



# ORAL TRADITION

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## Editor's Column

In the current issue of *Oral Tradition* we offer seven articles that collectively represent the original vision of what the journal was established to do: namely, to illustrate the enormous wealth and innate diversity of oral traditions and thereby to suggest comparisons and contrasts outside the customary boundaries of specialty and discipline. The next three issues will trace the same path, with a miscellany (like the present number) in 24, i to be followed by collections on “sound effects” and the interface of humankind’s oldest and most widespread communications technology with Judaism, Islam, and Christianity.

Tammy Ho Lai-Ming opens the discussion with an examination of the evidence that Charles Dickens meant his novels to be read aloud, in other words to be performed. Given the great Victorian author’s use of oral traditional strategies such as folktale plotlines and the heightening of suspense through serialization, this article helps us understand the continuing influence of pre-Gutenberg dynamics. Helen Gregory then takes up the rich topic of poetry in the U. K., with special attention to particular poets and their melding of an international performance art with their identity as British artists. Next in order is a suggestive essay by Joan Gross, who discovers the roots of contemporary Puerto Rican poetic improvisation in a sixteenth-century Spanish form, and shows how poetic practice fosters “re-territorialization” of Puerto Rican culture by recalling its rural, agrarian origins.

In an article written from the perspective of oral history, Outi Fingerroos explains how the lost homeland of Karelia (which spans parts of modern Finland and Russia) has been reconstructed in memory after war and resettlement foreshortened its history. Katrin Rupp explores what happens to an Anglo-Saxon charm, a practical and performance-based intervention, after it is committed to a manuscript, and how the scribe seems to have sensed the semiotic shift. In an essay that treats what may well be the most ubiquitous oral genre of all, Andrea Fishman looks at the oral tradition of lament by comparing examples from the ancient world (Euripides’ *Suppliants*) to contemporary field-recorded performances from Mani and Epiros. Finally, Lorenzo Cherubini considers the phenomenon of digital storytelling among the Aboriginal peoples of Canada as an extension of the oral tradition and a vehicle for political commentary.

Along with the ongoing forum represented by our journal, which last year attracted almost 30,000 readers online, two related projects at the Center for Studies in Oral Tradition are underway. The first consists of an omnibus bibliography of more than 15,000 entries compiled from references cited over the 23 years of the journal’s existence; like *Oral Tradition* itself, this searchable facility will be available online and free of charge, hopefully by October 2009. Along with this data-base we are assembling an eBook of tagged and subtitled video excerpts from extensive interviews with Paolo Zedda, an oral poet and ethnomusicologist from Sardinia, who is in a unique position to explain the art of oral poetry from the double perspective of performer and scholar. The Lord and Parry Lecture that he delivered at the University of Missouri in late 2008 will be linked to this eBook, along with additional videos of performances of Sardinian *mutetu*.

Let me end with a request. Please make a concerted effort to inform your colleagues of the existence of *Oral Tradition* in its free, online format



(<http://journal.oraltradition.org>). The site was created in order to increase and diversify both readership and authorship, and we have already seen dramatic surges in both areas. Quite clearly, the study of the world's oral traditions is an international enterprise, and we aim to serve all interested scholars, students, and institutions by promoting a truly democratic sharing of knowledge, art, and ideas.

John Miles Foley  
Editor, *Oral Tradition*  
<http://journal.oraltradition.org>

## **Reading Aloud in Dickens' Novels**

**Tammy Ho Lai-ming**

### **Reading Aloud and Dickens' Victorian England**

Reading aloud has a long history. In their introduction to *A History of Reading in the West*, Guglielmo Cavallo and Roger Chartier state (1999:40): "In the ancient world, in the Middle Ages and as late as the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the sort of reading implicit in many texts was oralized (as was their actual reading). The 'readers' of those texts were listeners attentive to a reading voice. The text, addressed to the ear as much as to the eye, played on forms and formulas that adapted writing to the demands of oral performance." Though Dickens' nineteenth century is a time period outside those discussed by Cavallo and Chartier, ample evidence shows that reading aloud continued into the Victorian period. For example, the habit of performing a literary text orally in a Victorian family is well documented. In *Daily Life in Victorian England*, Sally Mitchell presents us with a seemingly prototypical family scene (1996:234): "reading aloud was customary during an evening at home. . . . One person sat next to the only good lamp and read from a serialized novel or some other publication that would be interesting to both youngsters and adults."

Reading aloud was also a common phenomenon in the public domain in Victorian England. Dickens, with his publishers Chapman and Hall, successfully distributed literary reading materials to people from different social strata by reducing the price of novels through serialization. In *Victorian Novels in Serial*, Jerry Don Vann gives sole credit to Dickens' *Pickwick Papers* for broadening the Victorian readership (1985:2): it "greatly enlarged the reading audience, who . . . could not manage the price of a published volume but could afford the monthly installments." Serialization and the lower price of reading materials admitted a larger readership. Some of the new readers would have assembled and read a shared copy of the most recent issue in open spaces. Since the literacy level of this crowd was still low before school attendance was made compulsory in 1870 by the Education Act, many people from lower classes would listen to recitals of texts instead of reading print themselves. Dickens' readers who were from such social backgrounds might have read his work in this manner. Jeremy Hawthorn (1985:17) points out that "there have been cases of illiterate people gathering to hear novels read—part of Dickens's audience was of this sort."

Two types of readers were involved in reading scenarios like these: one who read aloud, and one who, though illiterate, was able to read with the ears rather than the eyes. Thus, as

Cavallo and Chartier comment (1999:4), “the text, addressed to the ear as much as to the eye, played on forms and formulas that adapted writing to the demands of oral performance.” Despite Walter Benjamin’s lament in his essay “The Storyteller” that “the reader of a novel . . . is isolated” (1969:100) and Ian Watt’s (1957:200-01) thesis about the relation between the rise of individualism and novel-reading, the readers-aloud and the listener-readers were not reading solitarily and “jealously,” to use Benjamin’s term. Instead, they enjoyed a more communal experience.

### Reading Aloud and Dickens’ Writing

The writing style of Dickens’ large body of work was influenced by the Victorian practice of reading aloud, an activity of the period that the writer himself indulged in both privately and publicly. Dickens was aware of the way his works were “orally consumed.” As Alan Shelston (1970:78) notes, he was “conscious that his installments were read, as they appeared, at family gatherings”; Donald Perkins also perceives that “the novels of Dickens are peculiarly fitted to be read aloud . . . . Dickens himself ultimately recognized this” (1982:25). In fact, during his farewell reading tour Dickens advertised his forthcoming new story, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, so that the listeners to his readings could “enter upon a new series of readings, in their own homes, at which his assistance would be indispensable” (Dexter 1932:253).

My argument is that in response to the pervasive family and social activity of reading aloud in the Victorian age, Dickens composed his novels in ways that would further encourage and facilitate such practice. The focus of this essay will be Dickens’ representation of characters’ speech. This aspect is especially interesting since it highlights the relation between “fictional dialogue” and “natural speech.” It seems that the more closely the fictional dialogue follows natural speech, the higher the level of orality achieved. Dickens employed explicit markers to simultaneously *elicit* and *assist* the oral reproduction of the distinctive voices of many of his characters—through phonetic spelling, narrative comments, and punctuation, or through a combination of the above. These markers illustrate plainly the writer’s active participation in creating a unique possibility for spoken performance of his characters’ voices. They also show that in the writing process Dickens took into account the “other” reader who read through listening, either due to illiteracy or because of a personal preference for aural reception. Although these markers have been mentioned by critics from a similar perspective,<sup>1</sup> their function in relation to reading aloud has not been systematically recognized and studied.

In *Aspects of the Novel* (1993), E. M. Forster likens people in a novel to “actors,” which is an appropriate term to describe Dickens’ characters. Stage performance usually involves actors speaking, and like actors on stage, “Dickens’s characters are found to exist very largely through their speech” (Allott 1959:210). There is direct biographical evidence that Dickens designed his works to be performed and heard. For instance, he often mimicked the speech of his characters while writing. This was observed by his daughter Mamie Dickens, who reported (Ackroyd

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<sup>1</sup> E.g., Quirk (1959), Page (1988), Chapman (1984), Fowler (1989), and Gerson (1967).

2002:561, emphasis added):

One of these mornings, I was lying on the sofa endeavoring to keep perfectly quiet, while my father wrote busily and rapidly at his desk, when he suddenly jumped from his chair and rushed to a mirror which hung near, and in which I could see the reflection of some extraordinary facial contortions which he was making. He returned rapidly to his desk, wrote furiously for a few moments, and then went again to the mirror. The facial pantomime was resumed, and then turning toward, but evidently not seeing me, *he began talking rapidly in a low voice.*

Allen Grant (1984:51) believes that Mamie Dickens' description reveals "the idea of energetic impersonation" as the inspirational process by which Dickens created his characters. The author also claimed that he could hear the voices of his fictional beings: "Dickens once declared to me that every word said by his characters was distinctly *heard* by him" (Lewes 1872:66). Roger Fowler, commenting on the conversation of Stephen and Rachel in *Hard Times*, says that "Dickens has—in *writing* of course—deliberately constructed a very *oral* model of language for these two humble characters . . ." (1989:86-87, author's emphasis). These remarks underscore the interrelatedness of hearing, writing, and oral reproduction in the course of Dickens' literary composition.

### Phonetic Spellings

Dickens occasionally demonstrated through phonetic spellings how some characters speak in dialects in the novels. Although the main characters in his work are often given a standard London dialect, there are a few exceptions such as Stephen Blackpool from *Hard Times* and Sam Weller from *Pickwick Papers* who speak in Lancashire and Cockney English respectively, as indicated by phonetic and deviant spellings. Chapman believes that "the conventions of spelling within the language are used to produce a written sign which can then be read aloud with reasonable approximation to its original sound" (1984:38). By the same token, deviant spelling tends to have the function of representing nonstandard pronunciation for reading aloud.

For example, to represent East Anglian English, a dialect spoken by some characters in *David Copperfield*, Dickens "relie[d] for his effect upon the rendering of pronunciation through variant spellings, concentrating on the broad vowel-sounds: weel (will), loove (love), etc." (Page 1988:64). East London Cockney is another dialect Dickens put into his characters' mouths. David Crystal (2004:497) contends in *The Stories of English* that "the omission of *g* and *h*, and the substitution of *w* for *v*" contribute to the construction of Cockney English in *The Pickwick Papers*. Cockney-speaking readers-aloud would probably feel at home with Dickens' representation of the dialect and perhaps even improvise in places to achieve a more authentic rendition. Yet other readers who are unfamiliar with Cockney would try to adjust their own pronunciation and imitate the dialect as suggested by the phonetic spellings. This strategy would also be useful for readers in construing other dialects and foreign speeches in the novels, such as

Yorkshire in *Nicholas Nickleby*, Lancashire in *Hard Times*, French in *Little Dorrit* and *A Tale of Two Cities*, and American English in *Martin Chuzzlewit*.

#### Four Narrative Comments

Dickens provided different types of narrative comments that assist the reader-aloud in orally performing the characters' peculiar speech styles. These narrative comments pertain to various speech aspects such as the pronunciation of some word sounds and the pragmatic use of the English language; but comments on syntax, speed, and quality of speech can also be found in conjunction with punctuation, as will be shown below. When reading aloud, the reader receives these comments as hints or even "stage directions," to use Randolph Quirk's phrasing, about how to dramatize the characters' utterances.

Sometimes the narrative comments appear after the actual speech; in such cases the comments are subsidiary in nature since very often the punctuation in the dialogue already suggests the manner of speech delivery. As Frank Smith suggests, "in fluent reading the eye is always ahead of the words the brain is actually working on, checking for possible obstacles to a particular understanding" (1978:84). This means that even comments that follow the speech can help the reader-aloud to notice how the text should be orally reproduced.

#### *Comments on Word Sounds*

In the novels Dickens provided narrative observations regarding his characters' articulation of some word sounds, thus facilitating the reading of the speech for a listening audience. For example, in both *David Copperfield* and *Hard Times*, Dickens commented on how the characters pronounce the [s] in their speech.

In *David Copperfield*, David introduced a servant in Steerforth's house, Littimer: "He had . . . a soft voice of speaking, with a peculiar habit of whispering the letter s so distinctly, that he seemed to use it oftener than any other man" (*DC*, 21:307).<sup>2</sup> Again in *Hard Times*, Dickens observed how Mr. Sleary, the circus proprietor, pronounces the [s] sound. Dickens paid close attention to his lisp; the lisp, according to Chapman (1984:115), seems to be "something of an affectation at one time in England but is more often an involuntary imperfection." It also produces a humorous effect. Here is a sample of Sleary's speech (*HT*, I. 6:40, emphases added):

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<sup>2</sup> In this narrative comment, Dickens used the word "letter" as a synonym for "word-sound" or "phoneme." David Abercrombie explains that ". . . *letter* has, in the past, frequently been used in a sense similar to the modern term *speech-sound*" (1965:77). Before the twentieth century, it was commonplace for people to use the word "letter" to refer to both an element from the alphabet and the sound produced, despite the occasional lack of precision this practice would lead to. We can assume that when Dickens talked about "the letter S," he was indeed referring to the speech sound [s]. Actually, in the short story "The Boarding House" from *Sketches by Boz*, Dickens also explicitly linked "the letter S" with whispering: "'S-s-s' whispered the mischief-maker" (*SB*, 301). Citations from the novels are made by abbreviation, and refer to Dickens 1994, 2002, 2003a, 2003b, 2003c, and 2004.

[1] 'Thquire!' said Mr. Sleary, who was troubled with asthma, and *whose breath came far too thick and heavy for the letter s*, 'Your *thervant!* *Thith ith* a bad *piethe* of *bithnith*, *thith ith*. You've heard of my Clown and *hith* dog being *thuppothed* to have *morrithed*?'

For the purpose of multiple emphases, Dickens not only explicitly noted that "[Sleary's] breath came far too thick and heavy for the letter s," but he also transformed every <s> (the [s] and [z] sounds) in his speech to <th> ([θ] and [ð] sounds). As a result, a combination of narrative comment and variant spelling helps suggest the distinctive voice of the character. All [s], [z], [θ], and [ð] are fricatives, but [θ] and [ð] seem to be easier for Sleary to pronounce because they require a less specific positioning of the tongue. While it is possible to explain Sleary's speech economically through narrative comment (or "telling"), Dickens' effort to change all the instances of <s> to <th> (or "showing") demonstrates unequivocally his intention of forcing the reader to imitate Sleary's way of spitting out the [θ] and [ð] sounds. Whereas in *David Copperfield* the reader is informed about Littimer's special treatment of the [s] sound without being required to mimic his pronunciation, in Sleary's speech quoted from *Hard Times* above, the reader faces the considerable challenge of forsaking some usual pronunciations and being forced to adopt the character's style when reading aloud.

#### *Comments on Characters' Use of Language that Suits the Situation*

Sometimes Dickens described his characters' use of language to suit the situation. In *Dombey and Son*, Mrs. Mac Stinger said, ". . . don't know that I lost money by that man, and by his guzzlings and his muzzlings," and the narrator comments as follows: "Mrs. Mac Stinger used the last word for the joint sake of alliteration and aggravation, rather than for the expression of any idea" (*DS*, 39:604). This comment stresses the pragmatic motivation of Mrs. Mac Stinger's word choice and explains how she used similar-sounding words to express her annoyance. Interestingly, however, the two words "guzzlings" and "muzzlings" do not alliterate—they rhyme. Dickens' comment is thus ironic and further indicates Mrs. Mac Stinger's arbitrary use of the language when she was agitated.

Another character in the same novel, Mr. Bunsby, might be considered to be a sharper language user. Captain Cuttle said "'no more. There he lays, all his days—' 'Mr. Busby, who had a musical ear, suddenly bellowed, 'In the Bays of Biscay, O!'" (*DS*, 39:600). Having "a musical ear," Mr. Busby discerned the rhymes "lays" and "days" in Cuttle's speech and picked up on the rhyming pattern in his "Bays" and "Biscay." Dickens created a comical character whose choice of words is pragmatically driven.

Examples in this section tell the reader-aloud little about how the speech should be produced, but nevertheless supply information about the speech habits of the characters and reveal Dickens's attentiveness to spoken linguistic features such as alliteration and rhyme.

### **Punctuation as a Sign of Language Awareness**

Typography invites us to see how Dickens conveyed orality through print. For example, italicizing key words in characters' speech to suggest emphasis or significant increase in volume is common in Dickens' fiction. This section focuses on punctuation, an element of typography, and studies the speech patterns it signals.

Punctuation has long been regarded as an aid for reading aloud. In *The Stuff of Literature: Physical Aspects of the Texts and Their Relation to Literary Meaning*, Edward A. Levenston points out that "Renaissance punctuation was . . . basically rhetorical, a guide to reading aloud" (1992:66). The significance of punctuation for spoken performance continued to the Victorian era. For example, Levenston investigates the punctuation in one passage from Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and remarks (70): "It seems designed to be read aloud, with appropriately long pauses between the sentences to add to the suspense. And even if the Brontë sisters never gave public readings of the novels; both Charles Dickens and Mark Twain did just that." Dickens' careful use of punctuation is well acknowledged. As Malcolm Parkes notes, "Charles Dickens when correcting proofs . . . paid meticulous attention to punctuation" (1992:5). Philip Gaskell observes that "many authors, especially since the mid nineteenth century, have cared about the details of their punctuation and have bothered to correct it. Dickens was one" (1972:342). In a letter he wrote to Miss Burdett Coutts dated 30 March 1853, Dickens complained about printers who changed the punctuation of a letter sent to him: "the printers have taken into their wise heads to punctuate elaborately—thereby destroying [the letter's] simplicity" (1853-55, vol. 7:53). The editors of the letter comment in a corresponding footnote that "the letter [that Dickens wrote to Miss Burdett Coutts] has very little punctuation." It seems that Dickens took punctuation seriously even in his personal letters.

In the novels, physical markers such as punctuation and typography for representing spoken utterances were important because Dickens "knew that his works were read aloud in the family circle and must be effective as sound, it was through the page as seen that he must make his main impact" (Quirk 1959:17). The effects of punctuation on reading aloud have been often observed by critics. For example, John Schad (1992) points out how a semi-colon in a passage from *The Old Curiosity Shop* allows breathing time for the reader who reads aloud. When describing Dickens' writing of *Oliver Twist*, Peter Ackroyd observes (2002 [1990]:243) that "[Dickens] gave his words a punctuation which suggests a more rhetorical or declamatory style; it is almost as if he had revised it so that it could be more easily read aloud." However, Ackroyd did not provide direct examples, or cite critical comments, to support his assertion.

Although a distinction needs to be made between narrative comments and the expressive aspects of punctuation, they often converge and are closely allied. In addition to providing narrative comments to guide the reader in reproducing the characters' speech, in a substantial body of his works Dickens also manipulated and sometimes even subverted conventional punctuation, a visual and written phenomenon, to mark and re-create the speech idiosyncrasies of many of his characters and to encourage a vivid spoken performance. The punctuation complements, consolidates, and elaborates the narrative comments.

### Punctuation Used to Represent Broken Speech

Dickens exploited the dash to represent broken speech. The dash, if not placed at the end of a clause or a sentence, usually disrupts the smooth flow of an utterance. In the following, a large number of dashes is used, two of them even splitting words that are not normally segmented (“impress-ively” and “thank-less”) (*LD*, II. 5:500, emphasis added):

[2] ‘I—ha—I most devoutly hope so, Amy. I sent for you, in order that I might say—hum—impress-ively say, in the presence of Mrs. General, to whom we are all so much indebted for obligingly being present among us, on—ha—on this or any other occasion,’ Mrs. General shut her eyes, ‘that I—ha hum—am not pleased with you. You make Mrs. General’s a thank-less task. You—ha—embarrass me very much. You have always (as I have informed Mrs. General) been my favorite child; I have always made you a—hum—a friend and companion; in return, I beg—I—ha—I do beg, that you accommodate yourself better to—hum—circumstances, and dutifully do what becomes your—your station.’

*Mr. Dorrit was even a little more fragmentary than usual; being excited on the subject, and anxious to make himself particularly emphatic.*

Dashes in this case are found mainly before and after “ha” and “hum,” accentuating Mr. Dorrit’s stammering speech pattern. The post-speech narrative comment, “Mr. Dorrit was even a little more fragmentary than usual,” acts as an explanatory note on the eccentric syntax of the speech. The reader who recites this speech aloud is entrusted to enact Mr. Dorrit’s fashion of speaking.

Dashes can perform a large variety of functions. For example, Park Honan (1969:13), commenting on Robert Browning’s use of the dash in his first published work, *Pauline* (1833), observes that “Browning uses the dash for every imaginable purpose in *Pauline*; it welds together fragments and sentences, substitutes for at least four of the common stops, and indicates ellipsis” (1969:13). Despite the myriad possible suggestions of the dash, Dickens’ reader knows how to react to it and formulate speech accordingly when reading aloud, owing to the specific narrative comments Dickens provided.

Here I would also like to compare Mr. Dorrit’s speech to a speech in Laurence Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy* (1759-67) that Levenston discusses: “—a mote—or sand—or something—I know not what, has got into this eye of mine—do look into it—it is not in the white—.” Levenston explains this speech as follows: “Sterne is well aware that in unplanned speech we sometimes begin structures that never become properly integrated in the syntax of the full utterance. Naturally he uses the dash to indicate such anacolutha and recycled syntax when transcribing speech” (1992:73). In Mr. Dorrit’s broken speech, there are false starts or self-corrections as well: “I—ha—I most . . . ,” “I might say—hum—impress-ively say,” “on—ha—on this or any other occasion,” “make you a—hum—a friend and companion,” “I beg—I—ha—I do beg,” and “becomes your—your situation.” Repeating previously uttered words or making amendments in speech are usual phenomena of live speech, which is characterized by immediacy and spontaneity. Dickens used the dashes in Mr. Dorrit’s speech to evoke these features.



Of the entire cast of Dickensian characters, the notorious Mr. Jingle from *Pickwick Papers* produced the most broken speech. And, perhaps fittingly, he has received much attention from critics. Earle Davis says Jingle has “a rapid-fire, staccato habit of speech” (1940:231). Hobsbaum writes in a similar vein that “[Jingle] has a remarkable style of speech: proceeding in jerks, apparently by free association” (1972:32). Monroe Engel considers Jingle’s speech to be “shorthand-of-the-mind” (1959:85), and David Parker thinks it is “telegraphic” (2002:98). In her article on “Fragmentation in *The Pickwick Papers*” (1992), Anny Sadrin uses Jingle’s speech as an example of broken English and linguistic fragmentation.

The broken, jerky, and “staccato” speech of Jingle, I argue, is conveyed to the reader-aloud through the profusion of dashes. As Quirk puts it, “the recurrent dash” indicates “the inarticulate jerkiness of Mr. Jingle” (1959:16). On his first appearance in front of the Pickwickian gang, Jingle spoke in this way (*PP*, 2:24, emphasis added):

[3] ‘Come along, then, . . . . Here, No. 924, take your fare, and take yourself off—respectable gentlemen,—know him well—none of your nonsense—this way, Sir—where’s your friends?—all a mistake, I see—never mind—accidents will happen—best regulated families—never say die—down upon your luck—pull him up—put that in his pipe—like the flavour—damned rascals.’ *And with a lengthened string of similar broken sentences, delivered with extraordinary volubility*, the stranger led the way to the travellers’ waiting room . . . .

In his narrative comment, Dickens seemed to be providing contrastive opinions regarding Jingle’s speech: “broken” and “voluble” are not close synonyms. Given the typographical evidence, I believe Jingle’s speech is more broken than voluble. The combination of a dash with another punctuation mark such as a comma (“respectable gentlemen,—”) or a question mark (“where’s your friends?—”) signals pauses of different duration. It is not typical for fluent speech to be interrupted by frequent pauses. This difference may underline the reality that the punctuation in the speech is more suggestive than Dickens’ own comments. Though narrative comments are absent on other occasions when Jingle speaks, the punctuation pattern already illuminates his manner of utterance. In every case, the reader-aloud is asked to imitate Jingle’s non-fluent style, pausing and hesitating before every dash.

Dickens also used a combination of dashes and capitalization to depict a broken speech style by including strong emphasis on some capitalized words. The following is a speech delivered by Mr. Micawber in *David Copperfield* (*DC*, 49:717, emphasis added):

[4] ‘I’ll put my hand in no man’s hand,’ said Mr. Micawber, *gasp*ing, *puff*ing, and *sob*bing, to that degree that he was like a man fighting with cold water, ‘until I have—blown to fragments—the—a—detestable—serpent—HEEP! I’ll partake of no one’s hospitality, until I have—a—moved Mount Vesuvius—to eruption—on—a—the abandoned rascal—HEEP! Refreshment—a—underneath this roof—particularly punch—would—a—choak me—unless—I had—previously—choaked the eyes—out of the head—a—of—interminable cheat, and liar—HEEP! I—a—I’ll know nobody—and—a—say nothing—and—a—live

nowhere—until I have crushed—to—a—undiscoverable atoms—the—transcendent and immortal hypocrite and perjurer—HEEP!’

I really had some fear of Mr. Micawber’s dying on the spot. The manner in which he struggled through these inarticulate sentences, and, *whenever he found himself getting near the name of Heep, fought his way on to it, dashed at it in a fainting state*, and brought it out with a vehemence little less than marvellous, was frightful.

Mr. Micawber’s speech appears to be more fragmentary than any other characters’ speech under discussion so far. Whereas Mr. Dorrit and Jingle used broken speech in most circumstances, Mr. Micawber’s language faltered only when he was talking about Heep, “the transcendent and immortal hypocrite and perjurer.” Dickens represented Mr. Micawber’s agitated speech with various typographical techniques, thus making it easy for the one who is performing the speech for an audience. Every “Heep” in the speech is preceded by a dash that aptly signifies how Micawber dashes at the name. Note also that “Heep” is always capitalized, which suggests that the name should be uttered with additional force or loudness.

### **Punctuation Used to Represent Non-stoppable Speech**

A relatively low level of punctuation in a speech represents a non-stoppable speech pattern. Described by Fred Kaplan as “nonstop loquaciousness” (1981:91), Flora’s speech in *Little Dorrit* is often punctuation-less. Raymond Chapman also considers Flora as the exemplar of “breathless, disorganized speech, marked by incomplete sentences and anacolutha” (1994:148). The following is an example of Flora’s outbursts. It is a long speech, but the quotation in its entirety affords an excellent illustration of her style (*LD*, I.35:438).

[5] ‘I declare,’ she sobbed, ‘I never was so cut up since your mama and my papa not Doyce and Clennam for this once but give the precious little thing a cup of tea and make her put it to her lips at least pray Arthur do, not even Mr. F’s last illness for that was of another kind and gout is not a child’s affection though very painful for all parties and Mr. F a martyr with his leg upon a rest and the wine trade in itself inflammatory for they will do it more or less among themselves and who can wonder, it seems like a dream I am sure to think of nothing at all this morning and now Mines of money is it really, but you must you know my darling love because you never will be strong enough to tell him all about it upon teaspoons, mightn’t it be even best to try the directions of my own medical man for though the flavour is anything but agreeable still I force myself to do it as a prescription and find the benefit, you’d rather not why no my dear I’d rather not but still I do it as a duty, many will congratulate you some in earnest and some not and many will congratulate you with all their hearts but none more so I do assure you than from the bottom of my own I do myself though sensible of blundering and being stupid, and will be judged by Arthur not Doyce and Clennam for this once so good bye darling and God bless you and may you be very happy and excuse the liberty, vowing that the dress shall never be finished by anybody else but shall be laid by for a keepsake just as it is

and called Little Dorrit though why that strangest of denominations at any time I never did myself and now I never shall!

There is no full stop in this speech of Flora's, which is in line with Dickens' earlier narrative comment: "Flora, who, whatever she said, never once came to a full stop" (*LD*, I.13:165). It seems that by "full stop" Dickens had more in mind than merely the punctuation component. Perhaps this is an example in which the label merges punctuation with syntactic features.

Eric Partridge points out the pragmatic significance of the full stop: "the period or full stop . . . ends a sentence, i.e. a statement, i.e. the expression of a self-contained or complete thought" Partridge (1999:12). By placing not a single full stop in the whole duration of the speech, Dickens depicts Flora as an overwhelmingly dominant and voluble speaker who speaks quickly (Flora is said to murmur "in rapid snatches" [I.13: 175]) and allows no turn-taking. The absence of full stops in Flora's speech is compensated for by commas that separate complete and distinct clauses that would normally be separated by full stops. I argue that the lack of full stops in Flora's speech guides the one who is reading aloud and confirms that the unusual lack of punctuation is quite deliberate. Flora's way of speaking, in particular the speech under present scrutiny, poses difficulties for the reader-aloud. There are the obvious issues of breathing and speed that have to be taken care of, as well as making sense of the convoluted syntax.

### **Punctuation Used to Represent Lengthened Speech**

Dickens employed the hyphen to lengthen some words in characters' speech. For example, in *Our Mutual Friend*, "M-m-m-m-music." "So insinuating was Mrs. Lamble that she got half a dozen ms into the word before she got it out" (*OMF*, I. 11:139, emphasis added). Also, "away" and "high" from *Dombey and Son* are lengthened to "awa-a-a-ay" and "hi-i-i-igh" (*DS*, 39:604). Dickens described these as "a lengthening-out of the last syllable" and "long syllable again," respectively. "Cheerily" is also lengthened in an earlier occasion in the same novel: "Oh cheer—i—ly" (*DS*, 15:237). This is the final line of a song, and Dickens explained in the narrative that "when it was impossible to sustain the concluding note any longer, the skipper bellowed forth a terrific 'ahoy!'" (*DS*, 15:237), which implies that the last word "cheerily" is exceedingly lengthened. In *The Old Curiosity Shop*, Dickens commented on the prolongation of an interjection: "'Woa-a-a-a-a-a'—dwelling upon the note a long time" (*OCS*, 38:290, emphasis added).

All the above examples of characters' speech consistently present us with an association of narrative comment and punctuation to represent the lengthening of a particular word for the reader who performs the texts for a listening audience. Dickens stretched phonemes by adding hyphens and repeating one or more letters in that word. The technique of repeating a letter many times with the effect of stretching a corresponding phoneme is also used by James Joyce in *Ulysses*. "Frseeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeefrong" and "Pfuiiiiiii" are examples of his phonological strategy (quoted in Wales 1992:108-09). In fact, W. A. Ward (1970:229) believes that "the writer in English most like Dickens is Joyce" because both writers are concerned with "words heard over words seen" (1970:229). In the above examples, Dickens stretched a word partly to

encourage an unusual spoken performance and partly to demonstrate the peculiarities of some eccentric characters, or for the heightening of emotional and intense moments in the narrative. Leading characters in Dickens do not lengthen their words, and even the minor characters speak with lengthened words only when dramatic events occur.

### **Punctuation Used to Represent Slurring Speech**

That the minimal use of punctuation signifies non-stoppable speech has been proposed above. Another minimalist scenario is the complete lack of spacing between words in a speech. "The absence of word-spacing . . . neatly symbolis[es] the slur," Quirk (1959:16) observes when analyzing David's speech in *David Copperfield*: "Steerforth, you'retheguidingstarofmyexistence" (DC, 24:368). David was under the influence of wine and thus lacked the ability to utter clear speech. Other slurring examples in the chapter include (in their order of appearance): "Neverberrer" (370), "Lorblessmer" (370), "I'mafraidyou'renorwell" (371), "Amigoarawaysoo" (371) and "Goori" (371). Gillian Brown uses "Amigoarawaysoo" to illustrate "slurred diction" and genuine drunkenness under the section "Articulatory setting" (1990:131).

Dickens put words together to create odd compounds and distorted normal spellings of individual words. For example, "Goori" is supposed to be a combination of "Good" and "night," as David revealed in his narrative. However, "Goori" by no means invites an easy association with the words "good" and "night," and formulations such as this may challenge the reader's understanding of the speech. Also, when the narrative advances, David is increasingly affected by alcohol, and the slurring speech becomes yet more demanding for the reader-aloud to comprehend.

### **Conclusion**

In this paper I have sketched the explicit markers that Charles Dickens employed to create a spoken- and performance-oriented style within his characters' speech. This style in various ways presumes and encourages the practice of reading aloud. The explicit markers Dickens provided, which include phonetic spellings, narrative comments, and punctuation, are obvious signs that the speech should not be simply skimmed over, but *orally* and *dramatically performed*. They are also direct hints to anyone who reads the speech aloud for a listening audience. However, at times this spoken- and performance-oriented style poses problems, particularly for self-conscious or unexpressive readers. Consider for example Sleary's heavy, breathy, and frequent <th> sounds and Flora Finching's breathless, non-stoppable, and quick speech. These examples show that the reader-aloud is required not only to imitate voices of characters of different genders, ages, and social classes, but also to adjust to a wide range of idiosyncratic speech styles and features when impersonating the characters.

Studying Dickens' use of language from an oral-aural perspective takes into consideration the sociological and historical characteristics of the period when Dickens' novels

first appeared. According to Terry Eagleton, who is quoting Henri Matisse, “all art bears the imprint of its historical epoch, but . . . great art is that in which this imprint is most deeply marked” (2000:3). Since Dickens was writing at a time when the practice of reading aloud was pervasive, his texts exhibit the imprint of that practice. I believe some texts are more suitable to be orally reproduced than others; and the fact that oral-aural features appear again and again in Dickens’ work reflects the writer’s expectations of having his writings read aloud and listened to.

This attempt to investigate the oral-aural features in Dickens’ novels is also an attempt to foreground the role of the reader and the importance of the reading experience in the study of literary texts. My investigation on orality and auralty presupposes the existence of two different types of readers: the one who reads aloud and the one who, as an audience member, reads through listening. Simon Alderson explains that: “the way readers respond to texts (i.e. the kinds of forms they notice, or imagine they see, and find pleasure and value in) is an important area of enquiry” (2001:28). Reader responses to Dickens’ works are thus “an important area of enquiry” given that he was conscious of how his texts were read by the readers-aloud and the responses of the listener-readers to the auditory aspect of texts.

Apart from identifying a dual agency in reading, this kind of oral-aural analysis also points to a practice of reading that depends not only on what is being read, but also on how the text is read. In *The Pleasure of the Text*, Roland Barthes has remarked that “the most classical narrative (a novel by Zola or Balzac or Dickens or Tolstoy) bears within it a sort of diluted tmesis: we do not read everything with the same intensity of reading . . . we boldly skip (no one is watching) descriptions, explanations, analyses, conversations” (1976:10-11). However, my view is that when someone is reading Dickens’ novels, the concern of being or not being “watched” is less significant than the concern of being or not being heard. Because a person who is reading aloud for an audience needs to be able to recite the text more or less in full, the activity of boldly skipping certain portions of a novel does not seem to be feasible. “Descriptions, explanations, analyses” aside, Dickens’ strategy of offering explicit markers for performing his characters’ conversations seems to encourage a unique “intensity of reading”—even of his non-narratives.

*University of Hong Kong*

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## **(Re)presenting Ourselves: Art, Identity, and Status in U.K. Poetry Slam**

**Helen Gregory**

### **Introducing Poetry Slam**

Poetry slam is a movement, a philosophy, a form, a genre, a game, a community, an educational device, a career path, and a gimmick. It is a multi-faced creature that means many different things to many different people. At its simplest, slam is an oral poetry competition in which poets are expected to perform their own work in front of an audience. They are then scored on the quality of their writing and performance by judges who are typically randomly selected members of the audience.

The story of slam reaches across more than two decades and thousands of miles. In 1986, at the helm of “The Chicago Poetry Ensemble,” Marc Smith organized the first official poetry slam at the Green Mill in Chicago under the name of the Uptown Poetry Slam (Heintz 2006; Smith 2004). This weekly event still continues today and the Uptown Poetry Slam has become a place of pilgrimage for slam poets from across the United States and indeed the world.

While it parallels poetry in remaining a somewhat marginal activity, slam has arguably become the most successful poetry movement of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Its popularity is greatest in its home country, where the annual National Poetry Slam (NPS) can attract audiences in the thousands and where it has spawned shows on television and on Broadway. Beyond this, slam has spread across the globe to countries as geographically and culturally diverse as Australia, Singapore, South Africa, Poland, and the U.K. Slam reached England in February 1994, when the first U.K. poetry slam was held in London by Farrago Poetry (2007). Farrago still holds monthly poetry slams today in the foyer bar of the Rada.

Despite the prevalence of slam and the number of intriguing research avenues this phenomenon presents, it has nonetheless received very little attention from academic researchers. Further, the few texts that do exist focus almost entirely on slam as a North American phenomenon.<sup>1</sup> This paper aims to begin to redress this imbalance.

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<sup>1</sup> See for example Eleveld 2004 and Smith 2004; Foley 2002; and Glazner 2000. It is worth noting here that Foley considers oral poetry in a range of global and historical contexts, from ancient Greece to South Africa and Tibet. In discussing slam, however, he focuses very much on the North American context.

## Method

The idea for this paper arose from an ongoing study into poetry slam, which seeks to analyze the re-creation of slam within local, translocal, and transnational communities. The study takes an interactionist stance and operates on the understanding that art should be viewed not as a disembodied product, but as a collection of dynamic social and interactional processes.<sup>2</sup> In line with this epistemological position, the research draws on tools of ethnographic inquiry to produce a rich, in-depth account of slam that aims to be sensitive to the situated meanings of participants.

The data on which this paper relies is derived from 44 semi-structured interviews with poets, promoters, event organizers, and educators involved in slams,<sup>3</sup> as well as participant observation of 22 slams over the course of 12 months. This is supplemented with participant observation of other poetry events and of workshops geared toward slam, and the analysis of materials used in slams, video and audio recordings, promotional materials, and articles discussing slam published in newspapers, magazines, and on websites.

This paper focuses primarily on data that relates to adult slams in the U.K.; however, research on U.S.-based adult slam will also be referred to at various points in order for certain cross-cultural comparisons to be made. An in-depth exploration of U.S.-based adult slam, and of youth slam in these two countries, is beyond the scope of this paper.<sup>4</sup>

There are clearly difficulties in generalizing from observations obtained in just two cities to a country as a whole, and the reader should bear in mind that this paper is based on research largely conducted in London, Bristol, New York, and Chicago. Where slam in the U.K. or the U.S. as a whole is concerned, the discussion reflects the work of other authors or, more commonly, participants' discussion of slam on the national scene. Further, although my research focuses specifically on English sites, I decided to refer to the U.K. rather than to England. This decision echoes the discourse of the research participants, who did not make any explicit distinctions between slam in England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland, as well as reflecting my own experience of slams in England, where Welsh, Scottish, and Northern Ireland poets often compete alongside English slammers.

Every effort has been made to preserve the distinction between local and national scenes where it was apparent. Since the participants in this research often made observations that were not restricted to the boundaries of their cities, however, it would have been erroneous to redirect their discourse in this way. Nonetheless, it should not be assumed that such generalizations provide an unproblematic representation of U.K.- or U.S.-based slam in a wider sense.

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<sup>2</sup> See for example DeNora 2000:38.

<sup>3</sup> Quotes from interviews are presented in this paper in the form of "cleaned-up" speech, which omits the hesitations, overlaps, and repetition of everyday conversation in favor of presenting a more lucid text. See Appendix A for the transcription key.

<sup>4</sup> See also Gregory 2008 for more on youth slam. Another paper focusing on U.S.-based adult slam is in submission at the time of writing.

### **Introducing this Paper**

What follows explores the discourse that members of U.K. slam communities, based primarily in London and Bristol, weave around slam: its nature, purpose, value, strengths, and limitations. Particular attention will be paid to the ways in which these individuals (re)construct their identities in the face of a potentially lucrative cultural import from a more powerful group.

The paper will begin by defining its key terms of reference before going on to explore the ways in which local issues and concerns color the construction of a distinct form of slam in the U.K. The relatively weak position of U.K.-based slam in relation to U.S. slam will then be discussed, with consideration given to the ways in which both U.K.- and U.S.-based slam participants respond to this situation.

The success of slam in the U.S. presents a unique challenge to U.K. participants: How do they take advantage of the potential benefits that slam may bring, particularly in relation to the relatively large and broad audiences it seems to be able to attract, without it swamping a cherished tradition of performance poetry in the U.K.? The remaining sections of this paper will pay close attention to this dilemma, and the ways in which U.K.-based slam participants perform their identities in an attempt to resolve it.

It will be argued that the introduction of slam into the U.K. prompts participants in the performance poetry scene to reassess definitions of performance poetry, slam, and their own identities as artists. In doing so, U.K.-based slam participants strive to define a uniquely British form of slam that enables them to preserve their identities as authentic British artists, while capitalizing on the benefits that this emerging art world may bring them.

### **Introducing Key Terms: “Slam,” “Spoken Word,” and “Performance Poetry”**

Defining key terms is an important foundational task for any emerging academic field. In the context of this discussion, it is particularly important to consider the concepts of “slam,” “spoken word,” and “performance poetry.” These labels are often used interchangeably, as is clear from the titles of books such as *The Spoken Word Revolution* (Eleveld 2004). To a certain extent, this usage is understandable since there are many similarities among the three forms (and forums), and poets often move easily between them. They remain distinct constructs, however, that we should seek to avoid conflating unnecessarily.

In record shops, bookshops, and many other retail outlets, “spoken word” is used to indicate a range of material, from audio recordings of speeches and comedy routines to readings of novels and short stories. When it is used within poetry circles, however, it typically refers to the oral performance of poetry, stories, or other prose pieces. Spoken word poets align themselves more with performance poetry than with traditional poetry recitals, while the term “spoken word” has been used for several decades. It has become more popular with the rise of performance poetry, following the success of slam in the last decades of the twentieth century,

and spoken word is increasingly being associated with performance poetry by individuals outside of the poetry world.<sup>5</sup>

There is some contention around the origins of the term “performance poetry.” Hedwig Gorski is often credited with coining the expression in her column *Litera*, which she wrote for *The Austin Chronicle* in the early 1980s; however, many slam poets also claim the term as their invention.<sup>6</sup> Gorski used the phrase to distinguish her work—performing poetry over music—from performance art, while slam poets used it to denote poetry performed on slam stages. The label has since been applied to poets like the Beats, whom Lawrence Ferlinghetti dubbed the world’s “first performance poets” (quoted in Morrison 2005).

Much like “spoken word,” the term “performance poetry” is commonly used within poetry communities to refer to work that is performed orally rather than presented on the page, and that allies itself more with the conventions of slam than with those of the “academic” poetry world. In the context of performance poetry, then, “performance” is juxtaposed against “reading,” since it possesses elements of acting and displaying that are often seen as lacking from more traditional poetry readings.

It would be erroneous, however, to imply that performance poetry and slam are interchangeable. Indeed, many performance poets are highly critical of slam, refusing to participate within the confines of the slam format. Slam poets, in contrast, rarely limit their performances to the slam stage, and “performance poet” is a term that many would prefer to that of “slam poet.” In the U.K. especially, where slams are less frequent and lower in profile than they are in the U.S., it is rare for poets to adopt the slam poet label, yet many would happily call themselves performance poets.<sup>7</sup>

Since its inception, slam has attracted controversy; even knowing how to refer to it, for example, is no simple matter. As noted previously, slam means many things to many people. On his website (2007), Marc Smith, the founder of slam, defines it in this way: “Simply put, poetry slam is the competitive art of performance poetry.” As indicated in the introduction to this paper, slam may also be seen as an event: a performance poetry competition in which poets perform their own work before an audience, some of whom are nominated as official judges. Though some may still contest this definition of slam, I find it to be a clear and explicit categorization that fits well with the phenomenon as I have observed it. As will become clear, the boundaries of slam do not end here, however, and slam is often viewed as giving rise to a particular style of poetry (and performance). Given this reality, the decision was taken to refer to slam throughout this paper as a “for(u)m”: for me, this appropriately captures slam’s dual (and contested) nature as both art form and forum. Thus, this analysis will be based around the definition of slam that has been detailed above. It will also, however, concern itself with the struggle to define and

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<sup>5</sup> See also the *Canadian Theatre Review*’s recent special edition on spoken word performance for several discussions on the nature and relationship of the terms “spoken word” and “performance poetry” (Cowan 2007).

<sup>6</sup> See Southern Arts Federation 2007.

<sup>7</sup> This theme will be developed to a much greater extent later on in this analysis. See, in particular, the section on “Slam and Performance Poetry in the U.K.”

(re)construct slam according to the particular concerns of individuals and the specific sociohistorical contexts within which they exist.

### **Slam and Slam Formulae in the U.K. and the U.S.**

This section considers some of the ways in which local concerns have acted on slam in the U.K. to create a distinct art form. U.K. slam has thus come to differ considerably from its U.S. counterpart in ways that its participants are often all too well aware.

Wherever slam has landed in the world, it has found related artistic traditions awaiting it. These art worlds and the specific geographical, historical, and social contexts within which they arose work to reconstruct the form, ensuring that it takes on (subtly or dramatically) different forms in each new context in which it arises. This analysis is supported by the work of authors like Bennett (2000) and Mahtani and Salmon (2001), who suggest that global arts are not merely imported wholesale into new sites, but are re-created to fit with local concerns and existing culturally contextualized art worlds. Given this situation, we would not expect slam in the U.K. to be a carbon copy of its U.S.-based counterpart, and indeed it is not.

In contrast to the U.S., where the “message” of a poem is often key, adult slam in the U.K. is typically viewed as being primarily a form for entertainment. In this connection, adult slam poetry in the U.K. sites of London and Bristol typically leans closer towards light, comic verse than the serious, emotive work that is common among U.S.-based slam poets. In an unpublished interview, stand-up comedian/poet Jude Simpson noted (n.d.):<sup>8</sup>

[Slam is] certainly not where people turn to be informed or challenged. In the States I think it’s more recognized as a way of making your point, whereas here part of the whole thing about it . . . [is] being very much about entertainment and witticisms and stuff.

Although it has precedents in the wider performance poetry scene, the comic poetry that often characterizes U.K.-based slam was viewed by many interviewees as constituting part of a British slam poetry formula. The following excerpt is from an interview with London-based performance poet Nathan Penlington (n.d.):<sup>9</sup>

NP: I think [slam] only allows for a certain kind of poetry the majority of the time.  
 HG: Which is?

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<sup>8</sup> Jude Simpson is a “stand-up poet” previously based in London. Interviewees’ real names are used except where indicated. This decision was made following a discussion with participants, many of whom argued that, as writers, they spend much of their time engaged with issues of authorship, and that it would effectively be unethical not to credit them for their statements. While all interviewees were therefore given the option of using a pseudonym, very few decided to do so. The descriptions of interviewees given in this paper are also their own, except in the few cases where this information was not supplied. The term “stand-up poet” references the stand-up comedy tradition, emphasizing the performative and comedic elements of these artists’ poetry. As Jude Simpson remarked: “I describe myself as a ‘stand-up poet’ now, as my act is a fusion of poetry, comedy, and music.”

<sup>9</sup> Nathan Penlington is also co-organizer of Shortfuse, a regular spoken word night held in London.

NP: Very performance-based. It might move into verse or comedy as such or rap. It's got quite a strong performance-based element. . . . So people tend to write three-minute poems that tick certain boxes sometimes, I think.

While the majority of participants readily identified a style they saw as being prevalent in U.K. slam, it was not unequivocally accepted that this constituted a binding formula. A number of participants were keen to emphasize instead the variety of poetry that is performed in U.K. slams, suggesting that what is often called "slam poetry" is simply that which wins slams more often. Nonetheless, both groups of individuals argued that perceptions of a slam formula acted to restrict the development of performance poetry, slam, and the artists who worked within these for(u)ms. According to Lucy English, Bristol-based performance poet (n.d.),<sup>10</sup>

I tended to find that the pieces I wrote for the [Bristol] slams were quite limited. You know, there were some comic pieces. There wasn't a lot of depth in them. I mean, performance poetry to me is any sort of poetry that is presented in front of an audience, and to me the parameters are a lot wider.

Interviewees also identified what was perceived as being a more typically American style of slam poetry. This kind of poem was associated with serious, emotive work, and often focused around the identities of members of oppressed and minority groups. Their observation is echoed by many U.S.-based commentators on the for(u)m. Writer Felice Belle (2003:14), for instance, notes that

the poets there [in the Nuyorican Poets Cafe] speak to social issues including, but not limited to, sexism, racism, police brutality, exploitation, and oppression of the working class. These poets have a sense of urgency about their work and use the stage to speak for those who may lack a public voice.

For U.K.-based slam participants, this American slam style was frequently viewed as being inappropriate for the U.K. context. As performance poet Steve Larkin contended (n.d.), when comparing slam in the two countries,<sup>11</sup>

people like A. F. Harrold<sup>12</sup> are still winning slams here, and it's not just a showy poem done in an oratory style with some passion about what it's like to be gay, Jewish, black, of mixed heritage

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<sup>10</sup> Lucy English is also a lecturer in Creative Studies at Bath Spa University.

<sup>11</sup> Steve Larkin is also the former International Slam Champion and co-founder of Hammer and Tongue, a poetry organization based in Oxford.

<sup>12</sup> A. F. Harrold is a performance poet and occasional slam poet based in Reading, England. His style is often humorous and could be labeled eccentrically British. The decision was made, with A. F. Harrold's permission, to leave his name unchanged, since it was felt that altering it would have detracted notably from the import of this participant's statement. Since it was not considered possible to obtain written permission from all persons referred to in participants' discourse, the names of all other individuals referred to in quotations have been changed, unless otherwise noted.

etcetera that will win the day. It's respected, but there's too much desire for your bizarre cabaret or for your intelligent satire for that to take over [slam in the U.K.], I think.

A number of U.K.-based interviewees viewed this difference as indicative of the presence of a more pronounced slam formula in the U.S. than in the U.K. Consider the remarks of Kat Francois.<sup>13</sup>

I think because our slam scene is not as developed as say (if you go to) New York, it doesn't have a specific way in which you have to perform. I think a lot of poets and people over here are really used to listening to poetry. They're really listening to the quality of work, and they're really looking at the quality of your performance. So you don't have to slam in a certain way to win a slam. You know, most of the time, if it's here, the best performer and the best writer walks away with the prize.

This apparent formula for U.S. slam poetry was heavily criticized, being viewed by many as inauthentic and lacking in artistic validity (Sam La-Rose n.d.):<sup>14</sup>

A lot of American slam poets that I've seen perform have a consistent style that . . . in an emotive sense, goes from zero to a hundred in like thirty seconds flat, and they start off quite calm, quite stable, quite steady, and then very quickly, within the first couple of sentences, they accelerate to this almost insincere, tearful, pained over-emoting. And the first time or two that you see it, it's like "Wow. Wow. That's really amazing. They really feel what it is that they're doing." And when you've seen it a hundred times you realize it's just a thing. It's just a device.

### **Positioning U. K. Slam on the Transnational Scene**

Slam in America has a clearer identity and more formalized, integrated networks, attracting greater media attention and larger audiences than in the U.K. Members of U.K.-based slam communities were often keenly aware of this disparity and of their less powerful position on the transnational slam scene. Poet Nathan Penlington (n.d.) states:

I think American slams work better somehow. I think their poets are geared to the slam format more, and it's bigger in America than it is here.

And according to poet Lucy English (n.d.),

my understanding of the slam scene in England is that there isn't one; that there are slams, but it's not a scene. In America there is a very highly integrated slam network, linking up major cities, and at The Slam Nationals they get audiences of thousands.

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<sup>13</sup> Kat Francois is a London-based performance poet and promoter of the Word Up poetry slam.

<sup>14</sup> Jacob Sam-La Rose is a poet and the artistic director of the London Teenage Poetry SLAM.



Responses to this situation varied. Some participants viewed slam as an unwelcome cultural import and a negative influence on performance poetry in the U.K., and therefore willingly accepted its relative lack of development in the country. For others, however, the benefits that slam could bring to performance poetry outweighed its limitations. A mixture of these viewpoints was often apparent in a single interview, reflecting the highly ambiguous approach that many members of U.K.-based slam communities have towards slam.

While some participants sought to move away from slam, developing their art works outside of the for(u)m, or were content for British slam to remain in its current state, others discussed the possibility of creating a more integrated, high-profile slam scene in the U.K., and establishing U.K. equivalents to Poetry Slam, Inc. (PSI), the non-profit organization that governs slam in the U.S. According to poet Steve Larkin (n.d.),

I'm trying to join up those dots, so that people can get round more; so that a network can be built. (So Hammer and Tongue in a way will be looking, if the right people get involved, on becoming an equivalent to PSI . . . then we can have an undisputed National Champion as well.

This initiative was seen as being able to provide a more integrated, clearly defined, and well-publicized community, a development that would enable it to act as a more powerful player on the transnational slam scene. Participants were keen to emphasize, however, that such an organization would be specifically British, rather than a mere replica of the U.S. model (Sam-La Rose n.d.):

Gill's talking about putting together a kind of national slam organization, basically a national organization of slam promoters and slam poets that would facilitate some of the communications that exist in the States between different promoters and whatnot. I'm not saying that we're modeling things on the States. It's just [that] there are things that should be in place that aren't at the moment.

### **U. S. Slam Participants and the Transnational Scene**

This power differential between U.K.- and U.S.-based slam was also visible in the discourse of U.S.-based interviewees. In part, it was made apparent by the rather limited amount of talk focusing on U.K. slam and by the manner in which U.S. and U.K. slam poetry was discussed. While a number of the U.S.-based slam participants I encountered during my participant observation work were dismissive, or claimed no knowledge of slam in the U.K., the majority of those I interviewed had performed in the country or encountered British slammers in the States and viewed the U.K. as a valid, if unequal, partner on the transnational slam scene.

Just as in the U.K., these interviewees were aware of the more successful, advanced nature of slam in the U.S., and responded to this distinction in a variety of ways. Some participants emphasized the superiority of the American model, suggesting that adopting this system would be beneficial for the development of U.K.-based slam and for the coherence of the wider transnational slam scene. These interviewees were often reluctant to impose their views on

others, however, balking at the idea that they may be implicated in any form of oppression. According to American slam poet Taylor Mali (n.d.),

there is no PSI in Europe or England or the rest of the world, and we've run into problems, and there have been international slam-masters who have asked for PSI to step in and mediate disputes that have happened in Europe between slams, and we always resisted because we didn't want to look like Americans going in and telling the rest of the world what to do; but I think there needs to be some sort of PSI for other continents.

Others, meanwhile, were more critical of the way in which slam had developed in the U.S., and saw the U.K. situation as offering hope for a different evolutionary course, one that may avoid the apparent formularization of slam and its dominance over the wider performance poetry scene. For some U.S.-based slam participants, then, the U.K.'s divergence from the U.S. slam model means that British slam participants may be able to avoid some of the less "palatable" features that they view as having accompanied the development of slam in the U.S. (Heintz n.d.):<sup>15</sup>

The English are struggling towards this [development of slam] in their own sort of anarchic way. Personally I'm relishing the anarchy, because it means that you're all holding on to a little bit of regional diversity and local prerogative in the process, and I hope that survives.

Several U.S.-based interviewees, then, expressed their hope that the U.K., and other countries with less developed slam scenes, may be able to retain some of the regional diversity that they perceive as having been suffocated by slam in the U.S., or, at the very least, offer a national diversity with which to replace it on the transnational slam scene.

### **Slam and Performance Poetry in the U. K.**

Such ambiguity around slam was present in the discourse of both U.S.- and U.K.-based participants; however, it was much more dominant in interviews with the British group. Debates around the validity of slam as an art for(u)m, and whether it was beneficial or detrimental to U.K. performance poetry, were perhaps the most salient feature of these participants' discussion.

On the one hand, slam was generally viewed as a means of attracting broader and larger audiences than were typically drawn to more traditional poetry events. In contrast to poetry recitals, slam was portrayed as being an accessible and entertaining forum that could help overcome the stigma that apparently surrounds poetry in British society. Sara-Jane Arbury (n.d.) states:<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Kurt Heintz, Chicago-based writer and media artist.

<sup>16</sup> Sara-Jane Arbury, of Spiel Unlimited, is a Cheltenham-based performance poet and slam host; "Spiel Unlimited (Sara-Jane Arbury and Marcus Moore) undertakes all manner of spoken and written word initiatives and

I think what slam does, is it turns the whole idea of a poetry night on its head, which is basically: audience come there with a preconceived idea that a) it's gonna be really boring b) it's gonna be dirgey and difficult to understand and something that's not for them. They come along to see a [slam] night that's in a structure and framework like that, which is very accessible, audience-friendly, and extremely entertaining, and suddenly the whole notion of what a poetry night could be is opened up.

In this sense, U.K.-based slam is defined in opposition to the dominant literary world in much the same way as it is by many members of U.S.-based slam communities.<sup>17</sup> On the other hand, the entertaining nature of slam is portrayed as essentially “cheapening” poetry, encouraging the production of work that lacks depth and has questionable artistic value. Bristol-based performance poet Mike Flint (n.d.)<sup>18</sup> presented this viewpoint when discussing a poem that he had written specifically for slam:

I can remember sitting there at the computer thinking, “What can I do that will be so different and it will also be funny?” But it has no real content. I mean it's got no philosophical argument or political debate or anything like that in it. It's just entertainment.

Slam was not evaluated in isolation, then, but rather in terms of the impact that it has on existing art worlds and on the identities of their participants. Slam's relationship with performance poetry was most salient in this respect. As London-based performance poet Steve Tasane (n.d.) commented, “Slam is there to serve the purpose of the performance poetry community.”

The subservience of U.K.-based slam to performance poetry in its wider sense is reflected in the ways in which poets engage with slam in the U.K. Fewer artists in the U.K. define themselves as “slam poets,” preferring instead to adopt the broader label of “performance poet.” Indeed, the lack of sufficient regular or high-profile slam events in the U.K. means that it is all but impossible for artists to pursue a career in adult slam in the region. Slam is thus seen as playing a very different role in poets' careers than in the U.S., where numerous high-profile slam events, including the annual National Poetry Slam, can confer great kudos on their champions and other participants.

While U.S.-based poets may spend substantial periods of time touring around slam venues, and are able to build a spoken word career on the basis of slam wins, U.K.-based poets more commonly engage with slam for much shorter periods of time. They compete only relatively early on in their careers, then leave the for(u)m behind once they have benefited from the instant audience feedback that slams provide, attracted the attention of event organizers, and/or made

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had been hosting slams for over ten years” (Moore and Arbury 2008). See <http://www.thepeoplespoet.com/spiel.htm> for further information.

<sup>17</sup> This topic is beyond the scope of the current paper. I have, however, written elsewhere on the relationship between slam and the academy (see, for example, Gregory 2008).

<sup>18</sup> Name changed on request of interviewee.

contacts within the wider performance poetry community. As performance poet Caroline Jackson notes (n.d.),<sup>19</sup>

I think there's a kind of natural progression in most performance poets' careers, as I've experienced the scene. . . you'll go for slam, that's kind of your training ground on what will appeal to a general audience and what won't, and then you might want to move on and mix that [up] a bit more.

The way in which these poets engage with slam over the course of their careers reflects the ambiguity with which the for(u)m is received in the U.K. There is a common perception that, while slam may increase the profile of performance poetry and poets, its influence must be tempered to keep it from swamping performance poetry completely and reducing a rich and varied art form to a much more limited and potentially formulaic model (Francois n.d.):

It's not as serious out here [in the U.K.], so we can be a bit more laid back about it; but out there [in the U.S.] you can make money from it and it's good for your career. You know, you're National Slam Champion or you win these big slams. You make money. You make a name for yourself, and to be recognized as a quality performance poet out there you have to win slams, whereas over here you don't.

U.S. slam is thus perceived by many U.K.-based slam participants as something of a poisoned chalice, providing more substantial rewards for slam winners in terms of money and prestige while simultaneously creating greater pressure to perform in and win slams. Although members of U.K.-based slam communities saw benefits to be reaped from following the American model, there was also often reluctance to encourage the development of slam in the U.K. for fear that it may stifle performance poetry more broadly and limit the forums in which poets may readily perform their work.

### **Defining an Identity for U.K. Slam**

Whether they sought to encourage the development of slam or dismiss it altogether, U.K.-based participants were keen to maintain a uniquely British identity for performance poetry in the country. Slam poet Ian Sills (n.d.) states:<sup>20</sup>

I think there's an importance of being original. It's the difference I think between being inspired by another style and blatantly trying to impersonate it. As I say, some of the top British poets have an American sort of a style, but they don't want anybody to think they're trying to be American.

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<sup>19</sup> Caroline Jackson is also an events organizer, writer, and tutor in Bristol. Her name was changed upon request.

<sup>20</sup> Ian Sills is a Bristol-based performance/slam poet and poetry organizer.

Those who wished to see the for(u)m succeed in the U.K. extended this desire to preserve a peculiarly British artistic identity into the realm of slam, as poet Joelle Taylor (n.d.) notes:<sup>21</sup>

So we came up with the idea of slam, which, as you will know, is an American idea; but I'm very proud of the fact that I think we've really changed it. We've changed its meaning and its function in London.

Members of slam communities in the U.K. often reacted against what they saw as being an element of American cultural imperialism. Thus they critiqued the idea that slam is necessarily defined by the U.S. model, and that slam in the U.K. is merely a diluted version of that model. This perspective is apparent in my own work as well. As an English performance poet and researcher, I have been keen to emphasize throughout my research that slam in the U.K. has a valid identity in its own right.

The risk that U.K. slam could become Americanized was not perceived simply as being imposed from the outside, however. Rather, the actions of U.K. slam participants themselves were seen as something that must potentially be guarded against. Organizers may (perhaps inadvertently) promote American poets over those based in the U.K.; for example, according to Larkin (n.d.),

because of the people we've chosen for big events, slam poetry has become synonymous with American performers. So now I could put on an American performer; just because they're American they'll get a good crowd. I put on a really top British performer who's been performing for years, who I think is better quality, and I'll get a low turn-out.

Similarly, U.K.-based slam participants may adopt a performance/writing style that is associated more with American slammers. These individuals were decried by many U.K.-based performance poets as being inauthentic, striving simply to achieve success rather than to create high-quality, original art. Those who maintained a style that was viewed as true to their identities as British artists, however, were often depicted by interviewees here as being authentic and innovative (Larkin n.d.):

At no point in Joan Calden's set will you hear an Americanism. . . . You will hear a London accent and a strong London accent, and near rhymes based on that particular accent as well, which if delivered in a New York or an L.A. accent just would not work at all, and that's a strong theme of her work, and that's why I think she's such a strong artist, because she is somebody who is authentic.

Thus these interviewees were concerned that slam performances should represent original work that does not seek to artificially re-create an American style of poetry simply to win slams, and, in the process, undermine a strong British tradition of performance poetry. London-based poet John Paul O'Neill (n.d.) concludes:

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<sup>21</sup> Joelle Taylor is a performance poet based in London.

I think that, as U.K. poetry people, we need to look at the organization, look at the professionalism of their set-up [in America], look at the format; but what we mustn't do is what hip hop did when it first came to the U.K., you know, having U.K. rappers who would be rapping in American accents. I think that we need to use the kind of professionalism, use the kind of structure, but look at the structures that they've set up, and apply them to the U.K. where it's appropriate; adapt them where it's appropriate; but always be performing U.K. poetry, and not trying to be second-rate copies of Americans.

U.K.-based slam participants thus strive to maintain a delicate balancing act; seeking to capitalize on the many benefits that slam may bring to the performance poetry world—such as greater media coverage, a recognized career path, more substantial financial rewards, and attracting new and larger audiences to the genre—yet without allowing slam to swamp performance poetry completely and thus restrict the career paths that performance poets may follow and the kinds of poetry that they may readily perform. The introduction of slam into the U.K., then, may be seen as a disruption to the wider performance poetry community, prompting poets to redefine both the art form within which they work and their own identities as artists.

### **Power in Performance: Negotiating Identity through Everyday Interaction**

In a Goffmanian context,<sup>22</sup> the discourse of U.K.-based slam participants may be viewed as representing the means through which they seek to perform their identities in such a way that their integrity as British artists and their control over U.K. performance poetry is preserved intact. Further, these participants strive to preserve a “line” within which the ability to master (and indeed reconstruct) what is often perceived as being a cultural import heightens, rather than detracts from, their identities as skilled, authentic British artists.

Something of the opposite process is apparent in the discourse of U.S.-based slam participants as they seek to retain their control over slam and their status as more powerful and skilled slam poets, without appearing to be (or indeed becoming) domineering cultural imperialists. Thus this analysis may be used to illuminate the construction and maintenance of preferred identities within both U.K.- and U.S.-based slam, and to explore the links between the ways in which slam participants perform their identities and the complex power relations through which they seek to navigate during the course of their everyday interactions. As Peter Middleton (2005:24) notes in his discussion of the contemporary poetry reading, identity is “closely bound up” with authority.

Slam is typically viewed by poets based in U.K. cities like Bristol and London as being subservient to performance poetry; yet its impact on this genre is difficult to ignore. This is particularly true for those who have chosen to engage with rather than dismiss slam. These individuals must walk a precarious line, maintaining their localized artistic (and personal) identities, while drawing on a global artistic for(u)m.

For many U.K.-based slam participants, it would seem that the issues of artistic identity that slam introduces remain unresolved. Because of this situation, the process of negotiation

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<sup>22</sup> See Goffman's *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959) for further explanation.

through which identity is constructed is particularly visible in the discourse of these participants. Interviewees often supplied more questions than answers to questions such as the following: Do the benefits of slam outweigh its negative impact on performance poetry? Can the development of slam be encouraged in the U.K. without its taking over the performance poetry scene? Is it possible (or desirable) to label oneself a “slam poet” in the U.K.? How can U.K. slam be constructed in such a way that it possesses unique national and local identities? And what is the extent to which the American slam model may be implemented in the U.K. without detracting from these identities?

While resistance to a perceived American cultural hegemony affects how many U.K.-based performance poets seek to (re)define their identities (and that of U.K. slam itself), it is important not to overemphasize the role that the power relations between these two countries play in the performance and (re)construction of slam participants’ identities. The majority of the U.K.-based participants I interviewed had performed in U.S. slams or seen American slam poets in the U.K. and were well aware of slam’s American roots and of the thriving slam scene there. Yet this is not necessarily the case for all those who participate in U.K.-based slams. Indeed, many individuals who take part in U.K. slams have only a sparse knowledge of slam outside of their local area. One schoolteacher and youth slam participant with whom I spoke, for instance, had no idea that slam existed in an adult context. Similarly, one Bristol-based interviewee insisted that slams, typically run on a first-come, first-served basis, were often invitational events, since this was her only experience of the for(u)m.

These participants are largely unaware of slam’s status as an American cultural import and have not participated on the transnational slam scene. Thus they can hardly be considered to be fighting against the American domination of slam. Because such individuals formed only a small part of the sample, however, drawing any substantial conclusions about this group is problematic. Instead, we must content ourselves, for now at least, with the observation that there is a range of power relations that affect slam participants’ performances of identity, and that these vary, depending on the nature of the actors involved and their position in local, translocal, and transnational slam communities.

## **Conclusions**

The nature of slam varies according to the geographical contexts within which it is realized. Slam in the U.K. is influenced by artistic traditions and cultures distinct from those that affect the for(u)m in the U.S. and is thus (re)constructed very differently. For many U.K.-based slam participants, the introduction of slam casts into question their artistic identity, as they seek to define both slam itself and their own position in relation to the for(u)m. They thus strive to construct a uniquely British identity for slam that aids, rather than threatens, U.K. performance poetry and their own identities as authentic British artists. The recognition that slam is a U.S. cultural import, which is much more developed in its home country, plays a major role in shaping this discourse.

Many U.S.-based slam participants are also aware of the power differential between U.K.- and U.S.-based slam, yet it presents them with a very different dilemma. If they wish to

influence slam in other countries, they must do so with great subtlety or risk being portrayed as the kind of domineering exploiters who are frequently derided on U.S. slam stages. Conversely, for those who critique the development of slam in the U.S., slam in other countries offers the possibility of a different and more favorable path of evolution.

This analysis can help us to understand more about the localization of global artistic phenomena, the ways in which artists may respond to the perceived cultural hegemony of the U.S., and how they seek to redefine their identities in the light of changing art worlds. We could argue that

Globalization  
pens America's shadow  
on local art worlds.<sup>23</sup>

This is no one-way transmission, however, but an interactive process. Thus this paper suggests that, rather than unquestioningly accepting cultural imports that derive from more powerful groups on the global stage, art world participants strive to reconstruct them in line with local concerns.<sup>24</sup> In doing so, they seek to perform their identities in such a way that they stand to gain, not lose, status from the influence of these new and constantly evolving art for(u)ms.

*University of Exeter, England*

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<sup>23</sup> This haiku is written by the author for the present article.

<sup>24</sup> The term "art world" is taken from Becker's (1982) insightful analysis of the ways in which artworks are created through the interaction of groups of individuals.



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- Tasane n.d.      Steve Tasane. Unpublished Interview.
- Taylor n.d.      Joelle Taylor. Unpublished Interview.

### Appendix A: Transcription Key

- “ “      Reported speech  
 ...      Missing text  
 [ ]      My words  
 ( )      Transcription doubt

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## ***Defendiendo la (Agri)Cultura: Reterritorializing Culture in the Puerto Rican Décima***

**Joan Gross**

### **Introduction**

Hispanic balladry is one of the most prevalent oral traditions in the Americas; one of the strongest examples of this is the Puerto Rican *décima*. People who sing these ballads today identify with a well-known type in Puerto Rican history call the *jibaro*. The word *jibaro* first appeared in print in 1814 according to Laguerre and Melón (1968) and referred to a peasant eking a living off the land in the high country, or center of the island. This paper explores the projection of Puerto Rican cultural identity in *décima* singing. In particular I show how particular themes evoke an idyllic bucolic past at the same time that formal constraints of the genre are rigidified. I discuss how both these trends relate back to the notion of defending a cultural identity in the wake of colonization and deterritorialization and how through singing *décimas* about country living, Puerto Rican culture is symbolically reterritorialized.<sup>1</sup>

For this research project 14 people were interviewed and recordings were made at nine different *décima*-singing events. This article focuses on 58 *décima* verses that were improvised for a contest outside of Comerío. The salient semantic clusters that emerged revolved around country life and singing *décimas*. All verses were transcribed and words related to these two themes were counted.

### **The Rise of the Puerto Rican *Décima***

The *décima* is a ten-line verse of eight syllable lines and a limited number of rhyme schemes which became popular in the literate culture of sixteenth century Spain, though several authors have suggested connections with the Andalusian *zejel*, *mushawashah* and *kharja*.<sup>2</sup> Bernal del Castillo informs us that Spanish colonizers arrived in America singing octosyllabic *coplas*, another predecessor of the *décima* (cited in Canino 1986:26). The first Puerto Rican *décima* that

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<sup>1</sup> The data for this paper come largely from fieldwork done in the summer of 1990 in Puerto Rico. I recorded *décimas* in several different contexts, including an improvisation contest that took place outside of Comerío that I focus on here.

<sup>2</sup> See Menocal 1987, Jiménez Benitez 1982, and López-Baralt 1985.

we have evidence of today was written during the seventeenth century in honor of the governor, unjustly imprisoned by the colonial government (Jiménez de Baez 1964:69). Evidence for the popularity of the *décima* form in Puerto Rico grew throughout the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries (Jiménez de Baez 1964:65-95).

The *décima* became the dominant oral tradition in Puerto Rico, enjoying long-standing popularity similar to the *corrido* in Mexico. In 1918 J. Alden Mason stated that while “the popular octosyllabic *copla* . . . holds undisputed sway” in the rest of Latin America, in Puerto Rico it is successfully challenged by the *décima* (Mason 1918:290). The same sentiment is expressed in more recent works. In the conclusion of Canino’s *El Cantar Folklorico de Puerto Rico*, published in 1986, he talks about the *décima* as if, with a voracious appetite, it is gobbling up all the other traditional song forms on the island. He laments, “Today’s *trovadores* almost never compose *coplas* or brief song forms, they prefer to improvise *décimas* and when they do create a *copla*, they do it to serve as a *glosa* for a *décima*.” Further on he states, “Although *romances* are totally disappearing they left the themes and topics they used to deal with to the narrative *décimas*.”<sup>3</sup> This statement is followed in the last paragraph of the book with the analysis that the popular traditions of today do not create new poetry, they only repeat the ancient oral traditions of the Spaniards: “Very seldom are we able to find” writes Canino “clearly Puerto Rican creations—except for *décimas*.”

*Décimas* are found in numerous contexts. They are written to be read and published by both elite and folk poets, written to be sung by oneself or another, or orally composed while singing. Practically nobody makes a living from singing, so weekends are the time when most *décima* events take place. Contexts for singing *décimas* include radio and T.V. programs, restaurant-bars, certain market places, patron saint festivals, religious events, folklore festivals, life cycle celebrations, political meetings, events to advertise businesses, homages, and improvisation competitions.

While the formal structure of *décima* lyrics harks back to Europe and North Africa, there is no mistaking the sung *décima* as a Caribbean form. The *güiro*—a gourd instrument inherited from the original inhabitants of the island, the Taíno Indians—forms the percussive base of practically all *décima* songs and in more recent years bongo drums have been imported from the more Afro-Antillean musical traditions on the island.

## Deterritorialization

Deterritorialization lies at the heart of Puerto Rican life, tied to the migration patterns of the islanders. The first soldiers and colonialists came to Puerto Rico in 1508 with Ponce de León and waves of European immigrants arrived from South America and peripheral areas of southern Europe, especially the Canary Islands, over the next 4 centuries. Export of Puerto Rican labor

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<sup>3</sup> Menéndez Pidal says that when the *romance* lost ground in Spain and took refuge among illiterate people, the continuing emigration of these people to America had to continue propagating the tradition there (Canino 1986:7). The cannibalization of other forms by the *décima* as described by Canino is paralleled by the *corrido* along the Texas Mexico border as described by Paredes (1988 [1958]:149).

began soon after the United States invaded in 1898 and today, when over a third of the population lives in the United States, most families have members abroad.<sup>4</sup> This massive out migration affects the entire island: those who remain, those who left and those who left and returned. Several *trovadores* told me that they began to sing *décimas* after suffering for a time working in the cold North, or fighting in the jungles of Vietnam. Away from home, they missed their island.

Physical departure is not essential for a feeling of deterritorialization to set in. Colonization creates its own sense of deterritorialization. People born in a place can feel the loss of their land and old way of life in a somewhat similar fashion as do those who leave. Puerto Rico remained a Spanish colony until 1898, about a century longer than most Latin American countries. From being a Spanish colony, Puerto Rico went directly to being a colony of the United States. Juan Manuel Carrión sums up the Caribbean situation in the following way (Carrion 1993:67):

The Caribbean has been the quintessential colonial region of the capitalist world system. The trans-European expansion that marked the birth of this world system came together with the birth of modern colonialism. Significantly, the first colonies were established in the Caribbean and colonialism persists there up to the present. Throughout a history that encompasses five centuries, colonialism has evolved, taking new forms, in the same way that capitalism and class rule have evolved.

Both on the island and in the United States, Puerto Ricans have been at the center of transnational capitalism since it began, while remaining on the margins of capital generated by this process.<sup>5</sup>

Cultural imperialism also creates a sense of deterritorialization. Cultural traits travel through global circuits of commodification that are not dependent on direct colonization. Even Latin American countries that have never been actual colonies of the United States experience cultural colonization by North America. In Puerto Rico the influence is stronger. New media promotions reach San Juan before they reach Oregon where I live. McDonald's replaces yucca and plantains, English appears more and more frequently and especially in music that one hears on the radio.

Deterritorialization can refer to the forceful imposition of a culture different from your own, whether at home or abroad. It also, more literally, refers to the separation of people from the land that used to feed them. Deterritorialization for food systems researchers names the present situation where agribusiness and industrial food processing have taken over the lion's share of the world's diet (Morgan et al 2006). This is particularly clear in Puerto Rico where most of the food is imported from the United States. From 1950 to 1980 food imports have

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<sup>4</sup> By the 1930s 70,000 Puerto Ricans lived in New York. During the decade of the 1950s about 470,000 people left Puerto Rico for the United States. The 2000 census noted that population of Puerto Rico (3.6 million) was only about 200,000 more than the number of Puerto Ricans on the U.S. mainland. See Gross and McMurray for a discussion of Puerto Rican (and Algerian) music in the diaspora.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Sidney Mintz's work on sugar cane workers in Puerto Rico and the importance of the sugar trade in Europe (1974; 1985).

increased 18-fold (del Mar et al 2001:54). At the same time, emigrants do their best to fill their suitcases with tropical tastes from home before returning to the cold north. Tucked into their bags, one might also find recordings of Puerto Rican music. Through the production and consumption of Puerto Rican music and cuisine, people can partake in a vision of Puerto Rican culture dating back to a time when people “lived off the land.”

### Cultural Identity in Food and Song

Cultural identity is reflected in the food one grows and eats and the songs one sings.<sup>6</sup> But if economic conditions have changed so drastically that people no longer grow and seldom eat the foods of their ancestors, just singing about the food one grows and eats fulfills the same desire for connection with a particular land. I recorded *décimas* in a variety of settings and the two dominant themes were *décima* singing itself and country life, especially procuring and consuming local foods.

The *trovadores* sang about country life in the mountains as the “good life”—this in a period after the destruction of high country agriculture by the importation of American industries. Over the last sixty years, agricultural production in Puerto Rico has become almost negligible. In the 1930s, about 43% of the island’s GNP was from agriculture, mainly sugar cane, coffee and tobacco. By 1996 the amount that agriculture contributed to the GNP had dropped to 1.2% (del Mar López, et al 2001). During the 1950s the urban population overtook the rural population and emigration to the United States almost tripled.<sup>7</sup> From 1960 to 1970, the percentage of the gross national product generated by agriculture dropped from 13% to 5% (Silvestrini and Luque de Sánchez 1988) and it is even lower today.

Few *trovadores* sang about a country life they personally had left behind. Many of the singers had never really lived in the country, but they liked the musical style of the *décima* and they liked what it had come to represent: a utopic vision of country life unfettered by the

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<sup>6</sup> I will not go into the racial view of cultural identity in Puerto Rico, which deserves its own book. The long-standing debate over culture in Puerto Rico revolving around the hispanophile (Pedreira 1934), the Afro-Antillean (González 1993 [1980]), and the U.S. emigrant population (Flores 1993), is a residue of this long history of cultural imposition. Folk poetry and musical traditions have entered into this debate, polarizing genres a bit too rigidly into European and African camps. Local hispanophile nationalists (and folklorists as well) were drawn to the mountainous areas of the island (where African settlement was less dominant) as a laboratory in time where centuries-old folk music from Spain was still being sung by the *jibaro*, or high country farmer of European extraction. The musical forms which were more popular in coastal and urban areas—the *bomba* and the *plena* did not receive the same kind of attention, tainted as they were by being too popular (rather than traditional) and not European. Yet José Luis González informs us that the Puerto Rican farmer of the countryside had already adopted African food and dress and was much less concerned about purity than the intellectuals who wrote about him. He recounts that the 1812 census revealed an almost exact parity between the races that brought about the promulgation of the *Real Cédula de Gracias* of 1815. This was meant to re-Europeanize the white elite in the face of the increasing power of mulattos (González 1993:34-36). Pedreira (1934) claimed that the European *danza* and international boleros and *canciones* represented the backbone of the national music is representative of a movement to emphasize the importance of the culture of the Spanish elite, rather than the Afro-antillean masses.

<sup>7</sup> In 1990 71.2% of the population on the island was urban, but even the majority of those living outside the city had abandoned farming.

demands of capitalism. In the well-known *décima* “*Allá en la Altura*” by Juan Morales, the *trovador* describes this bucolic life.

<p><i>Yo tengo en la serranía una finca bien sembrada desde malanga morada ñame, plátano, y yautía. Es porque al salir el día enseguida cojo el arado, el terreno preparado, señores, y lo cultivo así de feliz yo vivo, mejor que un adinerado.</i><sup>8</sup></p>	<p>I have in the mountains a well-planted farm from purple malanga yams, plantains, and yautía. It’s because at sun rise I immediately grab my plow, the ground prepared, people, and I cultivate it Thus I live happily, better than a rich person.</p>
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There are several examples of popular *décimas* which claim that the poor person surrounded by beauties of nature in the mountains lives better than the rich person. This same theme is used in diasporic *décimas* to express the preference for staying in Puerto Rico, rather than emigrating in the hope of becoming rich in the United States. While there is little correlation between increased wealth and increased happiness, the intense poverty of many rural families in Puerto Rico who suffered under the evils of the pass-book system was certainly a cause of stress.<sup>9</sup> There is such a close association between *décima* singers and the highland peasantry that many *trovadores* take the name of *jibaro* and wear the distinctive hat associated with the role.<sup>10</sup>

*Jibaro* has come to stand for the quintessential Puerto Rican. This nostalgic view of the past is very much a contemporary device that is popular because it is acceptable to a wide range of viewpoints. Whether you are for independence, the commonwealth, or statehood; whether you are Catholic or Protestant, you can still make a stand for Puerto Rican culture by singing about the riches of the land and the life of the *jibaro*.<sup>11</sup>

The Institute of Puerto Rican Culture listed one hundred and five *décima* improvisers on their 1988 list. This mainly represented *trovadores* who had competed in national improvisation contests. Many others were not listed. Old people tend not to compete and new *trovadores* are being formed all the time. Rather than one or a couple *décima* singers being the “bearers of tradition” within a community, *trovadores* appear to have formed their own community. In many

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<sup>8</sup> You can hear Juan Morales Ramos singing *Allá en la Altura* at the wonderful Puerto Rican Cuatro Project multimedia site <http://www.cuatro-pr.org/Home/Audio/Indexaudio/Instrmusaudio/Genres/Cantaores/HermanosMorales/Mejoradinerado.mp3>.

<sup>9</sup> The pass-book system restricted the movement of laborers and criminalized their failure to obtain work (Lewis 1963). See González 1989 for a non-nostalgic description of country life in Puerto Rico before World War II.

<sup>10</sup> Already in 1935, Pedreira notes that the word *jibaro* has changed from being pejorative to being a title of honor and many who claim this title are not really *jibaros* (in Laguerre and Melón 1968:7, 19).

<sup>11</sup> Carrión contrasts the relatively weak political and electoral manifestations of Puerto Rican nationalism with the very strong current of cultural nationalism affecting all formal political pronouncements (1993:69).



ways it is like a subculture.<sup>12</sup> *Trovadores* exist in all parts of the island, though particular towns have clusters of them. There was a great deal of participant overlap in the various singing events I attended. The singers knew each other and spoke of one another with warmth and generosity. This is epitomized by events in which they honor a particular *trovador*. Typically, fellow singers compose songs extolling his or her virtues and present this person with plaques, often painted with personalized *décimas*.<sup>13</sup> Often they charge admission to these *homenajes* and the proceeds go to the person being honored (if they have a great financial need)—otherwise, they are split up among the organizers.

Improvisation competitions have been documented for some time in Puerto Rico as in the rest of the Caribbean. I have heard and read about numerous *décima* competitions in Puerto Rico where two men alternate verses about a particular topic in dialog with one another. In its most common form every composed verse ended with the same line. These events were extremely personalized as they were designed to demonstrate the superior intelligence of one man over another and they were often carried out to impress particular female onlookers at community festivals. It was not uncommon for these contests to end in physical fights. A competitive form between one man and one woman also exists. This type often takes the form of a stylized war between the sexes.

Today, more impersonal improvisation contests are sponsored by the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture, the Department of Tourism, and Bacardi Rum. Winning the admiration of one's community, one's gender or a particular loved one has been somewhat overshadowed by monetary prizes. On an island with 40% unemployment, monetary compensation encourages the development of improvisation and singing skills.

### **Festival del Jobo**

One impressive example of Puerto Rican improvisation and singing skills took place at the Festival del Jobo, outside of Comerío. Twenty people competed in the *décima* improvisation contest. Nineteen of these were men who ranged in age from sixteen to about sixty, but most were around thirty-five. The other participant was a thirteen year-old girl, Victoria Sanabria, who ended up winning second prize much to everyone's delight. (Especially thrilled were her two older brothers who also competed.) Each of the twenty contestants improvised two ten-line verses based on a *pie forzado* which is an eight-syllable line given to the *trovador* minutes before s/he begins to sing. It forms the tenth line of each verse they compose and determines the rhyme for lines six and seven according to the *Espinel* rhyme scheme of *abbaaccddc*.<sup>14</sup> Six finalists were chosen and they each composed an additional 3 verses, giving us a total of 58 verses.

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<sup>12</sup> See Hannerz (1992) for a discussion of complex society and the nature of subcultures and Slobin (1993) for a more in-depth discussion of how musical subcultures work.

<sup>13</sup> Most *trovadores* have walls covered with plaques and trophies.

<sup>14</sup> The poet credited with developing the *décima* in its most elegant form is Vicente Espinel whose *Diversas Rimas* came out in 1591. His name is given to the rhyme scheme that has chased out all the others from contemporary *décima* production in Puerto Rico: *ABBAACCDDC* known as an *Espinela*. Pedro Escabí has analyzed

The Festival del Jobo was held in a pasture wedged between two steep green mountains. It ran from about three pm to eight pm on the fourth of July. Only once during the competition was it mentioned that this was a national holiday and none of the typical references and signs that one hears and sees on the mainland were evident here. In the initial song before the contest began, however, a *trovador* sang that he felt badly for people who suffer hunger and pain because their government is not on their side. They sleep on the sidewalks in all kinds of weather because they lack freedom, a homeland, and a flag. He left this subject rather abruptly to begin singing about the improvisation competition that was about to begin. Perhaps, he saw the *décima* contest as a remedy to the lack of dignity that poor people suffer when their own way of life is devalued. He ended with verses telling the competitors, in the name of Borinquén (the Taíno word for Puerto Rico), to sing and compete well and God would give them luck.

Next, Miguel Santiago, a well-known *trovador* from Comerío, followed with the rules of the contest or a public announcement of the formal devices:<sup>15</sup>

You're going to see two paper bags in the hands of two distinguished ladies who will be with us here on stage. In one bag will be the name of the *trovador* . . . who will come up to the microphone, and in the other will be the *pie forzado* by which the singer will have to improvise. Each *trovador* must compose two *décimas*. We have a list of 20 *trovadores*. Two *décimas* from each *trovador* with the *pie forzado* that he himself will pull out of the paper bag. The criteria that will be evaluated . . . this afternoon in this *trovador* contest are the following: Each *trovador* will have a total of 100 points in each *décima*. 100 points which will be evaluated in the following manner: The entrance of the *trovador* with the music—5 points—(how the *trovador* enters with the music). The rhyme that the *trovador* uses, correct consonantal rhyme, will have a weight of 35 points. The timing that the *trovador* has with the music; (remember that the *décima* is sung; one must be in time with the music)—this criterion will have a weight of 10 points. The content, the body of the *décima*, what the *trovador* says in his *décima*, what is the message that he brings to the one who listens to him—this will have a weight of 35 points. And the closing of the *décima*, how does it close, how does the *décima* go with the *pie forzado* and how does it close on that note—15 points. Which makes up a total of 100 points in each *décima*.

He then introduced the judges and said they were very competent and were chosen with great care. “They are good *trovadores* themselves who know about the art form and they are honest and serious.” The judges indexed this honesty and seriousness at several points during the contest by stepping up to the microphone. They emphasized that they do not discriminate according to sex or age or place of origin. They only judge *décimas*. Once a judge explained the meaning of a local dialect word in a *pie forzado* to a competing *trovador*. Another time a judge announced that the transposition we heard of two letters in a proper name in a *pie forzado* would

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Espinel's verse and found that only a small portion were of this rhyme scheme, which became more popular with Lope de Vega. (Personal communication.)

<sup>15</sup> Santiago had his own radio show on the weekend and also taught school.

not be marked as an error. One judge got up and announced his self-dismissal when his nephew got up to compete.

Each *trovador* came on stage when his or her name was drawn out of a brown paper bag. The first thing the *trovador* did was to ask the band-leader for a particular *seis* tune. The *seis fajardeño* was the most popular, but others chosen included *seis de andino* and *seis milonguero*. There are faster *seises*, like the *seis chorreao*, to which only the most advanced *trovadores* attempt to improvise. The music is very important for it constrains the number of syllables in a line to approximately eight.<sup>16</sup> After choosing their music, the *trovador* drew his/her *pie forzado* out of the second paper bag and handed it to Miguel Santiago to read to the audience. After reading it, Santiago handed it back to the singer who hung onto the slip of paper and occasionally referred back to it. One *trovador* told me of a time when he forgot his *pie forzado*, so holding onto the slip of paper while singing would insure against that, but sometimes it seemed that it was just a nervous tick or that they were stressing the fact that this was originally a literary form and had its base in writing.

Upon hearing the singer's choice of tune, the band immediately started playing. For the first verse or two of the song, the singer indexed the process of thinking through raising eyes, looking very serious and sometimes touching finger to cheek. In what seemed like an incredibly short time, the *trovador* began singing verses. I, for one, was totally astounded at their mastery of the form. The singers' demeanor changed the moment the singing began from an inward thoughtful stance to an outward didactic performance. Looking into the audience, the singers declaimed their verses, reaching out to the listeners, often punctuating the rhythm of the *décima* with arm movements.

As I listened to the songs, I thought that I was hearing formulas. This turned out not to be the case, the similarities coming instead from the repetition of themes. Reading through transcripts of the 58 improvised verses, the major themes that emerged were music or poetry (referring specifically to the *décima* form and its composition) and life in the country where people work hard on the land, eat traditional foods, and enjoy the beautiful scenery. Deictic references emphasizing a co-presence in time and space were also plentiful as is common in improvisatory traditions. This category overlaps with the previous two categories, since the event at hand was an improvisation contest in the mountains. Of the 26 separate performances (20 participants and repeat performances by the six finalists) 17 evoked some aspect of country life in the mountains, 17 made mention of poetry, music, or the act of creating or improvising *décimas*, and 17 made local references to the scenery, the festival and even the weather. At least one of these three themes occurred in all 26 songs and all but four of the songs contained more than one of these three themes.

The word is an important linguistic entity to the *trovador*. Good *trovadores* have large vocabularies. This allows them to improvise without repeating a word, to draw from a large set of rhyming words and to have a group of synonyms to draw from depending on the number of syllables they need to fill out an eight-syllable line. Several *trovadores* I interviewed cited reading as a way to expand one's vocabulary. I was told about *trovadores* of little formal

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<sup>16</sup> White (2001) stresses the importance of lyric-to-music match in the Basque *bertsolaritza* improvisation tradition.

education who knew such arcane words that university-educated people had to look them up in a dictionary. Only one person I interviewed had a copy of a rhyming dictionary and he had just received it from a friend, so he hadn't yet been able to use it when composing *décimas*. If a subject is important in the *décima* texts, words within particular semantic clusters will have a high occurrence. Operating on this principle, I counted what seemed to be the most salient of these clusters within the corpus: *décima* singing and country life.

### Décima Singing

I found a total of 75 words referring to song, poetry, the act of singing or this particular context for singing. The two words that appeared the most in the 58 verses of the competition were “*canto/ar*” which was used 15 times and “*verso*” which was used 16 times. “*Décima*” (in its various forms) occurred eight times, “*rima*” three times, “*canción*” four times, “*Espinel*” once, “*pie forzado*” once. Variations on “*trovar*” occurred nine times and variations of “*improvisar*” six times. All these words refer to the song form itself. Other words referred to the event that was taking place. “*Festival*” comes up seven times, “*público (-a)*” was mentioned five times, “*concurso/concurrencia*” four times and “*competencia*” twice. Here's an example sung by Victoria Sanabria. The number of syllables and the final rhyme is noted after each line. When the final syllable in a line is stressed, as it is in the first five lines of her verse, it counts as two syllables. Vowels that come together within or between words count as one syllable.

<i>Mis versos buenos serán</i>	8 a	My verses will be good
<i>porque así lo quiere Diós</i>	8 b	because God wants it like that
<i>y he de brindarlos a los</i>	8 b	and I must toast those
<i>presentes que ahora aquí están</i>	9 a	present who are here now
<i>y a los que pronto vendrán</i>	8 a	and those who will soon arrive
<i>a esta grande concurrencia.</i>	8 c	at this great contest.
<i>Es dura la competencia</i>	8 c	The competition is hard
<i>pero me encuentro segura</i>	8 d	but I feel sure
<i>defendiendo la cultura</i>	8 d	defending the culture
<i>en la luz de la conciencia.</i>	8 c	in the light of consciousness.

She continues the theme of *décima* singing in her second composition for the final round. In this verse, only lines 8 and 9 deviate from the standard pattern. However, Victoria was able to sing them in such a way that they followed the music and therefore their deviation wasn't noticeable. The rhyme scheme like in the previous example is a perfect *Espinela*.

<i>Cuando miro al alto pico</i>	8 a	When I look at the high peak
<i>yo continúo mi canción</i>	8 b	I continue my song
<i>y la doy de corazón</i>	8 b	and I give it from my heart
<i>a mi hermoso Puerto Rico,</i>	8 a	to my beautiful Puerto Rico,
<i>al grande también al chico</i>	8 a	to the old as well as the young
<i>porque no hay ningún duelo</i>	8 c	because there's no grief

<i>de décima cubre el velo</i>	8 c	in a <i>décima</i> -covered veil
<i>que en una improvisación buena</i>	9 d	that in a good improvisation
<i>yo sigo en mi faena</i>	8 d	I resume my labor
<i>una canción del riachuelo.</i>	8 c	a song of the brook.

### Country Life

The second salient theme in the composed verses revolved around country living. As I mentioned earlier, *décima* singers closely identify with the *jíbaro*, or peasant. In this contest the word “*jíbaro*” or “*jíbarito*” occurred nine times, “*campesino(-a)*” three times and “*agricultor*” twice. In most cases, the singer used this adjective to refer to himself as in:

<i>Yo soy un jíbaro neto</i>	I'm a pure <i>jíbaro</i>
<i>boricua ciento por ciento</i>	100 percent Puerto Rican
<i>y Dios me ha dado el talento</i>	and God gave me the talent
<i>de ser un cantor completo.</i> <sup>17</sup>	to be a complete singer.

Agricultural tools like hoes and picks are referenced, along with planted fields and land. “*Plantío*” is sung twice and “*terreno*” or “*tierra*” four times. The types of homes that used to be common in the countryside that still retain their Taíno names, “*bohío*” (shack) and “*batey*” (communal yard) were mentioned five times. The type of agriculture indexed in the songs is not the once-expansive sugar cane plantations of the coastal regions, but smaller subsistence farms in the mountains. Coffee was a common crop grown on these small farms in the mountains and “*café*” was included five times in the festival verses. (Three of those times, however, were in the *pie forzado*, “*Otros moliendo café.*”) The word “*montaña*” occurred five times, “*sierra*” once, “*serranía*” once, “*altura*” twice, “*colina*” twice, “*pico*” once, and “*loma*” twice, or 14 direct references to being in the mountains.

The following verses that Marcelino Ortiz composed for the final round present a good example of the nostalgic focus on agricultural life in the mountains. Like other descriptions of the *jíbaro*, Ortiz stresses his simplicity, humility, and honor.

<i>Yo aprendí a coser tabaco</i>	8 a	I learned to sew <sup>18</sup> tobacco
<i>también la caña corté</i>	8 b	also I cut cane
<i>y recogí yo café</i>	8 b	and I gathered coffee
<i>y a echarme al hombro un saco</i>	8 a	and throwing on my shoulder a sack
<i>mi pasado lo destaco</i>	8 a	my past I stress
<i>y lo digo con placer</i>	8 c	and say with pleasure
<i>allí quisiera volver.</i>	8 c	I would like to return there.

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<sup>17</sup> Marcos Collazo.

<sup>18</sup> The use of *coser* might be a back translation from the English homonym “sew/sow.” However, it is also quite possible that the singer is referring to the stage in the processing of tobacco when leaves are sewn together and put on drying racks.

<i>Por eso lo digo aquí</i>	8 d	For that reason I say here
<i>sí, representan para mí</i>	9 d	yes, they represent for me
<i>las costumbres del ayer.</i>	8 c	the customs of yesterday
<i>Como tengo sencillez</i>	8 a	As I have simplicity
<i>hoy digo una realidad</i>	8 b	today I speak a reality
<i>yo aprendí por mi humildad</i>	8 b	I learned by my humbleness
<i>lo que vale la honradez.</i>	8 a	what honor is worth.
<i>Lo viví una sola vez</i>	8 a	I lived it only one time
<i>y la quisiera obtener</i>	8 c	and I would like to obtain it
<i>porque no quiero caer.</i>	8 c	because I don't want to fall.
<i>Por eso esto cultivo</i>	8 d	That's why I cultivate this
<i>y pone en mi el motivo</i>	8 d	and it gives me the reason for
<i>las costumbres del ayer.</i>	8 c	the customs of yesterday
<i>Yo sé lo que es el amor</i>	8 a	I know what love is
<i>de uno que era en tierra</i>	8 b	of one who was on the land
<i>cuando su dicha se encierra</i>	8 b	when love's joy is embraced
<i>y trabaja con sudor.</i>	8 a	and works by the sweat of his brow.
<i>Porque sé darle valor</i>	8 a	Because I know how to value it
<i>y sé ganar y perder,</i>	8 c	and I know how to win and lose,
<i>mas no quiero recaer</i>	8 c	but I don't want to relapse
<i>y quiero que se motiven</i>	8 d	and I want you to be motivated
<i>porque en este jíbaro viven</i>	9 d	because in this <i>jíbaro</i> live
<i>las costumbres del ayer.</i>	8 c	the customs of before.

### ***Defendiendo la Cultura: Reflexivity and Reterritorialization***

*Décima* singing has become amalgamated with a certain version of Puerto Rican culture. In the Festival del Jobo, “*cultura*” was mentioned six times in the improvisations and in all but one of these instances it referred anaphorically to the art of singing *décimas*. It occurs in the only repeated line (which was not a *pie forzado*) in the competition, “*Defendiendo la cultura.*” The image of defending the culture was commonly used by *trovadores* who, in conversation, often use the words “defend,” “culture,” and “*décima*” in close proximity. At one event the *trovador*, Eduardo Gorritz, was introduced as “*el defensor de lo nuestro*” or “the defender of what is ours.” At two other improvisation contests, I heard the line “*Quien gana es la cultura*” in a personification of Culture itself winning the improvisation contest no matter who the individual winner might be.

Cultural reflexivity (discourse within a culture about the culture) was prominent in this event and others involving *décima* singing. This is mirrored in the *décima* verses about the *décima* and the act of composing *décimas*. There is an understood link between the two arenas of reflexivity, not just because *décima* singing is a part of Puerto Rican culture, but because

*trovadores* present the *décima* as the sine qua non of authentic Puerto Rican culture. But the *trovador* does not simply sing about this imagined idyllic life identified with Puerto Rican culture. In a metonymic shift, singing *décimas* comes to stand for country living. *Décima* singing used to be an integral part of life in the countryside. Now, singing *décimas* is all that is left of this life to most people who work as waged labor or collect unemployment in the towns and cities.

Reflexivity in the genre has increased parallel to the increasing distance from the *jíbaro* or country way of life. Before, *jíbaros* sang *décimas*. Now, singing *décimas* makes one a *jíbaro* and being a *jíbaro* makes a person “one hundred percent Puerto Rican.” The absent activity of working the land becomes re-activated in song lyrics. *Trovadores* speak of “*cultivando*” the *décima* in the same way that people cultivate the ground for planting. Likewise in Sanabria’s verse above, she uses “*faena*” to refer to her work of improvising *décimas* when it is more commonly used to refer to agricultural labor. In this way, *décimas* are brought “down to earth,” so to speak, and a de-territorialized Puerto Rican culture is re-territorialized in symbolic agricultural labor.

It is also evident in the songs that *trovadores* recognize that both the agricultural way of life and the oral traditions that accompanied it are in danger of disappearing. This is reflected in typical *décima* lines like “If our culture disappears,” “Already our folklore is being forgotten,” and “The customs of yesterday.” This recognition of a way of life that is slipping away causes this subculture to redouble its efforts to perpetuate *décima* singing and to symbolically re-territorialize Puerto Rican culture in the Puerto Rican countryside, not in the burgeoning cities of San Juan, Ponce, New York, and Philadelphia.

Well-known *décimas* warn against migrating. Ramito’s “*Me quedo en Puerto Rico*” is one of those. Here, he sings about how cold it is and how the only peak you can see is the top of the Empire State Building. He asks God to look after his Puerto Rico where *yautía*, *ñame* and *penapén* grow. In the final verse, he addresses the *jíbaro* directly and tells him “Never sell your land.”

The reflexivity that looms so important in *décimas* has affected the attitude toward the formal constraints of the genre. This has narrowed the range of acceptable forms. Rather than harking back to the form used by the *jíbaros* in the mountains with whom they identify, the literate *trovadores* of today by-pass oral poetry and reach back to written forms of the *Siglo de Oro* in Spain. Where once several rhyme schemes were acceptable, now only the *Espinela* is considered correct. Another example of increasing rigidity is that assonance, which used to be a perfectly acceptable way to rhyme, is now considered incorrect. Full rhyme has become a requirement in all the contests. One young amateur singer expressed regret that the *décima* had become so refined. He said that several young people he knew were afraid to compose them anymore.<sup>19</sup>

Even more indicative of the formalism in contemporary *décima* production is an insistence on the primacy of graphemic representation over sound, or the written over the oral. It is not enough that the words rhyme, they should be spelled with the same grapheme. In other

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<sup>19</sup> This mirrors the way discourses of linguistic purity plague language revitalization projects as they impede young people from speaking the endangered languages for fear of making mistakes (Gross 2007).

words, you cannot rhyme “*paz*” (/pas/) with “*más*” (/mas/) because the former is written with a final “z” and the latter with an “s.” Granted, these words would not be consonantal rhymes in Castilian Spanish, but they are throughout Latin America where the rules are being made. There are other examples of how local pronunciation is shunted aside in favor of graphemic representation. In Puerto Rican Spanish “r” and “l” are often pronounced the same, yet it is not considered correct to rhyme “*ideal*” with “*cantar*” and “*palmar*” (as was done by one of the contestants) even if the final sound is identical in the dialect of the singer. Likewise, the final “s” is often deleted in Puerto Rican Spanish, but *trovadores* were counted down for rhyming, for example, “*cocina*” with “*divinas*.” This was done four times in the Festival del Jobo by different contestants. Note that no one says that the singer’s pronunciation should change to reflect the orthography, only that when creating a rhyme in improvisation, one must carry an image in one’s mind of the word correctly spelled. Many *trovadores* in past generations were illiterate, so it is difficult to imagine that matching letters in words was of great concern.

While on one hand, local pronunciation takes a back seat to spelling conventions, on the other hand, the use of local vocabulary is highly regarded as indicating the rootedness of the form in Puerto Rico, and not elsewhere. Taíno words such as “*bohío*,” “*areíto*” and “*batey*” were common as well as those with African origins like “*mangó*” (considered a very hard word to find a rhyme for since it’s accented on the last syllable) and “*ñame*.” Names of local food and drink like “*cuchifritos*,” “*lechón*,” and rum and local fish like “*guabina*” and “*guabara*” were used in competition *décimas*.

Even though the Puerto Rican people continue to leave the country for the city and the city for the mainland, the words of *décimas* serve to symbolically re-territorialize Puerto Rican culture. This is also seen in the frequent recounting of Puerto Rican place names outside the big cities: *Juana Díaz*, *Utua*, and *barrio de Caguana* were all included in festival verses. I mentioned earlier the numerous references to being in the mountains, but I should also mention that the stage was set up in front of a river and words for river were used eight times in the contest. Comerío, the nearest town, was mentioned nine times in addition to occurring in a *pie forzado* where it was repeated twice. On an even more specific level, “*barrio Higüero*” and “*El Jobo*,” indexed exactly where the festival was being held. These place names were mentioned six and four times respectively.

## Conclusion

It became clear to me that rather than merely stating ideas about cultural identity, the *décima* has come to embody Puerto Rican culture, at least for the numerous *trovadores* who see themselves in the role of soldiers defending their national patrimony. Cultural reflexivity, born of a series of cultural displacements, has led to both a rigidification of the *décima* form and an emphasis on connecting *décima* verses with the Puerto Rican landscape. The image of Puerto Rican culture involves a romantic rejection of present existence and the nostalgic longing for a



golden past.<sup>20</sup> This imaginary edenic vision describes an agricultural past in the highlands of Puerto Rico, far from the anomie engendered by emigration and living in cities. The singers feel they have to defend their culture against the onslaught of globalization and the de-territorialization that comes with it. The United States, while colonizing the island, has taken over the airwaves with American music from the mainland and has made English the language of economic success. With this background, it is not surprising that resistance takes the form of composing intricate verses in Spanish and singing about the joys of living on little money in the mountains outside global commodity circuits.<sup>21</sup>

*Oregon State University*

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<sup>20</sup> See Gross and Mark (2001) to see how nostalgia is employed in Occitan rap music and McMurray (2001) for a discussion of how migration promotes nostalgia in Northern Morocco.

<sup>21</sup> I was introduced to the Puerto Rican *décima* when I worked at the Philadelphia Folklore Project and visited Norris Square Senior Center when they were having a fiesta and a couple of the residents were improvising *décimas*. Later I participated in Richard Bauman's NEH project on the octosyllabic line in Latin American verbal art. Puerto Rican students Jorge Martínez and Yolanda López served as research assistants and Mónica Rojas helped with transcription. Yolanda's assistance in Puerto Rico made the fieldwork extremely efficient and a pleasure. I especially want to thank Alberto Medina and all the *trovadores* in Puerto Rico who gave generously of their time and knowledge. All translations are by the author, with help from María Olaya.

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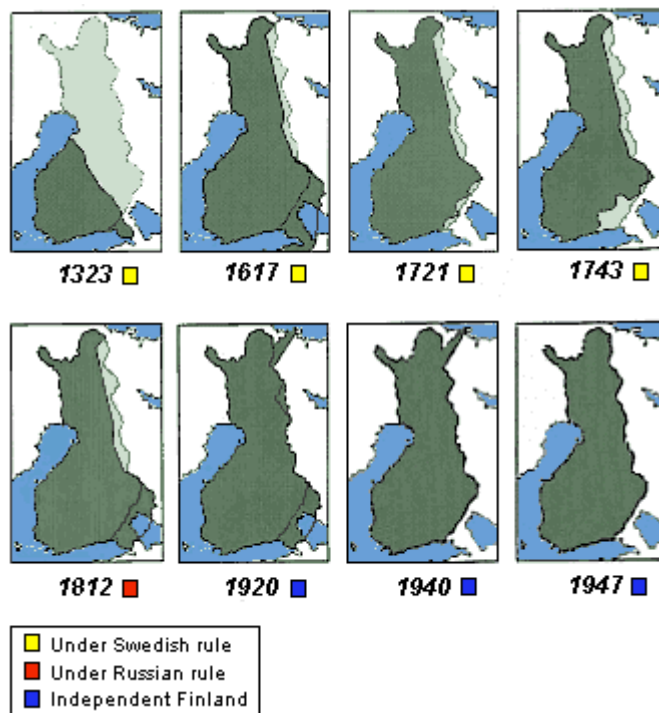
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## Karelia: A Place of Memories and Utopias

### Outi Fingerroos

Karelia is a vast inhabited area in northern Europe of historical significance to Finland,<sup>1</sup> Russia, and Sweden. In Finnish historiography, Karelia has often been described as a borderland or battlefield lying between East and West, and as a focal point. These labels date back to medieval times, when the East and the West, that is, Novgorod and Sweden, struggled for commercial and political power over the tribes that lived in the geographical area of Karelia. At the same time, this area was also the arena for a struggle that resulted in the coexistence there of two distinct religious traditions of Eastern and Western Europe until the Second World War.<sup>2</sup>

Map 1: Since the fourteenth century, the border in Karelia has been re-drawn about ten times. © The Finnish Karelian League

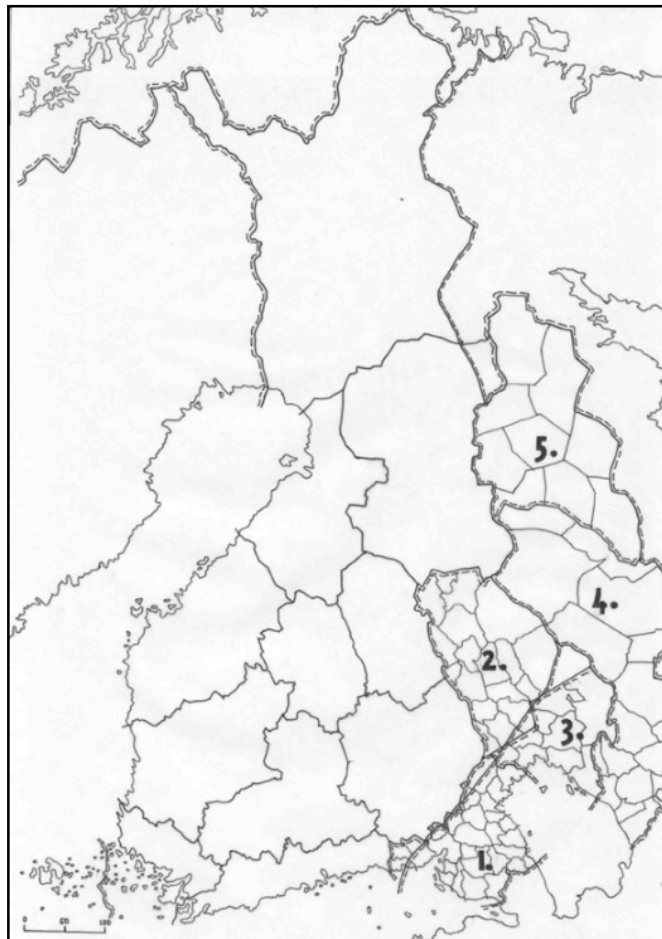


<sup>1</sup> Finland gained independence in 1917.

<sup>2</sup> See Fingerroos 2007a; Heikkinen 1989:16; Hämynen 1994:17-19; and Sallinen-Gimpl 1994:16-17.

Karelia is currently divided between the Russian Republic of Karelia, the Russian Leningrad Oblast, and two regions of Finland: South Karelia and North Karelia. There is also a Russian population living in many parts of the area. Some western parts of Karelia have never been on the Russian side of the border, whereas others have never been a part of Finland. Therefore, Karelia should be considered a heterogeneous area, parts of which are culturally connected to either Finland or Russia. This fact is also evident in the assigned names of Finnish and Russian Karelia. Both Karelias are further divided into several parts depending on the definition. The most commonly mentioned areas are the Karelian Isthmus (South Karelia), North Karelia, Ladoga Karelia (Border Karelia), Olonets Karelia, Dvina Karelia, and Tver Karelia (see Map 2). In total, Karelia has been given over forty definitions in different periods. The central defining feature of all these definitions has always been the border.<sup>3</sup>

*Map 2:(1) The Karelian Isthmus (South Karelia); (2) North Karelia; (3) Ladoga Karelia (Border Karelia); (4) Olonets Karelia; (5) Dvina Karelia. © Outi Fingerroos*



<sup>3</sup> See Fingerroos 2007a; Heikkinen 1989:16; Hämynen 1994:17-19; and Sallinen-Gimpl 1994:16-17.

The historian Jason Lavery has mentioned that during the years 1939-45, Finland's place between East and West was never more visible or dangerous; indeed many other small countries in that position lost their independence during these years (2006:113). The Winter War of 1939-40 and the so-called Continuation War (1941-44) were both followed by the loss of large areas of borderland territory that were ceded to the Soviet Union in 1944. The surrendered areas (see Map 3) included the Karelian Isthmus, Ladoga Karelia, and Border Karelia, and in the north the areas of Kuolajärvi and Petsamo (Russian Pechenga). After the loss, a total of 430,000 evacuees, of whom 407,000 were Karelians, were resettled in different parts of Finland (Lavery 2006:130; Nevalainen 2001).

*Map 3: Finnish areas ceded to Russia in 1944*



The loss of Karelia to the Soviet Union marked the end of over a thousand years of Finnish settlement in the area. The resettlement and compensation of the Karelian evacuees placed a heavy burden on the country. The events of the war years also gave birth to the concepts of a “lost Karelia” and “Karelian evacuees” (the Karelian exiles) (Nevalainen 2001). In this

article I shall concentrate on the lost areas of Karelia, that is, Lagoda Karelia and the Isthmus, from 1917 onwards.

### Different Utopias of Karelia

*Karelianism* has been seen as an idealistic interest in both science and art in Karelia, and particularly in Dvina Karelia and Olonets Karelia, that is to say in areas that lie completely on the Russian side (see further Sihvo 2003:11). This interest has its origins in the national epic poem of Finland, the *Kalevala*, compiled by Elias Lönnrot on the basis of Finnish and Karelian folk poems. Political Karelianism was born in an era when Finland was an autonomous grand duchy in the Russian Empire. The origins of Karelianism proper are usually dated to the 1880s, and it flourished particularly during the so-called “years of oppression” from 1899 onward. This movement had several political goals. In the earlier period (before 1910), it was more a question of autonomous rights and privileges within the Russian Empire (see Jussila 1999:56-60), while after 1909, the political goal of this movement was “the Finnish question,” that is, Finland’s independence (see *ibid.*:87-91), which was achieved in 1917. This heterogeneous and ill-defined movement united the Finnish intelligentsia in a broad way, since artists, students and collectors of folklore, natural scientists, and linguists all headed for Karelia, inspired by a nationalist spirit. In its extreme form, Karelianism developed into a movement aspiring to create a Greater Finland with Karelia as a part of it.

The Finnish literary scholar Hannes Sihvo wrote about a utopian Karelia and a Karelianist orient in his study *Karjalan kuva*.<sup>4</sup> He observed that Karelianism has gone through a cycle of early development, a peak (in the 1890s), and a decline, and that it has its pre-classical, classical, and post-classical works (Sihvo 2003:407). According to Sihvo, there is a niche for Karelianism even today (cf. Haapanen 2001). I approach Sihvo’s utopian Karelianism—what I call the old utopia of Karelia—from the perspective of the exiles’ experiences and memory—what I call the new utopia of Karelia. I agree with Sihvo that Karelianism has manifested itself in various periods, and within the perspective of a hundred years it might have developed into a tradition. The old Karelianism was created by leading members of the Finnish intelligentsia in the nineteenth century, whereas this article concentrates on the evacuees’ memory and reminiscences as well as on some political discussions in independent Finland. However, I will show that Karelianism has been transformed: ideological Karelianism still exists, but new utopias are also reified in memories anchored in the experiences of the exiles.

My article focuses on the places of memory and utopias, on how a lost Karelia has been constructed as a utopian place in Finland after the wars of 1939-45. I start by defining the phrases “place of memory” and “utopias.” Because my methodology is based on oral history,<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Trans. “The Image of Karelia.”

<sup>5</sup> The term “oral history” has not been translated into Finnish literally because research in this field has its own special characteristics in Finland. The Finnish term *muistitietotutkimus*, corresponding to the English concept “oral history,” means “research” (*tutkimus*) on “knowledge” (*tieto*) provided by “memories” (*muisti*) (Fingerroos and Haanpää 2006:26-27).

the terms place of memory and utopias derive their meaning from this tradition. It thus has a slightly different perspective than usual. I will present an interpretation of a utopian Karelia, which is defined on the one hand by the experience of place in exiles' reminiscences, and on the other hand by an ideological dream of the restoration of Karelia that persists in Finland.

The empirical part of my article comprises three different utopias of Karelia, which are examples of a living Karelian identity. First, I will present two predictions by a former fishmonger from Vyborg, Mikko Reponen, also known as "the Prophet of Karelia." His predictions gave hope to many exiles evacuated from the area of Vyborg.<sup>6</sup> The Prophet of Karelia was a well-known citizen of Vyborg before the Winter War, and after the Continuation War he became one of the evacuees from Karelia. He was not widely known in Finland.

Another empirical source for my article is a book entitled *Sain Karjalan takaisin*<sup>7</sup> (2003), written and published by an evacuee, Sirkka Pöysti from Helsinki. My idea is to capture a utopia realized by one evacuee from Karelia by describing how Pöysti returned to her birthplace in Ladoga Karelia. Karelian evacuees have been active writers of autobiographical texts and memoirs about the lost country. The utopias of exiles are the products of oblivion and vague and altered images. They include myths of the lost Karelia and narratives of individual heroism and survival in reconstructed Finland during the period of post-war reconstruction (Fingerroos 2007a).

Third, I will consider the ProKarelia movement's ideological utopia of the restoration of the lost territories (see ProKarelia 2007 <http://www.prokarelia.net/en/>) through a book entitled *Karjalan palautus*,<sup>8</sup> written by an active member of the group, Veikko Saksi. The book represents the manifesto of ProKarelia, which describes itself as a free, grassroots movement. Its political program focuses on the restoration to the state of Finland of the ceded areas of Finnish Karelia, Petsamo and Salla, as well as some islands in the Gulf of Finland. These areas were surrendered to the Soviet Union as a consequence of the last war. In addition, ProKarelia aims at preserving and publicizing Karelian culture. It calls this mission "the Karelian question" (ProKarelia 2007). Most of the members of the ProKarelia movement are leading active exiles, but some Finnish professors and well-known artists, politicians, retired entrepreneurs, and company directors are also members of the movement. The movement's political goals are radical, and it is therefore shunned by the Finnish government, the President, the Finnish Karelian League, and many Karelian societies operating in Finland and abroad, which do not officially participate in the debate on the restoration of Karelia.

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<sup>6</sup> My source is Mikkonen 1967, which was issued by a publisher that specializes in prayer books, and it consists of memories and descriptions by evacuees from the Karelian Isthmus. Trans. "Mikko Reponen, The Prophet of Vyborg: The Apostle of Finland's Years of Destiny."

<sup>7</sup> Trans. "I Got Karelia Back."

<sup>8</sup> Trans. "The Restoration of Karelia."



## Memories and Places

The content of the written source is independent of the researcher's need and hypotheses; it is a stable text, which we can only interpret. (Portelli 2002:70).

The memories used as a source in this article are texts and constructions, which my text reproduces, and which from an epistemological perspective are subjective reconstructions. In other words, my purpose is not to give information about true events of the past but to describe what the significance of these events was and still is—or is hoped to be—for the production of scientific knowledge (cf. Portelli 2002:67, 70). Therefore, as an oral historian, I am interested in the polyphony related to reminiscences of a place. I am looking neither for facts nor the truth about the past in oral history; rather, my purpose is to explore what those who recall the past wanted to do, what they believed in when they were doing it, or what they, in their own opinions, were doing at the time of their reminiscences and before (Portelli 2002:67-70).

Christopher Tilley (1994:10-17) has written about how *place* is a socially constructed expression that is an integrated part of people's everyday life. The interpretation of place includes both subjective and social dimensions, and place cannot be understood without them. In other words, the nature of place depends on the person who experiences it and the way he or she experiences it: a place does not exist without relations and is essentially restricted by the human vision and consciousness. In this article, place is understood as a construction that individuals and communities produce through speech and writing and creation in space.

Based on the same model of thinking, I also construct an analytical tool from the concept *place of memory* for myself. First, in my interpretation a place of memory is a construction, that is, a place (re)produced in reminiscences. Writing, speaking, and constructing are also means of producing places of memory. In addition, I use the concept of place of memory as an expression that includes both subjective and social dimensions, depending on whose perspective is active in the reminiscences.

In his book *Les Lieux de Mémoire* (2001), Pierre Nora explains the mechanisms through which the meanings of a phenomenon from the past—such as a place of memory—are re-created. Nora claims that, in the first phase, a monument symbolizes the particular phenomenon (*collective memory*) for which it has been erected. In the second phase, the monument becomes a place of memory that has been detached from its original purpose, and that carries the historical memory attached to it by those who have experienced it. For example, national holidays are celebrated in exactly the way we have been taught to celebrate them.<sup>9</sup>

The concept of *lieux de mémoire* (places of memory) in the French project differs from the Finnish concept of *muistin paikka* (place of memory), because Nora's original idea was to provide an ideological critique of the historical memory of a nation-state by using the term. However, Nora's interpretation attempt failed in its epistemology, since the process of *les lieux de mémoire* expanded in the way described above, and places of memory became myths for a nation-state and its historical memory (Parot 2005:500-03).

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<sup>9</sup> See Fingerroos 2004:387; cf. Nora 1996:6-7; and Nora 1998:636.

Nora's aim was to (re)interpret the French past critically. In Finnish cultural studies this dimension of the concept of place of memory has not been taken into account. In my own use, places of memory are constructions based on the traditions of oral history. A place of memory is first and foremost a construction produced in reminiscences. Therefore, I am interested in what meanings are attached to a place by the people who remember it, not in what kind of a manifestation of collective memory a place of memory is in itself.

### **Utopias Constructed by Memory**

The word "utopia" comes from the Greek words *topos* and the negative *ou*. Therefore, the word "utopia" means a place that does not exist. It is on the one hand an impossible fantasy and on the other hand a romantic plan for the betterment of the world. Similarly, in the punning form "Eutopia" (from the Greek *eu*, "good" or "well") it can be an (unfulfilled) ideal society of some ideological school of thought. The starting points for the less comprehensive definition—as used by Thomas Moore, Francis Bacon, and Tommaso Campanella in their images of a perfect state—comply with the definitions given by dictionaries: a utopia is on the one hand a place that does not exist; on the other hand it is a place for happy people (Lahtinen 2002:169).

In its widest meaning, a utopia can mean almost any work or a way of thinking that includes some utopian element that refers to something beyond reality, i.e. a transcendent element. In my view, one of the basic conditions for a utopia to truly be a utopia is the fact that, despite its transcendent reference, it has been born in some real place and time and is therefore context-bound. It can be, for example, part of a social movement, or become an ideology or a design for an experimental society. In its extreme form, a utopia leads to reform or even to revolution (see further Levitas 1990:190; Lahtinen 2002:171-72).

Ernst Bloch (1959:258-88) is one of the most interesting post-World War II utopian thinkers because he tries to bridge the gap between utopian thinking and utopias existing in a certain historical reality (abstract and concrete forms). Earlier utopian literature mainly consisted of novels about islands and unrealistic plans to improve the world. Bloch associates anticipatory ideas with the concept of a concrete utopia and compensatory elements with that of an abstract utopia. Bloch's ideas are important because he demands valid "travel plans" and concreteness from utopian thinking. In other words, an abstract utopia should be transformed into a concrete utopia that can be used to answer the following questions: Who are we? Where do we come from? Where are we going? What is waiting for us? (Lahtinen 2002:222; Levitas 1990:88-90)

### **Three Utopian Visions of a Place Called Karelia**

#### *1. Mikko Reponen: Back to Karelia in Seventy Years*

It was late summer in 1936. There was peace in the country, and people did not believe that any large-scale wars were looming. True, there was some fighting going on in Spain, but people thought that that, too, would gradually calm down.

In Vyborg, which was at that time the second largest city in Finland, people had gathered for a Sunday service in the cathedral. The Rev. Bertel Törmävaara was in the pulpit reading the lesson.

Then it happened: a short, bearded man stood up from his pew, walked to the aisle and shouted there in a firm, prophetic voice: “The destruction of Vyborg is near. In three years this temple will be demolished, and foreign troops will march through the streets of the town.”

Inevitably, this incident caused a great commotion. Quickly a number of people grabbed the man, and he was hurriedly taken out. Later he was accused of disturbing the church peace, although the preacher pleaded for his discharge.

News about this dreadful prediction was disseminated quickly around the country, and soon the name of the strange prophet, a fishmonger called Mikko Reponen, was known by everybody. (Fingerroos et al. 1999:7; Mikkonen 1967:36).<sup>10</sup>

Oral history, collected and published in a parish paper *Johannekselainen* in July 1964, offers a narrative about how this prophecy of 1936 was realized: the Cathedral of Vyborg was destroyed by bombing in the Winter War in February 1940, and Vyborg<sup>11</sup> fell in a major offensive in June 1944 to Finland’s eastern neighbor the Soviet Union. Finland finally lost Vyborg in the Paris Peace Treaty on 10 February 1947. After the fall of the city, attempts to recapture it and its adjacent areas failed, and the evacuation of people from the lost areas commenced (Häikiö 2005:1100).

The short, bearded man who made the prediction, Mikko Reponen, was a fishmonger who became a preacher in 1932, and who was best known among Karelian exiles by the sobriquet “the Prophet of Vyborg” after the war. Reponen’s roots were in the village of Revonsaari in Johannes,<sup>12</sup> where he was born on 18 June 1892. The family moved to Vyborg, where Mikko spent his childhood and adolescence, got married, and acquired a trade. Reponen became a preacher only in his later years, when deeply depressed after his wife’s death he experienced “a strong revival,” as he himself recalls (Mikkonen 1967:11):

Heaven opened, God glorified his Son Jesus and sent His Holy Ghost into my heart. I became a new creation. Jesus came to live and rule in my heart.

Oh that joy and bliss. Gloomy Mikko became a happy child of God, because ‘to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God.’

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<sup>10</sup> This and all the following translations from the sources have been made by the present author.

<sup>11</sup> Vyborg is a city in Leningrad Oblast in Russia, situated in the Karelian Isthmus, 130 km. to the northwest of St. Petersburg and 38 km. south from Russia’s border with Finland.

<sup>12</sup> Johannes (Russian Sovetski) is a municipality near Vyborg.

Reponen was a powerful and hardworking preacher who was well known among Karelian exiles. He was refused access to Vyborg after the Winter War because it was feared that he would fan the flames of panic and fear among the Karelians (Mikkonen 1967:10). However, the flame of religion was strong, and he was not discouraged by setbacks. He toured widely through the relocation sites of exiles in southern Finland and wrote many letters to relatives and other members of his religion even after the second evacuation of Karelians after the Continuation War. In a letter written in Nurmes and dated 3 January 1947, this preacher addresses his native parish (Mikkonen 1967:59-60):

Dear members of the Cathedral Parish of Vyborg. I humbly ask for my name to be recorded in the church register of the Cathedral Parish of Vyborg for the year 1947: A former fishmonger, a traveling preacher and widower, Mikko Reponen, born in the village of Revonsaari in Johannes on 18 June 1892. Latest address: Tiurinkatu Street in Tammissuo.

I hope that God will bless Karelian émigré parishes and give you, in particular the Cathedral Parish, a merciful year. We are on a road of suffering imposed upon us by God, when the signs of the second coming of our Lord and Savior are becoming clearer and clearer. Soon, He who redeemed us with His divine blood on the Cross of Calvary will come and take His own to His glory. . . . But before that He who has power in heaven and on earth will take us, the exiled people of Karelia, back to our former homeland in Karelia. Those three iron gates that have prevented our return to Karelia—their time will soon be over. Read the beginning of the second chapter of the Book of the Prophet Habakkuk, where the Lord tells us that he will fulfill his promises.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all now and evermore.

This example illustrates the nature of Reponen's message: his sermons and letters frequently included a prophecy of returning to Karelia after the period of evacuation. Karelian newspapers and memoirs abound with descriptions and memories of Reponen's predictions: "We will get Karelia back in the end, but I have not been told the time. This time, it will be given as a present, not through war. And he said that Russia will be our friend, although it is an enemy" (Mikkonen 1967:30). For many Karelian exiles who believed in God, Mikko Reponen was a man who spoke the word of God and represented a serious religious struggle, and one who provided hope with his words in times of distress.

Reponen's utopian declaration also included a strong belief in his own return. In his sermons, he describes several times how he will be buried in Vyborg: "Mikko will once more walk the streets of Vyborg." However, Reponen contracted consumption in late 1948 and his condition weakened rapidly. As a consequence, his return to Karelia never materialized. He died in Härmä Sanatorium on 22 October 1951 and was buried in Ylihärmä (Mikkonen 1967:26-29, 37, 63).

## 2. *Sirkka Pöysti: I Got Karelia Back*

It is the beginning of July in 1993. A car stops in the center of a village, in the yard of a house that used to belong to some relatives. The house looks the same as it always did; the granary and part of the cowshed are still there. Lake Alasjärvi, serene and beautiful with its familiar shore, opens out before my eyes. The name of the village is Kujansuo. I walk a few steps and see on the other side of the field, high up on the hillside, my birthplace, my home. I walk through the gate to the field and sit down on a bank. A trembling cry escapes from deep within my soul, fifty years of pain and longing. (Pöysti 2003:4).

This is the beginning of a book called *Sain Karjalan takaisin*, or *I Got Karelia Back*, which was written by a retired émigré named Sirkka Pöysti from Helsinki, who realized her dream and built a summer cottage in Hiitola in 1995. Hiitola is a small municipality located halfway along the western coast of Lake Ladoga in Karelia. Pöysti acquired 15 acres of foreign soil for herself there. The process started with her sending an inquiry about a site to the village council of Hiitola and continued with her writing an official application in June 1994. A government ministry of the Republic of Karelia in Petrozavodsk handled the site application and granted a building license, after which a 50-year tenancy agreement was concluded in March 1995. Here is her description (9-10):

I chose as the site of the plot my home hill and the highest spot on the other side of the cape. It has a panoramic view over the narrower part of the lake. The field on the shore is suitable for taking garden soil. I was also convinced that this site for a house had been waiting for me for fifty years.

The book itself consists of Pöysti's reminiscences—how she experienced her return home, what kind of cultural differences and people she met in the area as well as what had happened to her over the intervening years. Pöysti displays an admirable openness towards everything new and different in her writing. She is interested in the Russian history, economy, and administration of the place. Pöysti's birthplace is owned by a doctor's family who speak some English, and the relationship was clearly rewarding for both parties. Pöysti describes meetings with this family in her book, how several generations have adopted the site, and how her own task is to give information about the Finnish history of the place: "In general, Russian youth are not yet familiar with the past of Karelia. Only a new writing of history could improve this situation" (22).

In Pöysti's book the past and the future of the place enter into a dialogue, which forces the Karelian exiles into a reappraisal of the situation. Her approach to writing resembles the goals of Finnish-Russian research on the area: place narratives based on reminiscences are compared with each other, and the results are presented to the public. For example, the researcher Ekaterina Melnikova (2005) from the European University at Saint Petersburg has written about how the population of Russian Karelia describes the Finnish period of the place. The term *rodina*, or native country, is for the Russian inhabitants a signifier of both partial belonging and knowledge of one's roots produced in the form of narrative. Defining *rodina* is a

continuing process, which is ongoing among the Russian population of Karelia. Pöysti describes the same issue in her own narrative of experience:

Unfortunately, there are many Karelians who have been gripped by old animosities. Fears, bitterness, and suspicion deriving from the past corrode some people's minds. It is difficult for people who were transferred to Karelia to understand that the present generation was born there. But they [the present generation] know hardly anything about the past. The elderly people who came after the Finns left have nostalgic memories of a beautiful and well-kept Karelia that has gradually fallen into decay. Their experiences and sorrows are the same as those of the Finns who want to take their children and grandchildren to search for their roots in their lost native region. (55).

In an analytical sense, the most interesting aspect of her book is how the concepts of place, utopia, and place of memory are located. Sirkka Pöysti's Karelia is situated in a Hiitola of memories, in a place where an old house still stands and in a landscape that has been permanently engraved in Pöysti's mind. This site continues to draw her, and her return is like a pilgrimage, on which her soul is looking for peace:

The old kitchen and bedroom are the same as they used to be. In that little bedroom I first saw the light of day. My father told me that there was so little snow in January the year I was born that he had to go and get the midwife with a horse carriage. The striking and heartwarming *lake scenery* that opens up from the window of the little bedroom *was engraved into my heart permanently when I was a child*. It became the landscape of my soul that did not leave me alone. *It draws me constantly and requires me to return on a kind of pilgrimage in search of peace for my soul*. (9, emphasis added).

I have often used the terms "pilgrimage" and "generational experience" (Fingerroos 2007a; Lehto and Timonen 1993) when I describe how Karelian exiles are united by the time they lived in the Isthmus, the war, and the time of exile. The experiences of this generation were so strong that they are cherished by reminiscences and, for example, in pilgrimages to Karelia, now a remote place for them. Further, the knowledge related to the place is mediated for children and grandchildren in narration. This is how the exiles' own *Karelia of memories* becomes familiar as a *Karelia of narratives* to their descendants (Fingerroos 2004:18-19; Lehto and Timonen 1993:90-92).

However, Sirkka Pöysti defies the limits of time and place in a much stronger way in her book. If we start with the notion that a utopia is *ou-topos*, a place which does not exist, and in addition endow it with the attributes of being dreamlike, systematic, idealistic and unfulfilled, Karelia is indeed an ideal, utopian community or world. However, Pöysti has crossed the limits of the definition of *ou-topos* by building a home in this happy place:

As the work was being finished off, *I could already stay overnight under my own roof*. The furniture was partly fetched from the furniture factory in Käkisalmi in the following spring, partly delivered by the village shopkeeper from Lahdenpohja. Seen from the lake, *the front of*

*the house rises proudly high on the hill as if it were an omen of Karelia's reconstruction and new florescence.* (11, emphasis added).

At the beginning of this article, I defined places of memory as reproduced places; this reproduction takes place in reminiscences by writing, speaking, and here physically constructing. Pöysti's house in Hiitola exists both in a place and in a utopia. On the one hand, a house construction project does not fit the definitions of the term "utopia" as a non-place, since the actual cottage denies a utopia and comes close to being a place. In Pöysti's words, a utopia in the sense of an ideal place is only approaching, because the new cottage is an omen of Karelia's reconstruction and new florescence. From the perspective of place, Pöysti's project appears to be too ideal and lyrical, because Alasjärvi is a place where people go to and come back from—generally, the whole of Karelia is the destination of pilgrimages. Therefore, the home located in Karelia is a place of memory that has been reproduced in the present; it is as lyrical and light as summer:

You can enjoy the warmth of midsummer only after cold periods. "The weather" changes in life as well. There are times of joy and of sadness and periods of success and of hardship.

Returning to Karelia has been a great gift to me . . . . When I go to Alasjärvi in the spring, the cranes and swans have already arrived. We start our return journey at the same time in the autumn—I and the birds. (62).

### *3. Veikko Saksi and ProKarelia: The Restoration of Karelia*

With Return of Karelia—The Karelian Reform Plan, ProKarelia wishes to draw the serious attention of politicians, civil servants, the media and the general public to the aspect of the Karelian issue which remains open, that is, peaceful return of the ceded territories to Finland through negotiation (Reenpää 2001).

After the Continuation War, most active Karelian evacuees and some Finnish leaders hoped that it would be possible to return to the ceded areas. Overtures were made to the Soviet leaders, and the question was also raised at the Paris Peace Conference in 1946. However, the new border remained unchanged, and throughout the 1950s and 1960s the question of Karelia was an unofficial topic of discussion at meetings between President Urho Kekkonen of Finland and the Soviet leaders. During the period of Soviet stagnation under Brezhnev, the whole question was buried. In the 1990s Karelia returned to the newspaper headlines and public debate in Finland, but the leaders of Finland and Russia have repeatedly stated that there are no outstanding border disputes or territorial claims between the two countries (Nevalainen 2001).

In Finland there has been no progress at the government level on the possible return of Karelia, but public discussion of the question is currently very lively. The debate on the issue picked up in Finland at the end of the 1990s. The ProKarelia movement's roots can be found there.

*Figure: The logo of the ProKarelia movement*



Veikko Saksi is one of the leaders of the ProKarelia movement. His *Karjalan palautus*,<sup>13</sup> published in 2005, represents the official manifesto of ProKarelia. The aim of this book is to give correct, factual information on what the effects would be were Karelia to be returned to Finland. It considers that the general public and decision-makers around the world should be given the chance to form their own views and judgments on the basis of the relevant information (Reenpää 2001).

The author himself writes in the preface that his work “is a general account and at the same time ProKarelia’s stance on open questions.” These open questions are totalitarian aggression and crimes committed by the Soviet Union, which, according to Saksi, should be acknowledged when a new kind of relationship with Russia is formed. In Saksi’s view, the Finns experienced these deeds after the war so deeply that about 40 percent of the Finns support the restoration of Karelia. In addition, the Weapons Cache Case,<sup>14</sup> war indemnities, and the rights of the evacuees have not been dealt with so far. Therefore, if Finland does not make a move to repair these wrongs the accusations directed at Finland during the war will not be reinterpreted. In Saksi’s view, the whole political leadership, including the President, government ministers, and members of parliament, is sidestepping responsibility over this issue.

Above all, this book wants to activate discussion about these questions among politicians and citizens in Finland. It is not yet time to present Russia with negotiation initiatives. First all the related issues and their effects have to be studied thoroughly. We also have to look for support for our views from the EU and the USA. We are sending a completely wrong message to the world if we remain passive and wait for the initiative to come from Russia. (Saksi 2005:10-11).

The book consists of six chapters. The chapters on “The Background of Restoration” and “The Consequences of Totalitarianism” provide background, exploring, for example, the terms and documents of peace and describing the totalitarianism practiced by the Soviet Union. Finland

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<sup>13</sup> Trans. “The Restoration of Karelia.”

<sup>14</sup> The Weapons Cache Case was a secret military operation following the Continuation War, whereby a large amount of Finnish Army equipment was hidden away around the country. See further Nevakivi 1999:223-24.



is seen as the loser in terms of casualties, loss of territories, and economic costs. The chapter on “The Implementation of Restoration” is the core of the book. It charts the present state of Karelia and presents arguments and possibilities for restoration and how it should be implemented. The book also provides figures and solid statistics to argue for the restoration and constructs utopias that preclude totalitarianism: ProKarelia’s vision, the values of Karelia will be changed, the economy will prosper, and it will be integrated into the West. The book ends with the presentation of the communities promoting the restoration.

Even the author states that the book should not be considered an academic work because it makes no references to academic research. Rather, it is based on “numerous discussions about the restoration of Karelia and many other things among a variety of people.” It is Saksi’s wish that the book should find its way to ministries, research institutes, and schools. And the implications are significant: “if these issues are not settled, we will always remain in debt to the veterans of our wars, to those who constructed this country as well as to the future generation” (11).

Karelia has always been an essential part of Finnish nationalism. It is a site for both revolutionary and peaceful nationalism, and it has been regarded as the source of both the mythical past and benefits to the country as a whole. According to this ideology, Finland constitutes an epicenter and Karelia is located in the periphery. The Finnish folklorist Pertti J. Anttonen (2005:138-43) has written that national Finnish mythology and history have been constructed from a variety of defense situations and the myths about them. Karelians take the role of the Other, against whom the Finns are compared.

When speaking about utopias related to Karelia, it is imperative to refer to Y. O. Ruuth’s work, *Karjalan kysymys vuosina 1917–1920: Katsaus Karjala-kysymyksen poliittiseen luonteeseen*,<sup>15</sup> published in 1921. In this book the Karelian Question is formulated as a political, mental, and economic problem: “The educational level cannot be improved without economic progress; economic prosperity cannot be improved without mental agility and fortitude” (18). The core of this constitutes Finland’s interests in Karelia:

Does Finland benefit from the fact that Finnish businesses get raw materials from Karelia and driving power from its rapids for new factories or from the fact that the Finnish state will get paid in goods in the form of logs for even the smallest help given to Karelians or from the fact that Karelian people will develop into an affluent, civilized, and politically conscious people in a short period of time? (Ruuth 1921:8).

When this definition, which is over 80 years old, is compared to the essence of Veikko Saksi’s book *Karjalan palautus*, a remarkable resemblance can be detected in the rhetoric. The message given to the reader is crystalized in the question of Karelia’s interests: Finland can provide Karelia with economic and educational benefits. In fact, Saksi’s and ProKarelia’s vision goes even further, since according to Saksi Finland has moral and ethical grounds for demanding a re-evaluation of the terms of peace of World War II. This process should be implemented in

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<sup>15</sup> Trans. “The Karelian Question 1917-1920: A Review of the Political Nature of the Karelian Question.”

phases so as to unload “the historically weighty burden” by restoring territories and by paying a variety of expenses.

The starting point for this design for the restoration of Karelia combines both moral and ethical goals and purely economic interests. It is of that utmost importance that Finland and Russia review the historically deep burden between the countries together. The dismantling of moral and ethical tensions will take place by restoring the territories wrongly taken and by agreeing on the payments to cover the deparation and Finland’s expenses. (152).

Saski goes on:

In economic terms, we can call this our vision because it has a far-reaching and great effect: good-neighborliness and friendship between Finland and Russia. These actions are best described as a long-term period of phased actions. The vision should be implemented on the basis of a strategy of peaceful negotiations, for which the point of departure is a win-win situation. This tactic includes the wide dissemination of information about the issue. It is important for Finland that the court decisions on war criminals and the arms cache be reversed beforehand. (152-53).

The discussion about the restoration of Karelia shows that there is a call in Finland for nationalistic rhetoric about Karelia. In fact, Veikko Saksi’s and ProKarelia’s vision can easily be defined as political nationalism, since they depend on Finland’s omnipotence: “It will bring vigor and prosperity to the eastern part of Finland and northwestern Russia. This process will help to avoid a humanitarian catastrophe in Karelia” (ProKarelia 2007).

This utopian rhetoric has irritated a lot of people in Finland. Typically, on 28 May 2005, the Finnish newspaper *Karjala* wrote about how the Finnish Post Office rejected an idea by Heikki M. Uusilehto to have a series of stamps made for his own use with an image of the pre-war Finnish-Russian frontier defined in the Peace Treaty of Tartu (1920). The Finnish Post Office argued in its rejection that a map is not a suitable motif for a stamp because the regulations forbid national and social emblems.

### **Karelia as a Place of Memory and Utopia**

The Finnish social scientist Mikko Lahtinen writes that because the present is characterized by global interdependency and inequality, utopias are very different from what they used to be over a hundred years ago. Life is not free, safe, equal, or self-derivative for people. Perhaps this dire situation in the twenty-first century will also produce utopias of hope some day—or at least rhetoric about what is missing. It might be that there will have to be increasingly serious crises and “learning the hard way” before this happens. However, the crises should not be so severe that people will lose hope entirely. Positive illusions about the future will remain mere abstract utopias if the alternatives presented in them do not include a theoretically

valid analysis of existing reality and the terms and conditions required to change it (Lahtinen 2002:229-30).

I have a different view: we live in the middle of utopias, and these utopias have changed into concrete principles of hope, as assumed in the classic work *Das Prinzip Hoffnung* by Ernst Bloch (1959). Utopias live in their strongest form in the discussion about the restoration of Karelia. ProKarelia calls this mission “the Karelian Question” and states that “an econometric model” of the restoration would delineate the benefits accruing to Russia from the restoration of Karelia to Finland in detail. The most concrete form of this mission has taken the form of an international popular appeal: “Over 130,000 people from 90 countries and 40 states of the USA have signed the appeal” (ProKarelia 2006).

The lost Karelia takes a specific shape in exiles’ memories and hopes, the content of which is not affected by global interdependency at all. In addition, memories and utopias located in Karelian exiles’ minds are different from national and political utopias because they are closely connected with the *experience* of losing a place. Therefore, Sirkka Pöysti (2003:63) feels that she is like a migratory bird that constructs and operates in this moment but never finds its real home: “I suppose we humans are also migratory birds; we do not always know where our real home exists. However, our teacher Luther gave some advice which is still applicable: ‘I know nothing of tomorrow, but today I am going to plant an apple tree.’ ”

On the other hand, Viljo Huunonen (1998:153-54), who was born in the village of Uuras in Johannes, acknowledges the fact that the world has changed: “If the surrender of territories had never taken place and we still lived in Karelia, we would face the same kind of problems there as elsewhere in Finland.” However, he does not reject his experience: “Pondering these things does not wipe out the feeling of losing a familiar place and home. The injury caused by this loss is so deep in this people that it will take generations before it is healed. I wonder whether it ever will be.”

As Giorgio Agamben (1993) has observed, we can only have hope in what is without consolation, and the world would be without consolation if we could understand it as it is. Mikko Reponen first predicted the gloomy fate of Karelia, but then gave hope for its restoration in his later prophecies. As a consequence, *loss* and *hope* are key concepts in reminiscences related to Karelia. These concepts are located in human minds and have a relation to places and times before the border was agreed on in the Paris Peace Treaty. Different expressions about the absent place describe two aspects of experience: memories located in the past and utopias located in the future. The present provides a threshold between these two. However, there is no direct parallel between the threshold of the present and the border. The chairman of the Johannes Society, Paavo Väntsi, invited people to the event in the society’s newsheet as follows:

*The festival has been like a bridge to the past. The lost native district with its memories, experiences of the evacuation, Karelian culture, and the work of earlier generations have characterized the festival in a variety of ways over the decades. (2003, emphasis added).*

However, the purpose of the festival has not only been to look back. The goal has also been to create a bond between people who were born in Johannes and who are now scattered all over Finland. The festival has also provided an opportunity to meet relatives and acquaintances

and to hear how things are going. Personal memories of the native village have been rekindled as memories have been shared. *The bridge also reaches into the future*. In the festival we also try to see what lies ahead.

I am optimistic that the twenty-first century will provide as fruitful a context for utopias as the years after World War II or the social rupture in the nineteenth century. The recollection of the lost Karelia and the hope of its restoration are living, present-day utopian ideas. Karelian exiles' utopias are constructions resembling memory: they are not necessarily true as facts, but they are meaningful for the people who recall them. The Finnish geographer Anssi Paasi<sup>16</sup> has written that on the one hand the exiles' utopias are multidimensional, evocative, and ideal, and therefore may have only a superficial connection with the reality of the lost Karelia. On the other hand, utopias become particularly charged in regard to places, that are invested with hopes and dreams by those who reminisce about them. As a consequence, utopias attached to place by Karelian exiles are different from the Karelianists' ideological dreams; they are personal, experienced, intimate, and familiar. In them, an abstract utopia has been transformed into a concrete utopia.

*University of Jyväskylä*

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## The Anxiety of Writing: A Reading of the Old English *Journey Charm*

Katrin Rupp

The Old English *Journey Charm* is one of the twelve metrical charms<sup>1</sup> that have come down to us from this period. It is an appeal to the biblical patriarchs, the trinity, the Virgin Mary, and the evangelists for help and protection on a journey. The charm suggests that the speaker hopes for aid not only on a particular expedition on which he is about to set out, but throughout the journey of life. The prayer-like poem is intensified by the ritual of the speaker's surrounding himself<sup>2</sup> with a rod to shield him against anything ranging from sore stitches to all evil in the land, as described at the beginning (Rodrigues 1993:156-57, lines 1-7):<sup>3</sup>

*Ic me on þisse gyrde beluce and on godes helde bebeode*

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<sup>1</sup> I list the twelve metrical charms in note 18. The categorization is Dobbie's (1942:cxxx). The classification of *Journey Charm* as metrical is not unproblematic, as Stuart (1981:259) has noted, but she adds that "perhaps we are justified in leaving metrical peculiarities aside." There are numerous other texts that are referred to as charms. Grendon's (1909) edition of Anglo-Saxon charms includes prose incantations, exorcisms, recipes, and healing practices. Obviously, the term "charm" is not quite appropriate to refer to such a variety of texts. However, I suggest the term can be retained (as indeed it is) if we keep in mind Arnovick's (2006:28) definition of a charm as referring to "a linguistic text representing the illocutionary and/or physical action of a ritual performance."

<sup>2</sup> I use the masculine pronoun throughout, even though it is possible that women also uttered the charm.

<sup>3</sup> I use Rodrigues 1993 throughout my paper, but adduce translations from selected other editions where significant. The word *gyrde* in line 1 is translated as *rod* in earlier editions by Storms, Grendon, and Cockayne. In a footnote, Grendon (1909:177) wonders if this *rod* could be a cross. Cockayne (1864-66:vol.1, 389), also in a footnote, is more assertive when stating that it "is probably a holy rod." Cockayne does not give any further explanations, but Storms (1948:221) contends that the half-line that follows "is an argument in favour of a Christian interpretation." The reading of *gyrde* as rod probably leads Cockayne (1864-66:vol.1, 389) to translate *beluce* as *fortify*: "I fortify myself with this rod, and deliver myself into God's allegiance." The idea that the person uttering the charm draws a magic circle around himself is thus lost. Like Rodrigues, Storms and Grendon opt for a translation of *beluce* that emphasizes such an activity. Storms (1948:221) points to the pagan origin of this gesture: "all the evils to be warded off are of secular, pagan, magical character and the verb *belucan* suggests a definitely pagan magical action. The charmer encloses, surrounds himself by a staff." While Storms stresses the pagan nature of the poem, Stuart (1981:260) contends that it "stands apart since it, together with the fairly homogeneous group of theft charms, has more specifically Christian references than it does non-Christian or magical references." Stuart (264ff.) also offers a more detailed analysis of this line. For a thorough discussion of the charms' pagan and Christian elements, see Jolly 1996.



*wið þane sara stice, wið þane sara slege,*  
*wið þane grymma gryre,*  
*wið ðane micela egða þe bið eghwam lað,*  
*and wið eal þæt lað þe in to land fare.*  
*Sygegealdor ic begale, sigegyrd ic me wege,*  
*wordsige and worcsige. Se me dege;*

I encircle myself with this rod and entrust myself to God's grace,  
 against the sore stitch, against the sore bite,  
 against the grim dread,  
 against the great fear that is loathsome to everyone,  
 and against all evil that enters the land.  
 A victory charm I sing, a victory rod I bear,  
 word-victory, work-victory. May they avail me;

The hope for protection against the potential dangers incurred on a journey by uttering magical words and drawing a shielding circle points to the charm's explicitly performative and practical nature (Olsan 1999:401).<sup>4</sup> Indeed, the term *g(e)aldor* used in line 6 (in the compound word *sygegealdor*) underlines the performative element of the charm as it derives from the verb *galan*, which means "to sing," "to cry," "to practice incantation" (Clark Hall 1960:147).<sup>5</sup> According to Lori Garner (2004:20), the Old English charms therefore "require us to move beyond conventional text-based literary analysis and classification to apply performance-based approaches." It is thus in performance that "the charm's function as healing remedy becomes all-encompassing" (20). I quite agree that an analysis of the Old English charms profits considerably from a performance-based approach. However, in this article I want to examine what happens to the charm's originally performative nature when it is brought to parchment. The process of writing down the charm, I maintain, weakens its protective or healing power that is most effective when performed. Moreover, in *Journey Charm* the scribe arguably incorporates an awareness of his own disempowering activity.

In a larger context, the charm is an example of what Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe (1990:5) has termed *transitional literacy*, "a transitional state between orality and literacy" as she defines it. This phenomenon requires that we examine how a work was transmitted and received,

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<sup>4</sup> Stuart (1981:265) also argues that the circle need not necessarily be drawn, but could be "fashioned by some other means" and that it "need not even take the form of an action described continuously around the object to be isolated." However we may imagine the circle, Stuart does not deny that there is some activity, some performance involved.

<sup>5</sup> Stuart (1981:268) has wondered why *Journey Charm* is not called "a victory charm (*sygegealdor*, as it is termed in v. 6) or a battle charm," a title that, according to her, implies that the journey should be read literally, but the imagery of armor and victory metaphorically. She points out that "there is no reason in *JC* for assuming that the protagonist who utters the incantation is about to set out on a journey from one physical location to another" (268). However, I do not see why this possibility should be ruled out. If we accept that the encircling of the speaker with a rod points to the poem's originally performative nature, then it is quite possible that this activity would have been followed by another one, e.g., that of geographical dislocation.

which “admits into evidence manuscript, readers, textual variance and textual fixity, and situates the work in its proper historical context” (14). I would argue that transitional literacy also entails focusing on the anxiety caused by the largely incompatible relationship between the spoken and the written word. For even though the scribe writing down or copying a poem that had been transmitted orally was presumably familiar with its specifically oral characteristics and therefore did not consider them as something alien, he must have felt that there was a difference between the oral and literate word, precisely *because* he was accustomed to oral techniques.<sup>6</sup> This sense of difference is acute when the gestures accompanying the original performance of the poem are described by the content of the text, and, more particularly still, when the speaking subject of these descriptions is the first person singular, as in the initial line of *Journey Charm*.

For my analysis of *Journey Charm* I am mainly interested in the manuscript, not only as physical evidence of transitional literacy but also in the literal sense of the word of writing by hand. Therefore my focus will be on the scribe’s relationship with the charm’s speaking subject that is silenced in the process of being written down. By the same token, the entire charm is transformed from spoken words to voiceless signs. Inescapably, a written *Journey Charm* replaces enchanting activities with a semiotic representation, thus losing some of its original spell.

O’Brien O’Keeffe (1990:52) reminds us that the awareness of the Anglo-Saxons that “through writing, words, divorced from oral source and substance, are conveyed by silence and absence” is above all expressed in the riddles on writing. She points out that “the use of mouthless speakers, dead lifegivers, dumb knowledge-bearers, clipped pinions—all metaphors of loss—reflect an Anglo-Saxon understanding that speech itself is not a *thing*, but that writing, as it alienates speech from speaker, transforms living words into things” (54, emphasis hers). As the eighth-century Anglo-Saxon cleric Eusebius (1968:242, lines 1-2) puts it in his riddle on parchment sheets:

*Antea per nos uox resonabat uerba nequaquam,  
Distincta sine nunc uoce edere uerba solemus;*

Once we had no voice of any kind to say a word,  
now we produce words without an audible voice;

Parchment is the site of the transformation of spoken words into voiceless signs. And it would seem that certain anxieties connected to this transitional activity are reflected in *Journey Charm*.

The speaker of *Journey Charm* expresses his hope that performance and text will be equally victorious when he connects the two in line seven quoted above: “wordsigne and worcsigne.” The terms *wordsigne* (literally, “victory of word”) and *worcsigne* (literally, “victory of

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<sup>6</sup> Expanding on O’Brien O’Keeffe’s notions, Amodio (2004:45) notes that “the poets/scribes who apply these ‘oral techniques’ to the poems they are composing/copying employ these techniques because their direct experience with the register of traditional oral poetics has led them to internalize it, whether they have experienced it through their ears, their eyes, or some combination of the two.”

work”)<sup>7</sup> are linked by alliteration and even quite similar in sound. Within the context of performance, *word* refers to the uttering of the charm, *work* to the drawing of the circle as the previous line would suggest: “Sygegealdor ic begale, sigegyrd ic me wege” (“A victory charm I sing, a victory rod I bear”). In her discussion of these two lines, Marie Nelson (1984:63-64) focuses on the interdependence of the utterance of magic words and the performance of magic deeds. She does not, however, examine what happens to the magic words and deeds in written form. For within the context of writing down the charm, *work* arguably also refers to the activity of transcribing the *words* of the poem, especially if we are prepared to see the staff as a metaphor for the writing tool. Like the speaker of *Journey Charm*, who is about to set out on a journey, the scribe is also about to “travel” over the parchment with his staff/pen. The riddle of abbot Aldhelm (d. 709) on the quill pen likens the writing tool’s activity with traveling through fields (Aldhelm 1968:454-55, lines 3-5 and 3-6 respectively):

*Pergo per albescentes directo tramite campos  
Candentique viae uestigia caerula linquo,  
Lucida nigratis fuscans anfractibus arua.*

Through snowy fields  
I keep a straight road, leaving deep-blue tracks  
Upon the gleaming way, and darkening  
The fair champaign with black and tortuous paths;

According to Aldhelm (454-55, lines eight and seven respectively), writing not only pollutes, but it can also go astray easily: “For with a thousand bypaths runs the road” (“Semita quin potius milleno tramite tendit”). Those wanderers who find the right track, however, are led straight to heaven. This metaphor obviously points to the delicacy involved in trying to do justice to thoughts and speech as they are conveyed to parchment.<sup>8</sup>

The term *work* is used again in both senses when the speaker of *Journey Charm* appeals to holy men and women to direct his works (Rodrigues 1993:156-57, lines 21-25, emphasis added):

*Hi me ferion and friþion and mine fore nerion,  
eal me gehealdon, me gewealdon,  
worces stirende; si me wuldres hyht,  
hand ofer heafod, haligra rof,  
sigerofra sceolu, soðfæstra engla.*

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<sup>7</sup> For the first component, *word*, Clark Hall (1960:418) lists “word, speech, sentence, statement” as translation; for the second, *sig*, “victory, success, triumph” (305). Cockayne (1864-66:vol. 1, 389), Grendon (1909:177), and Rodrigues (1993:157) all translate literally: “word victory and work victory.” Storms (1948:217) turns the nouns into adjectives: “victorious in word, victorious in deed.”

<sup>8</sup> Irvine (1994:103) points out that the riddles were texts used in the grammar curriculum, grammar being the art of speaking and writing correctly.

May they lead and guard me and protect my path,  
 wholly keep me and rule me,  
 guiding my *works*; be to me the hope of glory,  
 the hand on my head, may the host of holy ones,  
 the company of conquering, righteous angels.

The speaker of the charm hopes to perform the right gestures just as the scribe hopes to write properly. Furthermore, the protecting hand (of God?) over the head is to guide the traveler on the journey on which he is about to set out and possibly also the path of life that will hopefully end up in heavenly glory.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, the superior hand protects the scribe's hand traveling over the parchment so that the path he takes may lead him to glory. The glory the scribe hopes for implies both achieving the successful balance of *worc* and *word* as well as realizing the splendor of heaven promised by Aldhelm in his riddle if this balance is found.

The metaphorical analogy between the charm's speaker and its scribe is continued in the lines that follow the ones just quoted and that invoke the writers of the gospels (Rodrigues 1993:156-57: lines 26-29):

*Biddu ealle bliðu mode*  
*þæt me beo Matheus helm, Marcus byrne,*  
*leoht, lifes rof, Lucos min swurd,*  
*scearp and scirecg, scyld Iohannes,*

In blithe mood I bid them [the holy men and women] all  
 that Matthew be my helm, Mark my coat of mail,  
 strong light of my life, Luke my sword,  
 sharp and bright-edged, John my shield,

Leslie Arnovick (2006:117) has pointed out that the military metaphors used here allow for *Journey Charm* to be read as a *lorica*.<sup>10</sup> A *lorica* "originally specifies a leather breastplate, [but] comes to refer to the spiritual armor provided by sanctity or, more specifically, to a hymn begging saintly protection" (117). The address of the evangelists by means of a specifically oral formula, the hymn, points to the charm's performative nature, which is lost to a certain extent when it is written down. But the scribe can appeal to the same protective powers as the traveler to make sure that his journey over the page is a safe one, in other words that he finds the right

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<sup>9</sup> The Old English term *for(e)* of line 21 may be both a geographical trip and the journey of life. Clark Hall (1960:124) glosses as "going, course, journey, expedition" and as "way, manner of life." Grendon (1909:179) clearly reads this line as expressing the hope for protection throughout the journey of life since he translates as follows: "May they strengthen me and cherish me and preserve me in life's course." Cockayne's translation is ambiguous (1864-66:vol. 1, 391): "May they bear me up and keep me in peace and protect my life." "My life" may be "my entire life" or "my life on this particular journey." Storms (1948:219) has "save my life," with the same ambiguity as in Cockayne. Amies (1983) reads the entire charm as a *lorica* for life's journey.

<sup>10</sup> For a reading of *Journey Charm* as a *lorica* see also Amies 1983.

way with words. The gospel authors, as the prime writers of the true story, are most adequate helpers in this case. Deriving from Old English *god spell*, the good and therefore true story (Clark Hall 1960:157 and 315), the gospels are a paradigm for correct “spelling,” that is, for proper speaking, and by the same token the proper translation of the Word into words. Besides being a call for aid in danger while traveling, the address of the evangelists thus also expresses the scribe’s hope for guidance in successfully transcribing the charm (or spell).

The gospel authors are also invoked in the metrical charm *For Unfruitful Land*, where they are equally connected to writing and performing. For a successful harvest, their names must each be written on a wooden cross and put in a hole in the ground. As they are placed there, each of the crosses has to be addressed in Latin: “Crux [cross] Matheus, crux Marcus, crux Lucas, crux sanctus Iohannes” (Rodrigues 1993:130). The power of the oral word (addressing the evangelists) and the power of the written word (the evangelists’ names spelled out on the crosses) are equally important in order for the charm to be effective. By analogy, such a power balance is ideally achieved when the charm is written down. However, such a balance is difficult, if not impossible, to attain.

In addition to raising questions about the proper representation of the spoken word on the page, *Journey Charm*, and by extension all charms, challenge the ability of the written charm to bring about magic changes. Stated quite simply, the charm has to be uttered and accompanied by some gestures in order to be effective. Such gestures may be described in the written charms, but their effect is weaker if they are read only. In a further step away from their original nature, some of the charms no longer include any instructions as to their performance. For example, the description of the medical treatment for a growth in *Against a Wen*, another metrical charm, is reduced to a minimum. For even though the desired effect, the cure of a cyst, is mentioned, there is hardly any description of magical/medical gestures anymore. Such gestures are still indicated in other medical charms, notably in *For Wens*, where the cyst has to be treated with a vessel filled by a maiden with water three times over (Grendon 1909:212-13):<sup>11</sup>

*Gif wænnas eglia mæn æt þære heortan, gange mædenman to wylle þe rihte east yrne, and  
gehlade ane cuppan fulle forð mid ðam streame, and singe þæron Credan and Paternoster; and  
geote þonne on oþer fæt, and hlade eft oþre, and singe eft Credan and Paternoster, and do swa,  
þæt þu hæbbe þreo. Do swa nygon dagas; sona him bið sel.*

If tumors near the heart afflict a man, let a virgin go to a spring which runs due east, and draw a cupful, moving [the cup] with the current, and sing upon it the Creed and a Paternoster; and then pour it into another vessel, thereafter draw some more, and again sing the Creed and a Paternoster, and do this until you have three [cups full]. Do this so for nine days: he will soon be well.

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<sup>11</sup> Called *Against Tumours* in Storms (1949:246-49). Number 114 of the *Lacnunga* (Recipes) in Cockayne (1864-66:vol. 3, 74-75).

In *Against a Wen* we simply learn that the wen's enigmatic brother "shall lay a leaf at thy head" ("sceal legge leaf et [*sic*] heafde," Rodrigues 1993:160-61, line 5), followed by the request that the wen (lines 8-10, emphasis added):

*Clinge þu als wa col on heorþe,  
scring þu als wa scerne awage,  
and weorne als wa weter on anbre.*

Shrivel as a coal on the hearth,  
shrink as dung on a wall,  
waste away *as water in a pail*.

The act of fetching water described in *For Wens* is here replaced by a simile. Garner (2004:33) concludes her analysis of the two wen charms as follows: "As they present themselves in the surviving texts, the two charms appear to offer two equally valid means of tapping into the same source of power, one a verbal description and the other a dramatic enactment symbolizing the desired reduction." Verbal similes and descriptions of the performative gestures may indeed be two equally strong devices *on the page* in order to maintain some of the original power of the healing performance. However, this power of the actual healing gestures inevitably wanes as it yields to the stasis of the written word.

A written charm not only causes problems with its healing performance, but with its performer as well. The moment of writing down *Journey Charm* marks a precarious shift of identity: the *ic* moves from its originally collective nature (the *ic* could be uttered by any member of a specific group)<sup>12</sup> to an individualized *ic* (the scribe at the time of writing). Doane (1991:80-81) points out that "whenever scribes who are part of the oral traditional culture write or copy traditional oral works, they do not merely mechanically hand them down; they rehear them, 'mouth' them, 'reperform' them in the act of writing in such a way that the text may change but remain authentic, just as a completely oral poet's text changes from performance to performance without losing authenticity." (M)uttering the *ic* brings the scribe closer to whoever initially performed the charm. Once it is on parchment, the *ic* becomes more universal again, since any reader might identify with it. Within the monastic context in which the charm was probably written down and read, it also becomes, on a different scale, a performing and performed *ic* again, since the monks would read actively, that is, they would ruminate the words. "What results is a muscular memory of the words pronounced and an aural memory of the words heard" (Leclercq 1978:90). It is moreover quite possible that the charms were not just ruminated by an individual reader but read aloud to an audience that might have been encouraged to identify with the *ic*. The *ic*, endowed with a multiple personality as it were, can now perform, or be performed, both in oral and written form. It is constantly shifting and does therefore not have a concentrated power.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> It is likely that only a restricted group (druids, physicians, mass priests) performed the charms (see Jolly 1996, especially chapters 4 and 5).

<sup>13</sup> See also Keefer 2003 on the fluidity of *ic* and *we* in Old English liturgical verse.

So why write down the charms at all if they and their speakers lose their magical power in this process? “Writing,” as O’Brien O’Keeffe (1990:70) has succinctly put it, “holds the power of memory, but exacts the price of silence.” The power of memory, however, is not guaranteed, since it is a deficient thing in connection with the writing of the charms. Garner (2004:23-26) points out that many of the Old English charms that have come down to us in manuscripts use abbreviated forms of the performed incantation. Such notable omissions may be indicative of the widespread popularity of and familiarity with the charms. Why bother to write down the charms in their entirety, if the user knows them or, more accurately, remembers them? But with gaps in the charms, memory becomes unreliable because they can be filled in more than one way. The gaps arguably also point to the writer’s anxiety that the charming word may lose its power once it has been caught on parchment. It therefore seems advisable to be reticent with letters. Moreover, by withholding parts of the magic formula, the scribe endows the charm with a certain cryptic aura, in this way striving to maintain in the transcription as much of its original power as possible. The scribe thus shows respect for the oral nature of the charms as well as his simultaneous uneasiness about conveying them to parchment.

*Journey Charm* does not have any apparent gaps in the manuscript, Cambridge Corpus Christi College 41 (CCCC 41).<sup>14</sup> Insofar as only one copy of *Journey Charm* has come down to us, an examination of textual variants cannot be conducted. The poem itself, however, contains textual uncertainties, and as a result we have modern textual variants of the poem that derive from its having often been emended by its editors from the nineteenth century onwards.<sup>15</sup> The scribe himself may not have been bothered by these uncertainties; indeed, he may not have considered them uncertainties at all. However, I want to argue that the appearance of *Journey Charm* on the manuscript bespeaks the scribe’s desire to keep a balance between the oral and literate powers contained in the poem.

*Journey Charm* is written in the margins of an eleventh-century copy of Bede’s *Ecclesiastical History* in Old English by a hand other than the two of the Bede text (Ker 1957:45). There are other marginal texts, Latin prayers, Old English homilies, charms in both languages, the Sator-Rotas Square, and *Solomon and Saturn I*.<sup>16</sup> Of these marginalia Rowley (2004:29) has noted that “there is no way to know if the scribe of the marginal texts in CCCC 41 intended them to be ‘marginal,’ that is, secondary or supplementary to the Bede, if he was using the book as a commonplace book of texts meaningful to him, or if he . . . was using extra space to archive texts with ‘primary’ cultural significance.”

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<sup>14</sup> A paper facsimile of the CCCC 41 marginalia can be found in Robinson and Stanley 1991, a microfiche facsimile of the entire manuscript in Graham, Grant, et al. 2003.

<sup>15</sup> See Stuart 1981:259-60. Another interesting example of (modern) textual instability can be found in Storms’ edition (1948:216, emphasis added), where line six reads “Sygegealdor ic beagle, sigegyrd is me wege.” Rather than an emendation, this is a typing mistake, since the manuscript clearly reads *ic* and Storms (217) translates with “I.” This mistake interestingly reflects on the scribal errors, in this instance unwitting mistranscription, that modern editors detect in medieval manuscripts and in most cases decide to emend.

<sup>16</sup> Ker (1957:45) suggests that the marginalia “are probably all in one unusual angular hand.” Larratt Keefer (1996:148) more cautiously contends that “there is no clear agreement on whether one or more scribes added the marginalia to CCCC 41.”

Even though the scribe's motives for writing down these marginalia ultimately elude us, we can examine how they communicate with the central text. *Journey Charm* is found on pages 350 to 353 of the manuscript, written alongside the *Ecclesiastical History*, in which the triumph of Christianity over paganism is described. The charm in the margin arguably mirrors the same process of conversion on the plane of literature: a pagan poem is turned into a Christian one. However, we cannot decide if the scribe was aware of the original nature of the poem. It is probably safer to conclude with Nancy Thompson (2004:64) that the marginalia, together with the Bede text, are "a collection of devotional works that seem intended to enhance and strengthen religious faith."

The precise passages from the *Ecclesiastical History* that *Journey Charm* frames are from Book IV, including the end of chapter 29 and the beginning chapter 30.<sup>17</sup> These excerpts describe St. Cuthbert's choice of a solitary life on an island, his election at the synod in Twyford (684 AD) as bishop of Lindisfarne abbey as well as his ensuing return from the wilderness at the intense bidding of the monks, and finally his preparation to go back to the island to die there. In terms of its communication with this specific content of the *Ecclesiastical History*, the place allocated to *Journey Charm* in the manuscript is thus rather arbitrary. But the way the charm is presented on the pages is quite remarkable as it appears to underline the idea of triumph expressed in it. Unlike the three other Old English metrical charms in the manuscript,<sup>18</sup> this poem is not crammed in the margins in small and crumpled letters, but accompanies the Bede text quite elegantly over the four pages, looking much like the core text in terms of letter size, line numbers, and overall appearance.<sup>19</sup> This particular metrical charm thus appears more grand

<sup>17</sup> The charm begins on top of page 350 of the manuscript, where the Bede text starts with the letters *domes* of *witedomes*, and it ends in the middle of page 353 at the letters *hæb* of the word *hæbbe*. Chapter numbers refer to the edition by Miller (1890-98:368), line 19 to 372, line 2. Miller's edition is not based on the CCC 41 manuscript, but includes a collation of four extant manuscripts (for this excerpt see pp. 445-51). The collation does not, however, mention the marginalia of CCC 41.

<sup>18</sup> The four Old English metrical charms in this manuscript are charms 8 to 11 (Dobbie 1942:cxxx-cxxxi): *For a Swarm of Bees*, *For Loss of Cattle*, *For Theft of Cattle*, and *Journey Charm*. Five other metrical charms can be found in MS Harley 585, British Museum (*Nine Herbs Charm*, *Against a Dwarf*, *For a Sudden Stitch*, *For Loss of Cattle*, *For Delayed Birth*), one in MS Cotton Caligula A.vii, British Museum (*For Unfruitful Land*), another one in Royal MS 12D.xvii, British Museum (*For the Water-Elf Disease*), and finally one in Royal MS 4A.xiv, British Museum (*Against a Wen*). See Olsan 1999 for a discussion of the place in the manuscript of some of these charms.

<sup>19</sup> All four metrical charms in the manuscript frame the main Bede text. *Journey Charm* is written in the outer margins of the manuscript. It begins in the left margin of page 350 and runs over 24 lines, like the Bede text. It is continued in the right margin of page 351 and runs over 23 lines, like the Bede text. On the left margin of page 352 follow the next 23 lines, with *sigere* (emended to *sigeres* by Grendon, Storms, and Rodrigues) and *godes miltse* of line 33 written above the line; the Bede text has only 22 lines as there is a space to mark the beginning with an animal-shaped initial (a thorn) of chapter 30. The final six lines follow in the right margin on page 353 of the manuscript. *For Theft of Cattle* is found on page 206 of the manuscript, and it "occupies the first nine lines of the note in the bottom margin of the page" (Robinson and Stanley 1991:24). *For Loss of Cattle* is found on the same page and "occupies ll. 10-15 of the note in the bottom margin of the page" (24). "The manuscript is very tightly bound, and some letters at the end of ll. 13 and 14 of the note are lost in the gutter . . . . The scribe seems to have regarded this charm and the preceding one [*For Loss of Cattle*] and the ensuing [Latin] prose charm (which continues on p. 207) as a single text" (24). *For a Swarm of Bees* follows a Latin prayer, both written in the left margin of page 182 in the manuscript. Like *Journey Charm*, *For a Swarm of Bees* is written in the outer margins rather than crammed at the bottom in a note, but there is far less space between the lines.



than the others, as if to emphasize the notion of victory that permeates the poem. For O'Brien O'Keeffe (1990:70) this notion of victory is also enhanced by the charm's communication with another marginal poem, *Solomon and Saturn I*. She rounds off her analysis of the tensions between the spoken and the written word in that poem by claiming that it is a visual reflex of the word *sygegealdor* in line 6 of *Journey Charm*. She does not further comment on her observation, but I would argue that the reflex is created by the emphasis in both texts on the intricate power relationship between the spoken and the written word. The alliance of these two poems through the visual and a common concern shifts our attention away from the words with which the poem is written down, words whose power to hold and to preserve threatens to obliterate the memory of oral performance. Through the visual, the scribe tries to accommodate both the oral and the literate in a balanced way so that *Journey Charm* may indeed be victorious.<sup>20</sup>

*University of Neuchâtel, Switzerland*

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## ***Thrênoi to Moiológia: Female Voices of Solitude, Resistance, and Solidarity***

**Andrea Fishman**

Margaret Alexiou's *The Ritual Lament in Greek Tradition* offered a diachronic, comprehensive study of Greek ritual lament that emphasized continuities between ancient and modern lament traditions while incorporating stylistic and thematic analyses of lament texts. In the past three decades, Alexiou's seminal work has been fundamental in shaping the field of lament studies; it has influenced scholars from such various academic fields as classics, comparative literature, anthropology, ethnomusicology, and folklore to engage in explorations of mourning that take into account textual, performative, and cultural contexts.<sup>1</sup> The anthropologist Anna Caraveli-Chaves, whose fieldwork emphasizes cultural issues of gender and lament in rural Epiros and Crete, has identified the following salient elements of modern Greek women's lament: the role of the lamenter as mediator, or "bridge" between the worlds of the living and the dead; the aesthetics and function of *ponos* ("pain"); lament as vehicle for revenge; lament as an instrument for social criticism and protest; and finally the role of lament in establishing solidarity among the community of women mourners.<sup>2</sup> This essay explores the relationship between gender, lamentation, and death in the Greek tradition, making use of Alexiou's diachronic paradigm and by expanding upon Caraveli-Chaves' ideas regarding the social role of lament by examining and comparing ancient literary representations of women in mourning with authentic examples of women's lament practices based on ethnographic material from modern rural Greece.

I shall focus specifically on the function of female lament as an expression of individual and collective pain (*ponos*; plural *ponoi*) and as a vehicle for uniting Greek women mourners through social bonding and solidarity in a community—what Caraveli-Chaves has termed a

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<sup>1</sup> Alexiou 2002; Auerbach 1987; Caraveli-Chaves 1986; Caraveli-Chaves 1980; Danforth 1982; Derderian 2001; Dué 2002; Feld 1982; H. Foley 2001; Holst-Warhaft 1992; Kitzinger 1991; Koskoff 1987; Kurke 1992; Lardinois 2001; Levaniouk 1999; Loraux 1998; Martin 2003; McClure 1999; Nagy 1996; Ó Laoire 2005; Partridge 1980; Racy 1986; Rosenblatt et al. 1976; Segal 1989, 1993; Seremetakis 1991; Sultan 1993, 1999; Suter 2008.

<sup>2</sup> See Caraveli-Chaves 1986 for a further detailed discussion of the categories of the functions of women's lament in the social context of modern Greek village culture based on her fieldwork in contemporary Epirot communities.

“sisterhood of pain”—by interweaving the threads of tragic descriptions of female mourning in Euripides’ *Suppliants* with analogous examples of documented female lament (*moirólógia*) from modern rural Epiros, Crete, and Inner Mani.<sup>3</sup> Female lamentation for the dead, both ancient and modern, is an emotive and expressive genre that voices an individual’s personal *ponoi* in her role as mourner—a voice of solitude; it also expresses a communal voice of collective grief, one of solidarity. Moreover, in the contexts of both ancient Greek tragedy and contemporary rural Greek society, female mourners use lamentation for the dead as a catalyst—more precisely, the “enabling event” (to borrow a term from John Miles Foley)—for expressing their essentially painful and sorrowful experiences in the world among the living and for protesting the power of the dominant patriarchal society (J. Foley 1995:64-65).

I intend to illuminate significant facets by which ancient and modern Greek lament traditions mirror each other in their function, theme, agency, and verbal art by using modern ethnographic evidence as a heuristic and interpretive device in order to better understand the ancient tragic texts. Such clear parallels in the modes of lament between material from the present and from the fifth century B.C.E. are not surprising. One might interpret the parallel thematic and functional elements of women’s laments for the dead as evidence of diachronic continuity and historical residue from ancient Greek tragic poetry through the contemporary laments in rural areas of Greece. Artemesia Kapsali’s modern lament for her husband Yiannis, for example (see below), expresses not only her grief for the loss of her husband but also embodies a voice that represents the community of Epirot women and mothers united in their feelings of helplessness and anger against war just as the chorus of Argive women in Euripides’ *Suppliants* manifests a collective voice of women and mothers bound by a “sisterhood in pain,” helplessness, and grief in their inability to properly mourn and bury their sons.

It is not my intention to privilege the ancient texts over modern performance contexts, nor to objectify or romanticize the modern Greek village *moirólóyístres*; for the voices of these women in black—voices that are otherwise marginalized in a distinctly patriarchal village culture—become instruments of cultural power in the context of lament performance. I intend, rather, to use the mirror images of ancient and modern women’s lament texts and lament-songs to demonstrate a diachronic continuity in the power of the female voice—albeit the marginalized and restricted female voice—through the tradition of Greek women’s lament for the dead. A comparison between the analogous features of modern and ancient female lament traditions is intended to help uncover what I believe are the veiled voices of the ancient Greek lamenters, namely, the anonymous women mourners whose powerful lament-songs were appropriated from their original context of oral performance (the mourning ritual) and incorporated into dramatic

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<sup>3</sup> Caraveli-Chaves (1986:181) uses the term, “sisterhood in pain” to describe the phenomenon of women’s bonding through lament performance in rural Epirot and Cretan communities. There is a consensus among female ethnographers who have researched the subject of gender and mourning in modern rural Greece (see n. 1 above) that the performance of laments and other ritual mourning practices serve to bond and unite women through a solidarity based on a community of shared grief and pain. Caraveli-Chaves’ phrase most accurately sums up this female sub-culture. Herzfeld (1986:215-34) cautions against generalizations concerning categories (e.g. “female vs. male,” “private vs. public,” “Mediterranean society,” “village culture”) used by (primarily female) anthropologists in ethnographies of modern Greece.

performances and texts that were composed by male poets and performed by male actors.<sup>4</sup> I thus consider women's laments for the dead as they are represented in classical Greek tragedy to be an embedded genre of poetry, specifically, a genre of oral poetry that playwrights such as Euripides borrowed from the original, "native artists"—women who actually engaged in ritual lamentation—as well as from the traditional oral performance context and integrated into their dramatic poetic texts.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, diachronic parallels in theme, verbal art, and function become evident when one situates women's laments for the dead in the genre and performative context of a continuous oral tradition and perceives representations of women's laments in ancient Greek tragedy as "oral-derived" texts (J. Foley 1995:60-65). In my view, the original female voices of the anonymous "native artists" were transposed to the dramatic personae of notable women mourners (performed by male actors on stage) and continued diachronically in the oral tradition of women's laments for the dead. This thread of an oral lament tradition that survived in the "oral-derived" texts of classical tragedy was rediscovered, so to speak, by ethnographers who have documented women's lament traditions in modern rural Greece in the performances of artful—often illiterate, but certainly not anonymous—lament poets such as Chrysa Kalliakati or Artemesia Kapsali (Caraveli-Chaves 1980; 1986).

I rely on Foley's definition of an "oral-derived" text—that is, a "text with its roots in oral tradition" as a category for (representations of) Greek women's laments for the dead as well as the process he explains as "the rhetorical persistence of pretextual, traditional forms" (1995:60-65). It is Foley's view that a developing literary tradition often gradually usurps and eventually privileges written texts over an original oral tradition—a process that eventually engenders the "oral-derived text" (60-65; 80-81).<sup>6</sup> He describes how this process of textualization often diminishes the original force of the primary voices of "native artists" (e.g. the original creators, poets and performers) in various oral traditions (60-98).<sup>7</sup>

Surely women's lament-songs were emotionally potent enough in their original verbal art and performance to provide convincing and compelling material for the ancient Greek dramatic poets. Added to these vocal lamentations, the dramatic bodily movements—tearing the face and hair, beating the breast, rending one's garments—together with other vocalizations (shouts of *aiai*, *oi*, *ea*, and so forth), the dramatic potential for representations of women's lament performance was indeed considerable. It is no wonder that the dramatists found the emotional power of women's lament for the dead appealing and included their interpretations of it in their own dramatic texts; to have excluded it would have reduced the validity and the richness of their own works.

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<sup>4</sup> See J. Foley's discussion of the original, "native artists" in various global oral poetic traditions (1995:80).

<sup>5</sup> Segal (1989:355) comments on the relation between tragic and oral poet: "The tragic poet draws on the oral poet's inherited role as spokesman for communal values and the continuities of social and religious forms."

<sup>6</sup> See Foley's bibliography for works on oral poetry and the oral tradition (J. Foley 1995). For a succinct history and additional bibliography on oral poetry, see J. Foley 1988. Cf. Bakker 1993; Finnegan 1977; Lord 1991; Nagy 1996; Ong 1982.

<sup>7</sup> See Ó Laoire's illuminating discussions on the process of improvisation and oral poetry in the Irish folk tradition (Ó Laoire 2004).

### The Aesthetics and Role of *Ponos* in Greek Village Communities

Anthropologists have demonstrated how women in modern Greek village communities use the occasion of the death of another as an opportunity to articulate their individual *ponoi* as well as their grievances against society's injustices.<sup>8</sup> In this section, I will discuss how women in modern rural Greek village communities articulate lament: first, as an expression of individual pain and grievances, then to establish community and solidarity among the *moirolyístres*. As we shall see, however, there is often a fine line between these two categories: the genre of "widows' songs" in particular (see below) best exemplifies the integration of personal and social aspects of the mourners' *ponoi*. Here I rely mainly on Anna Caraveli-Chaves' research on female lament practice and performance based on her fieldwork in Dzermiades, Crete and in the Zagori region of Epiros (1980:129-57; 1986:169-94). She views the aesthetic, ritual, and social elements of lament performance as components of what she terms the "symbolic female universe" created by women mourners that serves as a "bridge" between the restricted, marginalized world of rural Greek women and the larger sphere of rural Epirot and Cretan communities (1986:170-71). Moreover, Caraveli-Chaves demonstrates how women's lament works to establish a female subculture of *moirolyístres* through social bonding and ways in which it impacts the larger sphere of the patriarchal village culture (1986:171; cf. 1980:144-47).

Caraveli-Chaves asserts that one of the primary social functions of women's lamentation is a means of expression for the individual and collective female voice: "The death of a beloved person is the catalyst for and focus of women's lamentation and the broader universe of activity and experience generated by it. Yet participation in death rituals also becomes an important expressive avenue for the living" (1986:171). She ascertained that the refined cultural system of lament aesthetics in Crete defines "pain" not only in terms of the mourner's chronological proximity to death, but by the emotional intensity, depth, and style of delivery of her laments. A mourner might consider herself (or might be judged by her community in terms of her lament performance) "to be in pain" or "not to be in pain" (*eine ston pono; den eine ston pono*) (171). In fact, the stronger the pain of the lament performer, the stronger her laments are valued as ritual communications with the dead (172). The ethnographer refers to Artemesia Kapsali (see below), an Epirot woman in her late sixties who could enter into a state of pain voluntarily. Although her husband had been killed in World War II, 37 years before Caraveli-Chaves conducted her research in 1978, Artemesia still lamented with an "original intensity" (173).<sup>9</sup>

Caraveli-Chaves identified a significant feature of modern rural Epirot and Cretan women's lament practices: although a female mourner's lament originates in her emotional pain, it lies within the thematic framework of women's lament performance for the mourner to shift

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<sup>8</sup> See n. 1 above for specific references.

<sup>9</sup> Caraveli-Chaves observes that performers use a variety of methods to induce "pain"; they might loosen their black scarves or use objects (such as photographs) that have symbolic associations with the deceased (1986:173).

the focus of her song from the history and plight of the deceased to the pains and grievances (*ponoi*) of the lamenter herself (1986:181). The most significant thematic element concerning both the deceased's and the mourner's lives is the *ponos* of isolation and loneliness—loneliness felt by the lamenter due to the loss of the deceased, isolation of the lamented often because of her widowhood. Chrysa Kalliakati's Cretan lament for her deceased mother in Dzermiades, Crete, illustrates this dynamic (Caraveli-Chaves 1980:134; lines 1-20):

Oh slowly, oh mournfully, I will begin lamenting  
 Shouting out your sorrows mother—one by one!  
 Oh slowly, oh mournfully I will begin lamenting  
 Singing about your sorrows, mother, crying for them,  
 Because at the prime of your youth, you clothed yourself in black  
 And then the darkness of your heart matched that of your dress;  
 Because at the prime of your youth fate had written  
 That you should lose our father, you should become a widow . . .  
 Ah how many times at midnight, after the roosters had crowed  
 Wouldn't you be coming down the road—pale and tired out! . . .  
 How many times at midnight, on nights steeped in darkness  
 Wouldn't you come home from the road—lips saddened and embittered!  
 There is no one else who knows your sorrows, the plight of your life.  
 I, alone, am left here, mother, to stand up by your side.  
 Women of Dzermiathes come, decked out in your best clothes  
 And give her your forgiveness now, from inside your heart.  
 I'll go to Argolia no more. Whom should I visit there?  
 My mother has traveled far away. To whom can I call out?

This lament begins with Chrysa's statement of her intention to commemorate her mother's sufferings, then transforms her narrative of her mother's grievous, sorrowful life to a description of her own *ponoi*, specifically her isolation and loneliness. The lamenter's use of the verbs "to weep" or "to lament" (*kleo*, and *klapso* in the original Greek, lines 1-3) repeats her statement of intention to commemorate her mother's grievous, sorrowful life; Caraveli-Chaves remarks that "though the verbs used are either different aspects of the same verb or synonymous in the Greek original ('shouting out your sorrows' and 'singing about your sorrows' in the English translation) . . . the singer will not merely list the mother's sorrows, but she will shout them out as well" (1980:136).<sup>10</sup> Thus, women mourners use the event of the death of another as an occasion to transform their mourning into a genre of lament performance that becomes the "instruments for voicing the concerns of the living" (1986:171).

Themes expressed by the mourners' personal *ponoi* such as isolation, widowhood, loss of social status, desertion by male relatives, sufferings brought on by childbirth or the raising of children, and grievances against war and death, find expression in the function of women's

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<sup>10</sup> Alexandra Pateraki's lament (*ibid.*:133) shows similar features and structure.





practices of modern medicine, priests, and the institution of the Greek Orthodox Church (183-84).<sup>11</sup> This verbal art of lament in an oral performative context allows women in modern rural Greek communities to experience and transmit *ponos*, to transform the phenomenon of the death of another into an expression of their individual grievances and the concerns of the female community, and to use lamentation “as an avenue for social commentary on the larger world, rather than an instrument of restriction and isolation” (1986:191).

Caraveli-Chaves argues that rituals of shared grieving, the process of oral composition of laments, and their transmission across generations reinforce the sense of female bonding “in pain” and provides a context for creating a type of female subculture within the wider male-dominated world of the rural Greek village (1986:177-78; cf. 1980:144-45). Through the experiences of shared pain, emotional catharsis, and a collective identity as mourners, women in rural Greek communities “create, reflect, reinforce, and negotiate realms of experience and action that are exclusive to women” (1986:178). She adds that sometimes lament voiced as a social protest “recognizes a ‘sisterhood in pain’ among women, a sense of communal victimization inflicted by either social or natural forces . . . often this voice takes the form of an invitation to communal grieving” (181-82). The modern Epirot lament below illustrates this phenomenon and presents a striking introduction to literary examples from ancient Greek women’s laments that emphasize women’s solidarity, sense of bonding, and collective mourning in a collective voice from a marginalized group of society that is normally muted, if not silenced altogether (171; 182-83):<sup>12</sup>

Come women! Let you who are still untried, and us, who’ve known sorrows,  
join together our tears, shape them into a river;  
and let the river turn to lake, to seashore, water fountain,  
(oh, my love, my eyes!)  
where young beauties can come to wash, young men to groom themselves,  
and where unmarried children can have their target practice.

Such communal bonding among village women during the lament ritual operates both diachronically as well as synchronically through collective performance and transmission across

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<sup>11</sup> In part due to the religious dimensions of women’s lament performance and practices, laments may also constitute a protest against the official Greek Orthodox Church and the Christian doctrine of death that express contrary views and attitudes to those of traditional laments of an afterlife of reward for the pious: “Christian attitudes toward death preach patience, acceptance, and perseverance. Laments express despair, fear, and anger toward death and the deceased” (Caraveli-Chaves 1986:184). Auerbach (1987:24-43) addresses the function of *ponoi* in expressing personal pain and grievances against society in the context of lament performance in her work concerning the connections between gender, lament, and musical meaning in modern rural Epiros. A verse from an Epirot lament exemplifies the communal aspect of Greek female lament: “We’ll cry for our sufferings and our grievances, whoever has the most, we’ll divide them” (38).

<sup>12</sup> Performed by Alexandra Tsoumani; recorded by Caraveli-Chaves in Tsepelovo, Epiros, August 15, 1978. This lament is interesting for its erotic elements as well.

generations of women (Caraveli-Chaves 1980:145).<sup>13</sup> Caraveli-Chaves cites the example of Alexandra Pateraki's lament that she learned from her mother Chrysa (see above): the subject of her lament was Alexandra's grandmother; therefore it connected three generations of women in this family. Caraveli-Chaves concludes from this particular example that "the lamenter's manipulation of narrative conventions transforms a given item of subject matter (such as the mourning of a dead relative) into a source of personal benefit and a means of affirming a complex network of relationships among the female participants" (*idem*). Her observations, based on her fieldwork in women's laments for the dead in Epiros and Crete, may be applied to the creation of female solidarity and community through mourning as depicted in Euripides' *Suppliants*.

### **"Sisterhood in Pain": Female Solidarity through Mourning in Euripides' *Suppliants***

Literary representations of female lament for the dead from the textual and performative context of fifth-century Greek tragedy—specifically, Euripides' *Suppliants*—are, in my view, analogous to the previously cited examples of modern Greek rural lament in practice and performance. In addition, the antiphonal structure and style of lament performance contribute to social bonding among women; they mourn in a fugue. Perhaps a comparison between the ancient and modern Greek lament traditions might beg the question as to whether ritual mourning allowed ancient Greek women to express a certain power through female solidarity in their mourning, just as contemporary women, a marginalized group in modern rural Greece, become empowered through their mourning rituals. The plot of Euripides' *Suppliants* centers on the right of the dead to receive a proper burial and on the desire and duty of the living—here, the mothers of the Argive heroes slain at Thebes—to properly mourn their loved ones (*philoï*). Yet the more profound issue of this play concerns itself with the subordination of women's voices to the masculine encomium for the war-dead—the traditional *epitaphios logos*.<sup>14</sup> During the course of the *Suppliants*, the voices of the mothers of the warriors who died fighting against Thebes, raised throughout most of the play in lamentation, become muted and subordinate to the traditional funeral eulogy (the "true, just praise")<sup>15</sup> composed and delivered by Adrastus, with the assistance of Theseus, the two primary male characters.<sup>16</sup> The mourning mothers of the slain Argive chiefs create a "sisterhood in mourning" not only among themselves; they also form a bond within a

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<sup>13</sup> This observation raises a provocative and essential question: how "improvised" can a lament be if it is handed down from generation to generation?

<sup>14</sup> See Loraux 1986:47-49; 107-8. Her discussion of the replacement of the Argive mothers' laments for their sons by the traditional *epitaphios logos* has influenced later criticism of this play; cf. McClure 1999:45-47; H. Foley 2001:36-44; Michelini 1991:16-36. While H. Foley's analysis and interpretation of this play overlaps with several of my points, I read her chapter after I wrote my views on this play as expressed in my Ph.D. dissertation (Fishman 2002) and in this essay.

<sup>15</sup> ἔπαινον . . . ἀληθῆ καὶ δίκαι, 858-59.

<sup>16</sup> See McClure's synopsis (1999:45-46).

community of mourners together with Aethra, the mother of Theseus, and Adrastus, the king of Argos. Adrastus' role in this community of mothers in mourning is significant. I argue that he is a male character who represents the agency (e.g., the role and function) of a female lamenter. Euripides portrays Adrastus as a feminized, certainly an emotionally and psychologically weakened male—metaphorically θῆλυς (“female,” “womanly”)—although not as feminized nor as “orientalized” as the chorus of Persian male elders in Aeschylus' *Persians*.<sup>17</sup>

The *Suppliants* opens in front of the temple of Demeter at Eleusis where Aethra is engaged in prayer for the welfare of her family and city while expressing pity and compassion towards the suffering of the suppliant Argive mothers who mourn their lost sons. Euripides conveys a notion of shared female identity as mothers and sense of community between Aethra and Argive women in Aethra's poignantly sympathetic speech at the start of the play (*Supp.* 8-17):<sup>18</sup>

ἐς τάσδε γὰρ βλέψασ' ἐπηυξάμην τάδε  
 γραῦς, αἱ λιποῦσαι δώματ' ἄργείας χθονὸς  
 ἰκτῆρι θαλλῶ προσπίτνουσ' ἐμὸν γόνυ,  
 πάθος παθοῦσαι δεινόν· ἀμφὶ γὰρ πύλας  
 Κάδμου θανόντων ἐπτὰ γενναίων τέκνων  
 ἄπαιδές εἰσιν, οὐς ποτ' Ἄργείων ἄναξ  
 . . . νεκροὺς δὲ τοὺς ὀλωλότας δορὶ  
 θάψαι θέλουσι τῶνδε μητέρες χθονί,

They have left their homes in Argos and are falling with  
 suppliant branches at my knees because of their terrible  
 sufferings. They have lost their children: their seven noble sons  
 perished before Cadmus' gates  
 . . . the spear laid these men low,  
 and their mothers want to bury them.

One must keep in mind that Aethra and the Argive women nominally belong to two politically opposing sides: Aethra is the mother of Theseus, the Athenian king who tenaciously prevents the Argive female lamenters from regaining the remains of their sons for burial. Yet Aethra's feelings of sympathy and pity for the aged Argive mothers in mourning, together with her reverence for their vulnerable status as suppliants—rendered all the more powerful because the women occupy the same sacred space inside the temple of Demeter at Eleusis—prove to be more compelling than the queen's sense of allegiance to her son's political agenda. Aethra is

<sup>17</sup> On the topic of gender and representation in Greek tragedy, see (for example): Bassi 1998; Fishman 2002; H. Foley 2001; Holst-Warhaft 1992; Kurke 1992; Segal 1992, 1993; Suter 2008; Zeitlin 1996. On “Orientalism” and the feminization of the chorus of Aeschylus' *Persians*, see Saïd 1979:21, 56, 332.

<sup>18</sup> The Greek text and English translations in the indented paragraphs of Euripides' *Suppliants* are taken from Kovacs 1998 (unless otherwise noted); all other translations are my own.

metaphorically (emotionally and ethically, almost magically) “bound” (δεσμὸν)<sup>19</sup> by a sense of piety that is symbolized by the lamenters’ suppliant branches (ιερά στέμματ’). Indeed, the sacred space and her powerful fusion of feelings of compassion and reverence imbue Aethra with a sense of solidarity with the Argive suppliant women (*Supp.* 32-36):<sup>20</sup>

δεσμὸν δ’ ἄδεσμον τόνδ’ ἔχουσα φυλλάδος  
 μένω πρὸς ἀγναῖς ἐσχάραις δυοῖν θεαῖν  
 Κόρης τε καὶ Δήμητρος, οἰκτίρουσα μὲν  
 πολιὰς ἄπαιδας τάσδε μητέρας τέκνων,  
 σέβουσα δ’ ἱερά στέμματ’.

Since I feel the constraint of these suppliant branches—  
 which bind without any chain—  
 I stay here at the sacred hearths of the two goddesses,  
 Kore and Demeter, in pity for these  
 gray-headed mothers bereft of their sons  
 and in reverence for their suppliant wreaths.

The chorus of the Argive mothers addresses Aethra directly as they call her attention to their lamentation, specifically to the physical manifestations of mourning that creates the impression of a female community united in solidarity through their roles as caretakers of the dead. In the first antistrophe, the chorus insistently beseeches Aethra to “look at” (ἐσιδοῦσ’) their tears and torn flesh; the self-inflicted violence upon their aged bodies symbolically renders the lamenting mothers as victims of war, even though it is their sons who are properly the war-dead (φθιμένους) (*Supp.* 47-53):

ἐσιδοῦσ’ οἰκτρὰ μὲν ὄσσων δάκρυ’ ἀμφὶ βλεφάροις, ῥυ-  
 σὰ δὲ σαρκῶν πολιᾶν  
 καταδρύμματα χειρῶν. τί γάρ; ἄ φθιμένους παῖ-  
 δας ἐμοῦς οὔτε δόμοις  
 προθέμαν οὔτε τάφων χώματα γαίας ἐσορῶ.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>19</sup> I am not insisting that the Argive women are engaged in magical practices in the temple of Demeter in this opening scene, for Euripides does not state this explicitly. However, it is my view that the poet implies and suggests the spell-like effect of lamentation; this is a topic that I would like to explore at length in an expansion of the present work. Nevertheless, I would like to call attention to the powerful force implied in the noun δεσμός; it is a loaded term in the vocabulary of magic: e.g., the term κατάδεσμος, or “binding spell,” for the curse tablets that have been unearthed in Sicily, Olbia, and Attica, dating from the fifth century B.C.E. See Faraone and Obbink (1991:3-32) and literature cited therein.

<sup>20</sup> See Rehm (1994:110-21) for a discussion of this play that emphasizes the religious elements and symbolism. Rehm emphasizes the importance of the Eleusinian setting throughout the opening scene of the play (111). He analyzes how the staging of the opening scene of Euripides’ *Suppliants* is organized around the central altar (1988:283-88).

<sup>21</sup> Collard (1975:121 *ad loc.*) notes that the noun καταδρύμματα is a *hapax legomenon*.

Look at these pitiable tears upon our cheeks  
 and the gashes our hands have torn  
 in our old and wrinkled flesh! How can we do otherwise?  
 Our dead sons we could not lay out in the house for burial  
 or see a mound of earth raised over their tombs.

These non-verbal signs of female mourning (tears, disfiguring one's flesh, particularly the face or chest, beating one's breast) are ubiquitous in Greek epic and tragic poetry and may be interpreted as symbols of the archetypal female (or a feminized male) mourner.<sup>22</sup> In order to draw Aethra into their sphere of "sisterhood in pain," the chorus in the second strophe emphasizes their shared identities as women, mothers, and wives (*Supp.* 55-58):

ἔτεκες καὶ σύ ποτ', ὦ πότνια, κοῦρον φίλα ποιη-  
 σαμένα λέκτρα πόσει σῶ· μετά νῦν  
 δὸς ἐμοὶ σᾶς διανοίας, μετάδος δ', ὅσσον ἐπαλγῶ  
 μελέα <γῶ> φθιμένων οὐς ἔτεκον,

You too once bore, my lady, a son, making your bed  
 pleasing to your husband. So grant me a portion  
 of your kind regard, grant it, in pity for the grief  
 that I, unlucky one, feel for my son's death.

The Argive women mourners thus appeal to Aethra's sympathy as a mother when they entreat her to persuade her son Theseus to allow them to bury their own sons who died in battle against the Thebans: εὐ- / τεκνία δυστυχίαν τὰν παρ' ἐμοὶ / καθελεῖν ("relieve my misfortune by the noble son you bore," 67-68), and in their declaration: τὸ γὰρ θανόντων τέκνων / ἐπίπονόν τι κατὰ γυναῖ- / κας ἐς γόους πάθος πέφυκεν· αἰαῖ ("For when their children die, the grief in women's hearts is ever involved in the toil of lamentation. Ah me!" 83-85). With his entrance, Aethra's "noble son" Theseus reiterates the Argive chorus' reference to their gestures of ritual mourning upon his discovery of a community of women engaged in a highly emotive lament performance: τίνων γόους ἦκουσα καὶ στέρνων κτύπτον / νεκρῶν τε θρήνους ("Whose is the wailing, the beating of breasts, and the keening for the dead that I

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<sup>22</sup> Physical manifestations of female lament include tearing off one's veil, tearing the hair, beating one's breast, and tearing one's face (usually the cheeks) with the nails. See Derderian 2001:53-54 and n. 146 for Homeric examples of male and female physical manifestations of ritual lament. Male heroes in the Homeric poems openly weep and grieve for the dead; ritual gestures such as tearing one's face and hair and beating one's breast are exhibited by both men and women in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. Suter (2008) addresses the topic of male lament in Greek tragedy. Holst-Warhaft (1992:107-8) states that there is nothing unmanly about Homeric heroes mourning the dead, "provided that the circumstances are appropriate"; she adds that, "it is the men, rather than the women, who must be enjoined to stop weeping lest they become morbid or dangerous." Cf. Alexiou 2002:11-13, 132-34. On tragic images of the body and lament, see Murnaghan 1988.

have heard?” 87-88). Their dirges and physical acts induce fear and confusion (φόβος, 89; τί ταῦτα, μητέρα; 98). Theseus’ reaction of shock at the female mourners’ “dangerous voices,” as well as their dramatic physical gestures of ritual lamentation, is complicated by his discovery of the apparent solidarity between his mother and the “foreign women” mourners (ξένας γυναῖκας) (*Supp.* 92-97).<sup>23</sup>

τί χρῆμα; καινὰς ἐσβολὰς ὀρῶ λόγων,  
μητέρα γεραίων βωμίαν ἐφημένην  
ξένας θ’ ὁμοῦ γυναῖκας οὐχ ἓνα ῥυθμὸν  
κακῶν ἐχούσας· ἔκ τε γὰρ γερασμίων  
ὄσσων ἐλαύνουσ’ οἰκτρὸν ἐς γαῖαν δάκρυ,  
κουραὶ τε καὶ πεπλώματ’ οὐ θεωρικά.

But what is this? Here are strange things to speak of,  
my aged mother sitting at the altar, and foreign women  
with her in many attitudes of misery. From their aged eyes  
they shed pitiable tears on the ground, and the cut of their  
hair and the garments they wear are not fit for a festival.

Theseus is disturbed by the notion that his mother Aethra and the chorus of enemy Argive women have formed a female community that focuses on the chorus’ intense state of emotional grief that is manifested by their public ritual lamentation; their solidarity is subversive and alarming to the king of Athens. Aethra’s response to Theseus’ accusatory query conveys feelings of camaraderie and solidarity with the suppliant women due to their shared identity as mothers of sons. Euripides emphasizes this point semantically by the repetition of the words “son” and “mothers” in Aethra’s address to Theseus: ὦ παῖ, γυναῖκες αἶδε μητέρες τέκνων . . . τέκνον (“My son, these women are mothers of sons . . . son,” 100-103).<sup>24</sup> In this scene, Aethra has literally entered into the Argive women’s sacred circle of mourning: φρουροῦσί μ’, ὡς δέδορκας, ἐν κύκλῳ, τέκνον (“they keep watch, encircling me, as you see, with their suppliant boughs, son,” 103), the ancient literary equivalent of what Caraveli-Chaves terms the “symbolic female universe” among modern Epirot and Cretan women lament-performers (1986:170).<sup>25</sup>

<sup>23</sup> The phrase “dangerous voices” in reference to female lament is inspired by the title of Holst-Warhaft’s influential 1992 book.

<sup>24</sup> I find interesting Collard’s comment (1975:139 *ad loc.*) that τέκνων (100) has sometimes been emended to νεκρῶν, apparently due to the “tautologous” phrase μητέρες . . . τῶν κατθανόντων . . . στρατηγῶν (100-102); this emendation (which most modern editors, including Collard, do not accept) supports my notion that Euripides here emphasizes Aethra’s and the chorus’ shared identities as mothers of sons.

<sup>25</sup> Here, as in lines 33-36, I see a suggestion of ritual magic associated with female lamentation.

In the next short, irregular stasimon of the play (271-85), the chorus directly supplicates Theseus to release the bodies of their sons for burial.<sup>26</sup> In the following second part of the first episode, the king of Athens questions his mother's act of mourning—thus her solidarity—with the foreign Argive women (*Supp.* 286-88):<sup>27</sup>

μη̄τερ, τί κλαίεις λέπτ' ἐπ' ὀμμάτων φάρη  
βαλοῦσα τῶν σῶν; ἄρα δυστήνος γόους  
κλύουσα τῶνδε;

Mother, why are you weeping, holding your fine-spun  
garments before your eyes? Is it because you hear the unhappy wailing  
of these women?

Theseus rebukes Aethra for showing excessive sympathy and solidarity with the Argive mothers in mourning, for she is not one of their “tribe”: τὰ τούτων οὐχὶ σοὶ στενακτέον . . . οὐ σὺ τῶνδ' ἔφυς (“You must not groan at these women's fate . . . you are not one of their tribe,” 291-92).<sup>28</sup> Despite Theseus' warning, Aethra becomes an actively vocal member of this “tribe” of foreign Argive mothers in mourning by taking on the role of spokeswoman for their cause of regaining possession of the remains of their sons for proper burial and ritual lamentation; she successfully persuades Theseus to change his mind and recover the slain Argive chiefs (297-331).

As we have seen in several passages in the beginning of Euripides' *Suppliants*, ritual lamentation creates solidarity among the female characters. This “sisterhood in pain” is potentially empowering, as it becomes a communicative event that affirms social bonding through shared female suffering. Yet the *Suppliants* also reveals what one critic calls the “potentially subversive effects of uncontrolled feminine lamentation,” and “the subordination of women's ritual language to the city's collective eulogy” (McClure 1999:46). Adrastus' funeral oration (857-917), modeled on the fifth century B.C.E. Athenian *epitaphios logos*, eventually supplants the essentially female speech genre of ritual lamentation for the dead.<sup>29</sup> However, before Adrastus, urged on by Theseus, delivers his eulogy in praise of the Argive war-dead (842-56), he plays a part in the traditionally female antiphonal style and structure of lamentation. This

<sup>26</sup> Collard (1975:179-81 *ad loc.*) includes a metrical analysis of this passage, which is mostly hexametric. He terms these lines as “not a regular stasimon” in part because the astrophic lyrics (which indicate extreme emotional tension) interrupt the episode (179).

<sup>27</sup> Aethra holds her garment over her eyes (like a veil) in a gesture of grief and ritual lamentation.

<sup>28</sup> “You are not one of their tribe” is my translation of οὐ σὺ τῶνδ' ἔφυς. Although there is a fine distinction between “you are not one of them” (taking ἔφυς in the sense of φύω = “you are” [LSJ s.v. φύω, B. II]) and “you are not one of their tribe (taking the verb as suggestive of the noun τὸ φύλον = “tribe”), I prefer the latter because: 1) the Argive women are a different “tribe” of Greeks, and 2) because poets used this noun (most often in the singular) with a partitive genitive to refer to classifications of women as well as to animals (see LSJ s.v. φύλον).

<sup>29</sup> See Collard 1975:323-39 *ad loc.* and H. Foley 2001:37-38.



topic of gender, lament, and antiphony in ancient Greek tragedy and modern Maniat laments is one that I shall now address.

### Antiphony, Gender, and Lament: Ancient and Modern Threads of Grief

There are textual examples of lament from Euripides' *Suppliants* that are comparable to the practice and performance of women's lamentation in the Inner Mani region of the Greek Peloponnese. Antiphonal lament is ubiquitous throughout fifth-century Greek tragedy, yet I will concentrate here on this single play, since, atypically, the male character Adrastus is included in the female community of mourners.<sup>30</sup> Lamentation for the dead has been traditionally expressed as an antiphonal "call" and "response" dialogue between a single lamenter and chorus—both typically female—in ancient Greek tragedy and modern women's lament performance; in fifth-century tragic poetry, the *kommos* became the term that was specific to the antiphonal lament between an actor and the chorus.<sup>31</sup> Alexiou noticed the importance of antiphonic style and structure in the historical continuity of ritual lament in the Greek tradition (Alexiou 2002:150):<sup>32</sup>

Antiphony, dialogue and refrain, among the oldest structural features of the Greek lament, are still vital and dynamic elements of the modern *moirólógia*. They have survived, not because they have been consciously preserved . . . but because antiphony is still imbedded in the ritual performance, with more than one group of mourners, sometimes representing the living and the dead and singing in response to each other . . . . Continuity has been the strongest and most spontaneous in popular tradition.

The phenomenon of antiphonal lament structure and style may be interpreted as an act of reinforcing the emotional and social bonds, a sense of camaraderie, connections, and community among the performers of ritual laments. C. Nadia Seremetakis argues for the importance of antiphonal style and structure of Maniat women's lament performance in creating and cementing bonds between the soloist and chorus in the group of women mourners, and between the

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<sup>30</sup> Several examples of tragic antiphony (by no means exhaustive) are: Aeschylus *Pers.* 1038-77; *Choeph.* 156-59; Sophocles *Trach.* 874-80, 881-95; Euripides *Hel.* 164-90; *Phoen.* 1033-39; *Troad.* 146-52. See Alexiou 2002:131-60 on the Homeric origins of antiphonal structure in lamentation and for diachronic illustrations of antiphonal lament from the Homeric poems through to modern *moirólógia*.

<sup>31</sup> Aristotle in the *Poetics* 12.1452b defines the *kommos* thus. Cf. H. Foley: 2001:152-57; Sultan 1993:93-103; Holst-Warhaft 1992:45-47 for synopses of Alexiou's earlier work and brief comparisons between antiphony in ancient Greek tragedy and Seremetakis' work on antiphonal style and structure in Inner Mani. See Alexiou 2002:102-28, chapter 6, "The classification of ancient and modern laments and songs to the dead," particularly 102-8 on the epic and tragic distinctions between the terms *thrênos*, *góos*, and *kommos*. To the best of my knowledge, all subsequent work on ancient Greek lament traditions follows Alexiou's classifications as set forth in her chapter.

<sup>32</sup> See chapter 7, "Antiphonal structure and antithetical thought" (131-60), for a detailed history of the form and meaning of antiphony in Greek lament in the Homeric poems, Greek tragedy, Byzantine Christian hymns, and modern *moirólógia*.

community of female mourners and the larger village community (1991:99-124).<sup>33</sup> Her discussion of the role of antiphonic performance of laments as a vehicle of communication and social bonding among female mourners in rural Greece is instrumental to my argument for understanding this function of antiphonal style and structure within a diachronic framework of lament performance. My view is that the sense of female camaraderie and community represented in Euripides' *Suppliants* is mirrored in women's mourning practices in Inner Mani. A comparison between antiphonal passages from Euripides' *Suppliants* and modern Maniat laments documented by Seremetakis reveals ways in which antiphonal style and structure establish female community and solidarity through mourning (99-124).

Although Adrastus' persona is male, I would argue that throughout the play his character represents the role and function of a woman mourner. Euripides' portrayal of the Argive king in a state of lament in the beginning of the play clearly characterizes Adrastus as a weak and feminized male who manifests and enacts features of traditional female mourning. From the start of the play, the male Argive king is clearly included in the mourning mothers' communal "circle" of lamentation and solidarity. Thus, in the opening scene of the *Suppliants*, Aethra indicates that Adrastus is not only sympathetic to the mothers in mourning, but is actively engaged in lamentation, weeping as he "lies upon the ground" at Demeter's temple at Eleusis (*Supp.* 20-23):

κοινὸν δὲ φόρτον ταῖσδ' ἔχων χρείας ἐμῆς  
 Ἄδραστος ὄμμα δάκρυσιν τέγγων ὄδε  
 κεῖται, τό τ' ἔγχος τήν τε δυστυχεστάτην  
 στένων στρατεῖαν ἦν ἔπεμψεν ἐκ δόμων.

Sharing the burden of these women's appeal to me is  
 Adrastus here. His face is wet with tears as he lies upon the  
 ground, lamenting the ill-fated expedition he led from home.

Euripides again calls attention to Adrastus' femininity in Theseus' references to the Argive king's "pitiful mourning" (στενάζων οἰκτρὸν, 104) and his sharp command to the lamenting Argive king to λέγ' ἐκκαλύψας κρᾶτα καὶ πάρες γόον ("uncover your head, leave off your lament, and speak!" 111). A bit later in the play, Adrastus prefaces his plea to Theseus to retrieve the bodies of the slain Argive heroes with a recognition of his "disgraceful" acts of mourning and supplication: ἐν μὲν αἰσχύναις ἔχω / πίτνων πρὸς οὐδας γόνυ σὸν ἀμπίσχειν χερί ("I consider it disgraceful to fall upon the ground and cover your knees with my hands," 164-65); such actions are acceptable when they are manifestations of women's mourning and supplication, but shameful when enacted by a male.

Since Adrastus' agency in Euripides' *Suppliants* is comparable to that of a woman in a state of lamentation and he is included in the circle of Argive mothers in mourning, the antiphonal exchange between Adrastus and the chorus (794-821) is analogous to the

<sup>33</sup> See also Holst-Warhaft 1992:45-48.

phenomenon of female communication and bonding “in pain” that Seremetakis offers in her paradigm of modern Maniat women’s lament performance (see below). The lament-song exchange between Adrastus and chorus leader (*coryphaeus*) occurs during a highly emotional and dramatic point in the action of the play when the bodies of the slain Argive heroes are brought on stage to be lamented by Adrastus and the chorus. After the *coryphaeus* declares her desire to die and travel to Hades with the slain sons (794-97),<sup>34</sup> Adrastus initiates the antiphonal lament-song exchange that constitutes the *kommos* from lines 794-837 (*Supp.* 798-801):<sup>35</sup>

στεναγμόν, ὦ ματέρες,  
τῶν κατὰ χθονὸς νεκρῶν  
ἀύσατ’ ἀπύσατ’ ἀντίφων’ ἐμῶν  
στεναγμάτων κλυοῦσαι.

Utter, speak aloud, mothers,  
A groan for your sons below the earth!  
Listen to my groans  
and answer!

The intense emotional connection that this community of mourners shares is expressed rhetorically by the closely woven “threads” of emotional utterances—antiphonal “groans” or “laments” (στεναγμάτων)—that the singers of these laments (Adrastus and the chorus) “utter,” “speak aloud,” “listen to,” and “answer” (ἀύσατ’, ἀπύσατ’, κλυοῦσαι, ἀντίφων’). The antiphonal στεναγμάτων that Adrastus invites alludes to the *thrênoi* (ritual laments) that the Argive mothers will soon deliver. Euripides binds Adrastus and the chorus together psychologically and emotionally by interweaving their utterances of grief and lamentation within the stylistic framework of antiphonal performance. Both the Argive mothers and king take up and echo the threads of each other’s lament-songs in this highly emotive exchange (794-837). A poignant example is the interchange between them in lines 814-27:

δόθ’ ὡς περιπταῖσι δὴ χέρας προσαρμόσασ’ ἐμοῖς ἐν ἀγκῶσι τέκνα θῶμαι	(Chorus): Let me put my arms about my son and embrace him!
ἔχεις ἔχεις . . . . . . πημάτων γ’ ἄλις βάρος.	(Adrastus): You have, you have . . . (Chorus): . . . a weight of grief that suffices!
αἰᾶ ἄιαῖ.	(Adrastus): Ah me, <ah me>!
τοῖς τεκοῦσι δ’ οὐ λέγεις;	(Chorus): Is it not to his mother that you speak?
ἄιέτέ μου.	(Adrastus): Hear me!

<sup>34</sup> The motif of the journey occurs in ancient and modern laments for the dead. See Alexiou 2002:189-93.

<sup>35</sup> Lines 794-97 are an anapestic prelude to the antiphonal lament (the meter is primarily iambic) between Adrastus and the chorus. See Collard (1975:310 *ad loc.*; 311) for the metrical schema of the first *kommos*.

στένεις ἐπ'ἀμφοῖν ἄχη.	(Chorus): You lament both your woes and mine
εἴθε με Καδμείων ἔναρον στίχες ἐν κονίαισιν.	(Adrastus): Would that the Cadmean ranks had felled me in the dust!
ἐμὸν δὲ μήποτ' ἐζύγη δέμας ἐς ἀνδρὸς εὐνάν.	(Chorus): And I, would that my body had never been yoked to a man's bed! <sup>36</sup>
ἴδετε κακῶν πέλαγος, ὦ ματέρες τάλαιναι τέκνων.	(Adrastus): Look upon this sea of troubles, O unhappy mothers of sons!
κατὰ μὲν ὄνυξιν ἠλοκίσμεθ', ἀμφὶ δὲ σποδὸν κάρα κεχύμεθα.	(Chorus): Our cheeks are furrowed with our nails, our heads besprinkled with dust!

It is worth noting that the above exchange echoes the playwright's earlier description of antiphonal lament performance in lines 71-72 (chorus): ἀγῶν ὄδ' ἄλλος ἔρχεται / γόων γόοις διάδοχος ("See, each one takes up and leads laments in response to lamentations"). The close connection between the individuals who comprise this community of lament performers is reiterated in the chorus' cry to their "fellow singers" (ξυνωδοί) and those who "share in grievances" (ξυναλγηδόνες) to "take up the chorus that Hades honors" (73-75).

### ***Ponos, Truth, and Antiphony in Inner Mani***

The function of antiphonal lament performance in establishing a bond among the community of female participants that Euripides portrays in his *Suppliants* is mirrored in modern women's lament practices in the Inner Mani region of the Peloponnese. I reiterate that in the *Suppliants* Adrastus represents the agency and function of a female mourner through Euripides' feminized characterization and his traditionally "female" role in the antiphonal lament with the chorus (794-837), thus conforming to the paradigm of female mourning in ancient Greek tragedy. Interpreters of the *Suppliants* discuss the subversive and disruptive nature of the Argive mothers' lamentations as well as their suppression by Adrastus' eulogy, delivered in the style of the *epitaphios logos*.<sup>37</sup> However, they have generally neglected to discuss how the antiphonal lament between Adrastus and the chorus of Argive mothers in mourning expresses the sense of communal grief that develops among female lamenters in ancient Greek tragedy and modern women's lament performances. In the final section of this essay, I refer to Seremetakis' observations about female lament in modern Inner Mani to illustrate modern analogues to ancient tragic examples of the expression and validation of *ponos* as well as the importance of antiphony in constructing and preserving a female community in mourning.

<sup>36</sup> Lines 822-23 are my own translation.

<sup>37</sup> See, for example: Collard 1975:308; Derderian 2001:48; H. Foley 2001:36-45; Loraux 1986:48-49, 107-8; McClure 1999:45-47.

Seremetakis, who has family origins in Inner Mani and who participated in mourning rituals as a *moiroloyístra* during her research, believes that the Maniat women's lament tradition is an instrument of cultural power for an otherwise marginalized group in a traditionally male-dominated community (1991:2-5, 99-125, and *passim*).<sup>38</sup> Indeed, she recognizes women's laments as poetic expressions of emotion as well as a means of creating and cementing individual and community identities within the cultural context of Maniat village society: "Antiphonic reciprocity between women in the mourning ritual entails the intensive interpenetration of collective and individual poetic creation" (3). Essential to Seremetakis' examination and interpretation of Maniat female ritual lament is her chapter concerning what she terms "the ethics of antiphony," in which she explores the complex elements and functions of Maniat women's lament performance by discussing different ways women signify, witness, and validate pain (99-125). Seremetakis observes that mourning is a ritual process through which Maniat women construct an identity of the self; the element of pain (*ponos*) as "truth-claiming" is an essential aspect of female identity and of establishing an alternative, resistant community through the performance of laments for the dead.<sup>39</sup> In the context of the Maniat *kláma* (the wake and mourning ritual, a distinctly female institution), women mourners construct "truth" by expressing, witnessing, and validating each other's pain through a ritual process of mourning manifested in the antiphonal form and structure of lament performance. In the following Maniat *moirólói*, the leader of the dirge (*koriféa*), twice widowed, asks her audience to "witness to the truth of her discourse" (103):

I married off my Andreas  
 nearby me and conveniently  
 here in Koumouidrianika,  
 and afterwards, my Demos,  
 he took Christofilo,  
 the sister of Alogakos  
 who was a prosperous man  
 and filled our houses  
 with dresses and slips.  
 Eh, Alogako, come close  
 For me to speak this  
 And you to hear it.  
 Am I speaking truth or lies?

I chose this *moirólói* because the addressee of the phrase "come close" is a male kin of the *moiroloyístra*. Seremetakis asserts that the female mourner's appeal to her male relative to

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<sup>38</sup> H. Foley (2001:152, 156-57) and Holst-Warhaft (1992:45-7) also refer to Seremetakis' discussion of the role of antiphony in modern Maniat lament performance.

<sup>39</sup> See Martin (2003:126-28) for a discussion of the importance of "truth-claiming" in the contexts of modern Maniat, Homeric, and Irish lament. See also Ó Laoire 1999, 2004, 2005 and Partridge 1980 on Irish lament.

“witness” her *ponos* is in fact an appeal to her audience of women to “witness” and to “validate” her lament, since a male will avoid “crossing the gender boundaries of the lament session” (1991:103). During the *kláma*, the female lamenter will often call to and name a woman in the audience and invite her to draw closer to the corpse; those summoned then actively enter the mourning ritual, thus intensifying the emotional atmosphere of the *kláma* (97). In contrast, when a *moiroloyístra* calls upon a man, he neither responds nor engages in a dialogue with the mourners; nor does he enter into their physical space of lamentation, for the *kláma* exemplifies the interior, distinctly female space (95).<sup>40</sup> Seremetakis recounts a salient illustration of the geography of gender boundaries in the modern Maniat *kláma* (98):

The square was always divided into two gender domains—one side was occupied by women, the other side by men. One man moving towards the male side inadvertently passed too close to the female space of the *kláma*. He was immediately addressed by a female mourner, literally called to “come close and join.” The expression on his face was one of embarrassment, disorientation, and confusion. He quickly moved away.

This interaction is reminiscent of the interface between Theseus and the community of female lamenters in Euripides’ *Suppliants* 87-99. The Athenian king’s reaction to the mourners’ dirges and physical gestures of ritual lamentation is one of fear and “disorientation, and confusion” as well. Although Theseus and Aethra engage in a dialogue, Theseus refuses to take part in the pitiable “wailing, beating of breasts, and keening of the dead” (γόους . . . καὶ στέρνων κτύπτου / νεκρῶν τε θρήνους, 87-88). Unlike Adrastus, who, in the first part of Euripides’ *Suppliants*, is part of the community of lamenting women, Maniat men remain on the periphery or outside of the geographic and emotional/psychological boundaries of the female-controlled *kláma* mourning ritual. Instead, they exercise legitimate legal and political control through their participation in the *yerondikí*, the all-male council.<sup>41</sup>

During the *kláma* ritual, a single female lamenter (*koriféa*) emerges from among the collective mourners (*moiroloyístres*) as a leader who improvises a solo lament; Seremetakis observes that at least one woman is perceived to be the *koriféa* of all of the mourners “because she attains the deepest intensities of pain” (1991:99). The antiphonal responses of the *moiroloyístres* “validate” the soloist’s pain with their own pain, thereby legitimizing *ponos* by “witnessing” it. Antiphony is in fact “an extension of the ethic of helping,” that Seremetakis views as “a complex system of social exchange” that encompasses the female spheres of agricultural labor as well as mourning (100-101). One example of an intense and dramatic antiphonal lament is that of a “poetry-prose counterpoint” that takes place during a *kláma* ritual

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<sup>40</sup> Seremetakis examines the multiple boundaries between men and women in Maniat society. Mortuary, agriculture, and household spaces are connected by the “ethics of care” (95-98): “In this society with its everyday emphasis on optical distancing, care and tending are symbolized by special intimacy. Because of the predominant inside/outside polarities, and the multiple boundaries between men and women, clan and clan, and society and nature, special intimacy has a particular impact and meaning: interiority” (96).

<sup>41</sup> See Seremetakis (1991:126-58) on the function of the *yerondikí* and the conflicts between this all-male jural institution and the indirect political and social power of the female-controlled *kláma* in Maniat society.

where the monologues are sung by the two daughters of the deceased in coordination with the lament, which is sung by an elderly woman (112-15).

Seremetakis perceives a relation between the modern Maniat *koriféa* and the ancient Greek *coryphaeus*, for both emerge as leaders of the chorus who engage in a dialogical relationship with them: “Like the *coryphaeus*, the Maniat *koriféa* emerges as a leader from within the chorus, and in the *moiolói* establishes an antiphonic relation to the chorus. The *koriféa* is united with the chorus in an agon with the Other, be that death, *moira* (fate), or the male social order outside the *kláma*” (124). However, unlike the professional mourners’ and the kinswomen’s singing of antiphonal *thrênoi* in ancient Greek epic and tragic poetry, the modern Maniat *thrínos* holds no association with professional mourners; nevertheless, highly skilled mourners are often given precedence in a *kláma* mourning session (124-25).<sup>42</sup>

Seremetakis calls attention to the importance in the Maniat culture of mourning of properly “witnessing” death through ritual lamentation. There are two types of death in Inner Mani: the “silent” and “naked” (therefore “bad”) death, and the “witnessed” (thus “good”) death (76-77, 101). A “silent” death implies isolation, cold, nakedness, poverty, and public shame (*ibid*). One of the signs of a “naked” death is “the absence of a chorus and of other soloists to ‘take’ the *moiolói* from the *koriféa*” (76). When the chorus, through their antiphonic responses (e.g., singing refrains, doubling the last word of a verse, stylized sobbing), hears and responds to the soloist’s speaking the discourse of death, they are “witnessing” her pain and therefore validating the lament discourse (100; 104). Indeed, a “silent” death in Maniat society is a death without proper antiphonal lamentation (103-4). The “good” death, in contrast, is “witnessed” by female relations and friends in the female *kláma* mourning ritual. This process of validating, witnessing, and legitimizing the soloist’s pain by her group of fellow mourners, Seremetakis argues, is essential to female Maniat identity and in establishing an alternative, resistant female community through lament-performance (120). Moreover, Maniat women themselves claim that they cannot sing laments properly without the help of others; in this cultural context, pain must be socially constructed in antiphonic relations in order to be rendered valid (*ibid*). Seremetakis defines the “acoustics of death” as embodied in lamenting and “screaming” the dead (101). In the following lament, recited by an elderly Maniat woman, the mourner emphasizes the lack of a witness (104):

Where are you  
 Yiannakena [the dead]?  
 I climbed up your staircase  
 and I found Yiannakis [husband of the dead]  
 I climbed down the stairs  
 and I found Voulitsa alone  
 and Kalliopitsa the little one  
 and Vasilo drawing water [daughters of the dead].  
 I climbed back up

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<sup>42</sup> Cf. Alexiou 2002:11-13, 131-32.

And said to Yiannakis,  
 “Are we not going to say anything  
 to witness her, to suffer for her?”

The husband desires to “erase the dead” by silencing the mourners, but the *moiroloyístra* “rescues,” so to speak, the deceased from a “silent,” “naked” death by her *moiolóí*. Seremetakis’ account of an urban niece of the deceased who sang dirges, performed the ritual lament gestures, and talked to the dead for over seven hours in order to avoid a “silent” death is memorable (101). These accounts of Maniat *moiroloyístres* “witnessing” and “validating” a death in order to render it “good” reminds the reader of the tragic figure of Electra’s unceasing mourning in Sophocles’ and Euripides’ *Electra*. For while the playwrights portray Electra’s continual mourning as excessive, overly passionate, and at times dangerous, in the context of modern Maniat culture she would be properly “witnessing” her father’s death—saving Agamemnon from a “silent,” “naked” death—by her extravagant lamentation. Perhaps Electra’s emotive utterances represent the ancient equivalent to the modern Maniat “screaming” the dead.<sup>43</sup> I see a striking parallel as well between the choruses’ laments in the final *kommos* of Euripides’ *Suppliants* after Theseus and the sons of the slain Argive chiefs bring in urns containing the bones (ὄστᾱ) of the war-dead and the reaction of female relatives during a Maniat *kláma* when a box, bearing the bones of the son of the deceased, is brought into the room (110-11). In the *Suppliants* passage, the *coryphaeus* reacts to the sight of the remains of the Argive mothers’ slain sons (*Supp.* 1114-22):<sup>44</sup>

ἰὼ·  
 τάδε δὴ παίδων ἤδη φθιμένων  
 ὄστᾱ φέρεται. λάβετε, ἀμφίπολοι,  
 γραΐας ἀμενοῦς (οὐ γὰρ ἔνεστιν  
 ῥώμη παίδων ὑπὸ πένθους)  
 πολλοῦ τε χρόνου ζώσης μέτρα δὴ  
 καταλειβομένης τ’ ἄλγεσι πολλοῖς.  
 τί γὰρ ἂν μεῖζον τοῦδ’ ἔτι θνητοῖς  
 πάθος ἐξεύροις  
 ἢ τέκνα θανόντ’ ἐσιδέσθαι;

Look! They are bringing the bones of our dead children!  
 Attendants, take hold of a weak old woman! Grief for my  
 son has left me strengthless. I have lived a long space of  
 years and been melted away with many woes. What grief

<sup>43</sup> Seremetakis remarks that sometimes Maniat “screaming” the dead is completely cathartic and disorderly, while sometimes it is semi-musical (1991:110).

<sup>44</sup> These lines, as well as lines 794-97, are an anapestic introduction to the following iambic metra of the *kommos*, where Euripides employs a second chorus in lines 1123-64 (the sons of the seven slain Argive warriors). Cf. Collard 1975:390-95.



greater than seeing one's children slain could you find for  
mortals?

The chorus follows with a lament that begins the *kommos* for the seven chiefs (*Supp.* 1127-30):

ἰὼ, ἰὼ,  
πᾶ δάκρυα φέρεις φίλα  
ματρὶ τῶν ὀλωλότων  
σποδοῦ τε πλῆθος ὀλίγον ἀντὶ σωμάτων  
εὐδοκίμων δὴ ποτ' ἐν Μυκῆναις;

Ah, ah,  
How can you bring tears to the loving  
mother of the slain  
and a little dust in exchange for the bodies  
of men once glorious in Mycenae?

The two choruses, one consisting of the mothers, the other of the sons of the slain Argive chiefs, continue their antiphonal lament for their *philoï* (1131-64). It is worth remembering that the death rites for the Attic war-dead involved the laying out and cremation of the bodies on the battlefield—the very ritual that Theseus performed for the slain Argive chiefs—and public lamentation over their bones, followed by the *epitaphios logos* (H. Foley 2001:39-40).<sup>45</sup> The following scene from a Maniat *kláma* ritual presents a striking analogy (Seremetakis narrates; 1991:110):

At some point in the late afternoon, a little box appeared, and I sensed an entire change in the atmosphere of the *kláma* (wake). . . . The box was placed by the head of the coffin, where it remained closed for some time. When a mourner referred to the dead son in her lament, one sister began to shout *adhérfi* (brother) and the *kláma* reached its peak. Ascending screams and calls to the dead son by his name filled the room. At that moment the box was opened and bones appeared. . . . When the box was opened, a sudden and powerful jolt electrified the room. It was so forceful that I do not recall who opened the box. One or two human leg bones were taken out. One scream, coming from the elder sister, rose above all others. It retained its peak without subsiding till the woman passed out. . . . Women were standing and screaming, pulling their hair out. It was the peak. . . . The two sisters had been exclaiming, “My brother, is that you?! Is that how you became? It can't be.” The men, aware of the power of the emotions in that room, were alarmed and frightened.

<sup>45</sup> Apart from H. Foley's illuminating analysis of this play (2001), neither she nor any other recent commentator (to the best of my knowledge) has remarked on the similarities between this final *kommos* of Euripides' *Suppliants* and the most dramatic scene of lament in Seremetakis' ethnography. See Garland 1985, Danforth 1982, Kurtz and Boardman 1971, and Morris 1992 regarding ancient and modern Greek burial customs and rituals.

The emotionally charged atmosphere of these two “lamenting the bones” scenes is certainly comparable: the intense emotional effect of introducing the bones of the deceased in both the ancient and modern performance contexts is tangibly kinetic. The *coryphaeus* of the ancient tragedy and an elder Maniat *moiroloyístra* both exhibit extreme physical weakness. The lamenting family members address their deceased relatives directly in the second person: the Maniat sisters in the *kláma* repeatedly exclaim “brother,” while the chorus of sons in the *Suppliants* in the *kommós* shout “Father (πάτερ), do you hear your sons’ lamenting?” (1142), and again “Father (πάτερ), I seem even now to see you before my eyes,” (1151).<sup>46</sup> The tragic choruses and the *moiroloyístres* “help” each other lament through antiphonal call and response in the *Suppliants*, and by the modern lamenters “taking” the cathartic screaming, one from the other. At the end of both of these ancient and modern “lamenting the bones” episodes, a male authority figure enters (Theseus in the *Suppliants*, the Maniat men in the periphery of the *kláma*) in order to interject a “rational,” calming influence to the mourning session.<sup>47</sup>

Seremetakis’ observations regarding the function and significance of modern Maniat lament practices serve as a paradigm for the diachronic oral tradition and the “oral-derived” tragic textual tradition of Greek women’s laments for the dead. Performance of laments, be it the primary “enabling event” of the funeral itself, or the representation and reaction to death in the context of a tragic play, establishes and cements bonds among a community of women, or represented women in the case of tragedy. Lamentation utilizes pain (*ponos*) as a means of communication and expression of “truth”: the truth of an individual’s personal suffering and the truth concerning the female community’s criticisms and even protest against the wider sphere of patriarchal village society. Both ancient tragic representations of women’s laments for the dead and authentic modern accounts of lament performances may be viewed as empowering verbal arts, as manifestations of women’s ability to communicate individual and collective grief for the deceased, and as a “bridge” between the worlds of the living and the dead, between mourner and non-mourner, and between the otherwise marginalized members of the muted “female universe” and the larger social context in which men wield ultimate authority—with the exception of how women publicly lament their dead.

This comparison of the elements of solitude, resistance, and solidarity in the portrayals of female lament for the dead in ancient Greek tragedy with women’s lament practices in modern Greece suggests to me that modern *moirológia* have their roots in the ancient *thrênoi*, and that the ancient tragic representations accurately reflect the actual practice of ritual lamentation. This is not to claim teleologically that ancient and modern Greek ritual laments are the “same,” nor that we can understand everything about ancient women’s lamentation from studying its modern counterpart. Since parallels do exist, and since some bear striking resemblance to one another in

<sup>46</sup> A notable difference here is that, unlike the *Suppliants*’ passage, the female relatives of the deceased call to the dead son “by his name” before the sisters call out, “my brother, is that you?”

<sup>47</sup> Theseus reminds the Argive mourners that he rescued their “valiant” (ἀρίστων σώμαθ’) loved ones’ remains in his speech (*Suppliants* 1165-75). Seremetakis (1991:110-11) observes that men entered this *kláma* and took the women who had fainted out of the room to bring them back to consciousness by giving them coffee and fresh air.

a diachronic context, I believe that it is in the interest of scholars across disciplines to pay attention to them and to attempt to interpret them in ways that can help enliven, enrich, and nuance our understanding of the ancient texts. Contemporary ethnographic studies of lament, with their attention to social, performative, and political conditions, are embedded in a context. In a trans-disciplinary, diachronic analysis, studies of recent lament suggest, and even supply, a context that a strictly philological approach misses. An argument for the inclusion of such knowledge as a necessary component of our understanding of classical laments seeks a renewal of these ancient and sacred works through an acknowledgment that they emerged initially from human experience, which, however removed in time, may be partially recovered and effectively adopted into a tradition of rich linguistic study.<sup>48</sup>

*University of California, Davis*

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# **The Metamorphosis of an Oral Tradition: Dissonance in the Digital Stories of Aboriginal Peoples in Canada**

**Lorenzo Cherubini**

## **Introduction**

Storytelling, as an oral tradition for Aboriginal<sup>1</sup> peoples in Canada, is considered an ancient art form (Cruikshank 1990). Aboriginal peoples' communities are often founded on stories that are characteristically sustaining: communicating the epistemologies and norms that constitute their worldviews (see Valdés 2004; Dei 2000). Digital storytelling is understood as a form of short narrative told in the first person and enhanced by visual text and symbolic imagery (Ohler 2005; Salpeter 2005; Weis et al. 2002). It is considered an extension of oral storytelling, is welcomed by Aboriginal peoples, and represents a "continuation of what Aboriginal people have been doing from time immemorial" (Hopkins 2006:342), and complements the preferred values and styles of interaction innate to Aboriginal pre-colonial education paradigms (Battiste 2000a and b; Barman et al. 1986).

The metamorphosis of the oral tradition of storytelling into the digital medium creates a sense of audience for the elders who self-profess to be intermediaries from one generation to the next. As John Miles Foley (2008) insightfully suggests, oral tradition and digital technology are the frameworks to the fading era characteristic of the printed page. Digital storytelling situates the elders in the line of public gaze, where once their audience was more immediate and culturally relative. The presumed influence of their stories involves the variation of exposition, the representational language, and the latent relationships between the human and spiritual realms according to Aboriginal peoples' worldviews. The elders' role is to sustain the continuity of belief and so accept the digital as a means to reach a broader audience and illuminate a complex system of interrelated values.

By employing a reflexive ethnographic framework to examine selected digital stories from the Omushkegowuk area in Ontario, Canada, a core interpretation of these worldviews emerged; namely, the presence and exploitation of western colonial influence has caused the profound dissonance experienced by Aboriginal peoples' cultural, civil, symbolic, and spiritual paradigms, resulting from the presence and exploitation of western colonial influence. In turn,

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<sup>1</sup> In this paper the term Aboriginal includes all peoples who descended from various First Nations in Canada prior to contact with Europeans. This does not ignore the fact that each First Nation represents its own distinct historical, linguistic, and cultural traditions. In Canada, the Constitution identifies three categories of Aboriginal peoples including, Indian, Inuit, and Métis.

this paper further discusses how the stories of the elders require a rather imaginative interpretation from non-aboriginal peoples on the cultural periphery of these oral traditions.

### *Context of the Nishnawbe-Aski Peoples*

The Aboriginal peoples of this area have firm beliefs that are rooted to their land and natural resources. Foundational to this understanding are the typical vocations of hunting, trapping, and fishing that are passed from one generation to the next. The Nishnawbe-Aski Nation represents 49 First Nations near James Bay, Ontario, two-thirds of Ontario's land, with a population of 45,000 people. The traditional spoken languages include Ojibway, Cree, and Ojicree. They are ranked 69<sup>th</sup> in the United Nations' Human Development Index and hold the dubious distinctions of having the lowest life expectancy in Canada and the highest youth suicide rates in the world (A. Fiddler n.d.).

### **Conceptual Framework**

The literature suggests that ethnographic research focused upon culture, language, and the identity of Aboriginal peoples "would do well to cultivate the notion of Indians in unexpected places . . . the internet and other communication technologies" (Strong 2005:259; see also Collins 1998; Cruikshank 1998; Dombrowski 2004; Harmon 2002). This project fills a void in the research literature and is a segment of a larger study that examines Aboriginal peoples' oral traditions and various paradigms of teaching and learning (Cardinal & Hildebrandt 2000). It inquires about the communication of Aboriginal peoples' culture, history, and values as told by the elders' stories via digital technology (Basso 1996; Horne & McBeth 1998; Mitchell 2001; Sarris 1993). As a mainstream researcher engaged in a reflexive ethnographic approach, I believe that respect for the solidarity of Aboriginal peoples' beliefs and their uniqueness in the human social world are of paramount importance. The interpretations of the elders, as they were shared in the digital stories, were thus not subject to appraisal and were instead accepted as traditional teachings from which new understandings could be gleaned, particularly from non-aboriginal peoples who are situated on the cultural periphery of these oral traditions.

### **Elders as Storytellers**

In Aboriginal peoples' communities, the elders are considered the gatekeepers of wisdom and the conduits for the preservation and renewal of linguistic and cultural tradition (Crossing Boundaries 2006). An elder possesses knowledge of traditional teachings and ceremonies and is able to relate this knowledge to inform others (Stiegelbauer 1996; Waldram 1994). In Aboriginal peoples' communities, oral narratives are recollections told by elders who witnessed or were involved in the subject of the story (Haraway 1991). Traditional stories are told cross-generationally by elders who often consider the accounts as belonging to the community and not to themselves (Minha-ha 1989). The stories are also perceived as socioculturally significant

(Barton 2004; Dei et al. 2000). The elders' "collective memory and critical conscience of past experiences" shape their understandings of the social, physical, and spiritual worlds to which they belong (Dei et al. 2000:46-47). As a longstanding oral tradition, storytelling honors Aboriginal peoples' customs and epistemologies and is perceived as critical for the revitalization of First Nations cultures (Castellano 2000; Iseke-Barnes 2003). Stories provide the intergenerational communication of essential ideas (Lanigan 1998:103; see Iseke-Barnes 2003:218). They also acknowledge the imperial oppression of Aboriginal peoples in Canada and their resistance to colonial rule (Byrne and Fouillard 2000; Harjo and Bird 1997; Huggins 1997).

Stories are also instrumental in furthering an appreciation for the sociocultural behaviors unique to Aboriginal peoples (see, for example, Basso 1996; Casey 1996; Feld and Basso 1996). For Aboriginal peoples, storytelling embeds a sense of community that is related to notions of bravery and survival (Snow 1977). The metamorphosis of traditional stories into digital form fosters the sharing of oral testimonies between Aboriginal peoples and mainstream society (Horsley 2007). Storytelling broadcasts the experiences of the elders to a broader, electronically accessible venue. Digital stories feature the voice of the storyteller and their contribution to public culture through the interplay of text, symbol, and voice (Burgess 2006). Digital storytelling honors the voice of the elders and affirms their cultural and symbolic roles as the gatekeepers of wisdom (Atton 2001). They are examples of "social communication, where communication is not to be understood narrowly as the exchange of information or ideas but as the affective practice of the social" (Burgess 2006:210). The elders share their stories of culturally significant experiences in a publicly accessible forum. Through the use of technical tools, graphic and audio dimensions, and the narrative voice, digital stories offer opportunities for the viewer to identify with the subject and potentially be "changed by them" (Salpeter 2005:20; Weis et al. 2002). The visual component typically consists of photographs or culturally relevant imagery and is meant to lend a visual interpretation of the spoken word (Lafontaine 2006; Qiongli 2006). The digital stories not only perpetuate key traditions in Aboriginal culture, but are also conducive for establishing forums where "vernacular bridges can be built [between generations] that enable them to share, celebrate, and understand different values . . . . Stories are transferable and will continue after the storyteller has departed" (Horsley 2007:267-68). Further, they offer rich opportunities for intercultural learning (Crossing Boundaries 2006). As Candice Hopkins states, "cyberspace has been occupied, transformed, appropriated, and reinvented by native people in ways similar to how we [Native peoples] have always approached real space . . . digital technologies have become a medium for speaking and telling our stories" (2006:343). In Aboriginal peoples' communities, storytellers accept digital media as a means of sharing their distinct experiences and worldviews that impact upon contemporary realities (*ibid.*; Qiongli 2006).

## Methodology

Purposeful selection determined the inclusion of the six digital stories under study, including Fiddler's "The Whiteman Knew Very Little of the Native's Heritage" (1978), Gabriel Kam's "That is One of the Many Wonders" (1977), Helen Mckay's "We Were Taught How to

Do Everything” (1987), Jane Nothing’s “That is What I Know” (1978), Ellen Sainnawap’s “That is How Poor the People Were” (1975), and Peter Sturgeon’s “The Things People Did Long Ago” (1977). The selection was based on three factors: the recording date of the story (from 1975 to 2000 to mark one generation), its status as a recognized and publicly accessible electronic document, and its having emanated from the Ontario context, given that the concept of shared identity is intrinsic to a sense of place (Huff 2006). The selected digital stories belong to the collection entitled *Stories of Our Elders* collection, which is the property of the government of Canada Digital Collections and is currently archived by Library and Archives Canada online.<sup>2</sup> The stories are narrated in Oji-Cree by the elders of the Nishnawbe-Aski region, and were collected between 1975 and 1993. The tapes were transcribed first from Oji-Cree into syllabics and then into English. The stories under examination derive from the *atesokawenan* type (stories of sacred and legendary traditions and events) and the *tepaachimonewa* type (stories based on history and apparently real circumstances).

This study departs from the kind of traditional ethnography that calls for the researcher to be immersed in the culture of the subject-community (Strong 2005). Instead, it marshals a contemporary ethnographic practice that entails participant observation in more pioneering sample communities, such as institutional settings and cultural centers (see Bender 2002; Bodinger de Uriarte 2003; Cattelino 2004; Erickson 2002; Karson 2005), wherein the risk of encroaching upon private Aboriginal interests by the researcher is diminished. This reflexive ethnographic approach allowed for the *virtual* engagement and intimate encounter with the oral traditions of the elders. Although essentially being situated on the periphery of Aboriginal peoples’ cultural traditions, the digital stories served as entry points to reflect, interpret, note, and describe Aboriginal peoples’ epistemologies. Reflexive ethnography facilitates this unobtrusive inquiry from a conceptually open-minded perspective.

The multifaceted interpretations of the digital stories were managed by content analysis. On a pragmatic level, the stories were treated as data and subjected to a content analysis that tracked the process and scope of emerging insights (Patton 1980). The transcribed stories ranged from two to five pages in length. The text of each story was re-read and labeled by category, and patterns between categories and across stories were considered. Properties within the categories were distinguished as descriptors that represented the smallest segments of significant interpretation. The stories were then subjected to a second critical reading and the themes were exhaustively compared to the emerging categories and considered for applicability. The suitability of the properties within each subcategory determined their relevance (Avdi 2005; Johnstone and Frith Johnstone 2005). Selected extracts from the digital stories that were key in the formulation of the central interpretation are cited by the elder’s last name and the story’s date of recording.

The qualitative content analysis inductively arrived at four subcategories: the central role of family relations and cultural traditions as described in the stories; the influence of spirituality on Aboriginal peoples’ values; a unique narrative form employed by the elders described as a stream-of-consciousness technique; and the sharing of altruistic truths as a means of enlightening younger generations of Aboriginal peoples. These subcategories and their collective 14

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<sup>2</sup> See <http://epe.lac-bac.gc.ca/100/205/301/ic/cdc/elders/Frames/index.htm>.

properties were subsumed into a core categorical interpretation described as a depiction of Aboriginal peoples' profound sense of cultural, civil, symbolic, and spiritual dissonance resulting from the presence of and exploitation by western colonial influence. The paper also discusses the altruistic truths and intrinsic value statements made by the elders that require an imaginative interpretation from those who reside on the cultural periphery of these oral traditions.

### **Interpretations and Descriptions**

Interpretations of the stories are based on the written incarnation of the story considered as text, but also on feeling as conveyed through the voice of the elder. The following core categories emerged and are described below.

#### *Cultural Dissonance*

Consistent in the stories are the elders' first-hand accounts of the poverty that was characteristic of Aboriginal peoples' way of life. Typical of others, the elder Ellen Sainnawap very matter-of-factly states, "people were poor long ago . . . I did not think of eating. I guess I was starving" (1975). Profound poverty, according to the elders, was the norm for their migratory way of life, making it necessary to collectively rely upon the traditional practices of fishing and trapping. Although the elders reminisce about particular families who especially suffered, those individuals are not specifically identified because their identity was considered in light of tribal members who sustained themselves and each other through the cultural practices taught by the elders. According to Helen Mckay, to name only one elder, "we were taught how to do everything . . . . We were taught how to prepare food when animals were killed. We were taught how to prepare fish . . . . We were taught how to prepare beaver hides" (1987).

The engendering of such traditions not only contributed to Aboriginal peoples' survival during their travels, but also served to further their distinctiveness and identity. In many of the stories the elders distinguish the culturally different "Whiteman's food" (as described in Sainnawap 1975) that represented a foreign source of sustenance gathered not by trapping or fishing but by excursions to "the store." Such practices were not only culturally unsustainable according to Aboriginal peoples' customs, but resulted in perceptions of the Whiteman that further alienated Aboriginal peoples from the European presence. Typical of others, Peter Sturgeon admitted: "It seemed that the company got all of our money . . . . We did not know how costly things were. We thought everything was cheap . . . now that I think about it, I see how costly all the company's stuff was" (1977). The elders readily share the feelings of exploitation experienced by their people at the hands of the colonial presence that capitalized on Aboriginal peoples' lack of familiarity with the market exchange of food and goods. As T. Fiddler (1978) put it, "the Whiteman knew very little of the Native's heritage. He did not understand their cultural values." Worse yet, he further intensified the cultural dissonance experienced by Aboriginal peoples.

Moreover, the elders cite the Eurocentric dominance over their educational paradigms as another example of cultural dissonance. There are numerous accounts of how Aboriginal

children were educated by their parents, who modeled not only cultural practices but literacy skills as well: “We were also taught how to read and write in syllabics. The lessons started with easy words and then get harder as we went along. That is how we learned. We were not taught the sounds of the symbols first. That is how they taught us” (Mckay 1987). As a further consequence of colonial exploitation, elders spoke about formal Eurocentric schooling practices that were markedly different than Aboriginal customs: “School was held at the agency cabin for three months. Some of the children left for town schools after they were taught here. My parents did not let me go. We were taught the Whiteman’s language in the school, not the Native language” (Mckay 1987). The elders lamented the loss of linguistic traditions and educational practices that fostered their cultural uniqueness, and their digital stories represent Aboriginal peoples’ beliefs that education should complement Aboriginal values and tradition. The stories are testimonies to the importance that elders invest in the teaching of Aboriginal languages that sustain traditional beliefs and nurture a greater sense of Aboriginal self-identity. Language and culture, according to the stories of the elders, are the principal means for the cross-generational transferral of knowledge to illuminate Aboriginal peoples’ experiences and identity. From this perspective the Whiteman’s language is culturally dissonant. Typical of the other elders, Gabriel Kam shares his resignation to the fact that custom and linguistic displacement experienced by the Aboriginal people have rendered them forever different: “The times have changed from what they were before” (1977). Mckay also suggests the foreshadowing of the hardship experienced by Aboriginal peoples resulting from the cultural dissonance of colonial rule: “My father told us that we would have a hard time in the future and that everything would change. I am beginning to see what he was talking about” (1987).

### *Civil Dissonance*

The introduction and subsequent imposition of colonial rules and regulations also resonated, according to the elders, with a sense of dissonance for Aboriginal peoples. Aboriginal peoples, who consider themselves to be “made for this earth,” felt displaced by civil laws that were alien to their culture: “The Natives did not know the rules and regulations that the Whiteman made. The Whiteman did not talk to nor did they give notice to the Natives. They came suddenly . . . . It has not been right for the Natives since then. The Whiteman did that to them” (Kam 1977). The Eurocentric law had, in other words, no contextual applicability or relevance for Aboriginal peoples. The Whiteman’s civil law practices represent colonial arrogance and oppression against unsuspecting Aboriginal peoples. The elders make it explicitly clear in the stories that Aboriginal peoples are well aware of the colonial exploitation inflicted upon them, and lament the Whiteman’s governance that seems to augment their sense of cultural dissonance. The Natives, according to Nothing (1978), “should be able to handle and look after their welfare [particularly because they] have no idea how the [imposed] laws and regulations work for the Natives.” The sense of being regulated by an external governing body is counter to the natural laws and tribal traditions characteristic of Aboriginal culture. In this vein, the elders’ stories seem to indicate a partial succumbing to the sense of powerlessness Aboriginal peoples feel in terms of controlling their futures. The infusion of capitalist interest and the oppression of their traditional culture leaves them resigned to a state of doubt: “What will happen?” asks

Nothing (1978), “I do not know.” Similarly, Fiddler contemplates the perils that the imperial governance represented and regretfully observes that “we had no time to think things through about how we would handle the coming of the Whiteman” (1978). Common in the stories are circumstances where the elders speak on behalf of their peoples to describe the civil dissonance created by colonial rules and regulations. For example, Fiddler cites the blatant injustices of the Whiteman, who “did not tell [Aboriginal peoples] about the laws to be followed. They did not tell the people about the regulations that had to be followed” (1978), yet indiscriminately imposed them.

Land treaties, as well, are often referred to in the stories. The elders’ voices represent the collective sentiments of Aboriginal peoples in stating that the land was an instrument of further colonial exploitation and civil dissonance (Kam 1977):

The Whiteman promised the Natives that as long as the sun is in the sky, I will look after you when I use your land. The Whiteman’s promises were very good the first time he came. Now you can hardly see the good promises he made about caring for the Natives today. I know that the first Whiteman who made these promises is not alive. Their promises were broken. They do whatever they want and do not keep the promises that were made to the Natives. The Natives do not hold back anything from the Whiteman, they just try to get along. The Native people do not make things difficult for the Whiteman as he lives here on this earth.

The elders cite the overt manipulation of Aboriginal values as the Whiteman couches his promises to the Natives in the discourse of the natural imagery of the sun and skies that are innate to Aboriginal peoples’ worldviews. A common thread woven throughout the stories is the assumption of an imperial presence, of having free license and managerial authority over Aboriginal peoples’ land and laws.

### *Symbolic Dissonance*

A further sense of dissonance is evident in the discussions about the symbolic displacement of Aboriginal peoples’ customs. The elders meticulously describe the gathering of materials, the intricate labor, and the process of assembly involved in building a canoe. As significant as the actual product, however, is the symbolic importance inherent in the sense of community that is implied among the various tribal members who assume an unquestioned responsibility to assist (Sturgeon 1977):

After all this was done, many people would help sew the canoe. They helped each other make the canoe. After it was finished, they were able to use the canoe. This is what they did when they wanted a new canoe. No money was needed, unlike today when you need much money to buy one boat.

This sense of community is fundamental to the construction of the canoe. Like others, this elder makes a stark contrast in his story between Aboriginal peoples’ ethos to work communally for the greater good of their tribe and the market-driven dependence on financial means more



characteristic of Eurocentric paradigms. The point is underscored in Sturgeon's story, as he emphasizes the communal effort required to build the boat and laments the fact that he does "not see them anymore" (1977). Further, the making of snowshoes and the tanning of hides, along with the building of canoes, are consistently described in the stories as frames of reference for illustrating how these cultural symbols of the past no longer represent the same sense of tribal community and spirit of survival that distinguished the distinct identity of Aboriginal peoples.

### *Spiritual Dissonance*

Throughout the *atesokawenan*-type stories, the elders draw upon the image of the shaking tent. Typical of others is the following account by the elder Sainnawap (1975):

There would be an image standing in the shaking tent. It looked like the image of a Whiteman standing there. The people would ask the image for a cigarette. The cigarette looked real to those people who saw this. Animals would enter the shaking tent and tell stories. All the animals would go into the shaking tent that the Indian built long ago. The Native people were able to know many things from the shaking tent. If they wanted to know whether a person died or if someone was lost, they used the shaking tent. If a person was alive, the shaman would say so inside the tent. They said that the shaman would tell if the person was going to die. The shaman would know if someone passed away by talking to them in the shaking tent. All the animals would tell stories. The animals would tell the shaman why the people were unable to kill them at that time, but the animals knew they would be killed eventually. The Natives knew how to look after things well. They also knew how to make each other suffer by using the shaking tent. Even while they were fishing, they would see the image of the Whiteman standing around. Just as if he landed from above. He looked like snow floating by. The image was like a Whiteman standing there.

The tent is described by the elders as a source of divine communication. Unique to tribal spiritual culture, the process of being engaged in the shaking tent was transformative for the human and animal world alike. For the shaman, the shaking tent was the venue where knowledge and wisdom were garnered and eventually shared. As the sage, the shaman could communicate with the natural world in order to better understand the animals' elusive nature during the hunting and trapping seasons. According to the elders, the animal and natural world was highly interrelated to the human realm since the personified animal voice in the shaking tent readily accepted their impending capture and slaughter. The elders' belief that the animals also had something meaningful to communicate in stories underpins the significance of the oral tradition in Aboriginal peoples' epistemology. In the sanctity of the tent, the animals had an opportunity to "talk about their lives here on earth" (Kam 1977). This mystical connection to the animal world was not used by Aboriginal peoples as a means of exploitation to gain an unfair advantage over the animals; instead, the elders describe a mutual respect in a genuine spirit of communication that unites these realms in a spiritual existence. The elders describe a ritual of inclusion belonging to both animals and people.

Moreover, and of particular significance to this interpretation, the image of the Whiteman permeates this most unique Aboriginal spiritual tradition—in that it is said to have been seen standing in the shaking tent. Unlike the animal presence, however, the image of the Whiteman does not have a voice. Instead, it is described as a silent image and is perceived as a source that provides a commodity—a cigarette. The same image, according to the elders, often reappeared outside the shaking tent when Aboriginal peoples were fishing.

Furthermore, the shaman is distinguished by the elders as a person of privilege revered for spiritual presence. It was understood that the shaman “knew how to use communication through thoughts” (Kam 1977) to discover the welfare of distant persons, and to employ telepathic capacities to communicate with people and examine their thoughts. This is considered, according to the elders, as one of the “mysterious wonders” unique to certain Aboriginal peoples from “a long time ago” (Kam 1977). For Aboriginal peoples, the shaman was thus a viable recourse from whom to seek counsel. The elders depict this figure as a mediator for those in the tribal community who had a dispute with another or were the target of unexplained verbal aggression.

“When religion came,” however, “they stopped using the shaking tent,” says Sturgeon (1973), and this change represented a profound spiritual dissonance within Aboriginal peoples’ communities. Religion, according to the elders, represented an imported ideology that was externally imposed upon them. In the elders’ post-colonial accounts, the jargon of spirituality was replaced with references to religion. Similarly, references to the shaman were replaced by more Eurocentric terms such as ministers and clergyman. Characteristic of the other elders, Fiddler chastises the ministers who forced their presence on Aboriginal communities and justifies the people’s reluctance to “accept any religion [as] the people did not really accept it then” (1978). The elders share their dismay at the spiritual dissonance that affected Aboriginal peoples’ spirituality. Sturgeon’s summary offers a fitting summary of the implications of the colonial presence upon Aboriginal peoples’ spiritual practices: “Before religion they used the shaking tent all the time” (1977).

## **Discussion**

The oral traditions of the elders are critical in transmitting cultural understandings (Huff 2006) and often evoke a sense of moral agency unique to Aboriginal peoples (Entrikin 1996). The stories link images of place and community that significantly contribute to their self-identification. Each of the stories represents fluid, situational narratives that cultivate both a distinct identity and an accompanying dissonance experienced by Aboriginal peoples at the hands of colonial influence. The digital stories evoke a sentimental and profound response for both the teller and the recipient, since they are “a means of becoming real to others on the basis of shared experience and affective resonances” (Burgess 2006:211). From this perspective, the digital stories serve as entry points for mainstream researchers with backgrounds in western epistemology to reflexively interpret, describe, and further appreciate Aboriginal peoples’ traditions. For those on the periphery of Aboriginal culture, digital stories are opportunities to unobtrusively engage in Aboriginal paradigms via a conceptually and theoretically flexible

method (Gaard 1993), while recognizing the implicit cultural sensitivity necessary for any interpretation of Aboriginal customs (Keeshig-Tobias 1990; Ross 1992; Warry 1990).

Inherent in the oral narratives is an underlying impetus that describes a life of service to one's people, family, and spiritual beliefs. This commitment to service, as described by the elders, represents a significant teaching for the younger generations. In other words, Aboriginal peoples' devout commitment to serve immediate and extended family while remaining true to their spiritual beliefs is a prime factor for their sustainability as a culture despite the varied experiences of dissonance already discussed. The altruistic and core values espoused throughout the oral traditions of stories (digital and otherwise) provide a continuity of sense and seriousness of purpose for Aboriginal peoples. Through these stories elders share social and spiritual teachings in culturally significant terms.

In many regards, the elders represent the cultural conscience of Aboriginal peoples, and through the vitality of voice and exercise of passion exhibited in the stories they personify the affective and motivational dimensions necessary for the sustainability of their worldviews and epistemologies. In the process, the elders allude to various images that provide insight into culturally specific behavior (Sexton 1992) or have spiritual value (Montejo and Campbell 1993). The stories are considered "a living aspect of the popular imagination, [and] therefore [provide] valuable passwords or master keys into the understanding of certain social realities" and their spiritual implications (Harss and Dohmann 1992:429). As an example, the elder Sainnawap describes Aboriginal peoples' proficiency during their migration and explains "that long ago people were able to walk on water. That was one sure thing the Natives did. That was one of the wonders the Natives did before the Whiteman arrived" (1975). This elder, and others, make specific reference to the metaphysical capacities of the forebears of present-day Aboriginal peoples. Yet, like other external interventions that led to experiences of dissonance, the exploitation of the colonial oppressors negatively affected their mystical prowess (see Carson 2002; Montejo 2004; Thom 2005).

Like the elder Sainnawap, Kam classifies and accounts for Aboriginal peoples' "mysterious gift to know things" from a time "long ago" (1977):

If a person was away from his home and if they wanted to know if anything happened to him, they would ask a shaman who knew how to use communication through thoughts to find out how he was. The shaman would know how he was because the missing person could be heard talking as if he were alive. If the person died, the shaman would know how the people died by asking others that were still alive. They would tell what happened to the person. The shaman would relate to the people when that person would be back. That was another one of the mysterious wonders of the people. Another mysterious wonder was the use of thought communication to ask people why they teased a person. The shaman could be heard talking to the other person as he interrogated them. That is what he used it for.

The shaman's gifts could dispel false and erroneous information for those concerned about the welfare of another. Within the perplexing mystery of these gifts, the shaman represented the continuity between the human and animal world while exercising a judicious blend of influence in an environment conducive to harmonious relations between the hunted and the hunters.

These mysterious gifts were not exclusive to the shaman. According to the elders, prior to the arrival of European settlers Aboriginal peoples could transcend the physical realm (Kam 1977):

When the Native person wanted to go somewhere else, he was able to do so, just by thinking. He did not use a plane as we do today. He was able to fly by himself. He had everything. One time there was a man who went to the store to get supplies. He had two dogs and a sled. While he was inside the store it snowed heavily. The dogs had a hard time pulling him home on the ground, so he walked over the clouds with his dogs where it was good to walk. The people he visited on his way to the store could hear him as he yelled to his dogs as he went by. That is how they knew he went home. He landed right at home. They do not know what he used. There was no plane. He only used his powers. This was another one of the many wonders that the people used long ago.

The onus in all accounts of such mysterious gifts is on the proper use of these powers lest they be taken from the wrongdoer. From a mainstream perspective, these firmly entrenched beliefs signify the profound connection to metaphysical spheres. They expose the consequences of colonial rule that led to various experiences of dissonance experienced by the Aboriginal peoples. Not only were their policies and practices devalued, but their core values as Aboriginal peoples were unduly intruded upon.

For a non-aboriginal person situated on the periphery of Aboriginal culture, an interpretation of the values communicated through the stories of the elders is very insightful. For example, Fiddler draws upon the image of a man transformed into a *windigo* that self-mutilated himself and posed a threat to others in the community (1978):

The people saw that his teeth were growing longer. The old man ate his lips, his fingers, and his hands. The people realized he was turning into a *windigo*. They thought that if he gets bigger, he will eat them too. They knew that there would be no one left if he gets loose. The people realized that if they did not prevent him from becoming a *windigo*, he would eat them all. They knew that they had to save themselves. The Natives knew that they had to kill that *windigo* being.

This elder employs erudite verbiage that can be misleading and spurious for those who are conceptually narrow-minded and intolerant of cultural differences. Significant for this analysis is the elder's choice of an anecdote that depicts a Native in inimical frames of reference and describes the *windigo*'s physical alteration into a disproportionate form. The story of the *windigo* is a culturally rich one for the Aboriginal peoples of this land; conversely, it is quite possibly intentionally exclusionary for those who are not familiar with Aboriginal worldviews. In effect, this story, and others like it, use the medium and the message to further distinguish between Aboriginal and mainstream worldviews. The altruistic values communicated in the stories are not intended by the elders to be subject to mainstream judgment. To impose a western value system upon the culturally sensitive images explored by the elders would obscure the point of the story. An imaginative interpretation keeps the contextual awareness intact, is thoughtful and careful,



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## **About the Authors**

### **Tammy Ho Lai-ming**

Tammy Ho Lai Ming is a postgraduate research student in English Literature at King's College London. She has published articles on Victorian and contemporary literature, including "Reading Aloud and Charles Dickens' Aural Iconic Prose Style," and "Contemporary Victorian-centered Novels: A Comparative Study of Fowles' *French Lieutenant's Woman* and Byatt's *Possession*." Ho is also a poet and co-founder of *Cha: An Asian Literary Journal* [<http://www.asiancha.com>], the first and currently the only Hong Kong-based online English literary journal.

### **Helen Gregory**

Helen Gregory is a teaching fellow in psychology at the University of Bath, and is currently completing her Ph.D. in sociology at the University of Exeter, England. Her research interests include the social scientific study of the arts and popular culture, and the social construction of self. Recently she has written on youth slam for *Ethnography and Education* and presented her research at conferences across Europe and North America. Gregory is also a published poet and an active participant in the U. K. performance poetry scene [<http://www.hgregory.co.uk>]

### **Joan Gross**

Joan Gross is Professor of Anthropology at Oregon State University, where she teaches a variety of undergraduate and graduate courses within the areas of linguistic anthropology and the anthropology of food. Her research interests include verbal art, lesser-known languages, and food systems studies. She has published two books, *Speaking in Other Voices: An Ethnography of Walloon Puppet Theaters* (2001) and *Teaching Oregon Native Languages* (2007). Other publications can be found at <http://oregonstate.edu/cla/anthropology/faculty-staff/gross>.

### **Outi Fingerroos**

Outi Fingerroos is currently Senior Assistant in Ethnology in the Department of History and Ethnology at the University of Jyväskylä, where she coordinates the multidisciplinary Center of Excellence for Multiculturalism and Interaction and holds the position of docent. Fingerroos defended her doctoral dissertation in the Department of Comparative Religion at the University of Turku in 2004, and was awarded a grant for postdoctoral research by the Academy of Finland in 2005 in order to carry out a research project entitled "Karelia as a Place of Memories and Utopias."

### **Katrin Rupp**

Katrin Rupp holds a Ph.D. from the University of Bern, Switzerland, and currently teaches medieval English language and literature at the University of Neuchâtel. She did her doctoral research on John Gower's *Confessio Amantis*. Her most recent article studies journeys to Hell in selected Old and Middle English texts, and she is currently co-editing a collection of essays tentatively entitled *Writing the Medieval Body*. Other

research interests include the function of clothes in *Joseph of Arimathea*. At present she is working on a BBC telefilm adaptation of the *Canterbury Tales*.

**Andrea Fishman**

Andrea Fishman joined the Classics faculty at Northwestern University as a lecturer in the Fall of 2008, having previously served as Faculty-Fellow in the Classics Department at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Her research interests include Greek drama and performance, women in antiquity, anthropology and classics, and female lament in the Greek tradition, this last topic being the subject of her in-progress book. Fishman is also a Middle Eastern percussionist and Sephardic singer.

**Lorenzo Cherubini**

Lorenzo Cherubini earned an Ed.D. at the University of Southern Queensland, Australia. Dr. Cherubini holds a Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) Aboriginal Development Grant for his work with prospective and new Aboriginal teachers in Ontario. He is also the principal collaborator on a second SSHRC-funded project investigating new teachers' understanding of assessment and evaluation practices. His research focuses on post-industrial influences on organizational leadership concepts and school culture. Currently, he is an assistant professor in the Faculty of Education, Brock University.