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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

In the early thirties of this century, when Milman Parry began to write the book from which this one takes its name,[1] what was needed most in Homeric scholarship was a more exact knowledge of the way in which oral epic poets learn and compose their songs. Now in the late fifties of the same century the need is still great; in spite of the number of books about Homer and his poems, about epic poetry in general, and about specific epic traditions in various parts of the world, the student of epic still lacks a precise idea of the actual technique of *poiesis* in its literal meaning. Thanks to Parry, however, we have the material for the research necessary to determine what this technique is. He has left us his collection of South Slavic texts, which is the record on phonograph discs and in manuscripts of experiments in the laboratory of the living epic tradition of the Yugoslavs.[2]

In 1935 Milman Parry was Assistant Professor of Classics at Harvard University. He had already made a name for himself in classical scholarship by his masterly analysis of the technique of the formulaic epithets in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.[3] This work had convinced him that the poems of Homer were traditional epics, and he soon came to realize that they must also be oral compositions.[4] He therefore set himself the task of proving, incontrovertibly if it were possible, the oral character of the poems, and to that end he turned to the study of the Yugoslav epics. In the autumn of 1935, he wrote: "the aim of the study was to fix with exactness the *form* of oral story poetry, to see wherein it differs from the *form* of written story poetry. Its method was to observe singers working in a thriving tradition of unlettered song and see how the form of their songs hangs upon their having to learn and practice their art without reading and writing. The principles of *oral form* thus gotten would be useful in two ways. They would be a starting point for a comparative study of oral poetry which sought to see how the way of life of a people gives rise to a poetry of a given kind and a given degree of excellence. Secondly, they would be useful in the study of the great poems which have come down to us as lonely relics of a dim past: we would know how to work backwards from their form so as to learn how they must have been made."[5]

In Part I of this book I shall attempt to fulfill Parry's purpose of setting forth with exactness the form of oral narrative poetry, drawing my illus-

trative material from this collection; in Part II I shall use the principles presented in Part I in studying the form of some of the great epic poems from the past. Because I intend to limit the scope of this book to a consideration of oral form and manner of composition, a discussion of a broader sort which would aim at seeing "how the way of life of a people gives rise to a poetry of a given kind and a given degree of excellence" will not be fully entered upon. Yet considerations of this kind will inevitably occupy us to some extent in this book. It is hoped that what is said here will be of use for future comparative study of oral poetry.

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The burden of the first few chapters of Part I will be to work out in fullness of detail a definition of oral epic song. Stated briefly, oral epic song is narrative poetry composed in a manner evolved over many generations by singers of tales who did not know how to write; it consists of the building of metrical lines and half lines by means of formulas and formulaic expressions and of the building of songs by the use of themes. This is the technical sense in which I shall use the word "oral" and "oral epic" in this book. By formula I mean "a group of words which is regularly employed under the same metrical conditions to express a given essential idea." This definition is Parry's.[6] By formulaic expression I denote a line or half line constructed on the pattern of the formulas. By theme I refer to the repeated incidents and descriptive passages in the songs.

These definitions are but the bare bones of the living organism which is oral epic. We shall peer into the structural heart of the formulas to discern the various patterns which merge to give them form. We shall see that the formulas are not the ossified clichés which they have the reputation of being, but that they are capable of change and are indeed frequently highly productive of other and new formulas. We shall come to realize the way in which themes can be expanded and contracted, and the manner in which they are joined together to form the final product which is the song. We shall note the difference both in the internal structure and in the external connection of themes as they are used by different singers.

Finally we shall turn our attention to the song itself. We shall see that in a very real sense every performance is a separate song; for every performance is unique, and every performance bears the signature of its poet singer. He may have learned his song and the technique of its construction from others, but good or bad, the song produced in performance is his own. The audience knows it as his because he is before them. The singer of tales is at once the tradition and an individual creator.[7] His manner of composition differs from that used by a writer in that the oral poet makes no conscious effort to break the traditional phrases and incidents; he is forced by the rapidity of composition in performance to use these traditional elements.[8] To him they are not merely necessary, however; they are also right. He

seeks no others, and yet he practices great freedom in his use of them because they are themselves flexible. His art consists not so much in learning through repetition the time-worn formulas as in the ability to compose and recompose the phrases for the idea of the moment on the pattern established by the basic formulas. He is not a conscious iconoclast, but a traditional creative artist. His traditional style also has individuality, and it is possible to distinguish the songs of one singer from those of another, even when we have only the bare text without music and vocal nuance.

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The need for a clarification of the oral process of composition is reflected in the many terms which are used for oral narrative poetry. To no small degree difficulties have arisen because of the ambiguity of terminology and because each school has chosen a different facet of this poetry as distinctive. The term "oral" emphasizes, I believe, the basic distinction between oral narrative poetry and that which we term literary epic. But it too carries some ambiguity. Certain of the misunderstandings of Parry's oral theory arise from the failure to recognize his special use of the word "oral." For example, one often hears that oral poetry is poetry that was written to be recited. Oral, however, does not mean merely oral presentation. Oral epics are performed orally, it is true, but so can any other poem be performed orally. What is important is not the oral performance but rather the composition *during* oral performance.[9]

There may be ambiguity also when we say that the oral poet learns his songs *orally,* composes them *orally,* and transmits them *orally* to others. Like so many statements made in the debate on the oral theory, this one too is perfectly true if the word "oral" is understood in the technical sense in which it will be presented in this book. But if the reader interprets oral learning as listening to something repeated in exactly the same form many times, if he equates it with oral memorization by rote, then he will fail to grasp the peculiar process involved in learning oral epic. The same may be said for oral composition. If we equate it with improvisation in a broad sense, we are again in error. Improvisation is not a bad term for the process, but it too must be modified by the restrictions of the particular style. The exact way in which oral composition differs from free improvisation will, I hope, emerge from the following chapters. It is true also that oral epic is transmitted by word of mouth from one singer to another, but if we understand thereby the transmission of a fixed text or the kind of transmission involved when A tells B what happened and B tells C and so on with all natural errors of lapse of memory and exaggeration and distortion, then we do not fully comprehend what oral transmission of oral epic is. With oral poetry we are dealing with a particular and distinctive process in which oral learning, oral composition, and oral transmission almost merge; they seem to be different facets of the same process.

The word "epic," itself, indeed, has come in time to have many meanings. Epic sometimes is taken to mean simply a long poem in "high style." Yet a very great number of the poems which interest us in this book are comparatively short; length, in fact, is not a criterion of epic poetry. Other definitions of epic equate it with heroic poetry. Indeed the term "heroic poetry" is sometimes used (by Sir Cecil M. Bowra, for example) to avoid the very ambiguity in the word epic which troubles us. Yet purists might very well point out that many of the songs which we include in oral narrative poetry are romantic or historical and not heroic, no matter what definition of the hero one may choose. In oral narrative poetry, as a matter of fact, I wish to include all story poetry, the romantic or historical as well as the heroic; otherwise I would have to exclude a considerable body of medieval metrical narrative.

That whole body of verse that we have now agreed to designate as oral has been called by many names; the terminological battle is a serious one. Those who call it "folk epic" are carrying on a nineteenth-century concept of composition by the "folk" which has long since been proved invalid. At one time when "folk epic" referred to a theory of composition, it was a justifiable term. It pointed to a method of composition as the distinction between oral narrative poetry and "written" poetry. It was looking in the right direction. But when its theory of composition was invalidated, because no one could show how the people as a whole could compose a poem, then the technical meaning of the term was lost and it came to be equated in a derogatory sense with "peasant." The attention was then shifted from the way in which the poetry was made, first to the social status of those who practiced it, and then to the content and quality of the poetry itself. Although it may be true that this kind of poetry has survived longest among peasant populations, it has done so not because it is essentially "peasant" poetry, but rather because the peasant society has remained illiterate longer than urban society.[10] Indeed this poetry has more often been aristocratic and courtly than of the folk. It would seem even from its origins to have belonged to serious ceremonial occasions, to ritual, to celebration. The term "folk poetry" becomes more and more inadequate, more and more restricted in time and place. To apply the term to the medieval epics or to the Homeric poems is ever more inadmissible.

Another reason why this poetry should cease to be denominated as "folk epic" is that outside the circle of folklore enthusiasts the connotations of "folk" in many countries tend to be derogatory. One thinks of the simple peasant with his "quaint" ideas, his fairy stories, and children's tales. The use of folk stories as entertainment for young children has its ironic aspects; we are beginning to realize the serious symbolism and meaning of folk tales, which, if rightly understood, would be far from proper fare for children. Moreover, if we mean by "folk epic" to indicate that oral epic shares some of its subject matter with folk tale and all that is seriously

implied in that term, we are ignoring or underestimating all the other subjects of oral epic, historical, legendary, and heroic: we have outgrown the appellation "folk epic." It is no longer exact, and in time it has come to misrepresent oral epic poetry rather than to describe it.

Similar objections can be brought against the term "popular," the Latin derivative equivalent to "folk." While this term avoids the "simple peasant" connotations of "folk," its literal meaning has been overlaid with another set of unfortunate implications from its use in English to denote "popular music" and "popular songs."

The fever of nationalism in the nineteenth century led to the use of oral epics for nationalist propaganda. The poems glorified the heroes of the nation's past; they depicted the struggles of the nation against outside foes. Hence the hero emerged as a "national" hero, and the poems themselves were labeled "national" epics. In some of the Slavic countries the word *narodni* has a useful ambiguity, since it means both "folk" and "national." As a term to designate oral epic "national" is woefully inadequate and an insidious imposter.

Some scholars have sought to avoid the pitfalls of the three terms already discussed, folk, popular, and national, by recourse to the word "primitive." It sounds somehow more "scientific" because it has been borrowed from the social science of anthropology. But here too the ambiguity is great and the connotations hardly less flattering than those of "folk" in some countries. If the idea behind the use of "primitive" for this poetry is that oral epic poetry precedes written poetry in time in the cultural growth of a society, then its use would be legitimate, because as a rule oral poetry does precede written poetry, but it would, like the other terms, still miss the fundamental difference in form between the two.

In summary, any term that is used to designate oral narrative poetry in an attempt to distinguish it from written narrative poetry must contain some indication of the difference in form. It is because the terms which we have discussed above failed to comprehend this distinction that they have proved themselves to be inadequate. Any terms, also, carrying implications derogatory to either oral narrative poetry or written poetry (as, for example, such terms as "authentic" and "artificial"; "primary" and "secondary") must be abandoned, for they represent an attitude that is neither scholarly nor critical. Both these forms are artistic expressions, each with its own legitimacy. We should not seek to judge but to understand.

If the need for a clarification of the process which produces oral narrative poetry is reflected in the confusion of terms which have been used to designate that poetry, this need is even more apparent, of course, in the variety of theories put forth in the last two centuries (and which still survive in one form or another today) to explain the peculiar phenomenon of oral epic. On the one hand there has been a solid block of loyalists to the literary tradition who have maintained through thick and thin that the

Homeric poems, as well as the great epics from medieval times, are written literary productions by a single author.

These loyalists have found themselves defending their position from attacks by those who from time to time raised annoying questions. One of the earliest questions posed was whether writing existed in the ninth century B.C., the traditional date of Homer. This was first raised by Josephus;[11] it came to the fore again in D'Aubignac[12] in the early eighteenth century and reached its classic expression in Friedrich August Wolf's famed *Prolegomena* (1795). A second problem was formulated during the seventeenth century and played a great role in the Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes; this was the problem of the "errors" or inconsistencies in the Homeric poems. D'Aubignac, Perrault, Giambattista Vico, Robert Wood, and others led once again to Wolf and the later Separatists. A third question concerned the unusual length of the Homeric poems. If there was no writing in Homer's time, how could such long poems be preserved until the time of writing? In fact, how could poems of such length come into being at all without the aid of writing? Clearly this was a corollary of the first question raised. Among the earlier scholars who attempted to answer this question the name of Robert Wood stands out. A fourth problem arose from the increased knowledge of and interest in medieval minstrelsy and contemporary oral poetry during the eighteenth century and later. Here again we may begin with D'Aubignac and continue with Thomas Blackwell, Percy, Macpherson, Herder, Goethe, and a host of others. There was, fifthly, also the problem, inherited from ancient times, of the meaning of the Peisistratean legend about the recension of the Homeric poems. And finally with the development of linguistic studies in the nineteenth century the question was raised about the possibility of one man using dialect forms from several regions and archaisms from different periods.

These were the chief questions that were current in Homeric scholarship and still are. In answering them some scholars have gone so far as to deny even the existence of Homer, but the usual answer has been some form of multiple authorship for the poems with Homer at one end or the other of a series of poets. Sometimes he was the originator whose poems were carried through oral tradition or whose works were modified by later poets; more often he was the last of the redactors or compilers or, in an attempt to bridge the gap between Unitarians and Separatists, he was the great poet who reworked oral tradition into a "literary" poem. The concept of multiple authorship led scholars naturally to the dissection of the Homeric poems in an attempt to see what parts were done by different authors. They were thus led also to seek the "original" or archetype of the poems.

The doubt as to the existence of writing in Homer's time has given Homerists three choices: to seek proof that the doubt was ill founded and that there was writing as early as the traditional date of Homer; to change Homer's date, bringing it down to a period when writing was possible; t

CHAPTER SIX

WRITING AND ORAL TRADITION

The art of narrative song was perfected, and I use the word advisedly, long before the advent of writing. It had no need of stylus or brush to become a complete artistic and literary medium. Even its geniuses were not straining their bonds, longing to be freed from its captivity, eager for the liberation by writing. When writing was introduced, epic singers, again even the most brilliant among them, did not realize its "possibilities" and did not rush to avail themselves of it. Perhaps they were wiser than we, because one cannot write song. One cannot lead Proteus captive; to bind him is to destroy him.

But writing, with all its mystery, came to the singers' people, and eventually someone approached the singer and asked him to tell the song so that he could write down the words. In a way this was just one more performance for the singer, one more in a long series. Yet it was the strangest performance he had ever given. There was no music and no song, nothing to keep him to the regular beat except the echo of previous singings and the habit they had formed in his mind. Without these accompaniments it was not easy to put the words together as he usually did. The tempo of composing the song was different, too. Ordinarily the singer could move forward rapidly from idea to idea, from theme to theme. But now he had to stop very often for the scribe to write down what he was saying, after every line or even after part of a line. This was difficult, because his mind was far ahead. But he accustomed himself to this new process at last, and finally the song was finished.

A written text was thus made of the words of song. It was a record of a special performance, a command performance under unusual circumstances. Such has been the experience of many singers in many lands, from the first recorded text, I believe, to present times. And what has been said of other performances can be said of it; for though it is written, it is oral. The singer who dictated it was its "author," and it reflected a single moment in the tradition. It was unique.

Yet, unwittingly perhaps, a fixed text was established. Proteus was photographed, and no matter under what other forms he might appear in

the future, this would become the shape that was changed; this would be the "original." Of course, the singer was not affected at all. He continued, as did his confrères, to compose and sing as he always had and as they always had. The tradition went on. Nor was his audience affected. They thought in his terms, in the terms of multiformity. But there was another world, of those who could read and write, of those who came to think of the written text not as the recording of a moment of the tradition but as *the* song. This was to become the difference between the oral way of thought and the written way.

Before the advent of electrical recording machines, written texts of actual performance — not from dictation — were possible only in a very limited number of cases. Wherever the singing was done by two people and the second man repeated exactly what the first man sang there was time for someone writing rapidly to set down the line during the repetition, especially if the tempo of singing was slow and the verse not over long. This is the manner of singing in parts of northern Albania and Yugoslav Macedonia. Because of the slow tempo, such a manner is not conducive of long epic songs — it is too leisurely to sustain narrative interest. I have heard such singing in Albania (in 1937) and Macedonia (in 1950 and 1951), and have seen this method of writing down a text applied successfully in eastern Macedonia by Professor Rusić of Skoplje. Sometimes one singer repeats the line exactly and no assistant in the singing is called in, but this is merely a variation of a manner of singing that originally depended on two men. If the line is very long or the singing very rapid, it is difficult, if not impossible, to write down a song by this method. Wherever the assistant does not repeat the line exactly but repeats the idea in different words or adds another idea, as is the case in Finland,[1] this method is obviously impossible. It is restricted to very few special cases.

If the singer of oral epic always sang a song in exactly the same words, it would be possible, of course, to ask him to repeat the performance a number of times and thus to fill in on the second or third singing what was lost in notating the first singing. But bards never repeat a song exactly, as we have seen. This method, although it has been used often, never results in a text that truly represents any real performance. It produces a composite text even when a singer's song is fairly stable, as we know it may be with shorter epics. In a truly oral tradition of song there is no guarantee that even the apparently most stable "runs" will always be word-for-word the same in performance.

There are two methods of writing down a text from actual performance which I have not heard of being used, but which might be employed with some degree of success. One of these is to use shorthand. 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. Another method would be to have a battery

of two or more scribes taking down alternate lines or every third line, depending on the number of scribes employed. There is no evidence to my knowledge that this means has been used at any time in the past. The idea of obtaining an accurate text of a given performance is comparatively recent, because heretofore the concept of a fixed text somewhere in the background tended to minimize the importance of any single given performance. Actually there is very little chance, if any, for the reasons given above, that our written texts at any time were taken down during performance. It is normal to expect that, on the other hand, the singer was asked to dictate his song without singing, pausing after each verse to give the scribe time to write. Since this is the case, we should do well to consider how this special type of performance by dictation affects the text.

From the recited texts from Novi Pazar published in Parry and Lord, II,[2] we can obtain some idea of the singer's difficulties in making normal verses when he is deprived of singing. These texts were recorded on phonograph discs but the singer was unable to sing to instrumental accompaniment because of the ban on singing during the period of mourning following the assassination of King Alexander I in Marseilles in early October of 1934. Parry was allowed to collect only by recitation without song. A mixture of prose and verse, parts of verses interspersed with parts of prose sentences and *vice versa,* are the result. This is true especially at the beginning of the song, but even when the singer has accustomed himself to reciting, the number of lines that are irregular or poorly formed rhythmically and formulaically still remains high.

A nemade majka da rodi junaka, (12 syllables)	No mother has borne a hero,
Niko da se nafati knjige. (9 syllables)	None to accept the letter.
Ta put Meho reče: (6 syllables)	Then Meho said:
"Ču lji me, begov kahveđija! (9 syllables)	"Hearken to me, coffee-maker of the bey!
Aj, suoči u Kajniđu gradu, (10 syllables)	Go to the city of Kajniđa,
Traži kulu Ajanević Meha! (10 syllables)	Seek the tower of Ajanević Meho!
Ćejvan deda kulu traži, Ćejvanage deda, (14 syllables)	Seek the tower of Ćejvan the elder, of Ćejvanagha the elder,
Pa otidi k dedu u odaji! (10 syllables)	And then go to the elder in his room!
Ako ti se on knjige nafati, (10 syllables)	If he accepts the letter from you,
I dobro i jes; ako ti se nafati dedo knjige, dobro će ti biti, a ne šćene se nafatit', ne znam ništa!" [prose] (II, No. 12:77–87)	Then it is well; if the elder accepts the letter from you, it will be well for you, but if he is not willing to accept it, then I know nothing!"

It is not to be wondered at that when the singer is asked to dictate, stopping at the end of each verse, he is uncertain at first where to stop, and hesitates also as to the number of syllables in a line. Frequently he will give a whole sentence in prose. He is, after all, telling a story. As regards the forming of verses, songs recited for the records and songs dictated but taken down by a scribe who does not seek to obtain good rhythmic lines are about the same. They look very much like the text of the Old Spanish *Cid*[3] or that of the Escorialensis manuscript of the medieval Greek *Digenis Akritas*[4] with their "irregularities" of meter.

One collector in the second half of the last century wrote of his difficulties in taking down songs from dictation: "Many cannot dictate songs without the gusle, even as Todor Vlatković from Visoko, who without the gusle cannot speak two lines; he gets lost without it." That there are singers to whom it does not matter, however, he also bears witness: "To Ilija (Divljanović) it did not matter whether he sang to the gusle or dictated without it, except that in the case of dictation one had to give him a little wine or brandy to fire his imagination; then the song would be clearer and more adorned."[5]

A well-trained and intelligent scribe, like Nikola Vujnović, Parry's assistant, seeks normal verses, trying at the same time not to suggest them to the singer. He simply indicates that what has been said is not right, sometimes goes back several lines and reads them to the singer to give him the continued rhythm, or even puts the musical instrument in his hands and asks him to sing the verses. By this laborious and patience-trying process regular lines can be obtained from even the most confused of singers. For the most part these lines are just as they would be sung. But careful analysis reveals some differences between sung and dictated lines within the limits of a single singer's works. The singer when dictating occasionally builds his lines somewhat differently from the way he would if he were singing. For example, in Parry and Lord, Volume II, Salih Ugljanin sings the line *Sultan Selim rata otvorijo* ("Sultan Selim declared war") in No. 1, line 12, but dictates it *Sultan Selim otvorijo rata* in No. 3, line 2. The rhythms are different.

Such cases are instructive because they indicate that a dictated text, even when done under the best of circumstances and by the best of scribes, is never entirely, from the point of view of the line structure, the same as a sung text. One should emphasize, however, that these changes or differences are not caused by the singer's conscious or deliberate choice of an order of words or of words themselves for any other reason than the influence of the surrounding rhythmic structure. This structure is broken by the dictating and such breaks may be indicated by differences in the line. The singer is struggling with the traditional patterns under unusual circumstances. He is not seeking *le mot juste* for any other purpose than

that of the traditional line; he is, indeed, striving to maintain, not to depart from, the tradition.

It is vastly important that we do not make the unthinking mistake of believing that the process of dictation frees the singer to manipulate words in accordance with an entirely new system of poetics. Clearly he has time to plan his line in advance, but this is more of a hindrance than a help to a singer who is accustomed to rapid-fire association and composition. Opportunity does not make the singer into an e.e.cummings! not even if he is already a Homer! There is even the possibility that Homer would not feel complimented! It would, moreover, be easy to exaggerate the amount of *avant garde* musing which a scribe engaged in writing down a long epic would be willing to accept even were the singer capable of it. Nor is there any case on record — and I venture to submit there is none off the record either — of an oral singer going back in his song after it has been written down and changing words and lines. Opportunity there is, of course. But when an oral singer is through with a song, it is finished. His whole habit of thinking is forward, never back and then forth! It takes a vast cultural change to develop a new kind of poetic. The opportunity offered in dictating is not sufficient.

From the point of view of verse-making, dictation carries no great advantage to the singer, but from that of song-making it may be instrumental in producing the finest and longest of songs. For it extends almost indefinitely the time limit of performance. And with a little urging, under the stimulus of great accomplishment for a worthy audience, the singer of talent will apply every resource of his craft to adorn and enrich his song. The important element is that of time; there is nothing in the dictating process itself that brings this richness to bear. The collector who tells a singer that he can sing his song from day to day taking as many days, as much time, as he wants, can elicit the same results in sung performance, as we saw in the case of Avdo Međedović's songs in the last chapter. It should be stressed also that the additional time is of use only to the exceptional singer of great talent in a tradition rich in traditional themes and songs. The "ordinary" singer in a mediocre tradition will not have enough material at his command nor the imagination to avail himself of it. The extraordinary singer will enjoy the opportunity to the full.[6]

The use of writing in setting 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.

It is necessary for us to face squarely the problem of "transitional" texts. Is there in reality such a phenomenon as a text which is transitional between oral and written literary tradition? This has become a vastly important question. Diplomatic Homerists[7] would like to find refuge in a

transitional poet who is both an oral poet — they cannot disprove the evidence of his style — and a written poet — they cannot, on the other hand, tolerate the unwashed illiterate. Recent research in Anglo-Saxon and Middle English [8] indicates a strong desire on the part of medievalists also to seek a solution to the problems raised by the discovery of oral characteristics in some of the poems in their fields by recourse to the term "transitional." Even if one may have reservations about the ultimate results of the compromise, one is enormously encouraged by a development in the medieval sector that is a guarantee that the traditional association of Homeric and medieval scholarship is as alive and strong today as it was in the days of Lachmann.

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. I believe that the answer must be in the negative, because the two techniques are, I submit, contradictory and mutually exclusive.[9] Once the oral technique is lost, it is never regained. The written technique, on the other hand, is not compatible with the oral technique, and the two could not possibly combine, to form another, a third, a "transitional" technique. It is conceivable that a man might be an oral poet in his younger years and a written poet later in life, but it is not possible that he be *both* an oral and a written poet at any given time in his career. The two by their very nature are mutually exclusive. We may in actuality discover what might be called special categories of texts, but it is more than doubtful that they should be labelled "transitional," that is, part way between oral and written techniques.

We might ask whether those oral poets who write their own texts (for there are such) [10] can under any circumstances produce an oral poem. The answer is affirmative. Yet an oral singer who has learned just enough writing to put down laboriously a song that he would ordinarily sing would do this only at the request of a collector. Such a text might be called "autograph oral," because the singer would follow his usual oral style, having great difficulty, however, in doing so in a new medium and under strange circumstances. For the collector this means merely a very poor method of obtaining an inferior text which does not do justice to either the song or the singer.

Such a singer will probably learn some songs from the book, but he will still retain a residue of songs that he learned from oral transmission, and hence his repertory will be mixed in origin. When he thinks of the written songs as fixed and tries to learn them word for word, the power of

the fixed text and of the technique of memorizing will stunt his ability to compose orally. But this process is not a transition from an oral to a literary technique of composition. It is a transition from oral composition to simple performance of a fixed text, from composition to reproduction. This is one of the most common ways in which an oral tradition may die; not when writing is introduced, but when published song texts are spread among singers. But our singer does not necessarily blossom forth as a literary poet. He usually becomes . . . nothing at all.

When and how, then, does the "literary" technique start? The poet of whom we have been speaking can read and write, but he is still an oral poet. To become a "literary" poet he has to leave the oral tradition and learn a technique of composition that is impossible without writing, or that is developed because of writing. If I am not mistaken, the process can already be observed in the dictated and autograph texts; it is a process, or better the acceleration or aggravation or extension of a process that continually goes on in oral composition. It is a process of formula change and of change in thematic structure. Making new metrical expressions patterned on the old, is, as we have seen, a part of the oral technique. It is necessary for the introduction of new ideas into the tradition. If a man continues to use these expressions, they become formulas, and if they are taken up by another, they then enter the tradition and become traditional formulas. All this is within the realm of oral composition on the formula level. This is the way of oral poetry. 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. This breaking of the pattern occurs in rapid composition, but is always felt as wrong or awkward, or as a "mistake." When the point is reached that the break of the pattern is made consciously and is desired and felt to be "right," then we are in a "literary" technique.

Formula analysis, providing, of course, that one has sufficient material for significant results,[11] is, therefore, able to indicate whether any given text is oral or "literary." An *oral* text will yield a predominance of clearly demonstrable formulas, with the bulk of the remainder "formulaic," and a small number of nonformulaic expressions. A *literary* text will show a predominance of nonformulaic expressions, with some formulaic expressions, and very few clear formulas. The fact that nonformulaic expressions will be found in an oral text proves that the seeds of the "literary" style are already present in oral style; and likewise the presence of "formulas" in "literary" style indicates its origin in oral style. These "formulas" are vestigial. This is not surprising. We are working in a continuum of man's artistic expression in words. We are attempting to measure with some degree of accuracy the strength and mixture of traditional patterns of expression.

We should not be surprised to find a fair number of nonformulaic expressions in such a talented oral singer as Avdo Međedović. It would be fantastic to expect that a gifted poet who has thought in poetic form all his life should not have sufficient mastery of that form to be able not only to fit his thought into it but also to break it at will. No more should we be surprised to find formulas in Chaucer or William Morris, or to learn that at some periods there are more "formulas" in the "literary" style than at others. Some ages think less about breaking tradition than others; some ages prefer a traditional flavor, others seek a "new" pattern of expression. And yet the two methods are clearly distinguishable, I believe, in the analysis.

The formula level is not the only one to be considered. Analyses of different kinds of enjambement in different styles are likewise helpful. We have seen that nonperiodic enjambement, the "adding" style, is characteristic of oral composition; whereas periodic enjambement is characteristic of "literary" style.[12] Obviously, then, the oral text will yield a predominance of nonperiodic enjambement, and a "literary" text a predominance of periodic. But enjambement cannot be used as the sole test in determining oral or "literary" style; it alone is not a reliable guide. This is because writing actually tends to emphasize composition by line equally as much as the music or the instrumental accompaniment does for the purely oral performance. Nonperiodic enjambement persists longer in an otherwise "literary" style than formula patterns, because the cause of it in oral style is replaced by an equally strong, but different, cause in "literary" style.

While these elements of formula pattern and enjambement are vastly important for stylistic analysis in determining whether any text is oral or "literary," of greater significance for an understanding of the development of literary epic is the change that takes place in the ideas, in the themes presented in epic by a literate oral poet. The oral epic poet needs well-established themes for rapid composition. But when he is of the caliber of Avdo Međedović, he is not bound by these themes, except as he wishes, and he usually so wishes, because he feels them to be right — they are the proper subject of epic poetry. Eventually, however, writing will free him from the need of the themes for purposes of composition. This will mean not only a freer opportunity for new themes, but also greater freedom in consciously combining and recombining themes.

Writing as a new medium will mean that the former singer will have a different audience, one that can read. Psychologically, he may at first be addressing himself still for some time to the audience of listeners to whom he has always been accustomed. But the new reading public, though it will be small at first, will undoubtedly have different tastes developing from those of the traditional nonliterate audience. They will demand new themes, or new twists to old themes.

The singer will no longer be bound by the tyrannous time limit of a

performance, or by the fickleness of an immediate audience in a coffee house. This circumstance leads, as we have seen in the case of dictated oral songs, to longer songs than before. Coupled with greater thematic freedom, the freedom from the singer's audience produces long poems with greater variety of theme, tending frequently to episodic structure. It seems highly probable that the romance finds its origin in the oral dictated texts of epic at a stage when its solemn religious magic was less felt but when at least some of its practitioners were not wholly satisfied with "true history" and sought a degree of the marvelous and fantastic.

As I review the texts that over the years have given me pause as to whether they might be termed transitional, I find that in every case the answer is negative. They are either one or the other; they are either oral or written. Those poems that are written "in the style of" the oral epic, such as those in Kačić's *Razgovor,*[13] or of Njegoš in his *Ogledalo Srpsko,*[14] strikingly close though they may sometimes be to the folk epic, are nevertheless definitely written texts. I strongly suspect that in the very process of writing these songs both authors were psychologically out of the oral tradition of composition. In both cases, of course, they had heard oral epic from their earliest years. Yet they were after all educated men, learned in books. They could not compose an oral epic.

The songs of Kačić and of later writers in the style of the oral epic can be distinguished from truly oral epic, provided that one knows the oral tradition well. Sometimes the distinguishing marks are obvious. A few of Kačić's songs, for example, are written throughout in rhymed couplets.

Vesele se svita banov*ine,*	The countries of the world rejoiced,
I po svitu visoke plan*ine,*	And in the world the lofty mountains,
Sve pustinje i gore zel*ene,*	All the desert places and green forests,
Svako cviće, ružice rum*ene.*	Every flower, the ruddy roses.
Rodiše se četiri jedn*aka*	Four men alike were born
U istoku sveta imanj*aka,*	In the east, all with the same holy name.
Koji sjaju lipše neg Da*nica,*	They shine more brightly than the Day Star,
Žarko sunce oli prihod*nica.*[15]	The burning sun or its forerunner.

Moreover, this song, like the others in rhymed couplets, is written in four-line stanzas, with a full stop at the end of each stanza. This is not the way of the oral tradition of the region, which is purely stichic.

Among the songs written in the nineteenth century those which begin with the date are invariably from the hand of a writer and not from the lips of a singer. For example:

Na tisuću i sedme stotine	In the year one thousand and seven hundred
Devedeset i šeste godine	Ninety and six
Mahmut vezir sovjet učinio	Mahmut Vizier held an assembly
U bijelu Skadru na Bojanu.[16]	In white Scutari on the Bojana river.

This is perhaps the first instance of such dating, but it became a frequent mark thereafter.

Na hiljadu i osme stotine	In the year one thousand and eight hundred
Sedamdeset i pete godine	Seventy and five
Zbor zborilo dvanajest knezova	Twelve chieftains held council
Na šljemenu zemlje Hercegove,	On the heights of Hercegovina,
U širokom polju Nevesinju.[17]	On the broad plain of Nevesinje.

And also:

Braćo moja i družino draga,	My brothers and dear company,
Da vam pričam pjesmu od istine,	Let me sing you a true song
Za gospode i dobre družine.	For our lords and good comrades.
Od hiljade devete stotine	In the year one thousand nine hundred
Četrnaeste u ljetu godine,	And fourteen in the summer,
U junome, kada cvati trava,	In June when the grass blooms,
Sastala se dva silna vladara	There met together two mighty rulers
Habsburškoga roda i plemena.[18]	Of Hapsburg birth and family.

There seem always to be signs in the songs themselves that point to the fact that they are written and not oral. In a fully developed written tradition of literature the formulas are no longer present. They are not needed. There may be repeated phrases, but the proportion of them to the whole is small. Words are chosen for nontraditional effects and placed in patterns which are not those of the tradition. Thus the basic patterns behind the formulas are changed. Lines are unique, and are intended as such. The meter is strictly regular. If there are "runs" (which ordinarily do not occur) they are used by the author for a special effect and do not arise simply from the habitual association in composition. This is again impossible because of the uniqueness of each line. This kind of uniqueness can be balanced against the multiformity of the oral literary tradition on the level of the theme and the song. The uniqueness of a single performance in oral tradition is an element in the multiformity; for the single performance is a multiform. But the uniqueness of written literary tradition is stark. Virgil's *Aeneid* is unique; Ugljanin's *Captivity of Đulić Ibrahim* is unique and at the same time it is but one multiform of a large complex.

In most countries of Western Europe where there are traces of a change from an oral to a literary tradition having at least started, the development seems to have come about through the intermediary of those trained to some degree in a literary tradition that has itself entered from foreign sources. In other words the stimulus has come from an already existent, originally nonnative, literary tradition. Some member or members of that group applied the ideas of written literature to the native oral literature. Such are the cases of Kačić, Njegoš, Mažuranić, Karadžić, and Sima Milutinović.[19] In the Yugoslavia of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries there were men of education who wrote epic poetry in the native ten-syllable

line. Njegoš and Mažuranić used it for what is clearly written literary purposes in *Gorski Vijenac* and *Smrt Smailage Čengića,* for example.[20] In the works under consideration these authors are not *imitating* oral epic, not writing "in its style." They have developed a native literary tradition of epic.

Thus, Njegoš in Vladika Danilo's soliloquy with which the work opens:

Moje pleme snom mrtvijem spava,	My people sleep a sleep of death,
suza moja nema roditelja,	My tear has no parent,
nada mnom je nebo zatvoreno,	Above me the sky is barred,
ne prima mi plača ni molitve;	It does not accept my weeping or my prayer;
u ad mi se svijet pretvorio,	My world has been transformed into hell,
a svi ljudi pakleni duhovi! [21]	And all its men are demons of Hades!

Or, from a famous part of Mažuranić's *Smrt Smailage Čengića:*[22]

Kad al' eto inoga past'jera	When lo another kind of shepherd
gdjeno krotak k svome stadu grede.	Meekly approached his flock.
Ne resi ga ni srebro ni zlato,	He was not bedecked with silver or gold,
nego krepost i mantija crna.	But with strength and a black cassock.
Ne prate ga sjajni pratioci	A brilliant train did not accompany him
uz fenjere i dupl'jere sjajne,	With lanterns and shining crucifixes
ni ponosn'jeh zvona sa zvonika:	Or with proud bells from the towers:
već ga prati sa zapada sunce	But the sun from the west accompanied him
i zvon smjeran ovna iz planine.	And the measured bell of the ram from the mountains.
Crkva mu je divno podnebesje,	His church is the wondrous sky,
oltar časni brdo i dolina,	His holy altar the mountain and the valley,
tamjan miris što se k nebu diže	The fragrance of incense is that which rises to heaven
iz cvijeta i iz b'jela sv'jeta	From the flowers and from the bright world
i iz krvi za krst prolivene.	And from the blood shed for the Cross.

One of the difficulties in comprehending the change from oral to written style lies in the fact that we think of the written always in terms of quality, and that of the highest. We assume without thinking that written style is always superior to oral style, *even from the very beginning.* Actually this is an error in simple observation of experience, perpetrated alas by scholars who have shunned experience for the theoretical. A superior written style is the development of generations. When a tradition or an individual goes from oral to written, he, or it, goes from an adult, mature style of one kind to a faltering and embryonic style of another sort. The Homeric poems could not possibly belong to a "transitional" or early period of written style. Bowra's phrase that the richness of these poems "suggests reliance on writing" [23] is ambiguous.

While the presence of writing in a society *can* have an effect on oral

tradition, it does not *necessarily* have an effect at all. The fact of writing does not inevitably involve a tradition of written literature; even if it did, a tradition of written literature does not inevitably influence an oral tradition. The Southern Slavs had a tradition of written literature since the end of the ninth century; indeed they invented the alphabets used by the Slavs. Yet this written tradition had no influence on the form of the oral tradition until the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The two existed side by side, not, of course, within the same group, but certainly within the same district. In medieval times, writing and written literature, first on foreign models but soon developing along its own lines, were cultivated in the monasteries, as in the rest of Europe. The carriers of oral tradition were the unlettered people outside the monasteries. Beginning in the fifteenth century on the Adriatic coast and on some of the islands, particularly in the cities of Split, Zadar, and Dubrovnik, again under foreign influence and with foreign models at first, a rich literary tradition arose not only among the clergy, but more especially among the wealthy merchant aristocracy. In the villages surrounding these cities and among the other classes of the population in the cities, that is, among those who were not of patrician families and not educated in the schools abroad, or later at home, oral tradition continued to flourish among the unlettered. In both these instances the literary tradition was not a development from the oral tradition. It was stimulated from outside, from Byzantium or from Italy.

In the medieval literature influenced by Byzantium there is a conspicuous lack of verse except for hymns or liturgical and didactic poetry.[24] On the coastland verse was cultivated in Latin and in Croatian, both in medieval and renaissance times, but the verse used for the Croatian poems was not the native meter but an Italian one. Some poets, indeed, showed a knowledge of the native oral literature (which can be seen from the epithets used), yet their works were of a purely literary rather than oral character; and there was a handful of Croatian poems (in part attributed to Šiško Menčetić and Džore Držić of the fifteenth century, and in part to others) which were close to oral lyric and possibly were such. They were not published until later in the nineteenth century.[25] A few narrative ballads from oral tradition appear inserted in literary works beginning in the sixteenth century.[26] The first oral epic texts are found in manuscript collections dating from the first decades of the eighteenth century, discovered and published during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[27] These private collections had no influence on oral tradition itself. Before the eighteenth century we meet with either collected songs or purely literary works springing from nonnative forms.

In the eighteenth century we find the first epic works that are in the style of the oral songs, yet were never sung but were written. The most significant and influential of these is the *Razgovor ugodni naroda slovinskoga* of Andrija Kačić-Miošić, of which we have already spoken.[28] Kačić (1704–

1760) was a Franciscan monk, and his *Razgovor* is a chronicle of the South Slavs from the beginning to his own day, partly in prose and partly in verse. The verse part consists of epic songs almost entirely in the ten-syllable line of oral tradition. Kačić knew the oral epic very well and he wrote his songs in its style. His sources were in part oral epics that he had heard, but even more the available chronicles and histories, documents, accounts of eye witnesses. He aimed at historical truth as he saw it. He has set out to praise the heroes who have not been praised in the tradition, or not sufficiently.

It is worth noting that the Abbé Fortis, collector of the famed *Hasanaginica,* accepted Kačić's book as a collection of oral epics and through his translation of three of Kačić's songs into Italian they entered into Herder's *Stimmen der Völker in Liedern* (1778–79). In his *Saggio d'Osservazioni sopra l'Isola di Cherso ed Osero* (1771), Fortis compared Kačić's songs with the "translations" of Macpherson which had begun to appear in 1760.

The *Razgovor* became an extremely popular book and some of its songs entered into the oral tradition whence they had not come. They could still be collected from singers in the 1930's and probably even today. Kačić was not primarily a collector, but the days of great collecting activity were not far off. Vuk Stefanović Karadžić's first book appeared in 1814, and he was followed by many other collectors down to the present day. The material in all these collections is somewhat uneven, but for the most part the songs were really noted down from singers and, in spite of editing, give a fair picture of the tradition. They are oral dictated texts. Songs have entered these collections that were written, as Kačić's poems were written, and like his they are not really oral traditional poems. Still other songs were made up for the first time by the singers at the moment of dictation probably at the urging of the collector, as was the case of the new songs by the famous singer Filip Višnjić.[29] We must probably consider these as oral epics. The collecting seems to have stimulated the creation of new songs. Nationalism was rife and the chauvinism of the day, a chauvinism not inherent in the tradition itself but fostered by nationalistic and political forces outside the tradition, was unfortunately mirrored in the songs.

What has been the effect of the collections on the tradition itself? The larger, more expensive editions did not reach the communities in which the singing was cultivated, nor did they have any effect in places where there was no person who could read. But during the nineteenth century schools began to spread slowly, and after World War I schools were to be found in most communities. Since the establishment of the Communist regime a concentrated battle against illiteracy has been going on, and now in Yugoslavia only a comparatively small number of the older people are still unable to read and write. Common fare in all school books have been the songs from Vuk's collection or, to a lesser extent, from Njegoš's work. School teachers played a large role in collecting and they and the younger

generation have been the chief purveyors of the songs in their printed forms. But inexpensive paper reprints of individual songs have also been circulated down to the present day.[30] They are still appearing. These contain texts again largely from Vuk. They were also the means for spreading the new songs — largely written and not taken from oral tradition — of the various uprisings against the Turks, the Balkan Wars, World War I, and the recent wars and revolutions. Between the two world wars the Serbs and the Montenegrins were especially active in this field. Printing establishments in Belgrade and Cetinje produced many small paper pamphlets with songs. In Sarajevo, too, the Moslems were busy reproducing songs from the Matica Hrvatska collection and from Hörmann.[31] Most of this activity has taken place since the turn of the century, particularly since 1918.

The effect on the younger generation which could read was that the young people began to memorize songs from the books. They still learned the art from their elders and could sing songs picked up from oral tradition, but they were moving away from that tradition by memorizing some of their repertory from the song books. The memorization from a fixed text influenced their other songs as well, because they now felt they should memorize even the oral versions. The set, "correct" text had arrived, and the death knell of the oral process had been sounded. There are very few younger singers, particularly among the Christian population, who have not been infected by this disease. This is somewhat less true among the Moslems, because none of their collections has been given the almost sacred authority of Vuk's or Njegoš's.

The song books have, of course, spread songs from one district to another, but this effect of the collections has been similar to what would happen, and has often happened, when a singer from one district migrates to another, or when songs are carried by caravan drivers along the routes of trade. So far as oral technique of composition is concerned this distribution of songs by the song books has not been in any way abnormal.

Actually older unlettered singers, even when they are exposed to the reading of song books to them, are not greatly influenced.[32] The learning of the song in this way is like the learning of it from a sung performance. Their habit of oral composition is too well inculcated to be changed.

Those singers who accept the idea of a fixed text are lost to oral traditional processes. This means death to oral tradition and the rise of a generation of "singers" who are reproducers rather than re-creators. Such are the men who appear in costume at folk festivals and sing the songs they have memorized from Vuk's collection. You or I could do the same with a certain amount of training and with a costume. These "singers" are really counterfeits masquerading as epic bards! They borrow the songs of real singers complete from first word to last; one can follow the text in the book. They are a menace to the collector. The idea of the fixed text has been established in them, but they are not by this token literary poets, even

though they are now members of the community of those with written "mentality," in spite of the fact that some of them are still unlettered.

The change has been from stability of essential story, which is the goal of oral tradition, to stability of text, of the exact words of the story. The spread of the concept of fixity among the carriers of oral traditional epic is only one aspect of the transition from an oral society to a written society. Ironically enough, it was the collector and even more those who used his collection for educational, nationalistic, political, or religious propaganda who presented the oral society with a fixed form of its own material. This aspect of the transition can be dated, therefore, from the period of collecting or more exactly from the spread of the collected songs among the oral singers in one form or another as outlined above. Today in Yugoslavia the transition under this aspect is nearly complete. The oral process is now nearly dead.

But this is only one aspect of the transition and it is the easiest one to treat. The written epic traditions of renaissance times in Yugoslavia were not developments from oral tradition. They were extensions of Italian literary traditions and were not autochthonous. This does not mean that a real Yugoslav literary tradition did not arise from them. They did, of course, produce a real Yugoslav literature, just as real and as distinctive as those of other peoples. But they did not come in a straight line from the oral tradition of the Yugoslavs even when they borrowed the subject matter, as they did more and more as time went on. The existence of such literary traditions adjacent to oral traditions may or may not be necessary for the transition from an oral literature to a written literature, but these borrowed forms are in no way themselves transitional.

There is nothing peculiarly Yugoslav in this picture except that among the Yugoslavs oral tradition has lasted until the present time and was flourishing only yesterday. Beginning with the Romans, the peoples of Europe have borrowed a literary tradition and made it their own. It supplanted their native oral traditions; it did not develop out of them. There is no direct line of literary development from the *chansons de geste* to the *Henriade,* or from *Beowulf* to *Paradise Lost.*[33] Our Western literary tradition of epic stems from Homer through Apollonius and Virgil. Virgil did not write in Saturnians, nor in any direct descendant of them; nor did Milton write in alliterative Germanic verse, nor in any direct descendant of it, because there were no real direct descendants of these native oral traditional meters. Oral tradition did not become transferred or transmuted into a literary tradition of epic, but was only moved further and further into the background, literally into the back country, until it disappeared