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SINGERS AND TALES
IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

SINGERS AND TALES IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

edited by

David F. Elmer and Peter McMurray

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*The editors and contributors dedicate this book to
the memory of John Miles Foley.*

ἔνθεν δὲ προτέρω πλέομεν ἀκαχήμενοι ἦτορ

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Introduction

Parry, Lord, and the Polyphonic Archive

DAVID F. ELMER AND PETER McMURRAY

THIS VOLUME IS AN EXPLORATION of the legacies of the pioneering scholars of oral literature, Milman Parry (1902–1935) and Albert Lord (1912–1991). The essays included here have their origin in a conference convened at Harvard in 2010 to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of Lord’s landmark book, *The Singer of Tales*, and the seventy-fifth anniversary of the death of Milman Parry. The conference was deliberately framed in as broad a way as possible, in order to capture a wide range of topics. Its breadth is reflected in the essays here assembled, which, despite their divergent approaches, are all inspired by the work of Parry and Lord. Much time has now passed since the authors met in Cambridge, Massachusetts, to exchange ideas. The intervening years have brought the usual mix of joys and sorrows including, most poignantly, the loss of John Miles Foley (1947–2012), to whom this volume is dedicated. Nevertheless, even with the passage of time, or perhaps in virtue of it, it has seemed desirable to publish these essays, both for their individual contributions and for the testimony they collectively provide to the wide-ranging and continuing impact of the scholarship of Parry and Lord. In addition, we hope that the volume offers a kind of comparative conspectus, showing some of the breadth and richness of the ongoing study of orality, verbal arts, and sung poetry across a range of cultural and historical contexts.¹ In hopes of achieving these intertwined aims—considering the legacy of Parry and Lord, while also exploring what the study of oral poetry in the twenty-first century might mean—we begin this introduction with a review

¹ Oral poetry and the idea of orality more generally continue to give rise to important research across a range of disciplines. Some recent work of note includes Bohlman and Petković 2011, Minchin 2012, Ochoa Gautier 2014, Saussy 2016, Macintosh et al. 2018, Ready 2019, Vayntrub 2019, and Lang et al. 2019. The emergence of voice studies, with its emphasis on voice, vocality, and embodiment from a number of disciplinary perspectives, also offers important points of intellectual confluence; see Fisher 2016, Yasar 2018, Eidsheim and Meizel 2019.

of the physical archive that anchors the legacies of Parry and Lord, and from which their work in large part derives its continuing authority: the Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature, housed in Room C of Harvard University's Widener Library.² We then situate the contributions in this volume within that archival and intellectual history.

Archival Beginnings

Contrary to appearances, archives can be very unstable things—and the Parry Collection is no exception. The core of the Parry Collection comes from the research trips of Milman Parry and his student/assistant Albert Lord, especially their work from 1934–1935, conducted with the collaboration of Nikola Vujnović.³ Parry undertook two field expeditions, a short one to survey the terrain in the summer of 1933, and a longer one from June 1934 through August 1935. Parry died shortly after returning from his second trip and Vujnović died a little after World War II, while Lord continued to conduct research in southeastern Europe through the 1960s. The Collection was augmented by the materials of the James A. Notopoulos Collection of Modern Greek Ballads and Songs, recorded in 1952–1953, and the Whitman-Rinvulucri Collection (1962–1971), comprising recordings and films documenting Greek shadow puppet plays. The shelves and cabinets of Room C contain also a kind of para-archive, items not formally accessioned by the Collection. This para-archive includes tapes and other materials given to Lord over the years by students and colleagues, a large number of which were presented to Lord by Dwight Reynolds, whose essay appears in this volume, at the 1988 annual meeting of the American Folklore Society. By the time of Lord's death, however, the Parry Collection seemed to be a mostly static object, poised to be digitized to allow increased circulation of materials online and through new publications (e.g. on Albanian-language materials in the Collection), but not otherwise likely to change substantially.⁴

² For a concise overview of the history and contents of the Collection, see Elmer 2013. The editors of this volume have both served on the Collection's curatorial staff.

³ According to information related to Michael Nardone (to whom we are grateful for sharing his field notes) by Dragan Vujnović on July 29, 2019, Nikola Vujnović was born in 1908. Dragan Vujnović believes that Nikola was killed by Tito's Partisans in 1945, but in a letter to Parry's widow, dated November 27, 1949, Lord claims to have had recent news from Nikola, who was at that time living in Stolac, though suffering from an illness that Lord believed to be tuberculosis. (The letter is among the papers described below.)

⁴ A comprehensive introduction to the Albanian materials in the Collection is now available in Scaldaferrì 2021.

Yet in the past two decades, the Parry Collection has seen some crucial additions and reassessments that have reshaped what the Collection is and how it may be used for future scholarship. Key aspects of those reassessments have been tied directly to digitization, suggesting an archival corollary to McLuhan's dictum that "the medium is the message": there are ways in which the ontology of the archive is defined by the mechanisms of access to it. Many of the most dramatic shifts in the Collection's archival contours, however, have come through "old media," including aluminum discs and correspondence written on paper. Three examples of significant additions to the Collection that have simultaneously expanded and destabilized the archive include: test recordings Milman Parry made between his two expeditions; correspondence and personal papers documenting aspects of Parry's personal and professional life in the 1920s and 1930s; and family and local histories from the former Yugoslavia relating to the work of Parry, Lord, and Vujnović, in many cases made possible by ongoing efforts to digitize the Parry Collection. We briefly discuss each of these additions under headings corresponding to the media that made them possible.

Aluminum

Visiting the Parry Collection in 2014, media theorist Wolfgang Ernst emphasized the value of physical media that occupy the interstices of the catalogued collection, such as uncatalogued tapes that might have been left in tape recorders.⁵ The remark proved prescient: in 2016, we came across a record sleeve tucked away in the bottom corner of the set of shelves housing Parry's field recordings. In place of the serial numbers by which the catalogued recordings are organized was the simple, if cryptic, label "These discs have Milman Parry's voice on them." The four aluminum discs in the sleeve turned out to contain a variety of test recordings, presumably made around the spring of 1934 between Parry's two research trips to Yugoslavia as he explored the possibilities of recording on his newly-commissioned recording device. (Physically, in terms of the current housing of the discs, and temporally, in terms of the date of recording, these discs occupy an interstitial position in relation to Parry's fieldwork.) The recordings show Parry testing different recording set-ups: standing closer or farther from the microphone, trying out different cutting heads on the recording apparatus, and so on. He explores a variety of different ways of vocalizing, including reciting

⁵ Ernst has written widely on archival media, including those in the Milman Parry Collection: see, for example, his books *Digital Memory and the Archive* (2013, especially 59–65) and *Sonic Time Machines* (2016, especially 71–82). Peter McMurray elaborates further on interactions with Ernst at the Parry Collection in McMurray 2015.

poetry in Ancient Greek and Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian, reading written prose (a French text on Sophocles, an article from a student newspaper, and a letter from a former professor at Berkeley, who advises him not to be seduced by the “siren song of a Yugoslavian bard”; one detects a note of mirth in Parry’s voice as he recites this phrase), and even a recording of someone playing *gusle*, albeit rather badly. The most striking recordings, however, are those featuring Parry’s own singing, including excerpts of a Bach mass and several excerpts from music composed by recent Harvard graduate Elliott Carter for the Harvard Classical Club’s 1933 production of Sophocles’s *Philoctetes*, which Parry had directed.

Numerically speaking, adding four discs to the thousands already in the Parry Collection does not change much. Yet these materials offer important insight into Parry’s thinking and recording practice that would otherwise be largely left to speculation. For instance, in the aluminum disc recordings made in Yugoslavia, Parry actively monitors how loudly singers speak and how people arrange themselves around the microphone. It is clear from these earliest test records that Parry was keenly interested in maintaining adequate sound quality and particularly in ensuring the intelligibility of speech and song, something he found difficult to do on the wax cylinder recordings he made in the summer of 1933 (Lord 1954:7). At the same time, these records suggest that Parry was himself quite engaged with the question of vocal performance; whether or not he was singing Bach and Carter from memory, he clearly knew the music for both well, if not necessarily to a professional standard. In the 1980s, anthropologists began grappling with the so-called “crisis of representation,” questioning the role of the anthropologist/fieldworker in the forms of knowledge that were produced during such encounters. In recent decades, scholars have posed related questions about the Parry Collection (e.g. García 2001, Tate 2010, Ranković 2012). These recordings offer an important moment of methodological reflexivity in understanding how Parry conceived of his work and especially the act of audio recording: they simultaneously give concrete archival traces of Parry’s direct involvement in the practice of recording verbal arts (understood broadly) and deepen our understanding of Parry’s methodological concerns, made audible through the act of making preliminary recordings.

Paper

The musical skill that Parry demonstrated in his test recordings was partially contextualized by documents donated to the Collection in 2018 by two of Parry’s grandchildren, Laura and Andrew Feld. For over a decade prior to this donation, we, as curators, had sought to establish a broader context for the Collection’s

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catalogued materials by conducting interviews with individuals who had been personally involved in the fieldwork of Parry and Lord. These included Marian Parry, daughter of Milman, who traveled as a ten-year-old child with him and their family to Yugoslavia in 1934; Miloš Velimirović, Lord's Serbian assistant during his field research in the early 1950s; and Mary Louise Lord, who also traveled with her husband Albert in those years. The reminiscences of Marian Parry were particularly remarkable, narrated as they were from the viewpoint of an exceptionally observant child, and recounted with the visual richness one would expect from a celebrated watercolorist.⁶ The documents donated in 2018 by Marian's children are in many ways even more remarkable. In addition to correspondence, personal photos and other documents, and biographical notes collected by Sterling Dow as well as an interview conducted by Pamela Newhouse with Milman Parry's wife, also named Marian, these documents include the diary kept by 10-year-old Marian during the year she spent with her family in Yugoslavia.⁷ In those pages she describes a generally happy life in Dubrovnik, alternating between periods of anxious waiting while Parry was away collecting material and the long stretches of days after his return, when their house would be filled with the voices of singers as his assistants worked to transcribe his recordings. Among the details that the young Marian recorded from her youthful perspective is the fact that, clean shaven, Parry (who wears a moustache or goatee in nearly every available photograph) resembled Bela Lugosi's villainous character Roxor in *Chandu the Magician*, a 1932 film Marian saw in Dubrovnik.

With regard to Parry's own musicianship, the new materials reveal that Parry acquired his musical literacy from his mother, who worked as a piano teacher and taught her son piano. He put this musical ability to work by helping to compose the Senior Extravaganza, a theatrical production, at the University of California, Berkeley, in the spring of 1923. This experience doubtless served him well when he directed *Philoctetes* at Harvard ten years later (although one imagines that the two productions differed widely in character). The new documents also provide fascinating glimpses of the austere life led by the Parrys in France during Milman's doctoral studies. And they give an indication of where Parry saw his research leading at the time of his death: in a letter to his sister

⁶ Marian Parry shared some of her recollections at the conclusion of the conference in which this volume originates.

⁷ Both Sterling Dow, who retired from Harvard as the John E. Hudson Professor of Archaeology, and Pamela Newhouse (Mensch), who became a distinguished translator of classical texts, were contemplating writing a biography of Parry. Their ambitions have lately been fulfilled by Robert Kanigel, whose biography of Parry, *Hearing Homer's Song: The Brief Life and Big Idea of Milman Parry*, appeared in 2021.

written just two and a half weeks before his death, Parry states that he intends to spend the coming summer in Albania, presumably to follow up on the Albanian-language materials he had collected the year before (on which, see Neziri and Scaldaferrri in this volume). One of the most precious aspects of the new papers, however, is the strikingly personal portrait they provide of Parry as he was seen by several of the people closest to him (his wife, his daughter, his sister). His wife recalled that Parry was fond of making up stories for his children featuring a villain named Clifford Moore (the name of the Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences during Parry's years at Harvard). Concluding a letter to Sterling Dow, his sister Addison wrote: "Milman was of a warm and affectionate nature and he loved us all. His family took great joy and pride in him. And he was fun—he was such fun!"

Digital media

At the suggestion of Asim Vrcić, a local historian in Sjenica, Serbia, Peter McMurray traveled in 2004 to visit Zaim Međedović, son of Avdo, as part of a research project on the legacies of Parry's and Lord's work in the former Yugoslavia.⁸ A key aspect of that visit (and subsequent visits in 2005 and 2012), described in greater detail in McMurray's article in this volume, was bringing recordings from the archive back to the Međedović family. Since then, re-engagements between the "field" and the "archive" have become all the more common, especially in connection with ongoing efforts to digitize the Parry Collection holdings and to make them available online. Very often, exchanges between what John Miles Foley has called the "agoras" of digital archives and oral traditions have proceeded along the same lines: in his last book, Foley recounts his own experience with the digital afterlives of archives (2012:141), highlighting his electronic correspondence with a descendant of Halil Bajgorić who had contacted him regarding his electronic edition (Foley 2004) of an epic performed by Bajgorić and recorded by Parry in 1935.

In the past two decades, several families and other scholars in the former Yugoslavia have likewise contacted the Parry Collection. At a minimum, such contacts offer a chance at fostering a digital form of repatriating the materials in the Collection. But more often than not, the sharing is a reciprocal process in which families recount additional details from family histories about local singing traditions that do not appear in the Parry Collection holdings, often offering new ways of understanding the holdings. For instance, Indira Fazlijević

⁸ That project served as the basis for McMurray's 2005 undergraduate senior thesis, "The Singer after 70 Years: A Dialogic Restudy of Parry, Lord, and The Family Međedović" (archived in the Harvard University Archives).

Jusić, a relative of Jusuf Smajić's living in Texas, contacted the Collection after hearing from a friend who lived nearby, Enver Spahalić, himself a relative of Mujo Kukuruzović. Both Smajić and Kukuruzović had recorded songs for Parry and his team, and both families had been interested in the singing traditions in their families. The Smajić family shared some stories from Jusuf's life that added considerable texture to our understanding of what kinds of songs a singer might know (e.g. religious songs and other kinds of recitation), while also highlighting some of the political difficulties that swept through the region during World War II and its aftermath. The testimony of the Smajić family also helped to make sense of an archival document, a photograph showing Smajić "playing" a cane or walking stick as though it were a *tambura*: Smajić evidently used the cane as a performative aid or kinetic mnemonic device (McMurray 2019). Along similar lines, Aaron Tate has written about local memories of a particular day during Parry's research in Kijevo, in present-day Croatia (Tate 2010), while Michael Nardone has documented family lore about Nikola Vujnović, Parry's indispensable collaborator (see footnote 3, above).

From a technical point of view, examples such as these may appear to represent the expansion of archival metadata—the information *about* certain objects held in the Collection. But one of the striking aspects of Parry's work was the way he intertwined what we now would call "data" with "metadata," recording not only songs (data) but also interviews with singers about their lives and their poetic practices (ostensibly metadata), often with songs interspersed. In addition, his archival records (metadata) are typically extremely clear and precise. These mixings of genre blurred any clear boundaries between data and metadata, but so too did the collection of interviews themselves, which have in recent years become of particular interest to scholars as an archive in their own right (Vidan 2003, Elmer 2010, and Alexander in this volume). In short, these new archival additions offer an important reminder of the uniqueness of Parry's research approach and the rich and complex archive he and Lord left behind.

Rumbling and Polyphony as Archival Legacies

What then do these changes mean? On the most fundamental (perhaps even banal) level, they indicate that archives are rarely, if ever, fixed entities. That lack of fixity and the slight shifts within the archive—something akin to what Wolfgang Ernst has called the "stirrings" or "rumbling" (*das Rumoren*) of the archives (Ernst 2015)—yield new insights even while calling into question the undergirding structure of archives that has made knowledge possible. In many cases, such as Parry's test recordings, these new materials simultaneously offer clarity and raise new

questions: for instance, the newly-uncovered discs add crucial documentation of Parry's thinking and practice between the two trips, as he responded to challenges he faced in summer 1933; yet they also remind us of questions not yet posed, such as the relation between Parry's own musicianship and his fieldwork.

Ernst claims, provocatively, "The gaps are the archive" (2015:13), suggesting that the archive "is not so much what is left behind so much as it is the already extant screen for an indexed reality" (14). That is, for Ernst, the ways archives organize knowledge help clarify how human activity already follows a kind of archival logic. Postcolonial theorists and historians have also long reflected on archival gaps, highlighting the silence/silencing that archives can generate (Trouillot 1995) among other forms of absence (Falzetti 2015), all of which require particular ways of reading (or listening) that foreground the archive "as a site of knowledge production, an arbiter of truth, and a mechanism for shaping the narratives of history" (Burton 2005:2; see also Stoler 2008). For media archaeologists like Ernst as well as postcolonial historians, gaps and silences are defining features of archives.

In this case, recent developments within the Parry Collection suggest a similar argument, though one that has always been explicit in Parry's and Lord's writing: this particular collection of singers and tales is only one possible version of the broader archive of song repertoires and singers' lived experiences. It is an attempt at a snapshot of an expansive culture at a single historical moment (i.e. South Slavic epic singing ca. 1933–1935), a kind of synchronic slice; yet even that slice did not entail recording all singers singing every song they knew. By naming this subset of material both "oral" and "traditional," as Lord took pains to emphasize repeatedly toward the end of his career (e.g. Lord 1991), Parry and Lord effectively pointed to the gaps in their archive as *the* broader historical archive of this tradition. Silence, gaps, and archival "grains" remain, but in this case, the Parry Collection has always highlighted those as necessary conditions for conceptualizing an archive of oral poetry. As such, the Parry Collection has an unexpected timeliness for the archival turn across the humanities in recent years.

Finally, these stirrings or rumblings in the Parry Collection also highlight what we might call the *polyphony of the archive*. Parry's and Lord's analyses of oral poetry as a shared tradition explicitly required an encounter with many singers and many voices to establish patterns in transmission and formulaic language. This more literal polyphony is suggestive of the ways in which arguably all archives emerge from the multiplicity of utterances they contain. Again, the aforementioned gaps and silences in the archives remind us that every voice in the resulting archival polyphony is not given equal prominence. In an encouraging shift, many of those voices that had previously been less audible

have attracted attention in recent scholarship such as Aida Vidan's groundbreaking book on women's poetic traditions in the region (2003) and research by Nicola Scaldaferrri and Zymer Neziri on Albanian-language materials in the Parry Collection and beyond (see their contribution to this volume, as well as their essays in Scaldaferrri 2021). Of course, explorations of oral tradition were never confined to southeastern Europe, or the West more generally, and one of the important challenges that remains even decades after the publication of *The Singer of Tales* is to continue exploring different cultural contexts in which the precise mechanisms of sung poetry and other tales offer new and distinctive ways of understanding the concept of orality.

Singers and Tales

As mentioned at the outset, the principal aim of this volume is to (re)consider the legacies of Milman Parry and Albert Lord, including the idea of "orality," the life of the Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature since Lord's death, and more broadly, the application of Parry's and Lord's thinking to other poetic traditions. The volume is inherently comparative not only because it brings together scholars working in a variety of disciplines but also because so many of the central ideas Parry and Lord proposed emerged from comparative study. The plurality of the title—singers and tales, rather than an individual "singer of tales"—signals, again, the sense of polyphony in oral traditions more generally but also the proliferation of methodologies and cultural contexts that have grown from Parry and Lord. Their notion of what has become known as the Oral-Formulaic Theory remains a necessary starting point—but only a starting point—for research on a whole range of verbal and musical arts, as the essays here make clear.

The conference in which the seeds of these essays germinated was framed in a deliberately broad fashion. As a result, although there are many shared topics, themes, and approaches, the essays gathered here are predictably heterogeneous, and could have been organized in a variety of different ways. We have chosen to organize them into six categories, each of which corresponds to a key intervention made by Parry and Lord or an important aspect of their work. In many, if not most, cases, an essay could easily have been included in more than one category. Our organizational scheme is intended primarily as a way of highlighting six particularly significant facets of the legacies of Parry and Lord. These are, in the order of their appearance in this volume:

1. **“Formula and theme.”** At the heart of the approach to oral poetry pioneered by Parry and Lord is their model of composition in performance, which relies on the verbal formula—itself the realization in words of a unit of meaning (a “theme” or “motif”)—as its most fundamental mechanism. Parry’s famous definition of the formula as “a group of words which is regularly employed under the same metrical conditions to express a given essential idea” has been subject to a good deal of criticism and revision over the years, but the concept remains among the most useful for the analysis and interpretation of oral poetry.⁹ The concept of the “theme” as developed and elaborated by Lord has similarly proven to be of fundamental importance.¹⁰ The first section of this book assembles essays that engage in different ways with these fundamental concepts. Taking up Lord’s term for texts composed using techniques of formula and theme—“patterned narrative”—Minna Skafte Jensen (“Menelaus in the *Odyssey*: Introducing the ‘Doubled Pattern’”) explores a special form of patterning in the *Odyssey*, one that doubles a thematic sequence in order to produce effects of emphasis and contrast. Françoise Létoublon (“The Trojan Formulaic Theater”) explores the system of formulas referring to the city of Troy, confirming Parry’s notions of the “economy” and “extension” of such systems but showing also how an economical and extensive formulaic system can be shaped by poetic concerns and the broader mythical context. Dwight Reynolds (“Composition in Performance, Arab Style”), summarizing results of his fieldwork among the Bani Hilal Bedouins of Northern Egypt in the 1980s, examines formulaic systems shaped by a very different kind of constraint, namely end-rhyme. Rhyme does not function as a constraint either in Homeric poetry or in the South Slavic traditions documented by Parry and Lord, but it does turn out to be the most significant constraint for the singers of the Arabic oral epic *Sīrat Banī Hilāl*, with important consequences for their techniques of composition in performance.
2. **“Comparative approaches.”** Parry’s initial fieldwork was founded on the notion that comparison with a living tradition of oral poetry could

⁹ Parry 1971:272. For a sampling of some key views in the ongoing debate about the idea of the formula in oral poetry, see Finnegan 1992, Nagy 1996, and Friedrich 2019. Despite these lively debates over the course of decades, even prominent critics of Parry’s formulation such as Finnegan have tended to conclude that the “basic insights remain stimulating and fruitful” (1992:72).

¹⁰ Lord’s delineation of the “theme” and its function in the composition of oral poetry represents his most important contribution to the “Parry-Lord Theory”; see Lord 2019:71–104.

illuminate the poetry of the distant past; his project as a whole was conceived in a fundamentally comparative spirit, insofar as he aimed to articulate a model of an oral style that would permit entirely unrelated texts, in different languages, to be brought into relation with each other as examples of oral composition in performance. Over the course of his long career, Lord made good on the promise of Parry's comparative methodology, bringing his ideas and those of Parry to bear on *Beowulf* and other Anglo-Saxon texts, the *Chanson de Roland*, the Byzantine epic *Digenis Akritas*, the *Kalevala*, Latvian *dainas*, Turkic epics, and other texts and traditions. The essays in Section Two all employ an explicitly comparative approach to shed new light on texts derived from oral traditions. Margaret Beissinger's discussion of the theme of incest in Romanian epic songs customarily sung at weddings ("Spiritual Kinship, Incest, and Traditional Weddings: Honor, Shame, and Cultural Boundaries in Romanian Marriage Songs") makes illuminating connections with similar themes in South Slavic epics and Anglo-Scots ballads, with the result that a fuller, more generalized picture is established of the relation between taboo violations in performed narratives and the social practices in which those performances are embedded. Anna Bonifazi and David F. Elmer ("Visuality in Bosniac and Homeric Epic") revisit the classic comparison made by Parry and Lord between South Slavic and Homeric epic but shift the *tertium comparationis* from formula and theme to the mediation of visual experience—which turns out to play an equally important role in traditional techniques of composition in performance. Joseph Falaky Nagy ("Heroes and Their Snakes") likewise makes use of South Slavic epic to cast light on the folkloric and mythological background of a medieval Irish tale; the point of comparison is in this case the remarkable motif of snakes inhabiting the multiple hearts of the hero's antagonist. Nikolay P. Grintser ("Common Grief: Weeping Over Hector and Rāma") undertakes a comparative analysis of lamentation as represented in Homeric and Sanskrit epic, tracing both common typologies and significant differences. His discussion reveals, among other things, the existence of an Indo-European ritual paradigm that the sequencing of laments in the *Iliad* both reflects and departs from for special effect.

3. **"Multiformity."** One of Lord's more important and lasting contributions to the study of oral traditional narrative is his insistence that one must think in terms of "multiformity" as a fundamental condition of oral tradition and discard the notion of "variation" with its implied

concept of an “original” from which the “variant” departs.¹¹ Each of the four essays of Section Three explores a different kind of multiformity, each fundamental to the tradition to which it belongs. Casey Dué and Mary Ebbott (“The Homer Multitext and the System of Homeric Epic”) argue that the multiformity of the Homeric tradition, understood as a feature of oral composition in performance, demands, in the editing of the written records of that tradition, a different kind of textual criticism, one that takes full account of the systematic character of traditional multiformity. They offer their Homer Multitext project as an example of this new “digital criticism.” In a theoretically and ethnographically rich discussion of the ecology of genres in the Finnish-Karelian region, Lotte Tarkka (“The ‘Field of Song’ and the Four-Legged Horse: On the Dialogue of Genres in Kalevala-Meter Poetry”) provides numerous examples of the ways in which a generic system can provide a kind of matrix within which multiformity, as the recurrence of traditional elements in novel forms or contexts, becomes a mechanism of creative innovation: by hybridizing traditional generic forms or “translating” traditional content from one genre into another, performers are able to express themselves in new ways within the constraints of a traditional communicative system. In turn, Mirsad Kunić (“The Many Deaths of Mustaj Beg of Lika”) draws on the Milman Parry Collection and other published song texts to explore different accounts of the death of a key Bosnian hero, Mustaj Beg of Lika, and the unique narrative practices that emerge in the *Krajina* frontier region at the western edge of the Ottoman Empire. His approach illustrates how a multiform-based reading of oral epic can enable a more granular analysis of local poetics that also suggests some of the cultural complexities of Muslim and Christian coexistence along the frontier. Finally, in a posthumously published essay, John Miles Foley explores the realization of epic song as the product of an individual singer’s negotiation of regional and supra-regional traditions, applying the concept of “distributed authorship” to the kinds of creativity evident in epics from Stolac, Herzegovina. John’s presentation was one of the highlights of the conference in which this volume originated, and his influence can be felt in many of the essays in this book. We are pleased to be able to include his own contribution.

4. **“Orality and Textuality.”** As a scholar who had argued for the oral character of the Homeric poems on the basis of the evidence provided

¹¹ Lord 2019:106–107; 1995:23.

by written texts, Parry was acutely aware of the complexity of the relationship between orality and writing. In Yugoslavia he found that many singers had been influenced in various ways by written texts. If only so that he could identify and focus his attention on the singers who were least influenced by the culture of writing, Parry made a great effort to document the circulation of printed texts, collecting hundreds of volumes of published songs (now part of the collections of Widener Library). Even so, one of the landmark products of Parry's own fieldwork, Avdo Međedović's "Wedding of Smailagić Meho," represents a song that the singer had learned via a written text.¹² Lord, in his own writing, likewise wrestled with the relationship between orality and writing, particularly in connection with the notion of the "transitional text."¹³ The three authors whose essays appear in Section Four each explore a particular intersection of orality with writing. The writing in question in Olga M. Davidson's essay ("The Written Text as a Metaphor for the Integrity of Oral Composition in Classical Persian Traditions and Beyond") is, in the first instance, a metaphorical one: an archetypal Ur-text that serves as the basis, in terms of the poet's own mythologization, for the oral traditions that are textualized in Ferdowsi's *Shāhnāma*. Gísli Sigurðsson ("The Oral Background of the Eddas and Sagas") argues for the necessity of taking into consideration underlying oral traditions for a proper understanding of Old Norse Eddic poetry and sagas; he demonstrates how much is to be gained by appreciating the operation of "traditional referentiality" even in the case of the prose sagas, whose referential networks have too often been understood strictly in terms of relationships between written texts. In a similar way, Aida Vidan ("Držić's Magician and Lucić's Captive Maiden") employs a "palimpsestuous" reading of two plays of the Croatian Renaissance to uncover elements taken over from folklore and oral tradition, elements that are critical for understanding those plays' political subtexts.

¹² Međedović learned this song by listening to a friend read aloud from a published version of a song originally collected in 1884 from a singer named Ahmed Isakov Šemić (Lord 2019:83). The version Međedović dictated for Parry ran to over 12,000 verses.

¹³ A "transitional text" suggests a text that occupies an intermediate position between orality and writing: for example, a text composed with the aid of writing, but which nevertheless exhibits a style that indicates "oral" methods of composition. Lord denied the possibility of such a text in *The Singer of Tales* (Lord 2019:138–141), but later came to accept it as a reality (Lord 1986:479–480, 491–494; 1995).

5. **“Performance and Context.”** While the contemporary study of oral poetry naturally focuses on performances in their traditional contexts, Parry was ahead of his time in recording and studying actual performances of oral epic. Earlier scholars had to rely on texts gathered by dictation or taken down by teams of scribes transcribing the texts of performed songs; even in his own day, available recording technologies generally allowed the capture only of relatively short segments of a performance. Parry’s innovative use of dual recording heads allowed him, by alternating between one turntable and the other, to make recordings of virtually any length: for the first time it was possible to record a song or a narrative exactly as the performer wished to sing or tell it. Parry went to great lengths to make these recording sessions feel as “natural” as possible for the performer, but of course singing into a microphone hardly represented a traditional context. Nevertheless, in their writings both Parry and Lord spend a good deal of time thinking about the ways in which context shapes performance. Section Five gathers four essays that touch on the dynamics of performance, the relationship between performance and context, or the documentation of performances in context. Thomas A. DuBois (“Performances, Texts, and Contexts: Olaus Sirma, Johan Turi, and the Dilemma of Reifying a Context-Dependent Oral Tradition”) discusses two other pioneers in the study of oral poetry as an event inextricably embedded in a social context, Olaus Sirma and Johan Turi, writing in the seventeenth and early twentieth centuries, respectively. Working against the grain of contemporary tendencies to “itemize” folksong, these writers sought ways to present Sámi *joik* as “an embedded, context-dependent ethnographic event.” In “The Poetics of Immanence in the American Mountain *Märchen*,” Carl Lindahl offers us a precious glimpse of “the private dimensions of public performance” as he explores the inner worlds and domestic environments of the tellers of tales in an eastern Kentucky family. We learn about the striking and terrifying image of “Rawhead and Bloodybones” conjured in the mind of one future tale-teller and about the particular configurations of domestic life that shape both the content of the family’s tales and the rituals of their performance. A pair of essays by Gejin Chao (“Indigenized Applications of the Oral-Formulaic Theory in China”) and Qubumo Bamo (“The Institute of Ethnic Literature’s Institutionalized Approaches to Living Oral Traditions”) together describe past and present efforts to document and study oral traditions in China, where the extraordinary wealth of living traditions, many of them threatened by disruptions of traditional ways of

life brought about by modernization, demands an ambitious program of context-sensitive documentation. As Chao and Bamo both show, the strategies that have been employed in the Chinese context have been heavily influenced by the pioneering approaches of Parry and Lord, even as these approaches have been adapted and “indigenized” in various ways.

6. **“Audible Archives.”** A central, if sometimes tacit, part of Parry’s and Lord’s work was conceiving of oral traditions as sonic practices and, indeed, as a kind of audible archive distributed among many singers across the topographies of a given tradition. In turn, their research practices generated audible archives as well: as described above, Parry commissioned a special pair of phonographs to allow for the continuous, real-time documentation of a singer’s tale as sound. Lord managed that archive and built on it with many more recordings of his own (on wire spools and eventually magnetic tape) but also collaborated with composer/musicologist/pianist Béla Bartók to produce a book of song texts (transcribed by Vujnović and translated/annotated by Lord) and musical transcriptions (by Bartók). That resulting publication, *Serbo-Croatian Folk Songs* (Bartók and Lord 1951), was, in fact, the first book emerging from the Parry Collection materials, preceding the series of published song texts, *Serbocroatian Heroic Songs* (starting in 1953), and Lord’s *The Singer of Tales* (1960, new editions in 2000 and 2019).¹⁴ But more important than the question of chronological precedent is simply the emphasis Parry and Lord—each in his own way—placed on the sonic aspects of epic tradition. Indeed, we might reframe their broader intervention into ancient Greek epic studies as a challenge to understand Homeric poetry *as sound*, rather than as text—an audible tradition composed in real-time performance and transmitted orally/aurally across generations, rather than (just) a textualized corpus. The essays in this final section begin from this premise of *listening* to the archives, both figurative (as repertoire) and literal (as recordings), of oral poetry. Karl Reichl (“The Singing of Tales: The Role of Music in the Performance of Oral Epics in Turkey and Central Asia”) opens his essay by looking briefly at the history of engagement (or lack thereof) with the musi-

¹⁴ The various volumes of *Serbocroatian Heroic Songs* were numbered not according to their order of publication but according to their content: even-numbered volumes contained the original texts and odd-numbered ones translations, with volume numbers assigned in advance depending on the region in which the material for a planned volume was collected. As a result, the bibliographic record displays apparent anomalies: Volume 2 was the first to appear, in 1953, followed by Volume 1 in 1954, and there are gaps in the numbering.

cal aspects of epic, ultimately offering an extended analysis of music and singing in Turkish and Central Asian Turkic epic traditions, with special attention to Âşık Şeref Taşlıova, a renowned singer of tales from Turkey who performed at the 2010 conference and sadly passed away in 2014. Zymer U. Neziri and Nicola Scaldaferrri (“From the Archive to the Field: New Research on Albanian Epic Songs”) explore the dialectic between archival holdings and fieldwork in the context of Albanian epic, a tradition that played an important role in Parry’s research and was then taken up more overtly in Albert Lord’s 1937 research trip to Northern Albania. Their essay culminates with a focus on one particular epic singer, Isa Elezi-Lekëgjekaj, a Kosovar Albanian with an expansive knowledge of tradition and a highly embodied performance practice. Ronelle Alexander’s essay (“Tracking the South Slavic Epic Register”) looks at intersections of sound and archive beyond the notion of music by revisiting the large body of interviews Parry and his assistants recorded in the 1930s. She examines these interviews as a linguistic archive that further elucidates oral poetics through its particular language “registers,” a term John Miles Foley and others have previously explored in the context of oral poetry. Finally, Peter McMurray (“There Are No Oral Media? Multisensory Perceptions of South Slavic Epic Poetry”) suggests that attending to sound within oral poetry quickly leads to a broader constellation of multisensory experiences, in which listening, vision, and spatiality become interconnected, even more intensely so once oral poetry is recorded.

Taken altogether, these essays suggest, again, a rich polyphony of both oral traditions and research approaches to those traditions. The volume, we hope, will point to important continuities extending from Parry’s and Lord’s research to the present, as well as to areas and themes where further work is needed. For instance, the contributions from authors dealing with the geographies/periods that primarily interested Parry and Lord—ancient Greece, modern Yugoslavia and its successor states—show how lively those conversations remain today and how much work might continue to be done there. At the same time, that historical legacy suggests a latent Euro- or Western-centrism within the study of oral traditions that calls for a more expansive engagement with scholars (both past and present) working outside of Europe and North America. On a related note, we are pleased to be able to include essays in this volume from several contributors who themselves come from the regions they study and as such highlight a different set of questions—of cultural and economic power, of insider/outsider

dynamics, of repatriation—that have perhaps not been interrogated as thoroughly in oral traditional studies as they could or should be.

According to Albert Lord, the first paper Milman Parry planned to publish after his fieldwork in Yugoslavia was supposed to focus on what Parry called “the singer’s rests” in epic songs—that is, the possibility that after singing some part of a tale, a South Slavic singer “will pause at almost any point in the narrative to rest himself or to put off the singing to another occasion” (Lord 1936:106). In that same spirit, we hope that this book of essays can act as a collective utterance by this group of scholars and the artists and poets whose work animates our research, knowing that after the “rest,” other poets and scholars will carry these discussions further in a whole range of ways.

Editorial Note

Because the contributions in this book deal with so many different languages and styles of transliteration, many of which are not universally agreed upon, there remains some discrepancy between spellings/transliteration of names and key terms across different chapters. Unless otherwise specified, translations are by the author of each chapter.

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