihim, / wa-tarakahum fī ẓulumātil/ lā yubṣirūn, "like the example of one who kindles a fire / and then when it illuminates what is around him, / Allah takes away his light / and leaves him in complete darkness: / they see nothing."

صُمٌّۢ بُكۡمٌ عُمۡيٞ فَهُمۡ لَا يَرۡجِعُونَ (18)

ṣummum bukmun ʻumyun / fa-hum lā yarjiʻūn, "Deaf, dumb, blind— / and then they will not return."

أَوۡ كَصَيِّبٖ مِّنَ ٱلسَّمَآءِ فِيهِ ظُلُمَٰتٞ وَرَعۡدٞ وَبَرۡقٞ يَجۡعَلُونَ أَصَٰبِعَهُمۡ فِيٓ ءَاذَانِهِم مِّنَ ٱلصَّوَٰعِقِ حَذَرَ ٱلۡمَوۡتِۚ وَٱللَّهُ مُحِيطُۢ بِٱلۡكَٰفِرِينَ (19)

aw kaṣayyibim mina s-samā'i / fīhi ẓulumātun wa-raʻdun wa-barqun/ yajʻalūna aṣābiʻahum fī āḏānihim mina ṣ-ṣawāʻiq / ḥaḏara l-mawt / wa-llāhu muḥīṭum bi-l-kāfirīn, "Or like a raincloud from the sky / in the company of which is total darkness and thunder and lightning; / they put their fingers in their ears from the stunning bolts / as a precaution against death. / But Allah encompasses the disbelievers."

يَكَادُ ٱلۡبَرۡقُ يَخۡطَفُ أَبۡصَٰرَهُمۡۖ كُلَّمَآ أَضَآءَ لَهُم مَّشَوۡاْ فِيهِ وَإِذَآ أَظۡلَمَ عَلَيۡهِمۡ قَامُواْۚ وَلَوۡ شَآءَ ٱللَّهُ لَذَهَبَ بِسَمۡعِهِمۡ وَأَبۡصَٰرِهِمۡۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيۡءٖ قَدِيرٞ (20)

yakādu l-barqu yaḵṭafu abṣārahum / kullamā aḍā'a lahum mašaw fīhi / wa-iḏā aẓlama ʻalayhim qāmū / wa-law šā'a llāhu la-ḏahaba bi-samʻihim wa-'abṣārihim / inna llāha ʻalā kulli šay'in qadīr, "The lightning nearly takes away their sight— /as often as it illuminates for them, / they walk onward, / but when it's dark again they stand still. / And were Allah to will it / He would take away their hearing and their sight. / Indeed Allah is capable of everything."

Prior to these two similes there is an extended treatment of hypocrites who pretend they want guidance but really prefer error (2:8-16). This pair of similes gives a natural world view of how dark their spiritual vision is, but they could be left out without affecting the essential meaning or overall flow of the sura. A related topic is introduced at 2:21, where listeners are urged to "worship your Lord."

At 29:41 the simile of the spider, another image from the natural world, is presented. The preceding *āyah*s show there was no escape from God's punishment for the people who rejected: (29:33-35) Lūt (Lot); (36-37) Shūʻayb; (38) the messengers to ʻĀd and Thamūd; and (39) the example of Qarūn, Pharaoh, and Haman, who rejected Mūsā (Moses); all had no refuge:

مَثَلُ ٱلَّذِينَ ٱتَّخَذُواْ مِن دُونِ ٱللَّهِ أَوۡلِيَآءَ كَمَثَلِ ٱلۡعَنكَبُوتِ ٱتَّخَذَتۡ بَيۡتٗاۖ وَإِنَّ أَوۡهَنَ ٱلۡبُيُوتِ لَبَيۡتُ ٱلۡعَنكَبُوتِۖ لَوۡ كَانُواْ يَعۡلَمُونَ (29:41)

maṯalu llaḏīna ttaḵaḏū min dūni llāhi awliyā'a / ka-maṯali l-ʻankabūti ttaḵaḏat baytan/
wa-inna awhana l-buyūti la-baytu l-ʻankabūti / law kānū yaʻlamūn, "The comparison of those who adopt as gods partners apart from Allah / is like that of the spider that builds a house for itself, / and indeed the weakest of houses is the house of the spider, / if only they understood."

At 29:42 the topic returns to that of no escape for those who reject God's messengers.

We find another heroic simile at 22:31 built up by paratactic extension that could be deleted without loss of substantial meaning. The subject examined prior to the simile picks up again after a transition word (*ḏālika*):

فَكَأَنَّمَا خَرَّ مِنَ ٱلسَّمَآءِ فَتَخۡطَفُهُ ٱلطَّيۡرُ أَوۡ تَهۡوِي بِهِ ٱلرِّيحُ فِي مَكَانٖ سَحِيقٖ

> fa-ka'annamā ḵarra mina s-samā'i / fa-taḵṭafuhu ṭ-ṭayru / aw tahwī bihi r-rīḥu fī makānin saḥīq, "then, it is as if he falls from the sky / and then a carnivorous bird snatches him up / or the wind swoops on him (to drop him) in a far-off place."

The surrounding context concerns the rites of the annual pilgrimage, which has a purpose of celebrating the one God's name (and thus, God's attributes and favors to humanity). This heroic simile refers to anyone devoted to other gods alongside Allah, including things not normally considered idols, such as wealth. These gods are like birds of prey (for example, materialism, obsession with riches) that carry their victims off to soaring heights before letting them fall to the ground, where they die. Or such false worship is akin to being blown away, with no one to help.

Likewise, a simile comparing a good tree with firm roots with a bad tree whose roots cause it to be unstable complements a description of heaven and its gardens against hell and its torments (14:24-26). The simile is not required to convey the meaning—that good people will be rewarded and evil people will be punished—and the theme immediately prior to it is again picked up after it; the simile's language is paratactic, and the imagery in it refers to something in nature.

In fact, the imagery of the similes in the Qur'ān is normally something from the listeners' natural world and environment, set in the present time as a universal (Edwards 1987:103; Scott 1974). Thus, we find such images as the following:

> animals: gnat (2:26), dog (7:176), bird of prey (22:31), snake (27:10), spider (29:41), locust (54:7), donkey (62:5), camel (77:33 [but sometimes glossed as "copper"]);
>
> climate/weather: rain (2:19, 10:24, 57:20), lightning (2:20), wind (3:117; 14:18; 18:45);
>
> earth/natural environment: ashes (14:18); trees (14:24-26; 54:20; 69:6-7), oceans (18:109; 31:27), rocks (2:74), gardens (2:265; 18:32);
>
> man and his activities: fire (2:17) and light (24:35), and the measurement of time by day (22:47); grain and harvest (2:261; 3:117; 10:24); eggs (37:49); rubies and corals (55:58), pearls (56:23), as well as the search for gold in the froth of streams (13:17); writing pens (18:109; 31:27); slave and master (16:75-76); and
>
> architectural structures or components: fort (77:32), solid structure or wall (61:4), timber (63:4).

This list is by no means comprehensive, but it shows the prominence in the extended simile of the ordinary and the familiar with which listeners could readily identify, while much of the surrounding context relates to matters of good and evil and the society that fosters these behaviors. This does not mean that the similes present nature as a tame, benevolent force, forever peaceful, nor does it mean that similes are the only source of natural-world vistas in the Qur'ān (indeed there are numerous passages that catalog the bounties and benefits of God, most of which belong to "ordinary life").

Related to the simile is the metaphor (comparison without *like* or *as*), but as in Homer's poems, the metaphors of the Qur'ān tend to fall into what we might broadly class as "fixed diction" (as

defined by Parry 1933:34), by which "a certain diction, in short, became the style," so, for example, the sea might be styled a "way," "wave," or "deep," and by continued use the styled expressions lose their pleasing metaphorical force and simply become the correct way of expressing a thing. Along these lines we find metaphors in the Qur'ān having to do with vision, breath, and clothing or other covering:

> vision: (22:46) لَا تَعْمَى ٱلْأَبْصَـٰرُ وَلَـٰكِن تَعْمَى ٱلْقُلُوبُ ٱلَّتِى فِى ٱلصُّدُورِ lā ta'mā l-'abṣāru walākin ta'mā l-qulūb ullatī fī ṣ-ṣudūr, "not blind are the eyes, but rather the hearts in the breasts are blind."

> breath: (21:46) نَفْحَةٌ مِّنْ عَذَابِ رَبِّكَ nafḥatum min 'aḏābi rabbika, "a breath of the punishment of your Lord" (the scent of something is its least molecular bit, but precedes the actual thing, animal, or person) (cf. at 67:7, where the sound of the fire of hell is characterized as breathing).

> clothing or other covering: (3:71) لِمَ تَلْبِسُونَ ٱلْحَقَّ بِٱلْبَـٰطِلِ lima talbisūna l-ḥaqqa bi-l-bāṭil, "Why do you cover [that is, confound or confuse] the truth with falsehood?" (verb form), and (16:112) لِبَاسَ ٱلْجُوعِ libāsa l-jū' "the clothing of hunger" (noun form), signifying the utmost degree of hunger; cf. (2:88) قُلُوبُنَا غُلْفٌ qulūbunā ğulf "our hearts are covered" (this statement, made by unbelievers, is meant to ridicule believers because they want their hearts uncovered, not literally, as during open-heart surgery, but open to the truth).[10]

Paronomasia (Gk. "close naming") is a kind of euphony involving primarily an etymological play on words, thus in Arabic a kind of *jinās* (see below, under Sound). Unlike *jinās* paronomasia is often self-consciously clever or witty or its goal is humor or abuse (as in 9:61; cf. 2:58, 4:46); like *jinās*, however, paronomasia may play on word roots semantically to create subtle as well as powerful rhetorical effects (as at 11:1, 17:24; 19:23, 26):

> (9:61) وَمِنْهُمُ ٱلَّذِينَ يُؤْذُونَ ٱلنَّبِىَّ وَيَقُولُونَ هُوَ أُذُنٌ ۚ قُلْ أُذُنُ خَيْرٍ لَّكُمْ wa-minhumu l-laḏīna yu'ḏūna n-nabiyya wa-yaqūlūna huwa 'uḏunun. qul uḏunu ḵayril lakum, "And among them are those [Hypocrites] who annoy (*yu'ḏūna*) the Prophet and say 'he is an ear (*uḏun*).' Say 'the ear of a good thing for you. . . .'" The expression "he's an ear" means that he hears and believes whatever is said to him (the response deflects the abuse by clarifying that is a good thing that he listens to you because he gives a correct and fair judgment or decision). Translating the expression as "he is an ear" fails to replicate the force of that Arabic expression within the context of the *āyah*, however, because of the paronomasia between *yu'ḏūna* and *uḏun*.

[10] The noun *libās* is used in its sense of clothing, garments, or dress, at 22:23 and 35:33 (in both cases referring specifically to garments of silk, though at 22:23 the silk garments, of the inhabitants of heaven, are contrasted with the *ṯiyāb*, "robes," of fire of the inhabitants of hell at 22:19), and in reference to chain mail (21:80); in its metaphorical sense as the covering of anything, it is applied as something that is visible to others in the way apparel is to the *libās* of *taqwā*, or God-fearing righteous behavior (7:26), the lack of which leads the first humans to become aware of their "nakedness" (7:27). *Libās* is also applied as a covering that provides rest and comfort, as in the case of night (25:47; 78:10); and the word takes on the implicit sense of both what others see as "apparel" as well as something that gives comfort and rest (2:187), where it is applied wives as *libās* for their husbands and husbands as *libās* for their wives.

Diction

The choice of words, their phonological shape as well as their spelling, and how they relate to words around them are integral to the rhetorical style of a work. The language also determines the level and the degree to which any subtle communication can take place between reciter and listener, something that would have been far more significant for the first listeners of transmitted orally work. Such features include the use of rare words (for example, hapaxes, lexical isolates) as well as distinctive synonyms, variant plurals, and intensive forms (naturally formed in Arabic, called *mubālaġah*), plus haplologies, syncopated forms, and other inconsistencies in spelling that reflect a dialect that is artificial yet produces a euphonious soundscape for the work's first reception.

Because the Qur'ān was codified in a standard written edition around 650 CE, soon after the death of Prophet Muhammad in 632 (see Schoeler 2010; Al-A'ẓamī 2003:67-107), there is little likelihood that the Qur'ān contains lexical isolates similar to those found in the Homeric epics that are hypothesized to have been garbled over time by traditional reciters who picked up the words imperfectly (Reece 2009:7-13). Furthermore, the Qur'ān consistently qualifies itself and its *lisān* ("tongue, language") as *'arabī* (Retsö 2010:285) and not foreign (see Saleh 2010 for a compelling analysis of typical etymological approaches and foreign vocabulary for explicating notionally difficult words and phrases in the Qur'ān). Thus, words perceived as unusual or striking should be considered for the precise contextual meaning they provide and for their value in an oral setting, where their rarity confers on them a bookmarking function to signal to a mindful listener the place in the text (see below, The Use of Oral Signs in the Qur'ān).

Synonyms (Gk. "same name") in the Qur'ān are words whose meanings are nearly the same, though never exactly the same. Although synonymy cannot be classed with figures of speech, their use is a mark of high style, especially when their respective precise meanings are essential. The meanings of synonyms may vary subtly or significantly and connotation, intensity, and context may play a role in differentiating one synonym from another. Most important for anyone who reads a translation is the fact that there is not a one-to-one correspondence between any given Arabic word and an English counterpart, with the result that many words of similar meaning in Arabic are rendered with the same word in English and not with a synonym. Even if the same number of words having a similar meaning for a particular concept existed in each language, which is never the case, they would not "match" in terms of their respective precise meanings and in terms of their connotations.

One example may illustrate how synonyms specify particular qualities not reproducible with a single English word: The words *ṯu'bān, jānn,* and *ḥayyah* are all often translated simply as "snake" or "serpent," and all refer to the same animal. The Arabic words do not refer to separate genera of snakes, but, instead, each highlights certain aspects of the snake's behavior and appearance that enrich the meaning of the passages in which it is found. *Ṯu'bān* refers to a heavy, stout, or bulky snake, imposing in appearance, that moves quickly like a flowing stream; in both places where it is used (7:107; 26:32) *ṯu'bān* describes the snake that pharaoh sees. *Jānn* refers to a thin, gracile snake whose light, graceful movements, especially of the upper body, can be compared to a dance. In the two places in which *jānn* is used (27:10; 28:31), it refers to a snake that astonishes Mūsā with its lithe, delicate, and speedy movements, filling him with wonder and amazement.

Ḥayyah refers to a large serpent in its habit of coiling itself up or in its ability to twist, bend, or curve itself and thus move quickly, and in this regard resembles the utility of the upper part of the shepherd's staff, the crook, and indeed it is in the context of the staff's utility that the word *ḥayyah* is used (20:20; see ʿAlī Muṭāwiʿ 2006:113-16).

The common natural desire among speakers of a language for euphony (Gk. "good sound") alters the spelling and pronunciation of words in a variety of ways that in turn can be used for rhetorical effect. Syncope (Gk. "a cutting short") is the shortening of words for ease of pronunciation and for better sound. It is not a figure of speech, but a feature of the Arabic language. Nevertheless, such shortened forms have rhetorical effect, especially in enhancing the sound and facilitating recitation. Haplology involves the deletion of a second, similar-sounding syllable, such as the deletion of *ta-* to indicate a feminine singular at the beginning of imperfect verbs of forms V and VI, as at 97:4: تَنَزَّلُ ٱلْمَلَٰٓئِكَةُ tanazzalu al-malāʾikah (for تَتَنَزَّلُ tatanazzalu, form V, 3 masc. pl. impf.), "The angels descend." The same phrase appears without haplology at 41:30; the haplology is euphonically stronger, so its presence at the beginning of an *āyah* (as at 97:4) is to be expected, while in the middle of an *āyah* (as at 41:30) the longer, less forceful form is appropriate. Usually, syncopated forms have the same meaning as their unsyncopated versions, and they appear in contexts where their euphonious effect is desirable. A one-syllable word may be syncopated: (2:271) فَنِعِمَّا هِيَ fa-niʿimmā hiya for فَنِعْمَ مَا هِيَ niʿima mā hiya, literally, "so how beautiful is what it is (how beautiful it is)!" (the *tašdīd* above the *mīm* indicates a syncopation has taken place). A short vowel may appear instead of a long vowel: (79:43) فِيمَ fīma for فيما fīmā "in what" or "in which." Apocope involves the loss of one (or more sounds/letters) at the end of a word; for example, the forms *yaku, taku, naku,* and so on are abbreviated forms for jussive *yakun, takun, nakun*: (40:28) وَإِن يَكُ كَٰذِبًا wa-in yaku kāḏibā, "if he is a liar"; (4:40) وَإِن تَكُ حَسَنَةً wa-in taku ḥasanah, "and if there is (feminine) any good"; (74:43) لَمْ نَكُ lam naku, "we were not." Likewise, for euphony or to replicate urgent speech, and so on, at the end and in the middle of *āyah*s we find *pausal forms* (forms typical of the end of a line of poetry or the end of an *āyah,* in this case spelled as those end-of-line words are typically pronounced): (28:33) فَأَخَافُ أَن يَقْتُلُونِ fa-akāfu an yaqtulūn, "I fear lest they kill me" (long -*nī* shortened to -*ni*); (20:93) أَلَّا تَتَّبِعَنِ ʾal-lā tattabiʿan, "That you follow (subjunctive) me" (long -*nī* shortened to -*ni* in middle of *āyah*).

In addition, there are also changes in the spelling of nonsyncopated words to ensure proper pronunciation in recitation: (101:10) وَمَآ أَدْرَىٰكَ مَا هِيَهْ wa-mā ʾadrāka mā hīyah, "And what will make you understand what it is?" where هِيَهْ *hiyah* stands for standard هِيَ *hiya*, which would be pronounced at the end of an *āyah* as *hī*; the final *hāʾ* of the Quranic spelling indicates that one must read the second syllable of the word. Sometimes words are pronounced in recitation in a way that is easier on the tongue than the normal root letters would be. These pronunciation changes may appear in the text itself or be directed by *tajwīd*: (2:247, 7:69) *basṭatan* "excellence, high stature; increase in physical height or in standing within a community or in knowledge." At 2:247 (بَسْطَةً) the word is spelled using the true root letters, but at 7:69 (بَصْطَةً) it is spelled with a *ṣād* instead of *sīn* for euphony—the word, already emphasized by its position in the statement, is made more emphatic by the sound change. At 2:245 the verb of the same root uses *ṣād* but here the sound shift is probably due to the proximity of another emphatic consonant (*ḍād*) in the preceding word يَقْبِضُ yaqbiḍu. It should be noted that most words cannot be so readily made more euphonic by such consonantal shifts; the alternate pronunciations must already have existed at the time of the Prophet. Likewise, some words in

the Qur'ān may not strictly accord with their original, root-derived meanings because they fall at the ends of phrases (that is, thought and tone units) or *āyah*s, where a radically related word, a cognate, that rhymes with a word in an adjacent phrase in the same phrasal position. The meaning is clear to listeners and the cognate substitution may in fact enrich the meaning (see Stewart 2009 and 2015).

Syntax

Arabic offers great flexibility in natural (grammatically ordained) and artful, or rhetorical, expression. Some features especially noticeable in an oral setting include: anacoluthon, asyndeton, and polysyndeton, as well as certain characteristics of Arabic grammar, such as the prominent positioning of object or subject and the use of gender, and of Arabic style, such as *iltifāt* (a figure of speech particular to Arabic).

Anacoluthon (Gk. "not following") is an *artful* grammatical inconsistency, a grammatical structure that is altered midway or a construction started at the beginning of a sentence that is not continued consistently to its end. Anacoluthon is natural to Arabic by reason of the elasticity of the language, but is not as common in English, since English, with fewer inflected forms, is more rigid in syntax than Arabic. Anacoluthon represents the liveliness of extemporaneous speech and often is found in relation to complex thoughts or events in a narrative. In these cases it is strong and forceful because a more polished account might require structure or vocabulary so artificially elevated that listeners would be put off.

Because there are more kinds of anacoluthon than can be conveniently outlined here, a sampling must suffice to illustrate how they can be exploited in recitation. An anacoluthon results when a "parenthesis" (short digressive explanation) intervenes in the course of a sentence, obscuring or breaking the smooth flow of a larger structure, although it may be only the length and complexity of the sentence that "hides" the underlying structure:

> (6:15) إِنِّيٓ أَخَافُ إِنۡ عَصَيۡتُ رَبِّي عَذَابَ يَوۡمٍ عَظِيمٍ
> innī akāfu / in 'aṣaytu rabbī / 'aḏāba yawmin 'aẓīm "I fear, / if I should disobey my Lord, / the punishment of a great day." Here the statement "I fear the punishment of a great day" is interrupted by a "parenthesis" explaining the circumstances of the fear. Because this example is short, it is easy to recognize utterance units (with slashes), measures of thought that a reciter can emphasize with intonation, breathing, or repetition to broadcast his understanding of the passage. A reciter might, for example, decrease his volume on the parenthetical portion to suggest the improbability that the speaker would disobey.

Another type of anacoluthon results when coordinate clauses (for example, connected by *wa-* or *fa-*) lack parallelism, but this is often a natural way to express certain combinations of ideas:

> (5:3) حُرِّمَتۡ عَلَيۡكُمُ ٱلۡمَيۡتَةُ . . . وَأَن تَسۡتَقۡسِمُواْ بِٱلۡأَزۡلَٰمِ
> ḥurrimat 'alaykumu l-maytatu. . . wa-an tastaqsimū bi-l-azlām "Forbidden to you are dead (animals). . . and that you draw lots with headless arrows." That is, it is forbidden both to eat of dead animals and to use the headless arrows for making decisions.

Asyndeton (Gk. “not bound together”) is the absence of conjunctions or other connectors in a series of coordinate words or phrases. To insert a conjunction may be more natural, but statements are often livelier and more starkly forceful without one. In the opinion of some Muslim scholars, the appropriate lack of conjunctions and other words or phrases that link ideas in an expression as well as the appropriate use elsewhere of these same connectors define *balāğah* (“rhetoric” or “style”). A long series of descriptive words without conjunctions may be especially striking and powerful; one example is the most beautiful names of Allah that occurs at 59:22-24:

(31:27) إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ inna llāha ‘azīzun ḥakīm, “ Indeed Allah is powerful [and] wise.” The second adjective “wise” could theoretically be read as an adverb modifying the first adjective: “wisely powerful.”

(2:18) صُمٌّۢ بُكْمٌ عُمْىٌ ṣummun bukmun ‘umyun, “deaf, dumb, blind.”

Polysyndeton (Gk. “much bound together”) is the repetition of conjunctions (*wa, fa, lā,* and the like) in a series of coordinate words or phrases. Polysyndeton allows a reciter to compel listeners to hold in the mind for a time each item separated by the conjunction; for example, at 33:35 listeners can visualize different individuals they know who excel at one or another of the traits specified in the catalog list. By contrast, the lack of conjunctions (asyndeton, above) in the long series describing Allah (59:22-24 [excluding the final *wa-huwa al-‘azīz al-ḥakīm*]) lets the reciter pile on attribute after attribute, not as separate characteristics, but altogether as one idea, thereby emphasizing the Oneness (*tawhīd*) of God. Polysyndeton may also be found with other connectors other than *wa*- (e.g, *fa*- as at 23:14), including negative conjunctions (that is, negative polysyndeton); for example, we find the repetition of *lā* 5:2 “do *not* violate the sanctity of the rites of Allah, *nor* the sacred months, *nor* the sacrificial animals, *nor* the garlands” (see also 35:20-21). The repetition of the negative, even when strictly required (for example, with verbs in the perfect; see Wright 1967.2:300B), adds force and intensity to the expression: (75:31) “he neither believed nor did he pray.”

‘*Irāb* (Ar. “inflection, or case”) is technically not a figure of speech, but the use of inflected forms gives the Qur’ān much of its special character. Without ‘*irāb* (nouns, pronouns, and adjectives whose spelling indicates respective function within an expression), many figures of speech listed in this essay would not be possible or would be considerably weakened. ‘*Irāb* ensures that any ambiguity that exists in the text is intentional. Because the Qur’ān’s ‘*irāb* is strong (consistent throughout the text, with meaning highly dependent on the correct understanding of its inflected forms) the Qur’ān is also characterized by an economy of expression: Words are not expressed if they are not necessary (the category of necessary includes rhetorical effects because they enhance the phrase’s meaning). Because of ‘*irāb* every noun, pronoun, and adjective encodes its function in the sentence within itself (like English *I, my,* and *me*), and normally this function is easily discerned because of spelling differences in the cases. (Some words are spelled the same in nominative, genitive, accusative, and vocative cases, but in context a noun, pronoun, or adjective has only one case.) The functionality of ‘*irāb* permits it to support some of the strongest rhetorical effects—the movement of words, especially subjects and objects, from their normal neutral positions (verb-subject-object). Fronting the accusative object or backing the nominative subject to the end of the clause are the most common of these syntactic movements (see Hoffmann 2007:74; Al-Rifaee 2008):

(39:14) قُلِ ٱللَّهَ أَعْبُدُ مُخْلِصًا لَّهُۥ دِينِى qul illāha 'a'budu muḵliṣal lahū dīnī, "Say: *Allah* I worship as one pure to Him in my religion." Fronting an element that is not the subject of the sentence has the effect of focusing on that element with emphatic force, closer in meaning to "It is Allah alone that I worship as one pure. . . ." Even in English "Allah I worship. . . " is stronger than the neutral version of the statement ("I worship Allah as one pure. . . "; note, however, that the words here translated "as one pure" could be misread to modify "Allah" rather than "I," so one should translate: "I, as one pure. . . , worship Allah").

(112:4) وَلَمْ يَكُن لَّهُۥ كُفُوًا أَحَدٌۢ wa-lam yakun lahu kufuwan aḥad (reading according to word order) "And not is there to Him an equal *anyone*." The positioning of the nominative subject at the end of the statement is emphatic, suggesting that there is not anyone at all anywhere ever that is equal or like to Him. The effect of this back-positioning of the subject is especially powerful when used in statements with a negative.

Another grammatical characteristic of Arabic worthy of remark is gender. Historically the terms to describe the categories of grammatical gender in Arabic, *masculine* and *feminine*, may have been afterthoughts, arising only after a language that uses grammatical gender has developed a trove of words that divide into two patterns (or three, as in ancient Greek, which also has a "neuter" gender) and only after many words denoting males tended to follow one pattern while words denoting females followed another. Gender is a natural feature of Arabic, apparent in nouns, adjective, pronouns, and verbs. Superficially the primary function of gender is to show agreement between nouns and their modifiers. In inflected languages (that is, with *'irāb,* see below), because of this "sort" function of gender, grammatically gendered statements permit more liberal positioning of words for rhetorical effect without ambiguity (unless ambiguity is desired; cf. Aristotle *Rh*. 3.5.4/1407b). Even a listener with limited language skills will easily grasp the relations between pronouns and their antecedents if the reciter is good:

(31:16) إِنَّهَآ إِن تَكُ مِثْقَالَ حَبَّةٍ مِّنْ خَرْدَلٍ فَتَكُن فِى صَخْرَةٍ أَوْ فِى ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ أَوْ فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ يَأْتِ بِهَا ٱللَّهُ
innahā in taku miṯqāla ḥabbatim min ḵardalin fa-takun fī ṣaḵratin aw fī s-samāwāti aw fī al-arḍi ya'ti bihā llāh, "If there is (feminine verb) the weight (masculine) of a seed (feminine) of mustard (masculine) and it is (feminine verb) on a rock or in the heavens or on the earth, Allah will bring it (feminine) forth." There is only one feminine noun (seed) in the sentence, barring any ambiguity that could cause confusion in English (weight, mustard). The "it" on the rock that Allah brings forth is a *seed*.

Iltifāt (Ar. "turn") refers to a turn, for example, to right or left, in the course of a conversation, and so is applied most often to a change of person (say, from singular to plural, or vice versa) or a change from indirect to direct speech, though it may refer to other kinds of turns in the speech from what is directly in front of the listener to something at the side. *Iltifāt* occurs in spoken English, often when referring to persons in bureaucratic agencies ("They say . . . " but when one particular individual is singled out, the speaker will switch to "he said . . . "). It is commonly found in the Qur'ān and, unlike in written English, there is much to be admired in *iltifāt* in Arabic: It increases the liveliness of the speech and provokes interest in the listener who may interpret the ambiguity of person as a shift in emphasis. For example, at 7:26 there is a turn in the discus-

sion of clothing from it being both a benefit (to cover those parts of the body that are indecent to expose) and an adornment to the figurative idea that the best clothing (adornment for one's person and covering of anything shameful) is *taqwā,* a reverence for God that includes the good behavior one has in all aspects of life in gratitude to and out of love for God. At 6:6 it is stated that God has destroyed many generations before those who now reject the truth, and then the focus turns to *you,* who must make the choice to accept or reject the truth:

> (36:22) وَمَا لِىَ لَآ أَعۡبُدُ ٱلَّذِى فَطَرَنِى وَإِلَيۡهِ تُرۡجَعُونَ wa-mā liya lā a'budu lladī faṭaranī wa-ilayhi turja'ūn, "And what's the matter with *me* that I not worship the One who made me and to Him *you* (pl.) are going to return." The shift from "me" to "you" emphasizes the punishment in store for you, because I have submitted to the One. So the real force here is "what's the matter with *you*?!"

Iltifāt is a dynamic figure of speech that is particular to the Arabic language, but this figure is only one variety of deixis (cf. the "thick pronominality" of Hoffmann 2007:149-51), the use of pronouns and other pointer words, such as *this, that, these,* and *those* in English, to engage the audience so they will remain attentive. Deixis, like direct speech, brings objects and persons described into the listener's immediate field of view. Both devices support the underlying rhetoric of the work heard, for example, the *Iliad* or the Qur'ān. Homer (no matter who Homer was) could not have known Aristotle's Τεχνὴ ῥητορική ("Art of Rhetoric"), nor did the Arabs know of it when they first heard the Qur'ān.

According to Aristotle, rhetoric seeks to persuade using language (it does not involve gesticulations and other body movements), and so its methods are likely limited, perhaps intuitive. Aristotle (*Rh*. 1.2.3/1356a) held that statements could be rhetorically framed to persuade another in three ways, through an appeal to: (1) ἦθος, *ēthos*, or moral character of the speaker (whose trustworthiness must be due to the speech itself), and thus an appeal to the listener's soul; (2) διάθεσις, *diathesis*, the listener's disposition or temperament that can be roused by passion (πάθος, *pathos*), and thus an appeal to the emotions; and (3) λόγος, *logos*, reasonable argumentation within the speech itself, with either an inductive argument or an enthymeme, and thus an appeal to the intellect.

Since Kennedy's (1994) groundbreaking examination of Greek rhetoric, several studies have analyzed the rhetorical content of the *Iliad* through the lens of Aristotle's *Ars Rhetorica*. For example, Mifsud (2015) starts with a catalog of Homeric extracts that appear in the *Ars Rhetorica* to explore, from a literary perspective, how Aristotle appropriated Homer to define his art of rhetoric. *Iliad* books 9 and 24 have been cited for their use of persuasion as a "central theme" in a philosophical approach that sees the birth of rhetoric in Homer's epics (Naas 1995:133-39). Knudsen (2014), a philologist, presents the most careful, incisive, and illuminating study comparing the two works. She examines in detail how certain character's speeches in the *Iliad* conform to the three Aristotelian approaches cited above (as well as to other elements of his art of rhetoric), compared to other *Iliad* speeches ("controls") that do not conform; clues in the text reveal the intent of the former group is indeed to persuade whereas those in the latter group do not have that personal intent.

The first book of Arabic rhetoric (*Kitāb al-badī',* by Ibn al-Mu'tazz, 861-908 CE) rejects the notion that rhetoric is an invention of the Greeks, but rather is something that "could already be found in the Qur'ān" (Cuypers 2015:11). Indeed, another name for the Qur'ān is *al-furqān* (25:1; 3:4), "that

which discriminates" between right and wrong, belief and nonbelief, the true and the false, and surely deliberative rhetoric strives to make such distinctions clear to an audience (Arist., *Rh*. 1.3/1358b). As in the case of Homer, the Qur'ān includes numerous passages that conform to Aristotle's three rhetorical approaches (and it is easy to demonstrate their accord with other elements of the *Ars Rhetorica* as well). However, that conformity does not reflect any connection between the Qur'ān and Aristotle's work. As with Homer, there may be something intuitive in the rhetoric, perhaps related to orality.

For example, we hear (41:33; translation: Abdel Haleem 2004:309): "Who speaks better than someone who calls people to God, does what is right, and says 'I am one of those devoted to God'?" The original listeners recognized that the *ēthos*, or moral character, of the speaker, Prophet Muhammad, is exemplified by his desire to speak well and encourage people to what is good and right. The next statement indicates he will "repel evil with what is better," and thereby perhaps persuade enemies to become friends.

In the same sura, bitter anger (one of the passions detailed by Aristotle, *Rh*. 2.2/1378b-1380a) is expressed in response to disbelievers who try to drown out the Qur'ān (41:27-28; Abdel Haleem 2004:309): "We shall certainly give the disbelievers a taste of severe punishment. We shall repay them according to their worst deeds—that is the reward of the enemies of God—the Fire will be their lasting home, a payment for their rejection of Our revelations." These emotionally charged statements, in the voice of God, draw on *pathos* to affect listeners' *diathesis*.

The principle of reasoned argument in hortatory, deliberative rhetoric, according to Aristotle (*Rh*. 1.2.13/1357a) has two varieties. The first type, the inductive argument, usually is a "paradigm" from the past and, based on its outcome, listeners can judge what their own course of action should be. Examples of this type of rhetorical *logos* in the Qur'ān are numerous (for example, 26:5-191, nearly the entirety of the sura, is given over to this kind of argument). In this sura, we find the examples of 'Ād and Ṯamūd (41:13-17), peoples who rejected their prophets and, as a result, were destroyed. The first listeners knew the tales of the prosperity of these societies and some may have passed by the ruins of those societies, and so must reason whether to accept Prophet Muhammad who has come to them. The second type of *logos* is the enthymeme. An example of this type in the sura cited is (41:9; translation: Abdel Haleem 2004:307): "How can you disregard the One who created the earth in two Days? How can you set up other gods as His equals? He is the Lord of all the worlds!" Here the reasoning is: "It is good to venerate those from whom benefits are received. God created everything everywhere, including you, so how could you neglect Him and prefer lesser gods?" One needs to recognize that for ancient peoples in the West there was no explicit reasoned argument for what we now call *atheism*, and the existence of god/s was a given (*atheos* and related words in ancient Greek generally centered on neglect, abandonment, and occasionally the denial of the state-sanctioned gods).

There are many rhetorically persuasive passages like the ones cited here, but there are also "control" passages that do not exhibit an underlying goal of persuasion, for example, passages comprised primarily of imperatives, as at 17:22-38. In the listening environment both types of passages would support cohesion in the group who are persuaded.

Sound

A wide array of figures permit tonal utterances to be easily memorized by both reciters and listeners, and they contribute to the overall euphony (Gk. "good sound") of the Qur'ān. These fig-

ures include alliteration, assonance, *jinās*, *insijām*, and *saj'* (rhymed prose), as well as anadiplosis, isocolon, onomatopoeia (and mimesis), parisosis, paromoiosis, among others.

Alliteration is the repetition of consonant sounds, often at the beginning of words, and sometimes involves two or more close-sounding or complementary consonants in clusters. The clustering of consonants similar in sound is very common in the Qur'ān. It increases the listener's attention and facilitates memory:

> (57:27) رَأْفَةً وَرَحْمَةً وَرَهْبَانِيَّةً ra'fatan wa-raḥmatan wa-rahbānīyatan, "compassion and mercy, and monasticism" (*r* sound at beginning of words; note that the connector *wa-* does not count as a word).

Assonance is the repetition in close proximity of the same or similar vowel sounds. Assonance increases the listener's attention and enhances memory of what one has heard:

> (32:13) لَأَمْلَأَنَّ جَهَنَّمَ la'amla'anna jahannama. . . , "Of a certainty, I will fill hell. . . ." Nine short *a* sounds begin the statement.

Jinās is word play, often often translated as *paronomasia*, but paronomasia is traditionally limited to the contrast in meaning between two (or more) words similar in sound of equal (or near equal) length. The ancient Greeks applied the term *paronomasia*[11] to what we would consider a pun, with a desired effect of surprise or humor, as in this statement by the fourth-century BC politician Aeschines: οὐ γὰρ τὸν **τρόπον** ἀλλὰ τὸν **τόπον** [μόνον] μετήλλαξεν "for he did not change his *disposition* (*tropon*), just his *position* (*topon*)" (Aeschin. 3.78). Although paronomasia and puns repeat the same or similar consonants, normally in the same order, it is the shift in meaning that is responsible for any rhetorical force the figure may have. *Jinās* embraces paronomasia, certainly, but because of the triliteral-root structure of most Arabic words (with a triliteral root), there is far greater flexibility and variety in playing the component letters off one another as well as other letters that are similar (in sound or written shape). As a result, the rhetorical effects of *jinās* are less frequently humorous or manifestly clever, but, rather, are more often purely sonorous. This may be due in part to an intrinsic "organic" character that Arabic possesses, both in its root and word-forming systems and in its treasury of distinctive phonemes (spoken and/or written) that multiply possible plays between words, providing a rich substrate in which *jinās* flourishes naturally in Arabic style.

English and other Indo-European languages, including Greek and Latin, rely on fixed, "inorganic" block roots and similarly fixed prefixes and suffixes. For example, the Latin root *duc* ("to lead") appears in a number of English words, as *ab**duc**t, ad**duc**e, con**duc**tion, de**duc**t, in**duc**e, intro**duc**tory, irre**duc**ible, pro**duc**e, re**duc**e, se**duc**e*. The root *duc* is unchanged, with its vowel an integral part of it. Puns made from words in this list might "work," but only the best authors could use them so the pun isn't silly.

Compare *duc* to the typical Arabic root, as in the word *jinās*: it is composed of three letters, *jīm*, *nūn*, and *sīn*, and the vowels of the word *jinās* (the short *i* and the long *a*) are not con-

[11] The Arabic word *jinās* is thought to derive from the ancient Greek word γένος ("race or kin; kind or species"), suggestive of the similarity (that is, same classification) that characterizes the Arabic figure.

sidered part of the root. As in English, phonemes may be added in the front and at the back (for example, *ab*-duc-*tion*,), but in Arabic phonemes can also be added in between the root letters (a process that would destroy the root of English *duc*). The result is a variety of different-sounding, but related words: ***jannasa*** ("to make similar or to classify"), ***jānasa*** ("to be related"); *ta**jannasa*** ("to become naturalized, obtain citizenship"), *ta**jānasa*** ("to be related"), ***jins*** ("a kind"), ***jinsī*** ("generic"), ***jinsīya*** ("nationality"), *ta**jnīs*** ("paronomasia"), *mu**jānas**ah* ("relatedness"), *ta**jannus*** ("naturalization") *muta**jānis*** ("similar"). In addition, the Arabic script may make the etymological connection more prominent than their Latin script transliterations.

Because the Arabic root letters are linked "organically" (they can appear with many combinations of prefixes, infixes, and suffixes), at some level the native speaker of Arabic identifies words through these root letters. When the root letters are shifted, jumbled, or altered (for example, a play between one kind of *t* sound and another or one root letter with a dot above and another with a dot below), a native speaker apprehends the shift intuitively as subtle, satisfying, even sublime, like watching the colors of the setting sun slowly, almost imperceptibly shift from yellow and orange to red and violet through to deep violet blue and the dusky grays of eventide. The point is that *jinās*, although sometimes funny or witty like our puns, normally stirs up a sense of beauty and amazement in the listener.

Because the roots of Arabic may be perceived in the mind with the three letters of the root, words can be played against each other when the letters of the root are transposed. Thus, the root of *jinās* (*jīm – nūn – sīn*) can be heard in direct relation to any words created out of the following roots, five in use and one that is hypothetical: *nūn – jīm – sīn* (words meaning "unclean," and so on) *sīn – jīm – nūn* (*prison* and related words), *nūn – sīn – jīm* (*fabric, texture, weaving,* plus related words), *sīn – nūn – jīm* (*soot, smut*), and *jīm – sīn – nūn** (*not used). Furthermore, a root letter may be changed to another of a similar sound or similar written shape to likewise create the same word-play effect.

By its broadest definition, *jinās* may be said to include almost all euphonious effects found in the Qur'ān. Scholars through the ages (for example, Suyūṭī 1967:ch. 58 v. 2:271ff. and 1986) have categorized *jinās* into more than two dozen types (though not all of these are found in the Qur'ān), and many seem merely academic rather than necessary to grasp the figure's essential features. The following classifications incorporate most all types: (1) meaning; (2) vocalization; (3) written shape; (4) reordering of letters; (5) one-letter substitution; (6) number of letters; (7) etymology; and (8) false etymology:

(1) Regarding meaning, a word's connotations or denotations may be played against each other (*al-jinās al-tāmm* (Suyūṭī 1986:73ff.; Mehren 1970:154):

(30:55) وَيَوْمَ تَقُومُ ٱلسَّاعَةُ . . . مَا لَبِثُوا۟ غَيْرَ سَاعَةٍ wa-yawma taqūmu s-sā'ah. . . mā labiṯū ġayra sā'ah, "And on the day when the *Hour* comes. . . they had not stayed but an *hour*." The first *sā'ah* ("hour") refers to the Day of Judgment, whereas the second refers to the brevity of their lives in the *dunya* (the "lower" life, this earthly life).

(2:215) مَآ أَنفَقْتُم مِّنْ خَيْرٍ . . . وَمَا تَفْعَلُوا۟ مِنْ خَيْرٍ mā anfaqtum min ḵayr. . . wa-mā taf'alū min ḵayr, "what you spend of *good*. . . and what you do of *good*. . . ." The first *ḵayr* refers to your wealth, money,

or property, whereas the second *ḵayr* means good works performed for the sake of Allah to purify one of evil.

(2) In terms of vocalization, two words differ in their vowels (short, long; *fatḥah*, *ḍammah, kasrah*), or there may be an increase or decrease in quality or a change of a letter involving *sukūn* (a stop), or *tašdīd,* (a doubling of a letter). This type has been dubbed *al-jinās al-muḥarraf*, and is also called, among other names, *al-jinās al-muġāyir* (Suyūṭī 1986:161; cf. Mehren 1970:156):

(5:50) وَمَنْ أَحْسَنُ مِنَ ٱللَّهِ wa-man aḥsanu min allāh, "and *who* (man) is better *than* (min) Allah."

(42:53) أَلَآ إِلَى ٱللَّهِ alā ilā llāh, "*is it not to* Allah. . . ?" The question particle (a) and the negative adverb (lā), "is it not. . . ?" played against the preposition *ilā*, "to or toward."

(3) The written letter shape may also come into play. Two words differ in their letter forms (as they appear in print), for example, in the number or placement of dots, resulting in changes in the root (*al-jinās al-ḵaṭṭī*), a *jinās* of the written form (Suyūṭī 1986:180; Mehren 1970:157):

(18:104) وَهُمْ يَحْسَبُونَ أَنَّهُمْ يُحْسِنُونَ صُنْعًا wa-hum yaḥsabūna annahum yuḥsinūna ṣun'ā, "and they *thought* (yaḥsabūna) that they *were doing good* (yuḥsinūna) by their work." Change between *bā'* and *nūn*.

(45:11) هَٰذَا هُدًى hāḏā hudā, "*this* (haḏā) is *guidance* (hudā)." Change between *ḏāl* and *dāl*.

(26:79-80) وَٱلَّذِى هُوَ يُطْعِمُنِى وَيَسْقِينِ ﴿٧٩﴾ وَإِذَا مَرِضْتُ فَهُوَ يَشْفِينِ ﴿٨٠﴾ wallaḏī huwa yuṭ'imunī wa-yasqīn/ wa-iḏā mariḍtu fa-huwa yašfīn, "And He is the one who feeds me and *gives me drink* (yasqīni) / And when I am ill, then He *cures me* (yašfīni)." Change between *sīn* and *šīn* and *qāf* and *fā'*.

(4) Letters may be reordered. Thus, two (or more) successive words mix up the letters found in the other half (anagram) or the letters of the words read the same forward and backward (palindrome), a *jinās* of variation (called *al-jinās al-maqlūb* or *tajnīs al-qalb,* Suyūṭī 1986:197, 1967:ch. 58 v. 2:272; Mehren 1970:158):

(2:130) إِلَّا مَن سَفِهَ نَفْسَهُۥ illā man safiha nafsahū, "except for one who *makes a fool of* (safiha) *himself* (nafsahū)." (anagram; the *nūn* of the word *man* can be included in the letters counted in the anagram: *nūn, sīn, fā',* and *hā'*).

(36:40) وَكُلٌّ فِى فَلَكٍ wa-kullun fī falakin, "and *each one in an orbit*" (palindrome: *kāf-lām-fā'-yā'-fā'-lām-kāf*).

(74:3) وَرَبَّكَ فَكَبِّرْ wa-rabbaka fa-kabbir, "And *glorify your Lord* (accusative)" (palindrome: *rā'-bā'-kāf-fā'-kāf-bā'-rā'*).

(5) One letter may substitute for another. Two words, not necessarily contiguous, differ by a single letter (that is, change of a root letter), which may or may not be close in their point of articulation (*al-jinās al-maṭma',* also called *tajnīs al taṣrīf,* Suyūṭī 1986:210; cf. Mehren, 1970:159f., who divides this type based on point of articulation); the words often rhyme in English:

(6:26) وَهُمْ يَنْهَوْنَ عَنْهُ وَيَنْـَٔوْنَ عَنْهُ wa-hum yanhauna 'anhu wa-yan'auna 'anhu, "And *they keep* (others) (yanhauna) from it [Qur'ān] and *they go away* (yan'auna) from it themselves."

(33:51) وَكَانَ ٱللَّهُ عَلِيمًا حَلِيمًا wa-kāna llāhu 'alīman ḥalīman "and Allah is *knowledgeable* ('alīman) and *mild tempered* (ḥalīman)."

(27:22) وَجِئْتُكَ مِن سَبَإٍ بِنَبَإٍ يَقِينٍ wa-ji'tuka min saba'in bi-naba'in yaqīn, "and I have come to you from *Saba'* (sabā'in) with certain *news* (nabā'in)."

(6) There may be a difference in the number of letters. For example, two words may show a difference in the number of written (usually consonantal) letters, such as a long vs. short vowel, or one has an extra consonant compared to the other (called by Suyūṭī 1986:244 *tajnīs al-tarjī'* or, citing Ḵalīl ibn Aybak aṣ-Ṣafadī, *al-jinās al-muzdawij*; cf. Mehren 1970:157f., who divides this type into *al-jinās al-nāqiṣ* and *al-jinās al-muḏayyil*):

(28:45) وَلَٰكِنَّا كُنَّا مُرْسِلِينَ wa-lākinnā kunnā mursilīna, "*but* (lakinnā) *We were* (kunnā) senders of messengers."

(16:69) كُلِي مِن كُلِّ ٱلثَّمَرَٰتِ kulī min kulli l-ṯamarāti, "*eat* (kulī) of *all* (kulli) the fruits."

(7) Etymological *jinās* involves root letters that are split, separated, or dissociated (*al- jinās al-ištiqāq*; Suyūṭī 1986:270):

(56:89) فَرَوْحٌ وَرَيْحَانٌ fa-rawḥun wa-rayḥānun, "Then, rest (rawḥ) and plenty (rayḥān, all what want could need or want)."

(30:43) فَأَقِمْ وَجْهَكَ لِلدِّينِ ٱلْقَيِّمِ fa-aqim wajhaka li-ddīn al-qayyim, "set (aqim) your (masculine singular) face to the straight (qayyim) faith."

Etymological *jinās* includes examples that students of Arabic readily notice (because the words are often confused), such as related verb forms in close proximity, for example, I and II (96:5), I and IV (17:105), I and III (2:9), II and III (3:175), III and X (18:29), IV and X (9:6), and so on. Most of these relations cannot be reproduced in English, for example, causatives against the plain form (I-II or I-IV), such as *'alima* (to learn: form I) and *'allama* (to teach: form II, literally, to

cause to learn), though there are a few rare English examples: *fall* and *fell* (= to cause to fall); *rise* and *raise* (= to cause to rise); *lie* and *lay* (= to cause to lie). In Arabic the verbs of any of the usual 10 forms may be contrasted with any other and qualify as a form of *jinās* that in nearly every case cannot be reproduced in English.

Closer to English, the passive may be contrasted with the active, but in English a compound verb is required to express the passive (for example, he *was warned*), whereas in Arabic a single word suffices: (VIII at 2:166) ٱلَّذِينَ ٱتُّبِعُوا۟ allaḏīna ttubi‘ū (those who are followed). . . ٱلَّذِينَ ٱتَّبَعُوا۟ allaḏīna ttaba‘ū (those who follow); (IV at 37:72-73) مُّنذِرِينَ munḏirīn (those sent to warn) /. . . ٱلْمُنذَرِينَ munḏarīn (those warned).

Finally, a variety of cognates (including cognate accusative) may be used in a statement creating a strong rhetorical effect: (6:82) ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ وَلَمْ يَلْبِسُوٓا۟ إِيمَـٰنَهُم بِظُلْمٍ أُو۟لَـٰٓئِكَ لَهُمُ ٱلْأَمْنُ llaḏīna āmanū walam yalbisū īmānahum bi-ẓulmin ūlā’ika lahum al-amn, “Those who have believed (āmanū) and have not confused their belief (īmān) with wrongdoing, theirs is the security (amn).”

(8) In a false etymology, two words have similar-sounding letters, to the extent they appear to be from the same triliteral root, though they are not (called *al-jinās al-muṭlaq* or *tasnīs al-iṭlāq* according to Suyūṭī 1986: 272, [1967]:ch. 58 v. 2:273; and “pseudo-derivative paronomasia” by Cachia 1998:29):

> (26:168) قَالَ إِنِّى لِعَمَلِكُم مِّنَ ٱلْقَالِينَ qāla innī li-‘amalikum min al-qālīn, “*He said* (qāla) I am among *those who hate* (qālīn) what you (plura) do.”

> (55:54) وَجَنَى ٱلْجَنَّتَيْنِ wa-janā al-jannatayn, “and the *fruit* (janā) of the *two gardens* (jannatayn).”

Insijām (Ar. “fluency, harmony, order”) refers to the sweetness of any phrase that flows like water; thus, it describes portions of a nonpoetic work whose rhythm is borrowed from poetry. The Qur’ān is not a poem (36:69), nor is it in meter. But certain *āyah*s include phrases that have poetic rhythms with scansion proper to well-known ancient meters, such as *al-ṭawīl, al-madīd, al-basīṭ,* and so on (with accepted substitutions for certain feet in some cases; see Wright 1967.2:358-68). In antiquity listeners expected to hear snippets of speech in poetic meter because these phrases, if they are well crafted, refined, and relevant to the context, elevate the whole work with a unparalleled, majestic beauty, though the use of an entire line of poetry was discouraged as “most unpleasant” (Quintilian, *Inst. orat.* 9.4.72). Such partial poetic lines may seem purely accidental to modern Westerners, who might suspect only specialists would recognize them in recitation. In fact, a reciter may intuitively recite a metered portion of an *āyah* with intensive passion or a poetic sensibility such that the phrase resonates in the head of a listener with distinctive force, and sometimes such a phrase becomes an “ear worm,” in a sense confirming its its inherent metrical memorability.

Early Arabic poetry was defined by meter and, as in Greek and Latin poetry, was determined by the quality, or length, of the poetic syllable (rather than by a stress accent, as in English). A syllable may be short or long: The short syllable is “open” and short (that is, a short vowel only or a consonant plus a short vowel). The long syllable is either long by nature (long vowel or diphthong) or “closed” with a consonant (since two Arabic consonants cannot be pronounced together, except at the end of a line, the first of two consonants without an intervening vowel will close a syllable. Arabic consonants

include those English speakers might think of as made up of two, for example, the *sh* sound of the letter *šīn,* a single consonant (phonetic ʃ, as in English *sh*ip) that cannot be divided into *s* and *h*). Below, the name of the meter (and its meaning in English) and a typical scansion are provided, along with a reference in Wright's grammar; S stands for short and L for long (x marks the end of a line where the syllable quantity is not relevant). These are followed by an example from the Qur'ān along with a transliteration into English letters (letters are transliterated as written, not as sounded with Quranic assimilation, for example, in (4) "bu'dan li-" in recitation is sounded "bu'dal li-." In these transliterations, poetic syllables are shown in the following way: short syllables indicated by lowercase letters and long syllables by capitals. Spaces are added to indicate the metrical feet (and not word breaks); syllables that are created by connecting two words are joined by underscores:

(1) *al-ṭawīl* ("the long") SLL SLLL SLL SLLL (Wright 1967.2:§211).
(18:29) فَمَن شَآءَ فَلۡيُؤۡمِن وَمَن شَآءَ فَلۡيَكۡفُرۡ
fa-MAN ŠĀ- | 'a FAL-YU'-MIN | wa-MAN ŠĀ- | 'a FAL-YAK-FUR

(2) *al-madīd* ("the extended") LSLL SSL SSL. . . (Wright 1967.2:§220).
(11:37) وَٱصۡنَعِ ٱلۡفُلۡكَ بِأَعۡيُنِنَا
WĀṢ-na-'I_L-FUL- | ka bi-'Ā'- | yu-ni-NĀ

(3) *al-basīṭ* ("the outspread") SLSL LSL LLSL SSL (Wright 1967.2:§215).
(46:25) فَأَصۡبَحُواْ لَا يُرَىٰٓ إِلَّا مَسَٰكِنُهُمۡ
fa-'ĀṢ-ba-ḤŪ | LĀ yu-RĀ | 'IL-LĀ ma-SĀ- | ki-nu-HUM

(4) *al-wāfir* ("the exuberant") SLLL SLLL SLL (Wright 1967.2:§207)
(11:60) أَلَا بُعۡدٗا لِّعَادٖ قَوۡمِ هُودٖ
a-LĀ BU'-DAN | li-'Ā-DIN_QAW- | mi HŪD[12]

(5) *al-kāmil* ("the perfect") LLSL LLSL SSLSL LLSL (Wright 1967.2:§206).
(2:213) وَٱللَّهُ يَهۡدِي مَن يَشَآءُ إِلَىٰ صِرَٰطٖ مُّسۡتَقِيمٍ
WAL-LĀ-hu YAH- | DĪ MAN ya-ŠĀ'- | u i-LĀ ṣi-RĀ- | ṬIN MUS-ta-QĪM[13]

(6) *al-hazaj* ("the trilling") SLLS SLLS SLLS SLL (Wright 1967.2:§208).
(12:93) فَأَلۡقُوهُ عَلَىٰ وَجۡهِ أَبِي يَأۡتِ بَصِيرٗا
fa-'AL-QŪ-hu | 'a-LĀ WAJ-hi | a-BĪ YA'-ti | ba-ṢĪ-RAN

(7) *al-rajaz* ("the trembling") SLSL SLSL SLSL SLSL (Wright 1967.2:§204). The base is SLSL and the first syllable of any foot may substitute with a long, LLSL (as in the first foot cited here; other substitutions are also possible).
(3:200) يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ ٱصۡبِرُواْ وَصَابِرُواْ
YĀ-AY-yu-HĀ_L- | la-D̲Ī-na_Ā- | ma-NŪ_Ṣ-bi-RŪ | wa-ṢĀ-bi-RŪ

[12] Note that the long last syllable of the scansion does not appear in this Qur'ānic sample, since it appears at the end of an *āyah*, which normally has "pausal" pronunciation without final short vowels or *tanwīn.*

[13] This extract appears at the end of an *āyah*; see note in example (4).

(8) *al-ramal* ("the running") SSLL LSLS SSLS LSLx (Wright 1967.2:§219): the base here is SSLL, but substitutions include LSLS.
(34:13) وَجِفَانٍ كَٱلْجَوَابِ وَقُدُورٍ رَّاسِيَـٰتٍ
wa-ji-FĀ-NIN | KAL-ja-WĀ-bi | wa-qu-DŪ-RIN | RĀ-si-YĀ-TIN

(9) *al-sarīʿ* ("the swift") LLSL LSSL LSx (Wright 1967.2:§205).
(2:259) أَوْ كَٱلَّذِى مَرَّ عَلَىٰ قَرْيَةٍ
AW KAL-la-D̲Ī | MAR-ra ʿa-LĀ | QAR-ya-TIN

(10) *al-munsariḥ* ("the flowing") LLSL L LLSL LSx (Wright 1967.2:§216).
(76:2) إِنَّا خَلَقْنَا ٱلْإِنسَـٰنَ مِن نُّطْفَةٍ
IN-NĀ k̲a-LAQ- | NĀ_L- | IN-SĀ-na MIN | NUṬ-fa-TIN

(11) *al-kafīf* ("the light," or "nimble") LSLL SLSL SSLL (Wright 1967, 2:§221).
(4:78) لَا يَكَادُونَ يَفْقَهُونَ حَدِيثًا
LĀ ya-KĀ-DŪ- | na YAF-qa-HŪ- | na ḥa-DĪ-T̲Ā[14]

(12) *al-muqtaḍab* ("the lopped" or "curtailed") LSL SL SSL (Wright 1967.2:§217).
(2:10) فِى قُلُوبِهِم مَّرَضٌ
FĪ qu-LŪ- | bi-HIM | ma-ra-ḌUN

(13) *al-mutaqārib* ("the tripping," that is, taking short steps) SLL SLL SLL SLL (Wright 1967.2:§210). The base is normally SLS for this meter, but SLL may substitute for any foot.
(7:183) وَأُمْلِى لَهُمْ ۚ إِنَّ كَيْدِى مَتِينٌ
wa-UM-LĪ | la-HUM IN- | na KAY-DĪ | ma-TĪN[15]

*Saj*ʿ(Ar.; pl. *asja*ʿ) is commonly translated as *rhymed prose* and in the pre-Islamic and early Islamic periods was associated in particular with soothsayers (*kuhhān*; s. *kāhin*, as at 69:42), but the *saj*ʿ of the Qur'ān is much more than rhymed prose—it energizes the pure, natural expressions of the Qur'ān so they become rhetorically compelling and semantically dynamic and interconnected. Because it is characterized by cola (rhythmical units of an utterance spoken in a single breath, such as phrases and clauses) of similar length (for example, by counting words), morphology, and sound, *saj*ʿ can be compared with the ancient Greek and Latin figure known as *paromoiosis*. *Saj*ʿ originally referred to the cooing of pigeons, which may be why many Muslims have dissociated the Qur'ān from it, as it is "a rather humble epithet for Qur'ānic discourse" (Stewart 1990:107). Moreover, the traditional *saj*ʿ of the *kuhhān* involved a prioritization of sound over meaning, resulting in stilted phrases that are nonsensical, incomprehensible, and often downright laughable. Given the distinctively excellent nature of the Qur'ān, the preferred term for rhymes at the end of *āyah*s is *fāṣilah* ("partition, interval"), but most Western writers continue to use the term *saj*ʿ.

[14] This extract appears at the end of an *āyah*; see note in example (4).

[15] This extract appears at the end of an *āyah*; see note in example (4).

Rhyme (and impressions of rhyme when similar-sounding endings are used) is perhaps the most common feature of *saj'* noticed by Westerners and nonnative speakers of Arabic generally. The final word of nearly every *āyah* may be pronounced with *taskīn*, that is, in pausal form (as if with *sukūn* on the last alphabetical letter; exceptions are those *āyāt* where one is required to continue reading over the *āyah* break). The result is that *saj'* permits the rhyming of syntactically nonequivalent forms (for example, a subject noun with an object noun, which in poetry normally could not rhyme).

In the Qur'ān the most common rhymes occur at the ends of *āyah*s, in a sense marking the breaks between them (hence, the name *fāṣilah*); for example, sura 53 (an-Najm) is entirely in *saj'*. But phrases within *āyah*s occasionally are in *saj'*. The *Iklāṣ* has an example of a *d* rhyme within an *āyah* as well as between two *āyah*s: (112:3-4) لَمْ يَلِدْ وَلَمْ يُولَدْ ﴿٣﴾ وَلَمْ يَكُن لَّهُۥ كُفُوًا أَحَدٌۢ ﴿٤﴾ lam yalid wa-lam yūlad / wa-lam yakun lahū kufuwan aḥad "not was He parented (yalid) nor does He parent (yūlad) / And not is anyone (aḥad) an equal to Him." Note that *yalid* and *yūlad* both represent *saj'* rhymes (though because they are within an *āyah* there usually is no stopping in recitation to highlight them), as do *yūlad* and *aḥad*. If *yūlad* and *aḥad* were not pronounced in pausal form, however, they would not rhyme (it would be *yūlad* against *aḥadun*).

Tasjī' is the term used to describe the agreement in end portions of two or more *āyah*s or phrases in terms of *wazn* (often translated as "meter" but in this case refers to a word's rhythmical pattern, which usually is equivalent to its morphology) and *rawīy*, or *qāfīyah* ("rhyme"). As in poetry the *wazn* of *saj'* involves long and short syllables, but its "metrical foot" depends on the word unit, normally equal to what is written as one word (and not the flow of syllables across word boundaries to make up iambs, dactyls, and so on), and each foot's stress accent, which allows introductory and other unstressed words to be left out of the count. Most people who hear the Qur'ān intuitively feel that it is not simply rhymed prose, but appreciation of these "metrical" qualities is often difficult for modern people to define, in part because segments that agree may vary in length. Three elements combine in various ways to make *saj'* work: First, there must be parisosis, the approximate equality of a series of at least two cola (rhythmical units of an utterance spoken in no more than one breath, such as phrases or clauses) as measured by the similarity in length (the number of elements, counting words, or by some authorities syllables, in each colon) with a similarity in syntax (the order of elements need not be the same) and in stress (or accent) pattern; it is called *i'tidāl* (see Stewart, 2013, especially pp. 25-33, for a very instructive examination of this feature). The ends of the cola and *āyah*s strike the ears most prominently and here the other two elements may be present: the final words of each end portion share the same patterns of longs and shorts (*wazn*), and the alphabetic-letter rhyme (*rawīy*).

In the refined environment of the Qur'ān, in which both sound and meaning are woven together, *saj'* enhances the rhythm of prose and because of that rhythm can produce in listeners a more facile comprehension. The reason is that the strong, rhythmic element of the *wazn* of *saj'* alerts a listener to the completion of a thought; individual thoughts thus gather, grow, and become unified through the cadence of *wazn*. Quranic *saj'* is therefore much more than its rhyme, because the strength and energy of the thoughts are conveyed primarily by the *wazn*; this feature has led some commentators to dismiss the *rawīy* of *saj'* as nonessential. There is no comparable linguistic patterning available in the major Western languages.

There are several broad classifications of *saj'*, based on *wazn* and *rawīy*, since many sources indicate that only one of the two elements is required:

(1) with *wazn* and without *rawīy*: *muwāzanah* ("equally weighted"). The final words of the phrases must have the same metrical shape by syllable length (long, L; short, S) and stress accent to have *wazn*:

(88:15-16) وَنَمَارِقُ مَصۡفُوفَةٌ ١٥ وَزَرَابِيُّ مَبۡثُوثَةٌ ١٦ wa-namāriqu maṣfūfah / wa-zarābiyu mabṯūtah, "And cushions maṣfūfa (neatly arrayed) / And variegated carpets mabtūta (spread out)" [L-L-S; form I passive participles of geminate verbs (whose last two root letters are the same)]. The "rhyme" one feels hearing this type of *saj'* consists only of the nonalphabetic vowel (ة not counted).

(1A) with "superwazn" and without *rawīy*: *mumātil* ("similar"). Sometimes we find several words in succession matching another group of words in the next phrase or *āyah*, resulting in a "superwazn" pattern:

(37:117-118) وَءَاتَيۡنَٰهُمَا ٱلۡكِتَٰبَ ٱلۡمُسۡتَبِينَ ١١٧ وَهَدَيۡنَٰهُمَا ٱلصِّرَٰطَ ٱلۡمُسۡتَقِيمَ ١١٨ wa-ātaynāhumā l-kitāba al-mustabīn / wa-hadaynāhumā ṣ-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm, "And We gave the two of them the book *al-mustabīn* (that helps to make all things clear) / And We guided the two of them to the path *al-mustaqīm* (that is righteous)" [same metrical forms: *wa-ataynāhumā* and *wa-hadaynāhumā*; *al-kitāba* and *aṣ-ṣirāta*; and two form X participles used as adjectives complete the lines].

(2) with *rawīy*, without *wazn*: *muṭarraf* ("with color at the ends"):

(53:10-11) فَأَوۡحَىٰٓ إِلَىٰ عَبۡدِهِۦ مَآ أَوۡحَىٰ ١٠ مَا كَذَبَ ٱلۡفُؤَادُ مَا رَأَىٰٓ ١١ fa-awḥā ilā 'abdihī mā awḥā / mā kaḏaba al-fu'ādu ma ra'ā, "So He revealed to His servant what He revealed— / Not did the [Prophet's] heart fabricate (or distort) what he saw" [final alphabetic letter is *yā'* (pronounced as a long *ā*)].

(2A) with "superrawīy" and without *wazn: luzūm mā lā yalzam* ("adhering to what is not necessary"). We commonly find "superrhymes" of more than the final alphabetic letter that are neither strained nor forced, as they might be in English if English could produce such rhymes:

(75:29-30) وَٱلۡتَفَّتِ ٱلسَّاقُ بِٱلسَّاقِ ٢٩ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ يَوۡمَئِذٍ ٱلۡمَسَاقُ ٣٠ wa-ltaffat is-sāq bi-ssāq / ilā rabbika yawma'iḏini l-masāq, "And the leg will meet the leg (for example, as legs of corpse put beside each other for burial) / The drive on that day [will be] to your Lord" [*sīn* and *alif*, plus *qāf*].

(71:13-14) مَّا لَكُمۡ لَا تَرۡجُونَ لِلَّهِ وَقَارًا ١٣ وَقَدۡ خَلَقَكُمۡ أَطۡوَارًا ١٤ mā lakum lā tarjūna li-llāhi waqārā / wa-qad ḵalaqakum aṭwārā, "Why are you not in awe of Allah *waqārā* (with respect to His profound authority)? / When indeed He has created you *aṭwārā* (in various stages, forms, conditions, and so on)" [final alphabetic letters, *alif, rā', alif* rhyme, but the two adverbial accusatives are not the same: S-L-L vs. L-L-L].

(3) with *wazn* and with *rawīy*: *mutawāzī* ("parallel"):

(100:6-7) إِنَّ ٱلْإِنسَـٰنَ لِرَبِّهِۦ لَكَنُودٌ ﴿٦﴾ وَإِنَّهُۥ عَلَىٰ ذَٰلِكَ لَشَهِيدٌ ﴿٧﴾ inna l-insāna li-rabbihi la-kanūd / wa-innahū ʿalā ḏālika la-šahīd, "Indeed the human being to his Lord is ungrateful / And indeed to that he himself is a witness" [*wazn*: S-S-L; final alphabetic letter is *dāl*].

(3A) with "superwazn" and with "superrawīy": *muraṣṣaʿ* ("decorated"):

(82:13-14) إِنَّ ٱلْأَبْرَارَ لَفِى نَعِيمٍ ﴿١٣﴾ وَإِنَّ ٱلْفُجَّارَ لَفِى جَحِيمٍ ﴿١٤﴾ inna l-abrāra la-fī naʿīm / wa-inna l-fujjāra la-fī ḥamīm, "Indeed the beneficent will be in bliss / And the wicked will be in hellfire" [*wa* not counted in second *āyah*; one extra letter, *yā'* plus *mīm*].

The Use of Oral Signs in the Qur'ān

The many figures defined and alluded to above create a texture that one might compare to patterns of typically "Islamic" brocades, carpets, and architectural elements. That is, the figures' intricacies may not be appreciated in detail all at once, but with successive viewings one may detect something different each time, while the pattern one previously had apprehended may become less apparent. Certainly, each hearing of the same text provides new observations, and new extrinsic features are recognized.

In this regard, the figures and linguistic patterns present themselves, not as true formulas *sensu* Parry and Lord, but as formulaic analogs functionally equivalent to true formulas. In some cases, the "process of substitution is pushed to its extreme, and no key words are left to be shared in common by two" of these analogs (Monroe 1972:20). As such, they operate as one of the formulaic systems of the Qur'ān that reveal the textual substance's original "provenance," that is, the first environment for oral performance (cf. Bannister 2014:207). In a computer analysis of the Qur'ān using "blocks" of three Arabic bases at a time, one researcher has determined that "formulaic" material comprises up to 52 percent of the Qur'ān, an amount he reckoned "astonishingly high," though there is not adequate evidence to conclude the work was produced in an oral-traditional manner (Bannister 2014:274f.).

Although the text is not oral traditional, the oral texture of the Qur'ān, with its myriad figures and repetitions, operates within a remarkably robust, unbroken recitation tradition. As a result, each performance, each recitation event, has kinetic, rather than static, energy that permits direct and rapid communication between reciter and listener, and that communication, to borrow from Foley, is "explosively connotative rather than restricted in focus, bristling with idiomatic implication rather than claustrophobically clichéd" (Foley 1999:xii). Because each recitation event is imbued with this dynamic communicative potential, long-time listeners (who understand the language) hear each recitation as both old and new, with the present performance interjecting fresh meaning into their understanding that enriches and encompasses all past understandings.

The formulaic system embedded in the words of the text permits a *qāri'*—intentionally or not—to convey his particular interpretation of the moment by associating highlighted formulaic patterns of his choice in performance. In other words, the *qāri'* recites with his natural understanding, how he is thinking at the time, and the choice he makes of which formulaic segments (structures, themes or ideas, words, phrases, phonemes, rhythmic patterns) to bring to the surface to

communicate those thoughts to the listeners. Of course, this is the "normal" way spoken language works, absent a wooden, stiff, or lifeless manner of delivery. It's also what distinguishes a first-class opera singer—the ability to use primarily the voice to communicate the meaning of a frozen text (in this case with a frozen tonal pattern as well).

The formulaic analogs of the Qur'ān do more than just convey the meaning. They, "the formulas, narrative patterns, and other units of utterance," function, much like the *sêmata* (Gk. "signs") that Foley (1999:27) described in regard to the Homeric epics, "not as textual ciphers but as signals potentially rife with implication, as keys to an emergent reality." In the case of the Qur'ān, a reciter can choose one or more of these units to highlight and link with a companion of the same wording, phrasing, rhythm, or theme in the next section or sura, signaling what is to come. While no "emergent reality" (or narrative movement) is indicated, because the work is not a single protracted narrative like the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, these Quranic *sêmata* may operate "proleptically," or prospectively, to signal something that is about to come in the recitation; in addition, they may work retrospectively to connect with something the reciter also highlighted earlier in the recitation, locking a link. So, unlike Foley's *sêmata*, the ones exploited in public performances of Quranic recitation over the nights of Ramadan are frequently heard in pairs to signal what we've already heard or what we will soon hear. Moreover, the reciter sometimes gives a very light stress to distinctive hapaxes, because for those who are familiar with the material, these unique words identify precisely the reciter's current location in the text (what might be called *bookmarking*). Through this strategy of subtly highlighting select "formulas" the *qāri'* unifies the material recited and makes it cohere in the minds of listeners.

For example, sura 17, al-Isrā' ("The Night Journey"), topically has little in common with its predecessor in sequence, an-Naḥl ("Bees"). Al-Isrā' relates the news of the journey of Prophet Muhammad from Mecca to Jerusalem and back in a single night, and offers alternatively warnings from the tales of those who became arrogant and rejected the messengers sent to them by God and advice on good behavior to avoid similar oppression and punishment, whereas an-Naḥl celebrates the gifts from God of earth and universe and specifically describes the bee and her hive within the natural world and the health benefits of honey to humanity. Equally different in topic and tone is the sura that follows al-Isrā', al-Kahf ("The Cave"), which contains a series of parables about the transient nature of this life, and the promise of the afterlife, starting with the story of a group of believing youth in the time of the Roman empire who sought asylum in a cave and fell asleep there. They awakened, some say hundreds of years later, to a world in which their beliefs were no longer cause for persecution.

Using pairs of *sêmata* to connect an-Naḥl and al-Isrā', for example, a reciter may lightly stress the first word of the *āyah* in an-Naḥl at 16:125 ٱدۡعُ إِلَىٰ سَبِيلِ رَبِّكَ بِٱلۡحِكۡمَةِ وَٱلۡمَوۡعِظَةِ ٱلۡحَسَنَةِ id'u ilā sabīli rabbika bi-l-ḥikmati wa-l-maw'iẓati l-ḥasanah "*call* [them] to the way or your Lord with wisdom and good counsel" and later repeat the same kind of stress at the same position in al-Isrā' at 17:11 وَيَدۡعُ ٱلۡإِنسَٰنُ بِٱلشَّرِّ دُعَآءَهُۥ بِٱلۡخَيۡرِ wa-yad'u l-insānu bi-ššarri du'ā'ahū bi-l-ḵayr "Man *calls* [that is, prays] for evil just as he calls for good." And within al-Isrā' he might recite 17:93 with a special force to raise awareness of it in the ears of listeners, هَلۡ كُنتُ إِلَّا بَشَرٗا رَّسُولٗا hal kuntum illā bašaran rasūlā "am I not just a human being, a messenger." If stressed appropriately, many listeners will immediately grasp that al-Kahf is next, because 17:93 calls to mind a phrase at its end, 18:110

إِنَّمَآ أَنَا۠ بَشَرٌ مِّثۡلُكُمۡ innamā ana bašarun mitlukum "I am only a human being like you."

A single word might be stressed, for example, in an-Naḥl at 16:69 šifā' ("cure, remedy," to describe the healthful properties of honey) and again in al-Isrā' at 17:82 (where the word is applied to the Qur'ān). Or he might choose *a'nāb* (a plural meaning "grapes") at 16:11 (or at 16:67) and repeat the stress at 17:91 on a closely related word, *'inab* (a collective meaning "grapes" from the same root as *a'nāb*). The word can potentially be stressed again at 18:32 as well, and these are the only uses of the word in successive suras.

Because even individual words can be subtly stressed, just as in everyday speech, there are multiple potential *sêmata* that might connect portions of nominally disjunct passages that happen to come in sequence. Moreover, any reciter's stress on a given word or utterance unit may reflect his personal memorization strategy for keeping his place in the text. The use of single-word *sêmata* may be an artifact of community memorization, because of overlap with bookmarking, the use of hapaxes or words found in the text only a few times that are widely separated to remind the audience of the place in the text. For example, at 16:59 we hear *yadussuhu* ("he buries it"), a hapax, which is used in a description of female infanticide (the only other allusion to the practice is at 81:8-9); since this sura is well known, the bookmark might be especially useful for persons who arrive in the middle of the recitation. Sometimes, a two-word phrase is also distinctive enough to bookmark a sura, for example, the phrase خَشۡيَةَ إِمۡلَٰقٍ ḵašyata imlāq, "out of fear of poverty," is used at 17:31, and a similar phrase خَشۡيَةَ ٱلۡإِنفَاقِ ḵašyata al-infāq, "out of fear of spending," occurs at 17:100; the word *imlāq* is used in only one other place (6:151), and *infāq* does not appear elsewhere (although other radically related words do). Most audience members will recognize al-Kahf right from the beginning, but occasionally the rare word *juruza* ("dry or bare" referring to ground) at 18:8 is stressed, perhaps so people will pay attention because the next *āyah* introduces the first story, that of the *aṣḥāb al-kahf*, the "companions of the cave" (an obvious giveaway for the place in the text for most listeners).

It is improbable, if not impossible, that the use of individual words either as *sêmata* or as bookmarks would have been available to reciters in the time of Prophet Muhammad, and highly improbable even in the early years of Islam, after the codification of the text, because both *sêmata* and bookmarks operate within a community who have to a greater or lesser degree memorized the whole, and who expect to hear it in sequence. Moreover, a reciter does not normally "lock the link" between *sêmata* when following another reciter during an evening's recitation, nor will the same reciter stress the same *sêmata* in each year's performance. In that sense, every *sêma* exists in a potential state. There's little need for Quranic-style *sêmata* in a continuous narrative, such as Homer's epics, but bookmarks might well have been active in a community the majority of whom had memorized much of or even all the lines.

Because the Qur'ān was revealed in pieces and not every sura was necessarily first recited as a single unit, this exploitation of the formulaic material in performance today is something that developed some point time after the Qur'ān was ordered and codified into a single book. Comments from elderly participants suggest that the cohesion of the parts recited may not be the result of any current awakening or innovation in recitation; rather, it may be a natural result of many in the community hearing the work in sequence once a year every year, with its formulaic material facilitating not only memory for both reciter and listener but also comprehension of the whole. Indeed, the reciters most skilled in connecting passages using *sêmata* and in bookmarking words

or short phrases are usually the most practiced, those most attentive to meaning, those who have recited the whole for many years.

The impression one has, after listening to the Qur'ān recited again and again, absorbing and memorizing portions, is that such repeated listening draws out the rhetorical passages and enlivens the experience of the words as they fly into the ears. Regardless, hearing the whole in recitation by a skilled *qāri'*, any notion of "random" placement of disconnected pieces evaporates. Instead, the *qāri'* directs listeners to points on the route, like stations on a train line, placing each passage in a larger context, so each sura emerges as a coherent whole; with vocal shading each sura progresses necessarily and seamlessly to the next. Simply stated, *recitation is the key to the integrity of the Qur'ān: it is the fundamental, most basic means by which one perceives the connectedness of the Qur'ān in its totality.*

The largest problem that modern, literate people have in comprehending the Qur'ān and its coherence may relate ironically to our ability to read—swiftly, silently, and with facility, very unlike the way ancients read. Most of us are unable to retain word for word any more than a few words as we read; instead we are trained to grab the ideas expressed in a written or spoken work. We extract the concepts and discard the words. Figurative language, especially when repeated, can distract us from that concept-extracting task, which is the source of our comprehension, and so when a work uses a lot of figurative language we may ask ourselves "what is the point here?"

Oral textures that make memorization easy are both foreign and distantly ancient to our minds. Much-recited works, like the Qur'ān and Homer's poems alike, should be heard again and again, not just once, for an ideal understanding and appreciation. But we, with our "deep interiorization of print" (Ong 1988:263), prefer that, if anything is to be heard again and again, it ideally should be set to music—the music will remind us of the words, even when the words are totally nonsensical and meaningless. Our enjoyment of lyrics (even nonsense) set to music is natural, primitive, and very ancient. But paradoxically, if we take away the music, we tend to laugh at the words or fail to connect to them, perhaps because the lyricists spend less time on the concepts than on making jingly words that harmonize with the tune. In this case, we are not really experiencing the ancient world or orality; we've just substituted music for words to take us on an emotional, intellectual, and spiritual journey that the ancients had when they listened to someone speak or recite well. Ancient people, in contrast to us, retained the words to better grasp the concepts—for concepts to take anyone to a new, enhanced level of understanding they had to be well dressed in elegant words and figures. Those figures helped them visualize the concepts and move from concept to concept easily.

All these figures provide structure and patterns in the Qur'ān that determine the coherence of passages, individual suras, groups of suras, and ultimately the whole; their role as a unifying force may be greater here than in the Greek epic because of the lack of a straightforward narrative throughout the work. Moreover, all these figures were appreciated and apprehended in the early years of Islam by people who could read and write as well as those who could not; in the early literate period, writing was used to complement, to complete, and to verify and secure oral statements (Schoeler 2002:40). But although orality was the primary means of verbal expression and communication, there was no dichotomy between oral and literate. Against this backdrop of orality, the text of the Qur'ān as a much-recited work (a *qur'ān*) allows for manifold chaste and refined recitations (and interpretations) because no one recitation can draw listeners' attention to each and every figure of speech.

Reading from the page, one intuitively expects "literate" structures and "literate" texts; the "formulas" and any potential *sêmata* recede into the background unable to function as unifying elements. To some they may seem redundant or repetitious, but more often they simply get lost in the content. To remedy this, at the very least, one might do as the "Arabs do" (and ancient Greeks and Romans) and always read aloud, but until one knows the text intimately, the *sêmata* cannot readily rise into one's consciousness.

Final Observations

In conclusion, the Qur'ān instructs us to listen to it, but it also indicates that it is indeed a book; the Qur'ān wants us to receive it with the eye and the tongue as well as the ear (since reading at the time the Qur'ān was received meant reading aloud, moving lips and tongue). Beyond that, the recitations heard today represent unbroken links in a chain of recitations back to the beginning, so listening to the recitations of today might give us a sense of how the earliest listeners received its words. But, of course, even if we could prove the earliest recitations somehow match any recitation of today, there is a critical difference: the purpose of recitation has changed. Originally, the recited Qur'ān was meant to persuade and convince its hearers and to chastise those who turned away from it or who rejected it. Its rhetoric energized listeners to think, to believe, to follow. Today, by contrast, that urgent element of persuasion is gone. Virtually the only people now who spend time listening to the Qur'ān are those who believe; those who want to learn about it or study it almost always read it, and usually these readers listen to only a fraction of it because it all seems to sound the same. And for the majority of Muslims, who do not understand the words of the Qur'ān in Arabic, recitation is exclusively a formalized ritual act of worship. Recitation is thus reduced to a systematized chant, melodic utterances connected to the divine that may bring pleasure, soothe the spirit, or perhaps effect a supernatural change somewhere in the world. Or it may not have even those effects; in many mosques where most of the audience is not Arabic speaking, *tarāwīḥ* recitations are rarely of an entire *juz'* and breaks tend to be more frequent and longer, with a variety of speakers providing content that the audience can comprehend without difficulty.

Yet for the minority who understand the Arabic or read along with a translation the recitations do not sound the same, from page to page, reciter to reciter, year to year. The subtle differences may require a discipline to listen longer and more frequently to live performances. But in so doing, one might discover the linguistic, grammatical, structural, and rhetorical figures that hold the text together and that serve to convey a privileged understanding to those who know the meaning and listen again and again. For them, the Qur'ān is reinterpreted each year through the agency of a *qāri'* while the recitations satisfy the soul of the *ummah*, or nation, and unify it, albeit fleetingly. In a sense, the nightly recitations of Ramadan re-reveal the Qur'ān and re-unite the assembled listeners. For this audience at least, the contemporary reciter, to paraphrase Parry, succeeds only in so far as he reconstructs that community of thought through which Prophet Muhammad made himself understood to those who heard him.[16] The urgency of the message may be lacking for this audience, but so is its novelty—these listeners receive the message through bi-

[16] Parry (1971:3) wrote, the "philological criticism of Homer is only of value to the extent that it succeeds in reconstructing that community of thought through which the poet made himself understood to those who heard him."

modal means of verbal comprehension listening and reading), so their understanding is immediate, direct, and enhanced, and thus arguably as close as one can get to the urgency of the original recitations, however divergent they might have been from what we hear today.

Again, a comparison can be made with Homer's epics through history. The fictionalized poet of the *Odyssey*, Demodokos, is blind (*Od.* 8.64), so cannot see the audience response; like *tarāwīḥ* reciters, he had to sense it and adapt his recitation to what he sensed. From Homer's description of an audience contemporary with the poet, we know the nobles of the Phaikians had pleasure in the recitation, while for Odysseus, who had lived through some of the events described in the poem, it brought tears. Moving to a period when a written text had begun to circulate, we still have little evidence of what audience members were feeling when they attended Panathenaic festivals. There is no handbook on the rhapsodic art that might provide clues about audience "participation" or audience input and reaction, or on their shared individual and communal experience and how they processed these events.

At some point in time rhapsodes apparently also began to explain the Homeric words in their own hexameters or in prose (based on comments by Ion, a rhapsode; Plato, *Ion* 530c); the reason for this may have been to provide a break or to show off a rhapsode's skill. Or perhaps because the words of Homer were inspired by a divinity (Plato, *Ion* 530b), they had some kind of oracular mystery that needed explanation. In mosques today with large audiences of Arabic speakers, there is a tendency to include some *tafsīr* ("explication") on the nightly *tarāwīḥ* recitation, though this practice is not uniform across such mosques nor consistent even within mosques that incorporate *tafsīr* into the breaks; the reason for this is that the individual speakers invited for each evening's break are usually free to determine the topics of their speeches. When a speaker does talk about the evening's recitation, a large proportion of the audience may be distracted by other activities altogether—because the attendees usually already know the meaning, such speeches are not considered important. For this group of listeners, the Qur'ān is in a coded idiom (*sensu* Foley 1999:27) whose "words" (that is, figures, formulas, and other units of utterance) are potential *sêmata* that both reinforce each individual's memorization of the text and unify that text in their minds. Furthermore, the *sêmata* unify the community of listeners, at least in the moment of recitation, and this experience contributes to their desire to return year after year.

This may explain in part why, regardless of how later performances were conducted, a recited Homer remained popular, with Greeks reading and memorizing the poems and attending an annual Panathenaic festival even hundreds of years after the end of Athenian domination of the region. Finally, it seems reasonable that regular, sustained effort applying bimodal verbal comprehension skills to the ancient Greek epic (that is, reading and listening, with some memorization) may be be richly rewarding, regardless of how different reconstructed phonology and recitation techniques may be from the original.

Department of Classics,

New York University

References

Abdel Haleem 2004 — M.A.S. Abdel Haleem. *The Qur'an*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

'Abd al-Ḥamīd 2010 — 'Abd al-Ḥamīd. *Taysīr al-raḥmān fī tajwīd al-qur'ān.* Shubrā al-Ḵaymah, [Egypt]: Dār al-taqwā.

Aeschines — Aeschinis orationes. Ed. by Mervin R. Dilts (1997). Stuttgard: Teubner.

Al-A'ẓamī 2003 — Muḥammad Muṣṭafā Al- A'ẓamī. *The History of the Qur'ānic Text, from Revelation to Compilation*. Leicester, UK: UK Islamic Academy.

'Alī Muṭāwi' 2006 — Sa'īd 'Aṭiyyah 'Alī Muṭāwi'. Iškāliyyat al-tarāduf fī al-tarjamah al-'ibriyyah li-ma'ānī al-Qur'ān. Cairo: Dar al-Īfāq al-'Arabiyyah.

Aristotle — Aristotle. *Ars rhetorica.* Ed. by W. D. Ross (1959, reprinted). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bake 1979 — Arnold Bake. "The Music of India." In *Ancient and Oriental Music.* Ed. by Egon Wellesz. Oxford: Oxford University Press. pp. 195-227.

Bannister 2014 — Andrew G. Bannister. *An Oral-Formulaic Study of the Qur'an*. Lanham, MA: Lexington Books.

Beye 1987 — Charles Rowan Beye. *Ancient Greek Literature and Society.* 2nd ed. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Cachia 1998 — Pierre Cachia. *The Arch Rhetorician, or The Schemer's Skimmer: A Handbook of Late Arabic Badi' Drawn from 'Abd al-Ghanī an-Nābulsī's* Nafaḥāt al-Azhār 'alā Nasamāt al-Asḥār. Wiesbaden: Harrassowtz.

[Cicero] — [Attributed to Cicero] *Ad C. Herennium*. In Loeb Library, Cicero, vol. 1, in Latin with English translation by Harry Caplan. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Cuypers 1995 — Michel Cuypers. "Structures rhétoriques dans le Coran: Une analyse structurelle de la sourate «Joseph» et de quelques sourates brèves." *Mélanges de l'Institut dominicain d'études orientales du Caire,* 22:107-95.

Cuypers 2015 — ____________. *The Composition of the Qur'an: Rhetorical Analysis*. New York: Bloomsbury Academic.

Denny 1989 — Frederick M. Denny. "Qur'an Recitation: A Tradition of Oral Performance and Transmission." *Oral Tradition,* 4.1-2:5-26.

Dundes 2003 — Alan Dundes. *Fables of the Ancients: Folklore in the Qur'an*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

Edwards 1987 — Mark W. Edwards. *Homer, Poet of the* Iliad. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Edwards 2002 — ____________. *Sound, Sense, and Rhythm: Listening to Greek and Latin Poetry*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Farrin 2014 — Raymond Farrin. *Structure and Qur'anic Interpretation*. Ashland, OR: White Cloud Press.

Foley 1999 — John Miles Foley. *Homer's Traditional Art.* Univeristy Park, PA: Penn State University Press.

Fowler 2004 — Robert Fowler. "The Homeric Question." In *The Cambridge Companion to Homer.* Ed. by Robert Fowler. Cambridge University Press. pp. 220-32.

González 2013 — José M. González. *The Epic Rhapsode and His Craft: Homeric Performance in a Diachronic Perspective*. Washington, DC: Center for Hellenic Studies.

Guinee and Payne 1988 — Linda N. Guinee and Katherine B. Payne. "Rhyme-like Repetitions in Songs of Humpback Whales." *Ethology,* 79:295-306.

Hoffmann 2007 — Thomas Hoffmann. *The Poetic Qur'ān*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag.

Homer — Homeri opera, vol. 1. Ed. by David B. Monro and Thomas W. Allen (1902, reprinted). Oxford Classical Texts. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Kennedy 1994 — George A. Kennedy. *A New History of Classical Rhetoric*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Khalidi 2008 — Tarif Khalidi, trans. *The Qur'an*. New York: Penguin Books

Knudsen 2014 — Rachel Ahern Knudsen. *Homeric Speech and the Origins of Rhetoric*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Madigan 2001 — Daniel A. Madigan. *The Qur'an's Self-Image: Writing and Authority in Islam's Scripture*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Mehren 1970 — A.F. Mehren. *Die Rhetorik der Araber.* (1853, reprinted) Hildesheim: Georg Olms.

Martin 1989 — Richard P. Martin. *The Language of Heroes: Speech and Performance in the* Iliad. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Mifsud 2015 — Mari Lee Mifsud. *Rhetoric and Gift: Ancient Rhetorical Theory and Contemporary Communication*. Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press.

Minchin 2001 — Elizabeth Minchin. *Homer and the Resources of Memory.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Monroe 1972 — James T. Monroe. "Oral Composition in Pre-Islamic Poetry." *Journal of Arabic Literature,* 3:1-53.

Naas 1995 — Michael Naas. *Turning: From Persuasion to Philosophy. A Reading of Homer's* Iliad. Amherst, NY: Harmony Books.

Nelson 2001 [1985] — Kristina Nelson. *The Art of Reciting the Qur'an*. Cairo: American University in Cairo Press [originally issued by University of Texas Press, 1985].

Neuwirth 2010 — Angelika Neuwirth. "Qur'anic Readings of the Psalms." In *The Qur'ān in Context: Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur'ānic Milieu.* Ed. by Angelica Neuwirth, Nicolai Sinai, and Michael Marx. Leiden: Brill. pp. 733-78.

Ong 1988 — Walter J. Ong. "Before Textuality: Orality and Interpretation." *Oral Tradition,* 3.3:259-69.

Parke 1977 — H. W. Parke. *Festivals of the Athenians*. London: Thames & Hudson.

Parry 1933 — Milman Parry. "The Traditional Metaphor in Homer." *Classical Philology,* 28.1:30-43.

Parry 1937 — ____________. "Winged Words." *Classical Philology,* 32.1:59-63.

Parry 1971 — ____________. *The Making of Homeric Verse: the Collected Papers of Milman Parry.* Ed. by Adam Parry. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Pedersen 1984 — Johannes Pedersen. *The Arabic Book.* Trans. by Geoffrey French. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Plato — Platonis opera, vol. 2. Ed. by John Burnet (1901, reprinted). Oxford Classical Texts. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Quintilian — M. Fabi Quintiliani Institutionis oratoriae libri duodecim, vol. 2. Ed. by Michael Winterbottom (1970, reprinted). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Rağib Iṣfahāni [2014] — Rağib Iṣfahāni. *Mufradaat alfāẓ al-Qur'ān*. Damascus: Dār al-Qalam.

Reece 2009 — Steve Reece. *Homer's Winged Words*. Leiden: Brill.

Retsö 2010 — Jan Retsö. "Arabs and Arabic in the Age of the Prophet." In *The Qur'ān in Context: Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur'ānic Milieu.* Ed. by Angelica Neuwirth, Nicolai Sinai, and Michael Marx. Leiden: Brill. pp. 281-91.

Al-Rifaee 2008 — Kadhim N. Al-Rifaee. “Fronting as an Inimitable Linguistic Phenomenon in the Holy Qur’an. *University of Sharjah Journal for Humanities and Social Sciences*, 5.2:1-39.

Rodwell 1909 — J. M. Rodwell, trans. *The Koran*. London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd.

Rubin 1995 — David C. Rubin. *Memory in Oral Traditions: The Cognitive Psychology of Epic, Ballads, and Counting-out Rhymes*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Saleh 2010 — Walid A. Saleh. “The Etymological Fallacy and Qur’anic Studies: Muhammad, Paradise, and Late Antiquity.” In *The Qur’ān in Context: Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur’ānic Milieu.* Ed. by Angelica Neuwirth, Nicolai Sinai, and Michael Marx. Leiden: Brill. pp. 651-98.

Schoeler 2002 — Gregor Schoeler. *Écrire et transmettre dans les débuts de l’Islam*. Paris: Presses universitaires de France.

Schoeler 2010 — Gregor Schoeler. “The Codification of the Qur’an: A Comment on the Hypotheses of Burton and Wansbrough.” In *The Qur’ān in Context: Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur’ānic Milieu.* Ed. by Angelica Neuwirth, Nicolai Sinai, and Michael Marx. Leiden: Brill. pp. 779-94.

Scodel 2002 — Ruth Scodel. *Listening to Homer.* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Scott 1974 — William C. Scott. *The Oral Nature of the Homeric Simile*. Leiden: Brill.

Stein 2010 — Peter Stein. “Literacy in Pre-Islamic Arabia: An Analysis of the Epigraphic Evidence.” In *The Qur’ān in Context: Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur’ānic Milieu.* Ed. by Angelica Neuwirth, Nicolai Sinai, and Michael Marx. Leiden: Brill. pp. 255-80.

Stetkevych 2010 — Suzanne P. Stetkevych. “From *Jāhiliyyah* to *Badīʿiyyah*: Orality, Literacy, and the Transformations of Rhetoric in Arabic Poetry.” *Oral Tradition*, 25.1:211-30.

Stewart 1990 — Devin J. Stewart. “Saj‘ in the Qur’ān: Prosody and Structure.” *Journal of Arabic Literature*, 21.2:101-39.

Stewart 2009 — ____________. “Poetic License in the Qur’an: Ibn al-Ṣāʾigh al-Ḥanafī’s *Iḥkām al-rāy fī aḥkām al-āy*.” *Journal of Qur’anic Studies*, 11.1:1-56.

Stewart 2011 — ____________. “The Mysterious Letters and Other Formal Features of the Qur’an in Light of Greek and Babylonian Oracular Texts.” In *New perspectives on the Qur’an: the Qur’an in Its Historical Context 2.* Ed. by Gabriel S. Reynolds. London: Routledge. pp. 321-46.

Stewart 2013 — ____________. “Divine Epithets and the *Dibacchius*: *Clausulae* and Qur’anic Rhythm.” *Journal of Qur’anic Studies*, 15.2:22-64.

Stewart 2015 ____________. "Poetic Licence and the Qur'anic Names of Hell: The Treatment of Cognate Substitution in Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī's Qur'anic Lexicon." In *The Meaning of the Word: Lexicology and Qur'anic Exigesis.* Ed. by S. R. Burge. Oxford: Oxford University Press. pp. 195-253.

Suyūṭī 1967 as-Suyūṭī, Ḥāfiẓ Jalāl ad-Dīn 'Abd ar-Raḥmān. (written 878 A.H.). *Al-Itqān fī 'ulūmi al-Qur'ān*. Cairo: Dar at-Turāṯ.

Suyūṭī 1986 ____________. (written ~909 A.H.). *Jany al-jinās*. Cairo: al-Dār al-Fannīyah.

Thomas 1989 Rosalind Thomas. *Oral Tradition and Written Record in Classical Athens*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Whitman 1958 Cedric H. Whitman. *Homer and the Heroic Tradition*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Wolf 1985 [1795] F. A. Wolf. *Prolegomena to Homer*. Trans. by Anthony Grafton, Glenn W. Most, and James E.G. Zetze.

Wright 1967 W. Wright. *A Grammar of the Arabic Language*. 3rd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Xenophon *Xenophontis opera omnia,* vol. 2. Ed. by E. C. Marchant (1902, reprinted). Oxford Classical Texts. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

This page is intentionally left blank.

Oral Tradition, 32/1 (2018):191-228

A Pebble Smoothed by Tradition: Lines 607-61 of *Beowulf* as a Formulaic Set-piece

Michael D.C. Drout and Leah Smith

In lines 607-61 of *Beowulf*, just before the battle between the hero and the monster Grendel, the Danes and visiting Geats celebrate their comradeship in the great hall of Heorot.[1] While venerable Hrothgar, king of the Danes, presides, Queen Wealhtheow, bedecked with gold, carries the ornamented cup of fellowship to each warrior in turn, old and young alike.[2] The passage, which for convenience we will call "Wealhtheow's cup-bearing," is one of several depictions in *Beowulf* of the social happiness that Anglo-Saxon poetry often calls *dream* ("joy") and has been described as "the most detailed description we possess of the offering of the ceremonial drinking cup to an honored guest in early Germanic society" (Fulk, Bjork, and Niles 2008:155). But in contrast to Wealhtheow's later appearance in the poem (lines 1168b-231)—in which she thwarts Hrothgar's attempted adoption of Beowulf, promotes the king's nephew Hrothulf as a protector for her sons, and gives the legendary Brosing necklace to the hero—nothing much happens. Jeff Opland (1976:446-57) does not include the passage in his list of "joy in the hall" type-scenes.

---

[1] Corresponding author: mdrout@wheatoncollege.edu

[2] The authors would like to thank the members of the Wheaton College's Lexomics Research Group and the visiting scholars whose work over multiple summers made this research possible: Mark LeBlanc, Michael J. Kahn, Scott Kleinman, Yvette Kisor, Sarah Downey, Allison Dennett, Natasha Piirainen, Elie Chauvet, Devin Delfino, Julia Morneau, Bryan Jensen, Ann Marie Brasacchio, Richard Neal, Vicky Li, Rosetta Berger, Donald Bass, Courtney LaBrie, Carol Mannix, Douglas Raffle, Alicia Herbert, Veronica Kerekes, Namiko Hitotsubashi, Phoebe Boyd, Rachel Scavera, Yun Meng, Jillian Valerio, Rowan Lowell, Cora Kohn, Audrey Dubois, Chloë Urbanczyk, Elizabeth Crowley, John Segal, Jonathan Gerkin, Elizabeth Peterson, Sarah Creese, Christina Nelson, Amos Jones, Qi Zhang, Lithia Helmreich, Jinnan Ge, Sarah Zhang, Cheng Zhang, Shiwei Huang, Austin Gillis, Caleb Wastler, Jesse Aronson, and Jianxiang Liu. We would also like to thank Mary Dockray-Miller, Leonard Neidorf, Cécile Danehy, and Samuel Cole for their feedback and support. Lexomics research has been supported by the generosity of Wheaton College, the Teagle Foundation, the Mars, Hood and Clemence families, the Mellon Foundation, Central Children's Charities, the Youth Initiative Fund, and the National Endowment for the Humanities, who sponsored the research in three grants: NEH HD-50300-08, "Pattern Recognition through Computational Stylistics: Old English and Beyond" 2008-2009; NEH PR-50112011, "Lexomic Tools and Methods for Textual Analysis: Providing Deep Access to Digitized Texts" 2011-13; and NEH HD-228732-15. National Endowment for the Humanities, Digital Humanities Start-up grant: "Easing Entry and Improving Access to Computer-Assisted Text Analysis for the Humanities," 2015-17. Any views, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this article do not necessarily reflect those of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Yet new computer-assisted "lexomic" methods of analysis[3] show that these seemingly banal lines contain some of the highest concentrations of unusual lexical, metrical, grammatical, and formulaic features in *Beowulf*, and the overall distribution of vocabulary in the passage is so distinctive that it affects computer-assisted cluster analysis to a greater extent than any other similar-sized segment of the poem. In the discussion that follows, we introduce several techniques of lexomic analysis and explain how these approaches identify qualitative differences between lines 607-61 and the rest of the poem. We then show how all of these differences are best explained by positing that the passage has a source different from its surrounding textual matrix, a source that was most likely not a written text, but a traditional type-scene.[4] A close reading of the lines in the light of recent approaches to the formula in Old English explains how the passage, so well polished by tradition that it preserved low-level linguistic features to almost the same degree as a written source would, could nevertheless have been easily adapted to other narrative contexts.

Lexomic Methods

Lexomic methods combine computer-assisted statistical analyses with traditional literary approaches such as close reading, philological analysis, source study, and cultural interpretation. The specific techniques employed in this paper fall into two categories: hierarchical clustering, which uses the mathematical calculation of similarity and difference to create groups of texts or segments in which the members inside the group share more features than those outside, and rolling-window analysis, which produces a visual representation of the average frequency of particular words, letters or phrases within whole texts, allowing us to identify much smaller features within them.

In cluster analysis, we determine the relative frequencies of every word in a group of texts or text-segments, calculate the differences among these relative frequencies, square the resulting numbers, and uses the square-root of the sums of the differences to find what is called the "Euclidian distance" between each pair of segments. From this information, the Lexos software[5] uses the free implementation of hierarchical, agglomerative clustering to group the segments, without pre-specifying the number of groups to be created, by clustering together those with the smallest overall differences in word frequencies (these have the most words in common) in a branching diagram, or *dendrogram*, that visually represents the relative similarities

---

[3] Coined by Betsey Dexter Dyer (2002) the term "lexomics," modeled on "genomics," refers to computer-assisted analytical approaches that are focused on words rather than genes.

[4] Although Albert Lord (1960:68) described "groups of ideas regularly used in telling a tale in the formulaic style of traditional song" as "themes," the terminology used in scholarship on oral tradition has been unsettled, with "commonplace," "type-scene," and "cluster" being used interchangeably with "theme." See Fry (1968) and Foley (1985 and 1991:17).

[5] The software is available for free online use at http://lexos.wheatoncollege.edu. It can be downloaded through the Lexomics main page: http://lexomics.wheatoncollege.edu.

of the segments.[6] Branches of the dendrogram are called *clades,* the similarity of which is represented by the vertical distance between the branch-points: the shorter the line, the more similar the clades. Because variations in the distribution of very common words (most often *function words* such as conjunctions, prepositions, and pronouns), more strongly influence dendrogram geometry than the presence or absence of rare words in particular segments, cluster analysis can often identify broad patterns of vocabulary distribution that are not always evident to the unaided eye. The technique has proven to be particularly useful for identifying subsections of texts whose sources or authors are different from those of the main body of the text.[7]

Rolling-window analysis allows us to represent visually the distribution of individual phrases, words, or letters throughout an entire text. We begin by selecting a "window" size, w, which is substantially smaller than the total number of units, T, in the text to be examined. The first window begins with the first unit and ends with the wth unit of the text. We count the number of features of interest, n, found in this first window and then divide by the window size in units, giving us an average of the number of features (p=n/w). From this information we produce a data pair comprised of the ordinal number of the window, k, and the value of p (k, p_k), so for the first window, where k=1, the resulting data-pair is $(1, p_1)$. We then shift the window one unit towards the end of the text by incrementing both the initial and final units in the window by 1 (k+1, w+1), tabulate the number of times the feature of interest appears in this shifted window, and calculate $p_2=n_2/w$, producing a new pair of data-points, $(2, p_2)$.[8] This process is repeated, moving the window through the text until the edge of the window meets the end of the

[6] In our lexomic analyses the number of words is quite large, so it is difficult for the distributions of any single word to make two segments highly similar or dissimilar. A great deal of commonality (or difference) in the proportionate use of a wide array of words is required to create significant similarity (or distance) between two texts. See the discussion in Drout et al. (2011:311-15).

[7] Cluster analysis indicates that lines 235-851 of the Old English *Genesis* have a different source from the rest of that poem—a conclusion consistent with Eduard Sievers' deduction from a century and a half ago but using completely different methodology (Drout et al. 2011:315-19). The methods also correctly identified the parallel lines of the Anglo-Saxon poems *Azarias* and *Daniel* and further supported the conclusion that portions of *Daniel* are influenced by Latin canticles (Drout et al. 2011a:307-15) and a lost Old English poem (Drout and Chauvet 2015). Cluster analysis also correctly identified the divisions of the three *Christ* and two *Guthlac* poems of the Exeter Book and clustered together the signed poems of Cynewulf (Drout et al. 2011:319-35). The methods were also able to distinguish between the sections of the Old English version of Orosius's *Historiae adversus paganos* translated directly from the primary Latin source and those that were not, and to differentiate between the sections of the *Old English Penitential* based on an Anglo-Saxon source and those parts translated from Latin (Boyd et al. 2014 [2012]). Cluster analysis has also shed new light on the textual history of *Guthlac A* (Downey et al. 2012), and has been successfully used in the analysis of Old Norse prose texts (Berger and Drout 2015) and medieval Latin poetry and prose (Downey et al. 2014), and *Beowulf* (Drout et al. 2016).

[8] If we are using a window of 500 words, the first window is made up of words 1-500, the second of words 2-501, the third of words 3-502, and so on.

text (that is, where k+w=T), producing a set of k coordinates in the form (k, pk).[9] The graph produced by plotting the total set of coordinates, which is often much easier to interpret than the same data presented in tabular form, not only indicates the simple presence of features but also highlights clusters of elements of interest in a way that a simple inspection often does not.[10] Because the window moves continuously through the entire text, using a rolling average eliminates the problem of statistical artifacts produced by the placement of segment boundaries. Abrupt changes in the rolling averages or ratios of textual features are frequently associated with changes in authorship, source or scribe (Drout and Chauvet 2015).

Cluster Analysis

Our attention was initially drawn to Wealhtheow's cup-bearing when we noticed that this passage has a peculiarly strong effect on the results of cluster analysis. *Beowulf*'s narrative structure is complex and episodic, and there is no scholarly consensus as to the precise divisions of large-scale narrative units.[11] We were therefore obliged to experiment with many different segmentations, hoping to identify relationships among parts of the poem that were not disrupted by small shifts in segment boundaries (Drout et al. 2016). One of the most surprising but consistent results of this painstaking analysis was the strong influence of lines 607-61 on overall dendrogram geometry:

---

[9] Formally, the value of p at any location k is equal to:

$$p_k = \left| \left(\sum_{i=k}^{k-w} n \right) \div (w) \right|, k + w \leq T$$

where k is the ordinal number of the first unit in the window
w is the size of the window in units
n is the total number of features of interest in the window
T is the total number of units in the text

[10] When investigating the complementary distributions of textual elements that are mutually exclusive (such as *þ* and *ð* in the Old English poetic codices), it is useful to calculate the continuously rolling ratio of the two features to each other rather than plotting two separate averages. We therefore calculate the value at a given point by dividing the number of appearances of one feature by the sum of both features in the rolling window.

[11] However, there is a surprising degree of consensus about the boundaries of the smaller, low-level narrative units (Kisor 2009).

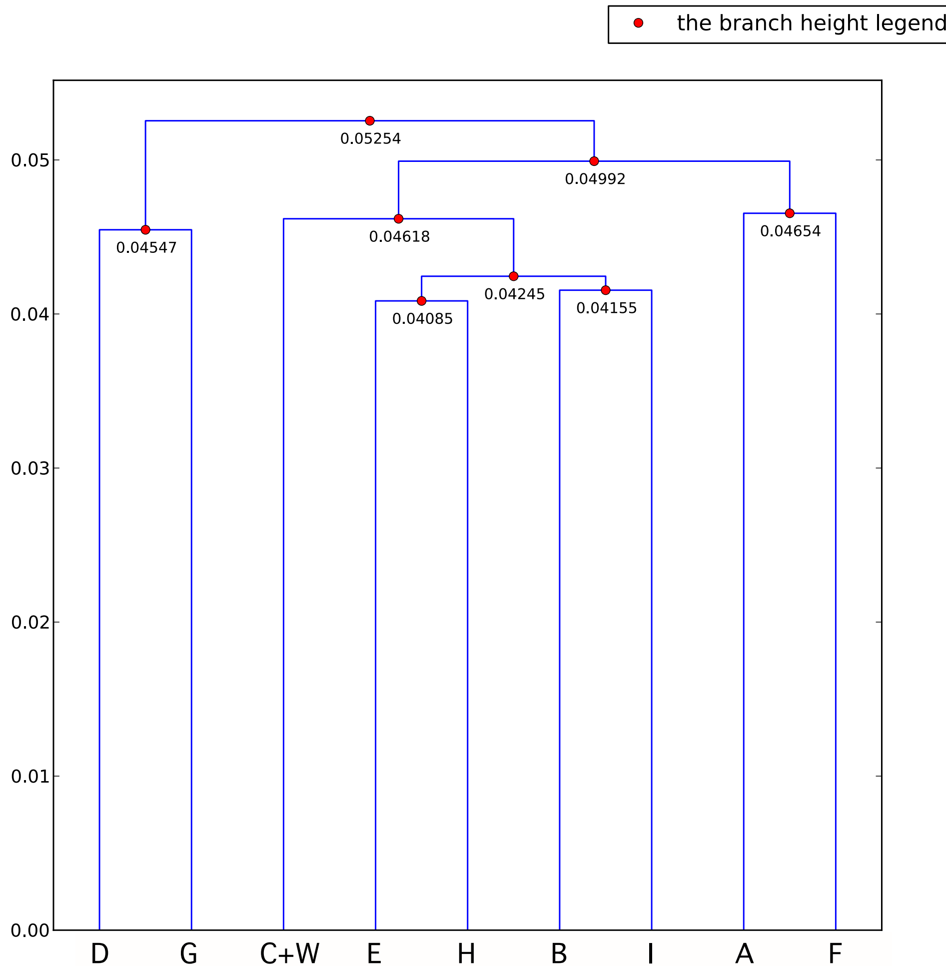


Fig. 1. Dendrogram of the A-Scribe Portion of *Beowulf* when the poem is divided into segments. "Wealhtheow's Cup-Bearing" is included in Segment C.

The section of *Beowulf* that we labeled Segment C—lines 499-606, which some scholars have called the "Unferth Intermezzo"[12]—almost always appears in a single-leafed clade, separate from all other segments of the portion of the poem copied by the A-Scribe.[13] However, as can be seen in Fig. 1, if we include lines 607-61 in this segment, it then clusters with Segments E (lines 837-1062), H (1306b-491 and 1623-86), B (189-498) and I (1687-919). Similarly, displacing lines 607-61 into Segment A (1-188) or D (662-836) disrupts the normal placement of those segments by causing whichever segment includes lines 607-61 to move towards the E-H-B-I grouping. Placing Wealhtheow's cup-bearing into H, B, or I keeps this four-segment cluster intact but causes whichever segment contains lines 607-61 to link to Segment E. Deleting the

[12] Fulk, Bjork, and Niles (2008:148) adopt this nomenclature for the episode; the name was originally coined by Adrien Bonjour (1965:19-20).

[13] The *Beowulf* manuscript was produced by two scribes, A, who copied lines 1-1939, and B, who copied the rest of the poem. Consistent differences in the spelling and orthography of the two scribes can interfere with cluster analysis, so for the purposes of the current argument, we focus only on the A-scribe portion of the poem. The whole-poem cluster analysis (which requires a normalized text) is not different with regard to these particular results (Drout et al. 2016:42-47).

lines entirely from the poem results in the dendrogram having the same geometry as that shown in Fig. 2 (in which lines 607-61 are included in Segment E). We therefore conclude that the vocabulary of Wealhtheow's cup-bearing and that of Segment E are most similar, since the placement of the lines in this segment is the only arrangement that does not disrupt dendrogram geometry by creating a strong similarity between whichever segment contains the passage and segment E.

Although surprising, this phenomenon might be explained by the similarity in content of lines 607-61 and Segment E, which is made up primarily of Beowulf's and Hrothgar's exchange of formalities and the depiction of gift-giving and happiness in the hall of Heorot. Wealhtheow's cup-bearing thus shares a discourse with Segment E, and, to a slightly lesser degree, with the other sections of the poem that are focused on formal social interactions, such as arrivals and departures, entry into a hall, and the exchange of promises and gifts (Segments B, H, and I). However, the degree to which the placement of the passage affects dendrogram geometry is unique in *Beowulf*; no other short passage in the poem shifts the clustering of segments as much as lines 607-61:[14]

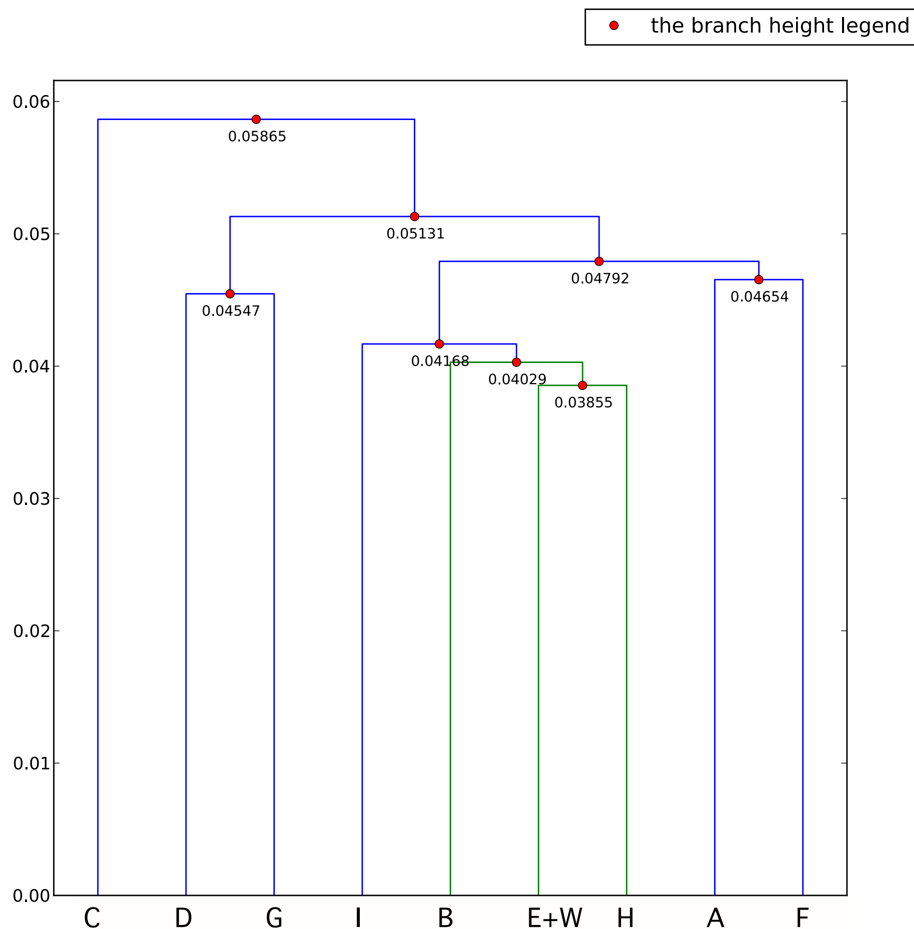


Fig. 2: Dendrogram of the A-Scribe Portion of *Beowulf* when the poem is divided into segments. "Wealhtheow's Cup-Bearing" is moved to segment E.

[14] The effect on the B-scribe portion of the poem of lines 2860-91, in which Wiglaf criticizes the cowardly retainers after Beowulf's death, is similar but much less pronounced (Drout et al. 2016:37-41).

As can be seen in Table 1, Wealhtheow's cup-bearing is unusual in that six of its fifteen most frequently used words are not function words: *word*, ("word") *Beowulf*, *Beowulfe*, *cwen*, ("queen") and *ful* ("cup") are nouns, and *eode* ("went") and *gelyfde* ("believed" or "trusted"), verbs.[15] And while each other segment has at least three pronouns in its top fifteen words, only *ic* appears among the most frequently used words in lines 607-61. Although it is highly likely that some of these differences are a result of the passage's small size, in ten other randomly selected passages of similar length, no fewer than fourteen of the fifteen most frequently occurring words are function words:

A (lines 1-188)		**B (189-455)**		**C (456-606)**		**D (662-836)**		**E (837-1062)**	
word	frequency	word	frequency	word	frequency	word	frequency	word	frequency
ond	0.028	ic	0.021	on	0.033	he	0.029	þæt	0.021
wæs	0.022	þæt	0.021	ic	0.023	þæt	0.027	on	0.020
Þa	0.020	on	0.020	þæt	0.021	on	0.024	ond	0.018
him	0.018	þa	0.018	he	0.015	þa	0.022	wæs	0.014
Þæt	0.018	ond	0.015	ne	0.015	wæs	0.019	þe	0.014
ne	0.015	wæs	0.011	þe	0.015	ond	0.016	he	0.014
on	0.015	he	0.011	swa	0.011	se	0.016	ne	0.011
to	0.012	him	0.011	þa	0.011	him	0.011	to	0.011
in	0.010	to	0.011	þu	0.011	ne	0.011	þa	0.011
se	0.010	se	0.010	git	0.010	ær	0.009	him	0.009
Þe	0.010	þe	0.009	me	0.010	ac	0.008	ic	0.009
he	0.009	ofer	0.008	ond	0.010	hie	0.008	swa	0.008
hie	0.007	wiþ	0.007	to	0.010	his	0.008	fela	0.007
wiþ	0.007	his	0.006	wit	0.010	þe	0.008	þær	0.007
æfter	0.007	is	0.006	no	0.008	Þær	0.007	hine	0.006

F (1063-250)		**G (1251-306a, 1492-1622)**		**H (1306b-491, 1623-86)**		**I (1687-1887)**		**Lines 607-61**	
word	frequency	word	frequency	word	frequency	word	frequency	word	frequency
ond	0.027	þa	0.034	on	0.028	þæt	0.027	on	0.034
Þa	0.021	þæt	0.027	þæt	0.024	on	0.023	ond	0.031
he	0.017	he	0.022	þe	0.018	þe	0.020	þæt	0.031
on	0.015	wæs	0.021	þa	0.016	him	0.019	þa	0.027
wæs	0.015	on	0.020	he	0.015	ond	0.019	ic	0.020
to	0.014	ond	0.020	wæs	0.013	to	0.017	þe	0.014
Þæt	0.014	se	0.014	ic	0.012	ic	0.016	oþ	0.010
swa	0.010	him	0.012	ne	0.012	he	0.013	word	0.010
hie	0.009	heo	0.010	ond	0.011	se	0.012	wæs	0.010

[15] Although the token *ful* can be an adjective or an adverb, in this passage the word is a weak noun in the accusative singular (Fulk, Bjork, and Niles 2008:381)

ne	0.009	ne	0.010	þu	0.011	ne	0.011	beowulf	0.007
Þær	0.009	to	0.009	to	0.010	þa	0.010	beowulfe	0.007
æt	0.009	æfter	0.008	se	0.009	wæs	0.010	cwen	0.007
Þe	0.009	þe	0.008	mid	0.008	swa	0.009	eode	0.007
Þu	0.009	þær	0.008	him	0.007	ofer	0.007	ful	0.007
him	0.008	swa	0.007	þonne	0.007	oþþe	0.007	Gelyfde	0.007

Table 1. Relative frequencies of the fifteen most commonly used words in each segment of the A-Scribe portion of *Beowulf* and in lines 607-60.[16]

The need to disambiguate pronouns in a scene with several interacting characters could explain a lower frequency of *he* and *him* (the presence of *Beowulf* and *Beowulfe* would be consistent with this interpretation). However, there are fewer interacting characters and less ambiguity in these lines than in the later depiction of Wealhtheow in the hall (lines 1168b-231), which does not have the same effect on dendrogram geometry. An alternate explanation for the influence of the passage's vocabulary distribution could be that there is proportionally greater use of bare noun inflection and less frequent use of optional prepositions and demonstratives to indicate grammatical relationships in these lines than elsewhere in *Beowulf*. Proportionally fewer prepositions reduces the number of words and syllables per line, creating the impression that the passage is more verbally compact than its surrounding matrix. Indeed, in published editions of *Beowulf*, lines 607-61 are visibly shorter than the passages that precede and follow them, with the greatest contrast appearing in lines 613-30.[16] Although the physical length of a line in a printed text is not necessarily a precise measure, the impression of tightness is supported by the average number of words per line, which in Wealhtheow's cup-bearing is 5.3, compared to 5.5 in the preceding passage and 5.7 in the lines that follow.[17] A more rigorous measure of density, the frequency of function words, likewise shows that lines 607-61 are more compact than neighboring passages: 1.67 function words per line compared to 2.09 and 2.15 in the preceding and subsequent 54 lines of the poem. Furthermore, between 607a and 630b, there are only seven half-lines that have as many as two unstressed syllables in a row, so there are very few "patter" verses in this section of *Beowulf*, resulting in a density of stressed syllables greater than that in the surrounding lines. All of these measurements support the subjective impression that the passage is verbally tighter than the surrounding material in *Beowulf*.

Verbal compression has often been cited as a sign of a text's oral antecedents. Indeed, the "thrift" of oral traditional works was first noted by Milman Parry, and although, as Foley demonstrated, the specific qualities of the noun-epithet formula that Parry identified were actually emergent phenomena of Homeric prosody, the general quality of "communicative economy" has been shown to be a feature of oral-derived works in many traditions (Foley

---

[16] Physical measurement confirms that this is not merely a trick of the eye: the median length of lines 607-61 in the fourth edition of Klaeber's *Beowulf* is 53.8mm, while it is 54.0 for 559-612 and a much more visibly distinct 56.5 for lines 662-708. The difference is even greater for the core of the passage, lines 613-30, which average 51.7 mm. The lengths were measured with an electronic Vernier caliper using the furthest projection of any letters as termini for each line.

[17] The number of words per line is also less variable in Wealhtheow's cup-bearing than in the other two passages, with a standard deviation of 1.4 words (compared to 1.5 and 1.8).

1991:19 n.37, 1990 chapters 3 and 4, and 2002:116-17). Unfortunately, although there is widespread agreement that oral traditional poetics enable surface-level verbal compression, there is no scholarly agreement as to how such communicative economy might be measured—or even detected—within individual traditions. Verbal compactness is unlikely to be sufficient as a measure of orality, but this quality of lines 607-61, plus the effect that they have on dendrogram geometry,[18] do indicate strongly that the passage is qualitatively different from its surrounding matrix. The additional analyses discussed below can help determine the cause of this difference.

Rolling-Window Analyses

Even though we had noted their unusual effect on dendrogram geometry quite early in our research, we did not think of lines 607-61 as being particularly interesting, in part because their narrative content is unexceptional. It was only after a long series of rolling-window analyses that we began to realize how anomalous the passage was. It seemed that every time we identified the sections of *Beowulf* with the greatest concentrations of some lexico-grammatical, metrical, or formulaic feature, Wealhtheow's cup-bearing was on the list. The cumulative implication of these analyses—discussed individually below—is that lines 607-61 are qualitatively distinct from the rest of *Beowulf*, and that the cause of these differences is unlikely to be the direct influence of a written source.

Distribution of Grammatical Feature: Conjunctive siþþan

In an effort to test arguments made by Levin Schücking (1905) about the composition-history of *Beowulf*, Janet Bately in 1985 examined the distribution of unstressed function-words throughout the Old English poetic corpus. One of these, *siþþan*, can be employed either as an adverb of time or as a conjunction.[19] Bately regarded the use of conjunctive *siþþan* as being potential evidence of a relatively early date for a poem or passage. She determined that although conjunctive *siþþan* is far more common in *Beowulf* than in any other long Old English poem,[20] the distribution of this construction in the poem did not support Schücking's hypothesis that *Beowulf* had been created when a later poet joined together two originally independent poems with a bridging passage. Because she found that conjunctive *siþþan* appeared in all three of

[18] Verbal density and dendrogram placement in cluster analysis may not, however, be entirely independent variables, since density can affect the frequencies of the function words whose distributions are important contributors to the results of cluster analysis.

[19] *Siþþan*-clauses "contribute significantly to the body of information contained in the poem, often by sketching in one of those passages that in the past have been labeled as 'digressions'" (Bately 1985:423-25).

[20] "All three parts of *Beowulf* show a preference for *siþþan* conjunction over *siþþan* adjective . . . a preference shared by fewer than half of the other longer poetic texts" (Bately 1985:421). *Siþþan* (with minor spelling variations) is used as a conjunction 56 times in *Beowulf*: lines 6, 106, 115, 132, 413, 604, 648, 656, 722, 834, 850, 886, 901, 982, 1077, 1148, 1198, 1204, 1206, 1235, 1253, 1261, 1281, 1308, 1420, 1472, 1556, 1589, 1784, 1947, 1949, 1978, 2012, 2051, 2072, 2092, 2103, 2124, 2201, 2351, 2356, 2388, 2437, 2474, 2501, 2630, 2888, 2911, 2914, 2943, 2960, 2970, 2996, 3002, 3127. It is used as an adverb in lines 142, 283, 470, 567, 685, 718, 1106, 1453, 1689, 1875, 1901, 1937, 1951, 2064, 2071, 2175, 2207, 2217, 2395, 2702, 2806.

Schücking's sections of *Beowulf,* not just the putative bridge, Bately (1985:431) concluded that the distribution "provides no evidence against the theory that one man was responsible for all three parts" of *Beowulf*.[21]

Unfortunately, the assumption that Schücking's tripartite hypothesis was the only reasonable alternative to a unitary *Beowulf* seems to have obscured potentially interesting patterns in Bately's data that can be seen if, instead of simply counting the number of instances of conjunctive *siþþan* in three large sections of the poem, we visualize the full distribution of the construction using rolling-window analysis. When we do so, the generally even distribution of conjunctive *siþþan* that Bately found turns out to be an artifact of the boundaries Schücking proposed for his three sections:

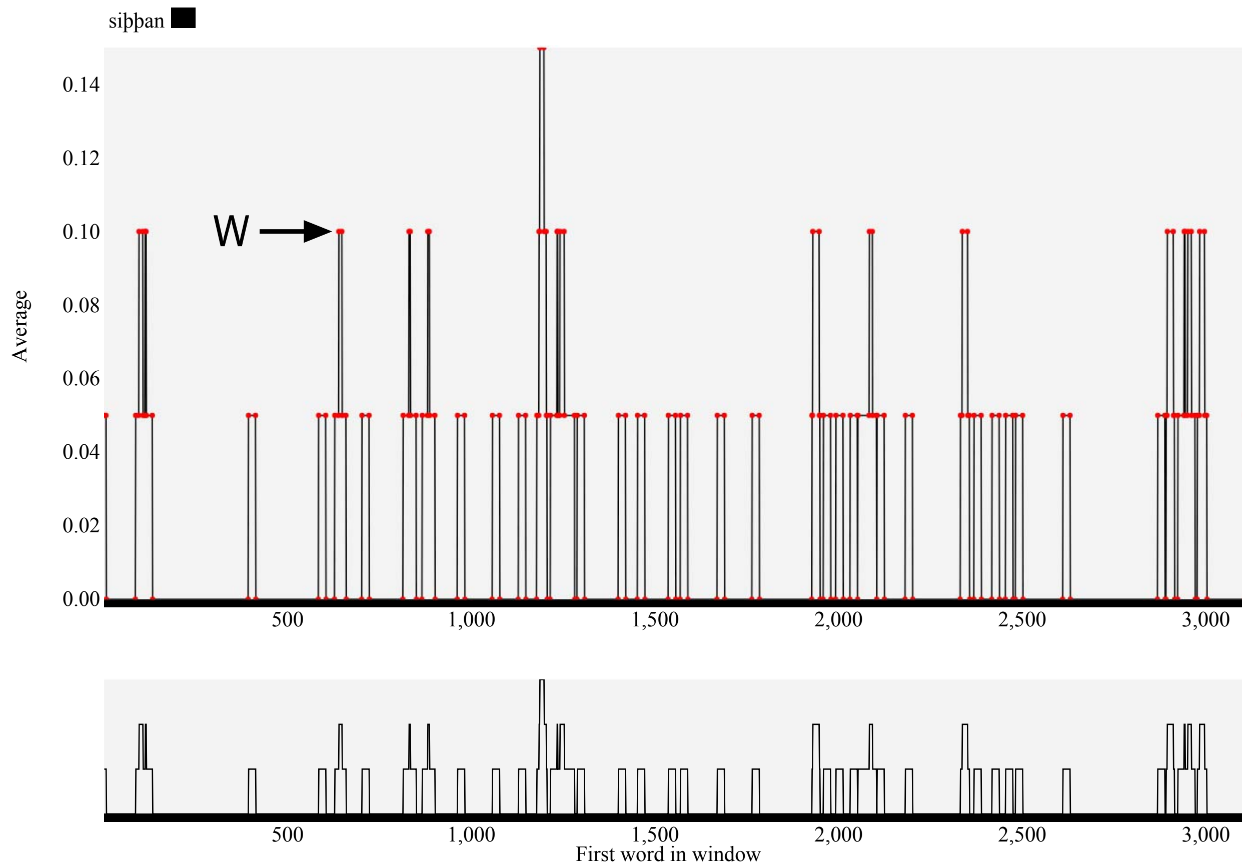


Fig. 3. Frequency of conjunctive *siþþan* in *Beowulf* in a rolling window of 20 lines.

Fig. 3 shows a plot of the distribution of conjunctive *siþþan* in *Beowulf* in a rolling window of 20 lines. The largest cluster of this grammatical feature occurs at 1107-236, a section of the poem that includes the end of the Finnsburg episode, Wealhtheow's speech to Hrothgar, and her gift of the necklace to Beowulf. A narrower concentration of conjunctive *siþþan* centered on line 2903 is coincident with the messenger's description of the wars between the Geats and the Swedes. The next highest concentration occurs with the story of Freawaru and the

[21] The elliptical way in which the normally very straightforward Bately phrases this determination, with stacked negatives and the ambiguous term "responsible," perhaps suggests some misgivings about this conclusion.

Heathobards (centered on line 2000). The fight with Grendel (centered on line 802) and the deaths of Hygelac and Heardred (centered on line 2338) also contain clusters of conjunctive *siþþan*. The Scyld material at the beginning of the poem and Wealhtheow's cup-bearing are the only other substantial clusters of this grammatical feature in the poem; the latter of these stands out because it is surrounded by very low frequencies of conjunctive *siþþan*, which is entirely absent from lines 133-412, 414-603, and 657-721, and only appears once between lines 657 and 833.

That there are both concentrations and absences of conjunctive *siþþan* in various parts of *Beowulf* does not necessarily, by itself, tell us much. Random variation also produces clusters. However, the coincidence of the clusters with portions of the narrative that are, for the most part, the historical or pseudo-historical background to the monster-fighting plot of *Beowulf* is by itself suggestive of the influence of sources on these parts of the poem, especially in light of Bately's conclusion that conjunctive *siþþan* is potentially diagnostic of relatively earlier poetic composition.[22] The evidence of cluster analysis and the verbal density of the passage further support an impression that Wealhtheow's cup-bearing has, at the least, been strongly influenced by a source.

Distribution of Metrical Features: Kaluza's Law, Ss/Sx, and Bliss Type A3 Verses

That impression is further strengthened when we consider the distribution in *Beowulf* of various metrical features. The most famous (and controversial) of these is the phenomenon that R. D. Fulk (1992:389-90) named "Kaluza's law." Kaluza's law is a recognition that in certain circumstances, two successive syllables are treated metrically as if they are a single syllable, but that this "resolution" is blocked in particular metrical positions not only if a syllable is "heavy" (that is, if it contains a long vowel, a long diphthong, or a vowel plus one or more consonants) but also if its etymon was heavy (Kaluza 1896). Because the distinction between "long" and "short" inflectional endings had stopped being observed in Old English by 725 south of the Humber and by 825 in the rest of Anglo-Saxon England, verses observing Kaluza's law, Fulk argued (1992:389-90), were likely to have been composed before this change occurred.[23]

The operation of Kaluza's law is also restricted to those verse types in which the resolvable syllables and the stressed syllable that precedes them occur in the same foot. Fulk (1992:389-90) saw the law as only applying under secondary stress[24] and showed that it operated in 106 of the 108 possible verses in *Beowulf*. Rand Hutcheson (1995:3.D) then demonstrated that Kaluza's law should also apply to syllables under primary stress at the end of certain types of

---

[22] For discussion, see Drout et al. (2016:62-66).

[23] To create verses that observed Kaluza's Law after the distinction between long and short inflectional endings had been lost, the poet would have to know the etymological antecedents of words and be a rather skilled philologist.

[24] Bliss' types 2A3a(ii), 2A4, 1D3, and 3E3.

"light" verse types in which resolvable endings do not occur,[25] thus increasing the number of verses in the poem to 176 out of a possible 179.[26]

Because of its potential implications for the dating of *Beowulf*, discussions of Kaluza's Law have been contentious. The most significant challenge to Fulk's conclusions has come from Roberta Frank (2007:857-60), who argues that the Kaluza's Law verses could be examples of deliberate archaizing—what she calls "a 'ye olde' sign." The verses preserve the old metrical features because they were transmitted verbatim from the earlier period as part of the poet's common traditional heritage rather than being composed de novo for *Beowulf* in an older linguistic environment. Frank (2007:857-60) states that the Kaluza's Law verses are concentrated in "dark, martial passages" that emphasize heroism. George Clark (2014:233-34), responding directly to Frank's arguments, disagrees, pointing out that not all dark, martial and heroic passages in the poem contain Kaluza's Law verses and, conversely, not all passages containing Kaluza's Law verses are dark, martial, or heroic. Dividing *Beowulf* into 32 segments of 100 lines and counting the frequency of Kaluza's Law verses in each, Clark determines that the verses are rather evenly distributed throughout the poem.[27] He (2014:233-34) rejects Frank's contention that these "semi-obsolete linguistic markers" were used merely to invoke a heroic past, concluding instead that the archetype of *Beowulf* having been composed before 750 is the simplest explanation of the evidence.

Rolling-window analysis cannot by itself resolve debates about the significance of Kaluza's Law,[28] but it can give us much better resolution of the actual locations of clusters or absences of the verses in question. That distribution suggests that both Frank's and Clark's seemingly diametrically opposed claims are each partially true, but incomplete.[29] Fig. 4 is a plot of the frequency of Kaluza's Law verses (using Hutcheson's expanded definition of the phenomenon) in a rolling window of 25 lines:[30]

---

[25] 2A1b, 2A3b, a1.

[26] Benjamin Slade's (2003) online compendium on Kaluza's Law and his machine-friendly list of the different verses are extremely valuable: https://www.heorot.dk/kaluza-dating-txt.html

[27] Like R. W. Chambers (1959:117-20), Clark (2014:222) recognizes that a random distribution would not spread the verses evenly throughout the text: "a distribution without clusters and corresponding gaps in the occurence of [Kaluza's Law I] verses would be wildly improbable."

[28] The debate is ongoing, and is summarized and discussed in detail in Neidorf and Pascual (2014).

[29] This is not the first time that lexomic analysis has suggested that two antithetical claims are each partially correct. Cluster analysis of both *Guthlac A* and Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*, and rolling-window analysis of *Daniel,* have shown that the heterogeneity of certain early medieval texts has the potential to mislead scholars who apply to complete texts interpretations that should be limited to particular sections (Downey et al. 2012 and 2014; Drout and Chauvet 2015).

[30] Although the shape of the overall plot is somewhat different if we used the more restricted sense of the law—as do Neidorf and Pascual (2014)—the peak at Wealhtheow's cup-bearing remains.

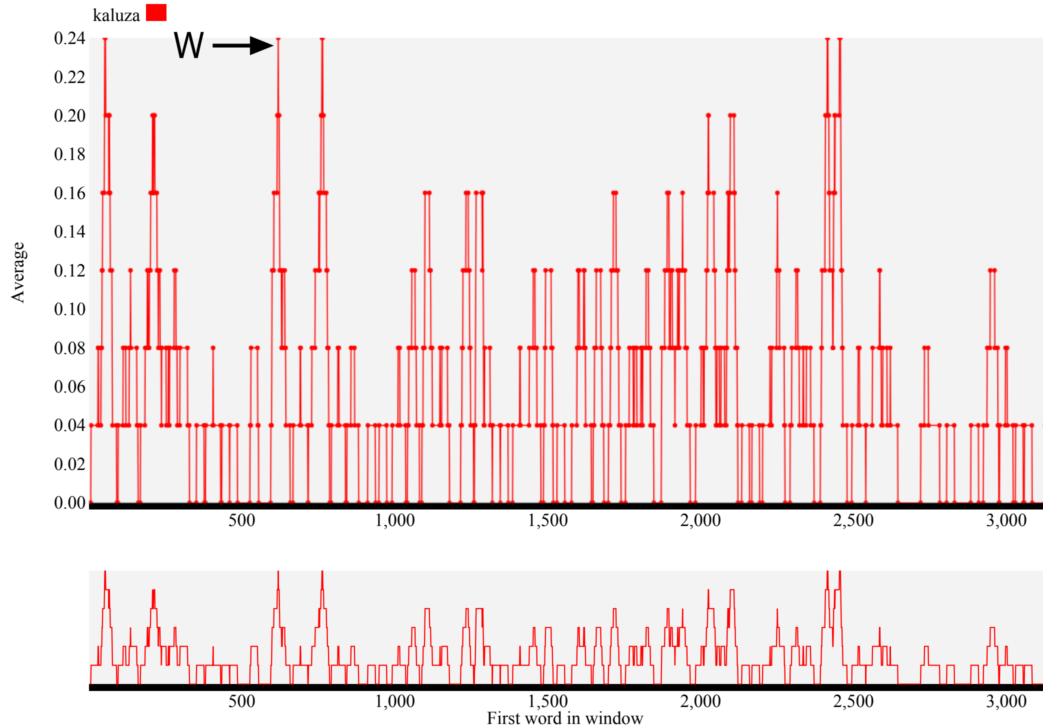


Fig. 4. Frequency of Kaluza's Law verses in a rolling window of 25 lines.

Analysis of the full distribution of these verses throughout *Beowulf* is beyond the scope of this essay,[31] but for present purposes, it is sufficient to note that Wealhtheow's cup-bearing has one of the highest concentrations of Kaluza's Law verses in the poem, with seven occurrences (lines 619b, 622a, 623b, 629a, 640a, 643a, 657a).[32] On average there is in *Beowulf* one Kaluza's Law verse every 18.3 lines (.055/line), so we would expect approximately three in any given 54-line section;[33] the frequency in Wealhtheow's cup-bearing is thus more than twice the poem's average. Only two other passages, lines 751-79 (the fight with Grendel), and lines 2397-462 (the thief leading the men to the barrow, the story of the Geatish succession, and the Father's Lament) —have similarly high frequencies of the verses.

If Clark, Fulk, and others are correct in inferring that concentrations of Kaluza's Law verses are diagnostic of early composition, then Wealhtheow's cup-bearing, along with several other sections of the poem, appears to be older than the rest of *Beowulf*. If Frank is correct, and the presence of Kaluza's Law verses indicates that a poet is drawing on memorized formulas to give the impression of archaism, then the passage is not only formulaically dense, but deliberately archaized in order to make it appear traditional. In either case, it is evident that Wealhtheow's cup-bearing is different from its surrounding matrix in its concentration of features that are generally diagnostic of greater age and formulaicity. By itself, we might

[31] That research is forthcoming, to be published as *A (Rolling) Window on the Past: Lexomic Analysis of the Construction of Beowulf.*

[32] There are seven total verses affected by Kaluza's Law in the passage: 3 Type I, 0 Type II, and 4 Type III.

[33] Using the more restrictive definition of the Law, we find that Wealhtheow's cup-bearing has 3 occurrences of Kaluza's law when we would expect 1.8, 66 percent more than the baseline value.

interpret the concentration as simply an artifact of a random distribution of Kaluza's Law verses throughout *Beowulf*, but in light of the differences in vocabulary distribution, the greater verbal economy, and the more frequent use of conjunctive *siþþan,* the clustering of Kaluza's Law verses in Wealhtheow's cup-bearing seems to be less of a coincidence, especially because these different kinds of features are independent of each other, and the latter two are generally considered to be indicative of earlier rather than later composition.

Distribution of the Ss/Sx verse type

Another metrically distinct feature of *Beowulf*, the Ss/Sx verse type (using Geoffrey Russom's word-foot notation), is concentrated in lines 607-61 of the poem.[34] Ss/Sx verses have a primary and secondary stress in the first foot, and a stressed and unstressed syllable in the second. Although there is some overlap between Kaluza's Law and Ss/Sx verses, they are not identical. A variation of the primary building block of Germanic alliterative poetry, the Sievers type A verses.[35] There are seven instances in Wealhtheow's cup-bearing (lines 619a, 622a, 626a, 629a, 640a, 643a, 657a), all of which begin with a compound word: *sincfato* ("treasure cup"), *wīsfæst* ("fast in wisdom"), *wælrēow* ("fierce in battle"), *gilpcwide* ("boasting speech"), *þrȳðword* ("strong word"), *ðrȳþærn* ("great hall"). More than 85 percent of the Ss/Sx verses in *Beowulf* begin with a compound word, so the rate of 100 percent in Wealhtheow's cup-bearing is not an enormous deviation from the norm, but compounds are somewhat more frequent in the passage than in the rest of the poem. There are 242 Ss/Sx verses in *Beowulf*, about 3.8 percent of the poem. If these verses were evenly distributed we would expect there to be four examples in Wealhtheow's cup-bearing rather than the seven that do appear.

Fig. 5 is a plot of the frequency of the verse type Ss/Sx in a rolling window of 50 lines. Wealhtheow's cup-bearing is the second-highest concentration of these verses in the first two-thirds of *Beowulf*; the only place where the verse form is used with greater frequency is in lines 1160-285, the portion of the poem that includes Wealhtheow's speech and gift-giving after the Finnsburg episode, the story of the Brosing necklace, and the preparations for bed before the attack by Grendel's mother.[36] It is, at the least, an interesting coincidence that the two largest concentrations of this verse type in the Danish part of the poem are scenes in which Wealhtheow appears:

---

[34] In Russom's (1998:18-19) scansion notation, a syllable receiving primary stress is indicated by capital S, one receiving secondary stress by a lower-case s, x indicates an unstressed syllable, and / marks the caesura or breath pause.We would like to thank Geoffrey Russom for generously allowing us to use his metrically parsed *Beowulf* for this analysis. The concentration of Ss/Sx verses was first identified by Audrey Dubois**,** Lexomics research associate.

[35] Sievers type A2l; Bliss 2A3a.

[36] Because the metrically parsed *Beowulf* is arranged by half-lines, the numbers on the horizontal axis of the plot must be divided by two to identify the correct line number.

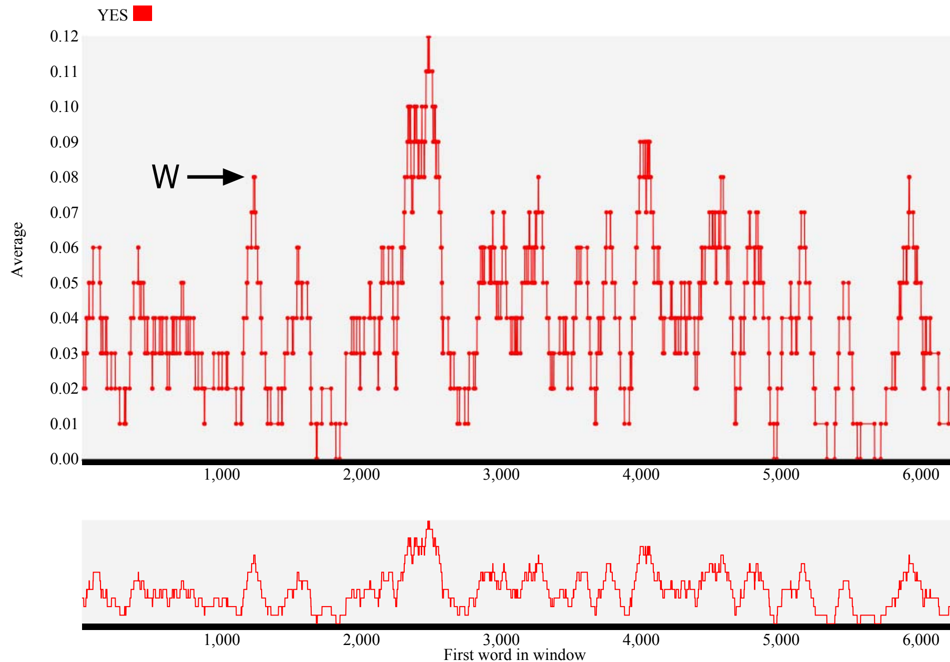


Fig. 5: Frequency of Ss/Sx verse types in *Beowulf* in a rolling-window of 50 lines.

Of the seven compound words beginning these Ss/Sx lines, five are found only in poetry, and 57 percent of the instances of the sixth, *wisfæst,* appear in poems. Only *wælreow* occurs more frequently in prose texts than in poetry.[37] There is, therefore, a higher concentration of purely poetic compound words in lines 607-61 than in most other parts of the poem. Approximately 10 percent of the Ss/Sx lines in *Beowulf* begin with names,[38] and elsewhere in the poem the names *Beowulf*, *Hrothgar*, and *Wealhtheow* are used line-initially.[39] But even though Wealhtheow's cup-bearing both contains all of these names and includes a concentration of Ss/Sx verses, none of those verses begin with the names of these major characters (640a and 657a contain the names, but not initially).

Poetic compounding was more productive in the early period of Old English poetry than the later,[40] but we do not have enough data to determine if there was a steady decline in compounding from the earliest period through the evolution of Middle English verse, nor can we separate out the presumed variability of individual authors' composition processes. By themselves, therefore, the concentration of Ss/Sx verses in Wealhtheow's cup-bearing cannot

[37] Because the prose corpus is so much larger than the poetic corpus, we cannot infer that *wælreow* is a non-poetic compound, only that it is not an exclusively poetic word.

[38] For discussion of whether many of the names in *Beowulf* were parsed as dithematic compounds or as single units, see Neidorf (2013).

[39] In Ss/Sx verses elsewhere in the poem, "Beowulf" appears initially seven times: lines 364a, 676a, 1191a, 1216b, 1310b, 1758b, and 2389b ("Beowulf" in line 18a is likely a scribal error for "Beow"). "Hroðgar" is used initially in Ss/Sx verses five times: lines 339b, 1646b, 1816b, 2010b, and 2144b, and "Wealhþeow" is used initially in an Ss/Sx verse in 664b.

[40] For the decline in the productivity of compounding in the later part of the Old English period, see Fulk (1992:254-68) and Russom (1998:65-8).

prove that the passage antedates the majority of the poem (in which this verse form appears less frequently). We do note, however, that once again, a distinctive formal feature associated with a poem's being relatively older rather than younger, is concentrated in lines 607-61.

Distribution of Verses Containing Alliterating Un-Displaced Finite Verbs (Bliss Type A3)

When stressed elements and displaced sentence particles of a verse clause are found in the alliterating positions of a line of Old English poetry, they alliterate; un-displaced sentence particles and proclitics are regularly placed in a group at the beginning of a line before the first alliterating element. The only exceptions to this rule are the finite verbs, the majority of which alliterate, thus creating an apparent contradiction between the alliterative and metrical-grammatical systems of Old English. In a recent essay, Mark Griffith (2016:113-14) updates and augments the work of Alan Bliss (1967 [1958]) on this problem, arguing that, when un-displaced finite verbs throughout the entire poetic corpus are examined, it becomes evident that register rather than syntax determines their behavior: "for the Old English poets, *un-displaced, poetic finite verbs ought to alliterate*." However, there was "license within the system which allowed the poets to exploit much more fully the potential of their verbs" (Griffith 2016:118). As Griffith shows in his close readings of multiple passages in *Beowulf* and other poems, poets could use the flexibility allowed by the system to create various aesthetic effects.

This poetic freedom, we can infer, would have been exploited to different degrees by different poets. Griffith (108) argues that the *Beowulf*-poet's general avoidance of "structures with alliterating finites preceding full compounds and two separate nouns" is probably "a particular constraint of that poet's style." If this is the case, then large discrepancies in the frequency of verses in which the finite verbs do not alliterate (among those verbs that appear in Bliss' groups of alliterative finite verbs) may be diagnostic of a passage's having a different author or source. The rolling-window plot in Fig. 6 was created from Griffith's (2016:108-11) list of verses:[41]

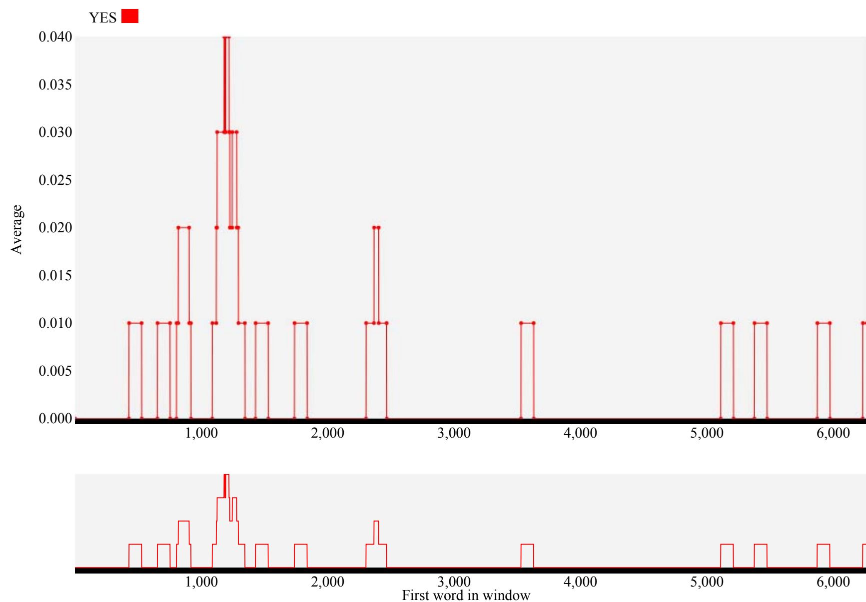


Fig. 6. Average frequency of alliterating non-displaced finite verbs in *Beowulf* in a rolling-window of 50 half-lines. Horizontal scale is in half-lines.

[41] This plot was made using Griffith's list of verses in Bliss' groups 2, 3, 4, and 7, which are the groups of these type of verses in which alliteration is most frequent in *Beowulf*. A plot of only the verses in group 3, which, according to Bliss (1966 [1958]), is the only group in which the alliteration is functional (the verb is the only particle before the first stressed element), has exactly the same shape as that of the four groups combined shown in Fig. 6.

Once again we find a cluster of a feature centered on Wealhtheow's cup-bearing: the frequency of verses containing alliterating non-displaced finite verbs is here twice that of any other section of *Beowulf*. The second-highest frequencies of the verses are found in the interaction between Hrothgar and Beowulf, when the hero offers to fight Grendel (lines 409-450), and in Wealhtheow's speech to Hrothgar (lines 1159b-1196), a passage which, as noted above, contains the highest concentration of conjunctive *siþþan* in the poem. Because the use of non-alliterating finite verbs in Bliss type A3 verses is a feature under the control of an individual poet (rather than being forced by the metrical system) and because the author of the vast majority of *Beowulf* appears to prefer to employ verses in which the finite verbs alliterate, the concentration shown in Fig. 6 strongly implies that Wealhtheow's cup-bearing either has a different author or has been influenced by an external source, a conclusion consistent with the other evidence discussed thus far.

Density and Distribution of Formulas

Francis Magoun's (1953) pioneering study of the oral-traditional nature of Anglo-Saxon poetry used formulaic density as an indicator of poems' relative orality. This measure was for the most part rejected by critics after Larry Benson (1966) showed that some Anglo-Saxon poems translated from Latin appeared to have the same formulaic density as texts, such as *Beowulf*, that were thought to have oral-traditional sources.[42] Even after significant flaws were identified in Benson's methodology—he was searching for Homeric formulas in a tradition that works quite differently (Foley 1990:207-35)—most scholars have followed Lord (1986:478-81) in seeing formulaic density as an unreliable marker of a text's orality. This may indeed be true, for a variety of reasons, (there is not even agreement in the scholarship as to what constitutes a formula), but variations in the frequency of formula-use—using any consistent definition of "formula"—*within* a given poem is, at the very least, additional data about that poem, regardless of whether or not we accept the idea that higher formulaic density is diagnostic of immediate oral origins.

Andy Orchard's tables of repeated formulas (2003:274-326) allow us to create a database of lines containing formulas. We recognize (as does he) that the method used by Orchard of counting as formulas only those phrases that exhibit verbatim or near-verbatim identity, probably misses many actual formulas.[43] For the purposes of this study, however, that conservatism is useful precisely because it avoids the confirmation bias that could arise from employing scholarly cleverness to identify putative non-obvious formulas: it is just too easy to apply more ingenuity to the identification of formulas in those passages that one suspects of being more formula-dense. Orchard's selection, therefore, provides a useful proxy measurement for whatever

---

[42] Benson's argument was so influential in part because he gave the field something it desired: a means of evading the critical problems posed by oral tradition. For a similar example of flawed arguments being accepted because they were what scholars wanted to hear, see Drout, Boyd, and Bowman (2014:157-77).

[43] Inter alia, Mize's examples of the *corna q-st* formula—*hwitust corna* and *corna caldest*—might not have enough overlap to be considered a formula if multiple appearances of the same exact phrases are required (Mize 2013:86-92; see below for further discussion).

the true (but now undetectable) formulaic density is within *Beowulf*.[44] After compiling a machine-readable list of Orchard's lines containing formulas, we used the Lexos software to produce a plot of the frequency of repeated formulas in a rolling window of 20 lines (Fig. 7):[45]

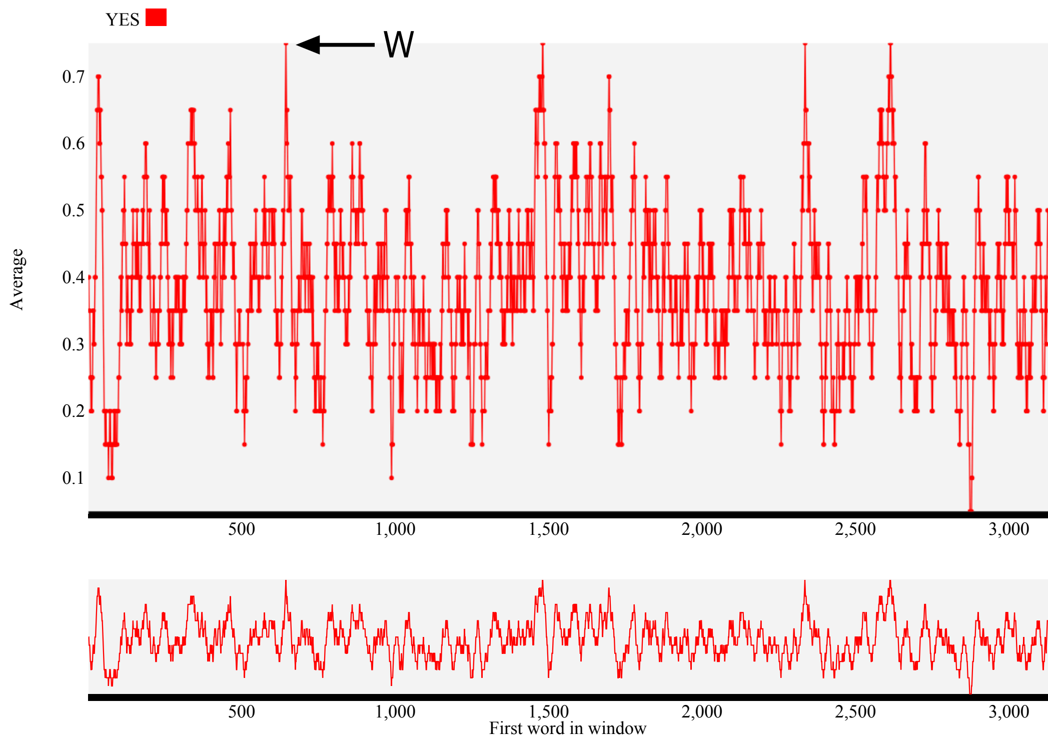


Fig.7. Frequency of repeated formulas in *Beowulf* in a rolling window of 20 lines.

The most important result of this analysis, for the purposes of this study, is the identification of Wealhtheow's cup-bearing as one of the four most formulaically dense passages in *Beowulf*, with an average density of .75 formulas per line. There are only three other places in the poem that reach this level of density, short passages centered on lines 1481, 2335, and 2614 (Beowulf's fight against Grendel's mother, the deaths of Hygelac and Heardred, and Wiglaf's upbraiding of the cowardly retainers). Taken in isolation, the concentration in lines 607-61 might not appear significant, because a random distribution of formulas would be expected to produce some areas of concentration and others of absence. However, the correlation of the high formulaic density in this part of the poem with all of the other features discussed above (which are at least theoretically independent of the passage's formulaicity) further supports the conclusion that lines 607-61 are qualitatively different from both their surrounding matrix and from most of the rest of *Beowulf*, and this difference, once again, is associated with a feature that has been linked to a text's being relatively older or more traditional.

---

[44] Orchard excludes phrases that appear in other poems but are not repeated in *Beowulf,* so his list certainly undercounts the total number of formulas in the poem, but again, for the purposes of this study, that useful restriction avoids the very difficult problem of the influence of a poem's topic on its formulaic density.

[45] It is remarkable how similar the general outline of this graph is to the plots in Foley's (1978) pioneering computer-based study of metrical patterns in *Beowulf*, even though the technology of the time limited Foley to calculating frequencies within arbitrary segments.

Distribution of thorn *<þ> and* eth *<ð>: Orthographic Evidence Against a Written Source*

In Old English orthography, the allographs <þ> *thorn* and <ð> *eth* are both used to represent the dental fricatives, both voiced and unvoiced. The two graphs are thus linguistically interchangeable, so their ratio in a text is not dependent on the content of the text, but instead on the interaction of scribal orthographic practice and exemplar influence.[46] A tenth-century scribe freshly composing a text might use approximately equal numbers of *þ* and *ð*, but when that same scribe copied an older text that preferentially employed *ð*, the relative frequency of that grapheme increased. Abrupt changes in the rolling ratio of the allographs have, in some cases, been shown to be indicative of sections of a text having different copying- and thus, presumably, composition-histories than their matrices (Drout and Chauvet 2015).

Fig. 8 shows the ratio of *þ* to *ð* in a rolling window of 25 lines of *Beowulf*. We immediately note that the orthographic practices of the A- and B-scribes of the poem are extremely different. The A-scribe, who copied lines 1-1939, uses *þ* much more frequently than the B-Scribe, who prefers *ð.* Because of this disparity in orthography, we can only make useful comparisons within the work of each scribe. Lines 607-61 contain one of the highest concentrations of *þ* in the A-Scribe's portion of the poem; only in lines 755-80 (the middle of Beowulf's fight with Grendel) and 1215-47 (talk in the hall and preparation for bed before the attack of Grendel's mother) does the scribe use proportionally more thorns.

In previous research, concentrations of *þ* were correlated with those sections of a poem that post-date the material in the rest of the text: *Genesis B*, which is substantially younger than *Genesis A*, uses many more *thorns* than *eths*. Conversely, high concentrations of *eth* appear to be correlated with sections of poems that antedate their matrices: the "Song of the Three Youths" in *Daniel* appears to be older than the rest of that poem (Drout and Chauvet 2015:292-99). However, it is not possible at this stage in our knowledge to state absolutely that a higher ratio of *thorns* to *eths* is always diagnostic of a younger underlying exemplar. Although *ð* entered Anglo-Saxon orthography somewhat before *þ*, and a number of early manuscripts, such as the Vespasian Psalter Gloss,[47] use only ð (Roberts 2005:20-28; Campbell 1959:25), the B-Scribe's much more frequent use of this grapheme when copying from the same exemplar as the A-Scribe indicates that individual orthographic practice could vary substantially even between two scribes working on the same manuscript at roughly the same time and in the same place.[48]

---

[46] Rolling-window analysis was originally developed specifically to investigate the complimentary distribution of the two letters in Anglo-Saxon poems.

[47] London, British Library, Cotton Vespasian A.i; the continuous gloss was written in the ninth century at St Augustine's, Canterbury (Ker 1957: no.203; Gneuss and Lapidge 2014: no.381).

[48] The handwriting of the B-Scribe suggests that he was perhaps a generation older than the A-Scribe, but that is not a sufficient explanation for the predominance of *ð* in his orthography (Fulk, Bjork, and Niles 2008:xxvii).

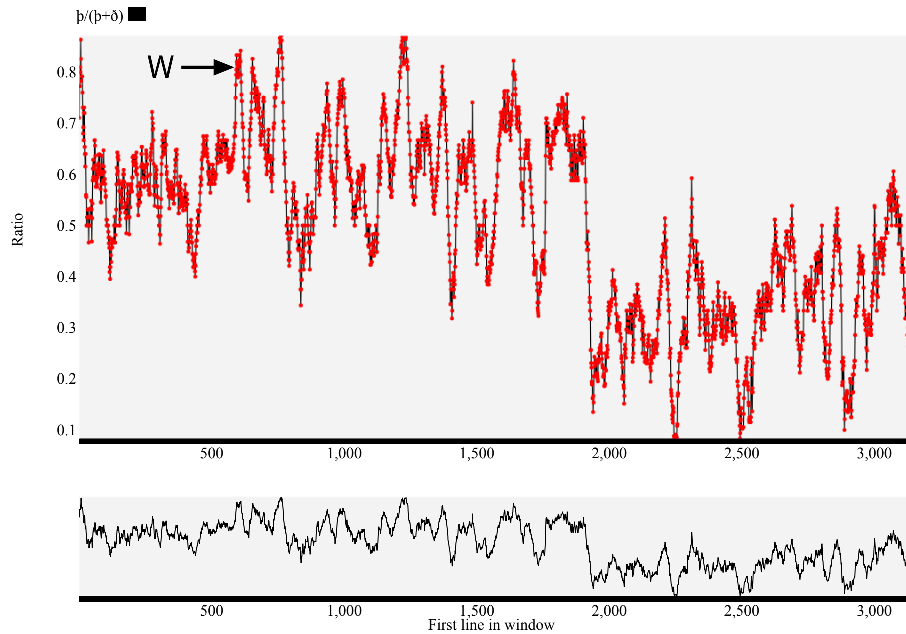


Fig.8. Ratio of þ to ð in a rolling window of 25 lines.

Two sections within the A-Scribe's portion of *Beowulf* that are generally thought to be most likely to have written, Old English sources are characterized by a more frequent appearance of *eth*: lines 1063-159a (the Finnsburg episode), and lines 1399-437 (the description of the mere). The now-lost Finnsburg fragment demonstrates that more than one version of that story existed in written form in the Anglo-Saxon period (Fulk, Bjork, and Niles 2008:278), and because neither the fragment nor the episode shows signs of being derived directly from the other, we can infer the existence of some ultimate source for both, although whether that source was written or oral is a problem that remains unsolved. The presence of a few unusual and lexically similar words in both fragment and episode[49] might imply that the source was written (Fulk, Bjork, and Niles 2008:279), but unusual and thus distinctive words are often conserved—even after their original significance has been lost—through many stages of oral transmission.[50] From this evidence alone, therefore, we can not determine if the different orthography of Finnsburg episode is due to the influence of a written or an oral source for this section of the poem.

However, the second concentration of *eth* can be traced to the likely influence of a specifically written source. As Charles Wright (1993:106-36) has demonstrated, the much-remarked similarities between the description of the mere in lines 1399-1441 and Blickling Homily XVI can best be explained by the *Beowulf*-poet having been familiar with a now-lost, vernacular verse treatment of the *Visio Pauli*. Although Wright's analyses are based on data entirely independent of the orthography of the passage, the distribution of the two allographs also

---

[49] *Eorðcyning* and *eorðbuend*, *hildeleoma*, and *swurdleoma*. For discussion see Campbell (1962:13-26) and Drout et al. (2016:103-107).

[50] See Amodio (2005:130). J. R. R. Tolkien (2014:210-11) thought that the similarity of *hæftmece* in *Beowulf* and *heptisax* in *Grettis Saga*, what he called "an extraordinary linguistic connexion," indicated that in the very old common source the hero wielded a wooden-hafted weapon that broke at a key moment in a fight with a monster. For an alternative view, see Fjalldal (1998).

supports his conclusion that the source was vernacular, as only an Old English text could influence the ratio of *thorn* to *eth* in a derived work.[51] We may infer, then, that the similar frequency of *ð* found in the Finnsburg episode is likewise also likely to have been caused by the influence of a written, vernacular source that antedated the composition of the rest of *Beowulf*.

Previous investigations have determined that although the ratio of *þ* to *ð* reached rough equilibrium in tenth-century poetic manuscripts, *eth* was never entirely replaced by *thorn* during the Anglo-Saxon period (Drout and Chauvet 2015:286-90). Thus, while we can have some confidence that a high-*eth* section of a manuscript is likely indicative of the influence of an older source, at the current state of our knowledge we cannot be equally certain that a particularly high-*thorn* section is definitely younger (only that it is not likely to be substantially older).

To this point in our analysis, the most parsimonious interpretation of the evidence has seemed to be that lines 607-61 had a written, Old English source antedating the composition of the majority of *Beowulf* (as the Finnsburg episode and the description of Grendel's mere most likely do). However, the distribution of *thorn* and *eth* in Wealhtheow's cup-bearing militates against this conclusion, as it strongly implies that the source of the passage was either not older or not written. The first of these possibilities seems unlikely, since the passage's being younger would not explain the concentration of non-orthographic features of the poem discussed above. The influence of an older, non-written source, on lines 607-61 of *Beowulf*, however, could explain the full range of evidence.

The Formulaicity, Feature-Interlinkage, and Adaptability of the Passage

The content of lines 607-661, however, would appear to be inconsistent with the passage having an oral source. The passage contains the names of peoples, families, and individuals, all of which are metrically, and for the most part alliteratively, integrated into the lines; it seems custom-made for *Beowulf*. But a close reading in the light of an improved theory of the Old English formulaic system shows that, at their core, lines 607-61 are much more generic and adaptable than they at first appear. The phrases containing *Beowulf*-specific names are in fact formulaic in a way that allows different proper nouns to be substituted with only minimal disruption to describe any queen passing a cup in any hall. The apparent specificity of the passage, therefore, is an artful illusion that does not preclude the influence of an antecedent on lines 607-61 but is instead evidence for the traditional nature of Wealtheow's cup-bearing.

Although the formulaic nature of Anglo-Saxon poetry was recognized as early as 1953 by Magoun, and despite six decades of subsequent scholarly effort, the precise workings of the formulaic system in Old English have not been captured by any single model. The fundamental challenge, recognized forty years ago by Vaira Vikis-Freibergs and Imants Freibergs (1978:331), is that while we identify formulas syntagmatically, by noting repetition in the surface structure, formulaic systems almost certainly work paradigmatically, providing a pattern or template into which various elements could be substituted.[52] Orchard's (2003:278-94) working definition of a

[51] Neither grapheme is used in Latin orthography.

[52] For a very recent summation of the problem, see Nikolaev (2016:112-15).

formula as a phrase that appears verbatim in at least one other place in the corpus takes the syntagmatic approach. Identifying *þeodnes þrymfulle* and *þegnas þrymfulle* as both being instantiations of the same underlying formula is more paradigmatic.[53] But although a paradigmatic model seems more desirable, there are, as Vikis-Freibergs and Freibergs (1978:329-31) note, some significant challenges to constructing one. In practical terms, identifying formulas in any large corpus can only be done syntagmatically, because most current digital tools are limited to finding repetitions only in the surface features of the text.[54] Identifying paradigmatic formulas would have to done by hand, and, at the current stage of our knowledge, we cannot be certain that such an approach would be successful, because recognition of the paradigm underlying any given formulas requires scholarly cleverness. We do not have a theory that would allow us to be sure that we have captured all the paradigmatic formulas in a corpus, or that what we think is a paradigmatic formula really is one. We thus end up relying on syntagmatic similarity even when trying to develop a paradigmatic model.

The most fruitful approaches to the formula in Old English, both of which can account for many of the observed features of Anglo-Saxon poetry are Foley's (1988) and Fry's (1967), particularly this latter as extended by John Niles (1981), who demonstrated how verbatim repetitions can arise as a product of the underlying flexible system rather than simply being "fixed formulas."[55] Britt Mize's (2013:52 n.44, 92 n.21) much more recent model, which is built upon those foundations, moves closer to a fully generative formulaic system and therefore seems to us to have the greatest potential for explaining the specific phenomena under discussion here.

In Mize's system, which is part syntagmatic and part paradigmatic, a formula is made up of a combination of fixed and variable lexical elements. These latter, designated by *q* in Mize's notation, can be constrained to varying degrees by phonetic value, grammar, meter, alliteration, and meaning. So, for example, in the *q* on *frofre* formula, *q* must be a polysyllabic noun or substantive adjective bearing primary stress and alliterating on /f/; in the *q on mode* formula, *q* must be a mono- or disyllabic adjective or noun bearing strong stress and participating in the line's alliteration (Mize 2013:52 n.44, 53). Similarly, *corna cealdest* and *hwitest corna* as two instantiations of the same underlying formula that includes a superlative associated with weather with *corn* in the genitive plural. Mize's model has the great benefit of including the phenomenon of interlinking different categories of linguistic features, to different degrees, across levels of the morpho-semantic hierarchy.[56] For example, in *q* on *frofre*, *q* is globally restricted to a single phonetic value, to either of two grammatical categories, and to being more than one syllable; it is locally restricted to words that would bear primary stress in the line in which the formula appears and whose meanings are consistent with being followed by on *frofre* [in consolation or relief]. The formulas that can be generated by this system exhibit the "variation within limits" that Foley

---

[53] In a different essay Orchard (2003:279) classifies these two half-lines as variants of the same formula.

[54] Nikolaev's remarkably clever algorithm for Russian is not easily transferrable to Old English.

[55] As Kiparsky suggested, a complete theory of the formula must be generative and productive of non-verbatim formulas (Kiparsky 1976:102-04).

[56] For the morpho-semantic hierarchy, see Drout (2013:103-07).

(1991:6-8 and 1998:149) and many others have identified as a key characteristic of oral-traditional poetics (see also Drout 2011).

In the following discussion we further elaborate on Mize's formulaic model by specifying semantic as well as phonetic, morphological, and metrical constraints on *q*. Thus instead of "*q on mode*" we write "[mono- or disyllabic adjective or noun meaning "emotion," bearing strong stress and alliterating with the other half of the line] *on mode*." To reduce visual clutter, we have not put every constraint into every q-slot but have instead only given those most relevant to the immediate discussion, which is focused on the participation of proper nouns in the formulaic system in lines 607-61.

There are ten different proper nouns (in various inflected forms) in Wealhtheow's cup-bearing.[57] The majority of these appear in just 25 lines of the passage, which we analyze in detail below. Proper nouns are given in italic type; phrases identified by Orchard (2003) as repeated formulas are underlined:

Þa wæs on salum	sinces brytta	
gamolfeax ond guðrof;	geoce gelyfde	
brego *Beorht-Dena*;	gehyrde on *Beowulf*e	
folces hyrde	fæstrædne geþoht.	610
Ðær wæs hæleþa hleahtor,	hlyn swynsode,	
word wæron wynsume.	Eode *Wealhþeo* forð,	
cwen *Hroðgares*	cynna gemyndig,	
grette goldhroden	guman on healle,	
ond þa freolic wif	ful gesealde	615
ærest *East-Dena*	eþelwearde,	
bæd hine bliðne	æt þære beorþege,	
leodum leofne;	he on lust geþeah	
symbel ond seleful,	sigerof kyning.	
Ymbeode þa	ides *Helminga*	620
duguþe ond geogoþe	dæl æghwylcne,	
sincfato sealde,	oþ þæt sæl alamp	
þæt hio *Beowulf*e,	beaghroden cwen	
mode geþungen	medoful ætbær;	
grette *Geata* leod,	Gode þancode	625
wisfæst wordum	þæs ðe hire se willa gelamp	
þæt heo on ænigne	eorl gelyfde	
fyrena frofre.	He þæt ful geþeah,	
wælreow wiga	æt Wealhþeon,	
ond þa gyddode	guþe gefysed.	630
Beowulf maþelode	bearn *Ecgþeowes*	

[57] In the uninflected forms used in the glossary of proper names in the fourth edition of Klaeber's *Beowulf* (1950 [1922]), these are: *Beorht-Dene* (609), *Beowulf* (609, 623, 631, 653), *Wealhþeow* (612, 629), *Hroðgar* (613, 653), *East-Dene* (616), *Helmingas* (620), *Geatas* (625, 640), *Ecgþeow* (631), *Healfdene* (645), and *Dene* (657) (Fulk, Bjork, and Niles 2008).

Despite the passage being quite formulaically dense (even when using the very restrictive method of identifying a formula only by finding a verbatim or near-verbatim repetition of a half-line), only two of the repeated formulas identified by Orchard include a proper name: "brego Beorht-Dena" in line 609, which also appears in *Beowulf* line 427, and "eode Wealhþeo forð" in line 612, a variant of which can be found in line 1162 as "þa com Wealhtheow forð." In both of these cases, the proper names are among the alliterating words in the line, as they also are in lines 616, 623, 625, and 629 (the proper names do not alliterate in lines 614 and 620). Any change in the proper name, therefore, would almost certainly necessitate other changes in the line. This feature interlink across levels of the morpho-semantic hierarchy contributes to a verbal unit being preserved and transmitted in its own form (Drout 2013:102-10), but therefore makes adaptation of the line to other narrative contexts a somewhat more difficult process than adapting a non-interlinked line would be.

However, when read in terms of Mize's system, the phrases containing proper nouns become more visibly adaptable (and therefore appear to be more formulaic). For example, in line 609, "brego Beorht-Dena, gehyrde on *Beowulf*e," the alliteration on /b/ ties the name of the hero both to the genitive plural proper noun "*Beorht-Dena*" and to the noun "brego" [chief, lord]. Substituting a different hero's name for Beowulf would therefore require modifying both the word for lord and the genitive plural form of the people that lord ruled. Such a set of changes would indeed be challenging to perform in real time if the formulaic system were merely a collection memorized of half-lines. But if the formula is instead a generative system combining stress patterns, morphological elements and lexical features, the required changes are surprisingly easy to accomplish:

> [**synonym for ruler**] + [(**positive adjective or noun**) + (name of people + genitive plural)] ||
> gehyrde on [**hero's name** + dative singular]

This formula provides a template that is lexical, metri-syntactic and phonological (alliterating elements are in boldface type). The poet is not required to search through an entire lexicon to identify three individual elements that would fit together; instead, the hero's name in the head-stave narrows the search space for the other elements. For example, if that name was Wulfgar, then the word for lord and the name of the that lord's people in the a-verse must alliterate on /w/, a condition that is easily met. Even a cursory glance at Stephen Barney's (1977) *Word-Hoard* or a search of the *Old English Thesaurus* shows a multitude of synonyms for *brego*, at least two of which alliterate on /w/ (*weard*, *wealdend*). The regular compounding of the names of peoples with either nouns or adjectives that indicate geographic location, glory, or martial prowess makes it simple to find a word with the appropriate alliteration for the first element in the compound (West is the most obvious). Thus if Wulfgar were the hero, the line could become **weard West-Dena / hyrde on Wulfgare*.

The formulaicity of line 613 is even easier to explain, since the underlying formula would simply be:

> **cwen** [king name + genitive plural] || **cynna** gemyndig.

The line would still alliterate if Hrothgar's name were replaced with that of any king in the genitive plural: **cwen Wulfgares, cynna gemyndig,* **cwen Beowulfes, cynna gemyndig,* **cwen Finnes, cynna gemyndig*. Line 620 works the same way, and can be generated from an underlying formula of:

> **Ymbeode** þa || **ides** [family-name + genitive plural]

The vocalic alliteration is determined by *ides* in the b-verse, so any family name can be substituted for the Helmings, for example, * *ides Wulfinga*, * *ides Scylfinga*. Both 620 and 613 thus alliterate on a generic word for queen or woman and allow open substitution of the personal or family name, providing great flexibility in adapting the passage to different stories containing different queens.

Adapting line 616, "ærest East-Dena eþelwearde," to some other context initially appears to be more difficult, since two substitutions would be required if the name of the people in the a-verse did not happen to alliterate. Vocalic alliteration, however, can be preserved by compounding any tribal name with a descriptive noun or adjective beginning with any vowel. The simplest and most obvious of these, used three times in *Beowulf*, is *East*: **East-Engla*, **East-Wedera,* **East-Seaxna*. The element *eþel-* in the compound could very easily be replaced with one of many synonyms for native land or people, such as *þeod*, or with a synechdochic word like *hama* ("homes") or *hord* ("treasure"), producing a surface form like **Hring-Dena hamweard*. The underlying formula, then, would either be:

> [**direction/characteristic** + people-name + genitive plural] || **eþelwearde**

or

> [**direction/characteristic** + people-name + genitive plural] || [**thing being protected**] + wearde]

In line 631, "Beowlf maþelode bearn Ecgþeowes," *Beowulf*'s name in the a-verse requires alliteration on /b/ in the second half-line, making substitution of another name slightly more difficult than in lines 613 and 620. However, the word to which the proper name is alliteratively linked is a compound whose first element can be replaced with many possible synonyms while preserving the sense of the phrase. The underlying formula is:

> þæt hio [**name** + dative singular] || [**treasure-word** + hroden] cwen

There are in the Old English corpus a significant number of treasure-words that could be combined with—*hroden* to create a compound with the necessary alliteration: *beag*, *gold*, and *sinc-hroden* are all attested, and *hring-*, *frætwe-*, *maþþum-*, *hord-*, and *wela-* would all preserve the sentence's meaning while enabling a different name to be substituted in the passage.

The double alliteration in the a-verse in "grette Geata leod, Gode þancode" (625) would at first appear to create a more substantial problem for replacing the name of the Geats with

some other people.[58] However, only a double, and not a triple substitution is needed as long as the name of the people does not alliterate on /g/.[59] The alliterating element in the a-verse is simply the name of the visiting people being greeted by the queen; that name must alliterate in the b-verse with a synonym for God—with which the Old English corpus is plentifully supplied. The underlying formula, then, is:

grette + [**people name** + genitive plural] leod || [**Name for deity** + accusative singular] þancode

Similarly, in line 629, "wælreow wiga || æt Wealhþeon," the double alliteration in the a-verse is not required, so another queen's name would only require a different initial compound adjective: **gromheort guma* || *æt Godgifu*. If the passage was composed while poetic compounding was still a productive process in Old English (as seems likely for a variety of reasons, including the distribution of Ss/Sx verses), then the poet could create a compound with the necessary alliteration. Retaining the double alliteration in the a-verse might not even be difficult in this particular circumstance, as there are quite a few monosyllabic words for "warrior" that could alliterate with the initial poetic compound chosen to alliterate with the queen's name. The underlying formula for this line, then would be:

[**compound adjective**] wiga || æt [**queen's name** + dative singular]

or

[**compound adjective**] [**word for warrior**] || æt [**queen's name** + dative singular]

If the queen's name had fewer syllables or a significantly different stress pattern than "Wealhtheow," the insertion of an adjective might be required, but this would not be difficult, as there are many positive mono- and disyllabic adjectives that could easily be applied to a queen. Again, the key substitution elements—compound adjective and synonym for warrior—are not in short supply in the surviving lexicon of Old English.

We are thus left only to explain line 612, "word wæron wynsume || eode Wealhþeo forð," the first line in which Wealhtheow's name is used. The anticipation of the queen's name by the triple alliteration on /w/ in the a-verse[60] would seem to imply that the line was composed specifically for this purpose and was not part of a formulaic set-piece into which the queen's name was substituted. We could even justify excluding this line from the putatively formulaic material, since the most compressed part of the passage begins with the next line. Finally, 612a is

---

[58] This line and the next seem slightly awkward. The combination of the expanded Sx/Sxs (Sievers Db) with a S/Sxx (Sievers Da) verse, may even suggest that the line as we have it is an adaptation of some earlier, tighter form instead of being composed specifically for this particular place in *Beowulf*.

[59] "Sievers' rule of precedence" requires that the initial verb *not* alliterate if the following noun does not, so **grette Huga leod*, *God þancode* would not be well formed (Fulk, Bjork, and Niles 2008:334). We are grateful to an anonymous referee for *Oral Tradition* for pointing this out.

[60] For discussion of verses with supplemental alliteration, see Orchard (1995).

the conclusion of a sentence that begins in line 611, so it seems that the poet would have had to anticipate needing a half-line that could alliterate with Wealhtheow's name at the same time that he was finishing a previous sentence. Closer examination of 612 and its immediate context, however, shows that even this seemingly customized line could easily be modified to accommodate a variety of queen names in the b-verse.

Line 612 has two functionally alliterating syllables in the a-verse, *word* and *wynsume*, and one in the b-verse, *Wealhtheow*'s name; the alliteration on *wæron* is ornamental. The core of the line could thus be generated from a simple substitution formula like those discussed above:

[**aspect of hall life** past-tense form of "to be" / [**positive adjective**] || eode [**Queen-name** / **ephithet**] forð

By "aspect of hall life," we mean any of the phenomena that, in Anglo-Saxon poetry, are associated with social activity in the mead-hall, including speech, laughter, music, song, joy, friendship, warmth, light, gold, wine, mead, beer, treasure (all of which are potential elements of the "joy in the hall" theme discussed below). A noun-adjective pair alliterating with the queens's name is required, but this can be constructed out of almost any positively connoted, monosyllabic alliterating nouns, since the second noun can be converted to an adjective by means of a suffix (Campbell 1959:263-72). Because the past-tense form of the verb "to be" does not take primary stress, the verb inserted between the two nouns is easily changed to monosyllabic *wæs* if the initial noun is singular. Finally, although 612a is grammatically linked to 611 while being alliteratively linked to 612b, the half-line is actually superfluous to the sentence of which it is a part; line 611 can stand alone grammatically without 612a. Compare line 1162, "win of wunderfatum || þa cwom Wealhþeo forð." The b-verse is nearly identical to 612b, but unlike 612a, 1162a is grammatically essential to the previous sentence. Without it, there is no object of the transitive verb *sealdon* in line 1161a.

We find, therefore, that lines containing a proper name and thus appearing to be specific to *Beowulf* can be rather straightforwardly converted to include different characters. Additionally, the words that must be modified in order to accommodate the lines to different names are, more often than not, drawn from semantic fields in which the Old English lexicon is particularly rich in synonyms. Lines 607-61, then, despite their inclusion of proper names, could easily be generic, the particular form of the passage in *Beowulf* just one instantiation of an underlying paradigmatic scene that could be readily adapted for any queen who enters any hall and passes the cup among any assembled happy warriors.

Lines 607-61 as a Theme or Type-Scene

In a 1976 study, Jeff Opland identified a "joy in the hall" commonplace in Old English poetry. This "theme" or "type-scene" is marked by the coincidence of a narrative pattern—a feast among warriors in a hall—with a cluster of lexical elements, including the words *dream* ("joy"), *gomen* ("mirth"), *gleo* ("glee"), *gyd / gied* ("song"), *sang / singan* ("song" / "to sing"), *sweg*

("sound" or "music"), *hearpe* ("harp"), and *scop* ("poet") (Opland 1976:446-57).[61] John Miles Foley (1983:690-91) extended Opland's argument, showing how the "joy in the hall" is used in The Seafarer to create an impression of loss by evoking the traditional connotations of the theme even as it is "negativized," thus evoking a sense of desolation. But despite their depiction of happy warriors at an indoor feast, lines 607-60 of *Beowulf* are not included in Opland's list of examples of "joy in the hall," and the passage is not discussed by Foley.

We can only infer the reasons for this omission, but it seems likely that the absence of harp music or singing made the passage seem too different from the other instances of "joy in the hall" identified by Opland and Foley. However, although there is no explicit mention of song or the music of the harp in lines 607-60, we do find the words *hlyn* ("sound"), *hleahtor* ("laughter"), and *swynsode* ("made a pleasing sound"). If traditional themes "are groupings of ideas rather than of words" (Foley 1985:42), then the passage, which includes social happiness and pleasant sounds in a hall, certainly seems to be very close to the other instances of "joy in the hall." Even if we use a more restrictive definition of theme that requires the grouping of both ideas and lexical items (Foley 1983:691), we find that that *Beowulf* lines 607-60 has the words sweg ("sound" or "music"), *hæleþ* ("warriors"), *duguþ* ("warriors"), and *geoguþ* ("young warriors") in common with some of the "joy in the hall" passages.[62] However, the word *sweg* is the only lexical item in "Wealhtheow's cup-bearing" that is among those listed by Opland; all of his "joy in the hall" passages share a minimum of three words (1976:449). It may be, therefore, that the combination of a slightly different idea-group (due to the lack of music) with the limited shared lexis made these lines of *Beowulf* sufficiently distinct from the other "joy in the hall" themes or type-scenes.

Another possible reason for Opland and Foley not identifying Wealhtheow's cup-bearing as an example of "joy in the hall" is the seeming specificity of the passage to *Beowulf* rather than being an example of a more generally applicable traditional commonplace or type-scene. However, three of Opland's eight "joy in the hall" passages also include proper nouns specific to *Beowulf*: the Danes and Weders, Healfdan, Hrothgar, Healgamen (if this is a proper name),[63] and the Scyldings. Only the last of these is not an alliterating element in its line.[64] Thus there appears

---

[61] These lexical elements can either stand alone or be parts of compounds like *gomenwudu* ("mirth-wood," that is, "harp").

[62] *Sweg* also appears in lines 89-9, 1063-68, and 3020-24; *hæleþ* also appears in lines 496-98, as does *duguþ*, and *geoguþ* can be found in lines 2105-10.

[63] In his third edition of *Beowulf*, Klaeber (1950 [1922]:170-71) interprets *healgamen* in line 1066 as a common noun meaning "entertainments in the hall." The fourth edition of the text, however, takes *Healgamen* to be the name of Hrothgar's *scop* (Fulk, Bjork, and Niles 2008:180-81).

[64] Opland states that he has identified seven passages, but one of these is a composite made of lines 1063-68 and 1159-61, which bracket the Finnsburg episode. The first of these includes references to Healfdane and Hrothgar, while the second is more generic, so, for the purposes of this essay, it seems better to count two separate instances here. The other generic examples of "joy in the hall" are lines 89-91, 2262-65, 2457-59, and 3020-24. The last three are all negative examples (that is, "there was no sound of the harp . . . "). Lines 496-98 contain references to Heorot and the Danes, and lines 2015-10 mention the Scyldings.

to be no obvious reason to exclude Wealhtheow's cup-bearing from the "joy in the hall" theme.[65] Indeed, we ourselves originally not only took the passage as a variant of "joy in the hall," but identified it as the archetypal instance of the topos in *Beowulf*, even going so far as to label the passage "Joy in the Hall" in another publication.[66] Based on the evidence surveyed above, however, we now interpret the passage as the only surviving example of a different, though related, type-scene: the "cup-bearing of a queen."

The Traditionality of Wealhtheow's Cup-Bearing

Although no single piece of evidence is dispositive, the distribution of vocabulary in the passage, its verbal economy and formulaic density, along with the concentrations of specific grammatical and metrical features, all combine to indicate that Wealhtheow's cup-bearing is qualitatively different than its surrounding matrix in *Beowulf.* This conclusion is further substantiated by the independence of the different kinds of evidence. Although the overall distribution of vocabulary could be in some way related to verbal economy, and, perhaps, formulaic density, hierarchical agglomerative cluster analysis is not affected by the distribution of infrequently used words and is therefore independent of the frequency of conjunctive *siþþan*, the Kaluza's Law and Ss/Sx verses, and verses containing an un-displaced finite verb. With the exception of the Kaluza's Law and Ss/Sx verses, between which there is some overlap, these features are also independent of each other. Therefore the clustering of all of these different variants in the same part of the poem is highly unlikely to be either a random occurrence or a set of epiphenomena of the concentration of just one feature.[67]

Previous scholars have associated the use of conjunctive *siþþan* and the presence of verses that follow Kaluza's Law, with relatively older Anglo-Saxon texts. The process of poetic compounding that underlies the Ss/Sx verse-type was more active earlier in the Old English period than it was later. Proportionally greater verbal economy and formulaic density are regularly assumed to be indicative of a text's relative proximity to oral tradition and thus, in the

---

[65] In part, not identifying Wealhtheow's cup-bearing as an example of "joy in the hall" may just be a manifestation of the lack of agreement within oral traditional theory as to how to define, recognize and classify the structures and sub-units of traditional works. Scholars do not even agree completely on the *size* of traditional "multiforms." Although Milman Parry and Albert Lord (1960:68) originally restricted the identification of formulas to identical metrical conditions, Lord also discussed much larger-scale "themes" that were groupings of ideas. More recent work has identified much larger formulaic entities (Honko 1998:102-14), even to the point where complete songs can be traditional multiforms (Foley 1998). Oral traditional theory does recognize a gradation in size of formulaic units ranging from the phraseological to the overarching narrative pattern, but how this continuum should be subdivided and its units taxonomized is an unresolved problem. Even within the narrower field of Old English studies there is little agreement on the differences between theme, type-scene, commonplace and motif (although see Foley 1988 74). However, in this particular case both Opland and Foley seem to agree upon the characteristics of the theme. For additional discussion see Ritzke-Rutherford's (1981a and 1981b) discussion of formulaic micro- and macrostructure and the essays in *Oral Literature and the Formula* (Stolz and Shannon 1976).

[66] It is both ironic and embarrassing that we picked the single instance of hall-happiness that is not on Opland's list to label "Joy in the Hall" (Drout et al. 2016:25, 31).

[67] Even if all the other pieces of evidence were merely epiphenomena of one, that concentration would still need to be explained.

context of Anglo-Saxon poetry, composed earlier in the period. The simplest explanation for the concentration of all of these features in lines 607-61 would be that the poet who created the archetype of *Beowulf* drew upon an older source for Wealhtheow's cup-bearing.

This interpretation cuts against the grain of a general scholarly consensus, which for nearly a century has strongly resisted the idea that *Beowulf* could be in any meaningful way a composite. Editors and commentators have repeatedly asserted, in no uncertain terms, that "scholarship is justified in regarding *Beowulf* as a unified composition" (Fulk, Bjork, and Niles 2008:xci).[68] This certainty is somewhat surprising. Many contemporary *Beowulf*-scholars—often the same ones who reject the notion of a composite poem—have supported the idea that nothing about the poem is certain (indeed, the supposed indeterminacy of the text has been celebrated).[69] However, the long-recognized medieval practice of *compilatio*, the incorporation of previously existing material into texts, is well documented in Anglo-Saxon poetry. Most famously and uncontroversially, Eduard Sievers' identification of *Genesis B* within the earlier *Genesis A* showed how one text could be inserted into another without any explicit indication in the manuscript. *Daniel* (Drout and Chauvet 2015), *Guthlac A* (Downey et al. 2012) and *Christ III* (Drout et al. 2011) also contain sections that either ante- or post-date the main body of the poems. In *Beowulf* itself, the Finnsburg episode almost certainly has an ultimate source different from the majority of the text,[70] and the conclusion that the description of Grendel's mere is derived from a lost Old English translation or poetic treatment of the *Visio Pauli* is widely, if not universally, accepted (Wright 1993). The possibility that Wealhtheow's Cup-Bearing has a different source than the rest of *Beowulf* should not, therefore, be a particularly radical claim.

Indeed, a different transmission history for these lines is the simplest explanation for not only all of the evidence discussed above, but also for the otherwise odd phenomenon of the passage being left out of lists of "joy in the hall" themes despite including both a hall and joy, as well as comradeship and sounds of happiness. We can infer that Opland and Foley, as well as subsequent scholars who have discussed "joy in the hall," intuited that there was something qualitatively different about Wealhtheow's cup-bearing.

Were it not for the distribution of *þ* and *ð*, that qualitative difference would be most easily explained by the passage being an insertion of a written version of a type scene. However, the apparent conflict between the evidence of orthographic variation and all the other concentrations of features could be harmonized if lines 607-61 were influenced by a source, but that source was not written. If the author of *Beowulf*, who was obviously skilled in the composition of Old English verse, had internalized a formulaic type-scene in which a queen enters a hall and passes the cup of fellowship to the assembled happy retainers, his application of this theme to the demands of *Beowulf* would produce a passage whose grammar, vocabulary distribution, meter,

---

[68] Among many others, see Fulk (2003:16-24 **[AQ: There is a Fulk 1992 in the references list and a Fulk, Björk, and Niles 2008 in the references, but not this one. Could you provide a citation for Fulk 2003]**).

[69] See the discussion in Frantzen (2014:239-45). For celebrations of the indeterminacy of the text, see Howe (1997) and Earl (1994:16-17).

[70] Although Fulk, Bjork, and Niles (2008:lxxxvii) dismiss the idea that the Finnsburg episode was a separate lay "inserted" into *Beowulf*, they accept that the poet has "reworked the material thoroughly and in original ways," tacitly accepting that there was a source to rework. For additional discussion, see Drout et al. (2016:62-63).

and formulaicity would then be different from the other material that he composed that did not have such a source.[71] Such an internalized template would not affect the distribution of þ and ð in the text.

Part of the appeal of this interpretation is that it explains how *Beowulf* could come to be characterized by varying densities of oral-traditional features. A tradition-fluent poet would mobilize the underlying oral tradition to different degrees in different compositional situations. At times only elements at the two ends of the morpho-semantic hierarchy might be used: the formulaic system and the abstract, overarching narrative pattern. But at other points, the poet could use set-pieces—such as sea-voyages, greetings, the exchange of gifts or the entrance of a queen into a hall—as more or less fully formed, feature-interlinked templates integrating material at multiple levels of the morpho-semantic hierarchy. These would include not just the grouping of ideas and lexical items (as per Foley's discussion of themes), but also the arrangement of these entities into somewhat more detailed formulaic patterns (as per Mize's *q formulae*). If the poet was also highly literate and thus influenced by a range of written sources (in both Latin and Anglo-Saxon), as he seems to have been, we would expect to find exactly what we do see in *Beowulf:* clusters and absences of various features in a blend of intellectual and literary traditions.

But exactly because such an interpretation is so appealing, we should be cautious in accepting it. Although our identification of clusters of features is as objective as it is possible to be in humanistic research, it could still be the result of confirmation bias. If the distribution of various features is random, there will eventually be some correlated absences or concentrations: if you fish in the pool of random numbers long enough, you will catch something. That we did not proceed in that fashion in this research (quite the opposite: we resisted until the last the idea that there was anything unusual about the passage and even mistakenly identified it as just another example of the "joy in the hall" theme), gives us some confidence that the patterns we have identified are real and significant, but we cannot be certain.

Another potentially substantial problem is that we appear to be suggesting that the type-scene would have been transmitted in near verbatim form, and this interpretation seems to violate what could be called the central dogma of the theory of oral composition: that oral traditions are not characterized by verbatim memorization of long passages (Hunter 1984 and 1985).[72] Indeed most investigations of type-scenes in Old English find exact repetition only at the lower and higher levels of the morpho-semantic hierarchy, in lexical elements, half- or single-line formulas at one extreme and in abstract idea groups at the other (Opland 1976; Foley 1983; Magoun 1953; Fry 1968; for a summary of previous approaches, see Foley 1988:69-74). The "cup-bearing of a queen," however, has a more linear narrative logic than "joy in the hall" or "the beasts of battle": for the scene to make sense, the participants must be introduced in a certain order.[73] That

---

[71] As Mize (2013:26 n.55) notes, all the characteristics of oral tradition in Anglo-Saxon—as delineated by Niles (1992 **[AQ: There is a Niles 1981 in the references but not Niles 1992; could you provide the reference?**) —are just as consistent with "active, robust poetic traditionality" as they are with orality.

[72] For additional discussion, see Goody (1987:87-91).

[73] See Rubin (1995:24-28) for discussion of how such narrative "scripts" help to structure and mnemonically preserve oral traditions.

requirement is an additional constraint on variation, as is the formulaic density of the passage. The more tightly interwoven, at multiple levels of the morpho-semantic hierarchy, a passage becomes, the more difficult it is for variation to arise (see Rubin 1995:208-10; Drout 2013:102-10). Familiarity with such a highly traditional, interlinked type-scene could affect a poet's normal composition process, causing the appearance of different frequencies of features in the type-scene than in the sections of the poem without such an influence. Furthermore, if the formal qualities of a type-scene cause it to be replicated in its own form, then that particular form is likely to be committed to memory. A sufficiently tightly interlinked passage would thus not only seem like a verbatim reproduction, but might eventually become one as the passage was passively memorized. In the absence of comparanda, it is impossible to tell to what degree the "cup-bearing of a queen" type-scene was so cross-linked, and there must have at least been sufficient flexibility to allow for the adaptation of the scene to different narrative contexts.

At this stage of our knowledge, the most parsimonious explanation for the different pieces of evidence (both independent and inter-related) is that the *Beowulf*-poet had an unwritten, highly traditional source for lines 607-60 of the poem. As per Opland's and Foley's description of the "joy in the hall" theme or type-scene, this "cup-bearing of a queen" included both the narrative pattern (the plot of a queen entering a hall and passing the cup) and a group of ideas (joy, a hall, warmth, enjoyable sounds, friendship, social unity) with their associated words. But unlike the other instances of "joy in the hall," the lexical items in the *Beowulf*-poet's internalized "cup-bearing of a queen" were incorporated into half- and full-line formulas interlinked semantically, morpho-syntactically, metrically, and phonologically, both to each other and to the type-scene as a whole. This interlinkage across different levels of a morpho-semantic hierarchy explains how such a set-piece could be adapted to the particular demands of an individual narrative while preserving many specific features of the underlying tradition.

If the "cup-bearing of a queen" did exist as such a set-piece, we may infer that the entrance of a queen into a hall to pass the cup of friendship was a common enough feature of heroic poetry that it was internalized by the creator of *Beowulf*. That the other queens in *Beowulf* (Hildeburh, Hygd, Fremu, and perhaps Freawaru) are not given such scenes may therefore be variants of the "negativized" use of a theme similar to what Foley identified in *The Seafarer's* inversion of "joy in the hall." If this is the case, then the poet is contrasting Wealhtheow to the other queens in the poem. At the very least, the absence of the "cup-bearing of a queen" theme in the introductions of the other queens shows that the poet was not a slave to his tradition, even when that tradition was so strong that he internalized it.

Given the lack of comparative data, such inferences may be stretching the evidence too far. But even if we accept only the more narrow conclusion that lines 607-61 are a formulaic set-piece, we can recognize that the linguistic and metrical tightness and verbal efficiency that we observe in every aspect of the passage are produced by the interaction of a long-developed tradition with an individual poet. Wealhtheow's cup-bearing is a single instantiation of a multiform, shaped and polished by many minds and cultural transmissions, a pebble worn smooth by the stream of tradition.

Wheaton College, Massachusetts

References

Amodio 2005 — Mark Amodio. *Writing the Oral Tradition: Oral Poetics and Literary Culture in Medieval England*. South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.

Barney 1977 — Stephen Barney. *Word-Hoard: An Introduction to Old English Vocabulary* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Bately 1985 — Janet Bately. "Linguistic Evidence as a Guide to the Authorship of Old English Verse: A Reappraisal, with Special Reference to *Beowulf*." In *Learning and Literature in Anglo-Saxon England: Studies Presented to Peter Clemoes on the Occasion of his Sixty-Fifth Birthday*. Ed. by Michael Lapidge and Helmut Gneuss. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. pp. 409-31.

Benson 1966 — Larry D. Benson. "The Literary Character of Anglo-Saxon Formulaic Poetry." *Pulications of the Modern Language Association*, 81:224-41.

Berger and Drout 2015 — Rosetta Berger and Michael D.C. Drout. "A Reconsideration of the Relationship Between *Víga-Glúms Saga* and *Reykdœla Saga*: New Evidence from Lexomic Analysis." *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia*, 11 (2015):1-32.

Bliss 1967 [1958] — Alan J. Bliss. *The Metre of* Beowulf. Oxford: Blackwell.

Bonjour 1965 — Adrien Bonjour. *The Digressions in* Beowulf. Oxford: Blackwell.

Boyd et al. 2014 [2012] — Phoebe Boyd, Michael D.C. Drout, Namiko Hitotsubashi, Michael J. Kahn, Mark D. LeBlanc and Leah Smith. "Lexomic Analysis of Anglo-Saxon Prose: Establishing Controls with the Old English Penitential and the Old English translation of Orosius." *Revista de la Sociedad Española de Lengua y Literatura Inglesa Medieval (SELIM)*,19 (2012 [2014]):7-51.

Campbell 1959 — Alistair Campbell. *Old English Grammar*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Campbell 1962 — ______. "The Old English Epic Style." In *English and Medieval Studies Presented to J.R.R. Tolkien on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday*. Ed. by Norman Davis and C. Wrenn. London: Allen and Unwin. pp. 13-26.

Chambers 1959 — R. W. Chambers. Beowulf*: An Introduction to the Study of the Poem with a Discussion of the Stories of Offa and Finn*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Clark 2014 — George Clark. "Scandals in Toronto: Kaluza's Law and Transliteration Errors." In *The Dating of* Beowulf*: A Reassessment*. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer.

Crowne 1960 — David K. Crowne. "The Hero on the Beach: An Example of Composition by Theme in Anglo-Saxon Poetry." *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 61:362-72.

Downey et al. 2012 — Sarah Downey, Michael D. C. Drout, Michael J. Kahn, and Mark D. LeBlanc. "'Books Tell Us': Lexomic and Traditional Evidence for the Sources of Guthlac A." *Modern Philology*, 110:153-81.

Downey et al. 2014 — Sarah Downey, Michael D.C. Drout, Veronica Kerekes, and Douglas Raffle. "Lexomic Analysis of Medieval Latin Texts." *Journal of Medieval Latin*, 24:225-74.

Drout 2011 — Michael D. C. Drout. "Variation within Limits: An Evolutionary Approach to the Structure and Dynamics of the Multiform." *Oral Tradition*, 26:447-74. http://journal.oraltradition.org/issues/26ii/drout

Drout and Chauvet 2015 — Michael D. C. Drout and Elie Chauvet, "Tracking the Moving Ratio of þ to ð in Anglo-Saxon Texts: A New Method, and Evidence for a Lost Old English Version of the *Song of the Three Youth*s." *Anglia*, 133.2:278-319.

Drout et al. 2011 — Michael D.C. Drout, Michael J. Kahn, Mark D. LeBlanc, and Christina Nelson. "Of Dendrogrammatology: Lexomic Methods for Analyzing the Relationships Among Old English Poems." *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 110:301-36.

Drout et al. 2016 — Michael D.C. Drout, Yvette Kisor, Leah Smith, Allisson Dennett, and Natasha Piirainen. Beowulf *Unlocked: New Evidence from Lexomic Analysis*. New York: Palgrave.

Drout, Boyd, and Bowman 2014 — Michael D.C. Drout, Phoebe Boyd, and Emily Bowman. "'Give the People What They Want': Historiography and Rhetorical History of the Dating of *Beowulf* Controversy." In *The Dating of Beowulf: A Reassessment*. Ed. by Leonard Neidorf. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer. pp. 157-77.

Dyer 2002 — Betsey Dexter Dyer. *"Blunt End" Genome Technology 1.27*. Accessed November 2014. http://www.genomeweb.com/

Earl 1994 — J. W. Earl. *Thinking About* Beowulf. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Fjalldal 1998 — Magnús Fjalldal. *The Long Arm of Coincidence: The Frustrated Connection between* Beowulf *and* Grettis Saga. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Foley 1978 — ______. "A Computer Analysis of Metrical Patterns in *Beowulf*." *Computers and the Humanities*, 12:71-80.

Foley 1983 ______. "Literary Art and Oral Tradition in Old English and Serbian Poetry." *Anglo-Saxon England*, 12:183-214.

Foley 1985 ______. *Oral Formulaic Theory and Research: An Introduction and Annotated Bibliography*. New York: Garland.

Foley 1988 ______. *The Theory of Oral Composition: History and Methodology*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Foley 1990 ______. *Traditional Oral Epic: The* Odyssey*,* Beowulf*, and the Serbo-Croatian Return Song.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Foley 1991 ______. *Immanent Art: From Structure to Meaning in Traditional Oral Epic*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Foley 1998 ______. "Individual Poet and Epic Tradition: Homer as Legendary Singer." *Arethusa*, 31:149-78.

Foley 2002 ______. *How to Read an Oral Poem*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Frank 2007 Roberta Frank. "A Scandal in Toronto: The Dating of *Beowulf* a Quarter Century On." *Speculum*, 82:843-64.

Frantzen 2014 Allen J. Frantzen. "Afterword: *Beowulf* and Everything Else." In *The Dating of* Beowulf*: A Reassessment*. Ed. by Leonard Neidorf. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, pp. 235-47

Fry 1967 Donald K. Fry. "Old English Formulas and Systems." *English Studies*, 48:193-204.

Fry 1968 ______. "Old English Formulaic Themes and Type-Scenes." *Neophilologus,* 52.1:48-54.

Fulk 1992 R. D. Fulk. *A History of Old English Meter*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Fulk 2003 R. D. Fulk. "On Argumentation in Old English Philology, with Particular Reference to the Editing and Dating of *Beowulf*." *Anglo-Saxon England*, 32:1-26.

Fulk, Bjork, and Niles 2008 R. D. Fulk, Robert E. Bjork, and John D. Niles. *Klaeber's* Beowulf*, Fourth Edition*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Gneuss and Lapidge 2014 — Helmut Gneuss and Michael Lapidge. *Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts: A Bibliographical Handlist of Manuscripts and Manuscript Fragments Written or Owned in England up to 1100*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Goody 1987 — Jack Goody. *The Interface Between the Written and the Oral*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Griffith 2016 — Mark Griffith. "Alliterating Finite Verbs and the Origin of Rank in Old English Poetry." In *Old English Philology: Studies in Honour of R. D. Fulk*. Ed. by Leonard Neidorf, Rafael J. Pascual, and Tom Shippey. Woodbridge, Suffolk: D.S. Brewer. pp. 103-21.

Honko 1998 — Lauri Honko. *Textualizing the Siri Epic*. Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica.

Howe 1997 — Nicholas Howe. "The Uses of Uncertainty: On the Dating of *Beowulf*." In *The Dating of Beowulf*. Ed. by Colin Chase. Toronto: University of Toronto Press pp. 213-20.

Hunter 1984 — I. M. L. Hunter. "Lengthy Verbatim Recalled (LVR) and the Mythical Gift of Tape-Recorded Memory." In *Psychology in the 1990's.* Ed. by K.M.L. Lagerspetz and P. Niemi. Amsterdam: North Holland. pp. 425-40.

Hunter 1985 — ______. Length Verbatim Recall: The Role of Text." In *Progress in the Psychology of Language*. *Volume I*. Ed. by A. Ellis. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum. pp. 207-35.

Hutcheson 1995 — Bellender Rand Hutcheson. *Old English Poetic Metre*. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer.

Kaluza 1896 — Max Kaluza. "Zur Betonungs- and Verslehre des Altenglischen." In *Festschrift zum siebzigsten Geburtstage Oskar Schad*e. Königsberg: Hartung. pp. 101-34.

Ker 1957 — N. R. Ker. *Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Anglo-Saxon.* Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Kiparsky 1976 — Paul Kiparsky. "Oral Poetry: Some Linguistic and Typological Considerations." In *Oral Literature and the Formula*. Ed. by Benjamin A. Stolz and Richard S. Shannon. Ann Arbor, MI: Center for the Coördination of Ancient and Modern Studies. pp. 73-106.

Kisor 2009 — Yvette Kisor. "Numerical Composition and *Beowulf*: A Reconsideration." *Anglo-Saxon England*, 38:41-76.

Klaeber 1950 [1922] — Frederick Klaeber. Beowulf *and the Fight at Finnsburg*. 3rd ed. Lexington, MA: D. C. Heath.

Lord 1960 — Albert B. Lord. *The Singer of Tales.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Lord 1986 — ______. "Perspectives on Recent Work on the Oral Traditional Formula." *Oral Tradition*, 1:467-503.

Magoun 1953 — Francis Peabody Magoun. "The Oral-Formulaic Character of Anglo-Saxon Narrative Poetry." *Speculum*, 28:446-67.

Mize 2013 — Britt Mize. *Traditional Subjectivities: The Old English Poetics of Mentality*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Neidorf 2013 — Leonard Neidorf. "Beowulf before *Beowulf:* Anglo-Saxon Anthroponymy and Heroic Legend." *Review of English Studies*, 64:553-73.

Neidorf and Pascual 2014 — Leonard Neidorf and Rafael J. Pascual. "The Language of *Beowulf* and the Conditioning of Kaluza's Law." *Neophilologus*, 98.4:657-73.

Nikolaev 2016 — Dmitry Nikolayev. "A New Algorithm for Extracting Formulas from Poetic Texts and the Formulaic Density of Russian Bylinas." *Oral Tradition,* 30.1:111-36.

Niles 1981 — John D. Niles. "Formula and Formulaic System in *Beowulf*." In *Oral Traditional Literature: A Festschrift for Albert Bates Lord*. Ed. by John Miles Foley. Columbus, OH: Slavica. pp. 394-415.

Niles 1992 — John D. Niles. "Toward an Anglo-Saxon Oral Poetics." In *De Gustibus: Essays for Alain Renoir*. Ed by John Miles Foley. New York: Garland. pp. 359-77.

Opland 1976 — Jeff Opland. "Beowulf on the Poet." *Mediaeval Studies*, 28:442-67.

Orchard 1995 — Andy Orchard. "Artful Alliteration in Anglo-Saxon Song and Story." *Anglia-Zeitschrift für englische Philologie*, 113:429-63.

Orchard 2003 — ______. *A Critical Companion to* Beowulf. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer.

Ritzke-Rutherford 1981a — Jean Ritzke-Rutherford. "Formulaic Microstructure: The Cluster." In *The Alliterative* Morte Arthure*: A Reassessment of the Poem*. Ed. by Karl Heinz Göller. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer. pp. 70-82.

Ritzke-Rutherford 1981b ______. “Formulaic Macrostructure: The Theme of Battle.” In *The Alliterative* Morte Athure*: A Reassessment of the Poem*. Ed. by Karl Heinz Göller. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer. pp. 83-95.

Roberts 2005 Jane Roberts. *Guide to Scripts used in English Writings up to 1500*. London: The British Library.

Rubin 1995 David C. Rubin. *Memory in Oral Traditions: The Cognitive Psychology of Epic, Ballads and Counting-out Rhymes*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Russom 1998 Geoffrey Russom. Beowulf *and Old Germanic Metre*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Schücking 1905 Levin Schücking. Beowulfs *Rückkehr: eine kritische Studie*. Halle: Max Niemeyer.

Sievers 1893 Eduard Sievers. *Altgermanische Metrik*. Halle: Max Niemeyer.

Stolz and Shannon 1976 Benjamin A. Stolz and Richard S. Shannon, eds. *Oral Literature and the Formula*. Ann Arbor, MI: Center for the Coördination of Ancient and Modern Studies.

Tolkien 2014 J. R. R. Tolkien. Beowulf*: A Translation and Commentary*. Ed. by Christopher Tolkien. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.

Vikis-Freibergs and Freibergs 1978 Vaira Vikis-Freibergs and Imants Freibergs. “Formulaic Analysis of the Computer-Accessible Corpus of Latvian Sun Songs.” *Computers and the Humanities*, 12.4:329-39.

Wright 1993 Charles J. Wright. *The Irish Tradition in Old English Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

About the Authors

Paul Battles
Paul Battles is Professor of English at Hanover College. His research focuses on the intersection between orality, tradition, and intertextuality. He has written extensively on Old English traditional themes, with essays on the subject appearing in *Studies in Philology*, *Modern Philology*, and *Anglo-Saxon England*. His forthcoming essay "Old Saxon-Old English Intertextuality and the 'Traveler Recognizes His Goal' Theme in *The Heliand*" examines another theme rooted in Germanic poetic tradition.

Virginia Blankenhorn
Virginia Blankenhorn received her Ph.D. in Celtic Studies from the University of Edinburgh, and held academic posts at the University of Edinburgh and the University of Ulster in Coleraine. Now retired and living in Edinburgh, she continues to research and publish on topics relating to the poetry and song traditions of Gaelic Scotland and Ireland.

Michael D. C. Drout
Michael D. C. Drout is Professor of English at Wheaton College, Massachusetts, where he teaches Old and Middle English, Fantasy and Science Fiction, and the works of J. R. R. Tolkien. Drout is the author of *How Tradition Works*, *Tradition and Influence in Anglo-Saxon Literature*, and *Drout's Quick and Easy Old English.* He recently co-authored *Beowulf Unlocked: New Evidence from Lexomic Analysis*.

Mary Knight
Mary Knight received her Ph.D. in Classics from New York University, with a dissertation on Strabo's Egypt. In association with that work she received a Fulbright Scholarship to study in Egypt, and consequently developed an interest in modern Egypt. She is currently preparing an expanded version of this article for an e-book (*Stylistics of the Qur'ān: A Handbook of Grammatical and Linguistic Features and Rhetorical Figures*).

Duncan Poupard
Duncan Poupard is Assistant Professor in Translation at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. He specializes in the translation of Chinese ethnic minority texts, particularly of the Naxi minority, focusing on issues of identity and hybridity. He has worked with museums and research groups around the world, including the Barcelona Museum of World Cultures and the British Library. Recent academic articles have appeared in *Neohelicon* and the *Journal of Modern Literature in Chinese*.

Leah Smith
Leah Smith is the Creative Director for the public arts collective Tape Art. A graduate of Wheaton College, Massachusetts, she is co-author of *Beowulf Unlocked: New Evidence from*

Lexomic Analysis and "Lexomic Analysis of Anglo-Saxon Prose: Establishing Controls with the Old English Penitential and the Old English translation of Orosius."

Maria Vivod

Maria Vivod, Ph.D., is an Associate Researcher in Cultural Anthropology at the Dynamics of Europe Research Laboratory in Strasbourg, France. Her research interests are ethnomedicine and visual/Eastern European anthropology. She is the author of ten ethnographic documentaries, some of which are part of the permanent exposition in the media library of Musée de l'Homme (Paris). Her publications include *Fifteen Years After—An Anthropological Field from a Diachronic Angle* and *Radmila—the Fairy-clairvoyant. Rethinking Ethnopsychiatry—a Case Study from Serbia.*

Charles D. Wright

Charles D. Wright is Professor of English and Medieval Studies at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. A specialist in Old English literature, he is author of *The Irish Tradition in Old English Literature* and numerous essays on Old English poetry and prose. Among his recent publications is another article dealing with oral-traditional formulae: "An Old English Formulaic System and Its Contexts in Cynewulf's Poetry."