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The Southern Sardinian Tradition of the *Mutetu Longu*: A Functional Analysis

Paulu Zedda

Paulu Zedda in a public performance. Photo by Robertu Corona. All photos used by permission.

Saludi e gratzias. First of all I would like to thank the University of Missouri and John Foley for giving me the opportunity to contribute to the knowledge of oral tradition, and for permitting me to present the poetic art of my homeland under the distinguished name of two scholars who are considered, by most of the world, to be the founders of the modern conception of oral poetry. The studies carried out by Milman Parry and Albert Lord redefined the criteria and principles underlying the creation and transmission of oral poetry in a pre-literary age.

Progress into the understanding of its internal workings has enabled us to dispel doubts regarding the origin of several ancient texts that have survived in written form (Foley 2002), and to understand not only what, but also "how," they mean. It is mostly thanks to the Center for Studies in Oral Tradition (http://www.oraltradition.org/) and the journal *Oral Tradition* (http://journal.oraltradition.org/) that this field of research has progressively increased in both quantity and quality, gaining respectability on a par with the most prestigious scientific disciplines. A renewed interest has drawn attention and uncovered new ways of conducting research into the unlimited range of oral poetry, which goes far beyond the range of epic poetry where Parry and Lord initially focused their attention. This new awareness, further increased by Walter Ong and John Foley, has not only given us a wider perspective on all the various forms of verbal art, but also a more profound comprehension of the principles that govern our society and its languages.

I shall consider in this paper the kind of oral poetry that was called *cantus amoebaeus*[1] by the Romans, based upon a poetic joust between two or more poets who improvise their verse in search of public approval. This is, and has been, a widespread genre in various separate cultures, and it has to be considered a unique chapter within the entirety of the oral poetic tradition. Some of the styles adopted in this specific form of oral poetry are so common and recurrent that they seem to derive more from an innate need in people than from their cultural education, and they can be considered universal to this genre.[2] Different traditions are, however, distinguished by many other characteristics that define their extremely lively, varied, and versatile nature.

Rather than merely referring to my experience as a faculty member at the University of Cagliari, the main aim of my work is to recount the firsthand experiences of a *cantadori* (performer of improvised sung poetry), such as I am, and to describe the oral tradition of the *mutetu longu*, this Sardinian poetic form to which I belong. My observations, my considerations, the explanations and evaluations I offer, notwithstanding the textual references, spring mainly from my hands-on experience gained while performing, and moreover from contact I have had with improvisers belonging to other extemporaneous traditions.[3]

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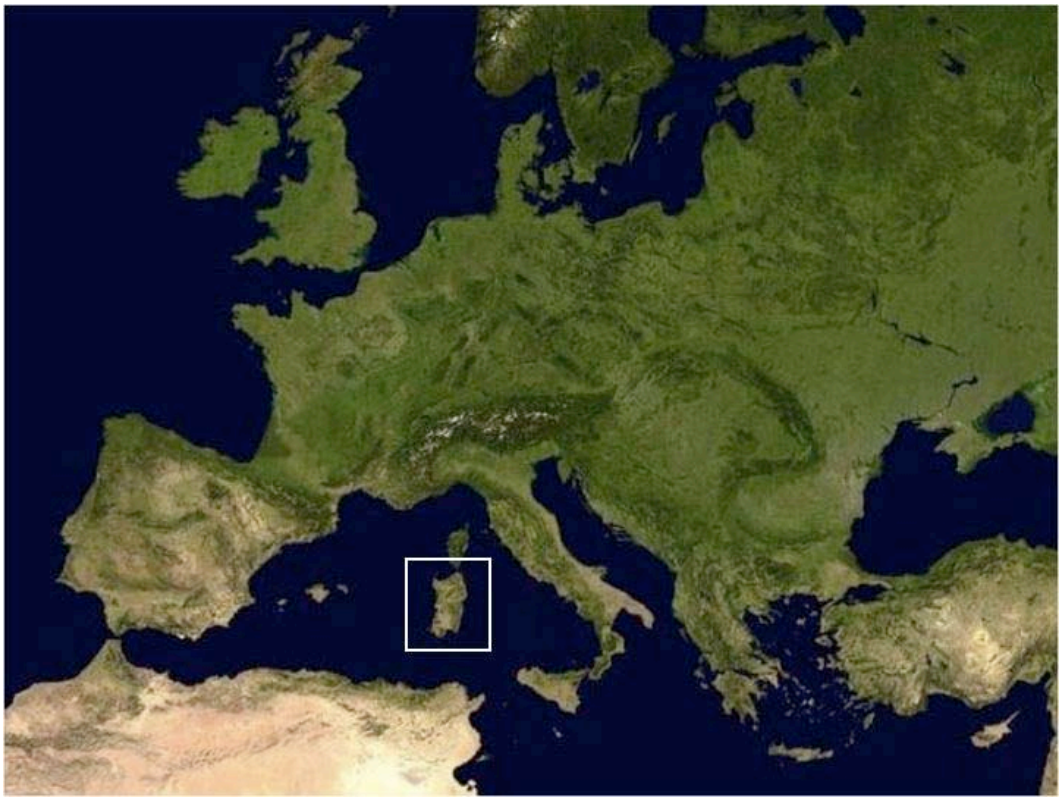
[1] An example can be found in Virgil, first and third bucolics.

[2] Its characteristics appear at different levels: the morphological pattern is used, with monostrophic compositions whose length is between four and ten lines, governed by rules regarding metrics and rhyme; on the dialogical level the poets, while strictly observing the set amount of time they are allowed, must all employ the same strophic structure; often, set themes are chanted about that have been requested by the public or by a committee, and competitiveness plays a primary role; the themes are executed in the form of a debate, almost never in the form of a simple dialogue; these traditions are usually more deeply rooted in rural areas where there is an agricultural and pastoral-based economy and where the population has a low level of school education; in situations of diglossia the older linguistic form is preferred; this poetry is relatively conservative, maintaining the use of archaic metrical and linguistic formulas; more often than not, in spite of its widespread popularity, it receives little attention from educational bodies and the media (institutions, schools, press, radio, and television) (see Díaz Pimienta 1998:112-51); as regards delivery, the poets' disputes are always chanted or sung and sometimes accompanied by music, frequently played on string instruments.

[3] I have had the pleasure of meeting poets belonging to numerous traditions of extemporaneous poetry: the Berber Amazigh tradition of Morocco, the z*ajal* of Lebanon, the *quintilla* of the *trobadores* of Murcia, the *regueifa* of Malaga, the *repentismo* of Minorca and the Balearic Islands, the *punto canario* of the Canary Islands, some of the various *décima* song forms found throughout Latin America, in particular in Mexico (Velasquez 2004), Puerto Rico,

This study is divided into two sections: the first basically describes the Sardinian *mutetu longu*, with particular attention to the structure of the strophic forms; the second reflects, drawing also on external comparisons, upon some of the aspects that strongly characterize it. In addition, this latter section discusses the way this complex phenomenon works and how it achieves its inner balance. I shall also evaluate the functional reasons behind the particular metrical structure (which reaches high levels of formal complexity and redundancy), the relevance of memory in the elaboration of the poetic text, and the flow of time and its perception.

Part I: The *Mutetu Longu*



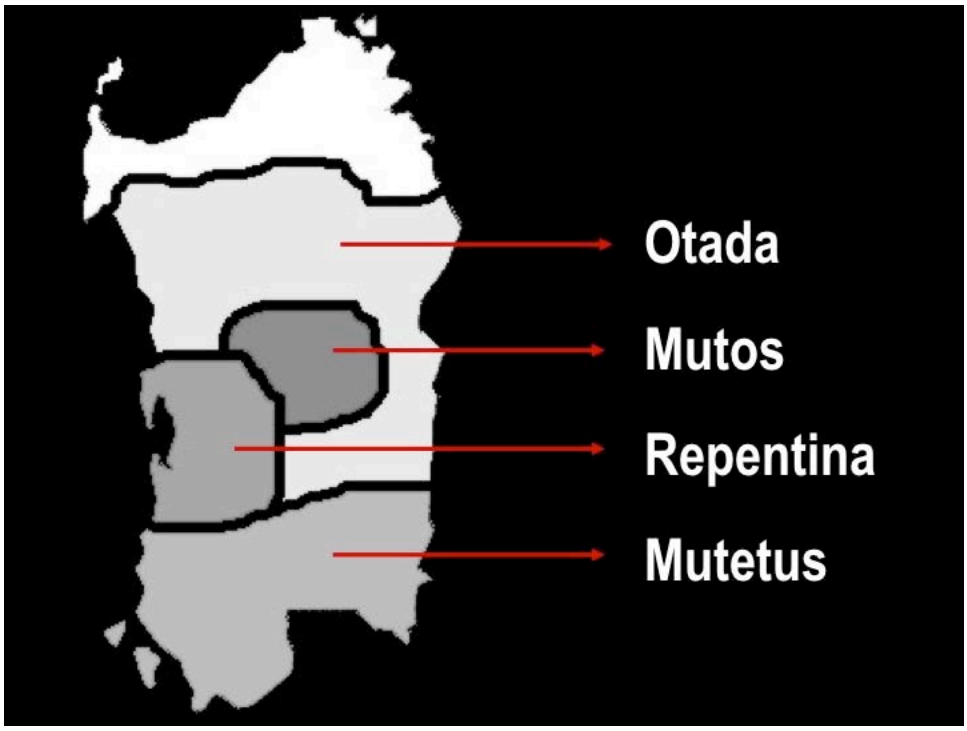
Map of southern Europe delineating Sardinia. Elaborated by the author.

Politically, Sardinia has belonged to Italy since 1861 and currently has 1,660,000 inhabitants.[4] Recent legislation meant that Sardinia was declared officially bilingual in 1997.[5]

Cuba, Argentina, Uruguay, Chile, Venezuela (Díaz Pimienta 1998:59-108), the *spritu pront* of Malta, the *chjama e rispondi* of Corsica, the *puisiari* of Sicily, and the *ottava rima* of Tuscany, Lazio, and Abruzzo. I know personally some of the improviser poets who perform within the four traditional genres to be found in Sardinia: the *otada* Logudorese (Pillonca 2003), the *mutu* of central Sardinia (Casula 2003) and the *repentina* of northern Campidano (Lutzu 2007), as well as the *mutetu*, common to southern Sardinia, which is the type of poetry I perform (Zedda 2005).

[4] Data from the National Census of 2007.

Italian and Sardinian are the two official languages.[6] A recent survey, carried out by the Sardinian Regional Council, shows that 68% of the population speaks a local language fluently (Lupinu 2007).



Thematic map of Sardinia indicating the territories of main diffusion in reference to the four traditional systems. Elaborated by the author.

When I use the term *mutetu longu* I shall be speaking about an oral poetry tradition in the Sardinian language, widely performed in southern Sardinia (Campidano), and specifically in an area bounded by the provinces of Cagliari, Sulcis, and central Campidano. The term nominally refers to the main stanza that the poets use during their competitions, but in a wider sense it will be used to name the compositional genre on the whole and its traditional use.

The performance of these *mutetus*, the so-called *cantada,* is a sung poetic duel held among several improvisers. These poets, called *cantadoris*, or literally "singers," challenge each other on stage before an audience in bouts of actual poetic jousting. A harmonic accompaniment to the poet's singing is created by a polyphonic chorus of two male voices (*basciu e contra*), who use a singular technique to intone a guttural humming sound.[7] This Sardinian throat singing was

[5] Regional Law no. 26 of 15 October 1997, on the "promotion and appreciation of the Sardinian language and culture."

[6] Sardinian belongs to the Neo-Latin or Romance family of languages and, because of certain features within it, is held to be among the most conservative and similar to the root language (Blasco Ferrer 1984). The first written documents in Sardinian date back to 1070. Sardinian is divided into two main variants: Logudorese, spoken from the center to the north of the island; and Campidanese, which is spoken in the center to the southern part of the island (Blasco Ferrer 2002).

[7] A short description is given in Bravi and Lutzu 2005.

recognized by UNESCO in 2006, receiving the title of "Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity."

History

The term *mutetu*[8] refers to a compositional piece that includes a wide variety of strophic forms adopted both in public poetic competitions and in working songs, lullabies, dirges, traditional unimprovised songs, and some literary poetry (Masala 1993, Susini 1993).[9] The *mutetu longu* is one of these (Cirese 1988:260, 303). To date, a great deal of research has been carried out and published aimed at establishing the origin and historical evolution of the *mutetu* genre. It ranges from analyzing some similarities in the device of inverting the strophic order, which is also to be found in compositions of Provençal origin (Maninchedda 1996), to the use of hyperbaton, in some ways similar to that found in a number of *coplas* in the Hispanic tradition (Wagner 1907; Cirese 1961). However, since the *mutetu* can neither be dated nor given a precise place of origin, historical and philological analysis seems to suggest that it is most likely an original Sardinian form (Ferraro 1898, Zedda 2008).

Historical records regarding forms of improvised poetry in Sardinia are sadly as poor as similar records in other literary societies (Spano 1999, Tola 2006). The first text to mention an extemporaneous tradition in Sardinia dates back to the seventeenth century (Bullegas 2004), while transcriptions of *mutetus* do not appear until the second half of the 1700s (Madau 1787), even if the practice seems to be much older than the documents (Zedda 2008). The Sardinian love for poetic duels was even described in accounts by numerous travel writers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Valéry 1996, Smith 1998, Fuos 2000), and by Sardinian scholars (Angius 1837, Spano 1838). Their curiosity about "a land that was largely unknown even to Italians, where customs from bygone days still retained their original beauty" (Vuillier 1893) pushed them to describe in meticulous detail their social traditions and language. These accounts make constant references to the Sardinian passion for the improvised poetry of their bards, who were never absent from social meetings and get-togethers, particularly in rural areas, and whose most important performances were at the numerous crowded religious festivals that took place throughout the summer season (Angius 1837).

During the first half of the 1800s the initial transcriptions of *mutetu longu* begin to appear, accompanied by references to the names of the *cantadoris* (Piras 1999), and in the latter part of the same century we occasionally see the text of whole poetry competitions being written down, naming not only the improvisational poets but also the precise date and location.

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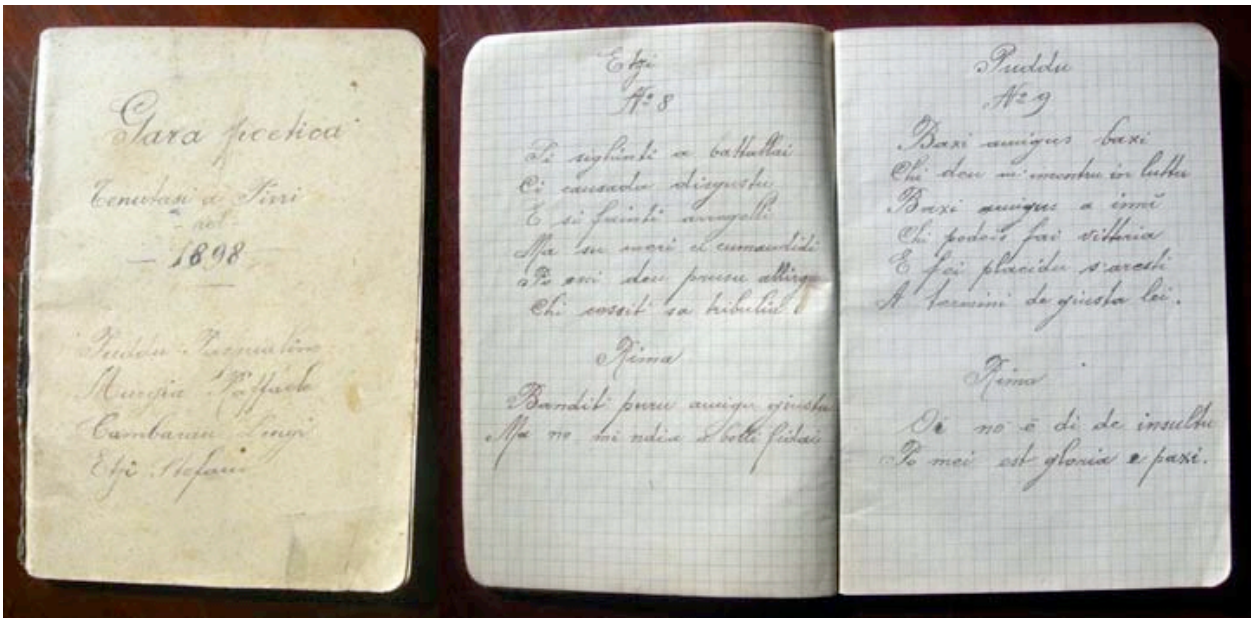
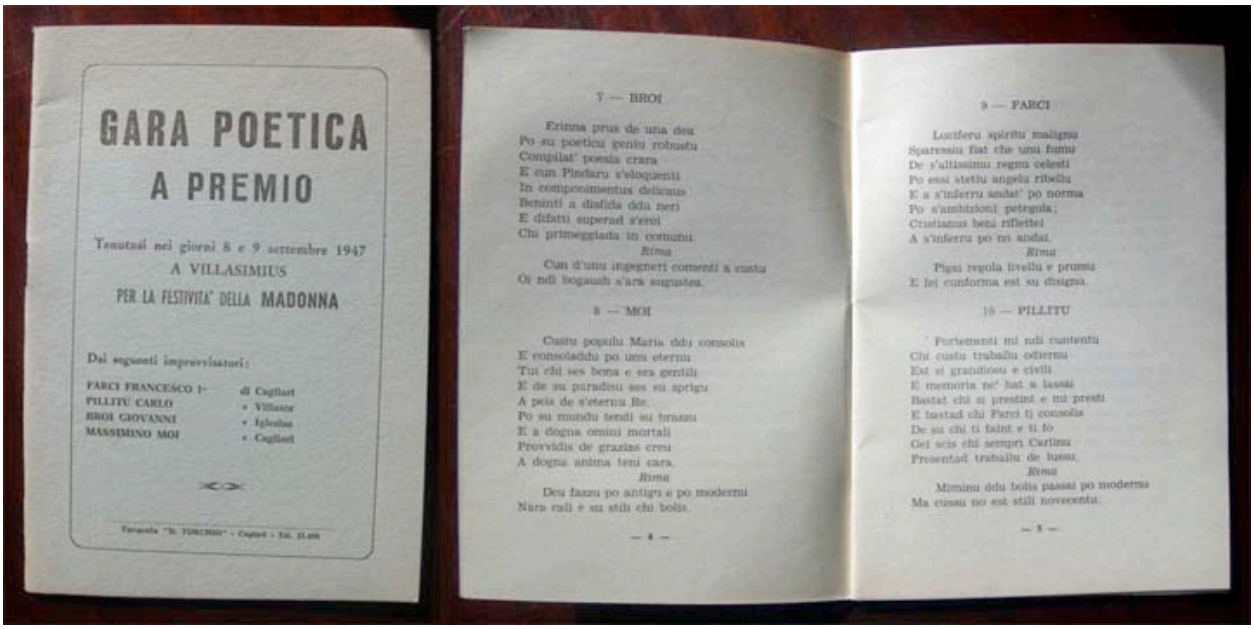
[8] *Mutetu* in the Campidanese variant of Sardinian corresponds to the word *mutu* in the Lugudorese variant. Not all scholars agree that the two terms have the same meaning. Cirese (1961) and Wagner (1907) prefer to separate the two forms depending on their metrical structure and on the area of the island in which they are found.

[9] Cirese (1961) composed an extensive treatise on the study of oral poetry in Sardinia, paying particular attention to the structural schemes and the forms of the *mutetus*. He classified 17 variants that could be found all over Sardinia.



The front and inside pages of a booklet with the manual transcription of a *cantada* dated 1898. From the private collection of Paulu Zedda.

From the early 1900s such transcriptions are printed in *libureddus*, "booklets," and sold to enthusiasts (Pillai 1985).



Front and inside pages of a printed booklet reporting the transcription of a *cantada* held in 1947. From the private collection of Paulu Zedda.

The production of these printed transcriptions remained high all through the 1900s, declining slightly with the advent of tape recorders. More than 700 detailed booklets still exist that bear witness to the extemporaneous output of the last 150 years.

The audience of a *cantada*. In the front row are some devotees with their tape recorders. Photo by Antoni Dessì.

The mid-1950s saw the popular introduction of reel-to-reel tape recorders, and enthusiasts of poetic competitions began to document performances by making analog recordings. Steadily, this practice became more and more common and was standard procedure by the 1970s, as industrial production made cassette recorders widely available. The Municipal Music School of Sinnai is currently compiling an archive containing over 2500 *cantadas* recorded on audiotape.

The Singers

Five *cantadoris* in 1926. From the private collection of Paulu Zedda.

The number of practicing professional poets is at present about 30 and their status can be clearly defined. They take part in the top-level *cantadas,* poetic duels, which are primarily held during the summer season, according to a schedule that is repeated year after year with few variations. Usually, they do not depend entirely on their poetic work for their livelihood; however, they do receive a significant fee (currently between 300 and 500 Euros for each performance).

Learning to be a poetic improviser takes place in an informal setting in the course of meetings held by enthusiasts and usually lasts several years. While learning their trade, the prospective improvisers are overseen by one or more top *cantadoris* who act as their teachers. There is no precise program to be adhered to, but rather the aspiring poet learns at his own pace and as his skill allows, by following experts' advice and profiting from corrections by others as well as through an exchange of opinions between practicing enthusiasts and listeners. Acceptance as a poet is earned by way of performing live in front of a public audience and an elder, a well-known *cantadori* who has the title of *cantadori mannu* ("great singer"). It is he who has the final say as to whether the aspiring poet will be elevated to the status of *cantadori*.

Festivals and Audience

The audience of a *cantada*. *Basciu e contra*, the two-man chorus, is visible on the right. Photo by Antoni Dessì.

Improvised poetry competitions occur mainly during religious festivals, which traditionally are held from late spring through early autumn. They are organized by a committee that collects the necessary funds by going around the village, door to door, accepting donations

from devotees. Festivities last four or five days and include religious rites, such as masses, processions, and meditations dedicated to the patron saint of the festival, as well as various non-religious events such as concerts by pop bands, dancing, folk theater, and plays. The *cantada* normally takes place on either the first or the last day dedicated to non-religious events.

Three devotees with their tape recorders in hand. Photo by Antoni Dessì.

Some booklets arranged on a chair for sale during a performance. Photo by Antoni Dessì.

The average audience attending a *cantada* in the Campidanese tradition varies from one to two hundred people. An audience of fewer than eighty to a hundred is considered a disappointing turnout, whereas only a few of the major festivals manage to attract several hundred spectators. Nowadays, those who attend performances tend to be middle-aged or older, in general over forty or fifty.[10]

In common with the performers, most of them share a measure of poetic competence, and often they themselves are improvisers. Some enthusiasts attend a great number of competitions, often traveling many miles to see a *cantada,* making sure of a front row seat and carrying a tape machine to record the performance.

Many of them have compiled personal archives containing up to several hundred cassettes (Lutzu 2004), as well as booklets with transcriptions of the poetic duels (Bravi 2008:133-85).

[10] The reason why the audience is largely made up of older people lies partly in the fact that fewer young people speak Sardinian and partly in the fact that appreciation of the extemporaneous genre requires a higher degree of meditation, calmness, and attention. For these reasons it is better suited to a more mature, experienced audience.

The Performance

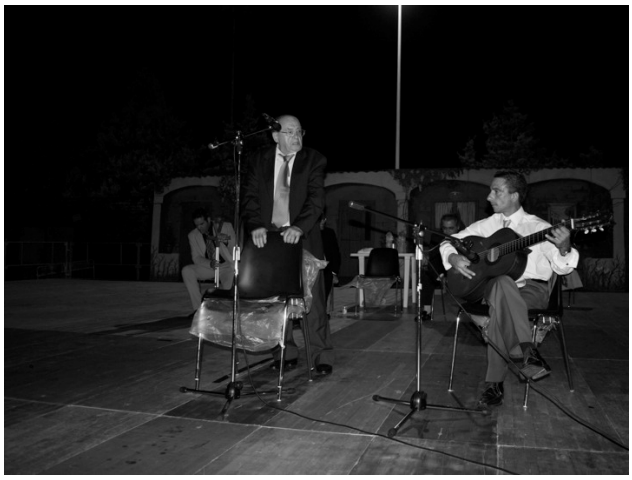
The *cantadas* circuit (improvised poetry competitions) can be divided into three different levels: the performances of amateur enthusiasts, those of second-tier poets (the *versadoris*), and those of the highest-level professional poets (the *cantadoris*).

The amateur contests are usually informal affairs, often held around a table laden with food during celebratory occasions such as weddings or birthday parties, events to mark the end of the hunting season or a football tournament, or quite simply during social get-togethers among friends. On these occasions the poets are accompanied by a guitar.

The contests among second-tier poets are held publicly, in more or less the same way as the professional ones. They do not, however, make use of the complex structure found in the *mutetu longu*, but rather their poetic duel consists of a series of *versus*, or verses of a few lines at a time, accompanied by a guitar. These improvisers sometimes earn a fee that is, however, less than that earned by the top-tier poets.

Four improvisers normally take part in a top-tier competition, or more rarely three or five. Strangely, a direct challenge between only two poets, which is the norm in most ongoing Romance traditions of contest poetry, is not allowed in Campidanese improvisation. The poetic performance mainly takes place in a town or village square in the open air. The poets are each seated on a chair facing the audience.

A group of friends sing verses accompanied by a guitar at a familiar get-together. Photo by Paolo Pilleri.



Pepuciu Loni, accompanied by a guitarist, improvises his *versu* on the stage. Photo by Robertu Corona.

Paulu Zedda, Robertu Zuncheddu, Marcu Melis, and Sarbadori Marras wait for the beginning of the *cantada*. Photo by Robertu Corona.

Basciu e contra, Giuanni Cogoni and Austinu Valdes. Photo by Robertu Corona.

A set table is placed on the stage between the chairs and the microphone. Photo by Robertu Corona.

On the singers' left sits the two-man chorus, the *basciu* and the *contra*. In front of the poets' chairs there is nearly always a table laden with traditional sweets and soft drinks, wine, and water, courtesy of the committee.

A chair is set at the front of the stage behind the microphone. Manueli Saba stands behind it, resting his hands on the back of it as he performs. Photo by Robertu Corona.

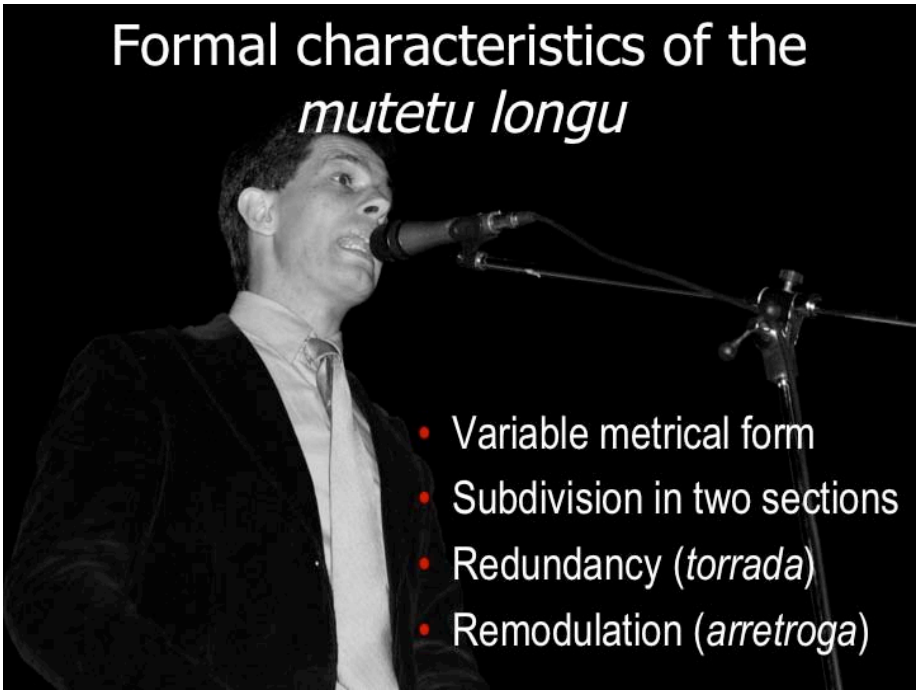
At the front of the stage and behind the microphone there is a chair. The poets stand behind it, resting their hands on its back, as they perform.

The group of poets and their chorus come on stage five or ten minutes before the start of the performance. During this time they decide on the positions they will take and who will begin the duel; the poet who is to assume the role of choosing the topic begins to mentally sketch his

first *mutetu*. Just before they start the evening, one of the poets comes forward to the microphone and announces to the audience the names of the poets, the order in which they will perform, and the names of the accompanying chorus singers and guitarist. He will also remember to mention the saint to whom the festival is dedicated and to thank the organizing committee. He finishes off by "tuning" with the chorus, in order to find a pitch that is suitable to both them and the poets. This phase is carried out with a certain formality in words and actions, giving it a ritualistic air.

The whole performance takes about three to three and one-half hours and is divided into two parts. The first and main part, lasting two and one-half to three hours, sees the poets facing each other in their challenge, singing *mutetus longus* while being accompanied by their guttural-sounding chorus. In the second part, lasting thirty to fifty minutes, they duel while singing in *versus*, accompanied by a guitar.

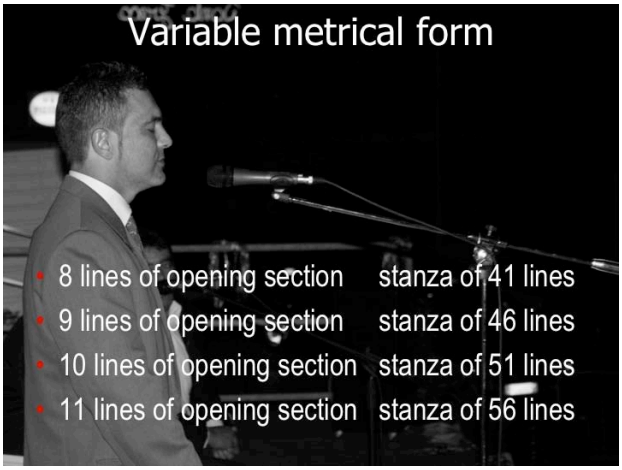
Metrics



Robertu Zuncheddu. Photo by Robertu Corona.

Metrical analysis of the *mutetu longu* is one of the most interesting and, at the same time, most demanding aspects of this work because it reveals an unusual complexity in verbal organization, evident at various levels. With reference to the structure of lines, the rhythm is governed by a stress-timed pattern and lines are linked together by a series of rhymes.

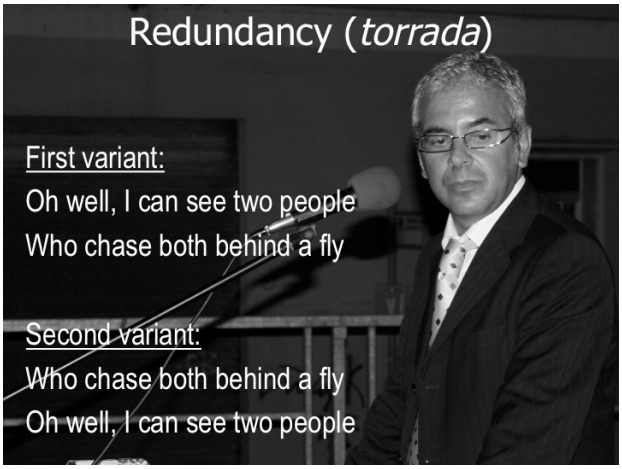
A description of the metrical scheme is complicated by several factors, such as the presence of a logical division between the two sections that make up the *mutetu,* the recurrent use of internal rhymes, and the reshuffling of verse- and word-order. Nevertheless, these aspects must be taken into consideration because they directly influence the organization of the poetic content and shape the poet's communication with his audience. Here, in more detail, are some formal characteristics of the *mutetu longu:*



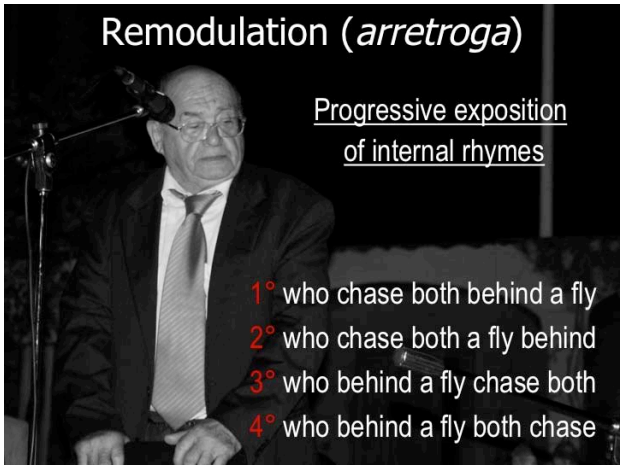
Sabadori Marras. Photo by Robertu Corona.

Eliseu Vargiu. Photo by Robertu Corona.

1) The metrical form is variable. In constructing the verses it is necessary to adhere to a pattern that defines the development and balance between the two sections of the stanza, but a precise number of lines is not defined.
2) The structure is divided into two dissimilar sections called the *sterrina,* which will hereafter be referred to as the "opening section," and the *cubertantza,* which will hereafter be referred to as the "couplet." It is therefore made up of two poetic sections, unified in one stanza but logically and semantically separate and distinct.



Antoni Pani. Photo by Robertu Corona.

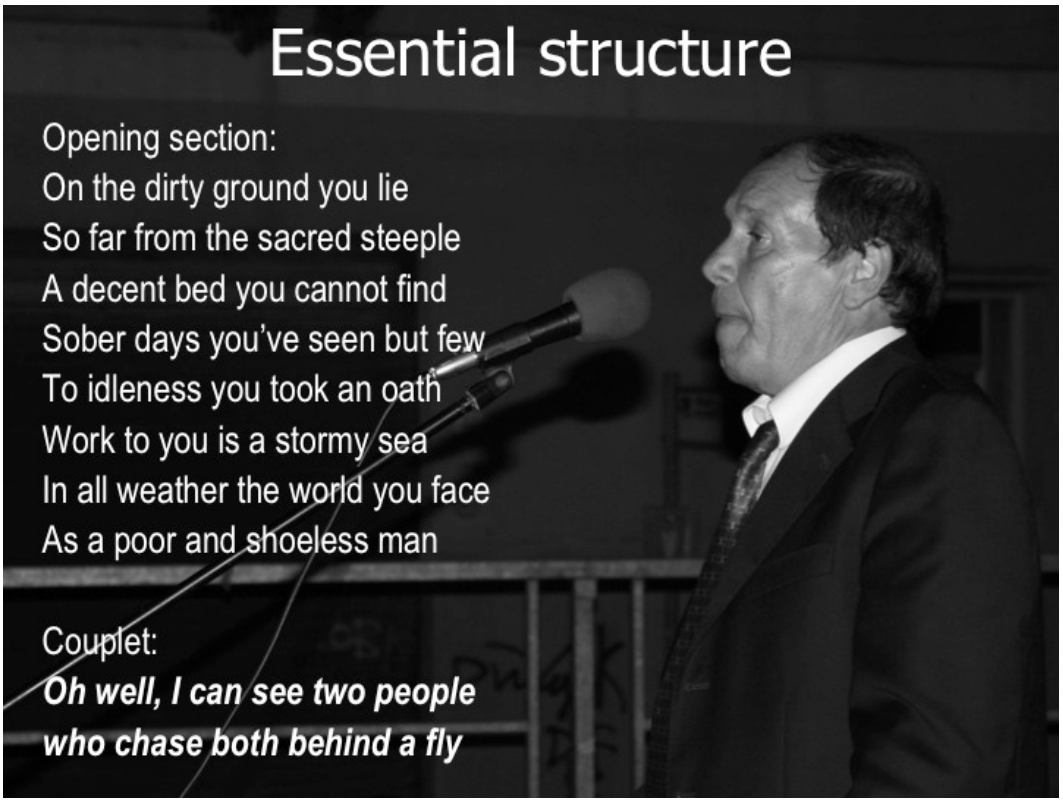


Pepuciu Loni. Photo by Robertu Corona.

3) It is highly recurrent. Its development hinges on the repetition of groups of verses represented in a new order (*torrada*). By using this mechanism, a group of three verses whose endings contain different rhymes—for example, an "abc" scheme—is repeated three times, changing the order so as to place a different rhyme at the end of the line each time. For instance, the same group of lines will first be delivered with the order abc, then acb, and lastly cba.
4) Some verses are rearranged by altering the internal rhymes (*arretroga*). By doing so, a verse such as "*a tempus miu in fainas mannas*" will then appear as "*a tempus miu in mannas fainas*" by inverting the last two words; then as "*in mannas fainas a tempus miu*"

by placing the third word in the final position; and lastly as "*in mannas fainas a miu tempus*," where we see the second word becoming the last. This structural device that makes use of what one might call a mathematical calculation lends a particular sound effect.[11]

The *mutetu longu*, as mentioned above, is created by means of a pattern or technique of expansion through which lines are reshaped. In order to better understand the formal architecture, we shall begin with the definition of a structure that we can call "essential" and in which each line appears only once.



Manueli Saba. Photo by Robertu Corona.

This essential structure is composed of an "opening section" made up of a variable number of lines, generally ranging from eight to ten,[12] and a couplet.

[11] *Torrada* and *arretroga* are poetic devices that are deeply rooted usages in the Sardinian poetic tradition and are found in a great deal of poetry in both the Campidanese and Lugudorese areas (Pillonca 1984:9-14, Lutzu 2007, Bua 1997, Zedda 2006).

[12] *Mutetus* with more than ten verses in the opening section are rarely constructed.

Essential structure (with the couplet in italics)

Opening section:
Ses istraciau e sucidu[13]
Bivendi a sa spensierada
No arreposas in nisciunu logu
Sempiri brillu de a mengianu
Una giorronada in su sartu
Sciu ca no fais prus
Fatzat soli o siat proendi
No portas butinus in peis

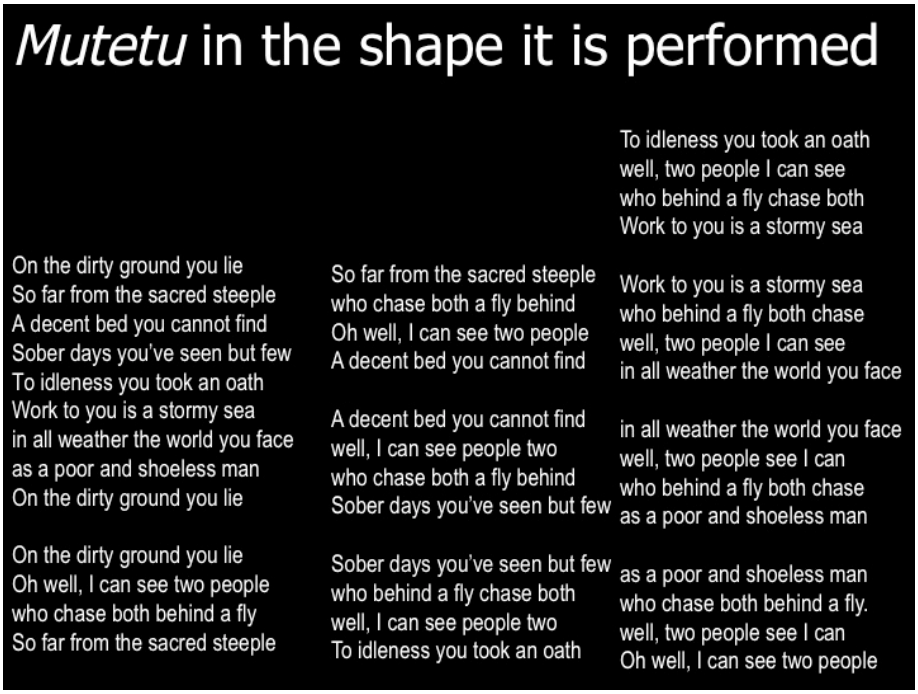
Couplet:
Seis in duus a manu pigada
Andendi in fatu a un ogu lucidu

Opening section:
On the dirty ground you lie
So far from the sacred steeple
A decent bed you cannot find
Sober days you've seen but few
To idleness you took an oath
Work to you is a stormy sea
In all weather the world you face
As a poor and shoeless man

Couplet:
Oh well, I can see two people
Who chase both behind a fly

(Metrical scheme of the essential structure*:* opening section*:* abcdefgh; couplet: *ba*)

During the performance, nevertheless, a *mutetu* is rendered in a broader and more complex way. It is developed using five times plus one the number of lines employed in the essential structure, with a number of movements that corresponds to the number of lines in the opening section plus one. A *mutetu* with an opening section of eight lines is performed in nine movements and 41 lines.



[13] *Mutetu* sung by Efis Loni at a *cantada* held in Quartu S. Eleni for the festival of S. Eleni, on the 13th of September, 1920. Printed by Tipografia Il Torchio, Cagliari.

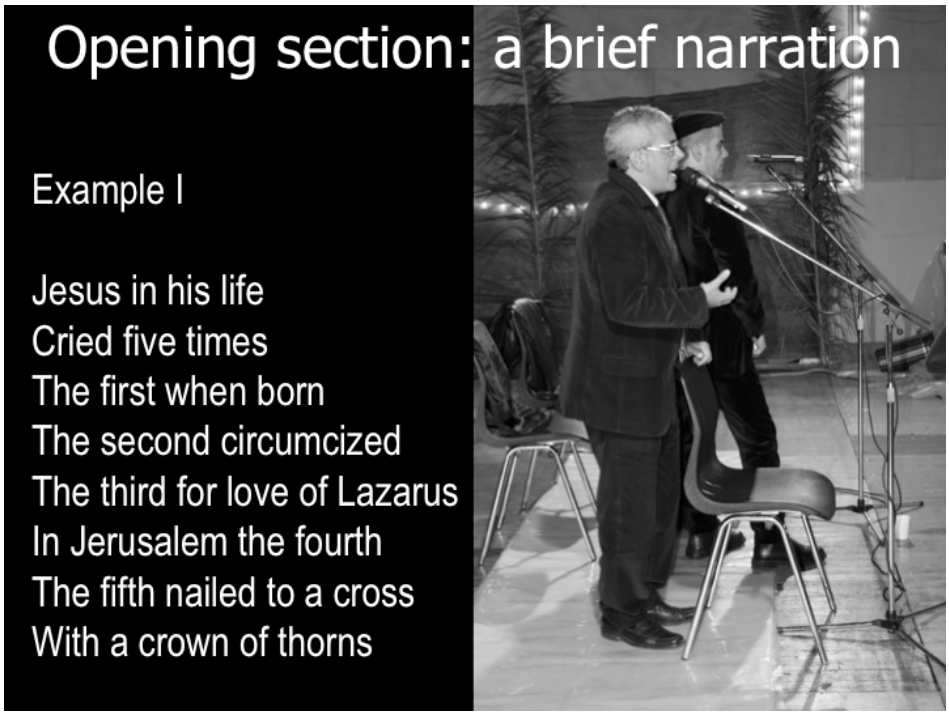
Here the same *mutetu* in the shape it is performed:

Opening section:	Opening section:
Ses istraciau e sucidu	On the dirty ground you lie
Bivendi a sa spensierada	So far from the sacred steeple
No arreposas in nisciunu logu	A decent bed you cannot find
Sempiri brillu de a mengianu	Sober days you've seen but few
Una giorronada in su sartu	To idleness you took an oath
Sciu ca no fais prusu	Work to you is a stormy sea
Fatzat soli o siat proendi	In all weather the world you face
No portas butinus in peis	As a poor and shoeless man
Quatrains:	Quatrains:
Ses istraciau e sucidu	On the dirty ground you **lie**
Seis in duus a manu pigada	*Oh well, I can see two **people***
Andendi in fatu a unu ogu lucidu	*Who chase both behind a **fly***
Bivendi a sa spensierada	So far from the sacred **steeple**
Bivendi a sa spensierada	So far from the sacred **steeple**
Andendi in fatu a unu lucidu ogu	*Who chase both a fly **behind***
Seis in duus a manu pigada	*Oh well, I can see two **people***
No arreposas in nisciunu logu	A decent bed you cannot **find**
No arreposas in nisciunu logu	A decent bed you cannot **find**
Seis in duus a pigada manu	*Well, I can see people **two***
Andendi in fatu a unu lucidu ogu	*Who chase both a fly **behind***
Sempiri brillu de a mengianu	Sober days you've seen but **few**
Sempiri brillu de a mengianu	Sober days you've seen but **few**
A un ogu lucidu andendi in fatu	*Who behind a fly chase **both***
Seis in duus a pigada manu	*Well, I can see people **two***
Una giorronada in su sartu	To idleness you took an **oath**
Una giorronada in su sartu	To idleness you took an **oath**
A manu piada seis in duus	*Well, two people I can **see***
A un ogu lucidu andendi in fatu	*Who behind a fly chase **both***
Sciu ca no fais prus	Work to you is a stormy **sea**
Sciu ca no fais prus	Work to you is a stormy **sea**
In fatu a un ogu lucidu andendi	*Who behind a fly both **chase***
A manu pigada seis in duus	*Well, two people I can **see***
Fatzat soli o siat proendi	In all weather the world you **face**

Fatzat soli o siat proendi	In all weather the world you **face**
In duus a manu pigada seis	*Well, two people see I **can***
In fatu a un ogu lucidu andendi	*Who behind a fly both **chase***
No portas butinus in peis	As a poor and shoeless **man**
No portas butinus in peis	As a poor and shoeless **man**
Andendi in fatu a un ogu lucidu	*Who chase both behind a fly*
In duus a manu pigada seis	*Well, two people see I **can***
Seis in duus a manu pigada	Oh well, I can see two people

(Metrical scheme: opening section: abcdefgha; quatrains: abab, bcbc, cdcd, dede, efef, fgfg, ghgh, hahb).[14]

Opening Section and Couplet



Antoni Pani. Photo bv Robertu Corona.

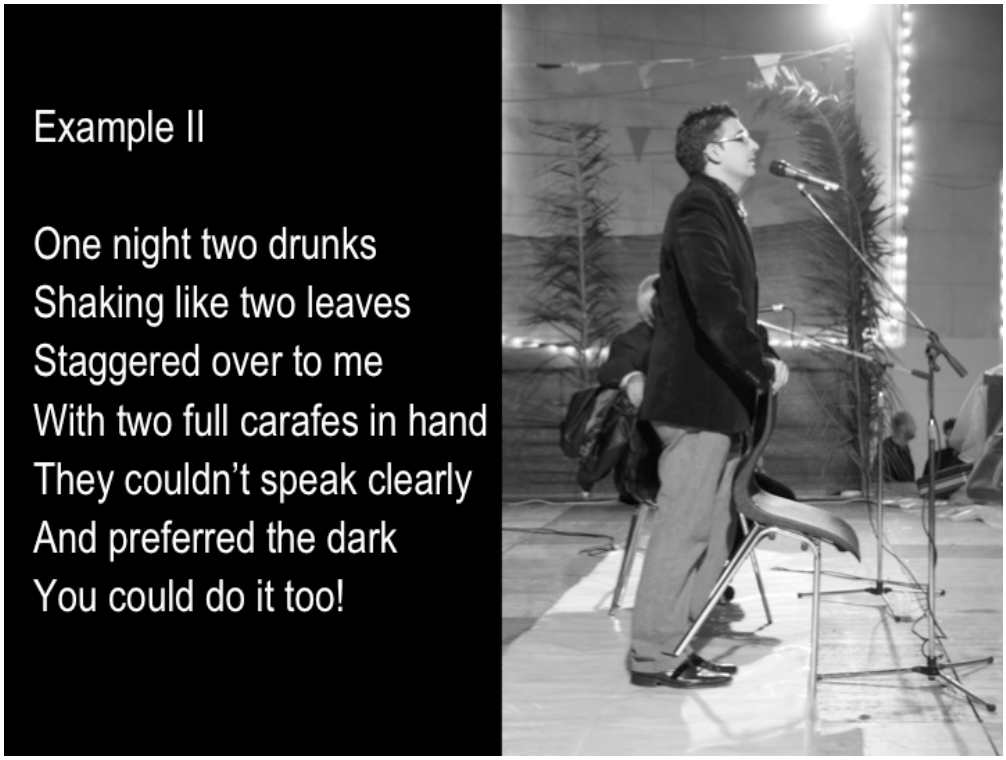
The opening section and the couplet, the two parts that make up the *mutetu*, have different communicative objectives and expressive styles. The opening section, in the form of a brief narration, initiates the com-position. Each poet is free to choose the subject matter in this part, since there is no obligation to compose according to the topic upon which the competition is based. The argument is often distant both in time and place from the here and now of performance. Although the competition rules allow for complete freedom in the choice of subject matter and the expressive form of the opening sections, there is a tendency to adopt certain traditional themes. Sometimes they are descriptions referring to historical events or inspired by religion or mythology. Such topics require a certain degree of elegance in delivery and in the choice of words as well as factual accuracy and truthfulness.

[14] The final quatrain is an exception as it contains only one line from the opening section.

Here is an example:

In sa vida Gesus[15]	Jesus in his life
Cincu bortas at prantu	Cried five times:
Sa primu candu est nasciu	The first when born,
Sa segunda circoncisu	The second circumcized,
Sa tertza a Lazzaru po amori	The third for love of Lazarus,
In Gerusalem sa cuarta	In Jerusalem the fourth,
Sa cuinta incravau in gruxi	The fifth nailed to a cross
De spina portendi corona	With a crown of thorns.

Another recurring theme is the creation of fictional scenes from everyday life that have a moral, sometimes allegorical slant to them. They need not have any bearing on reality, but only an internal coherence and a logical sequence to the narrative:



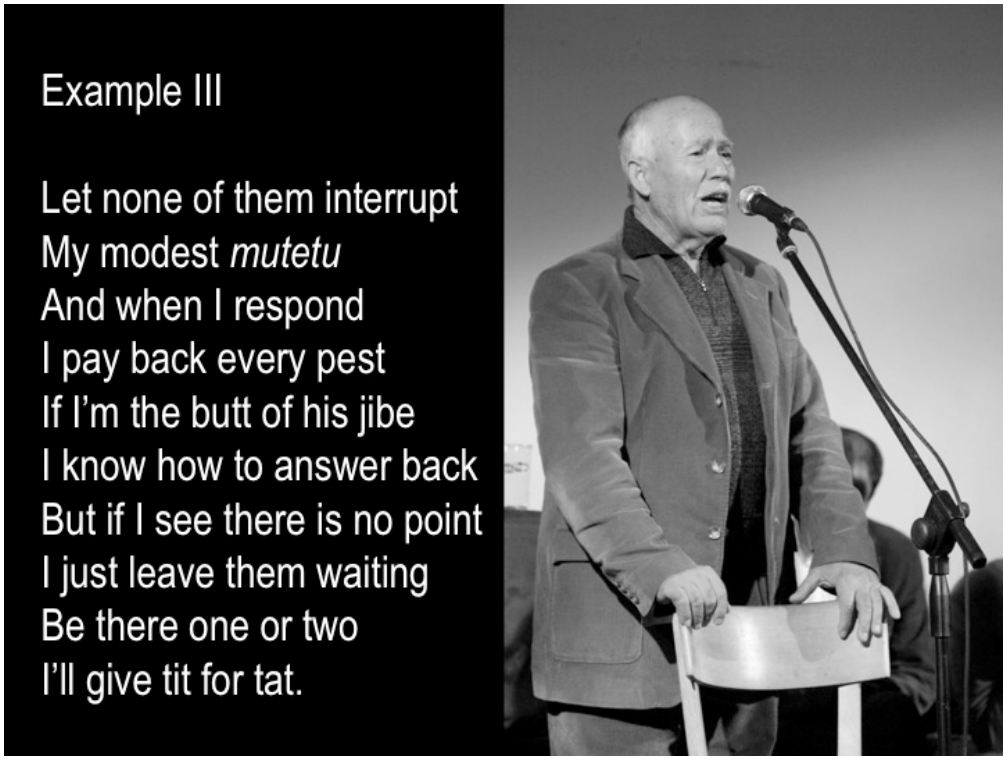
Pierpaulu Falqui. Photo by Robertu Corona.

Una noti duus impriagus[16]	One night two drunks
Tremendi che sutilis cannas	Shaking like two leaves
Mi ndi sunt benius acanta	Staggered over to me
Prenas cun duas carrafinas,	With two full carafes in hand.
No intzartànt beni is fueddus	They couldn't speak clearly
E ddis praxiat su scuriu,	And preferred the dark;
Chistionendi pariant ingresus	They were speaking like Arabs,
E bai e pigandi esemprus!	What could I understand?

[15] A *mutetu* by Sarbadoricu Serra, orally transmitted and documented by several sources (Anedda 1975; Zedda 2008:64)

[16] *Mutetu* sung by Chichinu Loddi at a *cantada* held in Deximuputzu for the festival of S. Giusepi, August 18th, 1965, recorded on audiotape; private archive of Paulu Zedda.

Another fairly common type is composed of statements directed at the other competing poets or the audience. In this kind of opening section the poet expresses a general point of view that does not include the forming of metaphorical content required by the central subject matter:



Omeru Atza. Photo by Marco Lutzu.

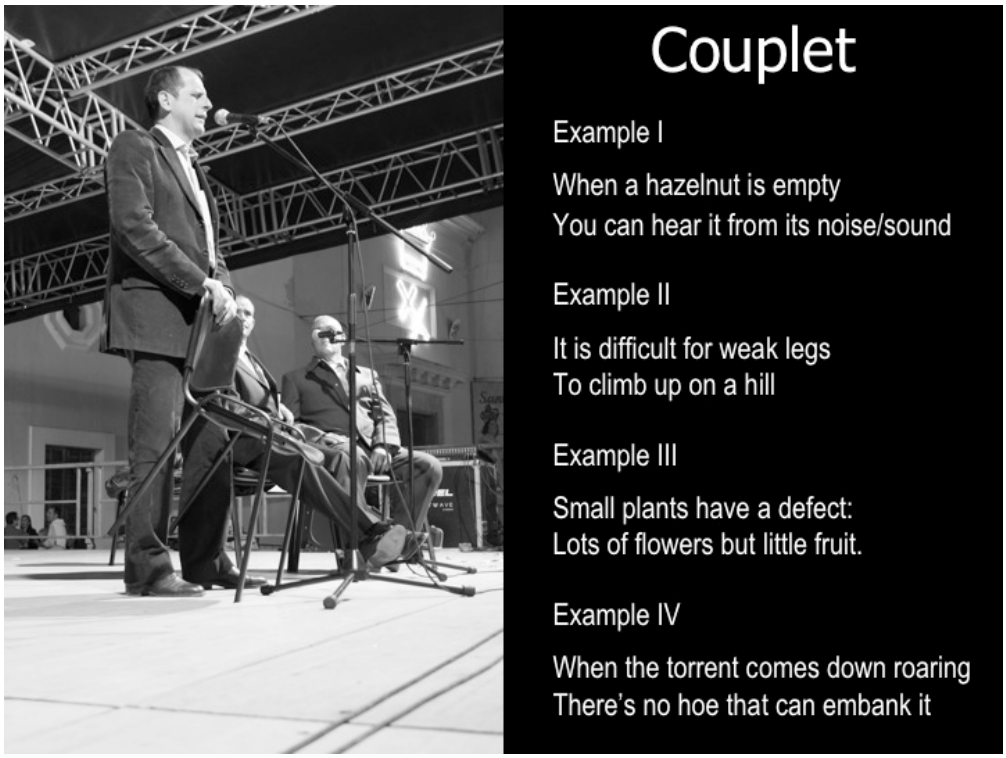
Nemus de issus interrompit[17]	None of them interrupt
Su miu modestu mutetu	My modest *mutetu*,
E candu sa resposta dò	And when I respond
Sciu pagai donnia importunu,	I pay back every pest.
Si tengu parti contraria	If I'm the butt of his jibe,
Fortza e consillu ddi presti	I know how to answer back.
E chi biu ca lompit a nudda	But if I see there is no point
De sceda ddu lassu giaunu.	I just leave them waiting.
Siat unu o mancai ddus	Be there one or two
A su giustu torru su giustu.	I'll give tit for tat.

Each of these different ways of developing an opening section has to be interpreted according to criteria that differ from one topic pattern to another. Opening sections should be received according to the method described by Richard Bauman (quoted in Foley 1995:7-11): "Interpret what I say in a special sense; do not take it to mean what the words alone, taken literally, would convey."

The couplet, on the other hand, draws upon dialectic skills. This is the section in which the duel between poets really happens and the subject matter always recalls the main theme of the *cantada*. All the couplets of a performance, therefore, follow and discuss only one theme

[17] *Mutetu* sung by Miminu Moi at a *cantada* held in Assemini for the festival of S. Luxia, on the 24th of April, 1954. Manual transcription, private archive of Paulu Zedda.

(Bravi 2008:289-90). Moreover, they are often expressed in a mysterious way, hidden under metaphors or allegories so as not to be easily interpreted (Zedda 2007). Because of their reduced length and the concise and evocative formal style, they are in a away similar to aphorisms or, more often, to proverbs. They hide sententious and morally oriented content behind a visible and poetic image.



Paulu Zedda. Photo by Robertu Corona.

Here are some examples:

…	…
Est connota a su sonu[18]	You can tell it by its sound
Sa nuxedda sbuida.	When a hazelnut is empty.
…	…
Cussu de andai a punta a susu[19]	To climb up on a hill
No est cosa poi is cambas moddis.	It's difficult for weak legs.
…	…
Est difetu de is prantas piticas:[20]	Small plants have a defect:
Frori meda, ma pagu frutu.	Lots of flowers but little fruit.

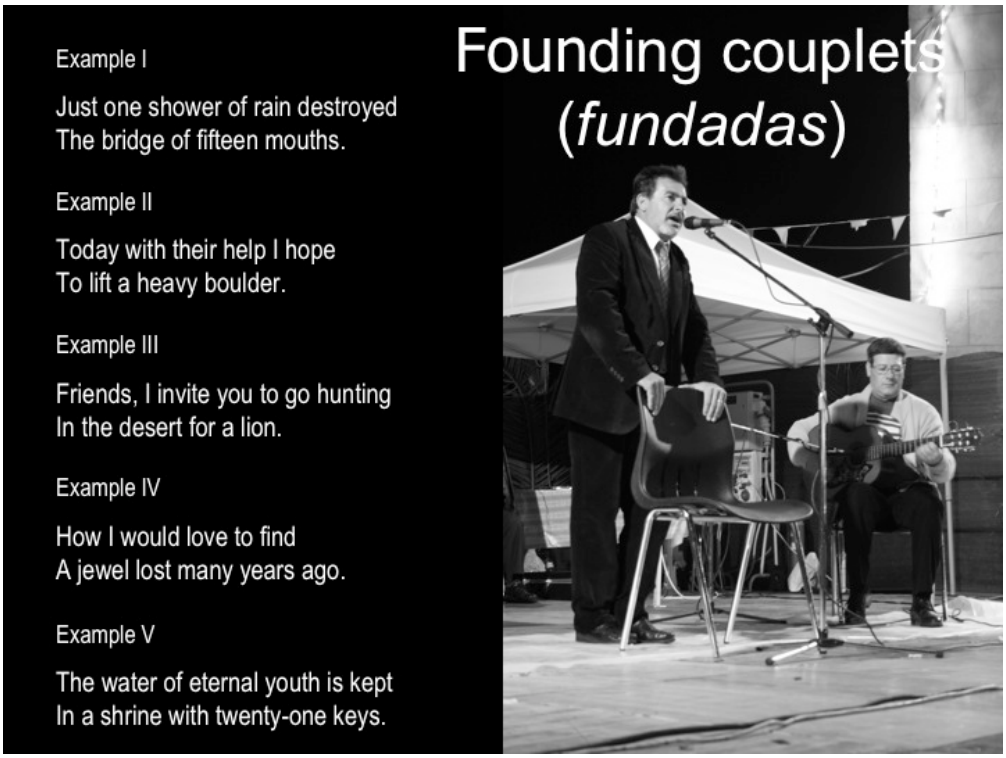
[18] Pinneddu Piras, 1890, single *mutetu* (Piras 1999).

[19] *Mutetu* sung by Efis Loni at a *cantada* held in Quartu S. Eleni for the festival of S. Efis, August 30th, 1931. Printed by Tipografia Il Torchio, Cagliari.

[20] *Mutetu* sung by Cicitu Farci at a *cantada* held in Quartu S. Eleni for the festival of S. Efis, August 30th, 1931. Printed by Tipografia Il Torchio, Cagliari.

…	…
Candu s'arriu calat a sonu[21]	When the torrent comes down roaring
No nc'est marra chi du scansit.	There is no hoe that can embank it.

A strong distinguishing trait of the couplet is its obscure, enigmatic character: the search for its exact meaning is one of the elements that generate most interest in the poetic performance. In front of the stage the listeners discuss, at length, the possible interpretations of the words and the meaning that the poets hide behind their verse.



Pascuali Sanna accompanied on guitar by Antoneddu Pau. Photo by Robertu Corona.

The first couplet plays a particularly important role in the performance because it establishes the symbolic and metaphorical theme that will be maintained for the duration of the competition. Thus the way in which the theme is introduced and developed in the Campidanese tradition differs significantly from any other method known among the traditions in the Romance languages. The topic is given to the poet who opens the performance. As his role suggests, he is known as the *fundadori*, the founder, and the first couplet is called the *fundada*, the foundation. He presents his theme in such a way that often neither the audience nor the other poets understand immediately what the underlying meaning may be. However, the poetic figure that he proposes is accepted and developed by the other poets, so that all the couplets of the poetic duel adhere to a unique theme, which becomes a kind of extended metaphor (Bravi 2008).

[21] *Mutetu* sung by Arrafieli Serra at a *cantada* held in Sinnia, June 1931, at a private event. Printed by Tipografia Editrice Artigiana, Cagliari.

Here are some examples of foundations:

Una acua solu at distrutu[22]	Just one shower of rain destroyed
Su ponti de cuindixi bucas.	The bridge of fifteen mouths.
Oi speru cun s'agiudu insoru[23]	Today with their help I hope
Sullevai unu grandu massu.	To lift a heavy boulder.
Amigus s'inbitu a cassa[24]	Friends, I invite you to go hunting
A su desertu po unu leoni.	In the desert for a lion.
Cantu emu a bolli incontrai[25]	How I would love to find
Una prenda di annus ismarria.	A jewel lost many years ago.
S'acua de s'eterna gioventudi s'inserrat[26]	The water of eternal youth is kept
In unu sacrariu de bintuna crai.	In a shrine with twenty-one keys.

In the course of the competition the improvisers progressively try to unveil, through their verse, the underlying meaning of their words, while at the same time they challenge each other in a linguistic contest in which the competitive side is highlighted. As the competition goes on, the images in the couplets that refer to the central theme of the contest alternate with the brief narrative lines taken from the opening sections, in a continuous series of Pindaric flights, taking the listener back and forth between the concrete central theme of the performance and the unpredictable, often ethereal narrative of the opening sections (Mossa 2004).

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[22] Pascali Puddu; the founder's couplet delivered during a *cantada* held in Pirri for the festival of S. Sidori, June, 1902. Printed by Tipografia Legatoria Sarda in 1905. The couplet refers to the fall of the city hall committee ("a bridge with fifteen mouths") after the elections ("just one shower of rain").

[23] Sung by Efis Loni during a *cantada* held in Munserrau, August 9th, 1923, for the festival of S. Lorentzu. Printed by Tipografia Il Torchio, Cagliari. The theme refers to the competition itself.

[24] Sung by Francischinu Lai at a *cantada* held in Quartu S. Eleni for the feast of S. Eleni, September 14th, 1923. Printed by Graphical, Caligiari. The topic couplet refers to the poetic duel being held, and the figure of the lion is an allusion to the surname of one of the competing poets, Efis Loni.

[25] Sung by Arrafieli Serra at a *cantada* held in Sinnia, July 16th, 1927, for the festival of S. Barbara. Printed by Tipografia Editrice Artigiana, Cagliari. *Prenda* (jewel) is a metaphor for freedom. This public performance was interrupted by the secretary of the fascist party, as indicated in a note printed at the end of the booklet.

[26] Paulu Zedda, founder of the performance held in Sinnia, at a *cantada* held in Sinnia for the festival of S. Barbara, June 18th, 2004. Recorded on audiotape, private archive of Paulu Zedda. The central theme is history (the water of eternal youth) enclosed within the alphabet (the 21 keys).

Part II: Memory, Structure, Dynamics

Paulu Zedda. Photo by Robertu Corona.

Memory (Long-term and Work-memory)

While creating oral poetry, composers must adhere to complex rules. These involve syntax, morphology, grammar, correct versification, placing of stresses, and rhymes. With such compositional logic in mind we must evaluate the importance of memory.

According to Greek mythology, the muses, who embody poetry and inspire its creation process, are the daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne, the goddess of memory. The oldest version indicates that there were three muses: *Aoidê* (the Voice), *Meletê* (the Practice), and *Mnêmê* (the Memory, once more).[27]

The debate over the Homeric question and oral epic poetry in general has allowed us to recognize those elements, such as formulaic language and recurrent patterns, that explain the genesis, evolution, and transmission of an oral poem (Lord 1960). The use of coherent and reproduced metrical schemes also works as a mnemonic device aimed at supporting the memorization of a poetic text (Havelock 1963). The ancient Greeks (and civilizations living in a

[27] Pausanius, IX, 29, 2.

state of primary orality) used metrically ordered poetic structure as a means of perpetuating works that were held to be important.

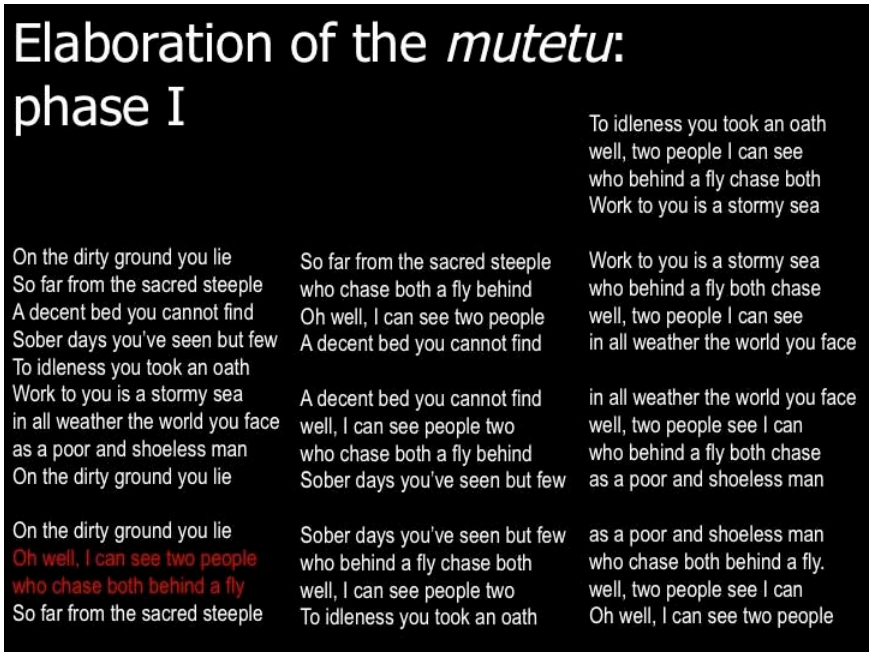
More recent research into other ongoing epic traditions has highlighted the amazing mnemonic ability of poets who are often able to (re)compose tens or sometimes hundreds of thousands of lines (Foley 2005). All such research underlines the key role of memory for the very survival of oral poetry. In closer focus, when scholars write about memory they are mostly referring to long-term memory, the kind of memory that allows the retention of an extended work for months or years.

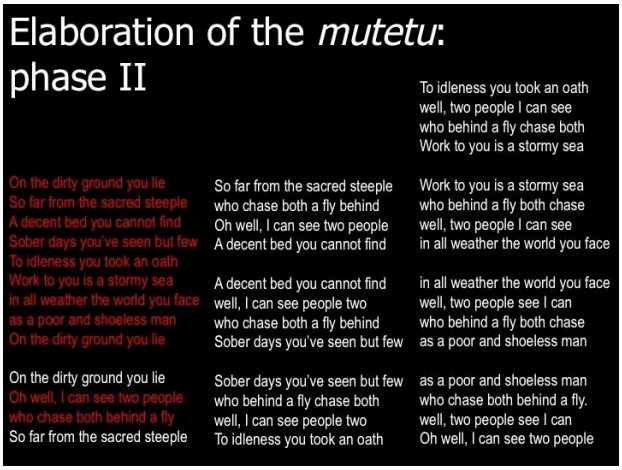
If one were to ask a habitual listener of Campidanese poetry what the "gift of nature" is (according to a popular belief), or what is believed to be the most significant innate characteristic of an improvised poet, he would answer "*s'arretentiva*," a term we can translate as memory. Yet in improvised poetry circles there are two words that are used for memory: "*su sciri*," or "knowing," a designation used to mean long-term memory, which allows the poet to draw his texts and text-patterns from a "mental library"; and *s'arretentiva, "*retentiveness," used to refer to the ability to hold complex texts in the memory while formulating them. This latter type of memory therefore functions as the poet's "work-memory," required to construct his improvised text.

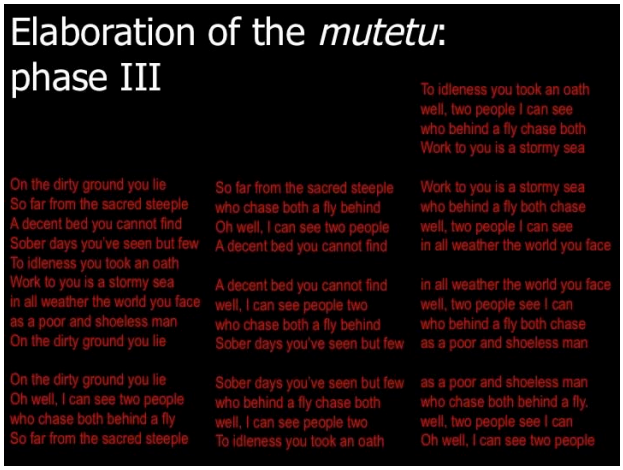
Although these two mnemonic functions are in some way connected, they are also diverse and independent. A poetry lover may have an excellent long-term memory, be able to recite thousands of lines by heart, and yet be unable to compose a *mutetu longu* because the verses he is composing are forgotten as he tries to reorder them. Conversely, a young person with little experience and a limited "mental library" might improvise a *mutetu* with relative ease due to his having a good work-memory. We could perhaps draw a comparison with the working of a computer: the long-term memory functions like the ROM, whereas the work-memory works like the RAM. As far as extemporaneous poetry is concerned, the second type is more important than the first, and when we are dealing with complex forms such as that required in the *mutetu* it is absolutely essential.

In order to understand the relevance of the work-memory, I shall focus on another detail. An improviser does not lay out his verse in his "mental notebook" in the same order that a speaker does, nor in the same way that a literary poet writes down or types his verse.

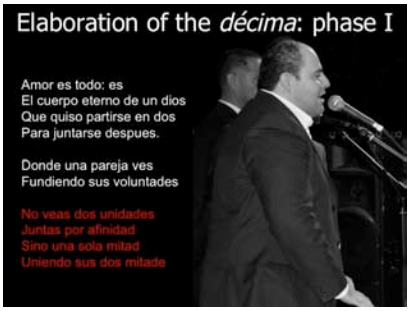
A Campidanese *cantadori* begins the composition of his *mutetu* with the section he will sing last, the couplet, and

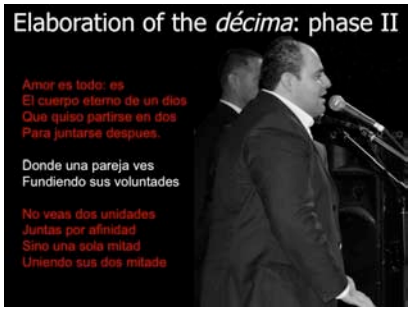






only after he has accomplished this initial step will he begin to work out the first part, the opening section, here also often starting from a central line or from the last line rather than from the first. A *cantimpanca* from Tuscany composes his eight-line stanzas beginning with the fourth or sixth line. A Cuban *repentista* composes his *décima* (ten-line stanza) beginning with the second *redondilla* and then moves on to the first one and lastly to the *bisagra* (Díaz Pimienta 1998:425-34; Della Valle and Mitrani 2006).





Marcu Melis. Photo by Robertu Corona.

A Basque *bertsolari* begins to formulate his *bertso* starting from the last line (J. Garzia et al. 2001:104-12). Whereas a writer composes his text in an anterograde fashion, an improviser tends to compose in a retrograde fashion.[28]

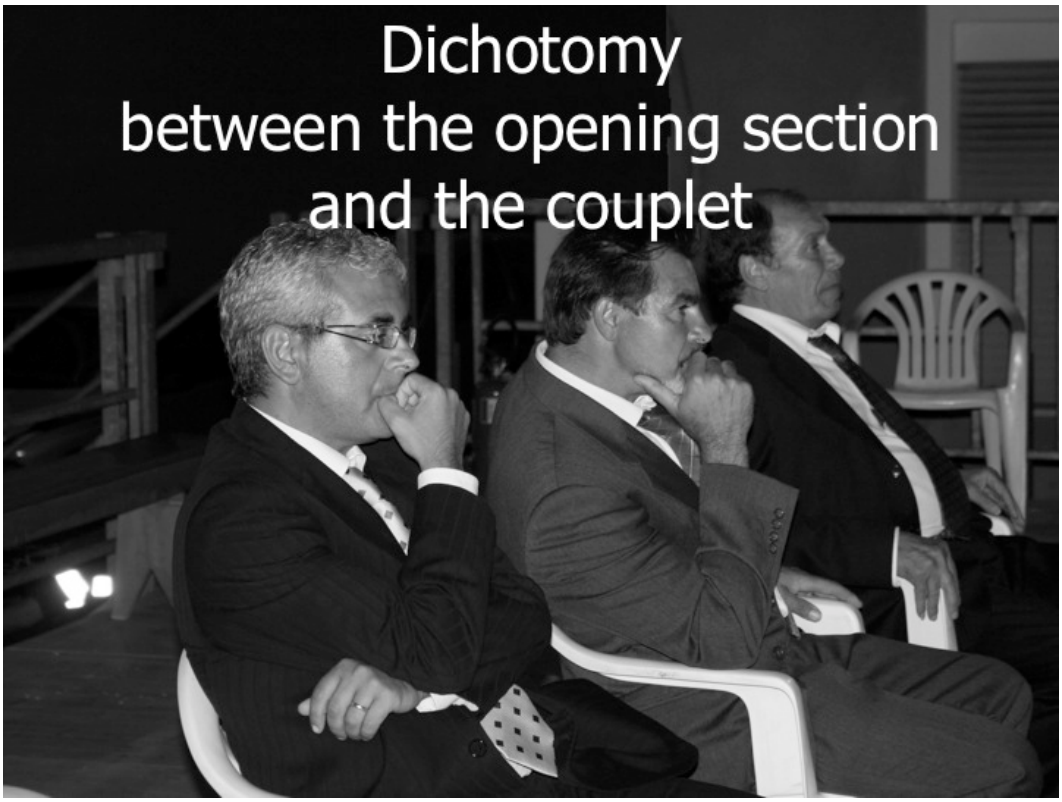
In order to improvise a good *mutetu* it is necessary to settle on some words or lines that will form the final part of the text and then store them in memory while the initial section is elaborated. This is certainly not the most natural way to arrange discourse. A speaker also needs to use his work-memory, for as he utters a sentence he simultaneously thinks of the following one. However, this only requires the retention of a few words for a few seconds. A writer works in more or less the same way, with the advantage of being able to verify at any time and in every detail all the words he has already written, thus avoiding repetition, syntactic errors, and incoherencies. He orders his discourse according to the requirements of a wider hierarchy of

[28] The reason for this kind of order in construction is found in the final result: in extemporaneous poetry, a stanza is much more effective if its conceptual nucleus comes at its end, and this most effective verse must be thought up first because only the first lines need not rhyme. Via this technique the stanza will build up to a climax, rather than losing its impetus as it proceeds.

words and ideas, putting down on paper (or in an electronic file) the contents of his work-memory. The improviser needs to hold a greater number of words in his mind than the speaker or the writer, and for much longer.

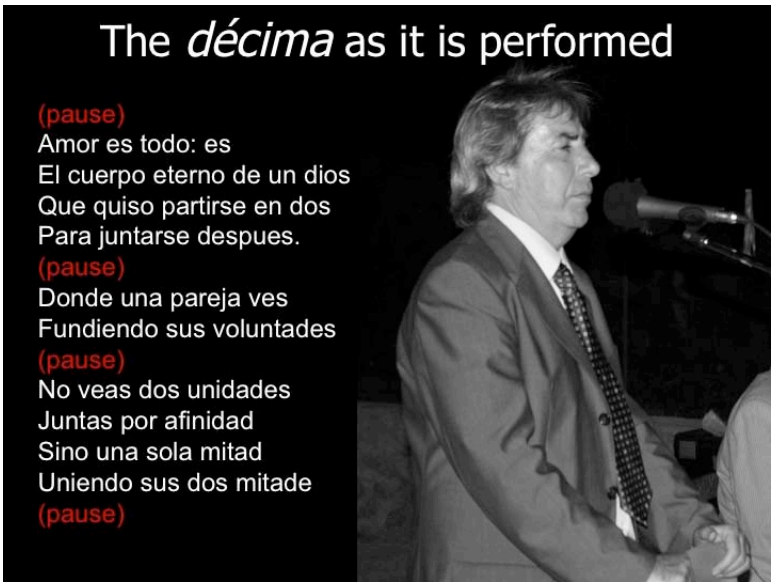
Moreover, the improviser's work-memory needs to be malleable. During the working-out phase of a *mutetu longu* he continuously modifies and perfects his stanzas in the minutes leading up to his performance. Consequently, he has to keep a virtual mnemonic notebook open in his mind, where some verses are altered and others are substituted for or eliminated, and be able to forget the rough compositions he has discarded until he arrives at his final draft. It is evident that one must possess a highly efficient work-memory in order to compose a linear, coherent, and effective stanza.

Dichotomy (between the opening section and the couplet)



Antoni Pani, Pascuali Sanna, and Manueli Saba. Photo by Robertu Corona.

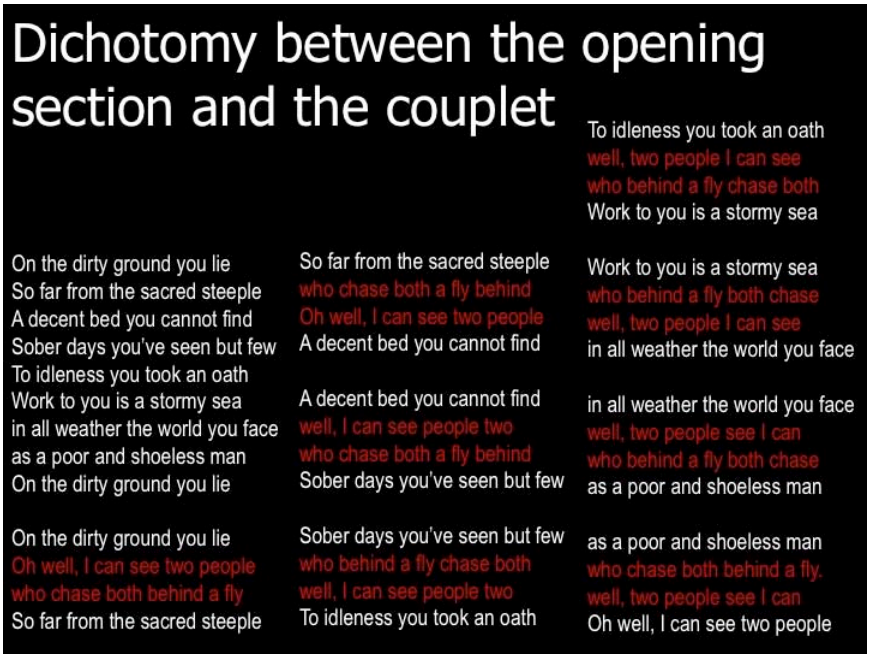
A further element that we must consider carefully is the order in which the various messages found in the *mutetu* are positioned within the stanza. Normally, the performance of a sung poetic text flows in such a way that pauses, rhythm, and intonation mark its continuity in much the same way as if they were punctuation marks.



Antoneddu Orrù. Photo by Robertu Corona.

In the *décima cubana,* for example, composed of ten octosyllabic lines in all, the *repentista* sings the first group of four lines called the *prima redondilla*. He then pauses for a few seconds before singing a further two lines, the *bisagra.* After another few seconds he sings the second group of four lines (*segunda redondilla*). Performing the *décima* in this way helps underline its syntactical structure: the *prima redondilla* contains the first thematic thread; the *bisagra* acts as a bridge; the *segunda redondilla* represents a second stronger conceptual nucleus that concludes the *décima*. Longer intervals separate one *décima* from another, while other shorter pauses separate the three subsections that make up the whole *décima.* The pauses, in other words, highlight the semantic discontinuity of the poetic performance, just as punctuation does (commas the short pauses, full stops the longer ones), and make it easier to comprehend. We find a similar situation with the octet sung by the *cantimpanca* of Tuscany. The stanza composed of eight hendecasyllabic lines is sung almost without stopping, although there are some barely perceived pauses that divide it into subsections (Bravi 2008). Once again, the pauses correspond directly to the degree of continuity between the verses.

In the *mutetu longu* the ideas are, in a sense, collocated less naturally. The *cantadori* starts his poem with the opening section, interrupts his singing for a few seconds, then sings his eight quatrains, separating them from each other with equal pauses. In this case, however, the criteria applied regarding the use of pauses in the understanding of the *décima cubana* or the Tuscan octet are no longer valid. The opening section of a *mutetu* is preceded and followed by a pause that underlines its semantic continuity, and so far everything seems normal. In the eight quatrains that follow, however, interpreting the pauses after each one in this sense is erroneous and misleading.



In every quatrain the first line is taken from the opening section, the second and third are the couplet, and the fourth, once again, is taken from the opening section. These four lines held together between two brief pauses have in reality no semantic continuity and thus are logically incoherent. Indeed, the first and last lines are fragments of a subsection that has already been heard. Only the second and third line of the quatrain make up a semantically coherent couplet that expresses a complete thought.

Furthermore, the couplet is heard in its original form only in the first quatrain because in successive ones it is reshaped: the two lines are inverted and the words within each line continually reshuffled into a new, different order every time the couplet is heard. The other competing poets and the audience must listen carefully to the central couplet of the first quatrain, for the content of these two lines is relevant to the central theme of the poetic duel. Therefore, in a strophic structure of 41 lines, only in the eleventh and twelfth lines, strictly speaking, do we hear the actual dueling dialogue between the poets. More precisely, all the quatrains contain a version of the central couplet, but, excluding the first, they have to be mentally reordered by the listeners in order to arrive at their correct and complete sense.

To date, no study has looked into the reasoning behind such an unusual arrangement. In my opinion a partial explanation could be found in its phonetic-musical component, which predominates over its semantic content. On the whole, this dimension would explain the reason for such a structure.

Oral language, especially in extemporaneous sung poetry, performs two functions simultaneously. The first is to communicate concepts through its semantic components. In doing so the poetic composition, although limited by the features that distinguish it from other communicative forms, functions nevertheless as a verbal language does by transmitting to the listener concepts and images coded in a series of words. The second communicative function is achieved exclusively through its sonorous qualities and, as such, is facilitated by mechanisms and requirements that are in some ways wholly "musical." The sound of each word, the sentence stress, the duration of each line, and the positioning of assonance and rhyme are all aspects of oral communication that work as features of a diverse and parallel register. Therefore, we must interpret the verbal message while bearing in mind both the phonetic-musical value of its sounds and the coded significance of its words.

With this in mind, we can see that these quatrains, seemingly incoherent from a purely semantic point of view, become perfectly coherent when judged only on the basis of this metrical and morphological language. Indeed, every line of the quatrain is of equal length and has the same metrical pattern. Invariably, it has a double alternating rhyme (abab type). If we look at all the quatrains, we can see that they maintain the same internal symmetry and each contains a similar rhyme scheme (abab, bcbc, cdcd, dede, and so on). In other words, a *mutetu* partially sacrifices continuity of statement, theme linearity, and logical coherence in order to constitute the highly symmetrical pattern, and in this it is "musically" perfectly balanced.

Recurrence

Cantada for the feast of Santu Bartzolu, in Sinnia. Photo by Robertu Corona.

The *mutetu* is a highly recurrent form. Every line of the opening section is repeated at least twice in the text, while the two lines of the couplet, as already stated, form the thematic nucleus of the poetic duel, appearing at least eight times. Let me enlarge upon this description. In reality, in the 41 lines that make up the *mutetu* there is no section that is simply repeated; as we have seen, its verses are continuously reordered according to a set pattern, and the word order of lines reshuffled to form new combinations. Such a strange and unusual mechanism has been observed by various scholars with open curiosity and, sometimes, with suspicion (Wagner 1907, R. Garzia 1917).

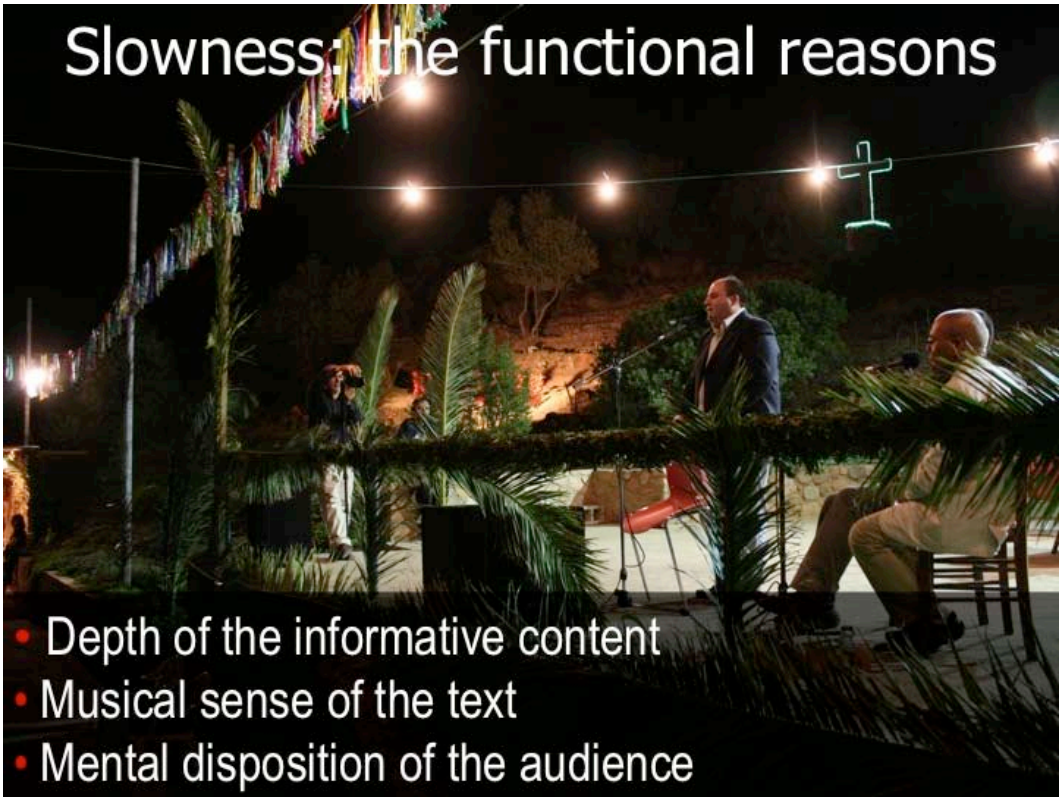
It has been suggested that such recurrence is a useful way of making sure the audience understands the message in the poetry (Cirese 1988:25), a very plausible explanation. The repetition of a concept would allow those who had not heard well the first time to check their understanding. This is particularly true as regards the centuries in which the form of the *mutetu* evolved, during which there was no means of amplifying sound. Nevertheless, there exist numerous other equally old traditions of extemporaneous poetic dueling in which no repetition is expected and they work well regardless. Another possible explanation, championed by some enthusiasts, is that the time taken to perform the "superfluous" quatrains gives the next poet more minutes to compose his *mutetu*. This too is a plausible reason, but is not the only nor even a major solution: several top-tier improvisers have repeatedly tried to speed up the *mutetu* by singing only a few of the eight quatrains, but such innovation has been firmly censured by the audience. The quatrains play a vital role in the relationship between the poets and their audience. After the main theme has been wholly exposed, there are two or three minutes during which the *cantadoris* perform their remaining quatrains. The audience takes this time to discuss the value of the poetic content and its possible meaning.

A further interpretation might be suggested by considering poetic language as being musical as well as semantic, and by recognizing that its phonemic content may function independently from its verbal message. We are accustomed to seeing a poetic text operating simultaneously on two levels: the semantic and the musical. In a *mutetu*, however, the two components also work separately. The *mutetu* operates on a strictly verbal level only in certain parts of the stanza, whereas the musical element is present throughout the performance.

Even considering the purely repetitive aspect of the verbal content of a *mutetu*, the musical language, as compared to the verbal, can be more revealing. Recurrence is always present in a musical piece of any kind in any culture. There is always a chorus in pop music; in classical music the central theme is repeated many times; in jazz the lead melody occurs at the beginning and at the end; in traditional music the repetitions are even more frequent, and some songs are made up entirely of a series of repetitions. Therefore, although recurrence is sometimes awkward in the spoken language and surely unattractive in the written one, in music it is, on the contrary, pleasant and even aesthetically indispensable.

Poetic structure derives from certain needs of both the verbal language and the language of music. It must satisfy requirements of grammar and syntax necessary for speech. However, as in music, repetition and reworking of specific sections are common; the poetic text transmits ideas and reason, as speech and prose do, but like music it is far better at transmitting images, emotions, and sensations; we analyze the spoken language almost automatically with a critical eye. On the contrary, music is accepted more passively and induces imitation (we all know how often a tune we have not thought about for a long time will surface in our minds). Poetic language sits halfway between pure speech and the language of music. In this sense the developmental structure of quatrains may be seen as a coherent and natural device, existing in order to gratify the musical-metrical level of perception, and not only the strictly verbal level.

Slowness



Marcu Melis. Photo by Robertu Corona.

Another feature that characterizes the Campidanese tradition is slowness. Time, during the performance, seems to flow at a very different rate from the one we usually experience. The main section of *cantada* normally lasts not less than two and one-half hours, which is much more than other corresponding oral contest traditions I know. A single argument in a Cuban or Argentinian performance rarely goes on for as much as one hour, more often concluding in 30 or 40 minutes. It is more or less the same for a North Sardinian or Tuscan *ottava rima*. Currently, a single theme is developed by Basque *bertsolaris* in an even shorter length of time. In the South Sardinian *cantada*, a single argument lasts more than three times the longest of the other traditions considered. This difference in the duration of the argumentation as a whole corresponds to a parallel length in the time normally required to perform each stanza. In the previously cited traditions, the execution time varies between 30 and 70 seconds. The recital of a single *mutetu* lasts from four to six minutes, more than five times longer.[29] How can we explain such unusual slowness?

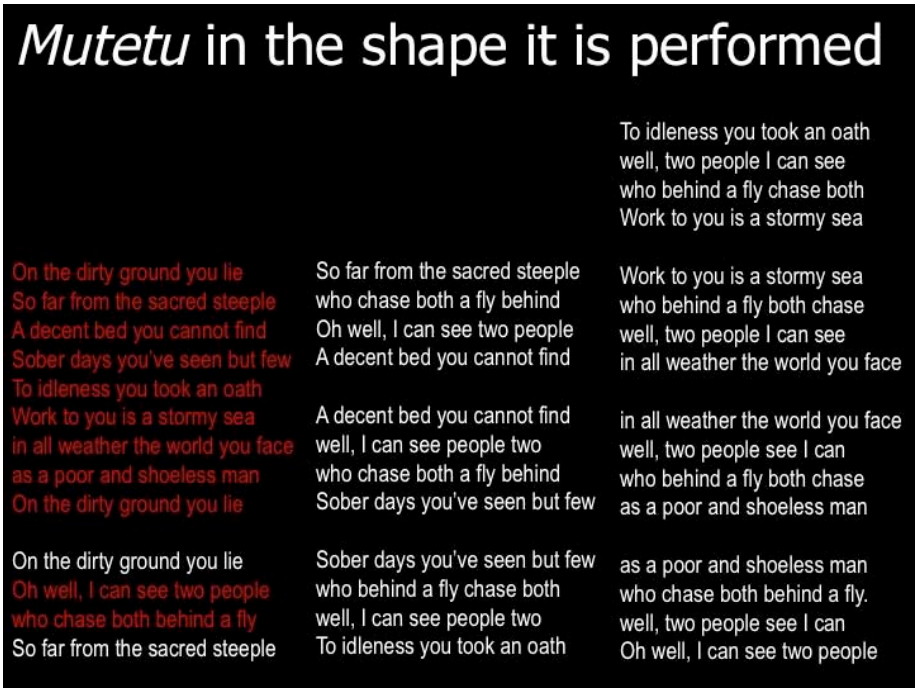
Several factors, in my opinion, influence and support this functional organization. First of all, we must consider the depth of the informative content. A *mutetu*, and to be more precise, its

[29] And although a Campidanese *cantadori* sings a number of lines between 41 and 51, the semantic nucleus is nevertheless contained in 10-12 lines, in comparison to the ten of a Cuban *repentista*, the eight of a *cantimpanca* of *ottava rima*, and the 4-10 of a *bertsolari*.

couplet, hides an obscure and barely intelligible message. The audience repeats it, discusses it, and tries to analyze each possible interpretation of it. When a performance is in its first phase and the lack of clues prevents any correct comprehension, a diligent listener must retain all the poets' couplets in a precise and coherent order, so as to interpret the whole meaning of the *cantada*. In a sense, the performance develops like a mysterious narration, like a detective story, in which a series of details must be analyzed with the aim of reconstructing the hidden sense of events.

After the delivery of the couplet there follows a certain number of quatrains that, as already mentioned, do not transmit any further textual message. During this period of time the content of the couplet, which has passed from the poet to the audience, is perceived, digested, and retained. In these few minutes the couplet reproduces itself, passing from the creator to the audience, and undergoing in this new passage a new elaboration, a further analysis, and a multiple memorization. It must be evaluated not just as part of an extended text, but as a landmark inside an articulated and often obscure and mysterious argument. The image conjured up by the couplet, in spite of its brevity, remains in the air.

Once again, I wish to take note of the musical sense of the text. Five minutes is a very long time to dwell on a text of just ten or twelve lines.

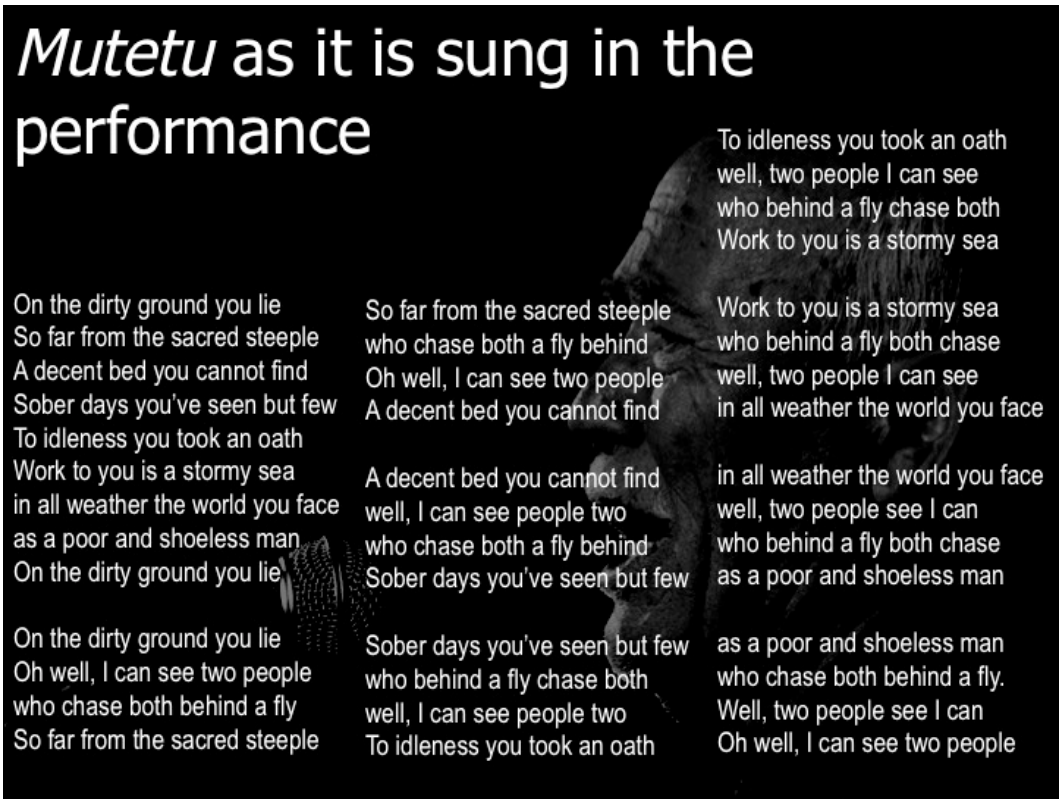


It has to be remembered that the information flow ends with the first quatrain, after just one and one-half minutes. The following three and one-half minutes contain only remodulations of lines that have been exposed before. Nevertheless, the metrical-musical language of the *mutetu* keeps working even when the informative verbal language has ceased.

Consider an analogy. Opera is composed of a succession of textual and musical sections, and other sections that are only musical. In the *mutetu* performance, in a sense, something similar happens. In the opening section and in the first quatrain both the textual and the sound components work together. From the second quatrain on, words lose their symbolizing function and maintain just their purely musical expression. This amounts to a poetic interlude in which only the phonic effect of stresses and rhymes can be heard, and no longer the coded meaning of words. Informative discontinuity of the verbal component is compensated for by the coherent continuity of its metrical expression.

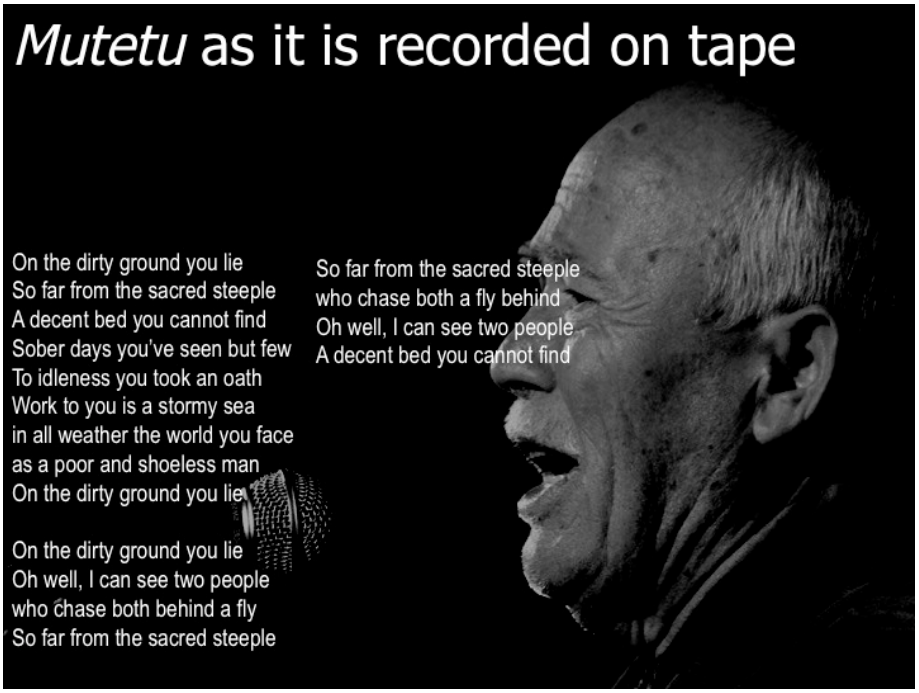
Further understanding may be arrived at by considering the mental disposition of the audience. Such a steady, repetitive flow in the performance works properly when listeners are tuned to a particular perceptual register, a sort of poetic trance or hypnosis. In order to attain this state of mind several factors play a relevant role. Singing is one of these; no improvised poetic contest could be held without it (Mossa 2004). A performance where poets challenge each other by reciting instead of singing their stanzas is not even imaginable and would appear unbearable.

Metrical organization of a text, as seen before, works as a sort of additional musical language that strengthens the impact of chanting. Other conditions help bring about this poetic trance. I will subsume all these under the comprehensive term of the "performing dimension"—the contact between poets and audience, with continuous exchanges of visual and aural messages; the ritualistic liturgy of the *cantada*, the position of the stage, the repetition of the same words and the same actions, the positioning of the performers, and so on; the union of the audience, the feeling of companionship and contact among its members, and the consciousness of being present at the exact moment of the birth of an artistic creation. When all these



Omeru Atza. Photo by Marco Lutzu.

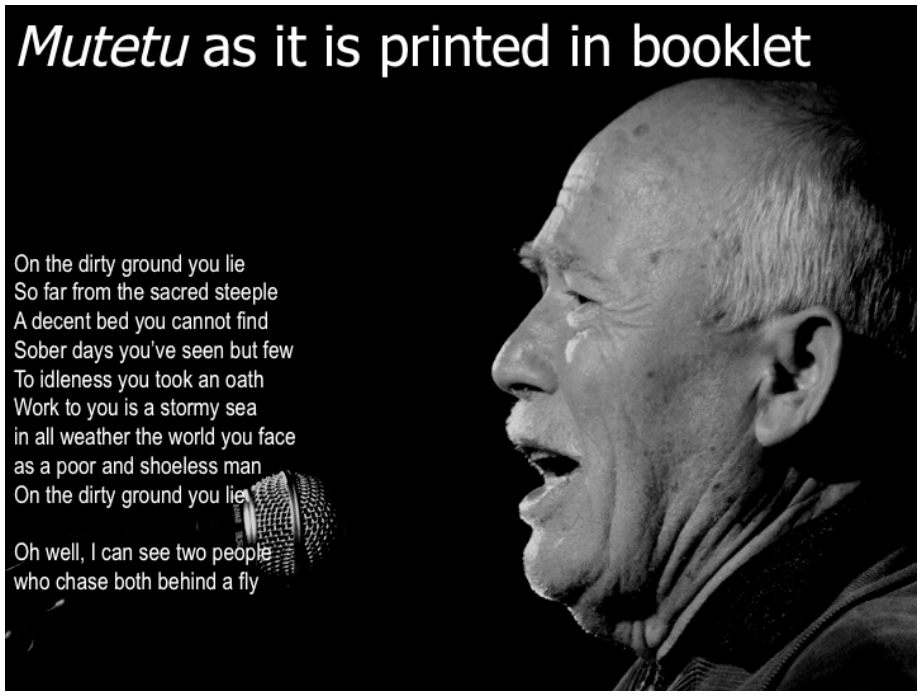
conditions are present at the same moment, listeners perceive the flowing of time pleasantly; they do not feel it as slow because rhythm and redundancy function perfectly to support the event. However, if any of these conditions is lacking, the developmental scheme becomes inadequate and the performance length has to be reduced in order to adjust to this new condition.



Omeru Atza. Photo by Marco Lutzu.

Devotees often document *cantadas* with their tape recorders. However, they do not record whole *mutetus*, but only the opening section and the first two quatrains, leaving out the other six to eight. In the audiotape—which is finally a text—music is present, but it lacks the "performative dimension" of the live event and the length of the poem is reduced to approximately one-half.

At times *cantadas*, as already discussed, are transcribed and printed in booklets. In this kind of text, in which only the printed word is present, both the musical and performing dimensions are absent. The length of the text undergoes a further reduction, with just the eight lines plus two appearing in the printed format, excluding all the redundancies.



Omeru Atza. Photo by Marco Lutzu.

The same *mutetu* in a live performance has a length of 41 lines, in a tape-recorded reproduction 17 lines, and in a printed booklet 10 lines. These three examples emphasize the role of mental disposition in the morphology of a

Campidanese improvised poetry performance. The flow of time does not have an absolute dimension, but rather varies depending on the mental attitude of the audience and consequently their relative perception of the *mutetu*. The perfect length for a tape recording is, at the same time, too short for a live performance and too long for a printed transcription.

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