

Textualization of Oral Epics



Trends in Linguistics

Studies and Monographs 128

Editor

Werner Winter

Mouton de Gruyter
Berlin · New York

Textualization of Oral Epics

edited by

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Mouton de Gruyter
Berlin · New York 2000

Mouton de Gruyter (formerly Mouton, The Hague)
is a Division of Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co. KG, Berlin.

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of the ANSI to ensure permanence and durability.

Die Deutsche Bibliothek – Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Textualization of oral epics / ed. by Lauri Honko. – Berlin ;
New York : Mouton de Gruyter, 2000
(Trends in linguistics : Studies and monographs ; 128)
ISBN 3-11-016928-2

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Cover design: Christopher Schneider, Berlin.
Printing: Werner Hildebrand, Berlin.
Binding: Lüderitz & Bauer, Berlin.
Printed in Germany.

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Preface

The task of textualizing oral epics in writing is a mission impossible. Oral performance cannot be captured in letters and words. Too many essential features are simply left aside in the written codification of a speech event which normally employs a wide array of paralinguistic means of expression from gesture to music. Even the most meticulous notation of all dimensions of the original oral performance does not reflect the intertextual construction of meaning, the core process of reception, manifest before the eyes of the outside observer but not seen by him because of a lack of traditional knowledge. The potential of the oral epic performance to open up several channels of communication simultaneously and mould the shared tradition into a novel experience packed with relevance for the participants has been largely underestimated or neglected.

The written codification of oral expression creates a kind of epic different from that experienced by the original audience. The route from an “incomplete and unfinished” oral epic manifest in performance to a complete written codification of its story manifest in a book does not, however, represent a process of decay but an intersemiotic translation. The focus on oral verbalization may be said to liberate the oral form in an important dimension, namely, the language. What we get is a new coherence of the story, a full exploitation of the local epic register through the vision of preferably one singer utilizing his/her epic idiolect and interpretive skill. The miracle of the process is that what we experience as literary value or beauty is there in the original oral textualization and is merely magnified, not created, in the written codification. The linguistic power of the oral genre becomes accentuated in the new non-oral form capable of living on as a piece of literature proper.

These facts have dawned on epic scholars only recently. The present volume reflects the awakening among top epic scholars, a process of new understanding taking place slowly along converging routes and with slightly different emphases. The days are past when a scholar sought for a “master form” by combining elements from different singers of epics, sometimes from different regions and eras, too. Such composite texts were in danger of gliding outside the local poetic system. Their connection to sung performance was lost or skewed. The reaction of modern scholarship has been to stay as close to the oral rendition of an “epic text” as possible and to listen carefully to the poet’s voice. In practice, this has led to an emphasis on the singer’s vision as a unifying force in the sequencing of traditional elements and his/her construction of meaning for the epic.

The new demands for accuracy and open reporting on methods in field documentation are a corollary of the source-critical concern, especially when

it has emerged that long oral epics are obtainable in induced contexts only, i.e. outside or in the margin of the social processes which normally encircle and set the limits to the epic performance. The whole epic is available only as non-transferrable mental texts in the minds of individual singers. Mental, not composite text may function as the frame of reference for modern research, because it is the element uniting the different performances of a particular epic by a particular singer. Yet it is neither fixed nor stable and develops throughout the singer's performing career. Since the mental text is manifest only in varying forms at different performances, the problem of editing cannot be eliminated totally, although the accurate documentation and publication of one performance is a basic method for fieldwork. The scholar will have to justify in detail the form in which he believes the epic may be presented as a reflection of the singer's vision.

The present volume is based on a selection of papers given at a conference on "Textualization of oral epics" in Turku, Finland, in June 1996. The conference belonged to a series of annual seminars arranged since 1991 at the University of Turku for the Folklore Fellows in Oral Epics, a scholarly network consisting of about 70 active epic scholars in all parts of the world. I wish to thank the sponsors, the Alfred Kordelin Foundation, Helsinki, and the Academy of Finland, Helsinki, for financing a major research programme on oral epics in southern India as well as the international seminars in Turku. The Kalevala Institute, newly established at the University of Turku, kindly hosted the final editing of the book and will sponsor comparative epics research in the future, too. I am most grateful to Anneli Honko, Editorial Secretary of the Kalevala Institute, for harmonizing the manuscript, and to Susan Sinisalo for her linguistic assistance with the editing.

Turku, Christmas 1999

Lauri Honko

Introduction

Text as process and practice: the textualization of oral epics

Lauri Honko

The concept of oral text has experienced a revolutionary development in recent years. What used to be an innocent object of research, a verbal transcript of an orally performed traditional song (with or, more commonly, without musical notation), has been problematized from a variety of angles by questioning its boundaries, apparent fixity, performative representativity, situational and cultural contextuality, co-textual and intertextual environment, discursive function and ideological bias. The modest transcript has undergone acute source-criticism: its textual origin and linguistic accuracy, its methods of documentation, transcription, translation, editing and publication have been subjected to scrutiny, not forgetting the singer's "voice" (always in danger of suppression), the collector's purposive role in the making of the text and the editor's impact on the final form. The demand is that the contours of the singer's and the scholar's interpretations be made clearly visible and reviewable apart from each other. Direct quotations from the singer's speech, preferably in vernacular transcription, are more dependable than scholarly résumés based on failing memory and defective textualization.

Paradoxically, the quest for authenticity has not necessarily led to "purer" texts but to a relativization of the concept of authenticity and, hopefully, to a better understanding of the multifaceted processes of oral and written textualization. Scholars, perhaps more inquisitive than ever, tend to demand a full history of textualization for texts claiming orality and traditionality.

The new wave of interest in textualization must be seen in the light of changes of attitude toward the concept of text in particular research traditions. Comparative research on oral epics is a good field of experimentation in textualization for several reasons. It is multidisciplinary, highly dependent on textual documentation and faces, e.g. in the analysis of long oral epics, very concrete problems of documentation and text-making. There are scholars who doubt that long oral epic is even possible. As a young scholar, I myself was educated to believe that long epic, based on folk poetry like the *Kalevala*, is a product of written compilation. In 1949 an expert of Vladimir Propp's stature could still claim that "the people never create an epic... the true epic always consists of isolated songs which the people do not join together..." (Propp 1984 [1976]: 73–73). Soon after that the breakthrough of long oral epics documented in the Soviet Union, Central Asia, Africa, India, Oceania and other areas where the long format was found alive in oral tradition led

to a paradigm shift which in my case resulted in intensive fieldwork among the Tulu speaking people in southern Karnataka, India, and eventually to the publication of the Siri epic (Honko 1998: 18–19).

Since oral epics research is multidisciplinary, the changes in attitudes toward textualization need not be fully identical or simultaneous in the participating disciplines, such as sociolinguistics, different branches of philology, folkloristics, cultural anthropology, comparative literature and so on. One of the reasons for inviting representatives of several disciplines interested in oral epics to meet in Turku in June 1996 was to let them compare their text concepts and report on changes which they had experienced in their own field of research. Somewhat fittingly, the conference became a platform for rarely heard reports on textualization, oral and written, with all its methodologically problematic implications.

The purpose of this introduction is not to focus on the papers in this volume, which are fully capable of speaking for themselves. (A brief characterization of their contribution will be given at the end.) My main task will be twofold: first, to survey the shifts of text paradigms in my own field, folkloristics and comparative religion, and second, to relate their impact on research on long oral epics by offering a processual model of textualization.

The situation of folkloristics as regards textualization is as problematic as that of printed oral poetry. Both the discipline and its material are based on oral culture but bound to written texts, i.e. archived or published documents on oral performance. Written texts constitute a necessary precondition for scholarly analysis on orality. Before profiling the conceptualization of text within folklore research it may be healthy to explore the line of demarcation between folklore and literature through the eyes of earlier scholarship. This line is of considerable interest for all disciplines dealing with oral tradition, mostly classified as the hazy marginal zone of literature proper, a kind of pre-literature or “unwritten” literature.

Problematic stereotypes: oral tradition and literature

The sharp divide between orality and literacy, once drawn by Romanticists frowning on the impact of a literary, individual hand on folk poetry, the product of collective creation, is a thing of the past. In recent decades it has been heatedly defended by scholars such as Albert B. Lord (1960) and Walter J. Ong (1982) but more generally the quest for purely oral cultures, uncontaminated by the art of writing, has given way to views which avoid the opposition and establish forms of cohabitation for orality and literacy (Goody 1987) or disclose literary influence and/or individual authorship behind many an “ancient” oral tradition (Finnegan 1988). What has emerged is an abundance of “interactive” forms and, at least in the case of long and complex

oral performances, an individual impact to the effect that reciter becomes author. Oral textualization may accommodate literary pieces and literary works may contain traditional elements in oral style. Illiterate singers are capable of handling information stemming from literary sources. Literary and oral performance traditions interact in most cultures and have done so for thousands of years in ancient civilizations such as India's.

Yet certain differences remain. If we look back to Roman Jakobson and Petr Bogatyrev, who defined the boundary between folklore and literature in 1929, a few of the criteria to which they adhered still persist. The literary work is unique, complete and permanent, whereas

A folklore work is extra-individual and exists only potentially; it is only a complex of established norms and stimuli; it is a skeleton of actual traditions which the implementers embellish with the tracery of individual creation, in much the same way as the producers of a verbal message (*la parole*, in the Saussurian sense) act with respect to the verbal code (*la langue*). A literary work is objectivized, it exists concretely apart from its reciter. Each subsequent reader or reciter returns directly to the work; ... whereas for a folklore work the only path leads from implementer to implementer. If all bearers of a given folklore tradition die, then a resurrection of that tradition is no longer possible; whereas, on the contrary, the reactualization of the literary works of a distant past is not uncommon... (Jakobson and Bogatyrev 1978 [1929]: 91–92.)

The "potentiality" of an oral work leads to a fluidity of its manifest form, a far cry from the fixity of the literary work. Another decisive criterion for Jakobson and Bogatyrev was the fact that works of folklore must be accepted by society, whereas the literary author may go against society and formulate his thoughts free of any "censorship". For the folk singer solidarity to tradition and social convention is obligatory, otherwise his works would not qualify as folklore. Needless to say, this does not exclude social protest in folklore. The consonance of a song with the values of at least one group promoting recognition of the singer in question seems to constitute the kernel of "collective creativity" for Jakobson and Bogatyrev, who deem it typical of folklore but not of literature.

This mild restoration of Romanticism may raise fewer objections than the talk about expressions of folklore as "works", i.e. thing-like entities. I will soon return to this problem, but it is interesting to note that instead of a master text Jakobson and Bogatyrev postulate "a skeleton of actual traditions" and a language-like production of oral discourse. Both statements apply fairly well to the model of textualization of oral epics presented below.

What is meritorious, too, is their warning against the use of literary stereotypes in the characterization of oral texts:

...one must beware of the mechanical applications of methods and concepts obtained in the elaboration of literary history... the difference between a literary text and a recording of a folklore work must be taken into account.

The typology of folklore forms must be built independently of the typology of literary forms. For example, compare the limited set of fairy tale plots typical of folklore with the diversity of plot characteristic of literature. Like structural linguistic laws, the general laws of poetic composition which result in a spontaneous likeness of plots are much more uniform and strict in their application to collective creativity than in regard to individual creativity.

The immediate problem facing synchronic studies of folklore is the characterization of the system of poetic forms which make up the actual repertoire of a given community (geographic, ethnic, professional, coeval, or other similar unions). The relationship of the forms within the system, their hierarchy, and the degree of productivity of each are to be investigated. (Jakobson and Bogatyrev 1978 [1929]: 93.)

The need for synchronic, empirical studies on hitherto unknown poetic systems of oral tradition is spelled out with clarity, as is the risk of applying high-Western literary concepts to low-Western or non-Western predominantly oral cultures. Avoiding Western stereotypes is probably the most important methodological problem of comparative research on oral epics.

The warning was issued seventy years ago but it has not been internalized by all researchers. Even such a basic distinction as the primary oral textualization (in performance) and its secondary written codification (in documentation and publication) is alien to certain scholars, who prefer to use "text" only for the act of writing, not for speech. Instead, we get euphemisms like "oral verbalizations" (Ong) or "standardized oral forms" (Goody). This attitude is unfortunate in four respects: first, it leaves the field of text-making in the hands of scribes and bypasses the wealth of oral textualization; second, it corroborates the stereotypes of written culture in an area where they do not primarily belong; third, it prevents the scholar from discovering how orality deals with text; and fourth, it may invite him to a detour of mystification of Romantic or some other kind, i.e. making oral tradition a collective endeavour void of individuated texts.

Softening the boundary between orality and literacy does not solve or eliminate the problems of relating the two. Looking at the prime object of our present interest, oral (printed!) epics, we may ask: what is their relationship to primarily literary epics.

Oral, tradition-oriented and literary epics

The taxonomy of epics cannot manage with the dichotomy of oral and literary epic alone. A transitional category between the two is needed. If we char-

acterize the purely literary epic as a text without “anterior speech” inscribing “directly in written letters what the discourse means” (Ricoeur 1991: 106; cf. Siikala in this volume) and the oral epic as speech only secondarily codified into written letters, we have denoted the main difference between Milton’s *Paradise Lost* and the Tulu oral epic of Siri. In the former case the primary codification of text takes place by writing, whereas in the latter it is effectuated by oral means (song, recitation, dictation), the exceptional written form resulting from the non-written one. Another obvious difference between oral and literary epic is that the literary author, even if he utilizes traditions (as Milton did the Christian tradition), does not let these elements determine his choice of plot or form, whereas the oral singer of epic is bound by tradition and the horizon of expectations of his audience.

Putting the primarily literary epics aside for a moment, we find that the remaining epics are not purely oral in the sense that they only reflect oral epic tradition but do not accurately follow the “anterior speech”, i.e. the oral performance. To this category belong the great epics from Sumerian Gilgamesh and Indic Mahābhārata and Rāmāyaṇa to the Homeric epics, from Iranian Shāhnāme and Central-Asian Manas, Gesar and Jangar and African Banî Hilâl, Mwindo, Lianja and Sunjata to Beowulf, Roland, El Cid, Nibelungenlied, the Eddas and the Kalevala, i.e. mostly epics which have consolidated the genre as a crowning chapter in the history of world literature plus hundreds of lesser-known scripts of epics caught in oral performance, written down and edited. Admittedly, we do not know the history of textualization of many of these epics in detail, and when we do, the histories differ quite dramatically. Yet we may conjecture that as a rule the final product is as much dependent on the scribe as on the singer. Most of these epics, or rather, the forms in which they have come to us have a long history of writing, copying and editing behind them and it is the task of scholarship to try to reconstruct that history on the basis of mostly scanty textual evidence and minimal knowledge about their cultural context, use, performance and documentation. Yet the epics in question undeniably possess, though in different ways, an intimate relationship to oral epic tradition.

I propose to use “tradition-oriented” (or simply “traditional”) to denote this vast category of tradition-bound epics which have been moulded, if not created, in the hands of performers, scribes and editors. They possess “anterior speech” in the form of oral epic registers internalized not only by their performers but also by their scribes and editors, but they are not direct documents from oral performances. Decisive here is the distance between the originally performed material and the final text of the epic. Poetically, the final text may be an “improvement”, but even that relegates it to the category of “tradition-oriented”, i.e. not directly oral.

The typology of ways in which the final epic text may “deviate” from its oral materials and models is still to be created but it will be broad indeed.

First of all, not many scribes and editors had the urge to stay close to what they heard. They internalized the poetic language, because they had to, dictation being not the best way to document a song. To take just one example, the compiler of the *Kalevala*, Elias Lönnrot, developed a method which allowed him to let the singer continue without those interruptions which could often shorten or damage the song. He wrote down only the first letters of words. Since much of oral poetry is formulaic and repetitive, he soon commanded a wider repertoire of authentic lines than the singer whose performance he was writing down. He “recognized” the line, gave it a form while it was still lingering in the air. Phonetic accuracy could not be achieved, of course. Instead, the competent scribe participated in the process of singing. In fact, he “sang” the line at least three times, first, when it was still in the air and had to be noted down quickly, second, when he wrote a fair (supplemented) copy of his notation soon afterwards, and third, when he placed the line in the final epic text at his desk much later.

This textual process gave the line a form consonant with the epic idiolect of the scribe, the best form according to the compiler’s linguistic competence, learned and developed while listening to the singers but also having other goals of unification and commensurability which the singers could not dream of. The goal was not to collect accurate texts for archiving but to publish a long epic, a format not automatically at hand. It was Elias Lönnrot’s own poetic system and his epic idiolect which constituted the basis of the final epic text. The system was admittedly traditional but not a copy of the poetic system of any oral singer or singers. When the compiler continued his work, it was not a mechanical procedure. We must recognize in Elias Lönnrot the creative scribe whom we find behind so many great epics. He obviously differed dramatically from most other collectors (he collected 25,000 lines when all the previous collectors had got only 10,000) and he had a goal, a long epic, and a narrative competence comparable to the oral singers’. Yet the epic he created is “tradition-oriented” not “oral” in the sense that the distance from the original materials as regards plot and format grew through the five versions of the *Kalevala* which he “performed” in writing during 1833–62. Here is another criterion of orality: the five versions of the *Kalevala* are reminiscent of an oral process where the work is always performed upon request, always different yet retaining the basic story. A literary work cannot be transformed at every recital; its text, once completed, does not change.

There are many other ways of handling the “anterior speech” in the process of written codification. The most conscientious scholarly attempts to preserve, not change the oral epic are only one category apparent in the articles published in the present volume. Jan Knappert, the erudite connoisseur of Swahili and other epic traditions, describes the process of “collation” in terms of comparing several available texts based on oral performances and patching up the final epic text with elements from different sources. Who, then, is the

singer? The oral performer who did not even know all the “versions”, i.e. the renditions by other singers? Or the learned scribe who knew the whole material and wanted to be loyal to it, eliminating only glaring inconsistencies and patching up the most obvious gaps? Is the final text consonant with any text an oral singer might produce? Should we call the epic “tradition-oriented” or, recognizing the attempt to follow the tradition, “oral”? These are hard questions to answer and they dot the entire history of textualization of oral and traditional epics. On the other hand, the absence of these questions in the case of primarily literary epics shows that we are dealing with truly different categories of epics. Literary epics may seem easiest to set apart, even if the “literariness” of not only scribes and editors (i.e. occasional singers in disguise) but also of, alas, the illiterate oral singers who compile long epics not shared by other singers in the same form, easily confuses the picture. Yet, it is worth trying to draw clear lines of demarcation even though they may have to be compromised from time to time.

The term “oral epic” would thus be limited to cases where “anterior speech” has been directly inscribed and published as such. Understandably, knowing the difficulties in documenting long oral epics and the compromises that even the best epic scholars have been forced to make (cf. Honko 1998: 169–217), the number of codifications of long oral epic which qualify as “true to the original” is limited and depends on where we want to draw the line. Thus far the comparative research on oral epics has accepted the attempt to preserve the oral form as sufficient for including a textualization in the “oral epic” category, even if the result is not always the best possible. It should be noted that certain epics listed above as “tradition-oriented” may occasionally have been textualized with an accuracy which qualifies the result as “oral”. The development of audiovisual documentation in fieldwork during the latter half of the 20th century has made a new level of accuracy available to growing numbers of epic scholars. The next millennium may witness a breakthrough of oral epics research based on improved quality of materials, not only textual but audial and visual as well, enabling new kinds of questions to be posed and analyses to be made which the uneven quality of earlier materials did not allow.

The paradigms of oral text

Before presenting a processual model of primary and secondary textualization of oral epics developed on the basis of empirical research, we must confront certain ambiguities concerning the “oral text”. By way of a backdrop, a glance at the shifts of paradigm relevant to our subject may not be out of place. As pointed out elsewhere (Honko 1998: 154), the interesting thing is that even if a new paradigm challenges the previous one in a most dramatic

way, it does not replace it totally. Thus the conceptualization of “text” contains several layers of intellectual heritage, mostly conditioned by the nature of developing scholarly curiosity. For a scholar, the “text” is a corollary of what he wants to know. Looking back, we may discern at least three different text paradigms in folkloristics plus a contemporary debate on the role of oral text in modern research.

The first phase of interest in oral tradition may be characterized as “pre-textual” (Honko 1998: 44). Originally folklore was seen as a source of information, a kind of archive of the wisdom of ancestors. Its form was of no importance. The discipline recognizing oral tradition as its prime research object, folkloristics, was not yet born. Writers and scholars coming from different fields of learning culled folklore materials for positive knowledge about historical, mythological, linguistic, topographical, demographical, sociological and other facts. The artistic and literary value of myths, narratives and folk songs was occasionally noted. Poeticians writing treatises on various genres in literature sought their beginnings in oral traditions; this development peaked during Romanticism in the late 18th and early 19th century. Since the early performances of literature were oral, the written form was for a long time less dominant than it is today. The idea of folklore works as presentable pieces of folk wisdom and art developed earlier than the idea of folklore as texts to be studied.

The first folkloristic concept of text in the proper sense of the word is coeval with the birth of the discipline during the latter half of the 19th century. Forerunners can be found. In Finland, Henrik Gabriel Porthan, Professor of Rhetorics at Turku University, in his book *De poësi Fennica* (1766–78) outlined “text-critical rules” for the editing of normalized forms of oral poems on the basis of variants. This task was taken up by the historic-geographic method of folkloristics a hundred years later, in Finland by Julius Krohn and his son Kaarle, who began to cooperate with Scandinavian and German scholars and created the “Finnish School” in folkloristics (Krohn 1926, Engl. trans. 1971).

For the new discipline concentrating on oral traditions, the text concept turned out to be a pervasive methodological criterion of identity. It called for a new kind of exactitude in relation to folklore materials and constituted the basis of scholarly analysis. This was partly a reaction against the sweeping generalizations of the contemporary quasi-historical, mythological and evolutionary theorizing which occasionally referred to folklore materials as evidence. The new discipline demanded that, before any scholarly conclusions could be made, as many text documents of the expression of folklore under study had to be amassed as possible and organized in geographical and chronological order. The main task was to trace the variation of form in the texture of expressions of folklore, i.e. at the language level of text. It was essential to know the boundaries of text, where it began and where it ended,

because without a definition of the textual unit its variants could not be identified. The final goal was to describe the “archetype” or textual core of an expression of folklore and explain its development by looking at the variation found in its renderings thought to stem textually from the same root.

The principles of text-criticism were borrowed from methods developed in the comparison of manuscript variants. It seemed possible to assume genetic dependence between certain folklore texts and place them in a stemma, a hierarchy of variants showing their mutual relations and derivation. The method made folkloristics a text-oriented discipline, and little attention was paid to the fact that folklore variation was basically different from manuscript variation, i.e. variation of a fixed text in the process of making copies of it. Neither “fixity” nor “copying” were good metaphors for understanding the real variation of living folklore. Yet the methodological stringency brought about plentiful systematic work and during a hundred years the paradigm produced monographs on the textual development and history of individual folktales, ballads, proverbs, etc., on a scale massive enough to fill the shelves of folkloristic libraries around the world wherever the discipline had established itself.

The development was different in Europe and North America. The collecting of variants from the entire distribution area of the folklore items to be studied and linguistic textual accuracy were the hallmarks of the method in Europe and led to the creation of folklore archives and series of text publications, whereas in North America the lack of proper folklore archives and the publication of popularizing anthologies of folklore led to a situation where the level of accuracy in the texts available to researchers was low (Honko 1998: 44–45; cf. Halpert 1947: 355–60). Thus when Elizabeth C. Fine labels the concept of text advanced by certain American proponents of the historic-geographic method as the “literary model of text” (Fine 1984: 28–30), it is mainly based on the opinion of leading U.S. folklorists in the 1940s stating that textual accuracy is less important than the fluency of discourse, an attempt to make the best of the situation where folklore texts were proven inaccurate. European folklorists, however, following the model of comparative Indo-European linguistics, maintained linguistic stringency, and soon the textual base grew to millions of items in the best archives. In Europe, then, we cannot speak of a “literary model of text”. A more adequate term for the European concept of folklore text is “text-critical”. Its closest trans-Atlantic counterpart is the “ethnolinguistic model of text” (Fine) developed by anthropologists such as Franz Boas and Edward Sapir, who saw language as the main tool in understanding cultures and based their analysis on accurate transcripts of oral discourse. Both European folklorists and American anthropologists felt that cultures could be objectivized as texts.

“The text is king” period lasted about a hundred years. Around 1970 a new paradigm was ready to question the basic tenets of the text-centred folk-

lore research. It was dominated by the concept of "performance": the focus shifted from the words of the song to the singer and his/her performance, and in fact to the entire situation of performance, interaction with the audience and the processes of the construction of meaning in a particular cultural context. Folklore ceased to be impersonal text documents and became a social matter, a tool of political will and power, an indicator of creative potential inherent in tradition and a testimony of the cultural and performative competence of the performer. The interest in verbal form did not die out; instead, it was expanded through "ethnography of speaking" and "ethnopoetics" to cover new dimensions of vernacular art. In the field of oral epics, the empirical work by Milman Parry and Albert Lord made a strong impact. Their oral-formulaic theory inspired many, and before long old theories of memorization of oral text were replaced by fresh analyses on composition-in-performance. (Honko 1998: 46; Foley 1995a: 605–14.)

"The performance is king" characterizes this third stage in the development of the folkloristic concept of text. The paradigm relativized text and declared that texts are misleading, because there is no stable text in folklore. It placed new requirements for texts made on oral performances. The verbal part is only one part of the text, not necessarily its core. An extension of "text" is needed to cover the verbal and non-verbal interaction between the performer and the audience, paralinguistic expressions such as gesture and body movement, the utilization of space and artifacts and, above all, collateral action (dance, pantomime, ritual, song, orchestra). The reading of "extended text" presupposes two documents: a "performance record" and a "performance report". As Elizabeth Fine (1984: 95) explains: "...a record, unlike a report, attempts to record systematically at least one level of signal, such as morphemes or phonemes, from the beginning to end of a performance". A report includes the elements which it is not possible to present by way of notation but which are necessary in order to understand the text, be they performer history, contextual information, cultural background, genre characterization or whatever.

An "extended text" with multiple and complex notations surrounding the verbal text is not a text but a libretto. Understanding the notation of changes in intonation, stress, pitch, pausing, gesture and spatial movement, etc., alongside the description of phonetic, morphemic and prosodic features of the text supplemented by audience reaction requires deconstruction with subsequent reconstruction not of the text but of the performance event itself.

When the method succeeds, it opens up the individuality of performance and performers and shows in detail how transient, connotative meanings are processed in a particular poetic system. When it fails, it offers a jumble of details and particles of speech without any novel insights into the dynamics of performance. The cumbersome notation apparatus may be suitable for small genres but hardly possible to apply to, say, oral epics lasting six days.

Yet the performance paradigm has made it perfectly clear that the oral performance is as a medium totally different from the printed text. Its spectrum of expressive means is much wider than that of print, and it effectively utilizes contextual, allusive understanding of the verbal message, often supported by the invisible presence of traditions not expressed verbally but influencing the processing of meaning. What we have here, in fact, requires intersemiotic translation, i.e. "the transference of a message from one kind of symbolic system to another" (Nida 1964: 4).

I doubt that the complex and typographically cumbersome notation of performance will point the way to future documentation and textualization of oral epics. My own experience from southern Karnataka, India, speaks for multiple audiovisual documentation (we simultaneously used 1–2 video cameras, 2 audio recorders and took photos) of complex performance situations (in our case, ecstatic possession rituals) which provides (1) the verbal text of the epic, invocations, prayers, dialogues, etc., (2) the integration of the epic singing in a wider ritual process, and (3) a continuous profile of the performance event lasting 10–14 hours per night (during 2–4 nights). The same technique was applied to simpler interview situations to allow continuous documentation and to eliminate pauses due to cassette change during singing. For the publication of our text and contextual information there are better ways than the notation discussed above.

The shift of paradigms may be in the making as we turn to the new millennium. "The performance is king" paradigm relativized text, the next paradigm will probably relativize performance. Any performance is a compromise, an intelligent adaptation of tradition within unique situations structured by a confluence of several factors. It can be understood only against a broader spectrum of performances of the same integer in similar and different contexts. A single performance cannot witness for other performances, just as one singer can not represent other singers. What are the joining links between commensurable but variegated performances is a question to be discussed shortly.

During recent years a more general debate on the nature of "text" and "oral text" has been taking place. I have briefly reviewed the discussion in another context (Honko 1998: 142–52) and will confine myself here to a few remarks. As suggested above, oral text represents speech only secondarily codified into written letters. Should we accept Paul Ricoeur's formulation (1991: 106) that "a text is really a text only when it is not restricted to transcribing an anterior speech, when instead it inscribes directly in written letters what the discourse means", we would have to relegate oral textuality somewhere outside "real texts". Leaving aside the complexities of "purely" literary creation, one possibility is to speak, as we have done, about primary and secondary written codification. The primary codification would then include Ricoeur's "real text", i.e. writing without anterior speech, and oral tex-

tualization would primarily take place in speech events and various performance situations and assume a written form only secondarily and exceptionally, because most oral textualization is unattainable after its performance and there is no guarantee that a later appearance will manifest itself in the same form. There is no need to deny speech text-like qualities, and the status of a "text void of speech" may turn out to be problematic. Yet it is not a problem to be discussed here.

What does deserve some attention is the status of traditional or tradition-oriented epics. They are based on "anterior speech" but do not reproduce it slavishly. They may contain ideas and expressions not found in any independent documentation of anterior speech. In this respect they constitute a category between "oral" and "literary", sometimes called "semiliterary". The decisive criterion, however, is the throughgoing dependence of these epics on oral models and traditional rules. This dependence takes the form of a solidarity to oral tradition which overrides all claims of individual authorship. Just as oral singers disclaim any individual creativity in passing on tradition, the compilers of tradition-oriented epics tend to disclaim their personal contribution. That our analysis cannot accept these disclaims uncritically (normally they are not true), does not deprive them of their significance. Describing the textualization history of traditional epics becomes a complex task which in many respects resembles the analysis of oral textualization (cf. the scribe as singer and the enigmatic elements taken from oral tradition).

Another observation concerns the model of oral-based textualization applied by scholars who have little or no access to fieldwork on oral tradition, such as Homerists, medievalists, philologists (of dead languages) and literary historians. Understandably, they tend to emphasize the written word in the process and mystify the pre-written textualization. Faceless rules of tradition and expressive powers stemming from oral sources, sometimes simply called "the voice", a prototypical agent, are apt to replace different types of singers known from the ethnographic experience gained from living oral-poetry cultures. For Paul Zumthor, for example, the human voice is not only a carrier of articulation and lexical meaning but also of transformatory, non-linguistic meaning: "the voice goes far beyond the spoken word". Voice thus assumes a function separate from language, "the voice is assigned the task of serving a protective function: it safeguards a subject matter that its language threatens; it checks the loss of substance which a perfect act of communication would entail." (Zumthor 1990: 74.) In Old English studies, A. N. Doane sees in the meagreness of the textual base a reduction of "the reverberation of many voices from the past in a single present one, an audible metaphor for all performances" (Doane 1991: 103–04).

The mystification of orality may thus lead to a pessimistic view on the visible text and fixed linguistic form in general. In the spirit of Derridean

grammatology the oral text is seen as stretched out or “tortured” into a linguistic form in danger of sacrificing its potential meanings to the “overdetermination” of language. There is a nostalgia for the multifaceted and “unfinished” oral poem and the “oral meaning” prior to textualization, both oral and written, the latter adding a “wrong” medium to the drama. The original multivocality of expression is sacrificed to artificial textual fixity in textualization.

Somewhat similar pessimism about oral text prevails in the terminological triad “entextualization / decontextualization / recontextualization” proposed by Richard Bauman and Charles Briggs. They ask: how is it possible that verbal art, so deeply bound to its context, can be detached from it at all? The answer is, roughly, that detachment is made possible through entextualization, which leads to decontextualization, which leads to recontextualization. In this perspective, textualization in general becomes a suspect phenomenon, a process able to force oral discourse or “a stretch of linguistic production into a unit – a *text* – that can be lifted out of its interactional setting”. The performer’s task then becomes “to render stretches of discourse discontinuous with their discursive surround, thus making them into coherent, effective, and memorable texts”. (Bauman and Briggs 1990: 73–74.) It seems questionable, however, whether the singer’s work in oral text-making can be characterized as “discourse rendered decontextualizable” or “discontinuous with its discursive surround”, when, at the conscious level at least, exactly the opposite takes place (cf. Honko 1998: 150–52).

A nostalgia for pre-textual meanings does not give us much to work with. For a fieldworker, oral text-making is not shrouded in mystery. The “voice” becomes audible through the singer and the “text” takes shape by oral/aural means. It is his/her singing praxis embedded in its social ambience which seems to open up vistas on textualization.

Oral text as process and practice

There are two aspects from which the dynamics of oral text-making may be elucidated, one diachronic and the other synchronic. Folklore texts are constantly on the move, they become born and disappear to be reborn again in the seemingly endless line of consecutive performances. If we wish to visualize the entire process through which a particular integer of folklore passes on its way from a pre-performance existence into oral textualization and further, presuming that documentation takes place, to a written form to be published and circulated to wider audiences, we must draw a profile of what we characterized above as “an intelligent adaptation of tradition within unique situations structured by a confluence of several factors”. Since there is no master text for the oral integer in question and since its fixed form is

made permanent only by exception and does not represent other renditions, we cannot really say in any detail what the oral text should contain. Yet, since there is textuality and cohesion in the different renditions, we do not normally have any difficulty in recognizing the oral text. It is observable as an individual text, even if we are unable to agree on its "correct" form or fixity (major "deviations" from the form may be valuable intertextual clues and should not simply be eliminated).

Thus what we witness is not so much a particular text as a textual process through which a story moves via "high" moments of manifest performance and "low" periods of latent existence in the mind of the performer. If we are able to gather information on all the factors which influence the performance, we may order our knowledge in a processual profile of the textualization of a particular story. In so doing we must critically assess – and fight against – such stereotypes as "one story", "variant" and "fixed form". The story may be modulated in ways for which we possess no textual evidence. "Variant" raises the questions of inertia, continuity and invariant in oral poetry (what is the "thing" that varies?); to avoid the problem we may try to use such terms as "telling", "rendition" or "performance" instead of "variant". The moment we see a verbal form we tend to impute connotations of fixity into it, unfortunately.

The diachronic aspect of textualization is visible mainly to the analyst, who gathers the necessary information and sketches a history of textualization. Even if most of the facts have been elicited from the singer telling the story, the processual profile may not be of much interest to him. His attitude to the story is dominated by his singing practice, which represents the synchronic aspect of textualization. The oral text is not played out in a vacuum, as a separate item or expression. The story has individuality but its verbal form does not exhaust the richness of life available in and around the performance. First of all, the verbal form as expression refers to so many unspoken traditions and implies so many latent channels of communication that the communicative thrust tends to expand from the verbal text to the entire event of performance and social interaction. The oral text is inseparable from the flow of information and the construction of meaning taking place inside and outside it. In a way, the oral text is occasionally lost from sight as a "thing" and replaced by something larger, a communicative event. In other words, the utterance is no longer readable in its verbal form only. At this point we must either abandon the text as a unit or start thinking in terms of an "extended text" as the true object of our synchronic analysis. It belongs to the narrative practice that a full verbalization of an episode or a narrative sequence may be replaced by allusions consisting of few words but retaining the most essential symbols guiding reception.

Table 1 (Honko 1998: 167):

THE MAKING OF ORAL EPICS

Pool of tradition:	
Coexistence of traditional multiforms, genres and registers in the human mind	
Epic register: common storylines, descriptions, multiforms, phrases, formulas	
Reception 1. The singer's repeated exposure to and gradual internalization of traditions	
▽	
The singer's thematic competence: orientation toward particular genres and narratives	
Epic idiolect: the singer's individual selection of shared expressions as language	
▽	
Reception 2. Internalizing a particular epic: intertextual interpretation	
Adaptation of tradition: mental editing and permanent change (diachronic variation)	
Mental text: storyline (flexible), rules of sequencing, textural cues	
▽	
The singer's performative competence: traditional rules and conditions of performance	
Performance strategy, mode of performance, performative style	
Adaptation of tradition to situations of performance (synchronic variation)	
▽	
The processing of traditional meaning by the singer in action: manifest text	
Observation of audience reaction and its immediate impact on performance	
Defensibility and truthfulness of performance: the last performance is the best	
▽	
Reception 3. Intertextual interpretation by the audience (processing of multiple meanings)	Interest in documentation: its origins inside/outside tradition community
Feedback to the performer (optional)	Documentation strategy
▽	▽
Looking forward: modification of tradition in view of future performances	Context of documentation (natural, induced, artificial)
	Collected text
	▽
	Editing strategy: textual choice
	Transcription, translation, commentary
	▽
	Publication strategy: collateral forms
	The oral epic as a book
	(AV options)

The previous model (see Table 1) attempts to draw attention to both aspects of textualization, the diachronic and the synchronic. It endeavours to map the confluence of factors present in performance. The number of these variables should enable us to see why there cannot be two identical renditions of one and the same folklore integer. The generalizing form of the table should not mislead the reader: the evidence for the argument stems from fieldwork on a particular genre, oral epic, viewed in its performative and cultural context over eight years. The necessarily brief commentary will occasionally specify and explain the statements through examples from the field in question.

The model in Table 1 attempts a realistic inventory of factors influencing all textualization processes from oral pre-textual beginnings to printed book. It subsumes different concepts of text, i.e. it does not depend on particular text paradigms such as the historic-geographic or the performance-record model. The empirical background is mainly two poetic traditions, namely, the Baltic-Finnic lament in half a dozen languages and the long oral epic in the Tulu language in Karnataka, South India. Let us briefly examine the key terms.

Pool of tradition. In what form is oral tradition preserved in human minds? What are the shared elements of folklore, and what is the contribution of the individual to the formation of folkloric expressions? It seems that most elements of epic discourse are older than their users, i.e. convention dominates over invention. Yet the elements are free to vary and combine, and it is in the variation and combination of multiforms, themes and formulas that the individual novelty can be found. That is why we cannot postulate a well-arranged library of earlier performed oral texts in the mind of the individual but rather a "pool" of generic rules, storylines, mental images of epic events, linguistically preprocessed descriptions of repeatable scenes, sets of established terms and attributes, phrases and formulas, which every performer may utilize in an imaginative way, vary and reorganize according to the needs and potentials present at a new performance. As stated elsewhere, it may be "realistic to seek a model applied in chaos theory, of narrative elements bubbling freely in a pool of tradition, ready to float in many directions and to fuse in novel ways. I deliberately use the word *pool*, meaning both a body of water and a fund to which many contribute and from which many can draw." (Honko 1998: 70.) The rules and models for the fusion of traditional elements vary by genre, and the performers normally specialize in a limited number of genres. In long and complex genres such as oral epic the art of sequencing is a special skill cultivated by the singers.

Whatever is shared by more than one singer belongs to the pool of tradition. The pool holds a multiplicity of traditions, a coexistence of expressive forms and genres, mostly in a latent state, only parts of it becoming activated

by the individual user. That it is not merely a technical abstraction denoting “shared elements” of folklore but a real platform of human exchange affecting a number of individuals is made clear through the interaction and communication within traditional groups by way of the social display of traditions in special performance arenas.

Epic register. Performances utilize special languages in a generic context, “a performance arena” as John Foley (1995b: 47–49, 79–82) calls it. “Epic register” denotes a special language, a “way of speaking” valid for performers and audiences of epics in a particular setting. Dell Hymes’s definition of epic registers as “major speech styles associated with recurrent types of situation” (Hymes 1989: 440) admirably fits the special institution of Siri possession cults as a platform where discourses based on the Siri epic dominate all behaviour. If “pool of tradition” implies the availability of shared traditions, “epic register” represents the organization of the available elements by genre and speech event. Learning the language of epics usually begins by learning a few oral epics one after another, whereby memorization may play a part. Later, the internalization of the rules of composition and the repertoire of repeatable expressions frees the singer from problems of wording and enables him to concentrate on the path of composition, i.e. the movement of plot and the construction of meaning.

Multiforms. The role of repeatable expressions in oral epic art is paramount. Epic discourse consists of descriptions of standard events (receiving guests, having a grand meal, sending a letter, etc.). These again contain a large number of relatively short formulas, elaborated phrases, standard images and minor episodic elements all of which vary in length, degree of embellishment and emphasis. We denote as multiforms those “repeatable and artistic expressions of variable length which are constitutive for narration and function as generic markers” (Honko 1998: 100). Multiforms always contain linguistic elements, keywords and syntactic structures which help us to recognize them, in other words, they are defined by their texture, not by their structural position or actual meaning. Multiforms should, at least in theory, be recognizable to the singer, too, who is aware of his poetic use of the “same” expressions. Multiforms are thus not to be equated with the “type scenes” or “themes” of the oral formulaic theory.

For syntagmatic purposes we use such units as subepic, description, episode and step (Honko 1998: 117–25), from larger to smaller, leaving “multiform” outside the syntagmatic coverage of content so as not to force the concept to be present everywhere, also in contexts where there is no empirical evidence of the singer’s recognition of a poetic unit. Multiform is designed to help us to explore the singer’s classification of repeatable expressions (which may contain “gaps” and need not cover all text produced).

Reception 1: Internalization of traditions. The essential thing in learning traditions seems to be early exposure to them. Complex genres such as oral epic require specialization, which normally proceeds in three phases: 1) exposure to narrative traditions in their performative contexts, 2) a call to become an active performer and the subsequent period of learning as a novice and 3) the emergence of a self-reliant singer recognized by the tradition community and able to assume leadership at performance events. The first phase implies broad learning, a construction of cultural competence, the performance career being not yet in sight. In Baltic-Finnic lament traditions early exposure to dirges, for example, at a young age at the funerals and memorial ceremonies arranged for near relatives, will leave a strong impact on the mind of a young woman, but this potential will not be converted into a full-fledged performance until much later, perhaps at the age of 40 or more, when members of her own family begin to die (Honko 1974: 23–26; Honko et al. 1993: 572–77). In the case of the Tulu oral epic *Siri*, the early exposure of a boy to epic singing by women as part of work in the paddyfield was coupled with a mental disturbance indicating an intervention by spirits which eventually led to an early call for the teenage youngster to become first an assisting *Kumara* at *Siri* possession rituals (the singing of the epic as a central requirement) and then, at the age of 20, to assume the leadership of a group of *Siri* women (Honko 1998: 519–34).

Tradition-orientation. In the process of learning oral traditions there is always choice. The availability of what could be learned is overwhelming compared to what is eventually internalized by an individual. Several factors direct the choice: the talent one may show at an early age, the family around which cultivates particular traditions, a genre specially valued by the community, a practical need to acquire professional knowledge and skill, the impact of teachers and guides respected by the individual in question. The list could be continued. In the end, however, there is logic in the construction of a store of traditions in the human mind. To use Anna-Leena Siikala's term "tradition orientation" (Siikala 1990: 202) we may characterize the process in question as a life-long series of adoption and rejection of available traditions in accordance with the individual's interests and worldview. In tradition orientation it is not only the positive selection which becomes visible; specific interpretations are also developed simultaneously for the integers selected. This means two things: first, the internalized elements are not "just stories" but become amalgamated in the person's view of life, and second, even if the same story is internalized by several storytellers, an interpretive adaptation is likely to make the final result (as may be witnessed in the performance of a story) different from one storyteller to another. All elements acquired in tradition orientation need not be developed to the level of performative competence, yet even if they remain at the level of cultural cognition

and knowledge, they constitute a sounding board for the active performance of traditions.

The focus of tradition orientation becomes manifest in the genres and narratives actively performed by the individual. In the case of complex genres, such as oral epics, an apprenticeship may ensue which may last for years and lead to a full specialization and performance career within basically one genre. In most cases, however, an individual's tradition orientation represents competence in many genres and domains of culture. It reflects his social roles, personality and worldview.

Epic idiolect. Concentration on learning a genre, say, oral epics, opens up a pathway to a special language, constitutive for a large number of narratives. The expressions shared by many singers within that language we just called "epic register". The command of that register is the main object of active learning for a novice, because therein he finds the poetic rules and repeatable expressions present in all epics, a kind of core or identity of the genre. He also learns to see how special characteristics of particular epics relate to that common core. On the basis of the epic register and the accumulation of knowledge resulting from the internalization of particular epics, the receptive capacities are transformed into performative competence. A novice can be said to transform into a singer when the memorizing and repeating of heard expressions give way to more imaginative and fluent use of the epic language in performance. The singer's competence lies in the producing of his own version according to a heard performance, not its mechanical reproduction.

The metaphor of language is essential for the understanding of epic composition and the singer's ability to produce cohesive narrative in freely flowing lines without any observable difficulty in wording. An epic may take several days to complete, yet the fluency of oral textualization does not seem to be a problem. What we witness here, in fact, is not the memorization of earlier textualizations but the production of a story in a particular language, viz. the singer's epic idiolect. The utilization of the epic register implies individual choice. The supply of narratives normally exceeds the demand: there is more in the tradition than one singer can consume. Learning the epic register does not imply its full utilization. Some of its elements become more important than others, whereas some do not seem to affect the singer's tradition system at all. The idiolect creates its own linguistic universe, the pillars of which are the epics known to the singer, their performance contexts and the poetic means he has absorbed and is able to take into creative use. All textualization takes place in the idiolectal universe of shared expressions.

Reception 2: Internalizing a particular epic. Stories are as individual as their singers, if not more so. In our Tulu material oral epics are easy to distinguish from each other. They clearly belong to the same genre and similar expressions

are utilized. Yet each epic possesses an individual melody which discloses its identity before we have understood its wording. It also has a particular refrain that beats regularity and cohesion to oral textualization from beginning to end. The names of personages, often poetically elaborated with attributes, constitute networks of implied social and cultural references not to be found in other epics. Repeated images and key symbols may represent unique formulation, etc. What is more, the worldview and system of values promoted by the story may vary from one epic to another. In other words, there may be ideological "conflicts" within the genre.

Thus the internalization of epics presumes choice of a second degree, viz. one particular epic may be closer to a singer's heart than another. The Siri epic turned out to be the key to the worldview of the singer, Mr. Gopala Naika, with whom we worked for so long. It represented the worldview of the female cult group which adhered to the epic and annually renewed its bondage to it. For our singer at least, each epic and its ritual context seemed to constitute a world of its own. "I am living in the Siri world", he confessed after having sung another epic (Kooṭi Cennaya) which propagates the virtues of warrior-heroes. His system of values was anchored to the Siri epic with its female heroines and virtues of non-violent resistance. In other words, he had made a choice between the Siri world and the Kooṭi Cennaya world. He could not have both, because the value systems of these epics are so different. He was able to understand and even sing several epics, six epics altogether, but it was just one of them, the Siri epic, which was closest to his heart and pervaded his philosophy of life.

The learning of a new epic normally creates an intertextual situation. The key to learning is not "learning by heart" but understanding what is being sung. Epics learned earlier and even short passages from different genres or formulaic expressions found in different contexts will function as intertexts and facilitate the work of reception. It is here that the pool of tradition will show its force. The essential "work" of reception with a performative interest ranges from listening carefully to the individual features (storyline, melody, refrain, structuring, etc.) of the epic to the making of an interpretation of what is sung. The interpretation forms the basis of mental editing, adaptation of the story and its poetic means to the narrative competence and tradition system the singer already has. Intertexts have a role to play in this creative process, which does not result in a mechanical replica but a partly "new" version of the story. In a way, the first performance of the new epic is the culmination of what we here call Reception 2.

Mental text. Long oral epics are rarely, if ever, performed in full. There may not be any cultural locus for a performance lasting several days. The time and need for performance may be defined by collateral action. In our case, the Siri epic, or fragments of it, was used as a work song in the paddyfield or

as a myth recitation at possession rituals. What unites, then, the actual performances of the epic in its cultural context, is something we will never see, namely, the mental text in the minds of the singers and, probably in simpler forms, their audiences (Honko 1996: 4–5). We need a term to denote the “whole story”, which must exist and can indeed be elicited in induced contexts created for the purpose of documentation, and to be able to understand the production of text in actual performance.

It seems realistic to postulate a kind of “prenarrative”, a pre-textual frame, i.e., an organized structure of relevant conscious and unconscious material present in the singer’s mind, not fixed as a written text, yet linguistically pre-processed by way of expressions and sequences which are easy to activate in performance. Mental text seems to contain such elements as a storyline scheme (basic plot, not fixed but open to elaboration), a number of textual elements, i.e., episodic patterns, images of epic situations, multiforms, etc., and their generic rules of reproduction (including rules of sequencing) as well as contextual frames such as remembrances of earlier performances, yet not as a haphazard collection of traditional knowledge but a prearranged set of elements internalized by the individual singer. This variable template is an emergent entity, able to be cut to different sizes and adapted to various modes of performance yet preserving its textual identity. It is not as fixed as all its documented manifestations tend to be. Yet it is only through its fixed manifestations that we can try to construct components of a particular mental text. Therefore it must be stressed that mental texts do *not* refer to fixed wordings of expressions kept in the memory and reproduced in performance. We may speak of an oral text’s “fixity” only after its phase of emergence in performance is over and the text has attained its form, regardless of how temporary or stable that form may prove to be.

Mental editing and diachronic variation. Stories are not copied as such in the transfer of tradition. Any story which the singer begins to consider for adoption requires a kind of deconstruction in view of his repertoire and tradition system, i.e. it must be made to fit the earlier conventions of standardized expression internalized by him. The same applies to short passages, images and phrases often taken over by the singer from another performer and tentatively stored in his pool of potential expressions for use in later performances. The process of adaptation involves milieu-morphological and tradition-morphological changes (Honko 1981: 19–33) in order to localize and familiarize the story. This leads to diachronic variation, i.e. the changes made are preserved in later performances of the story, as opposed to synchronic, situational variation, which is likewise adaptive but temporary and which will not be visible in the next performance. Researchers have been largely unable to differentiate between diachronic and synchronic variation because of thin materials not reflecting the real variation of folklore as

manifested in the verbal behaviour of a singer or singers within a community or region where true interaction and exchange between performers takes place (cf. Honko 2000).

I propose to call “mental editing” the adaptive processes of oral textualization taking place between actual performances, i.e. all changes made outside the actual composition-in-performance. The latter also causes changes but they are dominated by situational factors, most of them valid only in one performance. Mental editing works mainly by way of adoption and rejection of motifs and expressions offered in the performances of other singers. More importantly, it is responsible for the creation of a long oral epic. Mr. Gopala Naika never acquired the Siri epic as a whole from anyone. The sources were many and the process of editing long. A mental text of the whole epic was not needed to sing it anywhere. Instead, it served as a mythical charter for the Siri possession ritual led by the singer. The “translation” of all human behaviour manifest at the ritual into a cohesive entity reflecting key aspects of the Siri story, a narrative left almost untold yet constantly alluded to, required from the singer a linear concept of the entire plot. The plot helped him to relate to each other the “live” events based on divine intervention by the epic characters at the possession ritual. His command of the whole epic enhanced his authority over his assisting Kumaras and the Siri women whom he educated to command key parts of the epic also during visits to their homes, i.e. outside the ritual meetings. In interviews Mr. Gopala Naika admitted that he had combined certain episodes heard from different Siri women on diverse occasions to make them continue from one incident to another. Occasionally he had added some joining lines of his own. The creation of a long oral epic was a result of practice, an experiment in sequentiality, developed piecemeal over the years of his performance career (Honko 1998: 527).

Performance strategy. The cohesion of the actual epic performance cannot simply rely upon the main plot of the entire story. There are many parallel subplots in the narrative, thus the decision when to follow which must be repeatedly taken. The number and order of possible units is not stable: some units seem obligatory whereas certain others are optional. (Honko 1998: 139.) To be able to perform, the singer must design a performance strategy based on the potential and limits of the performance situation, audience, time-frame, collateral action (work, ritual, etc.), which often include quite unique elements and may determine what parts of the epic must, may or need not be performed. Since long epics can never be performed in their entirety in a multi-factor cultural context, each performance poses the question of how to cut the epic into a size and form relevant from the point of view of the situation.

Performers and audiences have their preferences and part of the performance strategy is defined along the way, as a response to what happens in the actual situation. Yet there is no need to overstate the impact of situation or audience on the “path of composition”. Its problems seem to be more innate difficulties in joining subepics, letting the life-stories of epic personages cross or deciding the relative emphasis of certain episodes in a plot sequence. There are junctures in the epic where the best linkage between certain subplots has not yet been found. Despite the experimental dynamics of path-making, our empirical evidence shows that the singer always tends to conceptualize his actual performance as a “truthful”, “correct” and “defensible” presentation of the Siri story, and even more, as probably the best presentation so far. From this point of view, an “abridgement” of the story is no vice. (Honko 1998: 134.)

Mode of performance. Oral epics may be performed in a variety of ways. The singer may perform in solo, with or without instrumental accompaniment, in linear monovoiced narration or with shifts to different tones (as different personages “speak”), switching melody and poetic category (prose, poem, song, recital, dance, pantomime or a combination of these) or by one or more ensembles (lead singer, accompanying singers, dancers, orchestra, etc.) utilizing all available means of expression from dialogue to full drama and incorporating members of the audience in the performance.

The phenomenon may be called “mode of performance”. The term denotes the technical and artistic setup governing the entire epic performance, its “external form”. An essential part of performance strategy is the decision on the mode of performance. Only after it has been decided may the often lengthy preparations begin. The singer will consider the available time frame, necessary assistants, the nature of audience and collateral activities. Different contexts may require different modes even if the story remains the same.

It is clear that the choice of mode affects almost every aspect of performance and makes a strong impact on what will later be viewed as the “epic text”. If we are unable to visualize and imaginatively, if retroactively, coexperience the mode of the particular performance from which our epic text originates, our ethnopoetic analyses may be led astray. (Honko 1998: 75–76.)

Performative style. Another term is needed for the intra-textual shifts observed in the singer’s epic discourse. I propose the term “performative style” for different forms of discourse used within a particular mode of performance. In the Tulu tradition, for example, each epic has a melody, refrain and recitation pattern of its own. This shows that individual epics may have specific performative styles which govern the performance. Within one and the same epic it is possible to find linear singing in the 3rd-person singular as well as a variety of other performative styles, such as emphatic singing in

the 1st-person singular at the peak of the ritual process, or the praying style with slightly different rhythmic patterns and occasional rapid recitation. The correct understanding of oral text presupposes that we recognize the performative styles used and the points at which the shifts from one style to another are made. Rhetoric means of emphatic adhortation, questioning as well as raising or lowering the voice, pausing and using mime, gesture and body movement as well as operative space, i.e., kinesic and proxemic means, may all contribute to various designs of performative styles. Looking at the external criteria of style, we must not forget that the content of discourse is part and parcel of style. Thus such moods as respect, humour, irony, anger, sorrow, etc., clearly affect the performative style in ways which may or may not be readable in the produced oral text. Style is obviously the field where keen documentation and close analysis of even the minor details pay off. (Honko 1998: 77–78.)

Construction of meaning and synchronic variation. The production of a particular oral text in a more or less unique performance situation thus represents a confluence of multiple factors. The basic premises of performance have been fulfilled in the much earlier processes of internalizing epics, their language, performative modes and styles, collateral activities, and so on. What is at stake in the actual telling of a story told so many times before is the construction of its actual meaning, never quite the same from one telling to another. Every performance may be seen as an attempt toward the “truth” of the story, its core meaning, once again made to shine in the sacred behaviour of the worshippers in a possession ritual acting out their epic identities, or in the likewise exalted recitation of women plucking paddy seedlings to the rhythm of the sung epic. According to the singers, practically every performance achieves the goal by displaying the truthful story in a form more perfect than ever.

For the observing scholar, the achievement lies in the ingenious adaptation of the story to the particular situation of performance. On the textual side, this brings about variation which we have called “synchronic” because it is uniquely adaptive and produces forms determined by the situation. In a sense, it shows the shifts of emphasis in the standardized expressions serving the unique construction of actual meaning. There is no need to expect exactly the same expressions and emphases to repeat themselves in the next or later performances. Flexibility is the hallmark of the work of adaptation and construction of meaning by the singer.

Audience interaction. The singer’s work in performance does not take place in a vacuum. It is directional and anticipates reception by its audiences. The idea of more audiences than the physical one present at the performance springs from the observation that beyond the real listeners the singer also

has ideal audiences. The very act of performance presupposes the creation of a correct place for it, a "performance arena", which standardizes the speech event regardless of the actual audience. This arena is more spiritual than physical, yet there may be signs of a symbolic construction of an ideal platform, such as the construction of a temporary altar for gods who constitute the main audience and interlocutor with the singer. In the singing of the Siri epic this is accentuated by the singer's facing the temporary altar with icons, his back turned to the Siri women and the rest of the village audience. It is quite clear that the singer is more occupied with making contact with the divinities than with the devotees behind him or the common village people watching the ritual drama. This constellation consolidates the performance as a "service to god", the corollary being that divine epic characters are invited to use the bodies of the present worshippers as their mundane vehicles and enter the scene. Eventually, the divinities take over the cultic responsibility and a perfect, immaculate service ensues.

In many analyses of audience interaction the singer's need to please his/her audience takes a prominent role. In the previous example the interaction is focused on gods, not on the physical human audience, but in many cases people around the singer constitute the sounding board crucial for his inspiration and motivation. The audience can be activated to the role of co-performer; dialogues between the singer and the audience are common, a feature that emphasizes the centrality of the construction of the actual meaning of a performance by the individual and the social ambience at hand. Persons in the audience may be identified with personages in the epic, also in profane contexts and temporarily, not only, as in our Siri case, in the systematic identification of possessed women with their spiritual alter egos. The latter form effectively eliminates the line between performers, the leading and assistant Kumaras, and the front-line audience, the Siris. A wider circle of relatives and spectators embraces them with a similar, although less ecstatic involvement.

Reception 3: Intertextual interpretation. So far we have dealt with the reception of traditions and particular epics in the learning process of the singer. A third and important form of reception is the network of multiple meanings attached to the epic by the spectators and listeners. Somewhere here we find the group which makes the story a real epic, a tradition community which accepts the narrative as a song of truth and recognizes in it features of its cultural identity. Our definition of epic speaks of "exemplars" and "identity representations" (Honko 1998: 28).

There is no guarantee that the collectively experienced identity feeling can be matched with identical interpretations at the semantic level. On the contrary, most groups are heterogeneous as to the traditional knowledge of their members. Correspondingly, interpretations held by group members vary

from person to person and, qualitatively, from intellectually meagre and superficial to rich and detailed. It is not uncommon for conflicting interpretations to generate debate within the community of reception and lead to an identity negotiation, a rather normal phenomenon in the case of strong symbols with multiple meanings.

All reception is dependent on intertexts, i.e. a store of similar or antagonistic storylines, narrative structures, hero types, episodes, phrases and formulas known from other contexts but possessing interpretive potential for the individual receiving the epic. The intertextual universe varies from person to person depending on their education, social status and role, ideological stance and, above all, previously internalized traditional expressions. That is why we get multiple meanings in Reception 3.

Feedback. The reception always guides the singer, however independent he may seem to be. During the performance a continuous reading of receptive cues informs the singer about the effectivity and appeal of his performance. It may bring about changes in the strategy of performance, some modification of the path of composition and adding or diminishing emphasis and embellishment of certain episodes.

What the audience obviously wanted to hear or became impressed by may have a long-term effect on future performances. Mental editing always contains an evaluative aspect and memories of earlier singing may affect the planning of later renderings of the story. Typically, the singer has no need to look back to his earlier tellings for their own sake but, as an inquisitive outsider-interviewer will soon find out, where there are some new ideas to be drawn from them, mental editing is the place to sort out their impact. The same applies, for example, to new expressions and episodes of the epic heard from other singers. Some of them will be tried out on the singer's own textualization whereas others will be rejected as incommensurable, wrong or ugly.

Documentation strategy. As a separate line of textualization the above model concludes with a profile of documentation which leads to a publishable text. Interest in such documentation is rare inside the oral cultures which produce epic performances as part of their annual cycle of feasts, rituals or working techniques. However, it does occasionally exist, as in our case. Mr. Gopala Naika expressed in the early 1980s his wish to have his Siri epic taken down by dictation. Dictation took place later, in 1985–86, in many sessions weeks and months apart, mainly by a student in longhand and Kannada script. In December 1990 our Finnish-Tulu team of scholars audio- and videotaped his (first!) sung performance of the whole epic during seven days. In February 1999 a three-volume work was published concentrating mainly on this performance and contextual information (Honko 1998; Honko et al. 1998a, b).

In a way, we became involved in a project instigated by the singer. More normally, the original interest in the documentation comes from outside the traditional community. That is why we have so few oral textualizations published by the communities who produced them. An inevitable intercultural imbalance pervades most oral epic work published so far.

Our documentation strategy consisted of several points: (1) we would prefer the singing mode, not yet explored and an interesting point of comparison with the dictated rendering; (2) we would postpone lengthy interviews after the whole epic had been completed in order to minimize our impact and let the singer concentrate on his singing; (3) we would eliminate pauses or gaps due to cassette change by using multiple taping (1 video, 2 audio recorders as a minimum) at all times from morning till evening; (4) we would allow the singer as much time as he wanted and let him decide when it was suitable to make pauses in singing, i.e. we would follow his segmentation of the oral text; (5) we would let the singer decide on the best environment for our work and the presence of people other than our team members; (6) we should comply with his concept of the "whole" epic, which, as it turned out, would mean the inclusion of introductory invocations (the element left out of the dictated Siri text); finally, (7) we would not consider any "collation" with the singer's other performances of the same epic but publish just one text, the oral text as it was performed in the imminent situation of performance. (Honko et al. 1998: xxxiii–xxxix; Honko 1998: 163–64, 261–71.)

Documentation strategies vary from case to case, as I have shown in a survey of eleven productions of an oral or tradition-oriented epic (Honko 1998: 169–217). More often than not the strategy is simply a compromise made in a fieldwork situation on the basis of what seems possible, a pragmatic optimal choice among available limited alternatives. Recipes for "correct" documentation techniques are in this sense meaningless. Yet the comprehensiveness of the oral text, its unbroken continuity, linguistic accuracy and, in general, the heeding of the singer's wishes as regards the details of documentation and the context of performance are high on the list of requirements for a good oral text.

Since long oral epics are practically never performed in full in their normal culturally determined contexts, an induced "natural" context or a laboratory environment are the main alternatives available for the documentation of the whole epic. By creating an environment according to the wishes of the singer it is possible to approach an induced performance context which is novel but natural, at least to a degree. Some of the best texts may come from situations to be classified somewhere between "induced natural" and "laboratory context". These situations may involve motivating and guiding the singer. Sometimes performance and documentation strategies intertwine: the singer moulds his act to suit the recording and expressed goals of col-

laboration. All this makes it imperative to get a full report on the documentation process, including the discussions with the singer. The reader must be made able to judge how the method of documentation may have influenced the textualization. (Honko 1998: 161–63.)

In our project, an extensive report on every step, minute by minute, in our documentation process was published, and everything included in that report (Honko 1998: 261–388) can be corroborated by audiovisual evidence from our audio and video tapes and photographs. Every syllable of the epic and every small remark expressed outside singing can be made accessible to the reader who is willing to plunge into the Siri archive of RRC in Udupi, Karnataka, India or the TKU archive in Turku, Finland (about 250 hours of videotape, 350 hours of audiotape and some 6,700 photographs).

Collected text. What constitutes the “text” to be offered to the reader is one of the hardest questions in the textualization of oral epics. Publication requires a strategy: how to go about the transcription, translation and interpretation of an oral epic suddenly epitomized and petrified through scholarly documentation. The fate of the original oral discourse is often to become compromised in the process. The absence of music, gesture and transformal meaning changes the traditional concept of an “epic” into something else, not likely to be recognized by the performers. (Honko 1998: 163.) The situation poses a number of problems, partly addressed above in the context of the debate on performance records and reports. What is basically needed is an intersemiotic translation able to convey the experience of a speech event in writing or in audiovisual media. What the academic community normally expects is a book, a readable text. If we wish to heed this expectation we must decide what goes into that text.

Our decision to publish just one performance of the Siri epic by Gopala Naika was taken so rigorously that a part which he sang for us much later a second time, and which contained some new information, was not integrated into the earlier text. In other words, we refrained from “collation” or “patching up” with the help of other “variants”, a method so widely used by editors of epics. On the other hand, when Gopala Naika interrupted his singing, saying that he had forgotten an episode prior to the passage he had just completed and asked for permission to sing that too, we consented and the episode was inserted in its place while editing, mainly because all this happened within the same singing session. Generally, however, we rejected the possibility of comparing the singer’s several performances of parts of the Siri epic in view of selecting the “best” passages for the patchwork final text. Patchwork represented a bad word for us, a plague in the history of the editing of oral epics, and there was no pressing need to consider it, because the published version turned out clearly the most comprehensive and “good enough” for

orientation. The comparative work on different performances of the Siri epic was postponed to a later volume focusing on the interpretation of the epic.

Phonetic transcript. Published oral epics may be divided into two groups: those which include the text in a phonetic transcript of the original language and those which do not. There is no doubt about which group is scientifically more adequate. Without a phonetic transcription, the linguistic interest is lost, the prosody cannot be studied, the poetic means of the original language are largely hidden and the translation becomes suspect. Yet, even when the phonetic script is available, its form may be problematic: should it follow the idiolect of the singer, i.e. should it reflect the sung forms or the normalized transcription found in lexicons?

In our case, the whole process of editing was structured by our decision that the Siri epic would be published in the original Tulu, following a modified Sanskrit phonetic transcription, and in English translation, both texts preferably side by side allowing for immediate checking by those who know Tulu and for viewing the phonetic structure by those who do not. The latter is by no means irrelevant, because much of the poetic texture can be “read” even without knowing the language, i.e. alliteration, assonance, repetition, word order in relation to word length, line structure, figura etymologica, etc. The accuracy of translation automatically increases when the translator knows that the original text will be available to the reader. Because modern documentation technology provided impeccable accuracy of the original, this accuracy was not to be compromised in the process of editing the oral text for publication. For once, orality was to be carried as far as possible in the written media. (Honko 1998: 583.)

It was decided to write down what was heard on tape without any editing or normalizing. As we know, the hearing differs between scholars even if they are used to transcribing. We based the transcript on multiple hearing by all four academic members of the team. As more ears were included in the work, the final form partly became a compromise of different hearings. Our transcription follows the phonetic forms actually used in the song more closely than a transcript using normative lexicon forms would do. For the reader, this has the advantage of a more accurate prosodic appearance of the text, but the deviation of the sung epic idiolect from the lexicon form requires some attention when single words are quoted and should then be normalized. (Honko 1998: 584.)

Poetic line. The most conspicuous feature of the transcript is the division of singing into poetic lines. This affects both transcription and translation. If clear-cut metric patterns dominate the poetic discourse, they can be followed. Quite often, however, the metric patterns are too complex and their use so flexible that they cannot be solely relied upon in creating the lines. In the Siri

epic, for example, there are passages which show a uniform prosodic pattern, but the patterns are many and their constancy is low. A metrical analysis would obviously require a simultaneous melodic analysis. Yet ethnomusicologists tend to regard the “music” of the Siri epic as mainly speech-like recitation, although the rhythmic patterns are so accentuated as to exclude mere speech analysis. We are clearly working in the grey zones of research where there are no experts able to tell when intonation turns into rhythmic recitation and recitation into melodious song.

A method which can be applied as long as the final metrical analysis is not available is to follow the breath breaks of the singer as systematically as possible. They mostly create line-like structures which include the impact of rhythm and melody. Occasionally, however, rapid “runs” may produce overlong lines, and breathing may occur due to factors irrelevant from the prosodic point of view.

Punctuation is another tool in creating the poetic appearance of an oral work. In oral discourse there is no punctuation; the presentation may be “additive”, “repetitive”, “direct (speech)”, “reported (speech)”, etc., but it usually avoids subordinate clauses. At least in Tulu, the poetic discourse enjoys nominal or participial constructions and other ways of substituting for sentence hierarchy. That is why we did not use any punctuation in our transcription of the Siri epic in spite of the fact that it reads almost like a script of a drama at times, full of direct speech and sentences framing it. The suggestion by Gene Roghair (1982: 52) that in the epic discourse, for example, the “filler” words would have the same function as punctuation has in writing sounds interesting but cannot be systematically applied. The traditional discourses seem to possess strategies for sequencing that differ from one genre to another.

Translation. Even if punctuation can be avoided in the rendering of the original language in phonetic script, for translation, however, punctuation is all-important regardless of language, or, to put it more precisely, its importance depends more on the language into which the text will be translated. This is probably *the* critical shift from orality to literacy in the process of textualization. As absent as commas, full stops, semicolons and exclamation or question marks are in the original Tulu transcript of the Siri epic, as crucial they become in its English translation. Without them, the readability of our translation would sink dramatically. With their help, quite paradoxically, much of the orality can be saved and certain characteristics of Tulu, such as the relatively free word order or the multitude of participial constructions, as such untranslatable, can be preserved for viewing by the English reader, too. The lack of copulative conjunctions does not disturb in oral Tulu but in the English translation we could not manage without a comma denoting the