Contextualizing Classics

Ideology, Performance, Dialogue

Essays in Honor of John J. Peradotto

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Sicilian Folktales, Cognitive Psychology, and Oral Theory

Joseph Russo

A central feature of Oral Theory that makes it of seemingly inexhaustible value is the ease with which it can be combined with insights derived from other theories from other disciplines. Oral theory connects especially well with ethnography and folklore, with linguistics, and with cognitive psychology, connections that have received differing degrees of attention and emphasis in the tradition of oral Homeric studies begun by Albert Lord's pioneering work.[1] My purpose here is to illustrate the fruitfulness of these interdisciplinary possibilities by making some new comparisons and some new connections.

The Oral Theory constitutes a landmark conceptual breakthrough in the way we look at certain texts representing transcriptions of verbal performances in face-to-face situations before live audiences. Albert Lord's extension of Milman Parry's vision of an oral Homer relied very heavily on Serbo-Croatian comparative material to establish what seem almost "canonical" features of oral style, composition, and engagement with tradition. Scholars of oral performance in other traditions then brought in new comparanda and sometimes challenged

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1. For a full bibliography and a succinct review of history and methodology see Foley 1985 and 1988 respectively. Lord 1960 initiated the critical role played by the ethnographic dimension in oral studies, an approach continued in all his work and very evident in his posthumous volume 1995. An excellent linguistic reading of oral formulaic style was offered by Kiparsky 1976. Discourse linguistics has been used extensively by Bakker, to be discussed in detail below.

Lord's exclusive reliance on Yugoslav parallels to interpret Homeric phenomena.[2] I have no interest here in recapitulating any of those interesting debates; instead, my wish is to widen the areas of comparative scholarship in two distinct directions.

First, I wish to continue the argument that Oral Theory offers its richest insights if we do not limit ourselves to the study of parallel material from Serbo-Croatian heroic epic, despite the *prima facie* plausibility of privileging material of similar genre and regional provenience in the Balkans. If the theory is successfully grounded in sociolinguistic and ethnopoetic realities, it should be able to illuminate issues and raise questions beyond those emphasized within the Serbo-Croatian analogy. Oral theory presents a vision of literature without letters, literature as purely verbal product that is fully real only in the evanescent moment of performance. Its meaning or value belongs to the participants in that act of performance and, especially, to the audience in their act of *reception*. We can best understand the affective and cognitive processes of reception, and the range of possibilities within the traditional, by learning something about what researchers in linguistics, folkloristics, and cognitive psychology have discovered.

Furthermore, in our consideration of oral traditional material, let us remember that performance in *prose* genres constitutes a significant part—no doubt the major part, quantitatively—of oral literature. We should be willing to look across the wide spectrum of collected folktale texts and recorded performances for any evidence that may help us restore the full dimensions of Homer's lost performances.

To this end I am first going to consider some textual features—essentially linguistic, stylistic, and performance features—of a group of dialect folktales, technically classified as Märchen, translated from Sicilian into Italian by Italo Calvino in his famous collection (Calvino 1993 (1956), Eng. trans. 1980). Calvino found the two areas richest in folktales to be Tuscany and Sicily. The Sicilian tales he used came from the 4-vol. collection of Giuseppe Pitrè (1875), the late 19th century pioneer of Sicilian folklore scholarship. Calvino, to some extent following the example of the brothers Grimm, arrogated to himself carte blanche to "improve" Pitrè's original versions by not only changing regional dialect into standard Italian, but replacing oral folk-diction, with its characteristic syntax, local expressions, and occasional

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2. Finnegan 1977, Smith 1977, with a reply by Lord 1995: 187-202 to some of his critics.

logical and grammatical lacunae, with "correct" literary diction. Calvino casually alludes to this practice of "improvement"—considered highly improper by professional folklorists—in his Introduction (Calvino 1980: xix-xxi); but the reader would have no grasp of how widespread the practice is without comparing several of his versions closely with their dialect originals. And like the Grimms, he is not above sometimes grafting a whole episode onto one tale from a different tale, just to make a more cohesive plot structure

The nature of such alterations, and what they reveal about the linguistics of oral style, is an interesting and as far as I know largely unexplored area in oral scholarship. Albert Lord, in a posthumously published essay, discusses Calvino's re-telling of these dialect tales as examples of how a "transitional text" is created, noting a tendency to substitute more conventional language for the more idiosyncratic and colorful folk idiom of the original (1995: 213-20). This significant observation (plus my own awareness that Lord did not always perfectly understand the Sicilian idiom he quotes[3]) suggested to me a fuller investigation of these texts, which have much to show us about the difference between oral folk idiom and the conventional language of habitual literates. The Sicilian originals were already in my possession because filial piety—or rather nepotial piety if I can coin a term—moved me to buy Pitrè's collection in 1978 when I happened to be in Palermo. This is the dialect my grandparents spoke and was the second language of my bilingual childhood. With small effort I find I can read these texts with ease. (In fact they were transcribed around the time my grandparents were children, in the late 1800's, many of them in the identical Palermo dialect which I grew up speaking.)

Beyond this neat autobiographical coincidence, the real point is that here we have something like a laboratory experiment for what is distinctive of genuine oral style and missing in written style: we have the identical story told both ways. We also get another bonus, the distinctive voice of a "tradition-bearer" of exceptional linguistic and performing talent. Anyone who has read Pitrè's description of her (quoted in Calvino's Introduction) will not easily forget Agatuzza Messia, the nanny of Giuseppe Pitrè's household who filled the childhood of this

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3. 1995: 219, "tutti li survizza di fora" is translated "all the services of the market," apparently through confusion with Latin "fora" plural of "forum." Sicilian "fora"= Italian "fuori," and the phrase means "all services available from outdoors" (for the three daughters who have been literally "immured" in their house by the protective father).

great collector with hundreds of brilliantly told folktales. She was a stellar performer with an enormous repertoire, and of course illiterate. Pitrè seems to have observed a high standard of accuracy in capturing her voice and her style. He nowhere addresses the question of fidelity in transcription; but his texts seem remarkably accurate, recording her frequent departures from perfect syntax and her occasional inconsistencies and self-corrections. Many of these resemble distinctive features of Homeric style usually judged as awkward. Believers in an oral Homer have long accepted many of these "blemishes" as strong indicators of an oral genesis. The further reinforcement of this piece of the oralist argument from hitherto untapped sources of evidence seems to me important for an increasingly clear and strong understanding of how oral storytelling style is indeed different from written style.

Among the traits of oral style common in the Sicilian originals and emended away by Calvino, the most common is extreme parataxis, leading to a syntactically fragmented style and sometimes to the use of two nominatives in apposition instead of one being a partitive genitive. Another characteristic is the question-answer sequence in the narrator's voice; and still another is the use of a self-correction formula for rescuing inadvertently omitted material by restoring it to a later place in the narrative. All of these except the overt self-correction are well known in Homer.

Here follow three specimens of original Sicilian dialect phrasing, followed by a literal English translation and then Calvino's Italian translation. The dialect texts all exhibit a tendency toward paratactic fragmentation. Example 2, which shows substantial streamlining by Calvino, also exhibits the interesting apposition of two nominative subjects.[4] Example 3 shows the paratactic preference for using simple connecting "and" instead of relative pronouns,[5] and for shorter phrase units throughout, as well as no inhibition on repetition, seen in the final redundant "tu" capping the closing rhetorical flourish. Calvino's version by contrast, preferring hypotactic compression and omitting the significantly emphasized word "Queen," seems very flat compared to the expressive effusion of the original.

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4. For nominative apposition as characteristic of Homeric style see the discussion of passages like *Il.* 16.264-5, 317-25, *Od.* 12.73, by Janko 1992: 359, Russo 1994: 381-3.

5. This is a feature of oral discourse particularly emphasized by Bakker as distinctive of Homeric speech, as discussed below.

1. Sic.   poi ci licinziau, e ci dissi
          (then he took leave of them, and said to them)
   Ital. salutandole chiese[6]

2. Sic.   tutti li medici di lu regnu nuddu avia l'abilità di
          fallu stari bonu
          (all the doctors of the realm, no-one had the skill to
          make him well)
   Ital. nessuno dei medici del regno ci capiva niente.[7]

3. Sic.   Sta donna è la soru di Burdelluni: io mi la duvia
          pigghiari pi mugghieri, e tu, 'mmiriusa, la facisti
          addivintari serpi niura pi essiri Riggina tu.
          (This woman is the sister of Burdelluni: I was
          supposed to take her as my wife, and you, envious
          one, turned her into lack snake to become Queen
          yourself)
   Ital. Questa donna è la sorella di Baldellone che io
          dovevo prendere in moglie e che tu invidiosa avevi
          fatto diventare serpe nera per prenderne il posto.[8]

The original oral texts also frequently feature the narrator's question-answer sequence, which is regularly edited out by Calvino. For example in "Burdelluni" (called "La serpe Pippina" by Calvino) we read "The baker's wife after a little bit begins to smell an aroma that was a delight. What does she do? She takes one of those pastries and eats it." Calvino renders simply "The baker's wife after a while smells coming from the oven an aroma that was a delight. She could not resist temptation, she pulled out one of those pastries and ate it" (Pitrè 1875.2: 76; Calvino 1993: 778). In "Gràttula-Beddàttula" we read "And what does he forget? The date-palm branch for Ninetta," while Calvino simply says "but he forgot about the date-palm branch for Ninetta" (Pitrè 1875: 1.369; Calvino 1993: 763).

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6. "Gràttula-Beddàtula," Pitrè 1875: 1.368; Calvino 1993: 762.
7. "Gràttula-Beddàtula," Pitrè 1875:1.372; Calvino 1993: 765.
8. "Burdelluni," Pitrè 1875: 2.83; Calvino 1993: 784 ("La serpe Pippina").

But there is a further, more unexpected inference to be made from this traditional oral material. It is often assumed without argument that traditional genres imply, even require, traditional mentalities, so that only the comfortable, "mainstream" cultural values can be transmitted and reinforced in such folk literature. In this regard Agatuzza Messia surprises us. Calvino notes that her repertoire has a surprisingly high number of tales with plucky, tough and outspoken heroines who challenge the patriarchal values of the traditional tale-world and get away with it (Calvino 1993: xxix; 1980: xxiii). Not only do they get away with it, but in fact their success and brilliance as story figures derive specifically from their demonstration of self-assured power. And this in the face of one of the most reactionary social milieux in late nineteenth century Europe! Messia herself was never married, and was not a conventionally attractive woman as Pitrè describes her. One is tempted to see in her someone whose personal life made her something of an oppositional reader of her own culture, even as her oral legacy and great performance skills led her to be a transmitter of material that tends traditionally to valorize the most conventional—and specifically sexist—values of that culture. We see then that not every master of oral tradition need be a "true believer" in every aspect of that tradition.

An excellent illustration of this point is Messia's "Gràttula-Beddàttula." This is an especially fine version of the single most widely diffused Märchen in the world, the Cinderella Tale (Type 510 in Aarne-Thompson), whose counterparts include Grimm's "Aschenputtl," Afanasyev's "The Golden Slipper" and "Vasilissa the Beautiful," Perrault's derivative and very literary but charming "Cinderella" ("Cendrillon") and a myriad other tales.[9] In Messia's version, one is struck by the heroine's extraordinarily high energy and forceful personality: she is emphatically *not* victimized by mean mother or sisters, stands in *no awe* of the prince and his elegant court, runs circles around him with brilliant doubletalk to avoid giving away any information about herself, ingeniously foils three attempts by the King to have her followed, and consents to end the charade and marry the prince *only* when he is dying for love of her and she is *begged* by his father the king. No glass or golden or "fur" slipper, no coquettish strategies to captivate the prince, and no impostor sisters (the Proppian motif of the

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9. Dundes 1988 offers a thorough study of this tale's international representation.

"False Hero/ine", normally employed at this point in the plot of most Cinderella-type tales). In fact there is no rivalry with the sisters at all. They urge her to come to the ball with them and she politely declines. In all of Agatuzza Messia's heroine tales, the sister-rivalry so endemic to the Märchen world is absent. If a female tries to thwart the heroine, it is a rival bride, not a sister. Of course marriage remains the goal of all Messia's heroines; it would be too much to expect her feminism to lead to plots that match *MS* magazine's Modern Fairy Tales for progressively raised children. Yet within the parameters of her highly traditional genre she is remarkably revisionist. Her heroines regularly take the upper hand in dealing with their Prince Charmings.[10] This is not simply because she is a female narrator; most Märchen narrators in European traditions are female (including the Grimms' principal informants). It is because the constraints of traditional genres are not enough to prevent a gifted artist from achieving a somewhat unique and counter-cultural perspective on how to conceive and present the individual in relation to society. I think this lesson is transferable to Homer. An important recent book (Rose 1992, Chap. 3) has raised the question, "How Conservative is the Iliad?" If we had only the Grimms and some of the other popular collections to go by, and wished to address that question through comparative evidence from the highly conservative genre of Märchen, we might be tempted to support the generalization that conservative genres offer conservative worldviews. Agatuzza Messia gives us one important piece of evidence against that argument.

Let us now move back from questions of content to questions of language. The argument thus far has been that, on the level of rhetoric, oral discourse offers certain clear linguistic markers whose universality transcends the boundary separating prose from verse, folktale prose narrative from epic verse narrative. The dichotomy oral/written is in certain significant ways more powerful than the dichotomy prose/verse. In other words, whether a tale is verse or prose is less important, in accounting for its style, than whether or not it is product of an oral creative process. The remainder of my argument will be directed to (1) searching out the underlying reasons why oral discourse

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10. Examples available in the English edition (Calvino 1980) include "Catherine the Wise," "The King of Spain and the English Milord," "The Thieving Dove," and "The Wife Who Lived on Wind."

is so marked; (2) showing how the dichotomy baldly stated above as "oral/written" in fact needs to be complicated by still another distinction, that between fully spontaneous oral discourse and ritualized oral discourse. The less tidy picture that emerges from such complication—the embedding of one dichotomy within another—should bring us toward a more accurate assessment of the nature of Homeric language, inasmuch as slightly messy schemata are often more likely to map reality better than reductive, overly tidy schemata.

I must acknowledge here my indebtedness to the work of Egbert J. Bakker, who has done much to re-frame the study of Homeric language within the perspective of modern discourse linguistics and its connection to the psychological study of cognition. Bakker has argued persuasively that many distinctive features of Homeric style are precisely features of oral unpremeditated speech of any kind, speech which has a particularly close connection to thought-processes (Bakker 1991, 1993, 1997a and 1997b.). His approach requires us to consider that the Parry-Lord oralist vision, for all its merits, has placed too much emphasis on the distinction between Homeric style and the style of Apollonios or Vergil, as if the key paradigm at issue were that which would separate hexameter narrative generated orally from that generated through writing, i. e., differentiating two kinds of *literature* (both of them distinct from non-literary speech). There is an even more fundamental paradigmatic distinction to be made, Bakker argues: that between oral discourse and written discourse, i. e., between two kinds of *speech*. The best way to evaluate exactly what constitutes the oral quality of Homeric speech is to match up its stylistic features to those of oral prose discourse as transcribed by discourse linguists. For an explanation of why oral discourse exhibits the features it does, there is a growing body of literature from other disciplines that can help us answer this question. Bakker supports his arguments by making substantial use of the research of the linguist Wallace Chafe, and refers further to the findings of other linguists and of cognitive psychologists (Chafe 1982, 1994; Rubin 1995). I find this material, drawn from the disciplines most intimately involved with the study of language and its relation to cognitive processes, to be especially rewarding for Homerists attempting to capture the essence of oral style

Chafe's basic point is that we produce oral, conversational discourse in a manner very different from that in which we create formal written or spoken lectures. The spontaneous, more loosely connected conversational mode is based on structures inherently closer to the very

processes of thinking; that is, language is generated in short "chunks" of 4 to 5 words, each representing a focus of consciousness. Chafe labels this loosely organized quality *fragmentation*. Expression of thought progresses by juxtaposition of small units, and thus linkage is inherently paratactic, not complex and syntactic, and often non-grammatical. This mode of speech depends on heavy use of the word "and," and is further marked by small hesitations, "rests," and "place-holders" like "mm," "uh," "y'know," "well," "like," "I mean." When we write, by contrast, we generate a very different kind of discourse, much more subject to "cerebral" processes of organization: we subordinate, co-ordinate, and strategically select and structure our language according to a different set of rules, which allow much higher concentration of information per unit. The resulting style is characterized by what Chafe calls a high degree of *integration*. In an integrated style, dysfluencies are judged unattractive and systematically excluded. Thus each mode of language production has its own distinctive style, and oral, fragmented style is by far the more fundamentally "natural" one.

"Natural" is a loaded term here, because it to some extent begs the question of the relation of language to thought, a crucial but elusive topic relatively neglected by both psychologists and linguists (although William James emphasized its centrality over 100 years ago). This neglect has to some extent been remedied by the publications of Chafe (1982, 1994) and psychologist David Rubin (1995). Chafe understands consciousness as always having a point of focus, which is itself embedded in a peripheral area of semiactive information serving as a context to which it has access. This focus represents the limited capacity of consciousness to be fully present to only one small piece of information at a time, which is reflected linguistically in our tendency to speak in short spurts of language framed as intonation units of 4-5 words, or about 3 seconds' duration. Consciousness is dynamic, moving restlessly from one focal point to another, expressed linguistically in the way each intonation unit expresses something different from the preceding and following one. Groups of such intonation units form larger coherences called discourse topics.

This description may serve very well to characterize the flow of Homeric diction that moves by half-lines, and occasionally smaller colon-units, in sequences that Bakker has compared to the intonation units of natural speech. The specific sequencing of Homeric or any oral discourse would be guided by patterns best understood, according to Rubin's analysis of memory in oral tradition, as "serial recall guided by

multiple constraints" (p. 176). The range of constraints operating as cues for recall would include genre- and theme-specific cues, song-specific cues, temporal and serial-position cues, and so on. For certain traditions—e.g., the counting-out rhymes studied in one chapter of Rubin's book—rhythm, rhyme, alliteration and assonance serve as the major constraints that cue memory. In addition, as Rubin puts it, "Meaning and imagery also appear to function mostly in a local, serial fashion to limit choices and increase the discriminability of items in memory" (*idem*). All of these constraints would be at work, at least to some extent, in the production of Homeric speech. And among them all the most globally effective one, Rubin's research reveals, is *rhythm*.

The centrality of rhythm brings us back to the issue raised earlier of the necessary complication of an apparently clear paradigm. Having accounted for those features of Homeric style that seem very close to spontaneous oral discourse, features of fragmentation, we need to account for the other side of the ledger, those features of Homeric language that show distinctive features of (1) stylization and (2) integration, both relatively foreign to spontaneous oral discourse.

Any consideration of stylization in Homeric speech must account for the thoroughly metrical nature of such speech, based on the need to fill a demanding hexameter structure with not only the correct sequence of longs and shorts but also one that avoids the several rhythmical inhibitions subsumed under the various "laws" and "bridges" that metricians ancient and modern have identified. Another important feature of stylization is the heavily formulaic quality of Homeric diction, a feature so heavily intertwined with the metricization of the diction that we might say that Homer's language is to some extent metrical because it is formulaic and formulaic because it is metrical.[11] The oral prose discourse analyzed by Chafe and offered by Bakker as analogous material to Homeric speech is not totally devoid of formulas or rhythmic patterns; but no one would characterize this style as significantly

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11. Exact quantification of formular content will be eternally elusive, but Homer's strong reliance on formulaic language compared to that of later, non-oral poetry is beyond dispute. See Russo 1997 for a survey of concepts of "formula" and the problems its "measurement" has posed. The question of whether meter conditions and creates formula or formula is primary and ends up shaping a full hexameter meter is a long-standing conundrum. See Nagy 1976, 1979, Russo 1976, Gentili 1977.

formulaic or rhythmical, and so the appropriateness of the analogy to Homer needs further justification.[12]

The centrality of meter in the shaping of Homeric discourse would seem to raise an obstacle to equating Homeric style with oral prose discourse according to the model suggested by Bakker for the production of speech. Homeric speech is produced in a strictly controlled metrical flow, while no such constraints operate upon the prose speech offered as an analogous product. The requirement that epic speech be framed only in hexametric segments may suggest that some kind of primary status be granted to the constraint of meter, creating a kind of speech different enough to require its own category (as "epic poetry") and resisting assimilation to the category of "oral speech." This question is well stated by the linguist Jan Puhvel:

> Is meter, and the earliest Indo-European meter in particular, just a matter of regulating these suprasegmentals and quantitative lengths of phraseology? . . . Are we not then entitled to wonder whether the origins of meter are to be sought rather in extra-linguistic rhythmic material, to which the words are strictly lyrics in the modern sense, as in musical comedy for example? (1976: 261-2)

Bakker's view, by contrast, considers metrical constraints as "part of the package" of traditional epic speech and as just one more constraint among the others. In his latest study he argues as follows for this approach:

> Instead of speaking of discourse in terms of meter, then, we are dealing with meter in terms of discourse, as part of our discussion of the emergence of poetry out of speech. In terms of cognition, the hexameter cannot be an original discourse unit: it is simply too long. . . . Instead, I propose, thehexameter is a matter of rhetoric. . . . the exact metrical details of this process will probably remain forever in the dark, but the origin of the hexameter from smaller units is a very plausible scenario, if not an inevitable one from a cognitive point of view. (1977: 148)

Scholars have debated the question whether meter creates formula or vice versa, with no clear consensus. Bakker's view of the *interdependent* origin of hexameter form and its constituent rhetorical units is attractive, and fits nicely with some recent metrical research that

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12. Past studies have shown that oral styles in prose tend not to be formula-dependent, e.g. O'Nolan 1969. They may, however, rely on metrical or rhythmical patterns to a degree that might surprise us. The oral sermons of African-American preachers studied by B. Rosenberg, and cited by Bakker, offer ample testimony to this claim. For details, see Bakker 1997b: 129-38, "Rhythm in Speech."

would explain the rise of the Greek hexameter from smaller units that naturally constitute rhythmic and semantic entities: the hemiepes and the various enoplian/paroemiac units that commonly complete the verse and offer the most characteristic shapes for formulaic phraseology.[13]

The other phenomenon of Homeric style that needs explanation is its more than occasional use of integration. Bakker's identification of Homeric style with oral discourse leans heavily on Homer's use of discourse features like *de, kai, alla, ara, de,* all paratactic discourse markers characteristic of Chafe's "fragmented" style (Bakker 1997b: 62-85; cf. also 1990: 5-6, 1993: 11-14.). In addition, we might consider here the phenomenon of "oral anacoluthon" (Janko 1992: 71, 101, 118, 211, 276, 347, 353, 359, 368). as further evidence of a failure to achieve a successfully integrated style. But there are also some significant features of Homeric style that suggest the opposite of fragmentation, i.e., *integration*: the frequent use of relative clauses; the frequency of if-clauses and conditional clauses of all types, most of the time well-structured with corresponding apodotic clauses; and the high incidence of long complex sentences that do exhibit formal grammatical completeness and stretch over several lines. While many Homeric clauses fall neatly into the hexameter line's two main cola, there is a significant minority of cases where rhetorical effectiveness is achieved by what seems a deliberate choice to override the more familiar and expected compartmentalization of phrase-units within the confines of the two main cola and the limits of the single verse. This phenomenon is noted and subjected to detailed analysis by Bakker who labels it "antimetry" (1997: 150-55). His discussion goes on to treat several rhetorical features that set Homer apart from ordinary speech—and indeed apart from the norms of oral and improvised composition—and place his language within the category of "special speech." Homeric rhetoric sometimes develops significant tension between syntactic and metrical periods, which Bakker sees as a device for effective impact in performance and on audience attention.

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13. West 1973, 1982; Gentili-Giannini 1977; Fernández Delgado 1982. It was Gentili 1977: 24-5 who first called attention to the possibility of seeing Parry's original line-ending formulas as metrical complements to the hemiepes, and therefore offering support for the theory of hexameter origins via the union of two shorter elements each having a long diachronic existence as independent units of poetic expression. Less plausible, but also envisioning a genesis from smaller units (expanding rather than joining), are the theories of Nagy 1974 and Berg 1978.

Thus, in his most recent published analysis, Bakker has refined his concept of Homeric speech as oral discourse by showing in detail how it may be understood as an example of "special speech" within that body of discourse. Very relevant to this question are some observations made by Chafe in an earlier study, based on his fieldwork with the Seneca language, a Native American language of the Iroquois family (Chafe 1982). In addition to the basic dichotomy oral discourse/written discourse, Chafe suggests we add a second one within the realm of oral discourse, that between *natural speech* and *ritualized speech*. Seneca religious rituals are performed with language that is improvised anew for each occasion but follows highly set rhetorical patterns. There is a certain required degree of stylization that inevitably leads to a more integrated style than is normal for oral discourse.

The analogy to Homeric language seems obvious. For Homer, I would argue that the strong syntactic and rhythmic expectations established by the formulaic style, together with the metrical and specifically colometric constraints demanded by the hexameter, provide ideal frames for carrying out the more stylized or "ritually expected" features of the language. These would include such precise habits as the tendency for relative and other subordinate clauses to begin most regularly in the fifth foot or fourth colon (ὅς μάλα πολλά, *Od.* 1.1), and secondarily in the second colon (οὐλομένην, ἥ, *Il.* 1.2) or with a conjunction linking the first to the second colon (πλάγχθη, ἐπεὶ Τροίης, *Od.*, 1.2); and the whole series of preferred or metrically localized slots for different kinds of words.[14] Given such strong elements of structural support built into the very fabric of Homer's rhetoric, oral dysfluencies are naturally far less evident in Homer than in fully spontaneous oral discourse; and

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14. The four-part hexameter colometry initiated by Fränkel 1926 and the criticisms and modifications made by subsequent scholars are succinctly surveyed by Russo 1997. Barnes 1986 defends Fränkel's model against its critics. The existence of metrically localized slots for different word-shapes was demonstrated by O'Neill 1942, and an attempt to further differentiate the localized words by grammatical type and characteristic formulaic combination was made in Russo 1962. For attempts to connect stylistic/syntactic tendencies to colometric structure, see Russo 1966, Edwards 1966, and Ingalls 1972. One important consequence of Bakker's emphasis on half-line structures of the hexameter as natural lengths for the intonation units of oral discourse is a significant *devaluation* of the importance of Fränkel's four-part colometry for revealing constituent units of structure or sense. I intend to develop this argument in a future study.

yet their occasional presence may be further evidence to support the argument that the Homer we possess comes from oral dictated texts.[15]

We have been developing a view of Homeric language as organized according to a mixed rhetoric, partly oral discourse, partly formally determined ritualized discourse. And up to this point our analysis has concentrated on the level of style. Now let us consider some rules of organization at deeper levels of structure.

Recent studies in cognitive psychology have brought to light what might be called structures of expectation-and-fulfillment in the processing of any information, the organization of any narrative, or the performance of any behavioral sequence. For our behavior, for example, in the activity sequence of dining out in a restaurant, there is a stable expected frame around the activities of entering, being seated, being waited upon, making food choices, having carefully boundaried interaction with the waiter, asking for and getting the bill, and departing. Many areas of social activity are similarly "framed," including a reader or listener's reception of a literary communication, whether oral or written. This concept of "frame" comes from research published in the 1970's by the psychologist Minsky, the sociologist Goffman and the linguist Wilks.[16]

In addition to the frame as a static environment of the expected, psychologists speak also of schemata and scripts. It is not always clear how much overlap there is here between several terms coined by different scholars in different disciplines to refer to essentially similar concepts. If the frame is the background informational set of "givens," the schema may have more ideological content: schemata are called "higher level complex knowledge structures" which function as "ideational scaffolding" in the organization and interpretation of experience.[17] In the strong view of schemata, they are deterministic and predispose one to interpret experience in a particular way, much like the "strong" Whorfian view of language. In a weaker view they are merely "structures of expectation." Other writers have used the technical term "scenario" to indicate a similar "extended domain of reference"

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15. Janko 1990, 1992: 37-8 and Index s.v. "dictation"; Russo 1994: 381-5, on "ambiguous syntax, bad grammar, and anacoluthon." .

16. A good summary of the concept of frame, as developed by these three scholars, is given in Brown and Yule 1983: 238-41.

17. Brown and Yule 1983.247, combining earlier studies. See 241-50 for discussion of and distinction between schemata, scripts, and scenario.

behind a text. What the terms frame, schema, and scenario have in common is their reference to *structures of knowledge stored in the memory* and available and necessary to draw upon for understanding a situation.

The term "script" refers to what is actually done in a given situation, a standardized sequence of events. A predictable script follows from a given frame. Thus in any familiar activity—attending a concert, going to church, going shopping, going to the barber shop, and so on—we rely on a set of known frames and scripts to integrate and "lubricate" both our cognitive and social processes.

The idea of breaking down Homeric plot-lines into "scripts" was carried out by Elizabeth Minchin (1992), using a theoretical base derived from the cognitive psychology of R. Schank and R. Abelson (1977). Their research is concerned with the way people store information about their world in structures that must be organized hierarchically in order for memory to function effectively. This hierarchy moves downward through three levels which they call "goals," "plans" and "scripts," with the latter defined as the stereotyped sequences of events that we all understand and expect as our shared way of perceiving and acting in the world. Thus the Homeric use of repeated sequences—similar to what Homerists have called "themes"—represents no less than the fundamental human process of cognition. It may well be, then, that the poet's ability to vary, distort, and create hybrid "scripts" should not be seen as a poet working "against" his tradition[18] but rather as the natural capacity of a mentality fluent in the language of scripts, carrying out "an everyday cognitive process that is fundamental to our understanding of human action in the world around us" (Minchin 1992: 239). A similar approach has been taken up by psychologist David Rubin. In a carefully laid out chart, he shows how the scripts of Arming, Bathing, Sacrificing, and Guest-Hosting follow the same sequences across both *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. He similarly shows that the apparently simple act of Penelope's entering a scene—not hitherto accorded the full status of a "theme" or "motif"—may be taken as a script that contains identical details in repeated sequence (1995: 210-20). These and many other narrative threads of the story are dependent upon pre-existing scripts, part of the epic poet's repertoire of narration and of the audience's repertoire of expectation.

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18. My own formulation some years ago, Russo 1968.

My argument contains an unspoken assumption that needs at this point to be fully surfaced and defended: it is that the modern linguists and cognitive psychologists I have followed are in fact describing what is universal and not merely culturally specific. Only on this premise are their findings transferable to the language of Homer, or of Agatuzza Messia. Frames, schemata, and scripts are inherent in all human interaction and communication. The cognitive psychologists are describing not just how their subjects' minds, but how *the human mind* stores, transmits and receives data; the linguists, how language is the vehicle for this innately human process; and the sociologists, how the particular society under observation exhibits the specific application of a universal human process.[19] Of course, the patterns (frames, etc.) of a specific local culture are most readily perceived by, have influence over, and are best manipulated by those who live within that culture. But the need for such structures is a universal need; to be human is to have a natural capacity for working with such structures. Thus when we are transacting business, eating in a restaurant, or simply getting a haircut in Thessaloniki, Kyoto, or Rangoon, we are likely not as well attuned to the relevant frames and scripts as are the locals; but the point is that we *do* possess a "universal" instinct for searching them out and for fulfilling their patterns as best we can.

If we move from the realm of behavior to the realm of storytelling, it is precisely the heavy employment of such frames/schemata/ scenarios and scripts that tends to mark off the more traditional genres from the less traditional ones. We might in fact construct a diagram of narrative genres that locates Märchen told by a conventional teller at one extreme, then moves to Märchen told by a very inventive, elaborating teller, then to a literary tale derived from Märchen (Hans Christian Andersen, Oscar Wilde), and then to a "free-form" literary tale published in *The New Yorker*. Each item is freer of conspicuous frames and scripts than the previous item in the series. And what is true for these prose narrative genres will also be true for metricized genres. We can

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19. Such assumptions of universality normally remain implicit and rarely acknowledged in the authors I have cited. Yet this implicitness does come subtly to the surface in the "Preface" to Chafe 1994, where he says "we can never really understand language without understanding the human mind (p. ix)." He then proceeds to acknowledge his debt to certain linguistic anthropologists, "whose understandings of language (and ultimately the mind) were influenced by their contacts with the indigenous languages of the Americas" (p. x). The language we analyze may be Native American or English, but the mind whose processes we seek to understand is "human."

probably construct a series that everyone would agree shows a decreasing reliance on frames and scripts: beginning perhaps with the short Russian or Serbo-Croatian epics and moving through the Homeric epics, Apollonian and Vergilian epic, to modern English/American epic (first *Paradise Lost/Regained*, followed by whatever intermediate forms are necessary to arrive at William Carlos Williams's *Paterson* or any other 20th century epic).

However we fill in this series, it is clear that Homeric epic will stand fairly near the traditional end of the spectrum, which means it will carry a rich load of inherent recognizable patterns. The largest patterns, at the level of plot structures, constitute a kind of macro-schemata; and patterns may be identified at each smaller level, including what Homeric scholarship likes to label as type-scenes, themes, motifs, etc., all varieties of micro-schemata, down finally to that smallest phenomenon of patterned repeated language called the formula. Something is deeply satisfying about the way Homer says things, and about the way he arranges and coordinates his story elements. Much of this impression comes from the fulfillment of our largely unconscious expectations of pattern, on multiple levels.

By emphasizing the presence of pattern, I do not mean to suggest that the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are essentially like folk tales writ large. Through their ambitious scale, complex plot structures, subtle characterization, and cosmic scope, they attain the kind of profundity, power, and rich ambiguity that are normally characteristic of written novels. Therefore I am not arguing for an "aesthetic of predictability" as the prime factor that gives Homeric epic its appeal and its greatness; but it remains undeniable that the strong presence of the familiar and predictable, in theme and in language, gives such traditional narrative art much of its distinctive flavor. If, therefore, we combine what can be learned from disciplines like folklore, linguistics, and cognitive psychology, we have ideal tools for conceptualizing and talking about one important aspect of the distinctive spell cast by Homeric epic, the power of variation within repetition.

Scholars like Minchin and Rubin are in essence re-stating, with the more precise methodology and descriptive habits of cognitive psychology, insights that students of comparative oral literature offer in different terms. The fourth chapter of Albert Lord's *The Singer of Tales* analyzed repeated thematic material in terms of traditional story-patterns that often had deep cultural and even mythic roots in the Balkans; and Lord's followers, most notably John Miles Foley, have

continued this documentation of traditional thematic elements while adding new descriptive and cultural sophistication. Foley has demonstrated oral epic's remarkable capacity for evoking, by a process of metonymic association he calls "traditional referentiality," larger zones of meaning hidden below the surface level of a text but accessible to an audience deeply imbued with a knowledge of the tradition.[20]

If we see Homeric epic, then, as offering a wide range of forms that richly satisfy our innate predisposition to perceive patterns and to be gratified by them, presented in a language that mirrors our own units of thought and expression, we may have found an ideal way to explain why Homeric language and narrative are simultaneously so attractive in their use of repetition with variation, and at the same time so effective in playing against our expectation of the familiar by the occasional but very strategic use of deferral, deflection, and the unexpected. Homer's units of language are normally closer to our own intonation and thought units than are those of poets who write; but occasionally, to achieve a major effect, he expands his phrase-units via enjambement and more complex sentence structure, so that heightened or surprising rhetorical organization becomes mimetic of meaning itself. In similar fashion, we may describe Homer's storylines as constructed on a basis of frames, schemata and scripts that are most often predictable but subject to occasional alteration, embellishment, hybridization, or outright distortion, when special effects or peak narrative moments are presented. But the fact remains that the Homeric norm, in both style and storytelling, is to lean heavily on the familiar. The resulting effect for the audience is that Homer's words resonate especially well with what we *already carry within us* and bring to the listening experience. Thus we tend to *merge* with what we hear. Eric Havelock long ago compellingly described the process of emotional and physical gratification the listener derives from an oral performance (Havelock 1963: 145-64). He framed his understanding entirely in terms of audience involvement via a kind of sensuous, affective identification with the recitation, making much of the famous Hesiodic passage that brilliantly describes the "therapy" bestowed by the *therapon* of the Muses :

> Sweet is the voice that flows from the mouth of the man
>   whom the Muses love.

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20. See Foley 1990, chapters 7, 8, and 9, on the thematic structure of the *Odyssey*, the Serbo-Croatian Return Song, and *Beowulf*; and 1991: 6-8 and 38-60 for traditional referentiality.

Why even if someone is stricken with grief in a new-troubled heart,
Still a reciting poet, the Muses' minister, will sing the deeds
Of the men of ages past, and the blessed gods of Olympos,
And that man right away forgets his sadness and lets go of his griefs:
The gifts of the gods have swiftly turned him around.
                              Theogony 96-103 (my own transla-
tion)

Recent linguistics and cognitive psychology teach us that there is a still more complex process going on here. Both the story and the style in which it is being told capture and captivate us with a special ease, because we feel, unconsciously, more *cognitively* involved in the very processes that create both language and story. In other words, besides a process of *affective* self-projection into the poet's world, we also undergo a process of *cognitive* identification. Most likely the two work synergistically as the cognitive and affective mergings reinforce one another. A similar process of cognitive identification is what makes Agatuzza Messia's original dialect texts more "gripping" than Calvino's literary versions: they literally hold us with their rhetoric. Even in print, her language represents the short intonation units, the natural rhythms, the hesitations, repetitions, slips, and awkwardness of natural speech. Here, even more forcefully than Homer because the medium is vernacular prose, we are in the presence of language being generated in the same manner that we ourselves use in the processes of improvised, oral expression. And so we are drawn into an associative alliance with the narrating voice, which is the essence of the psychology of the oral performance.

My purpose has been to renew the claim that oral theory is the indispensable key to understanding the kind of literature that used to be the only kind of literature in the world. I hope to have persuasively suggested some new ways in which folkloristics, discourse linguistics, and cognitive psychology can be meaningfully assimilated to oral theory to deepen our understanding of the processes of both the creation and the reception of oral texts. In analyzing modern Sicilian vernacular prose literature and Homeric Greek epic literature from the same perspective, and with the same methods, my intention was to bring these two oral traditions—and by implication all oral traditions—into the same realm, all products of compositional and performance modalities we have learned only in this century to call "oral," following the pioneering work of Milman Parry and Albert Lord. These two scholars made history by combining philology with fieldwork and thereby

turning modern Homeric studies into an interdisciplinary practice. My paper has been an illustration of how that practice may continue to grow.

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