

The Joint Role of Orality and Literacy in the Composition, Transmission, and Performance of the Homeric Texts: A Comparative View*

Thérèse de Vet
University of Southern California

A consensus exists among classicists that the work of Milman Parry and Albert Lord has provided satisfactory answers to some parts of the Homeric question. Accordingly, Homer's date is generally agreed to have been the late eighth century (based on diachronic linguistic research into the speed of sound changes in an oral environment). Homer's manner of composition was oral (based on the formulaic nature and other features indicative of orality)¹, and the poetry was transmitted either orally for two centuries or reached written form immediately (with the aid of dictation). All that remains to be done is to establish the time period(s) reflected in these poems before they can be used as sources for social history. Here the Oral Theory again comes to our aid: comparative evidence from other societies shows that oral poets customarily adjust events and language to fit the present. Nevertheless, performers are careful to maintain "epic distance" to preserve the sense of antiquity.

These answers to the Homeric question rest on the rules derived from research done in Yugoslavia which posits that all oral poets, poems and societies share a certain number of characteristics. However, the emphasis on the oral and fluid nature of the Homeric epics has led scholars to conclude that literacy must have the exact opposite qualities. Thus we have created a sharp

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¹The other features here alluded to are economy (or thrift), expansion (or extension), and enjambment. Throughout this paper reference to the Oral Theory will imply that these features have been taken into consideration for the discussion. See n. 15 for (abbreviated) definitions.

division between two ways of making poems: either oral and fluid, or written and fixed.² For Yugoslavia this is indeed the case.

This study aims to reopen the apparently settled issue of orality versus literacy and to challenge the Yugoslav model. First, a schematic overview of concerns that Homerists have had to face over the centuries will raise the question whether current views of literacy (and the rules ascribed to literacy) may not have impeded further progress. Then my own research in Bali, which is ongoing, will show the literary customs of a society that possesses both fluid oral and fluid written poetry, sung and composed in oral performance, or composed in writing and then sung, or sung and improvised from a written text but abbreviated or lengthened and so on. All genres make use of an epic language which is a mix of various historical languages and which is never used in spoken communication. Many poems are based on the Indian epics, the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, which came to Bali in the ninth century C.E. if not earlier. This society has its own rules for composition and performance, rules that fall outside those confirmed by the oral theory.

In the last section I briefly outline the general implications of a prolonged interaction between oral and literary works, and apply the findings obtained from the Balinese model to those issues believed to have been settled by the oral theory: Homer's date and the manner of composition and transmission of his poems. I find that a system which allows for the close interaction of orality and literacy better explains the literary and oral features of the poems, as well as their continued transmission and performance. However, these findings affect our use of the epic poetry for the investigation of social history at any particular time. In explanation I suggest that in societies like Greece and Bali it may be nearly impossible to use the poems as sources for social history; not only do these poems reflect their respective societies, they also, over time, helped shape them.

I.

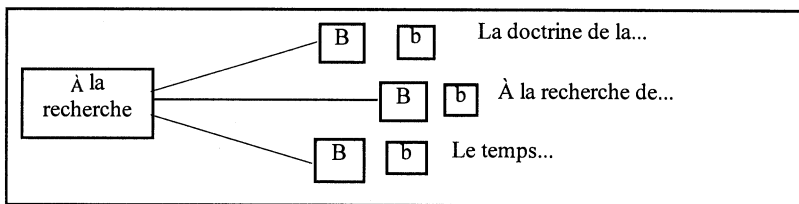
Already in antiquity it was clear that there were two major problems with the Homeric texts. One was factual: the realization that the text as it had been transmitted was not "pure." This problem became even more obvious during the reign of the Alexandrian scholars, when manuscripts collected from all over the Mediterranean were seen to be in conflict. The second problem is more

²I will use the term "fixity" to indicate the stage at which a text—written or oral—no longer undergoes major changes or transformations; some lines or words may continue to be added or deleted in performance or in the copying process.

complex, related to the first one, and merits a closer look. It concerns the many pre-Alexandrian references to the texts and the many interpretations of the poems which have come down to us, and how to account for them.³

Interpretations of the Homeric poems have been relayed from the sixth century B.C.E. on, and large numbers of new interpretations and explanations (“readings” is the preferred term) are still rolling off the presses in most modern languages. No Homerist can claim to have read every interpretation and every article and book, or to be aware of what all the others have said on the same topic or passage. At the risk of seeming simplistic or over-generalizing, I will attempt to provide a schematic outline of the main points where scholars’ opinions can diverge; to assist the reader, I have included several small charts. They will also aid us in identifying the (often unstated) assumptions underlying the many theories of the past and of our times.

The first picture is straightforward: “A” is the text (as produced by the author), while “b” represents a commentary or concordance produced by a reader or member of the audience (“B”). A modern example would be Proust’s *À la recherche du temps perdu*: A is the text as written by Proust, B is the text as understood by, for instance, Alain de Lattre, André Maurois, or Julia Kristéva. Their interpretations of what Proust really meant can be found in their books (b), *La doctrine de la réalité chez Proust* (1985), *À la recherche de Marcel Proust* (1985) or *Le temps sensible* (1994), respectively, which were created to help other Bs understand A.



picture 1

An ancient example for the Homeric poems would be Pherecydes of Syros, who, in the late sixth or early fifth century B.C.E., explained the immoral

³The term “text” is ambiguous, and I would like to adhere to the following definition borrowed from Foley 1990: 5–6: “In using this term I mean to indicate a real, objective, and tangible score, an entity that exists both as a thing in itself and as a directive for its perceivers.”

behavior of the gods in the Homeric epics as symbolic of battles between the elements. Examples of this kind of adjustment of the meaning of the poems abound.⁴ But here we encounter our first problem: Proust's *À la recherche* has not undergone any physical changes. We can pick up Proust's **A** today, and know on what de Lattre was commenting. But we do not know on what **A** text Pherecydes was commenting. It is unknown whether for Pherecydes **A** was written, fixed, or a changing oral text so frequently performed in his part of the world that his audience (or readers) may be considered to have known to what he was referring.⁵ We can say that for this period, **A** is completely unknown, and, unfortunately, most of **B**'s interpretation is lost.

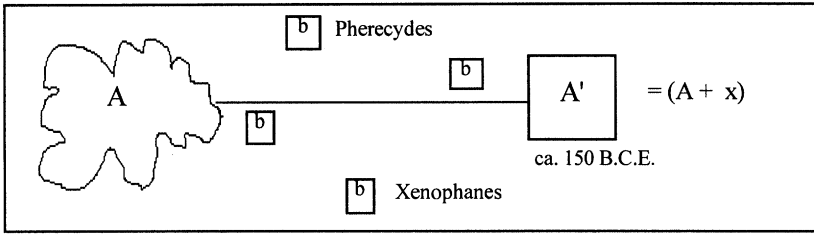
Thus we have uncovered a problem central to Homeric studies: the need to establish the form of the text before it becomes possible to provide an interpretation, a step that is obviously not needed for Proust.⁶ To represent the situation correctly, we must add a second text, as illustrated in picture (2): **A** is still our (hypothetical) original text—however, we do not know its shape, which is why it is represented as a little cloud. We also do not know where to place it on the time line. Our received text is labeled **A'** for this argument, to distinguish it from the hypothetical original **A**. This text (**A'**) took shape in Alexandria in the middle of the second century B.C.E. (Bolling 1925: 7–8; Davison 1968: 128; Pfeiffer 1968: 109–10; Apthorp 1980: 1; S. West 1988: 33–48). It is this text **A'** which is our first definite fixed text: the one that was used henceforth in the Roman and Hellenistic world and the one to reach us via Byzantium (Wilson 1983). We have an abundance of interpretations and explanations, labeled “**b**.” Since these references to the Homeric poems precede **A'**, we do not know whether they refer to **A'** or to some other **A** text.

Our text **A'** of the second century B.C.E. had undergone changes and picked up stray material (**x**) over the centuries, which is why I have labeled it “**A + x**.” But we cannot solve the equation $A + x = A'$, because both **A** and **x** are unknowns.

⁴See Clarke 1981 for more examples; also Buffière 1973.

⁵For the sake of simplicity “**A**” is made to stand for both *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. Even though the history of the transmission of the physical text is argued to have been different, this has made no difference in the way these works have customarily been treated.

⁶Only those who judge the texts from an entirely literary standpoint can afford to ignore their date of fixation. However, the increased interest in the oral composition of the poems and the accompanying call for an “oral esthetics” by which to judge the poems make the option of ignoring the date and manner of composition harder to defend.



picture 2

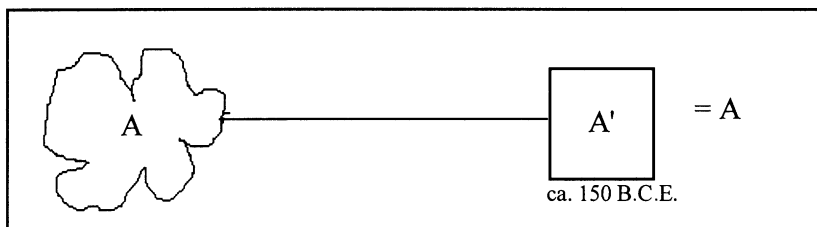
Much of the discussion in antiquity (and in the recent past) centered around exactly this attempt to solve the equation; that is, many scholars attempted to find **A** by subtracting **x** from **A'**. Since **x** is not knowable, the answers scholars came up with really depended on what value they had assigned to **x** (or **A**). Of course results differed from scholar to scholar and depended upon the type of outside source the scholar had accepted as valid or invalid in the attempt to define the value of **x** (or **A**).

The best example of this type of scholarship is provided by the analysts, whose work began after F. A. Wolf published his *Prolegomena ad Homerum* in 1795. Wolf outlined this type of research, advocating the use of other sources, such as the scholia and the arrival of the alphabet (and of course the remarks found in the “bs” of ancient authors), to uncover **A**. His methods were borrowed from biblical scholarship current at the time, which had started an open investigation of the text of the Old and New Testaments along similar lines.⁷ The extravagances of this type of scholarship are well known: it was always possible to refute the findings of another researcher based on personal opinion and the weighting of the data (such as the scholia or the date of the arrival of the alphabet). But the philological method was accepted by all: to apply a set of rules, working backwards from **A'** to uncover **A**. Naturally, different scholars came to many different conclusions on how far back it was possible to go. So **A** was placed at many different points along the time line. Once a scholar had identified **A** and its position on the time line, however, he could begin his interpretation (**b**).

But there is a second way to chart the voyage of the physical texts, depicted below. That is, to believe that the second century **A'** really did not pick up any **x** at all; that it was as close to **A** as it was possible to get. The equation

⁷See Grafton's 1985 introduction to *Prolegomena* as well as Todorov 1978 on the novelty of this kind of approach.

can be represented as $A = A'$. This approach is represented by the unitarians. To them the Homeric epics as we have them came down from the hand (or mouth) of the poet himself, and were not changed (or were changed to a very small extent) over time. The only major decision that the scholar had to make was to identify the point in time at which, he believed, A had come into existence. According to the time period chosen for this event, interpretation would vary.



picture 3

It becomes obvious from the above that the disagreement between the two schools was based on more than ethnic antagonism (German speakers versus English speakers): they were working with different assumptions. The analysts worked on the trajectory between A and A' in order to solve x and uncover the true A , whereas the unitarians worked on A' , firmly believing that it was A . Whenever an analyst identified a part of x , the unitarian would explain how x had been part of the poem all along—at least since the Peisistratean recension during the sixth century B.C.E.⁸ Although the arguments and investigations may look very similar and are often directed at the same topics, the attitudes of the two groups toward the text (A') were fundamentally different.

This is how matters stood during the late twenties and early thirties. The analysts had mostly exhausted their search for x , and the unitarians too had reached the end of their material. Some scholars (most notably the Chadwicks in England, 1932–40) had begun to look at epic traditions in other societies for comparative material. But it was the work of Milman Parry and his student Albert Lord which breathed new life into the study of the Homeric poems by directly addressing the question of composition and transmission, matters which

⁸The highly controversial topic of the Peisistratean recension will not be discussed here, but see n. 35 on the myth shared by many societies that some exceptional sage, politician, king, etc., was responsible for the creation and/or preservation of the local masterpieces. For judges without scripts see p. 60.

we saw above are crucial to the interpretation of the poems. The goal was to observe an oral text A in the “living laboratory” provided in Yugoslavia and to deduce the rules governing such a process. Their studies on the Yugoslav epics provided an analogy to explain points which had long puzzled scholars; moreover, it supplied a “methodology” by its emphasis on statistical analysis.

Parry analyzed transcripts of performances as well as oral, dictated compositions made at his instigation. And indeed, the Yugoslav texts could not have been studied any other way because in the Yugoslavia of that time the oral performance was a reality, but the written counterpart of this performance was non-existent. Parry used these written works to elicit a set of rules respecting oral composition in performance. Next he applied these findings to the Greek epics. Here the situation was reversed: these texts were written and nothing was known about their oral counterparts. But because Parry recognized many features in the Greek epics which he had also found in the written transcripts of the Yugoslav performances, he concluded that they too must have been composed orally in performance.

The impact of Parry’s work was delayed due to his untimely death and the occurrence of World War II. Lord’s work, *The Singer of Tales*, was not published until 1960. It comprised both the results of work in which he and Parry had been engaged as well as his own views. Lord took Parry’s conclusion a step further: since both the Yugoslav and the Greek poems were the products of singers who composed in performance, he concluded that the Greek poems must have come into existence in the same manner: by dictation. Moreover, he argued, illiteracy was a *sine qua non* for an oral poet: once a performer became literate he could no longer compose “oral” poems (of course the style could be imitated, but true orality could not be achieved, as Parry’s analysis of the works of Quintus Smyrnaeus, Apollonius and others demonstrated).⁹

For decades the Oral Theory, widely adopted and discussed in English-speaking countries, was ignored in Germany. A new movement had developed there, intended to bridge the gap between analysts and unitarians. These neoanalysts (renamed to reflect the change in focus) followed the methods of analytical scholarship on the level of sources (not any longer on the level of language layers) and argued that the Homeric poems were original compositions (Kullmann 1960, 1981, 1984). Thus they now agreed with the (unitarian) statement $A = A'$. Neoanalysts no longer searched the trajectory

⁹M. Parry (orig. 1923) in A. Parry 1971: 428–36.

between **A** and **A'**, but now investigated pre-**A**, to see how **A** had come into existence. This required sources, which were found in the fragments of the Epic Cycle (which, even though written down much later, could be used as a basis on which to build). A reconciliation with the unitarians would have been possible if these scholars had not meanwhile adopted many of the axioms of the Oral Theory, which of course emphasized the traditional and oral aspects of the Homeric poems. German scholars had worked so long on the premise that these texts were composed with the aid of writing that they had difficulty accepting Albert Lord's (1953: 124–34; 1964: 68–78) hypothesis that the texts were a transcript of an oral performance.¹⁰

To those with a unitarian outlook the Oral Theory provided the much wanted confirmation that the second century B.C.E. text, **A'**, had indeed been **A** all along, since much of the **x** previously detected in the poems now turned out to be an indication of the oral origins of the epics. There was one problem, though, and this concerned the role of the poet, Homer. The Oral Theory claimed that the poet used a traditional and formulaic epic language in order to compose his songs, which was interpreted by many to mean that the Parry/Lord theory favored a diminished creative role for the epic poet. Thus much recent scholarship of a unitarian bent has been dedicated to showing Homer's individuality, either in his use of the epic language or in his skillful manipulation of the old epic themes and oral manner of composition, plot transformation (here overlapping with neoanalytical work), or the use of psychological insights not found among other oral poets. The oral theory vindicated the unitarians' earlier belief that text **A'** was really **A** and composed by a single individual. But they had to reject the neoanalysts' belief that the poems were the result of composition in writing. To them, written composition suggested a more complex and protracted process than the technology of the times would allow.¹¹

Parry and Lord's work has found wide acceptance in other fields, and the study of "Oral Tradition" has become a sub-field not only in the humanities but also in the social sciences. At present classicists of all backgrounds freely use the findings of Parry and Lord and (not always cautiously) those of researchers in other fields. The Oral Theory has provided common ground for investigation:

¹⁰Kullmann 1984: 311: "The Parryists consider the formulaic character of Homeric language to exclude the possibility of written composition." Repeated in Kullmann 1991.

¹¹The mixed reactions to Parry's work are well described and explained by Combellack 1959: 193–208.

as we saw, the goal of discovering the originality of Homer is shared, even though scholars look for it in different time periods and at different levels (there is some overlap, of course). There is general agreement that the epic language (or *Kunstsprache*) is a tool employed skillfully by a poet/performer and cannot be separated into layers.¹² There is agreement that the poems were meant to be performed—and that this fact explains their repetitive and “oral” nature. Scholars also agree that the poems were probably fixed (in written or in oral form) during the eighth century B.C.E., and that an oral poet most likely reflects the thought and customs of the society in which he lives (e.g., Morris 1986: 85). There is agreement that a new aesthetics must be constructed for the appreciation of oral poetry, since an aesthetics based on written texts, like our own, may lead to our misunderstanding the poems’ original intentions. Arguably, the Oral Theory has provided many more points of agreement between the various currents in Homeric scholarship than there have ever been before, all aimed at clarifying the earliest possible form of the poems.

It is the adoption of dictation as the means of transformation from oral to written form which has proven most problematic, because it marks the point at which the Greek and Yugoslav poetic traditions diverge. In Yugoslavia, after the transformation into written form had taken place at the request of Parry and Lord, poems continued in their oral form. Even though Parry and Lord had procured the best singers to perform for them, other singers and audiences did not value the poems enough to demand their verbatim reperformance. As Lord himself admitted, oral performers have no need for written texts, and each oral performance is a unique event. Even if the singer claims to sing the same song, sound recordings show it is not.

¹²Complications arise related to the use of a *Kunstsprache*, that is, “an artificial idiom constructed out of archaic, dialectal and invented forms, used both for their metrical utility and to give the effect of distancing the poetic language from everyday speech” (as defined by J. Chadwick 1990: 176). Most societies have a *Kunstsprache*: some have become so far removed from the audiences’ spoken language that they require the use of interpreters (as we shall see in the case of the Balinese); others are fairly close to the spoken language—as is the case for English. As we shall see in the last part of this paper, the use of a *Kunstsprache* (which not only preserves old forms but makes its own new ones, on both the phonological and the semantic levels) complicates its use as a dating tool. Many classicists view studies such as Janko’s (1982) as decisive; but (as the Balinese example will show) a *Kunstsprache* which is developed/maintained with the aid of writing and other aids such as dictionaries, vocabulary lists, etc., upsets the otherwise efficient methods of diachronic linguistic analysis, since it keeps forms which would have become obsolete and archaic in an exclusively oral environment at hand for reuse.

But in Greece the appearance of the poems in written form is supposed to have had entirely different results. There singers are believed to have memorized the written text and to have performed it without major changes for the next one thousand years (see below, p. 71). Of course this change-over was not as instantaneous as suggested here: a period of several centuries of overlap of the oral and written phases of the poems is usually allowed. Yet it is generally believed that once the poems had been written down—and it may have been the transcript of the best oral version of the times—this version rapidly gained supremacy over all others then in (oral) circulation (S. West 1988: 35–36; Nagy 1996: 110).

As stated above, in Yugoslavia the recording of the poems by dictation did not lead to the fixation of these poems (in written or in oral form), whereas in eighth century Greece, for all the points of agreement outlined above to hold true, it must have done so.¹³ The analogy between Yugoslavia and eighth century Greece is thus only partial, illuminating composition in performance only. The Yugoslav model is unable to account for the next two steps, transcription and transmission, and must be abandoned in favor of a model that will explain how these eighth century poems achieved their written form and maintained their eighth century characteristics over time. This difficulty did not escape the attention of classicists, and since the appearance of *The Singer of Tales* a number of studies have appeared pleading a special case for the use of writing in ancient Greece for the first recording and subsequent transmission of the Homeric poems.¹⁴

Thus at present the discussion revolves around writing, for the sooner the poems achieved written form the closer they would be to their eighth century embodiment. The underlying assumption here is that writing not only has the potential to fix a text but also will preserve its oral features in spite of its written

¹³The customary explanation for this difference is the continued illiteracy of the performers and the general backwardness of the region. Some of the songs recorded by Parry and Lord had been recorded once before, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, by the ethnographer Vuk Karadžić. A comparative study of the influence of these fixed written texts on subsequent performers can be found in Lord 1991: 170–85 (first published 1966).

¹⁴Wade-Gery 1952, most recently Powell 1991. Many topics treated in *The Singer* had been the subject of earlier publications by Lord. For the argument in favor of a period of oral transmission (albeit founded on different premises and with different outcomes) see Kirk 1962: 301–4; 1985: 1–16 and Nagy, who views the time of oral transmission as a period of crystallization which results in “transcripts” produced from the mid-sixth century until the later part of the fourth (summarized in Nagy 1996: 110).

manner of transmission. The work of both neoanalysts and adherents of the Oral Theory is premised on this fixity of written texts. Although the neoanalysts assign a creative role to the process of writing and the followers of Parry and Lord view it as a passive procedure, both groups share the need to defend an early arrival date of the alphabet and its subsequent rapid development and spread, because only literacy and fixity would make the transcription/composition and transmission of such lengthy poems possible without the loss of the crucial oral features.

To summarize, there is agreement that the formulaic nature of the Homeric poems (together with the related features of “economy,” “extension” and paratactic construction) provides an indication of the oral origins of the epics.¹⁵ If Parry’s findings apply, this would mean that the higher the level of formulas and related features, the higher the likelihood that the poems were of oral origin and that they were recorded very close to the moment of performance. The discussion is centered on how to identify and measure these features, which ultimately are premised on each scholar’s own definition of what constitutes a formula. As Bakker (1988: 153) humorously put it: “Nobody denies that Homer is full of formulas, but on the question as to how full there is no agreement.” The disagreements among oralists have allowed critics of the Oral Theory, such as David Shive (1989: 1), to describe the situation as follows:

¹⁵Parry 1930: 276 defines “economy” as follows: “thrift [economy] of a system lies in the degree to which it is free of phrases which, having the same metrical value and expressing the same idea, could replace one another.” The “phrases” in this definition are the formulas. Expansion is defined by R. Martin 1989: 206 as follows: “The changes made in formulaic patterns by the addition of words, or by melding with other patterns.” Thus the concepts of “economy” and “extension/expansion” are premised on one’s understanding and definition of what constitutes a formula and how it functions (Lord 1960: 65: “The poetic grammar of oral epic is and must be based on the formula.”). The low percentage of verses exhibiting necessary enjambment, a feature indicative of paratactic composition, is often seen as strengthening the case for the oral origins (which I do not dispute) of the Homeric epics. A further reduction of their number can be achieved by viewing a verse longer than a line as a cluster of “idea units” centered around a mental picture (Bakker 1990). But compare Goldman 1984: 99–100: “the style and the content...are...quite simple. Partly because of the absence of ambivalence in the characterization of the epic’s central figures, they almost invariably think, speak, and act simply and directly. This simplicity is matched by the poet’s diction. The style tends to be paratactic and the periods are usually short.” The epic discussed is the (written) *Ramayana* of Valmiki. The present discussion does not question the “grammar” of oral composition in performance, or the formulaic and paratactic nature of the system, but investigates the reasons why most western scholars believe that these rules were (must be) abandoned when literacy arrives.

Homeric oral poetry has become indistinguishable from Homeric literate poetry: any poetic device that is now characteristic of literate composition might have been developed and deployed by oral technique—and so may be demonstrative of orality.¹⁶ Transcendentally oral to the oralist, to the non-oralist Homer has transcended traditional orality.

Once again we find ourselves in a situation akin to that of the analysts and unitarians of yore, where the same features found in the poems can be used by either side in support of its views.

It was the ambiguous oral/written nature of the Homeric poems which first led me to investigate Balinese performances. I knew that in Bali episodes of the Indic epics *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* were still being performed. I believed that if I studied a performance as well as the written text used I would gain insight into how a Greek rhapsode of the fifth century (for instance) might have used his written Homer text. At the same time my investigation might provide comparative material to explain the continued presence of oral features in written texts.

I found, however, that in order to account for my data I had to rephrase and adjust the Parry/Lord paradigm on which the Oral Theory rests. My research forced me to question two main points of the Oral Theory, namely 1) the effects that literacy is thought to have on a singer's ability to compose in performance and 2) the effects that literacy is thought to have on textual fixity. In Bali literacy, rather than interfering with a performer's improvisational skills, enhances it. Moreover, the presence of literacy for over a thousand years has not resulted in textual fixity: to this date poems are written and re-written in the (undatable) *Kunstsprache*. The implications of these findings affect the two processes for which the Oral Theory possesses hypotheses only, namely the recording of oral poems in writing and their transmission in written form. Of course the results of my investigation are in part culture specific: that is, they will explain the Balinese situation, and not necessarily any others. However, the same can be said for the Yugoslav paradigm on which to this date all our generalizations about the orality of Homer are based. I believe that the Balinese model (which is really an extension of the model of Parry and Lord into the field of literacy) provides a better analogy for the transition of oral poems into written texts—and back again. The following section provides a brief history of

¹⁶He credits two proponents of the Oral Theory: J. Griffin with the comment before the colon, and R. Janko with the part following it.

Bali which is closely intertwined, as we will see, with the development of its *Kunstssprache*, literature and performance traditions.

II.

The literary history of Bali of concern to us here begins with the introduction of Sanskrit writing as the consequence of cultural contact some time before the ninth century C.E..¹⁷ Inscriptions dating to this era are found in several areas of Bali. These inscriptions use the Indic writing system to inscribe native formal discourse, such as royal decrees and the like (influences from northern and southern Indic scripts can be distinguished).¹⁸ Most terms referring to the kings or to festivals are in Sanskrit. The remainder is Old Balinese. An explanation for the kings' use of a foreign language and ideas is provided by Bentley (1986: 288): "Chieftains imported Indian religious specialists in the Hindu/Buddhist symbolism on which their claims to authority rested" (see also Christie 1983: 33, 70, 144). The foreign languages became the court languages, and interpreters were needed when kings and subjects interacted (Zurbuchen 1987: 9–13).

During the early eleventh century C.E. Bali apparently came into closer political contact with Java through intermarriage of some royal families. It is probably at this time that a *Ramayana* composed in central Java came to Bali, together with other palm leaf manuscripts containing Javanese poetry, didactic works, and so forth. At this point court inscriptions started to appear in Old Javanese. Old Javanese and Old Balinese show some structural similarities, but are "clearly different in phonology, morphology, syntax and lexicon" (Teeuw 1965: 273). Once again, another linguistic layer was added; Old Javanese now became fashionable for kings and courtiers, although the rest of the population

¹⁷Recent archeological finds in the north of Bali suggest contact—albeit through intermediaries—may have taken place even earlier, around the first century C.E. (I Wayan Ardika 1993, personal communication). Traders brought goods as well as their culture. It is also possible that manuscripts and writing reached Bali at this time; however, no physical evidence exists.

¹⁸In India, the first references to a written text of the *Mahabharata* date to the fifth century B.C.E. (van Buitenen 1973: xxv); the historical setting of the epics is thought to be the ninth or eighth century B.C.E. No substantial additions were made to the work after 400 C.E. The Indic writing systems are an offshoot of Aramaic, itself an offshoot of the North Semitic script which is also the ancestor of the Phoenician script. Aramaic (and Greek) were introduced as administrative languages into the Indus valley during the conquest by Darius I (521–486), but may have been brought even earlier by Semitic traders (Gaur 1985: 105–6). Moreover, Indic writing is alphabetic, although often irregular or inconsistent (DeFrancis 1989: 169, 193). The codification of the Sanskrit language by grammarians occurred during the fifth century B.C.E., "long before it was committed to writing" (Gaur 108).

continued to speak Old Balinese. Interpreters were still needed when the groups had to interact.

Literature and the arts flourished, not only at the courts, but also in the villages, as is clear from royal inscriptions dating back as far as 882 C.E., which guaranteed tax exemptions for performers provided they settled in certain villages. The edicts also informed the villagers of the fees they were expected to pay to the performers, and were warned that double fees applied in case of unscheduled performances (Lansing 1983: 30–31)! Many inscriptions refer to these artists as royal performers: in order to spread the message of kingly superiority and due obedience, the plays and other performances needed to enter the everyday life of the many farmers who were, after all, the tax payers. We may assume that the same plays (also mentioned in the inscriptions) were presented at the courts and at the village temples. This assumption is supported by a royal charter, engraved on copper and dated 907 C.E. It provides the names of the artists and the episodes from the *Ramayana* performed on the occasion of the unification of three villages (Zoetmulder 1974: 208).

Thousands of manuscripts in classical (or old) Javanese were copied and recopied from this time on, such as the *Kakawin*, poems in Indian-based meters and mostly Sanskrit lexicon. These include the *Parwa*, prose retellings in Old Javanese of an Indian *Mahabharata* interspersed with Sanskrit slokas, the *Ramayana*, and the *Kidung*, romantic and historical poetry with indigenous content and meter. In the fourteenth century Bali came under Javanese control. During the late fifteenth century more Javanese nobles settled there due to the Islamization of Java. Spoken and written Balinese were both affected by these arrivals. In Java the ancient literatures and manuscripts partly disappeared under the influence of the new religion, and new texts with new, Islamic, heroes and subjects were added. In the seventeenth century Java was conquered by the Dutch. Although the heroes of the Indian epics *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* remained popular and shadow play performances continued, very little of the old written literature survived in Java (Zoetmulder 23).

Meanwhile, Bali continued its traditional way of life until the beginning of this century, escaping European conquest until 1908 (Anak Agung 1989). The conquered territory proved to be a treasure house. Not only was the island very prosperous, but it also had preserved the ancient literatures and arts. The young Dutchmen entering the colonial service, themselves a product of a humanistic education and schooled in Latin and Greek, were struck by the similarities they observed between ancient civilizations and the Balinese courts and arts. The

Sanskrit roots of Indonesian literature lent greater prestige to its study, since at that time Sanskrit was also studied intensively by classicists.

In 1928 the Dutch government, with the assistance of Balinese intellectuals and nobility, founded a library in the north of Bali for the purpose of gathering Balinese manuscripts. Originals were requested from owners, and those judged “the best ones” by a committee of twelve were copied (Zoetmulder 42). Note, however, that what makes a manuscript “the best” was never clearly stated. *Lontars* (palm leaf manuscripts) came in on all kinds of subjects: *Ramayanas*, *Mahabharatas*, prayers, village constitutions, irrigation society laws and by-laws, agricultural advice, customary law, instructions for offering-making, maps, works on astronomy and the seasons, philosophical topics, dictionaries, a type of concordance, word-lists, histories of the royal families, histories of priestly families, love poetry, and lists of festivals (Hinzler 1993: 442). This is by no means an exhaustive inventory. It is calculated that by 1950 the number of manuscripts held at the library approached 2,400 (Hooykaas 1979: 349).

It was thought that the Balinese manuscripts were corrupted versions of the old Javanese manuscripts no longer in existence in Java itself. One of the goals of the library was to collect as many manuscripts as possible, and to reconstruct the original Javanese ones:

Manuscripts written in Javanese linguistic forms were considered part of “Javanese” or “Javano-Balinese” literature irrespective of their significance or possible origin in Bali; words borrowed from Sanskrit or modeled on Sanskrit analogy were to be “corrected” to resemble the “true” originals. (Zurbuchen 5)

However, it quickly became obvious that the manuscripts collected (or looted from destroyed palaces and temples) were all very different from one another, even when they purported to refer to the same subject or topic. Sorting them according to “first lines” also did not help, since introductions tend to be largely formulaic and do not guarantee the manuscripts will continue to match (Zurbuchen 86–87). The attempt simply to collate and eliminate “new” additions proved impossible. The *Kunstsprache*, the product of centuries of peaceful cultural contact and warlike invasions, as well as its various derivatives used for different kinds of literatures, proved too complex to separate into layers of accretion. The analytic model (which we saw used in the

study of the Homeric texts) proved itself unworkable for the ancient Balinese texts as well, a construct that had no footing in reality.

Collecting of manuscripts intensified during the 1930s; ironically, due to this revival and renewed interest, many “new” manuscripts came into existence to respond to the demand, both Dutch and Balinese.¹⁹ The librarians were faced with many difficulties: a *Kunstsprache* that was over a thousand years old (not to mention the many word-units of Sanskrit origin calculated to be as high as 25 to 30% for the *Kakawin* (Zoetmulder 8), and individual manuscripts which were all different, containing texts whose age could not be assessed.²⁰ No “original” of any manuscript could be found or reconstructed.

This is how matters stood when World War II erupted and Japan occupied Indonesia. After 1945 a brutal colonial war broke out, which resulted in the withdrawal of the Dutch in 1949 and the declaration of independence. Questions and manuscripts which had occupied the Dutch and Balinese scholars faded into the background. Since European scholars were cut off from the performative aspect of the poems from 1950 onwards, most attention was focused on the linguistic, philological and historical aspects of the manuscripts. The fact that the *lontars* collected were all different was always remarked upon by the few scholars working on this topic, and faulty copying and rewriting formed the answer provided most frequently. Even a scholar such as Zoetmulder, who studied the manuscripts intensively, mentions performance only cursorily, and barely considers the possibility of performance traditions influencing the manuscripts under study (241). Only recently has the possibility

¹⁹Hinzler 1993 documents the increased production of palm leaves in order to fulfill demand. A similar event occurred earlier in Java, where “mini industries sprouted up around Dutch scholars who advertised their interest in acquiring manuscripts of a certain kind” (Behrend 1993). Note the similarity with events reported to have occurred in Alexandria when calls went out for manuscripts: many brought in manuscripts which they themselves had fabricated in order to cash in on the rush (Wolf XXXIII n. 9; Sch. on D.T., *Grammatici Graeci* 3.29.17–30.17).

²⁰A poem which was generally thought as having originated in the first half of the thirteenth century has now been dated to the second half of the fifteenth century. The false dating was due to the misinterpretation of the name of a king mentioned in the poem; linguistic data all supported the earlier date (Zoetmulder 27). Parry 1932: 9 n. 2 recognizes the difficulty of dating poems by their language, but argues “that this uniformity of style is due as well to the fact that the language of the older poems changes along with the language of the diction as a whole.” I will argue in section III that literacy can prevent these changes from occurring by allowing constant access to older forms.

been formulated more strongly that performance might produce texts intended to be heard rather than seen (Khanna et al., 1993: 243 n. 17).

Nevertheless, all scholars would agree that all texts, at some stage in their history, were (and still are) possible sources for a performance. The text of a *lontar* on healing, for instance, could be included in the advice given to one of the characters in a play who was sick. Or advice could be taken from the *lontar* on offerings, or ceremonies, pointing out where mistakes had been made, explaining current bad luck or other disasters. A performer thus brings the totality of his (literary) knowledge to the performance. Plots and themes from different written versions (poetry or prose) could be recombined to create a new performance, possibly resulting in yet another version, the basis for yet another play, and so on.

To the Balinese, performance does not necessarily mean a theatrical event in the Western sense. One kind of performance is the reading out loud of a manuscript in a “reading club” consisting of a main reader, a “translator” and an attentive audience which discusses the line which has just been read out loud (and translated). Even though the audience does not have texts in hand, the discussion can be on linguistic issues, on higher meaning, on the relation to other texts, and so on. Even when alone, a reader will chant out or vocalize the text, since melody, meter and vowel length are vital for the determination of meaning (Wallis 1980: 161–63). Moreover, since the manuscripts are in *scriptio continua*, just like the ancient Greek texts, sounding out the text helps understanding. During small or large festivals, texts are read to the audience at large while other ceremonies go on. Even though no one seems to be paying attention, the “sounding of the texts” forms an integral part of every celebration (Lansing 75–92).

A second kind of performance based on a text could be on the occasion of a small or big festival: in this case, only the relevant part of the text would be used: i.e., an episode would be chosen pertaining to the event, e.g., the “Wedding of Arjuna” at someone’s wedding ceremony (Zoetmulder 245). Plots can be adapted to the number of actors present. The (masked) actors, all familiar with the text, sketch a rough outline to be followed, and proceed with the performance, each one improvising in a mix of *Kunstsprache* and Balinese (high and low). If one actor tends to run on, the others will stop him by interrupting, without falling out of character. The accompanying musicians also can play a role by slowing down or speeding up the music (personal interview Dibia, spring 1993). The texts most frequently used for this kind of event and

performance tend to be the historical chronicles or “babads”: stories of battles, kings, intrigues, lineages, foundations, and so on. I must emphasize that only part of the text is used as a basis, even though to those attending the performance (especially to Westerners who come with the expectation of seeing a “complete” play) it would look like a unified whole.

A third kind of performance based on the ancient texts is formed by the plays presented by puppeteers. The plots for these *wayang* performances usually are taken from the *Mahabharata* or *Ramayana* (from the Parwa or “origins” tradition). Episodes are selected for their relevance to the reason for the performance, just as we saw above. Once again, only parts of the existing text are selected and freely improvised on by a single puppeteer, who can perform without interruptions for as long as six hours.²¹ The presenter creates the characters and does all the voices and varieties of language mixes. For understanding the audience relies on the translations done by the puppeteer by means of clown figures. The entire performance is accompanied by a small orchestra, which also improvises, following the puppeteer’s cues of sharp raps on wood (indicating caesura) made with a wooden hammer held between his toes. Since episodes from the old Indian epics most frequently provide the material for these plays, the language tends to be at its highest level of difficulty, and performers are judged by their audiences on how well they “speak” this *Kunstsprache*. Nowadays there even are annual competitions with judges evaluating the level of competence—without written guidelines or texts.²²

We see then in Bali a situation where a *Kunstsprache* is so far removed from the ordinary language that it needs to be translated for the benefit of the

²¹Zurbuchen 219–20 compared a puppet performance to the existing written text, and found that the performer constructed three episodes, basing his plot on 12 of the 44 cantos. For additional background material he used information contained in 24 cantos. He also started halfway into the poem and stopped before the end. Thornton 1984 uses the evidence from Javanese and Malay puppet performances and puppeteers to illustrate the stamina of these performers; however, for the present study on literacy and orality these examples are not as relevant, since the written tradition in those areas was disrupted by the advent of Islam, while the oral, performative tradition was affected by the wave of British and Dutch scholars in the nineteenth century who were eager to restore the performances to what they imagined them to have been in pre-Islamic times. Boon’s observations 1984: 167 on the lack of exegesis of written texts in Bali are discounted by Dutch scholars. The “frustrated investigators of meanings behind Balinese performances” (165) had perhaps encountered the equally traditional Balinese reticence when questioned directly, especially by foreigners.

²²Wallis 1980: 165: “Shadow puppeteers whose spoken Old Javanese and mastery of the texts are faulty become objects of critical disdain.”

audience. The explanation for the historical growth of the “art language” and the reasons why translation between members or groups of the population was accepted as perfectly normal were highlighted. To recapitulate, the *Kunstsprache* is used for the composition and performance of plays in poetry or prose, and contains Sanskrit terms (mostly formulaic)²³ and Old Javanese (Kawi). The translations provided by the performer are a mix of all the necessary registers in modern Balinese.

The performer improvises his performance, in the *Kunstsprache*, using either his *lontars* or oral plots which are so widely shared that no performer remembers where he learned them. He may rely on some of the expressions or phrases found in his text to be used during the performance; on the other hand, if he is an experienced performer, he may not depend as much on the existing text.²⁴

The result of a successful (improvised) performance may be that the puppeteer or actor decides to change the *lontar* in his possession, or at least make a note of it for incorporation the next time this episode is requested. Relatives of the puppeteer, or other members of the audience, who in their turn may also be puppeteers, will most likely adopt the innovation. Thus innovations can spread from village to village, according to ties between them, and may (or may not) be incorporated in some written versions. Rather than being upset that an idea was “taken,” the original performer will be flattered that it was judged of equal value to at least the existing text and adopted.²⁵ The question of “plagiarism” or text ownership therefore does not arise. Similar “non-copyright” traditions exist for music and other arts.

The production of *lontars* is expensive and time-consuming. They need to be recopied frequently in order to guarantee their survival. Not many puppeteers have large libraries because the cost is prohibitive, and manuscripts can always be borrowed from others in the village, such as priests, Brahmins, or other literati or performers. Most interested parties are fairly familiar with what is

²³For the kind of Sanskrit used in Balinese texts and performances, see Schoterman 1979.

²⁴A slightly different situation developed in Java, where schools for puppeteers were created during the 1920s to prevent the disappearance of *wayang* (see summary in book review by Ras 1979). Also Keeler 1987: 183–84 and Schechner 1993: 184–227.

²⁵Padanda, Nartha, personal interviews summer 1993. The Balinese view their stories as branches of a tree: the trunk of the tree itself is the unchanging original epic (e.g., the *Mahabharata*). The branches are the adaptations and new stories created by the individual performers (Zurbuchen 215).

available, and who owns what. Requests for copying or borrowing are frequent, and are usually granted. However, what is copied may not be the entire *lontar*, but just parts that the user deems useful for his purposes.²⁶ Thus, different parts of different *lontars* may be included and combined in one *lontar* belonging to someone else. There are even different words for the various possibilities of the combinatory process (Hinzler 1993: 456).

The Balinese are not unusual in that they use improvisation for their performances, the way the Oral Theory outlined above specified. What is unusual, however, is the fact that these performances are based on written texts in the possession of the performers, and that, moreover, the performers are highly literate, and belong to the most literate groups on the island. Another unexpected feature is their use of a *Kunstsprache* unintelligible to most of their audience, a language they learned not only through hearing it from their masters or teachers, but also from the very manuscripts which form the basis for their performances. The improvisational aspect is learned by attending performances (which every Balinese does anyway from the day he/she is born), and, in the case of talented youngsters, by apprenticeship to a working performer or group of performers.²⁷ Already as a child his parent(s) will start to teach him a different vocabulary, and test him; as he gets older, there are *lontars* containing long lists of similar information which he will study.²⁸ Thus, far from losing his skills as oral-improvising performer due to literacy, as Lord surmised following the Yugoslav example, the Balinese performer stands to increase his repertory and skills the more literate he becomes.

The editing and reworking of texts is an ongoing process, one that sometimes can be traced back a thousand years. The *Ramayana* mentioned earlier is a reworking of Sanskrit texts which may have come to Java during the ninth or tenth century C.E. It is not based on the standard Valmiki *Ramayana*

²⁶Compare to Pl. *Lg.* 8.810e–811a: “and there are people who select the most important passages from all the poets, and gather certain entire speeches into a single collection.”

²⁷One of my main informants for this paper, I Wayan Dibia, started out as a musician accompanying performances; one day he discovered his talents lay in performing when one of the actors failed to turn up and he was pressed into service (he had to play the Monkey General, Hanuman).

²⁸Talent (or inspiration) supposedly runs in families, but not every member has it. Rebirth into the same family forms part of Balinese beliefs, which explains the reoccurrence of talent across the generations. Those who study the *lontars*—and this includes the performers—must undergo special purification rituals, which procure the assistance and protection of Saraswati, the goddess who brought language, culture and civilization to humans (Zurbuchen 49, 60).

(VR), the text best known in the West, but on a *Ramayana* composed by Bhatti, known as “The Slaying of Ravana” or “Bhattikavya” (BhK), which in its turn either followed the Valmiki text or took its material from a common source. In the end-product, the *Ramayana Kakawin* (RK), different parts correspond to different Sanskrit sources: where the BhK is too obscure, the poet uses the VR to help him out; where Bhatti skips an episode, the Javanese poet will borrow from the VR. Direct influence of the *Bhagavadgita* is found in *sarga* 21: the poet rearranged the material to suit his needs, borrowing metaphors and interpreting obscure epithets correctly. The influence of Kalidasa’s *Meghaduta* can be detected in four similes which follow each other closely. The eight divinities embodied in the King, a kind of guide-book to kingly behavior outlined in the *Manusmṛiti*, are echoed by the poet in his admonishments to Vibhisana, recently crowned ruler of Lanka. In this episode Rama tells the new king to pay attention to the teachings of Manu. This passage is non-existent in the VR, and in the BhK Rama only makes a few brief suggestions. The RK, however, dedicates the ten central stanzas of *sarga* 24 to some very detailed instructions, and the passage is even known by its own name, the “astabrata” (Khanna 1993: 240). The end result is “[a] work [that] has become no mere display of technical virtuosity but an outstanding work of literature” (Khanna 242). The RK itself, as we saw, became a source for other authors and performers, who borrowed freely for their own performances and new (derived) texts.

Episodes can be added or dropped when a text is copied. For instance, in the case of the historical texts (*babads*), an author who disagrees with certain aspects of a story, such as which king attacked first, or which piece of land belonged to which village, may alter the text. These conflictive renderings of historical events, of course, greatly complicate the task for historians trying to reconstruct the past situation (Creese 1991; Hinzler 1986).

The partial copying of *lontars*, either because the copier does not agree with part of the content or because he does not need certain episodes, thus explains the fragmentation of larger and longer manuscripts. For instance, very few people—if any—own a complete *Mahabharata* or *Ramayana* in *lontar* form (since the *Ramayana* alone is 50,000 lines long). A similar situation may have existed in Greece: we are reminded of Socrates’ amazement on finding out that one of his friends owned a “complete” Homer, suggesting that the poems were only rarely found in their entirety, perhaps only in the hands of professionals such as rhapsodes. And Socrates indeed proceeds to ask if his

friend has any intention of becoming one (X. *Mem.* 4.2.10). On the other hand, new works can come into existence by the recombination of other ones.

At the verse level, a different kind of change can be made: when copying a poem, the copier (who is at the same time a literatus and possibly also a performer), may insert a few lines of his own. A simile, an anecdote, an elaboration of an event, all can be inserted (personal interview Padanda, spring 1994). However, what an author/copier is not allowed to do is omit individual lines, even if they do not make sense to him or seem badly composed (wrong meter, for instance).²⁹ As it was explained to me, the reason for not “fixing up” the text at the micro-level was that perhaps the original author was cleverer than the present one, who may fail to understand what is meant, and who, by changing it, would unwittingly destroy the original meaning or intention.³⁰ Since until the end of the nineteenth century there were no textbooks with precise rules for spelling (Hinzler 1993), and since the Sanskrit quotations are sometimes spelled correctly and sometimes follow Balinese spelling while still being sounded as Sanskrit (Zoetmulder 54–60), copiers tended to respect what they found in their texts. Doubting the truth-value of an entire part or episode of the story and deleting it seemed more acceptable than doubting the validity of individual verses.

Insertions and expansions have to be created in the style of the current document; thus, a performer/reader/copier/adaptor of texts exercises the utmost care to ensure that his lines or passage are correct.³¹ Many style manuals may be consulted to ensure the use of the right vocabulary (Padanda, interview 1994). Expressions found elsewhere in the poem may be slightly altered (or kept in their entirety), the way formulas have been found to be used in the oral traditions studied by Parry and Lord and their successors. This strategy provides greater coherence to the entire poem by linking the new passage to the overall text. Internal rhyme or vowel assonance, if used, is preserved; the correct meter or combination of meters is maintained (but see Uhlenbeck 1989: 330–31 who, applying metrical criteria, discovers a lengthy interpolation). Only a scholar

²⁹Compare S. West 1967: 18 on the treatment of the Homeric texts: “The classics were now fossilized: even if what the author wrote appeared to be non-metrical, ungrammatical, factually incorrect, obscure, and improper, this was what must be transmitted.” The Balinese appear to draw the line at “factually incorrect,” however.

³⁰Padanda, personal interview spring 1994; I am not sure many adhere to these lofty ideals or are able to resist the temptation to show off their higher learning.

³¹It should by now be clear that in Bali a performer can also be an author, copier and interpreter of the texts in his care. Some even prepare their own palm leaves for use—a lengthy process.

advanced in knowledge would dare to “improve” or add on to an already existing work, which makes the task of discovering insertions extremely difficult, if not impossible.

However, the more “famous” the (written) poem, the less a (would-be) author will dare to interpolate, for fear that his lines will stand out. The performers have no such inhibitions during their performances, and freely improvise and insert events and episodes into the “trunk” stories. As is to be expected, greater variety exists in the written texts which relate recent (or historical) events. Thus we find multiple, sometimes contradictory, versions in the court chronicles whereas the RK manuscripts “are uniform to a surprising degree” (Zoetmulder 64).³²

In summary then we can say that Balinese performers improvise in performance, but use written (and oral) texts as a basis. They are also able to create new written texts, based on successful performances or new information obtained from other *lontars*. Improvisation and written composition are facilitated by the existence of a complex *Kunstsprache*, whose origins lie in the very distant past and which forms the heart of the Balinese written and oral tradition. It is used like any other language that the performer or writer has command of: these authors and performers are multilingual, and are not to be caught out.³³ Singers and literati learn this language from childhood on by reading, studying, and listening to others perform. It is the epic language, the *Kunstsprache*, that guarantees the survival of the ancient poetry. There is no need for the Balinese singers to memorize the ancient texts: it is much simpler and more efficient to learn the *Kunstsprache*. In this way the singers can always

³²Sometimes entirely new poems will be created in the ancient style or a combination of ancient styles, using Javanese or Balinese meters. An example of this is the *Bhuana Winasa*, a poem which describes the invasion by the Dutch and the subsequent destruction of the royal house in 1906. The text was composed by a priest attached to the court approximately twelve years after the invasion and mass suicide. It follows the old style and vocabulary, uses metaphors, similes and imagery found in older texts, and in a sense offers a sequel to the ancient texts by providing one more destruction of a kingdom in keeping with the *Kaliyuga* (our own time, a period of darkness and calamity). Were it not for the references to the Dutch army a text like this could be thought to have originated much earlier. This same text was used as the basis for a performance during the annual Bali Arts Festival a few years ago.

³³In reality, every Balinese is proficient on several levels, since Balinese has different registers according to the status of the participants; most have some understanding of the *Kunstsprache*, just from hearing it so often on all kinds of occasions. All Balinese nowadays learn Indonesian in school, and are literate in that language. When unsure of the status of the person to be addressed Indonesian is often used to avoid faux pas.

offer their audiences something new and suited to the situation. It must be stated here that their intention is not to fool the reader/listener and make him believe that the poem or text is older than it really is: the intention is to create a new text which is relevant to the present moment, using the old, traditional language and manner of composing.³⁴ Thus these authors/singers perform, and write, within their tradition, using methods that heretofore were thought to be only available to oral performers.

III.

The pioneering work of Milman Parry and Albert Lord has been fundamental in opening up the field of classics to the study of other societies and literatures. Their work has answered many questions concerning the nature and composition of the Homeric poems and has received wide acceptance. The result has been an explosion of studies on the orality of Homer, but, as I pointed out in the first part of this paper, the recording and transmission of the work, the road between A and A', have been relegated to the familiar processes of literacy and memorization (of written or oral texts).

At present scholars have roughly two choices to account for the appearance in written form of the Homeric poems: either direct composition in writing, as posited by the neoanalysts who use the poetry of the middle ages as a more appropriate analogy (Kullmann 1984: 320), or composition in performance and dictation to a scribe, as advocated by the adherents of the Oral Theory. Beliefs shared by both schools state that the written version of the poems dates from approximately the late eighth century, and that even after achieving written form the epics continued to be performed. Performers preferred to follow the written texts rather closely and over time their improvisational skills decreased. The written texts (however they had come into existence) underwent few changes. Performances, now mostly based on the written version, became more and more similar.

Both schools also believe that the following conditions were met in eighth century Greece: a composer who was a genius (and, in the case of the

³⁴In this they can be compared to the Romans of the second century C.E. The younger Pliny (*Ep.* 6.21.1–2) describes listening to a public reading of a comedy written in the ancient style by a certain Vergilius Romanus. He was so impressed with the closeness of the comedy to the model that he predicted that one day it might serve as a model itself: *comoediam...scriptam tam bene, ut esse quandoque possit exemplar*. The point is not to be original but faithfully to recreate an *exemplar*.

neoanalytic theory, able to write);³⁵ a sponsor or sponsor(s) who recognized this genius and had the means to have the poems recorded (by dictation, transcription, or some other method) and preserved; a fully developed writing system and the technical and material means to use it;³⁶ the concept of fixity, that is, not to alter a written text even if one believes it to be wrong;³⁷ other performers willing to learn and repeat this same poem (something which the Yugoslav singers—and all oral singers in other societies as well—were unwilling to do); and an audience not subject to boredom.³⁸ These factors might occur singly, but cumulatively they strain belief.

Both models encounter additional difficulties. The neoanalytic model (composition with the aid of writing) argues that the compositionary process came at the very end of the oral phase when improvisation in performance was rapidly becoming a thing of the past. For the proponents of the Oral Theory the difficulties stem from the very analogy between the Yugoslav and the Greek situation itself. The Yugoslav case provides an oral phase and data on how poems were transmitted orally (but some oral texts proved later to have been based on written texts read to the performers).³⁹ From the oral performance a written version, virtually identical to the oral text, was produced by Parry and Lord's assistants. The rules concerning oral composition in performance and transmission were deduced from this (artificial) written product, and then applied in reverse (from written to oral) to the Homeric poems. Since we had a

³⁵It is sobering for a classicist to find that comparative research into other canonical traditions shows that all societies claim geniality for the presumed authors of their masterpieces: for instance, the Indian tradition brings us Valmiki for the *Ramayana* and Vyasa ("Editor") for the *Mahabharata*; in China Confucius is considered the (genial) author of much of the canon. An intriguing account of the shared claims made by exegetical traditions as different as the Qur'anic, Vedantic, medieval Christian, Chinese and some others can be found in Henderson 1991.

³⁶Many societies view writing as a fully developed system, ready for use, which arrived as a gift of the gods (in the Greek case, as the gift of the Phoenicians), or, in the case of the Chinese, as a gift of the Emperor (Senner 1989: 17).

³⁷But we know that the Homeric texts did not achieve fixity until the middle of the second century B.C.E. (see section I above), and we also saw how happily the Balinese "correct" historical texts.

³⁸Other authors have recognized these difficulties and for these reasons have chosen the time of Peisistratus (mid-sixth century) for the recording of the poems. This leaves a period of two hundred years to be bridged by the memorization of the poems in their oral form. See also n. 14.

³⁹Some songs were first collected in the nineteenth century by the collector Vuk Karadzic, and were known to many of the singers employed by Parry and Lord (M. Parry 1971: 379 n. 1, 391 n. 4, 471; Lord 1991: 170–85).

written text which displayed similar oral features, the conclusions were that it, first, must have come into existence in the same manner as the Yugoslav texts, and, second, must therefore be the record of one particular performance. Neither model removes the need for the special circumstances outlined above.

The Balinese model by contrast eliminates the need for special circumstances to explain the genesis and survival of oral and written texts and, moreover, allows for continued improvised performances. The analogy on which it is based has many points in common with the situation in ancient Greece as it is known to us. The Balinese illustration presents oral texts, autochthonous written ones and a well-documented case for how the oral and written processes interact to make transmission and change possible. In addition we possess transcripts of performances made by Western scholars which highlight the differences between the written texts and the performance transcripts. My description of Balinese poetics showed how written texts can come into existence as a result of a long interplay between oral and written texts, and in the process acquire the characteristics of both. The Balinese model offers the added attraction that we do not have to posit that written poems represent one single performance; on the contrary, they provide the basis for multiple and different performances, a virtual guarantee of continued audience interest.

The implications of the Balinese model are manifold. First, we will have to revise our views of the role and powers of literacy. The date of the arrival of the alphabet in Greece, whether as early as the eleventh century B.C.E.⁴⁰ or as late as the mid-eighth century, ceases to be an important factor, since the Balinese model teaches us a “relaxed” version of literacy. There is no need for an instantaneously efficient writing system. Poems get written down slowly, and weave in and out of the written medium. They absorb improvements; they shed unworkable episodes. Much of the poems is retained in the oral memory, but much also gets written down. Written texts are shared, borrowed, copied in their entirety or partially, and discussed and explained. However, these written texts are never meant as a substitute or a libretto for performance, but rather provide a basis (“dasar” as the Balinese call them, which has exactly the same meaning) for performances. Over the *longue durée* the poems and their content become more and more polished while continuing to receive “new” material adjusted to fit. Meanwhile, it is the epic language, the basic tool of the tradition, which becomes more fixed since now it is supported by writing, dictionaries,

⁴⁰Semiticists and others have recently reaffirmed this early date (Naveh 1982: 175–86).

grammars, word lists and other aids.⁴¹ And the writing in turn is supported by the oral medium, which is how Sanskrit pronunciation, as we saw, was able to survive in Balinese poetry. In Bali literacy thus enabled the fixation of the *Kunstsprache* (say, at the fourteenth–sixteenth century C.E. level, encapsulating many earlier forms such as Sanskrit), but the presence of written texts did not stop the evolution of the poems or the creation of new ones.

What should we call a text that is still being modified to this day under the influence of oral performance? Recently a new category of oral-derived (or “transitional”) texts was added to accommodate texts which conserve oral features but are of obvious written origin, such as the Old English *Beowulf*, the Spanish *Cantar de Mio Cid*, the medieval French poems and a host of others.⁴² These texts came into existence “in an oral traditional context,” and need to be analyzed accordingly.⁴³ Creating this new intermediate category solved some of the problems encountered earlier, when the discussion was exclusively focused around written origins or oral origins with a one-time recording in writing. However, implied in the term “oral-derived” is the assumption that an oral manner of expression is used to create a written work by a poet steeped in the oral-formulaic tradition, whose work henceforth will be transmitted in written, not oral, form.

If the above texts can be called “transitional,” the Balinese texts do not fit this description. We saw how in the Balinese example writing was used both to preserve and to create, processes that take place continuously. Nor does this process take place in one location or at one time only: copies of copies are rewritten and re-performed, and can either grow apart or come together again.

⁴¹The Oral Theory states that the survival of the ancient poetry is due to the fact that all oral poets had mastered the epic language and its requirements; what I am proposing is that this part of the theory be extended to cover written composition as well. Knowledge and learning of the epic language did not need to stop because literacy had arrived. On the contrary, literacy served as an aid for learning and preserving it. Ancient Greece too developed lists of difficult words and expressions, which were widely discussed among scholars. In fact, scholarship in the Western sense has its origins in the exegesis of Homer (Pfeiffer 1968, Marrou 1948).

⁴²Lord 1960: 129 disputed the existence of such texts: “The question we have asked ourselves is whether there can be such a thing as a transitional text...I believe that the answer must be in the negative...The written technique...is not compatible with the oral technique, and the two could not possibly combine, to form another, a third, a “transitional” technique.” This view is also stated in his earlier and later publications (1951, 1953, 1986).

⁴³I borrow the term “oral-derived” from Foley, ed., 1986: 6–9, the introduction to an entire volume dedicated to these kinds of texts.

These texts could truly be called “transitioning,” since they continue to go back and forth between the realms of literacy and orality.

The multiformity and constant adaptation of these written and oral texts has implications for those who search the poems for signs of social history and background. It is well known that oral poetry constantly updates itself, with only a small gap possible between what the poet sings and his own life experience. Fixation would freeze this picture, guaranteeing its accuracy to within a generation or two. However, even oral poets sometimes consciously manipulate or break social custom for the sake of the plot. Those unfamiliar with the culture may not always be aware when this occurs.⁴⁴ The fluidity of written texts which I am advocating here would remove this possibility of a one-time cohesive picture, and replace it with the possibility of endless variation. Episodes can be dropped or language can be changed if necessary during performance. Writing makes such manipulation possible on an even larger scale.

The Balinese model also has implications for performance and how we should imagine performances to have taken place in ancient Greece. First, the artist. The examples from modern Yugoslavia or medieval Europe do not adequately describe the improvising/literate performer/author. Again, based on the analogy with the Yugoslav case, classicists have long divided the profession of “singer” into that of *aoidos* and that of *rhapsode*, although well into the fourth century the terms are used interchangeably.⁴⁵ Under the influence of

⁴⁴J. W. Johnson 1986: 52 comments on a passage in the Son-Jara epic of West Africa which describes how the birthright is stolen during a baby switch: “Caution must be exercised while searching the lines of any epic for cultural data. Some of the narrative is undoubtedly employed only for literary purposes. A deliberate distortion or conscious omission of some cultural features may be used only to intensify the drama of a theme. To cite an example, the bard probably describes the housing of both women in the same recovery hut after each had given birth for the dramatic effect of heightening the tension of the scene. *It is hard to conceive of a situation in Mande society which would allow two co-wives to recover from giving birth in the same room*” (emphasis added).

⁴⁵Pl. *R.* 600d. For comparison, I offer the English term “bard” which has an archaic and romantic ring to it. Thus Macpherson’s invented character, Ossian, was called a bard (an illiterate, itinerant Scottish singer), but the same term, “The Bard,” is used for Shakespeare, definitely a literate author. T. S. Eliot is not considered a bard; together with Shakespeare, Ossian, and Homer, however, he belongs to the class of people we call “poets.” Bard (in English) then seems to refer to someone who is particularly gifted or inspired, whether he employs writing or not. The literate Roman poets of Augustan times liked to call themselves *vates*, reintroducing a term originally used for seers delivering their prophecies in verse.

the Yugoslav model, the *aoidos* came to represent the *guslar*, who improvised and was illiterate, whereas the *rhapsode*, whose profession evolved from that of the *aoidoi*, performed a memorized fixed text (almost always believed to be written) and had turned into a mere actor. But it must be pointed out that the assigning of illiteracy to the one and literacy to the other is entirely based on our understanding of the arrival of the alphabet and literacy in general; nowhere in the ancient sources is this stated in so many words.⁴⁶ Allusions to written texts do occur in the ancient literature, but, as I pointed out in the first part of this paper, we do not know the shape or size of these works or how they were used.⁴⁷

Second, the performance itself takes on a different aspect under the Balinese model. Rather than a memorized rendering of the same material (as both the neoanalytic model and the Oral Theory suggest) from 700 B.C.E. until 300 C.E. (or even later, according to the Egyptian papyri), the Balinese model shows how adaptation to present circumstances and audiences continues to be possible, making performances and competitions more challenging and interesting.

The adoption of the Oral Theory in the first half of this century allowed classicists (especially in the English speaking countries) to move beyond the impasse existing between analysts and unitarians. But, as I pointed out earlier, at the end of the second half of this century we seem to have reached another impasse, created by too close adherence to the earliest findings of the Oral Theory, which induced English-speaking scholars to reject any influence of literary composition. The too strictly observed analogy presented by the

Ennius (*versibus quos olim fauni vatesque canebant*, *Ann.* 214) still puts *vates* on the level of *fauni*, not generally known for their literary skills. See also Nagy 1990b: 42 and 1996: 60, 69–70.

⁴⁶At least two other scholars view the rhapsode as a creative artist: “der αἰδῶς ῥάπτων ist der ‘Lieder-Ersinner,’ der sich auf seine Kunst versteht. ῥάπτειν zielt also gerade nicht auf den minderen Flickpoeten oder Verknüpfer, sondern auf den schöpferischen Dichter” (Patzner 1952: 319). Ballabriga 1990: 21: “Nous sommes bien loin de l’idée commune de rhapsodes décadents tout juste bons à déclamer des textes composés deux siècles auparavant.” Compare van Buitenen 1973: xxiii–xxiv: “A reciter’s reputation was based on his skill in bringing the old stories to life again. Successive generations would add, embellish, digress; but also understate what might have been emphasized before” and “what would come down from generation to generation...was...the technique of spinning out a tale to please the listeners. The reciter was thus also a creative poet, within the idiom of his craft.” See also Nagy 1990b: 42.

⁴⁷When Xenophon (*Smp.* 3.5–6) tells us of a young man, Niceratos, who had been forced by his father to learn Homer by heart, it is not clear what (written) text formed the basis for this act of memorization.

Yugoslav material has turned oral composition and written composition into two mutually exclusive categories. Contemporary oral literatures still being collected world-wide have reinforced this idea of incompatibility, because they were selected to mirror the situation found in Yugoslavia, not the situation in Greece.

This brings me to my final, and, I believe, most important point, which concerns the role of poetry in the life of each individual and in the shaping of cultural identity. In Yugoslavia poetry played a minor role in the society and belonged to only a part of the people. It was a poetry that did not interact with the literary centers of its country and culture. As Lord (1960: 138) confirmed, it had literally been removed “into the background,...into the back country.” Thus we look at oral poetry in cultural settings very different from those found in antiquity, and at any hint of writing dismiss the sample.⁴⁸

The situation in Greece was very different from the one in Yugoslavia. The pervasiveness of the Homeric poems in Greek culture is a commonplace, well illustrated and documented in the works of Marrou 1948 and Havelock 1963, for instance. It is corroborated by the Greeks themselves. Heraclitus *All.* 1 (first century C.E.?) said that all Greek children from the tenderest age were given “the milk of his [Homer’s] verses.” Earlier, Xenophanes fr. 10 had already expressed this idea, and Plato (*R.* 10.606e) confirmed it as a *communis opinio*: ...ὥς τὴν Ἑλλάδα πεπαίδευκεν οὗτος ὁ ποιητής. Herodotus 2.53 informs us that the Greeks received their theogonies from Homer and Hesiod, and that previously they had been ignorant of the gods’ characteristics and duties. In everyday life the Greeks were surrounded by reminders: temples, divine images, paintings, customs, religious ceremonies, objects, references and allusions in other genres to the Homeric epics, and so on. In the fourth century Isocrates concluded that this shared culture and education were more an indication of Greekness than shared blood (*Pan.* 50).

The same situation still holds true in Bali today (and in many other Southeast Asian cultures as well). The *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* serve as sources for all other literary genres (even soap operas on television) and form a frame of cultural reference for all members of the society. The oneness of society and its literature (both oral and written) is expressed as follows in the *Mahabharata* (1.56.33): “whatever is here, on Law, on Profit, on Pleasure, and on Salvation, that is found elsewhere. But what is not here, is nowhere else.” Through the performances, the reading clubs, the studying of the written texts,

⁴⁸This point is also made by A. Parry 1966: 212–15.

the statues, the paintings, the temples and festivals and so on, this poetry is brought before the eyes and ears of all every day. It is a shared culture: performances and reading clubs are democratic, and prince and sharecropper participate equally (Wallis 164–65; Lansing 75–92, 143–48).

In order to escape out of the increasingly sterile debate alluded to by Shive, we need a different model, one which is closer to ancient Greece in its approach and its use of the literature. Formulas, continued performance, a *Kunstsprache*, adaptation to contemporary society and situations, all these features exist in oral societies. They also exist in Bali, but in addition the society has been literate for over a millennium. We have divided the Greek past into two phases, pre-literate and literate, and assign the creation of the Homeric poems to the first and their continued existence to the second one, based on the analogy with the Yugoslav poetry. However, I think that a better match is found in the Balinese case, which presents us with a different and more suitable model. For in Bali oral and written literature coincide and are of equal importance. The written texts are not an imitation of oral literature, but form its very foundation and secure its survival. The gap existing elsewhere between literacy and orality, between intellectuals and peasants, between what one group reads and what the other group hears does not exist.⁴⁹ The power of this poetry lies precisely in that “a brahman who reads it becomes eloquent, a kshatriya becomes a lord of the earth, a vaisya acquires profit from his goods, and even a lowly sudra achieves greatness,” or, as Plato puts it, μυρία τῶν παλαιῶν ἔργα κοσμοῦσα, τοὺς ἐπιγιγνομένους παιδεύει.⁵⁰

This essay started out “à la recherche du temps perdu,” in search of times past. In order to understand those times past we found that we needed the help of times present. The question is: when we chose Yugoslavia as our present-day example of times past, did we choose the right place?

⁴⁹Although Balinese society in itself is based on caste, and extremely class conscious. The different registers of the language are just one manifestation of this carefully maintained system of differences and status. Yet the reading clubs are democratic (as are all performances).

⁵⁰Valmiki *Ramayana* 1.1.79; Pl. *Phdr.* 245a: “by adorning the countless deeds of the ancestors, [it] educates those who come after.”

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- Personal interviews conducted in spring 1993 and spring 1994:
- Dr. I Wayan Ardika
- Dr. I Wayan Dibia
- Dalang Wayan Nartha
- Ida Padanda Gde Sideman.