

AVDO MEĐEDOVIĆ'S POST-TRADITIONAL EPICS AND THEIR RELEVANCE TO HOMERIC STUDIES

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Abstract: [Milman Parry established first that Homeric poetry was traditional, based on his studies of its formulae and language, and then that it was oral, based on his experience of recording south Slavic epic; he likened the unusually long epics of Avdo Međedović to those of Homer. Albert Lord put the two concepts together, holding that both south Slavic epic and Homeric poetry were oral-traditional and that all oral epic poetry, including that of Međedović, is traditional. However, the author's investigations into the Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature and his personal experience of collecting epics in Montenegro in 1989 prove that this is incorrect. The poems of Avdo Međedović do not conform to traditional uses of language, theme and story-patterns, but offer something new, of which other traditional singers disapproved, as their recorded conversations demonstrate. Similarly, by analogy, the epics of Homer differed from the traditional poems of the Epic Cycle, exactly as Aristotle indicates in the *Poetics*. Hence neither Međedović nor, by analogy, Homer were fully traditional poets, although they were oral poets; instead, they deliberately adapted the tradition so that the old stories were mixed and matched into much lengthier and more complex epics, which should be called post-traditional.]

Keywords: [Homer, Avdo Međedović, oral-traditional, epic, Milman Parry]

This study will argue that Avdo Međedović (to a high degree) and Homer (to the highest degree) were *post-traditional* poets, and that in both Bosniac and ancient Greek oral epic there are two fundamentally different techniques of epic composition, which have produced distinct kinds of epic poems: a *traditional* and a *post-traditional* technique.

Post-traditional epic composition is *oral epic poetry that, on the level of ideas and compositional technique, essentially transcends the bounds of oral-traditional myth-historical epic composition*. Its products cannot be learned by listening to the performance, i.e. transmitted orally and recreated via a conservative traditional epic craft. Post-traditional epics are the products of art, and are hybrids of tradition and innovation. While their diction, style and overall design surpass traditional oral epic, they lack deep traditional meaning, as the myth-historical component of the inherited traditional tale is destroyed. To compensate for this loss, post-traditional poems contain many parts of other traditional poems and oral-traditional forms (i.e. storytelling, ballads and lyrics). Post-traditional singers, who resemble poet-artists, strive to encapsulate the whole tradition in a single poem that is much longer than traditional songs. They develop new modes of performance and creation, highly improvisational, where declamation replaces singing; they can create

* [This article was written in Croatian in Amherst MA in 2007 by Zlatan Čolaković (1955–2008) and published in Čolaković (2007) 1.47–89; the conclusion is adapted from Čolaković (2008). Čolaković was the most important recent collector of Bosniac oral epic poetry in performance, who in 1984–1988 worked as a Fulbright Scholar with Albert B. Lord at Harvard University and then collected Bosniac epics himself. The article has been translated by his widow, Marina Rojc-Čolaković, and his daughter, Alberta Colakovic, and modified by the inclusion of additions. Richard Janko helped with editing and bibliography; editorial additions are in square brackets. For some initial reactions to Čolaković's ideas, see Elmer 2010; Danek 2012a. The translators and editor are grateful to the Curators of the Milman Parry Collection of Oral

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Marina Rojc-Čolaković adds, 'I would like to thank Richard Janko for his extraordinary help in editing the article and helping with the bibliography. I am grateful also to Robert Fowler for providing my late husband and afterwards myself with ongoing support to continue the promotion of my husband's scholarly works and his legacy. I would also like to thank the journal's reviewers for their valuable critique. I would like to thank my daughter, Alberta Colakovic, for her initiative and help with the translation. My sincere thanks go to the curators of the Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature for giving permission to reprint the quotations from my late husband's books and articles.']

dramatic representations (*mimēseis*) of characters' words and deeds (with a preference for direct speech)¹ and develop new plot designs. In the poems of such singers the plot and diction are not stable and change substantially in each performance.

Traditional oral epic poetry is a *corpus of myth-historical poems which are closely interconnected and produced by traditional singers in a distinct region according to the conservative traditional patterns of myth-historical epic composition using the diction, ethics and aesthetic features developed in that region*. Its products are created and transmitted orally by singers of tales who do not resemble poet-artists, but 'artisans who recreate'. Such singers memorize the stories' structures in detail. They know many poems intimately and possess 'knowledge of the past'. They can 'bring to life' truthful events depicted in the traditional songs by closely following plots that they learned from older singers. Their skill resides in the creation of 'mythic structures' through their own 'compositional schemes'. Each individual singer 'embodies the tradition', within the limits of his own knowledge of the traditional poems and his own recreative capacities. Such a singer's plots and diction remain stable throughout his singing career. The essential characteristic of tradition is its conservatism.

Traditional epic singers [normally] sing accompanied by an instrument which they often play with virtuosity. They sing pleasantly, often change tone of voice and melody, and 'act' with convincing facial mimicry. Post-traditional singers develop declamation and recitation in rapid performance, neglecting the musical aspect. Their poetic language becomes more 'musical' and 'literary', whereas the creation of verses is far freer and easier; the diction is enriched with neologisms, and embellishment, using descriptions, speeches and comparisons, increases.

I feel frightened when I look at you,
Let alone when I talk to you!

[*Zazor mi je u te pogledati
A kamo li s tobom govoriti*]²

These verses of Međedović are traditional in form and well known in Bosniac epic tradition. Traditionally, courtiers utter such formulae with fear and veneration when addressing the sultan.³ But in Međedović an unhappy young wife and mother addresses them to her husband, the powerful Mustajbey of Lika, on the day of Bayram, the Muslim religious holiday; the wife salutes her husband as if he were sultan. In traditional epics no wife addresses her husband in this way (Appendix A-I). The use of this formulaic expression is at odds with its traditional context; nonetheless, it makes a powerful reference to the tradition, as is clear to the audience. Mustajbey's wife utters these words after Mustajbey enters her chamber wearing boots, which is considered irreverent among Muslims, and carrying a whip. He blasphemously demands that she accept his second marriage to a Christian, the most beautiful woman, whom he has decided to abduct by force. After she refuses, he whips her mercilessly. Covered in blood that crimson her Bayram outfit, her words turn damning: let him abduct the woman but die as well (Appendix A-II). Her curse is fulfilled. Maddened by lust, Mustajbey begins a war and abducts the woman, but brings

¹ Homer's *Iliad* and Međedović's long epics contain about 55% direct speech. In Međedović's shorter epics the percentage of direct speech is significantly higher [Čolaković (2006) 170–71]. The *Odyssey* contains 75% direct speech [cf. Griffin (1986) 37].

² Međedović, *The Death of Mustajbey of Lika* (Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature, PN 6807, lines 685–86, records 5146–80, 28 June 1935).

³ In Aeschylus' *Persians* [694–96], the chorus of elders salutes with similar verses the spirit of Darius that has just risen from the grave.

disaster on himself and the Bosniac army; the army perishes in battle and he dies in a duel with the most beautiful woman's brother.⁴ According to its plot, this Bosniac epic is post-traditional, in my view, because its 'hero' performs an act of hubris, which causes the army's defeat and his death.

In the second part of the song (Međedović's invention of a bipartite song is post-traditional), this same woman persuades Halil, the greatest Bosniac hero, to enter her chamber wearing boots. By duplicating this scene (Appendix A-III), Međedović gives it a non-traditional meaning. Although the motif 'entering a sultan's court wearing boots', duplication and the verses used to address a sultan are common in the tradition, Međedović gives each of these elements new meaning by linking them together in a new context, unusual in the tradition. Moreover, at this woman's request Halil gives her his *besa* or promise to marry her, which cannot be broken even at the price of his life. This theme is traditional, but incorporated here from other songs (Appendix A-IV). Halil is forced to break his word (Appendix A-V), and so, through his creation of plot and characters, the poet violates the moral code of his tradition, wherein the greatest hero cannot break his word. Međedović incorporated this theme into this song for the first time; it is absent from the songs of other traditional singers (Appendix A-VI). Thus Međedović's innovative composition makes the greatest Bosniac hero break his promise, a non-traditional theme.

By using traditional themes and diction and applying traditional elements like duplications in a non-traditional context, Međedović ironizes and steps outside the traditional frame. Homer uses the same technique in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. At *Odyssey* 12.184, Robert Fitzgerald notes that the Sirens use verses from the *Iliad* to lure Odysseus, verses that occur there in a quite different context.⁵ In another example, Zeus sends Agamemnon a dream telling him to begin an attack on Troy that will result in his taking the city. Certain that everything will happen as promised, Agamemnon obeys the god's order, but Zeus deceives him.⁶ According to tradition, a message from a prophetic dream, sent by the god himself, must be fulfilled, because the supreme god of Greek tradition is not a 'lying poet', as Plato states.⁷

The Neoanalysts⁸ have proved that Homer composed much of the *Iliad* by adapting themes from an earlier version of the *Aethiopis*. He adapted from the *Aethiopis* the themes of Patroclus' death and funeral, which correspond to Antilochus' and afterwards Achilles' death and funeral in the *Aethiopis*, as well as Thetis' ritual lament over the death of her son. Such an innovative thematic 'takeover' is prohibited in the tradition. Traditional elements such as diction, themes and plots in Homer's and Međedović's epics do not make them traditional. Many other characteristics separate Međedović's epics from Bosniac tradition and make him more closely akin to Homer.

I. Avdo Međedović: the Bosniac Homer?

Many Homerists now accept Milman Parry's view, based on the compositional style and diction of the Homeric epics, that they are both oral and traditional, exhibit many features of Bosniac oral-traditional epics and somewhat resemble those of other nations. Parry's work launched research into oral traditions in over a hundred languages and resulted in the birth of the so-called 'oral theory' or 'oral-formulaic theory'. Parry's theories have had more influence than any other literary theory of the 20th century, not just on our understanding of Homer but on that of literature, its sources and its nature. Parry's best *guslar* (singer), Avdo Međedović of Bijelo Polje, recorded a song as long as the *Odyssey* (*The Wedding of Smailagić Meho*), although he did not know how to read or write.⁹ Parry found in Međedović his Bosniac 'Homer'; Albert Lord calls his meeting with

⁴ [Čolaković (2007) 2.773–810].

⁵ See Fitzgerald's 'Postscript' to his translation: (1961) [493].

⁶ [*Il.* 2.1–40.]

⁷ [*Resp.* 2.382d.]

⁸ For example Pestalozzi (1945); Kakridis (1949); (1971); Kullmann (1960).

⁹ Powell (2004) [16].

Međedović a ‘historic moment’.¹⁰ Parry’s work on Homeric style, collection of recordings and discovery of the ‘Homer from Obrov’ caused a sensation, which over time and in waves influenced Homeric studies, literary theory, folklore studies, comparative mythology, ethnology, anthropology and other fields. Međedović’s epics became famous and were translated into English and German.¹¹

In 1935, unfortunately, Parry died only four months after leaving Bijelo Polje, either by accident or possibly by suicide, as Barry Powell assumes.¹² His assistant Nikola Vujnović, from the village of Burmazi near Stoc, met a similar fate: he vanished during World War II, after completing in Dubrovnik (1937) and at Harvard (1938–1939) the transcription of all the materials that he had collected with Parry.¹³ Likewise, Hungarian composer Béla Bartók died before his book of musical transcriptions of Parry’s recordings came out.¹⁴ Međedović died aged about 80 in 1955 and did not live to see the publication of *The Wedding of Smailagić Meho*.

Lord and David Bynum brought out the first bilingual edition of this extraordinary epic in 1974.¹⁵ In 1980, Bynum published two more epics by Međedović: *Osman-bey Delibegović and Pavičević Luka*, the longest epic recorded in recent times in Europe, and the dictated and sung versions of *The Wedding of Vlahinjić Alija*.¹⁶ This edition evoked no reaction among scholars, although both epics are of high quality: Georg Danek and I both judge *The Wedding of Vlahinjić Alija* to be more authentic than *The Wedding of Smailagić Meho*. Marina Rojc-Čolaković and I published two more epics by Međedović – *The Death Warrant for Đerđez Alija* and *Gavran the Brigand Chieftain and Serdar Mujo* – in 2004.¹⁷ In 2007 I published a critical edition of his epics,¹⁸ including *The Wedding of Smailagić Meho*, *The Vizier’s Arrival in Travnik*, *The Death of Mustajbey of Lika*, *The Revenge of the Death of Mustajbey of Lika* and *Sultan Selim Conquers Kandija*. Thus Međedović’s songs are finally available, 71 years after Parry and Vujnović collected them.

At first Parry’s work had no appreciable success. He wrote some of his most interesting Homeric studies in French, while his writings in English were limited to academic journals, mostly *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*; only in 1971 were his ‘collected’ works published by his son, Adam Parry,¹⁹ who translated his father’s French into English. But he presented his father’s research incompletely. From Parry’s still unpublished diary in English entitled *Ćor Huso* (‘Blind Huso’), his son published only the parts on Homer.²⁰ He [also] appears to have been unaware of the significance of Parry’s notes from 1934–1935. For Parry wrote a manuscript – *The Questions from Bijelo Polje [Pitanja iz Bijelog Polje]* – in which he [asked Međedović questions and] added many notes [regarding his replies].²¹ Adam Parry could not have read these materials, since his father had written them in the Bosniac language.

¹⁰ Lord (1974).

¹¹ Lord (1974); Danek (2002).

¹² Powell (2004) [15]. See Čolaković (2004b), reprinted with minimal changes in Čolaković (2004a).

¹³ Vujnović, a stonemason by trade and *guslar*, was born in about 1907 (he was 28 when he was collecting with Parry). I have been unable to find further information about him. In addition to his transcripts of Parry’s collection and numerous recordings of his conversations with singers, the Harvard collection contains recordings of his songs and those of his relatives. His role in Parry’s enterprise is still inadequately recognized. While Parry himself (in his reports to Harvard), Lord [(1986) 34–40], Adam Parry [(1971) xxxvi–xxxvii] and Čolaković [(2004b)] stress his enormous contribution, Bynum [Čolaković (1992) 244] and Foley minimize his role and criticize his transcriptions (especially Foley [e.g. (2004a) 145–56]). According to my sources, at times in 1934 and 1935 Vujnović collected songs independently and recorded songs after Parry’s death. Thus Parry’s collec-

tion contains his recording of Ibro Bašić’s song *The Wedding of Smailagić Meho*, dictated on 17 August 1937 (Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature, PN 12491, 1,270 verses, Stolac).

¹⁴ [Bartók (1951); (1954); (1987).] In a letter to Douglas Moore of 18 April 1941, Bartók writes ‘[t]he style and musical treatment of these heroic songs is probably as close to that of the Homeric poems as any folk music style found today may be’ [Bartók (1971) 300].

¹⁵ Lord (1974).

¹⁶ Bynum (1980).

¹⁷ [Čolaković (2004a) 345–432.]

¹⁸ Čolaković (2007).

¹⁹ Parry (1971).

²⁰ Adam Parry, unfortunately, was among those Homerists who viewed Bosniac epics with disrespect, calling them a ‘backwoods phenomenon’ [(Parry (1966) 212–13); for a corrective, see Lord (1967) 7–9].

²¹ [This is published in Čolaković (2007) 1.367–71; cf. Kay (1995) 17–18.]

In *The Epics of Avdo Međedović* I published for the first time important sections of *The Questions from Bijelo Polje*,²² as Parry's manuscript is of great interest. It proves that he was well versed in the language and plots of Bosniac epic, and arrived at almost all the insights which Lord later presented in *The Singer of Tales*.²³ This especially pertains to Parry's notion of 'theme' and 'thematic composition',²⁴ and to his thesis that Homer dictated his own epics, both of which are clearly presented in *Ćor Huso*,²⁵ while his investigation of epic technique and the singer's methodology in learning oral epic song are recorded in *The Questions from Bijelo Polje*. Parry's inquiries and conversations with Međedović reveal his interest in plot-making, catalogues, referentiality, characterization, dialogues, ornamentation, digressions, duplications, repetitions, the difference between dictated, written and sung oral texts, the singer's performance before the audience and other elements that shed light on the Homeric epics by means of Međedović's compositional technique.

Despite the largely undisputed scholarly consensus as to Homer's oral style, there are major disagreements in Homeric studies [regarding the nature of his poems]. One branch of scholarship, maintained mostly by Parry's followers, views the poems as products of oral epic tradition, without differentiating between *oral* epics and *traditional-oral* epics. Geoffrey Kirk regards Homer as the highest developmental stage of Greek traditional oral epic and as the author of the two 'monumental' epics.²⁶ Nagy states that 'the artistry of the Homeric poems is traditional both in diction and in theme ... What [Homer] means, however, is strictly regulated by tradition. The poet has no intention of saying anything untraditional.'²⁷ According to him, the Homeric epics contain no mythic innovations. Janko recognizes that Homer was inspired by the plots of some earlier form of the Epic Cycle, accepting the Neoanalytic argument which shows that he adopted some essential themes from the *Aethiopis*. Janko also claims that Homer did not 'harmonize' some of his themes with his tradition. However, he does not make some crucial inferences. He believes that, within the Greek tradition, epic poets had the liberty essentially to change mythic stories; yet, like Kirk, Bryan Hainsworth and Mark Edwards, he considers Homer to be a traditional oral epic singer.²⁸ However, a traditional singer will always compose traditionally; he will not introduce innovations into his songs or adopt essential themes from other songs within his tradition. If the oral poet harmonizes his themes with his tradition, this merely proves that he has already transcended it; only oral poets who are post-traditional create epics in this way.

²² [Čolaković (2007) 1.91–163, 349–451, with a detailed manuscript description at 349.]

²³ Lord (1960). The title of his book was coined by Parry, as was the concept of the 'singer of tales'.

²⁴ Gesemann [(1925); (1926) 65–96] introduced the notion of 'compositional scheme' that undoubtedly inspired Parry; Lord stated this in a conversation with me, first published as Čolaković and Lord (1985) [at 6] and then in full with notes in Čolaković and Lord (2005) [at 47]. Unfortunately, Parry's notion of 'theme' and 'composition by theme' has been almost entirely abandoned, not only in Homeric studies, but also within the oral theory of literature, and has been replaced by Arend's notion of 'typical scenes' [Arend (1933)]. Parry's idea of 'theme' is still used by Jensen [(1980) 68], Slatkin [(1991)], Schein [(1984) 12], Friedrich [(2002)] and especially Powell [e.g. (2004) 74]. In 1971 Gunn tried to prove the author of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* one and the same by investigating similar 'themes' in both epics. Lord's 1951 comparison of Međedović's and Homer's composition by theme is [a] classic.

²⁵ The thesis of dictation (Parry (1971) 451), which some Homerists at first greeted with ridicule, has had an increasing number of followers, [including] Lord (1953), Whitman [(1958) 77–86] and Powell [(1991)]; its most ardent follower is Janko (1998a). Nagy rejects this view, proposing an elaborate 'evolutionary model' for the fixation of the texts of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* over the span of a millennium; the context for the 'definitive' period is Panhellenic festivals, such as the Panathenaia at Athens (Nagy (1996) [29–112]). Although he has many followers, especially in the United States, most prominent scholars today reject his 'evolutionary model'. I, too find it to be wrong, as I argue here and especially in Čolaković (2006), where I seek to establish the notion of Homeric post-traditionality.

²⁶ [e.g. Kirk (1962) 271–81; (1965) 91–125.]

²⁷ Nagy (1979) 3.

²⁸ Janko (1992) [309–14, 322, 359, 372, 408–10; Edwards (1987) 15–28; Hainsworth (1993) 1–53.]

Gregory Nagy's insistence on the traditionality of the Homeric epics in diction and themes is impossible to verify in the ancient Greek material because we have no pre-Homeric epics.²⁹ Nagy, John Miles Foley and other 'oralists' equate the Homeric epics with the ancient Greek epic tradition. But if we accept the comparison with Bosniac epic and the analogy with Međedović's creativity as our method for investigating Homer's compositional technique, then the Homeric epics are post-traditional, for Nagy's position on Homer cannot be applied to Međedović. The latter's diction is considerably richer than the diction of all other Bosniac singers, and he introduces some themes that are entirely non-existent in the Bosniac epic tradition. When he uses traditional diction and themes, it is often in a non-traditional context, thus giving them new meaning. All the above aspects are applicable to Homer, even to a much higher degree.

Međedović told Parry and Vujnović that he had introduced many new 'things' (themes, motifs and diction) into his songs, which he had not learned or heard from other singers; they were, in his words, 'from my own head', 'from my own heart' or 'from within myself' (see Appendix A-VII). I believe that Homer too introduced his own diction and themes into his creations, especially the *Odyssey*. Monologues in character and extended comparisons, sections of the epics that are, according to Robert Fowler, 'the best in Homer', are not formulaic or traditional, but completely Homer's (Appendix A-VIII). My aim is to show that Međedović's processes of thought and of epic composition are not regulated by tradition, but rather that he uses the rules of traditional epic-making for his own purposes in post-traditional creation, and ironizes the tradition or is at odds with it. I believe the same to have been true of Homer. The poet's intention in expressing himself, especially if he is an excellent innovator who creates a new technique, often has nothing in common with what his work expresses, as Mikhail Bakhtin shows regarding Dostoyevsky.³⁰ Both Homer and Međedović may have believed their epics to be 'more truthful' in description, representation (*mimēsis*) and the 'revival' of mythic-historical plot structures, but their compositions are not traditional; they are post-traditional.

The second branch of Homeric scholarship still doubts Homer's traditionality; this movement includes Parry's son, Adam, the latter's wife, Anne Amory-Parry and numerous European scholars. These scholars emphasize Homer's unparalleled literary and artistic value, individuality and separateness from the tradition. For instance, Fowler introduces the term 'cognitive shift' to emphasize Homer's distance from his tradition; he reasons that the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* arose as a new form of epic composition.³¹ Paolo Vivante's work is an extreme example of a consistently anti-Parryist approach. He rejects not only the concept of traditionality in Homer, but also Homer's oral style of composition. For him, research based on the analogy between Homer and oral-traditional epics is fruitless, because nothing substantial can be learned about Homer by 'deriving Homer from anything else'.³²

Homerists have often rejected Lord's thesis that Međedović's traditional compositional technique is closest to Homer's, but they have used weak arguments. They assert that the quality and developmental level of the Homeric and ancient Greek epic traditions are superior to the epics of Međedović and the Bosniac tradition: hence the analogy is unacceptable. Many have supported this by arguing that the Homeric epics are aristocratic, courtly and elitist. But Lord rightly states that the Bosniac epics were also for centuries the art of the ruling classes, nurtured and supported by rich patrons, the *aghas* and *beys*.³³ In my view, *both* aristocratic *and* popular forms pervaded Bosniac

²⁹ Janko, relying on statistical research on the language of the epics, proves that the oldest literary text that we have is Homer's *Iliad*, after which follows the *Odyssey* and then, after them, Hesiod and the so-called Homeric hymns [(Janko (1982); (1992) 12–15; (2012)]. Nobody has as yet refuted Janko's theses.

³⁰ Bakhtin (1973) [63–149].

³¹ Fowler (2004).

³² Vivante (1991) [26–33].

³³ [Lord (1967) 7–9.] Substantial evidence for this is documented by the collectors of epics ([Luka] Marjanović, [Kosta] Hörmann [(1888–1889)], [Matthias] Murko [(1951)] and [Alois] Schmaus [(1953)]) and the conversations between Parry and Vujnović and their singers.

epic.³⁴ This is probably true of ancient Greek epics too, in which popular folk heroes like 'rough' Heracles and 'insolent' Thersites played significant roles (similarly, the character of the hero Tale Ličanin or Tale from Orašac was developed to perfection in Bosniac epics). Homer was probably a singer of humble origin, who performed for both the aristocracy and the common public.

Many Homerists also hold that the root of Homer's superiority in relation to all later epic traditions lies in the presumed absolute orality of ancient Greek culture before the invention of the alphabet;³⁵ they conceive of his epics as a kind of encyclopedia of the collective knowledge of the ancient Greeks, their history, gods, geography, ethics etc.³⁶ Contemporary Bosniac scholars have an analogous view of the Bosniac epics and their influence on Bosniac culture. In my view, [Eric] Havelock advanced an excellent argument for an encyclopedic tradition in the pre-Homeric epics and the tradition contemporary with Homer, but erred in applying it to the post-traditional Homer.³⁷

The main problem in contemporary Homeric studies was already defined by Lord in 1986: 'there are only a few classical philologists who truly know the living oral tradition or oral traditional songs'.³⁸ If Homerists could hear, see and study oral-traditional epics in live performance, and understand the tradition and its conservatism profoundly, they would be able truly to judge whether Homer was a traditional or a post-traditional oral singer, according to my terminology. By studying Homer without a thorough knowledge of the living tradition, Homerists can only declare their speculative agreement or disagreement with Parry and his followers, which does not contribute to a fundamental understanding of Homer.

Parry began researching Homer as a 'traditional poet', and built his understanding of tradition and traditional style by examining Homeric style and 'formulas'. Only later, under Murko's influence and after becoming a collector of epics and lyrics himself, did he understand Homer to be an oral poet. Thus the 'traditional' Homer became the 'oral' Homer in Parry's work, but he did not have the chance to provide us with his understanding of the 'traditional' and 'oral' Homer, based on his acquaintance with many oral-traditional singers, and especially Međedović. Before finishing his collecting, in the summer of 1935, Parry met his 'Homer', Avdo Međedović, in Bijelo Polje. Until then he had met many oral-traditional singers, but none who could create a story in a way comparable to Homer; only Međedović, with his own unique technique, composed in this way. But, as Parry understood, Međedović's epics were unlike the compositions of other 'oral-traditional' singers.³⁹

³⁴ I base this position on the conversations of numerous singers, especially Mehmed Kolak Kolaković, recorded by Marjanović, as well as Međedović, Šećo Kolić and Mumin Vlahovljak, recorded by Parry and Vujnović. In Bosnia, there were aristocratic singer-heroes, *bey*s and *aghas* (for example [Osman] Kalić, [Ašir] Čorović and [Murat] Kurtagić), as in ancient Greece (for example Homer's Achilles), as well as plebeian singers of modest ancestry. The best of them performed in aristocratic palaces and at public gatherings and religious events (in *hans* and later in coffee- or teahouses) as well as in modest homes, like Čor Huso, the famous singer of the later 19th century. Parry recorded songs from several singers who learned from Čor Huso. Foley claims that Čor Huso, like Homer, represented a legendary cultural idol and that neither was a historical person [(1998); (1999) 49–63]. He thus reveals that he is not aware of the recordings made by Parry and Vujnović, and the manuscripts from Bijelo Polje. Several of Parry's singers undoubtedly learned their songs from Čor Huso, especially Vlahovljak, who learned most of his repertoire from him [Appendix A-XI; Čolaković (2004c) 50–51, 54–55, 58–59, 60–61; (2007) 1.429–51].

³⁵ So Kirk [for example Kirk (1962) 68–72].

³⁶ So Havelock [(1982); (1986)]. He suggests that the tradition of epic composition in the eighth century BC, before the epochal appearance of Homer and then Hesiod, was at a considerably higher level of development than the Bosniac tradition and all other traditions known to us. But this argument is not fruitful, because it does not help us understand Homer. It is based either on a demand for a better model for Homeric epic than Bosniac epic and Međedović can provide or on a belief that the analogy is itself inappropriate.

³⁷ A basic characteristic of traditional epic singers is their conservatism, i.e. their effort to preserve as many elements as possible from songs learned from older singers, as they believe deeply in their historical truth. Contrariwise, post-traditional singers doubt the truth of the songs in the form in which they heard them and make no effort to preserve the songs' mythic-historical elements.

³⁸ [Čolaković and Lord (1985) 9; republished as] Čolaković and Lord (2005).

³⁹ See his manuscript *The Questions on Art* [Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature, PN 12467, published in Čolaković (2007) 1.395–428].

The traditional singer and pupil of Ćor Huso Husović, Mumin Vlahovljak, told Parry and Vujnović that Međedović's epic composition was not 'traditional' and was unacceptable within the tradition. Vlahovljak insisted that any expert on Bosniac epic could confirm this by comparing Parry's recordings of Međedović's and Vlahovljak's performances of the same song (Appendix A-XI).⁴⁰

Lord's understanding of Parry's theory is the 'oral-traditional Homer'. He believes that a relationship between 'oral' and 'traditional' is necessary, and equates the two: 'if Homer is an oral poet, he is necessarily a traditional poet'. In *The Singer of Tales*, he puts this postulate into italics: '*there are no oral poets who are not traditional*'.⁴¹ Although this assertion is completely wrong, many Homerists and followers of Lord agree uncritically. But many oral epic singers are not traditional, as Murko already knew. Homerists who doubt that Homer is an oral-traditional poet attempt to prove Homer's literacy or the influence of literacy on his epics; Homeric studies of the 20th century are preoccupied by the 'chasm' between orality and literacy. The Greeks' development of literacy is the predominant explanation for Homer's appearance, as witness Havelock's title: *The Muse Learns to Write*.⁴² Foley tries to bridge this gap by conceptualizing the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* as 'oral-derived traditional texts',⁴³ but this leaves unsolved the problem of the genesis of Homer's epics, as Janko notes in his critique of Foley.⁴⁴

In my view, a 'traditional' epic singer is *necessarily* an 'oral' epic singer, even if he learns to read and write and records his own song in writing.⁴⁵ However, an 'oral' epic singer is *not necessarily* a 'traditional' epic singer. Homer is an oral epic poet, but it does not follow that he is a traditional poet. An oral epic poet can be 'traditional', but can also be pseudo-traditional, non-traditional or post-traditional, like Homer. Homer may have dictated his *Iliad* and may have written his *Odyssey* by hand, but it makes no difference regarding his traditionality, post-traditionality or orality. If he was a post-traditional oral poet, his epics are post-traditional.

I hope that my two volumes of *The Epics of Avdo Međedović* (2007), containing better editions of several of Međedović's epics, will contribute to a new view of Međedović and of Homer. To my mind, Parry's and to a greater degree Lord's statements about Homer's traditionality are basically incorrect; Homer no more represents traditional ancient Greek epic than Međedović represents traditional Bosniac epic. Some scholars concur with me about Međedović, but this still needs to be proved as regards Homer, through an analogy with Međedović and a comparison with Bosniac epics.

Homer and Međedović knew traditional epics and their creators; their roots were in their respective traditions. They could have been traditional 'singers of tales', like other singers,⁴⁶ but they thought and felt in a new time and composed in a new, post-traditional style.⁴⁷ In addition to a similarity in performance between the Greek and the Bosniac production of epics (singing, that is

⁴⁰ Lord published neither Parry's manuscript *The Questions from Bijelo Polje* nor Parry's recordings of his conversation with Mumin Vlahovljak about Međedović's work [Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature, PN 12472, records 7109–24, 10 August 1935]: see Čolaković (2004c) [49–67; (2006) 163–66; (2007) 1.431–49 (transcribed), 2.570–73 (in English)]. It can be stated openly that Lord published only those texts of Parry and Vujnović that confirmed his theses, but not numerous texts that might have opposed them or raised doubts.

⁴¹ Lord (1960) 155.

⁴² [Havelock (1986).]

⁴³ Foley (1997). They should rather be defined as 'tradition derived' texts, as they had ceased to be traditional.

⁴⁴ Janko (1998b).

⁴⁵ I have many songs that traditional oral singers recorded by hand (from Ćorović and [Šučo] Nurković)

and the Parry Collection at Harvard also has such songs (from [Ćamil] Kulenović and [Avdo] Avdić). Many are traditional, because these singers 'transcribed' their own songs, i.e. recorded them in much the same way as they sang them and in the form in which they were learned orally from other singers (Appendix A-IX).

⁴⁶ In conversations with Parry and Vujnović, Međedović stated that, if he wanted, he could compose a song that he had learned from singers of 'lesser' quality in just the same way as they sang it, but such a song would be 'poor' [Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature, PN 12467; *Pričanje za kunst*, in Čolaković (2007) 1.415].

⁴⁷ Međedović was not the only Bosniac singer who composed very long songs. Murko mentions several others, like Džafer Kolaković, son of the famous singer Mehmed Kolak Kolaković in Marjanović's collection (Murko [(1951) 279]).

rhythmical declamation before listeners to the accompaniment of instruments, recreative composition during performance, formulaic expressions, themes, thematic structures, the way of structuring events, depictions of characters etc.), the analogy must be pursued more subtly by comparing, on the one hand, hypothetical ancient Greek oral-traditional epic with Homer and, on the other, Bosniac traditional epics with Međedović.

The bearers of tradition and creators of traditional epics are singers who know the plots of songs and other mythical stories well, believe profoundly in the truth of the song and sing in a conservative style inherited from older singers. They create anew, or recreate, the 'true' event about which they know. Among the Greeks, the Muse, daughter of Memory, aids them in this task; among the Bosniacs it is the Vila (fairy) or even God.⁴⁸ Their own 'historical' stories, learned by listening to older singers, are composed by building the thematic structure which they use to create the mythical structure, in accord with their personal ability at composition. This creates the paradox of 'multiformity', where one 'same', i.e. 'individual', story, in which neither the text nor the flow of the story is strictly fixed, is embodied within different mythical structures. Traditional singers are recreators; therefore they are in essence neither poets nor artists, but 'historians' with knowledge of the past. Just as Xenophanes and Heraclitus criticize Homer because he invented and 'lied' about the gods and the deeds of heroes,⁴⁹ traditional singers find Međedović's style intolerable. Such singers would never consciously incorporate into a particular song an important theme from another song, nor would they 'mix' or 'prolong' songs, change the plot or 'add' or 'remove' anything (Appendix B).

All that is sung outside the traditional framework and with essential departures from that framework transcends the tradition. The epics of Međedović and those of some of the best Bosniac singers, such as Mehmed Kolak Kolaković and Murat Kurtagić, contain some post-traditional characteristics (these singers were, like Homer, professional singers of tales engaged in the business of singing, who performed before the public for monetary or other reward). Homer's Panhellenic epics, with their complex, artistic representation of the world, surpass all the traditional norms of epic poetry, as well as the presumed traditional heroic songs of the regions of ancient Greece. While Kolaković, Kurtagić and, most probably, Ćor Huso are excellent traditional singers who on occasion transcend their tradition, Međedović is often in conflict with it. He reshapes it through composition (Appendix B), using a new technique in a novel way, especially in his composition of epics not learned from a written text (*pjesmarica*), but from other singers in the traditional way. In this respect, he is quite like Homer. Their extended songs, as we know them, were unrepeatable and not learnable within the tradition. Singers would not be able to learn them from Homer or Međedović by the traditional mode of listening, but only by memorizing written texts.

The creation of epics is oral but not necessarily traditional.⁵⁰ The fallacy of the notion that 'oral' and 'traditional' are equal, propagated by Parry and his followers and by many Homerists, lies in Lord's equation of 'oral' with 'traditional'. Relying on this notion, Homerists naively equate traditional ancient Greek epics with Homeric epics⁵¹ and traditional Bosniac epics with Međedović's. Lord's and Bynum's presentation of Međedović as a *bona fide* oral-traditional singer and of *The Wedding of Smailagić Meho* as a *bona fide* oral-traditional epic has contributed to this misconception.

⁴⁸ Homer begins the *Odyssey* by asking the Muse to help him sing [*Od.* 1.1], and Međedović's standard introduction is 'First word: God help me!'. Kurtagić asks the fairy 'And you, fairy, help me sing old memories!' (*The Captivity of Mustajbey of Lika* 3–4).

⁴⁹ [*Cf.* Xenophanes *fr.* B 1.21–24, 11–12 DK; Heraclitus *fr.* B 42 DK; Pind. *Nem.* 7.20–24.]

⁵⁰ Unless we are dealing with written epics like Virgil's, or the conscious imitation of oral epic style in

written literature belonging to transient or transitional literary forms; in south Slavic countries, such literature is represented by Petar Petrović Njegoš and Andrija Kačić-Miošić.

⁵¹ Fowler offers the most original contemporary review of the Homeric Question: Fowler (2004). Nagy is a strong supporter of the 'oral theory' ((1992); (1996)), while Adam Parry's 'Introduction' to his father's work is still an excellent text (Parry (1971) ix–lxii).

The essence of Međedović's and Homer's (post-traditional) creations does not lie in their greater literary value in comparison with the epics of traditional singers, since their literary value could have varied according to their artistic ability. Their epic creativity is fundamentally different from the making of traditional epic. Some elements of Međedović's composition also appear in Homer's composition, in which the poet completely departs from the traditional framework, or is even in conflict with the tradition. I will now show that there are post-traditional features of Međedović's epics that Homerists will recognize in an identical, similar or modified form in Homeric poetry. Bosniac traditional epics must be compared with (pre-)Homeric as well as with the Homeric epics.

II. Homer: the ancient Greek Avdo Međedović?

If the answer to the Homeric Question is to be found by comparing Homer with the Bosniac epic tradition and via an analogy between his epics and those of Međedović, we must first understand the latter's compositional technique and the fundamental meaning of his epics, and then compare them with Homeric and Bosniac traditional epic technique and their essential meanings. Before us we have four phenomena: (i) Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, (ii) (pre-)Homeric traditional epics and their derivatives (i.e. the Epic Cycle, some Homeric hymns and possibly some introductions to poems), (iii) the epics of Međedović and (iv) Bosniac traditional epics. Much can be learned about (pre-)Homeric epics and Homer's relation to them through a comparison between Međedović's epics and traditional Bosniac epics. But we must keep in mind that pre-Homeric epics, though in many ways similar to Bosniac epics, are on a higher developmental level than Bosniac epics, just as Bosniac epics are at a higher developmental level than Christian south Slavic epics.⁵² Ancient Greek epics have a more highly developed mythology and technique of epic composition than Bosniac epics. Some mythical schemes and themes that are present in Bosniac epics had in all likelihood [already] lost their meaning and function in ancient Greek epic before the appearance of Homer.⁵³

Homer and Greek tragedy, the so-called Homeric hymns, Hesiod, [the *Poetics* of] Aristotle, Proclus' summaries of the cyclic epics and other sources tell us [much] about pre-Homeric traditional epics. Suppose that the sands of Egypt yielded a large collection of (pre-)Homeric (and post-Homeric) epics, perhaps 20 or even 100, or the lost tragedies of Aeschylus and Sophocles, which we know only from fragments, titles and occasionally [summaries of] their plots and themes. Such a collection of 'cyclic' epics certainly existed in Classical Greece: Aristotle read them and the tragedies that were inspired by them. Perhaps Xenophanes, Heraclitus, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides and Plato were able to listen to these epics in some form of performance. Before us we would have the Theban Cycle about Laius, Oedipus, Jocasta and their children, and about the successful and unsuccessful sieges of Thebes (Cinaethon of Sparta's *Oedipodea* and *Thebaid*, consisting of more than 6,600 and 7,000 verses, sometimes attributed to Homer), [the Trojan Cycle about] the siege and fall of Troy (from the *Cypria* to the so-called *Little Iliad* and *Aethiopis*), epics about Heracles' deeds and those of his children (for example the Ps.-Hesiodic *Shield of Heracles*), about Theseus, about the Argonauts' travels and about Agamemnon's unfortunate return from Troy and the fortunate returns of Menelaus and other Achaean warriors (*Nostoi*), and about Odysseus' return and later adventures (*Telegony*). Until recently there was an overwhelming consensus that the cyclic epics were created as a later supplement to the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. However, scholars now argue rather convincingly that, on the basis of their plots and of scenes that we do not find in

⁵² This was Parry's thesis [Parry (1971) 452].

⁵³ In this respect I follow Gesemann [(1925); (1926) 65–96], who convincingly shows how some schemes that have deep meaning in the Christian epics of the Serbs

and Croats lose that meaning in the more developed epics of the Bosniacs (see the excellent work of Schmaus (1953) [118–23, reprinted 1979]). Parry knew Gesemann's work [above, n. 24].

Homer, the cyclic poets drew their themes from the tradition independently of Homer.⁵⁴ Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides and other tragic poets found more themes for their dramas in the cyclic epics than in Homer, as Aristotle already observed.⁵⁵

All these epics, as we know from ancient sources, were less than half the length, aesthetically cruder and structurally simpler than the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*,⁵⁶ [but] were analogous to the length and structure of traditional Bosniac epic songs in relation to Međedović's. We can hypothesize that, before the cyclic epics existed, epics were sung by unidentified singers who followed the tradition more faithfully than Homer did; i.e. they sang heroic tales as they had heard them from singers of an older generation, which they believed to be historical and truthful. In their songs we would find not only Homeric diction and formulaic expressions, but also many analogous themes and motifs, as well as entire thematic sections of Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. These sections, already similar to Homer's, sung in hexameters, describing heroic deeds and scenes and containing ornamented descriptions, would probably be less adorned and poorer, as judged by their literary aesthetic, than the Homeric epics; however, they would more genuinely represent the traditional myth-historical songs about the fall of Troy (for example [the] *Aethiopsis*).

Scholars of traditional epics and their mythical meanings would be much more interested in these epics than in those of Homer. They would occasionally view him unfavorably, as did Heraclitus, Xenophanes and Plato, as a poet who neither respects nor follows tradition, but destroys it by creating hybrids, inventing 'untrue' stories about gods and heroes, and combining epics of different origin. Homer created 'monumental' epics⁵⁷ that contain themes and whole sections from different traditional epics, to which he refers constantly, and many episodes from traditional stories and other oral literature.⁵⁸ Researchers would not consider Homer a traditional poet, because it would be clear that Homer did not believe in the truthfulness of the stories in the form in which he adopts them, but recreates them following the demands of his own artistic vision, and so betrays and ironizes his tradition or completely disregards its deep mythic stratum.⁵⁹ The Homeric epics derive their power from the fact that readers do not know the tradition from which Homer originated, and so 'construct' the tradition into the Homeric epics; for them, Homer represents the highest achievement of ancient Greek and world epic poetry.

Međedović was a post-traditional poet, as his contemporary, the singer Vlahovljak, points out. Vlahovljak was a *bona fide* traditional singer and pupil of Ćor Huso.⁶⁰ According to him, (i) Međedović creates songs in a way inadmissible within the tradition, (ii) incorporates parts of other songs into his individual song, (iii) does not accept the truthfulness of the tradition and (iv) lengthens songs excessively with unnecessary embellishment (Appendix A-XI).⁶¹ Homer likewise

⁵⁴ See Davies (1989); West (2003); but especially Burgess (2003), who defines the cyclic tradition and the cyclic epics thus (33): 'by "Cyclic" tradition I mean essentially the living pre-Homeric tradition of the Trojan War that led to the Trojan War poems in the Epic Cycle and continued with the Cycle as a major manifestation of it. This tradition preceded the Homeric poems but then in turn was gradually overshadowed by them.' See also Dowden (2004).

⁵⁵ [*Poet.* 23, 1459b2–7.]

⁵⁶ [*Cf.* Griffin (1977).]

⁵⁷ So Jebb [(1887) 155–74] and Kirk [(1962) 316–34].

⁵⁸ Referentiality, a fundamental characteristic of post-traditionality, is very well developed in Međedović's songs [Appendix A-X].

⁵⁹ Čolaković 2006 [175–76, Appendix B]. In

Čolaković (2004a) 446, I compare a traditional mythic character, the sacred hero Đerđelez, and Homer's post-traditional character Achilles: 'Đerđelez, God's messenger, whose parents are unknown (the foundling, whose adopted sisters are fairies), goes under the ground into a grave (a living death), whereas Achilles, the son of Thetis and Peleus, goes only to the seashore; Đerđelez's substitute must sacrifice his life (most often of his own free will) in order to save Đerđelez. Patroclus does not sacrifice himself to save Achilles, but for his own glory, as his name confirms; Đerđelez indeed has a Double, who is his *alter ego*, his blood-brother, whereas Patroclus is not a Double, but Achilles' friend.'

⁶⁰ Čolaković (2006).

⁶¹ [Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature, PN 12472, records 7109–24; *cf.* Čolaković (2004c) 60–67; (2006) 161–68.]

constantly goes against his tradition.⁶² Međedović knew that his creative method differed profoundly from that of all other singers.⁶³ In his songs, he departs so significantly from his native tradition that he must be considered post-traditional. Length, thematic duplications, referentiality and masterfully developed thematic structuring in both his and Homer's songs, compared to the songs of truly traditional singers, are only some of their necessary and unique elements. Homer and Međedović created outstanding works, but moved away from their traditions.

When we encounter traditional epics, we do not ask ourselves much about the authors, but can still conclude that some songs are sung better, others worse. We know that each song has its own author; our knowledge of the singer's identity, his other songs and the songs of other singers in his region assists us in this investigation. The individual traditional song does not require us to wonder about its author, but rather, above all, about the actual song in its multiform embodiment within different mythic structures.⁶⁴ [Contrariwise,] Vivante notes that every approach to the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* demands that we question their authorship.⁶⁵ The case is the same with respect to Međedović's epics. There was only one way to preserve the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*: to write them down and memorize them for performance. Otherwise, as Adam Parry states,⁶⁶ these epics would have vanished in the post-traditional form in which Homer composed them; post-Homeric singers who had learned epics from Homer by listening would in time distort them in the process of recreation.⁶⁷ Powell and Fowler have raised similar objections to Nagy's 'evolutionary' model of textual creation.⁶⁸ Recently Danek has shown, rather convincingly, that the *Iliad* must have been preserved in writing before the inclusion [in it] of the *Doloneia*.⁶⁹ The *Doloneia* differs in style and language from the other Homeric texts, and with this the 'evolutionary' model collapses. Janko and Fowler believe that, if the Homeric texts were [first] written down in Pisistratus' time, features of their diction and language would reveal it;⁷⁰ I hold the same view because of the Bosniac analogy.⁷¹ Moreover, if it is true that the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are the works of a post-traditional poet, then the 'evolutionary' model is impossible, because a post-traditional improvisational technique adopts far more neologisms and new forms of language (along with a significant number of anachronisms)⁷² than the traditional technique, which is more conservative. [Thus] singers could not have

⁶² Aristotle (*Poet.* 17, [1455b16–23]) incisively describes the essential plot of the *Odyssey*: after the Trojan War, Odysseus returns across the sea to his home, after a long absence caused by Poseidon's anger; in his home, he revenges himself against the suitors. Everything else is additions with which Homer lengthened his story (many Bosniac songs about the return of a hero prove that this is its essential plot). Thus Homer freely took over from other traditional sources the themes of the so-called Telemachy and most of Odysseus' travels.

⁶³ [Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature, PN 12443; cf. Čolaković (2006) 170 n. 21.]

⁶⁴ I discuss these problems more broadly in Čolaković (2004a) [607–30].

⁶⁵ Vivante (1991) [12–22].

⁶⁶ Parry (1989), wherein his essay 'Have we Homer's *Iliad*?' [104–40, originally *YCS* 20 (1966) 177–216] is especially important. Lord replies that, in a traditional society in which traditional epics are alive, the idea of writing down a text in order to save it for the future is absurd [Lord (1967)]; this is accepted by Kirk [(1970) = Kirk (1976) 129–45]. In my view, both Lord and Kirk are mistaken. The decision to save the song of the best singer, who developed his technique of composition almost to perfection, and thus to preserve it for other

singers to learn and perform it in the same form, is quite understandable. This idea may have come directly from Homer: [so] Whitman [(1958) 79–83]; Fowler [(2004) 224–31]. The recording of the song's text enabled each singer who learned to write or recite Homer's songs to perform it as Homer did, or indeed to execute it in a pleasant voice, more convincingly and in a finer interpretation.

⁶⁷ Janko [(1992) 37–8] and Fowler [(2004)] agree in this respect with Adam Parry. According to Janko, the linguistic data prove that Homer's texts had assumed a fixed form before Hesiod's time [(1982); (1992) 13–15; (2012)], whereas the [oral] transmission of accurately memorized texts is improbable [(1992) 29; (1998a) 11–12].

⁶⁸ [Powell (1997a); (1997b) 30 n. 54; Fowler (2004) 225 n. 18.]

⁶⁹ I am grateful to Professor Danek for sending me his text before its publication [Danek (2012b)].

⁷⁰ [Janko (1992) 29–32; (1998) 11–12; Fowler (2004) 224–25.]

⁷¹ Čolaković (2006) [175].

⁷² An anachronism in Međedović's *The Death of Mustajbey of Lika* is the use of the word 'colleague' to address *beys* and *pashas*, for example 'Ah my colleague,

learned Homer's epics, in the form in which he composed them, by listening to his performance.⁷³ Međedović, and possibly Homer to a higher degree, developed his revolutionary technique of creation and song construction in a way that differs essentially from the traditional one.⁷⁴ Instead of the [traditional] technique for composing the story, which, for the story to be 'truthful', demands a detailed knowledge of many traditional stories and the presentation of all their details faithfully, Homer and Međedović developed a technique of bringing the story to life by dramatic presentations of the heroes' words and deeds. Post-traditional poets thought that they thus brought the story to life more 'truthfully', but from the standpoint of tradition they 'lied', because they sang what they had not heard and in a form in which they had not heard it. Both Plato in his *Republic* and Aristotle in his *Poetics* note the prevalence of 'mimetic' direct speech in Homer (the poet speaking through the mouth of his characters),⁷⁵ as a *differentia* in relation to the 'less mimetic' narration in other epic poems.

If we accept that, within [both] the Bosniac and [the] ancient Greek traditions, epic singers learned the art of composition and adopted the songs and knowledge of their tradition by listening to other singers because they were illiterate, we must conclude that nobody could have learned the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* from Homer in the form in which we know them. That virtuoso technique of an extraordinary art of words could only have been learned through memorization. When Parry's assistant Vujnović, a solid *guslar*, remarked that he too could sing Međedović's *Wedding of Smailagić Meho* (he had heard this song in different versions from several singers and slowly wrote it down by dictation, over the course of seven days), Međedović replied with nuanced superiority: 'you could never learn to perform my poem as I do, even if you tried to learn it for the rest of your life!' Vujnović answered him, a trifle enviously, but also victoriously because he was literate: 'I have your song here; I wrote it down word for word from beginning to end. In three months, I could learn it by heart and then sing it to you exactly as you sang it!'⁷⁶

Fetibegović' (line 820). In *The Arrival of the Vizier in Travnik*, he uses the words 'pardon', for example 'Pardon, oh *bey*, our mirror' (line 460), 'consulate', for example 'Confirmed in Vienna's consulate' (line 855) and *fruštuk* (the Germanized word for 'breakfast'), for example 'When [they] eat dinner or *fruštuk*' (line 862). Parry asks Međedović to avoid anachronisms in his songs, and chides him for having sung that a horse jumps 'three metres' instead of 'three spears' high, which is the usual measure in tradition [Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature, PN 6802, 12400, published in Čolaković (2007) 2.785 n. 13].

⁷³ The singer Ašir-bey Ćorović knew Međedović, enjoyed a friendship with him and listened to many of his songs, [but] did not 'accept', i.e. adopt, anything from Međedović's composition, either his songs or his style [Ašir Ćorović, *The Wedding of Smailović Meho*, 649 verses, *The Rescue of Pasha's Emina*, 682 verses, *Mujović Omer and Filip Madžarin*, 411 verses: Bašić (2003) 109–39] (Appendix A-XII).

⁷⁴ For a detailed description of the 'post-traditional' versus the 'traditional' technique of singing, see Čolaković (2006) 169–84.

⁷⁵ [Pl. *Resp.* 3.392e–94b; Arist. *Poet.* 4, 1448b34–38, 24, 1460a5–11.]

⁷⁶ [Čolaković (2007) 1.67–68.] Nagy refers to Radlov's observations that some Kara-Kirgiz singers could not dictate their songs well, and that their songs

were better in performance (Nagy (1996) [34 n. 22]). He also states that the recording of a specific song makes the performance of that song no longer feasible. Both claims betray an unfamiliarity with living tradition, which is a major problem for contemporary Homerists, as Lord notes [above, n. 38]: some singers adapt to dictation with difficulty, others, for example Međedović, with ease, and in so doing compose texts that are in a literary sense more readable and poetically better. Almost every collector of epics knows this, and has encountered the memorization of songs from songbooks. The ancient Greek singers needed nothing other than an accurately recorded text to sing in the same way as, or even better than, Homer, after they had learned the text by heart for performance. Paradoxically, only Homer would have been unable to repeat his performance in the same form, unless he could have learned his own text by heart. Lord recorded Međedović's *The Wedding of Smailagić Meho* 15 years after Parry had done so. Lord's version is 4,000 verses shorter, with many substantial changes to the plot. In Međedović's post-traditional composition, there were enormous changes within the story, even when he sang and dictated for Parry the *same* song (*The Wedding of Vlahinjić Alija*) twice over a short interval. On the other hand, I recorded two songs from Kurtagić, which he had sung 30 and 40 years earlier to Lord: the changes were negligible throughout.

While the tradition, whether pre-Homeric or Bosniac, was alive, there was no need to write down the songs of traditional poets because they could not disappear; singers could learn them through listening and recreate them, sometimes better and sometimes worse, according to their own talent and ability. In 1935, when Međedović and Vujnović had the conversation noted above, the tradition was very much alive in Bijelo Polje and its environs, and it still wavers even today. The ancient Greek tradition was undoubtedly alive in Homer's time. Yet nobody could learn the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* only by listening, without a written source; but every singer (for example the so-called Homeridae) who had learned to read, that is, to decode the text so as to 'hear the song within himself' and 'sing the song within himself', could drill it for performance. This could give the singer earnings and glory as a reproductive artist, not unlike a virtuoso pianist in classical music. Moreover, he could beautify and decorate the Homeric text even more during performance, and in acting it could improve and interpret it more convincingly. The rhapsode Ion makes this claim to Socrates in Plato's *Ion*.⁷⁷ According to ancient sources, the possession of written Homeric texts conferred great wealth.⁷⁸

The elderly singers from Bijelo Polje whom Parry met had learned their songs from Ćor Huso. They openly admitted that their songs were not as good as his, nor were they as good *guslars*, because Ćor Huso was the best: '[a singer] such as he is born once in a hundred years'.⁷⁹ Međedović and Kurtagić learned songs from them and often made them better, because they were more gifted singers of tales. This was the traditional method of learning oral epics. Kurtagić became an unsurpassed *traditional* singer among the Bosniacs, whereas Međedović became a *post-traditional* one.

III. Parry's collecting of Avdo Međedović's epics

Only experienced collectors of Bosniac epics can understand Parry's enthusiasm and astonishment at his first encounter with Međedović. He stumbled across Međedović at an opportune moment, when he already had a strong grasp of traditional epic and lyric composition. Until then, he had recorded dozens of Bosniac (Muslim) singers of poor, medium and high quality, as well as Christian (Orthodox and Catholic) epic and lyric singers of both sexes. Parry and Vujnović, the latter a *guslar* himself, were especially interested in this singer's compositional technique; from that perspective, Međedović composed in a different way from the other singers within the tradition. This was also obvious to me after I listened to Međedović's recordings at Harvard.

Vujnović and Parry knew Međedović's virtuoso style of composition through rapid declamation in live performance; 15 years later, Lord would record Međedović by dictation, solely when Međedović was aged and ailing. I became acquainted with him by listening to the recordings, and afterward by recording the epics of his son Zaim, who had adopted his father's style of composition, but regrettably sang rather rarely.⁸⁰ I transcribed the songs of dozens of Bosniac and Christian singers, over 120,000 verses in total. My recordings were done by video-camera or sound-recorder (my audio-video collection contains between 40,000 to 50,000 sung verses). Some singers, only at certain times, created verses with an arrow-like rapidity of between 20 and 25 verses per minute. Kurtagić could sing for eight consecutive hours with barely a break, i.e. even longer than Međedović.⁸¹ However, Međedović's style differed from that of all other singers known to us. He developed his own unique technique of recitation, mostly by declamation instead of singing. He transformed the music, rhythm and melody of traditional sung verse into recited verse, and scarcely sang except in the opening (introductory) sections [of songs]. We can only guess whether Homer's

⁷⁷ [*Ion* 530c–d.]

⁷⁸ [*Vita Herodotea* 15–17.]

⁷⁹ [Vlahovljak in Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature, PN 12472, records 7109–24, 10 August 1935, published in Čolaković (2004c) 59; (2007) 1.441.]

⁸⁰ Kurtagić's son Šefket adopted both his father's melody and singing style.

⁸¹ My singer Nurković, who is still living and singing (he, like Kurtagić, is from Rožaje), is a similar case.

style was the same, but it is probable; I incline to believe that he recited or alternated between singing and reciting. Another notable departure from the traditional mode of performance was that Međedović scarcely played the *gusle*. In this way, he could compose verses more quickly than other singers: on average 20 per minute continuously, without changing the rhythm of storytelling, while other Bosniac singers compose an average of 12 to 16 verses per minute.

Although Parry had a better command of the Bosniac language than other American scholars of Bosniac epics, he could not understand Međedović's songs during sung performance. Vujnović, likewise, could follow only short segments with intense concentration, because he was not from the same region and lacked a thorough knowledge of the language of the Bosniac epics and of Međedović's rich lexicon. Accordingly, they decided to record a song not only in sung performance but also in a dictated version, in order to ascertain the quality of the sung text. Thus began the recording of *The Arrival of the Vizier in Travnik (Dolazak vezira u Travnik)*.

On the first day of dictation, Međedović composed 1,038 verses; these covered only the opening of the song and began to tell of the gathering of the Bosniac army for warfare (the catalogues), in which he characterizes his heroes, Mujo and Halil, and their flag bearers with superb embellishment (*kićenje*) in about 300 verses. On the same day, Međedović began singing *The Death of Mustajbey of Lika*, which he would continue with a sequel, *The Revenge of Mustajbey of Lika*.

After recording and documenting these extended songs (of over 7,000 and 8,000 verses respectively), Parry asked Međedović to dictate the longest and loveliest song possible, under ideal recording conditions (and not to 'shorten' any sections). For a full week, Međedović dictated to Vujnović *The Wedding of Smailagić Meho*, a song of 12,311 verses. In order to offer direct evidence that Međedović could compose in performance an epic of such size, Parry persuaded him to sing *Osman-bey Delibegović and Pavičević Luka*, an even longer epic of 13,326 verses.⁸² Parry began recording *The Slavery of Tale Ličanin in Ozim*, which Međedović called his 'longest' song, but did not reach the end (he recorded 3,738 verses).⁸³ Parry and Vujnović recorded several other songs with Međedović,⁸⁴ including the excellent epics *The Death Warrant for Đerđelez Alija*, *Gavran the Brigand Chieftain and Serdar Mujo*,⁸⁵ *The Wedding of Vlahinjić Alija*⁸⁶ and *Selim the Sultan Captures Kandija*.

Although Parry and Vujnović made a remarkable effort to record Međedović's epics, many experienced collectors would have preferred to record songs from Ćor Huso's best pupils, who were still living at the time, and possibly the full repertoire of the best among them.⁸⁷ After all, that would have been the right approach to the study of traditional epics, [as it was] developed by the admirable collector Luka Marjanović.⁸⁸ Would any collector actually have recorded

⁸² See Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature, PN 12389 and 12441, [published] in Bynum (1980) [153–308].

⁸³ Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature, PN 12428; for a synopsis of this fragment, see Bynum (1978) [297–302].

⁸⁴ I describe the collecting by Parry and Vujnović in Bijelo Polje more thoroughly in Čolaković (2004b), reprinted in Čolaković (2004a) [453–87]. A chronological list of their collecting of Međedović's epics can be found in Čolaković (2007) [1.495–99].

⁸⁵ Published by Zlatan and Marina Rojc-Čolaković in Čolaković (2004a) [345–432].

⁸⁶ For both the dictated and the sung versions of this song, see Bynum (1980) [1–67, 73–143].

⁸⁷ Parry met at least three excellent singers who had learned their songs from Ćor Huso: Kasum Rebronja, Ragib Gojaković and Mumin Vlahovljak [on the last, see

Čolaković (2004c)]. Međedović deprecated Rebronja and Gojaković; unfortunately Vujnović believed him, but Parry was more cautious. Today we know that these singers were excellent traditional *guslars*.

⁸⁸ Marjanović collected all the songs of his best singer Mehmed Kolak-Kolaković and also the songs of other good singers from the same region. He claimed that he collected the whole Bosniac tradition of Krajina epics. He knew that every new song would be different from the one that he recorded. But he was essentially right, because he collected all thematic material in all the major combinations and versions that existed at the end of the 19th century in the region of Krajina. In the 1930s in Bijelo Polje, as in Novi Pazar, Rožaje, Pljevlje and their environs, one could still find a number of excellent singers. Murko, Schmaus, Parry and Vujnović and the young Ćamil Sijarić found only some of them.

Međedović's songs?⁸⁹ If so, he would have tried to record those of his epics that had been learned in the traditional way, for example *The Death Warrant for Đerđez Alija* and *Gavran the Brigand Cheiftain and Serdar Mujo*.⁹⁰ I believe his approach would have resembled Murko's, in that he would have avoided collecting songs learned from songbooks (*pjesmarica*), especially if he perceived that, in using them, Međedović lengthened his songs excessively with embellishment and post-traditional novelization.⁹¹ Even so, this collector would still have been astonished at Međedović's techniques of novelizing, phenomenal structuring of themes in story-songs, superior characterization and post-traditionality. The songs in this imaginary collection would be double, if not triple, the *length* of those of other Bosniac singers, ranging from 1,300 to 7,000 or 8,000 verses; most would contain 4,000 to 6,000. Such a collection would also comprise double to triple the *number* of songs, with a greater variation in theme than in the collection of Parry and Vujnović, and would shed more light on the greatness of Međedović's artisanship. Such a collection would be ideal for a comparison with Homer, but would *not* contain epics of Homeric length.

Only a fastidious Homerist and 'literary anthropologist' (Parry's term), who was especially interested in the singers' technique of performance and versed in the problems associated with the length of heroic epics,⁹² would have decided to devote so much time and effort to a singer who represented the oral tradition in Bijelo Polje neither by his repertoire nor by his style of composition and creation. Indeed, only an inspirational researcher into literary theory could have persuaded a singer to take part in the experiment of composing the 'longest' Bosniac epic.⁹³ Parry's experiment unintentionally produced 'the first genuine heroic oral epos' in Slavic literature.

Let us imagine that Lorenzo de' Medici had ordered Michelangelo to sculpt his *David* a metre taller than the sculptor had planned, and that the latter, in utter desperation, had agreed to the task. Such a *David* would, in all probability, be a celebrated work, but connoisseurs of the Renaissance would surely regard it as too big. The same can be deduced about the length of *The Wedding of Smailagić Meho*.⁹⁴ However, with his collection of songs from Međedović, Parry did prove that Homer could have composed the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* orally, without a stylus and ink in hand. The Homeric epics are of staggering proportions and were recognized as such in antiquity, but still maintained harmony in Aristotle's view.⁹⁵

⁸⁹ Sijarić recorded the songs of four singers from Bijelo Polje, and personally knew and listened to Međedović's songs. Still, it did not occur to him to record them; he admitted that [it was] Parry [who] discovered their quality [(Arhiv SANU (Srpska Akademija Nauka i Umetnosti), Sijarić Čamil, *Četiri narodne muslimanske pesme iz Sandžaka*, Etnografska zbirka br. 336; cf. Čolaković (2007) 1.71, 104 n. 6).]

⁹⁰ These were first published in Čolaković (2004a) [345–432].

⁹¹ [i.e. the transformation of a traditional epic song into a novelistic form. See below, section V.]

⁹² See Bowra (1952) [330–67].

⁹³ Dukat, in his book on the Homeric Question (Dukat (1988) [248]), tries to belittle *The Wedding of Smailagić Meho* by claiming that there are traditions of composing 'mammoth' epics that contain over 100,000 or even a million verses; Foley makes the same mistake (Foley (2004b) [175–76]). But this is not true: such 'epics' were never performed in that form, but always in fragments. The *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, like Međedović's epics, are unique works that were publicly performed as wholes. Međedović performed his longest epics only twice, under Parry's persuasion. We can only speculate as to whether Homer performed the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* more often in

roughly the length and form in which we know them. To judge by his descriptions of the singers Phemius and Demodocus and their performances [*Od.* 1.325–64, 8.266–369, 486–543], we may conclude that he did not. In Bosniac epic, the longest songs were performed continuously over two days and were composed only by the best singers. Thus these could not have contained more than 4,000 to 8,000 verses, because [only] that many verses could be sung by an excellent singer in two days. The *Iliad* and *Odyssey* could probably have been sung in five to seven days. Homerists believe that two days sufficed for the performance of the *Odyssey* and three days for the *Iliad* in competitions (this is possible since the singers exchanged places). Taplin (1992) [1–31] envisages that the *Iliad* consists of three parts; Stanley (1993) [248–96] and Schein (1984) [30–36] agree that the tripartite *Iliad* corresponds to the original Homeric performance. Danek [(1988); (2012b)] and Taplin [(1992) 11, 152–53] hold that the *Doloneia* is a later interpolation, which seems likely. For an excellent review of structural research on the *Iliad*, see Schein (1997).

⁹⁴ See Čolaković (2007) 1.[165–347].

⁹⁵ [*Poet.* 26, 1462b3–11.] Are the Homeric epics the result of two experiments? According to Janko [(1992) 37–38; (1998a)], the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were created by

Međedović probably proposed the composition of *The Wedding of Smailagić Meho* himself as [one of his] longest and most beautiful song[s]. But a seasoned collector of traditional epics would not have agreed to record it, for the following reasons: (i) the singer learned it from a written text instead of from oral performance; (ii) that text was recorded in Rotimlja, near Mostar, and not in Međedović's region; (iii) the singer learned the song from an incorrectly edited songbook, in which the unprincipled editor changed the original dialect and even the original text;⁹⁶ (iv) Međedović had learned the song recently.

Parry knew some of these facts, but may have decided to record the song because, like Lord, he naively believed that it was irrelevant whether the singer had learned the song from another singer or from a written text. This is a misconception.⁹⁷ I have explained elsewhere⁹⁸ his rationale for deciding to record this epic in its longest possible form rather than choose another song. He most probably thought he had many years of collecting ahead of him. His academic future depended on the value of the collection that he brought back to Harvard. He deliberately sought 'material proof' of his 'discovery of the Homer from Obrov', as is clear in his manuscript *The Questions from Bijelo Polje*; the songbook text in comparison with Međedović's song could serve as evidence.⁹⁹

The Wedding of Smailagić Meho establishes the excellence of Međedović's artisanship, because he succeeded in composing an unusually beautiful epic that, in its unnatural breadth, overstepped the boundaries of his song within *his* and especially the tradition's usual frames of presentation. At any rate, I believe Međedović could dictate a marvellous, more harmonious and beautiful, but shorter song of 7,000 to 8,000 verses in length.

Međedović, who was in a difficult state of affairs, understood that Parry and Vujnović expected from him the unnatural undertaking of the 'longest song'. He devoted himself to the task of dictating *The Wedding of Smailagić Meho* with honesty and enthusiasm, and thereby repaid his 'debt' to Parry (on which more shortly). But he no longer put as much effort into composing his even longer epic *Osman-bey Delibegović and Pavičević Luka*, probably because he recognized that the young collectors could not follow his singing in performance. In this epic he doubled the length of the catalogues that were already over-extended in *The Wedding of Smailagić Meho*, and added some unnecessary descriptions and repetitions.¹⁰⁰

dictation. But Janko also states, on the grounds of his statistical research into their language, that the *Odyssey* is 'younger' than the *Iliad* [(1982) 42–94; (1992) 12–15; (2012)], and that it is both possible and probable that both texts are by a single author [(1992) 37–38]; to me, single authorship appears certain. If so, Janko's conclusion that Homer dictated his epics seems incorrect, because a traditional singer does not change his language, especially if he is in a society where literacy is encroaching only slowly. I have recorded songs by Kurtagić which Lord had recorded 30 or 40 years before: his poetic language did not change at all. What can we deduce from this analogy? Whether or not Homer dictated the *Iliad*, he did not dictate the *Odyssey*. It seems more likely that he wrote the *Odyssey* himself and consciously added some linguistic elements and themes that were not present in ancient Greek traditional epics. Montenegro has a unique example of a traditional poet, Njegoš, who in his youth was an illiterate 'singer of tales', but then learned to write and created written literature using traditional elements.

⁹⁶ Šemsović has discussed the problem of Alija Nametak's 'editing' of [Ahmed Isakov] Šemić's song which Krauss had published in the *ikavica* dialect in 1886

[Krauss (1886)], producing irrefutable evidence: see Šemsović (2006). Lord already knew that the edition of 1925 [Anon. (1925)] contained an incorrectly edited text of Šemić's song, and made a detailed comparison between these texts (Lord (1974) [281–98]), but his analysis is superficial compared to Šemsović's, because he was unaware of Nametak's role in editing Krauss' edition. A German translation of the song appeared in 1890 [Krauss and Gröber (1890)].

⁹⁷ On the difference between a song learned from other singers in a traditional way and one learned from a songbook, see Čolaković (2004a) [275–86].

⁹⁸ See Čolaković (2004a) 479.

⁹⁹ Hence Parry and Vujnović searched Bijelo Polje for the songbook containing Šemić's version of *The Wedding of Smailagić Meho*: see Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature, PN 6840, in Čolaković (2007) [1.385–95].

¹⁰⁰ Bowra published [Lord's] synopsis of this epic in 1952 [351–4], holding that its grandiose plot proves it to be a real epos. Bynum published it in 1980 [153–308], and describes the process of recording it [(1980) x–xi, xxxi]. I discuss Parry's experiment with this epic in Čolaković (2004a) [481–82].

IV. The validity of the comparison between Međedović and Homer

Like Scheherazade, Međedović created under harsh pressure to compose in the way that the collectors 'ordered'. He sang or dictated *ca.* 80,000 verses during only 40 days of recording. Just before Parry arrived at Bijelo Polje, Međedović's house had burned down; his wife and children had no roof over their heads and he was unemployed. He could earn his 'roof' only through his artistry, by singing and dictating for Parry and Vujnović. The poet found in them his 'God-sent' deliverers.¹⁰¹

A comparison between Homer's works and those of Međedović, although flattering, is not fully justifiable, not only because we have [merely] a small part of the latter's repertoire, which comprised about 50 songs, but also because Homer may have composed only the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, and perhaps the epics about the conquest of Thebes, Achilles' death and the fall of Troy, the returns of Agamemnon and Menelaus (*Nostoi*) and the Argonauts to which he refers. Comparative research on Balkan and other epic traditions, the theory of 'epicizing', and the field experience of collectors prove that the prolongation of epic songs *decreases* the number of songs in a particular tradition. It is no coincidence that Međedović's repertoire comprised fewer songs than that of other solid Bosniac singers in his region. In some traditions, all the epic songs flow into one song of gigantic size performed in numerous 'sequels', hence always in 'fragments' and never as a whole.¹⁰²

Comparison between Bosniac traditional epics and Homer's epics shows that Bosniac mythical songs (for example songs about sieges of cities, the absence of a sacred hero and the death of his substitute, 'the Double', the hero's homecoming from another 'world' and his ensuing revenge against suitors) have deeper meanings than these stories have in Homer.¹⁰³ Moreover, I believe that the mythic-historical stories in traditional pre-Homeric epics likewise had a deeper meaning than in Homer. The deep meaning of [such] mythical stories was developed over centuries with the aid of a conservative style of composition. Since the tragic poets Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides recognized this, they mostly adapted their plots from the cyclic epics rather than from Homer.¹⁰⁴

Homer betrayed his tradition and the meaning of its traditional stories, because he did not fully believe in his tradition or its meaning¹⁰⁵ and, like Međedović, was dissatisfied with the traditional technique of composition. Hence he created a new technique that went beyond the tradition. Homer is a poet of a new age, one which would, simultaneously or soon after, also produce Hesiod, whose didactic poetry is not at all traditional. Armed with his new post-traditional technique of oral epic composition and his individual genius, Homer created some of the most influential literary works of human culture beside the Bible and the Koran, which gave rise to a new 'tradition'. Thus my understanding of Homer is in essence antipodal to Parry's.

Traditional Bosniac epics do not resemble Homer's epics. Aristotle states that the cyclic epics, which provided the plots of the tragedies by Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides, were unlike the Homeric epics.¹⁰⁶ In other words, Bosniac epics and the derivatives of traditional pre-Homeric epics are essentially different from Homer's compositions. Bosniac epics, ancient information about (pre-) and post-Homeric epics, and Aristotle's *Poetics* offer many proofs that Homer is not a traditional, but a post-traditional poet. Only the songs of some of the best Bosniac singers, who in their composition surpassed the limits of their tradition or were deeply at odds with it, resemble Homeric epic composition. In my view, they do so because Homer too transgressed the limits of traditional Greek epic composition. By studying the Bosniac epic singers' breakthrough into post-tradition, we can acquire a better understanding of Homeric post-traditionality. This is where the value of the comparison between Međedović and Homer lies.

¹⁰¹ So Međedović, quoted in context in Parry's manuscript *The Questions from Bijelo Polje* [Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature, PN 12431, apparently unpublished].

¹⁰² In Homeric times there were probably singers who specialized in the creation of songs about the Trojan War and knew all its events down to the smallest detail.

Demodocus' song about the Trojan Horse that begins with Odysseus' order 'start the song when ...' [*Od.* 8.492–520] points to such a possibility.

¹⁰³ See Čolaković (1989); (2004a) [607–30].

¹⁰⁴ [*Cf.* Arist. *Poet.* 23, 1459b2–8.]

¹⁰⁵ See Čolaković (2006 [175–76]).

¹⁰⁶ [*Poet.* 23, 1459a30–1459b2].

V. *The Vizier's Arrival in Travnik*

Međedović's lengthy songs *The Vizier's Arrival in Travnik*, *The Death of Mustajbey of Lika* and *The Revenge of Mustajbey of Lika* show his compositional style and artistry in a truer light than does *The Wedding of Smailagić Meho*. He composed these three songs simultaneously from late June to early July 1935, the first by dictation, the second and third (a continuation of the second) by singing; he himself, [unprompted by Parry,] decided to compose these songs, which he had learned from other singers in the traditional way. He thoughtfully connected them so that they refer to one another.¹⁰⁷

With *The Vizier's Arrival in Travnik*,¹⁰⁸ Međedović introduced Parry and Vujnović to his dearest heroes and themes, and to his unique style of composition; he used this epic's richly woven structure to transport them into his epic world. In it, he proves to be an unsurpassed master of the creation of catalogues and embellished descriptions of heroes, of their speeches and dialogues, of large gatherings and of the beauties, horses, armies, weddings and wars of Bosniac epics. To those versed in these epics, the greatest novelty is the first-rate 'reports', which, at first glance, form 'unnecessary' duplications of the basic theme; Parry did not understand this, and attributed it to deliberate lengthening of the song by duplications, i.e. by the repetition of the basic theme.¹⁰⁹ [Such] reports had already entered Bosniac epic, but Međedović brings a fantastic novelty into them: his heroes retell everything that the singer has previously described, but also [give] extra information that the singer does not, because the latter follows the journey and actions of the central hero alone.¹¹⁰ By using this technique, Međedović, like Homer, makes direct speech predominate over narrative. Digression, the incorporated short retelling of another epic from [Međedović's] own repertoire, likewise narrated by one of the characters, contributes to this as well;¹¹¹ the Homeric epics have many such digressions, for example the stories of Meleager, the Trojan Horse, Menelaus' return and Agamemnon's death.¹¹²

The main theme [of this epic] is post-traditional. It gives us a description and nostalgic glorification of the Bosniacs, who were at one time in the distant past at the peak of their glory, under the rule of a righteous vizier and a sultan well disposed towards Bosnia.¹¹³ The ending of this epic reveals Međedović's inclination to novelize. Such, at times overstretched, endings of songs are a significant innovation of his. Novelization is another essential characteristic of Homer's post-tradi-

¹⁰⁷ Only the best Bosniac singers who have turned towards post-traditionality make references to other songs. Such references are an essential feature of the Homeric epics.

¹⁰⁸ Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature, PN 6802.

¹⁰⁹ I translate from Parry's manuscript *The Questions from Bijelo Polje*: 'I don't understand: when the Ličans come to the vizier, they report on all that happened over in Primorje. But you sang this already; so it's as if you sang the same song twice. Did you do this only when you sang it for us, to make the song longer? ... It is sure that if you sang that song in a *han* on Ramadan, they wouldn't let you sing the same song in one night ... This song that you sang us has four parts, but two of them are the same.' Međedović answered quite appropriately that these are the necessary 'reports' [Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature, PN 6802, 12431, in Čolaković (2007) 1.77 n. 56].

¹¹⁰ We can imagine Međedović's method of structuring this story graphically, as concentric circles within which the main theme widens and eventually fills the largest circle; in each subsequent circle the story is supplemented with new details about events from the viewpoints

of the heroes themselves. Kurtagić developed a similar technique of reports, as did some singers in Marjanović's collection. Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides perfected such reports and the character of the 'messenger'.

¹¹¹ Parry already saw in Međedović's songs similarities to Homeric references to other songs. He tells Međedović the plot of a digression and then asks: 'It seems to me that there is one whole song about this and that the plot is the same ... Do you know this song?' (translated from Parry's manuscript *The Questions from Bijelo Polje* [reference not found]). Međedović indeed listed this song in his repertoire [Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature, PN 6802, 12400].

¹¹² [*Il.* 9.529–99; *Od.* 4.271–89, 8.492–520; *Od.* 4.81–93, 4.341–586; *Od.* 11.405–61, respectively.]

¹¹³ Parry and Vujnović rightly complain that this work of Međedović's lacks Homer's objectivity, i.e. impartiality in presenting both sides in the conflict. Parry also asks Međedović whether he invented the song's ending, while Vujnović critiques his shallow and not entirely ethical characterization of the captured Christian maidens [Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature, PN 6802, 12400, *The Questions from Bijelo Polje*].

tional epics. Homer is the Cervantes of ancient Greece. Like Homer, who in his unique way ironizes and rationalizes the entire corpus of traditional epics of his time to create the novelistic epos, Cervantes ridicules the popular chivalric and pastoral novels to create the modern novel. Just as Don Quixote refers in the second part of the novel to the first book of his wanderings, criticizing its author and content,¹¹⁴ in the *Odyssey* Odysseus refers to the *Iliad* and the return songs of Agamemnon and Menelaus.¹¹⁵ In Alcinous' palace he listens to a song recounting events of the Trojan War and describes his adventures himself.¹¹⁶ Homer's cross-references are exquisite; their greatest charm is that they reinforce the 'credibility' of the *Iliad* with new information and unexpected allusions made by a witness to and important participant in the siege of Troy.

Some ancient Homerists, the so-called *chōrizontes*, thought the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were not the work of a single author. But these epics are, in their unique way, the sole work of such an author. They represent, in an Aristotelian sense, (i) a synthesis of simple events and the miraculous (the role of the gods), full of suffering and torments, and ending in a tragic death (the *Iliad*) and (ii) interwoven ethical events full of *peripeteia* and recognition, with the growth of a youth into a hero (Telemachus) and comical elements that end happily with the wedding of a hero (the *Odyssey*).¹¹⁷

VI. *The Death of Mustajbey of Lika*

The Vizier's Arrival in Travnik is an optimistic epic that concludes with numerous recognitions and happy marriages with captured maidens. According to its plot and structure, it is a comedy as defined by Aristotle.¹¹⁸ However, in *The Death of Mustajbey of Lika*,¹¹⁹ created in parallel [with it] but reminiscent of the *Iliad* in structure, Međedović depicts, with depth and pessimism, the principal hero as a hubristic, tragic character, who in a mindless passion destroys both himself and the Bosniacs. In this song, Međedović's distance from tradition is astounding. Mustajbey, who represents not just the best Bosniac hero but also 'our mirror', as the post-traditional Međedović puts it,¹²⁰ becomes a villain and *hubristēs* who veils Bosnia in black (Appendix A-XIII). This song's mythical background is completely different from that of *The Vizier's Arrival in Travnik*, which describes a reign of justice and reason. It begins with a tremendous sin, committed by the main hero on the day of Bayram and caused by the hero's obsession with the description of Janja's beauty (obsession is a common motif in the Homeric epics and Greek tragedy).¹²¹ Mustajbey brutally whips his wife on [the day of] Bayram, after she rejects his demand that she accept with goodwill his second marriage to an infidel, [the Christian] Janja; this is impossible from the standpoint of a devout woman, a mother and a proud person of noble birth. As Mustajbey's act happens on the day of Bayram, it is sacrilegious and represents the reign of disharmony. His demand is, at first sight, not altogether unacceptable morally, as it conforms to the legality of polygamy among Muslims;¹²² in many Bosniac epics heroes do in fact marry two women, one a Muslim and the

¹¹⁴ [Cervantes (1950) 369.]

¹¹⁵ [*Od.* 11.387–464.]

¹¹⁶ [*Od.* 8.499–520, 9.1–12.453.]

¹¹⁷ [Cf. Arist. *Poet.* 24, 1459b13–16, 1460a11–18, 13, 1453a30–33, respectively.]

¹¹⁸ [Arist. *Poet.* 13, 1453a30–39.]

¹¹⁹ Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature, PN 6807 [in Čolaković (2007) 2.773–810].

¹²⁰ [*The Death of Mustajbey of Lika* lines 2078 and 2148, in Čolaković (2007) 2.805–06.]

¹²¹ A similar plot with tragic events is found in the song *The Adultery of Mujo's Wife*, where the main role of the *hubristēs*, maddened by the news of the most beautiful woman, is played by a Christian, not a Bosniac hero. Even so, in this song the Bosniac hero Mujo Hrnjica is also a *hubristēs*, because he drinks to intoxication and

punishes his lawful wife by making her a servant (this excellent song, which I collected from Kurtagić, is published in Čolaković (2004a) [257–72]). The song contains the archaic mythical layer of the struggle between light and darkness that, I suppose, was preserved only in Montenegro and the Sandžak. In the *Iliad* [19.86–138], Agamemnon attributes his great sin against Achilles to 'madness' [*atē*].

¹²² In patriarchal ancient Greek society the situation was rather similar. Agamemnon and Achilles acquire Chryseis and Briseis as war-booty, and in Homer their relationships with these slaves are not seen as at all sinful (if we leave aside Apollo's anger). Neither Odysseus' amatory adventures [with Calypso and Circe], nor Agamemnon's return from Troy with Cassandra [*Od.* 11.421–23], nor Neoptolemus' [liaison with] Andro-

other a Christian who voluntarily accepts Islam. Moreover, Mustajbey's love for and obsession with the most beautiful woman accords with the ethical bearing of the 'best hero' [in the tradition]. However, Međedović's understanding of ethics and his moral position is contrary to, and in conflict with, the tradition.¹²³

In Aristotelian terms,¹²⁴ this song has a tragic structure, like certain other songs of Međedović and Kurtagić. It presents the atrocious military defeat of the Bosniacs and the justified death of their sinful army commander, Mustajbey, which results from his wife's curse. As in Greek tragedy, a curse replaces a prophecy that must be fulfilled. The *hodža Šuvajlija* and *Tale*, with their ominous forebodings, unveil to us, in multiple layers, our recognition that the curse will be fulfilled. In the entire Bosniac tradition there are only a few examples of such a tragic structure of events.¹²⁵ This song's similarity to Sophocles' tragedy [*Trachiniae*] about Heracles and Iole is astonishing, and shows that Sophocles probably took his plot, with few changes, from epic material and dramatized it. The bloody Bayram outfit of Mustajbey's unhappy wife is like the shirt, soaked in the tainted blood of the centaur Nessus, which Deianeira gives to her husband Heracles after he returns with the captive Iole. Heracles has captured Iole in an act of hubris, just as Mustajbey captures Janja, i.e. by savagely destroying her city. Iole will be married to Heracles' son, just as 'the most beautiful woman' [Janja] will be forced to enter an unhappy marriage with Mustajbey's under-aged son. This song's protagonists, Mustajbey and his wife in the first part and Halil and Janja in the second, are tragic heroes.

The division of *The Death of Mustajbey of Lika* and *The Revenge of Mustajbey of Lika* into two separate songs was an innovation unique to Međedović; this song was sung throughout the Sandžak and Montenegro as *one* song. Traditional singers would briefly recount Mustajbey's death, after which Mujo's revenge of his death would ensue. Parry knew this when he recorded different versions of the song from other singers from Bijelo Polje.¹²⁶ When Međedović performed before traditional listeners, he presented this mythic-historical story as a single song; hence we cannot exclude the possibility that he first made this division just for Parry and Vujnović.¹²⁷

Međedović gives his characters an extraordinary characterization, which is unusual in Bosniac epics. He uses traditional themes, motifs and expressions where we should not expect to find them in traditional epic and where they should not be (Homer continually does the same); by so doing, he reveals his rejection of the tradition and of its naivety, as in [Mustajbey's] wife's use of words reserved in traditional epics for the Sultan and for him alone (Appendix A-I). Questions at once arise for the [traditional] reader or listener to this story. What sort of husband and marriage is this? What sort of sacrilegious celebration of [the day of] Bayram is this? Why does the wife speak to her husband in this way? Mustajbey promises huge financial and other rewards to anyone from

mache [in the *Ilias parva* fr. 21 Bernabé and in Proclus' summary of the *Aethiopsis*] is morally objectionable. After all, Zeus himself is a notorious adulterer, who turns into a bull, a swan or golden rain, if need be, so as to cheat Hera [cf. *Il.* 14.315–28]. But of course slave women in ancient Greece did not have a status equal to that of the lawful wife, as they did among Muslims.

¹²³ I locate the origin of Greek tragedy in a deeply emotional break with the oral epic tradition, in which the traditional naivety of an uncritical glorification of the heroic past leads to its consequences. The post-traditional poet Homer first shaped this split; thus Aeschylus [in saying that his plays were 'slices from Homer's banquet': Ath. 8.347D], Plato [*Resp.* 10.607a] and Aristotle [*Poet.* 4, 1448b38–49a2] rightly believe that he paved the way for Greek tragedy.

¹²⁴ [*Poet.* 13, 1452b30–53a23.]

¹²⁵ For example Kurtagić's song *The Death Warrant for Đerđez Alija* in my collection (Čolaković (2004a) [99–120]). On the structure of events in the works of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides as analysed in Aristotle's *Poetics*, see Čolaković (1989) [21–201, 279–93].

¹²⁶ While recording Međedović there, Parry [also] obtained two variants of the song of Mustajbey's death; these were sung by the accomplished singers Hajro Ferizović (Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature, PN 12393) and Šećo Kolić (Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature, PN 6832).

¹²⁷ In conversation with Vujnović (Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature, PN 12436 and 12443 – Međedović's memories about his life, singers and songs), Međedović proudly talks about how he sang this song in [Iljaz] Sijarić's house for six hours before a distinguished group that included the famed singer Kasim Rebronja [Čolaković (2007) 1.103–8].

whom he seeks a favour; this is again a traditional motif. Međedović uses naive traditional motifs ironically, to show that Mustajbey resorts to bribery; Homer characterizes Agamemnon in a strikingly similar way.¹²⁸ Mustajbey cunningly uses people when he needs them by calling on their naively represented traditional character, as is depicted by his description of the hero Tale. The height of his hubris is his unjust insulting of the best warriors by calling them cowards,¹²⁹ and his drunkenness and pre-marital relationship with the captured Janja.

Odysseus' meeting with his dead mother [Anticleia] in the underworld is a superb example of Homer's use of traditional themes at unexpected places.¹³⁰ I believe that, according to Bosniac and Greek tradition, Odysseus should have met his mother only after his homecoming, when the hero's mother dies only after she has recognized her son.¹³¹ In the *Odyssey* she dies of grief because her son does not return, which, although unacceptable to the tradition, seems more logical and humane. Odysseus' meeting with Nausicaa is another example.¹³² From the standpoint of tradition, this meeting should have resulted in his (or at least Telemachus') marriage to Nausicaa. [Again,] Odysseus travels the same route as the *Argonauts* did before him,¹³³ so that the description of their travels could be included in the story of Odysseus' return. The account of Telemachus' journey¹³⁴ is unjustified in the tradition, because he does not rescue his father and his journey has no effect on the plot. The description of Penelope's 'non-recognition' of Odysseus¹³⁵ is ironic, endearing and humorous. Whereas, in the tradition, the theme of the recognition of the husband [at the moment of their meeting] would have been the climax of the plot, in Homer the wise Penelope cunningly and stubbornly demands that Odysseus prove his identity to her. Thereby Homer ironically shows that he had heard several traditional variants of Odysseus' return, including one in which the 'unfaithful' Penelope is preparing for a new wedding. He develops Penelope's complex character by combining different, mutually opposed traditional variants.

There are many such examples in the *Iliad* too. Patroclus' death,¹³⁶ which from the perspective of tradition is the tragic and necessary death of the substitute 'Double' of the sacred hero, is differently motivated in the *Iliad*, and Homer all but discards the mythic theme of the 'Double'. I suspect that in the pre-Homeric tradition Patroclus had no role in the siege of Troy. In Homer Achilles is not a sacred hero, and the *Theomachia*, the magnificent traditional theme of the battle of the gods,¹³⁷ becomes a comic motif. The story about the Trojan Horse¹³⁸ may be Homer's humorous 'rationalization' of the naive traditional theme of a winged horse that leaps or flies over the fortification of an enemy city. Homer is ironic when he ridicules the beloved traditional theme of the hero's conversation with his supernatural horse. In Homer, the horse speaks to Achilles,¹³⁹ but 'Achilles' heel' goes unmentioned as an overly naive subject.

Međedović tends to ironize his tradition likewise: for example, the essential traditional and mythical themes 'brother almost kills brother' and 'the absence of a sacred hero' are present in the epic only as comical elements in the story (Appendix B).¹⁴⁰ Likewise it is only in Međedović's song that we find that the [hero's] mother does not die, but merely faints for a moment when her son returns after many years of captivity in the underworld.¹⁴¹ Moreover, in his song, this hero finds an unfaithful wife in his palace preparing for another marriage, and punishes her with death.

¹²⁸ [*Il.* 9.119–57.]

¹²⁹ [One may compare Agamemnon's insults to Achaean leaders at *Il.* 4.327–421.]

¹³⁰ [*Od.* 11.84–89.]

¹³¹ [Lord (1960) 177.]

¹³² [*Od.* 6.85–320.]

¹³³ [*Od.* 12.70. The argument is made by Meuli (1921).]

¹³⁴ [*Od.* 2.267–4.623, 15.1–300, 495–549.]

¹³⁵ [*Od.* 23.1–206.]

¹³⁶ [*Il.* 16.1–867.]

¹³⁷ [*Il.* 21.1–514.]

¹³⁸ [*Od.* 8.485–520.]

¹³⁹ [*Il.* 19.392–424.]

¹⁴⁰ *Gavran the Brigand Cheiftain and Serdar Mujo*; see Čolaković (2004a) [381–432].

¹⁴¹ [This is in] Međedović's unpublished song *Kara Omeraga's Slavery* (Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature, PN 12465, 9 August 1935); this song has only 1,302 verses – a result of Parry's experiment in which he asked Međedović to sing it without embellishment (*kićenje*).

VII. *The Revenge of the Death of Mustajbey of Lika*¹⁴²

In an excellent parallelism with *The Death of Mustajbey of Lika*, *The Revenge of the Death of Mustajbey of Lika* too starts on the day of Bayram, 12 years after the Bosniacs' defeat. The magnificent but sinister wife of Mustajbey, accompanied by her little son Bećirbey, too young for heroic deeds, meets their leading warriors. Again disharmony reigns and a great hubris occurs. Although Bosnia has barely recovered from its enormous loss of warriors, a new war is about to begin, which Mustajbey's wife will start. In an act of hubris, she unjustly reprimands Mujo Hrnjica, the 'best' Bosniac hero and army commander, for failing to avenge Mustajbey's death.

In a second parallelism with *The Death of Mustajbey of Lika*, after Mujo has been shamefully reprimanded, he bitterly describes the many years he spent in a vain effort to avenge Mustajbey. This digression is not a short retelling of the epic song, as in *The Vizier's Arrival at Travnik*. Mujo's digression at once tells a scholar versed in Bosniac epic that this song's plot has a completely different mythic structure from that of *The Vizier's Arrival at Travnik*: whereas the digression in the first song recounts the heroic victory of the Bosniacs' chief horsemen in a horse race and duels at Vienna, this one describes the failed attempts of a disguised assassin to ambush and kill his adversary – an undignified theme for a traditional epic. Although Mujo shows commendable courage and cunning, it becomes clear that he is unequal to his enemy, whom we already know from the previous song to be the real hero. In Mujo's words, his enemy cannot be conquered 'by human strength', [but] only by a sacred hero-avenger (Ibro Hamajlić).¹⁴³

Mustajbey's decapitated head remains impaled on the enemy's fortification wall; this must be avenged and the head rescued. As the main Bosniac commander and Mustajbey's successor, Mujo announces the mustering of troops for a large retaliatory operation. The young and unheroic Bećirbey will join the venture and single-handedly avenge his father; as a result the Bosniacs will marry him to Janja. This decision, albeit traditional, is, according to Međedović, quite unreasonable and introduces a new plot that will end tragically.

The height of Međedović's rejection of tradition is yet to follow. Ironically, and quite unjustifiably according to tradition, he incorporates into the theme a hero who ventures to spy on the enemy himself with two incapable helpers, in order once again to create a parallel not only with *The Death of Mustajbey of Lika* (the duplicated spying departure of the standard-bearer or *bajraktar*), but also with *The Vizier's Arrival at Travnik* ([where] Uskok Radovan is the capable helper). When the best Bosniac hero, Halil Hrnjica, meets Janja, he gives her his *besa* (sacred oath) to be faithful to her, a traditional motif. Janja, 'the most beautiful woman', promises in return to bear him 'a son better than his father', which is the dream of every hero in both Homeric and Bosniac epic. However, listeners to Bosniac epics [in general] and to Međedović's [in particular] know that 'historically' Halil has no children and that Janja has already been promised to the adolescent Bećirbey, Mustajbey's son. They also know that Mujo has given his word that this will happen and that Bećirbey will single-handedly decapitate Janja's brother Jovan (compare the young Neoptolemus, who kills Priam and in turn wins Andromache). By novelizing the epic, Međedović creates a tragic plot. Halil is forced to break his sacred oath (this is at odds with the traditional concept of the 'greatest hero') and the unfortunate Janja, cheated by the greatest of Bosniac heroes (another parallel to Mustajbey's wife, who was cheated on [the day of] Bayram in the previous song), is forced to marry Bećirbey, though she has helped the Bosniacs to avenge Mustajbey's decapitation. Thus this magnificent epos concludes not with a happy but rather with a sad and

¹⁴² Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature, PN 6810 [in Čolaković (2007) 2.811–908].

¹⁴³ The deep mythic layer of the song lies in Halil's visit to the eternally young sacred hero Ibro Hamajlić.

During this visit Halil refers to their joint undertaking and their meeting on the mythical mountain Jadica. This is the theme of a well-known song in Međedović's repertoire, which was sung by other Bosniac singers as well.

tragic ending.¹⁴⁴ The song's main theme is the hubris of Bosniac heroes and the often unfair position of women in traditional patriarchal society. It is a pity that Parry did not persuade Međedović to dictate this entirely post-traditional song under ideal conditions as his 'longest and most beautiful song'.

VIII. *The Wedding of Smailagić Meho*

*The Wedding of Smailagić Meho*¹⁴⁵ became Međedović's 'masterpiece' chiefly because it was written from dictation under conditions that were ideal for the singer, as Parry had arranged. This [song] is the unique result of collaboration between an excellent singer and an outstanding scholar under exceptional circumstances. It has provoked many contradictory interpretations, ranging from an uncritical enthusiasm, sometimes completely unprofessional, that prompted a national awakening among the Bosniacs, to an unscholarly and unjustified rejection caused by a prejudice against Bosniac epic. Some feel that Međedović followed too closely the thematic structure of Šemić's song from the songbook [(Anon. (1925))]. The first editor of Međedović's text, Bynum (the only person, apart from Lord and myself, who knew his complete repertoire), believes that learning songs from published texts produced 'thematic paralysis'.¹⁴⁶ This is an acceptable term to describe how learning songs from songbooks devastated Christian and Bosniac epics; I believe that the appearance of the Homeric epics in writing and their subsequent memorization for public performance created a similar paralysis, the death agony of ancient Greek traditional epic. Lord translated *The Wedding of Smailagić Meho* into English, unfortunately in prose.¹⁴⁷ He deemed it the best traditional epic in the Bosniac tradition, and many scholars agree. In my view, this song should not be considered traditional at all,¹⁴⁸ because the singer learned it from a songbook and the collector persuaded him to lengthen it. As is proved by his manuscript *The Questions from Bijelo Polje*, Parry already doubted the traditionality of Međedović's composition, and especially that of this particular song. He was disappointed that Međedović had not followed the original plot from the songbook more closely.¹⁴⁹

As an artistic piece, *The Wedding of Smailagić Meho* is an oral epos unique in the whole of Slavic literature. This magnificent song has been analyzed by many scholars, both south Slavic and others, like Maurice Bowra and Cedric Whitman, who recognize it to be a real epos on the basis of its outstanding structure and plot.¹⁵⁰ Lord shows that parts of the song are of 'Homeric quality',¹⁵¹ and Bynum claims that it is perhaps 'the best Telemacheia' we will ever have.¹⁵² Others think it is lengthened excessively.¹⁵³ On the basis of its plot, Bowra deems it too episodic.¹⁵⁴ [Ramón] Menéndez Pidal regards it as developed from tradition,¹⁵⁵ and Danek seems to agree.¹⁵⁶ Many scholars of traditional oral epics have held that this song cannot be considered a true product of tradition, because Parry persuaded Međedović to sing it in the longest possible form.

¹⁴⁴ The structure of Euripides' *Iphigenia at Aulis*, in which Achilles must agree to Iphigenia's sacrifice [1338–1432], is similar.

¹⁴⁵ Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature, PN 6840 [in Čolaković (2007) 1.165–347].

¹⁴⁶ Bynum (1993) [653].

¹⁴⁷ Parry was first to begin translating this epic into English, also in prose, right after his return from Bijelo Polje.

¹⁴⁸ See Čolaković (2004a) [282–86].

¹⁴⁹ Parry was also certain that in *The Wedding of Smailagić Meho* Međedović had merged the plots of two different but related songs; this was firmly denied by

Međedović, and seems not to be true [*Pričanje za rukopis* 6840, in Čolaković (2007) 1.371–77].

¹⁵⁰ [Bowra (1952) 351–54, 357–58; Whitman (1958) 5.]

¹⁵¹ Lord (1971) [464].

¹⁵² Bynum (1968) [1303].

¹⁵³ [For example Kirk (1976) 203.]

¹⁵⁴ Bowra (1952) [354].

¹⁵⁵ [Menéndez Pidal (1965–1966) 196–214.]

¹⁵⁶ Danek translated Međedović's *The Wedding of Vlahinjić Alija* into German verse (Danek (2002) [43–230]).

Its most Homeric characteristics are: (i) the 'bringing to life' of ossified traditional themes, for example the description of the fine houses of chief heroes, the excellent account of the gathering of an army (the catalogue), the description of war and especially the tragedy of large martial defeats; (ii) superior characterization, especially of Meho, Tale, the treacherous vizier and Cifrić Hasan; (iii) the novelization of the epic story, especially in the second part of the song; and (iv) the free incorporation of themes from other songs, and of motifs from folk stories, also in its second part.¹⁵⁷ Međedović readily incorporated into this song some themes that were not in the songbook, for example Tale's forcing the vizier to reveal treasure that is hidden behind a secret door in the treasury,¹⁵⁸ the punishment by hanging of the vizier and of General Petar,¹⁵⁹ and the wounded Grdan Omer-agma's hiding under the bridge;¹⁶⁰ these are akin to the Homeric post-traditional novelization of epic composition. This song is, in the truest sense of the word, a *treatise* on the ethics of Bosnian heroes, as is convincingly shown by [Hodo] Katal and [Ferid] Muhić,¹⁶¹ and on the essence of *murtatstvo* (treason).

IX. *The Conquest of Kandija*¹⁶²

Međedović sang *The Conquest of Kandija* about the lengthy siege of Kandija towards the end of Parry's [period of] collecting, probably as a farewell gift to Parry and Vujnović. When Vujnović finished transcribing it, he wrote: 'when Avdo is no longer among the living, there will be no one able to sing like him'.¹⁶³ Its introduction poignantly enumerates sacred places that the sultan's beautiful daughters are visiting, which the singer only dreamed of or heard about from happier, richer Muslims, who had been fortunate enough to travel to Mecca, see the Kaaba and become *hadjis*.¹⁶⁴ This part of the song is a magnificent 'postcard' for underprivileged listeners to the singer's sacred and profoundly post-traditional story during the long and blissful nights of Ramadan.¹⁶⁵

Interpretations of this song will vary. I think its meaning lies in Međedović's certainty that throughout our lives we must all travel a thorny path, whether one is poor or a sultan. In this song the main hero dies, gleaming and golden like the sun, as does his magical horse (this is a post-traditional theme, because a sacred hero cannot die, but can only vanish),¹⁶⁶ while the great Bosniac heroes, from generation to generation, personified by grandfather Ljubović and his sons and

¹⁵⁷ In his version of *The Wedding of Smailagić Meho* from 1950, Međedović novelizes the plot even more freely, and adds a character, the wife of the treacherous vizier, and horse- and foot-races at Meho's wedding [unpublished, but summarized in Lord (1974) 298–323]. Homer uses a similar technique, especially in the *Odyssey*: see Carpenter (1946) [165]. Woodhouse (1930) and Page [(1955); (1973)] investigate folk elements in Homer.

¹⁵⁸ [Čolaković (2007) 1.334–36, lines 11441–595].

¹⁵⁹ [Čolaković (2007) 1.337–38, lines 11635–65].

¹⁶⁰ [Čolaković (2007) 1.323, lines 10660–70].

¹⁶¹ Katal (2006); Muhić (2006).

¹⁶² Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature, PN 12447 [Čolaković (2007) 2.909–98].

¹⁶³ 21 May 1939, Cambridge MA [in Čolaković (2007) 1.87–88].

¹⁶⁴ A fervent believer, Međedović dreamed of completing the *hajj*; he spoke of it to Parry and Vujnović, listing all the local *hadjis* (pilgrims) whom he knew [Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature, PN 6802, 12380, in Čolaković (2007) 1.88 n. 79]:

Parry: 'Are there any people in Bijelo Polje who went to Mecca?'

Međedović: 'Before the war there were: Hajji Selim Dervović, Hajji Ibro Dervović, Hajji Ibrahim-bey

Kajabegović, Hajji Medaga Dobardžić. They all passed away. We call them *hadžije* today'.

¹⁶⁵ In a variant of Salih Ugljanin's song *The Two Sultan's Wives*, the wives never reach the Kaaba, but, driven by a storm, suffer shipwreck before Kandija [Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature, PN 656, dictated on 18 November 1934 and published in Lord (1954)]. The celebrated song *The Two Sultan's Wives* was dictated by Bećir Islamović to Marjanović on 16 October 1888, and the Sarajevo variant was published by Petranović in 1870 (*Tzar Suleiman and the King of Kandija*, in Petranović (1867–1870) 3.[543–52] no. 56). Before he met Međedović, Parry recorded a variant of this song in Gacko from the competent singer Avdić (Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature, PN 913, *The Sultan Conquers Kandija*, dictated). The earliest texts of the song about the conquest of Kandija were published by Karadžić (1894) [82–86] and Bogišić (1878) [311–14 no. 113]. In 1965 Lord recorded *The Two Sultan's Wives* sung by Hazir Čolaković from Kladnica, which I transcribed at Harvard in 1986 (558 verses).

¹⁶⁶ On the other hand, the sultan's construction of the magnificent mausoleum in which grandfather and grandson Ljubović are ceremoniously buried resembles Achilles' funeral [*Od.* 24.43–84, especially 80–84].

grandson, leave behind a lustrous remembrance – and their widows. The good and heroic widows will raise their children to become great warriors, worthy of the memory of their glorious fathers and grandfathers. This song is also a treatise on heroic ethics and a statement of the singer's belief in the necessary fulfilment of God's will. Throughout the song he conveys the essence of life's constant struggle for justice and his strong faith in God's providence. With this song he again proves that he is a post-traditional singer-artist *par excellence*, like Homer.

X. Conclusion

The argument that Homer's poems are traditional because they are composed in the 'traditional style' is misleading (it originated, I suppose, from Parry's dubious definition of style as a 'form of thought'). It is a perilous idea, which consequently led Parry's successors to deny the existence of one of the greatest and surely most influential poets in human history, and drowned Homer in an 'ancient Greek oral epic tradition' (the same was attempted with Hesiod).

What is *tradition*, and what is *traditional* in Homer, and what is *not*, are the key (Homeric) questions that Homerists should answer. It is not the question of whether Homer's poems are oral, taken down by dictation or written.¹⁶⁷ What is 'fixed' text and 'fixed' plot, and what 'to be fixed' means, and what is the origin of 'fixation' are the (Homeric) questions that Homerists should define, before trying to establish when, how, why and by whom Homer's poems were 'fixed'.

Neither 'Homer-The-Singer-of-Tales' (which is the traditional phase that Homer undoubtedly transcended), nor 'a dictating Homer' (which may entail speculating on the origin of the alphabet and venturing too far in an unproductive search for 'Palamedes'), nor 'Homer-The-Culture-Hero' (which throws post-Homerica back into Homerica) provides us with a satisfactory answer. Nor does the highly speculative 'evolutionary theory', which yielded no more than educated guesses about the 'gradual process of fixation' or 'crystallization' of the Homeric poems. These models, all of them springing from Parry's ideas and his work in the field, prove only one thing: that their authors are applying vague concepts about tradition and traditional heroic epics.

I offer the hypothesis that there was one individual, whom the Greeks decided to call Homer, who 'fixed' the texts of his *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. (This is not a new answer to the Homeric Question, but rather my attempt to give it back its question mark and proper meaning.)¹⁶⁸ By 'fixing' the texts, Homer contributed, deliberately or unintentionally, to the destruction of his own tradition. For *not-to-be-fixed* is the essence of tradition. The fixed plot and the fixed text of a poem do not exist in the tradition of heroic epic-making. The fixation appears only when the content and the plot of epic becomes firmly established and thus petrified, when it contains a counter-traditional meaning and new or inverted traditional themes and motifs, and when it is preserved in writing (in order to be non-traditionally learned by heart and delivered in a non-traditional form of oral performance).¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁷ Homer might have written his poems and they could still be oral, and appear to be oral. (They were meant to be learnt by heart and delivered in oral performance.) Alternatively, Homer might have dictated his texts, and they could still have the characteristics of a written text, or he could have written his texts less than carefully, so that they appear to be dictated and unrevised (not to mention mistakes caused by copying and recopying manuscripts). This is not a paradox. Parry collected many poems by singers who wrote down their poems (I did the same). These poems do not differ from their sung versions, unless the singers were semi-literate and found writing too difficult. They did not recognize the advantages of the 'new' medium in writing down their texts. I have worked with some singers who also wrote down their own new poems, never heard or sung by anyone. They did recognize those

advantages, as Homer also might have done. There are singers whose poems, although orally delivered and in song, possess when transcribed the qualities of a carefully premeditated written text. Such poets sing at a slower pace, which enables them to make verses full of internal rhymes and other poetic qualities, and to avoid mistakes.

¹⁶⁸ The view of Homer as a superb poet, who provided within his epics a 'redaction' of ancient Greek tradition, using a traditional style mixed with innovations that display unmatched individual artistry, existed long before Parry.

¹⁶⁹ The idea that Homer's epics were traditional because they were orally performed at the Panathenaia and elsewhere is as ridiculous as to state that Bach's music is 'traditional' because it has been performed in concert halls and churches for a few centuries.

The mythic-historic traditional poems about the siege of Troy and the tragic sacrifice of the substitute became, when 'fixed', the *Iliad* and the poem of Achilles' anger.¹⁷⁰ The author of the *Iliad* deprived his creation of its traditional mythic-historic content. On the other hand, the *Iliad* gained via its transformation its volume, its poetic and many other values and its productive strength.

One could object that the traditional epic poems also appear as somewhat 'fixed'.¹⁷¹ However, they are fixed in a specific way – they are 'fixed with' their own traditional limits and content. This is as natural and organic a fixation as we can know. Each traditional poem differs from the rest, and is at the same time similar to the rest, because none of them lacks anything given them by nature from time immemorial. The strength of traditional poems lies in their generative ability to produce ever-new poems; the post-traditional poem possesses only its self-reproductive power, as it is an artefact and inorganic.¹⁷²

Homer 'fixed' his post-traditional heroic poems using traditional poems and material from other traditional forms of expression, including many inventions from 'his own mind', in a different way: his poems, which he created (and perhaps performed) in his own unique improvisational style, became 'fixed without'. Homer intervened in the traditional themes, and inverted the traditional meaning and content, because he questioned it, laughed at it, criticized it and situated himself above it. 'Homer-The-Singer-above-Tales' placed himself above the world and the characters of gods and heroes that the traditional poems portrayed, thus definitely stepping out of his own tradition (Ps.-Longinus noticed this, in his phenomenal work *On the Sublime*).¹⁷³

Homer's inversion of tradition gave birth not only to his expression of his own *Weltanschauung*, but later greatly contributed to the formation of Greek religion, geography, mythography, mythology, history, tragedy, philosophy, art, science, education and politics; it gave birth to the Western point of view and to Western literature. Studying Homer with all of this in mind gives us an insight into the beginnings and origin of Western, essentially post-traditional and non-traditional, culture.

Appendix A

A-I

[From Međedović, *The Death of Mustajbey of Lika* (Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature, PN 6807, in Čolaković (2007) 2.783.) After Mustajbey's wife hears that Mustajbey wants to marry Janja, she says:

'Zazor mi je u te pogledati,	685
A kamo li s tobom govoriti!	
Ti si begler sultan cara draga,	
A na tebe ferman Sulejmana.	
Ja, beglerbeg, jedna ženska glava,	
Jesam deček od dobra odžaka,	690
Među sedam brata jedihnica.'	

¹⁷⁰ Neither someone's 'anger' nor someone's 'homecoming' is traditional subject matter. Both anger and homecoming are present in traditional heroic poems, and may be important motifs, but the subject matter of the traditional *Iliad* is the siege and the sack of a city and the tragic death of the substitute, or a blameless hero, and that of the traditional *Odyssey* is the return of a hero temporarily released from the realm of death (this return is usually granted only conditionally, upon the hero's voluntary return to the realm of death, after he has taken care of some important private or public business in the realm of the living).

¹⁷¹ This is only an appearance, when one reads the transcribed text of the poem. Neither the singer, nor his

audience, knows exactly what will be the final product of his singing. Experienced collectors have observed that the singers are as amazed at their poems, and at their own ability to 'reproduce' and 'revive' them, as their audience.

¹⁷² There is a false impression that written and post-traditional poems, like Homer's, are superior to the products of traditional literature. Homer is superior in some respects, traditional singers of tales in other respects. A traditional poet could never make a Homeric poem, and Homer could never make a traditional poem. The fact of the matter is that the tradition is necessarily more potent than any individual post- or non-traditional poet.

¹⁷³ [[Longinus] *Subl.* 9.7.]

Oh, may God grant, and holy Muhammad,
 that you go, bey, and raise Krajina,
 and arrive in health at Uzovlje,
 to capture Jovan's [sister] Jana!
 May she come from Uzovlje in health, 735
 and may you stay and lose your head!
 May your widow Jana remain
 so that it is spoken of while this world lasts!'

This curse represents a prophecy that must be fulfilled, like prophecies in Greek tragedy.

A-III

The duplication of the scene 'entering the chamber with boots on' in *The Death of Mustajbey of Lika* and *The Revenge of Mustajbey of Lika*.

1. From Međedović, *The Death of Mustajbey of Lika* [Čolaković (2007) 2.782]. Mustajbey in Jana's chamber in boots and with his whip:

No kandžiju uz'o od Goluba, 633
 ...
 Pa se š njome bije po i čizmama. 636
 Šeće begler po kafazu hanki.
 Hanka njega dvori za vratima

He takes the horsewhip for Golub [sc. his horse] 633
 ...
 and with the horsewhip he hits his boots. 636
 The commander strolls in his wife's chamber.
 His wife serves him behind the door

2. From Međedović, *The Revenge of Mustajbey of Lika* [Čolaković (2007) 2.880]. Jana's meeting with Halil:

'Nemoj gazit' čohu bez čizmama,
 Haj' s čizmama na moje dvorove!' 4340

'Do not walk on cloth without boots,
 but with boots in my chamber!' 4340

A-IV

Examples of the *besa* (word of honour) in traditional epic songs.

1. From Kurtagić, *Kraljević Marko i Đerzelez Alija* (Koželjac 2001). Here, the word of honour is given several times to emphasize that the promise must be fulfilled. Kraljević Marko gives his word to four heroes that he will fight a duel with Đerzelez Alija to see who is the better hero:

Besu daje Kraljeviću Marko:
 'besa vam je, moja braćo mila,
 hoću tražit' Đerzelez Aliju;
 dadne li Bog i sreća donese,
 hoćemo se muški okušati,
 jednom je vakat umrijeti,
 obojica falit' se nećemo'.

Kraljević Marko gives his *besa*:
 ‘my *besa* is, my dear brothers,
 I will search for Đerzelez Alija;
 Were God to grant and luck to bring it,
 we will test ourselves as men.
 For one it is the time to die;
 we will not both boast of winning.’

According to his *besa*, Kraljević Marko tries to kill Đerzelez. He searches for Đerzelez and finds him sleeping on a mountain. He does not succeed in killing him, even while he sleeps, because Đerzelez is a sacred hero. He comes to his mother, who gives him her word of honour that she will not reveal his words to anyone. She advises him what to do, because Đerzelez is so powerful that he will find him and kill him:

‘Je li *besa*, moja majko mila,
 da ne znade ni zemlja ni trava,
 da ti majko, nikom pričat’ nećeš?’
 Besu dala ostarala majka:
 Za života nikom kazat’ neće.

‘Is it a *besa*, my dear mother,
 that no one know, neither earth nor grass,
 that you, mother, will tell no one?’
 His aged mother gave her *besa*;
 while living she will tell no one.

2. From Mahit Binjoš Muminović, *The Wedding of Šarac-Mahmut Pasha (Ženidba Šarac-Mahmut paše)* (Koželjac 2001). Rade has been captured by Christians and brought to Zadar. The Ban of Zadar asks him who was the leader who captured his parents. Rade, although in mortal danger, tells him the truth that it was he himself and Mujo who captured them:

‘Besa, bane, da te lagat’ neću:
 serdar Mujo četni starješina,
 a ja, bane, četni dumendžija’.

‘My *besa*, Ban, that I will not lie to you:
 Serdar Mujo the troop leader,
 and I, Ban, the troop’s helmsman.’

A-V

From Međedović, *The Revenge of Mustajbey of Lika* [Čolaković (2007) 2.889–90, 907]. Jana asks Halil to marry her and Halil gives her his *besa*:

‘Nemoj slagat’, ka što lažu turci, 4970
 No me uzmi! Da me ne prevariš!
 Pa da vidiš što će biti ljuba,
 Što će bula roditi junaka.’

...
 To se Halil preko muke svije, 4976
 A u strahu tvrde bese daje:
 ‘Ja te uzet’, drugom dati neću!’

‘Do not lie, as the Turks lie, 4970
 but take me! See that you do not cheat me!’

Then you will see what a darling will be,
how a Muslim woman will bear a hero.'

...

Here the tormented Halil bends, 4976
and in fear his rigid *besa* gives:
'I will take you, to no other will I give you!'

Halil is forced to break his word, after he is asked by his generals and persuaded by Tale Ličanin, who speaks as follows to Halil:

'O, Halile, srce od nedara, 6200
Ti si moja, sine, osobina!
Ja te Bogom kumim milosnijem,
Podaj Janu begskom Bećir-begu!
Nek je gleda Mustaj-begovica,
Nek joj prije srce pukne kletu, 6205
Koja joj je bega izgubila,
Za čem se je utrla Krajina!
Talska riječ prelomi Halila.
Janu daše begu Bećir-begu ...

'O, Halil, heart from my bosom, 6200
you are my confrere, my son!
I beseech you by merciful God,
give Jana to the bey Bećir-bey!
Let Mustaj-bey's wife watch her,
let her accursed heart break first, 6205
that lost her her bey,
for which Krajina was ravaged!
Tale's word breaks Halil.
He gives Jana to the bey Bećir-bey ...

This is a major departure from Bosniac tradition as known to me, and transcends the tradition in such a way as Homer could! Jana makes a request that cannot be fulfilled by the greatest Bosniac hero, and he is forced to accept it, and then not to fulfil it. Here Međedović, as in several other places [in the epic], approaches the real meaning of a tragic event. Here we are dealing with the most beautiful woman promising the greatest Bosniac hero that she will bear him a son – a true hero. This is the dream of every epic hero. With his inability to keep his word, Halil becomes the tragic hero *par excellence* as he will never have children. Međedović created from this epic a really tragic story.

A-VI

From Hajro Ferizović (traditional singer, around 90 years old), *The Death of Mustajbey of Lika* (Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature, PN 12393). Janja tells Halil how to win Jovan the Captain and at the end bids him not to fear her betrayal. She does not ask Halil for anything in return nor for Halil's *besa* to marry her, as this theme is not part of the traditional song about the death and revenge of Mustajbey of Lika:

'Sal se nemoj od mene prepanut, 1298
Jer te nikom prokazati neću.'

'But do not be afraid of me, 1298
for I will not betray you to anyone.'

A-VII

The *Questions from Bijelo Polje* (the conversation about the song *The Vizier's Arrival in Travnik* is Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature, PN 6802, 12380, 12400, 12423, 12431 and 12434; the conversation about the song *The Wedding of Smilagić Meho* and the characteristics of Međedović's epics are Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature, PN 6840, 12445, 12450 and 12457).

Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature, PN 6840 [in Čolaković (2007) 1.382–84]:

Vujnović: Moreš li mi tačno reć' đe si ti okitijo u toj pjesmi?

Međedović: Mogu.

Vujnović: Što je iz tvoje glave.

Međedović: Mogu, iz moje glave sve i da ti se zakunem.

Vujnović: Eh, dobro. Ne treba se klet'.

Međedović: Ol mi vjerovat?

Vujnović: Hoću, čoječe! Đe si okitijo?

Međedović: Đe sam okitijo? Eh kunem ti se, te sam sve iz moje glave svaku pesmu ...

Vujnović: Can you tell me exactly where did you embellish in this song?

Međedović: I can.

Vujnović: Is it from your head?

Međedović: I can, everything is from my head, and I swear it to you.

Vujnović: Good! No need to swear.

Međedović: Will you believe me?

Vujnović: I will, man! Where did you embellish?

Međedović: Where did I embellish? I swear to you, I embellished everything from my head in each song

...

Međedović explains to Vujnović how he embellishes the battle. He clearly states his awareness that his composition is different from that of other singers known to him:

Ko će ić' na topove? Ko će dočekati straže od druge države? I ko će more pritisnut' obale, da preko mora ne sustigne vojska? Kudije će se vrstati borba? Đe će se vojske sastavlјati? Na kojeme mestu i kakojeme? Kod čijega dvora i topova? To je kod mene sve, kod drugije nema.

Who will go to the cannons? Who will wait for the guards from other countries? And who will defend the coast so that the army does not come over the sea? How will the battle manoeuvre? Where will the armies meet? In what place and how? Near whose court and cannons? All that is in my songs; others [sc. other singers] don't have it.

Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature, PN 12436 and 12443 [in Čolaković (2007) 1.128] contain Međedović's memories about his life, singers and songs:

Vujnović: Je li otac dobro znao, kao ti da okiti pjesmu?

Međedović: Nije kao ja.

Vujnović: A đe si ti naučijo tako?

Međedović: Ja sam naučijo iz meraka, iz srca moga.

Vujnović: Did your father know how to embellish a song as well as you do?

Međedović: Not like me.

Vujnović: And how did you learn it?

Međedović: I learnt it from enjoyment, from my heart.

A-VIII

Examples of passages from the *Odyssey* that do not belong in traditional epics (translations from Fitzgerald 1961).

Book 9 [130–41], a description of the geography of an island and a review of the possible use of the land; there are no examples like this in Bosniac traditional epic:

‘This isle – seagoing folk would have annexed it
and built their homesteads on it: all good land,
fertile for every crop in season: lush
well-watered meads along the shore, vines in profusion,
prairie, clear for the plow, where grain would grow
chin-high by harvest time, and rich sub-soil.
The island cove is landlocked, so you need
no hawsers out astern, bow-stones or mooring:
run in and ride there till the day your crews
chafe to be under sail, and a fair wind blows.
You’ll find good water flowing from a cavern
through dusky poplars into the upper bay.’

Book 9 [218–23], numerous words that are not in the traditional epics:

‘so we looked round at everything inside:
a drying rack that sagged with cheeses, pens
crowded with lambs and kids, each in its class:
firlings apart from middlings, and the “dewdrops,”
or newborn lambkins, penned apart from both.
And vessels full of whey were brimming there –
bowls of earthenware and pails for milking.’

Book 19 [564–69]:

‘Issuing by the ivory gate are dreams
of glimmering illusion, fantasies,
but those that come through solid polished horn
may be borne out, if mortals only know them.
I doubt it came by horn, my fearful dream –
too good to be true, that, for my son and me.’

A-IX

Some of the songs in the Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature from singers who recorded their songs by hand and had their songs collected by autograph (see the Milman Parry Collection on line at http://ted.lib.harvard.edu/ted/deliver/advancedsearch?_collection=mpcol).

1. Songs of Avdo Avdić from Gacko

- (a) *Ženidba Čejvanović Mehe* (*The Wedding of Čejvanović Meho*): Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature, PN 957
- (b) *Ličanin Tale i Smiljanić Ilija* (*Tale of the Lika and Smiljanić Ilija*): Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature, PN 958
- (c) *Kajtaž Omeraga i Dojčin kapetan* (*Kajtaž Omeragha and Captain Dojčin*): Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature, PN 6208
- (d) *Halil Hrnjica djeli mejdan sa arapom u Stambolu* (*Halil Hrnjica Fights a Duel with the Arab in Istanbul*): Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature, PN 6210
- (e) *Ženidba Halila Hrnjice* (*The Wedding of Halil Hrnjica*): Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature, PN 6211

2. Songs of Ćamil Kulenović from Kulen Vakuf

- (a) *Ibro Bajraktar djeli mejdan sa Šarac kapetanom za Mandulu gospoju (Standard-Bearer Ibro Fights a Duel with Captain Šarac for Lady Mandula)*: Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature, PN 1942
- (b) *Mustajbeg Lički izbavlja Ajku, sestru Crnice Alage (Mustajbey of the Lika Rescues Ajka, the Sister of Crnica Alagha)*: Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature, PN 1941
- (c) *Ženidba Crnice Alage sa Jelom bana korlatskoga (The Wedding of Crnica Alagha and Jela, Daughter of the Ban of Korlat)*: Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature, PN 1943

A-X

Lord stated in *The Singer of Tales*: 'In the Yugoslav tradition stories are kept separate and, to the best of my knowledge, singers never refer in one song to the events of another' [Lord (1960) 159]. However, there are many such references in Avdo Međedović's songs.

1. There is a reference in *The Death of Mustajbey of Lika* to Tale Ličanin's usual feats in the tradition [Čolaković (2007) 2.797]. He often disguises himself as a priest and attacks churches and monasteries, and is also known for his fearlessness when he is first to forge an attack against cannons with his *Orašans* (his troops). When booty is divided, he will at times get an old woman whom he beats until she hands him over the money she has hidden:

Na njih Tale udri s Oraščima	1573
...	
Lomi njemske pope sa oltara	
E, i babe tuće po Primorju ...	1578
Tale attacks them with his Orašans	1573
...	
He smashes German priests from their altars,	
eh, and beats old women in Primorje ...	1578

2. There are four references in Avdo Međedović's song *The Revenge for the Death of Mustajbey of Lika* [Čolaković (2007) 2.811–908].

(a) A reference to the song *The Death of Mustajbey of Lika*, in which Mustajbey's wife curses her husband [Čolaković (2007) 2.820]:

'Najzad, najzad, Mustaj-begovice,	
Ti si kriva, te bega stopila!'	469
'At last, at last, Mustajbey's wife,	
You are guilty, you drowned the bey! [sc. you are guilty of his death]'	469

(b) A reference to the czar's gift of two cannons to Mujo Hrnjica in the song *The Vizier's Arrival in Travnik*. These cannons on Mujo's tower are mentioned in many Bosniac songs, for example in Kurtagić's epics [Čolaković (2007) 2.822]:

'Propenj'te se na moju kapiju,	
Koju mi je devlet načinijo	
I na njojzi dva topa turijo,	605
Kad goj mene od nevolje dođe	
Da hi mećem sa moje kapije.'	

'Climb onto my gate,
Which the czar made

And on it two cannons he gave, 605
 Whenever trouble comes to me,
 To put them onto my gate.'

(c) A reference to Međedović's song about the rescue of Kozlić Mejra in Vienna where Halil ran in the horse race. He [also] mentions the latter song in *The Arrival of the Vizier in Travnik* [Čolaković (2007) 2.670]. Later in the same song, Međedović retells the rescue (digression) [Čolaković (2007) 2.688–92]. [Here] Halil speaks to his horse Malin [Čolaković (2007) 2.834]:

'E, Maline, drago ime moje,
 Ja sam triput u Stambol s'lazijo,
 A i u Beč tri-četiri puta.
 U Beč s Đogom trčao košiju' 1305

'Eh, Malin, your name is dear to me,
 I descended three times to Stambol,
 and also to Vienna three times or four.
 In Vienna with Đogo [sc. Mujo's horse Đogat] I ran the race' 1305

(d) A reference that is ominous for the traditional audience that knows the epics well, since it is well known that Mujo's and Halil's sister Ajka never married [Čolaković (2007) 2.858]:

Kad evo ti Zorića Šabana.
 E to zetak hoće biti Muju,
 Za koga je Ajka isprošena,
 Ajka, sestra dvije Hrnje carske. 2924

And here is Zorić Šaban,
 Eh he wants to be Mujo's brother in law,
 For whom Ajka was asked in marriage,
 Ajka, the sister of two royal Hrnjica. 2924

3. Avdo Međedović's song *The Arrival of the Vizier in Travnik* [Čolaković (2007) 2.731] refers to Međedović's song *The Slavery of Tale Ličanin*. Unfortunately, Parry and Vujnović recorded only the beginning of the latter song (over 3,000 verses), in which Halil rescues Tale from captivity [Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature, PN 12428, unpublished]:

Hel je Halil Talu osobina
 I sva nada Oraškoga Tala.
 Kad bi neđe poginuo Tale,
 On je rek'o: 'U zdravlje Halila, 5000
 Ne bi ost'o neosvećen Tale.
 Da poginem, bi me osvetijo,
 Da s' osužnjim, bi me izbavijo.'

For Halil is Tale's confrère
 and all hope of Tale of Orašac.
 If Tale should die somewhere,
 he would say: 'To the health of Halil, 5000
 Tale would not remain unavenged.
 If I died, he would avenge me;
 if I were imprisoned, he would rescue me.'

A-XI

Mumin Ramadanović Vlahovljak in *Pričanje* (Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature, PN 12472, records 7109–24 [in Čolaković (2007) 1.429–51]). Vlahovljak tries to describe Ćor Huso's performance, but honestly admits that he cannot. The perfection of Huso's technique, his acting in performance and his poems were 'beyond words' [Čolaković (2007) 1.441–42]:

Vlahovljak: When he started to play, you would say that he was joking, like a child. He would continue. When he began his singing, at first slowly, one could not hear it [sc. if sitting] near the entrance, but then *ha-ha*, and then *ha-ha*, and ever better, and ever better. Even in this big hall, everyone could hear him. He began slowly. He did it word by word. He never piled up a hundred words for one word ...

Vujnović: Were his poems good?

Vlahovljak: 'Were his poems good?' He was such a singer that no other singer could measure up to him in this area, and warm the heart of a man as he could with his poem! Almost as soon as he began singing his poem, even if there were fifty or sixty [sc. in the audience], nearly everyone would start crying!

Vujnović: And why?

Vlahovljak: Ah, it was so sorrowful. If someone were to die somewhere, he would say it with such sorrow, as though it were happening right now, here, and you could see it.¹⁷⁴

Vujnović: And did he use a lot of 'embellishment' (*kita*) in his poems?

Vlahovljak: He did not ... That [sc. embellishment] is not the truth; they use it just to lengthen their poems.

Vujnović: But why did he not use a lot of embellishment, when they [sc. the poems] are better when they are embellished?

Vlahovljak: Oh, they are better for the present time, for today's instruments, for those who are around today ...

Vlahovljak continued by explaining that 'embellishing' a poem means not only 'to lengthen it' but also 'to bring lies into it'. He exclaimed, 'I don't want to lie; I will never lie, for anything!' [Čolaković (2007) 1.442].

Vujnović and Parry wanted to find out Vlahovljak's opinion of Međedović's technique in comparison with his own technique and that of Ćor Huso [Čolaković (2007) 1.442–43]:

Vujnović: But you see, Avdo has good poems, and did he not learn any of them from Ćor Huso?

Vlahovljak: 'Avdo has good poems.' Avdo's poems are good. Avdo embellishes, and now this poem of mine, which I know, he can embellish it even more, twice as much, and it will be even more embellished.

Vujnović: Is it good?

Vlahovljak: To one person it is, and to another it isn't.

Vujnović: I would say that a good singer is not the one who embellishes a lot, but the one who does not embellish. For example, you say that Ćor Huso was a good singer.

Vlahovljak: He was such a good singer; there was none like him on the entire globe!

Vujnović: And why did he not embellish poems?

Vlahovljak: Oh, he did not embellish poems, as it is not what really happened. He did not add anything to what happened.

Vujnović: Was he singing the truth only, then?

Vlahovljak: Yes! Only the truth.

Vujnović: So none of the embellishments in the poem is true?

Vlahovljak: Eh, indeed they are not!

Vujnović: Why do you laugh now? Tell me!

¹⁷⁴ Kurtagić stated that when he sang about a dangerous battle some listeners were so afraid that they would shout in panic 'we will die', and when he sang

about the unfortunate destiny of young lovers, the women would cry so much that the 'floor was wet' from their tears [Čolaković (2004a) 291].

Vlahovljak: I must laugh now, when you see yourself.

Vujnović: What do 'I see'?

Vlahovljak: You understand it.

Vujnović: How?

Vlahovljak: Well.

Vujnović: By God, what do 'I understand', when I did not see anything?

Vlahovljak: By God, you understand, it seems, as well as I do! It seems that he, this mister boss [Parry], he also understands it. Eeh!

Vujnović: Do you understand what 'embellishment' is, the foundation of the heroic poem?

Vlahovljak: One hero, one man who is a heroic man, is the poem's foundation. And embellishment is the decoration, the clothing of a poem. To put clothes on a poem means the same as, for example, to put fine clothes on a good-looking youngster and he just appears good-looking. This is the truth: here is this young fellow Nikola, a fine and ready and good-looking fellow, but he has no fine clothing.

Vujnović: That's the truth, by God; I do not have any good clothing!

Vujnović had noticed that just before the recording of this conversation Parry had had a lively discussion with Vlahovljak [Čolaković (2007) 1.447]:

Vujnović: What did you say to our gentleman [sc. Parry, Z.Č.], when you held this pack of cigarettes? You held it like this in your hand. What did you tell him?

Vlahovljak: Ah, about that 'embellishing'. He said to me, 'How does Avdo sing?' I said, 'He sings fine, he embellishes.' He said, 'How does he embellish?' Here is this pack of cigarettes. In it are 'Drava' cigarettes. He [sc. Avdo] said there are 'Drava', 'Zeta', 'Vardar' and 'Drina' cigarettes [sc. in it]. Yet there is only one pack, and 'Drava' is written on it. And if we agree that all of them may be mixed into Drava, go ahead!

Vlahovljak's criticism of Međedović is that he incorporates elements of other songs into one individual song. In such a way Međedović expands the song, but narrows the repertoire and eventually destroys the traditional epic corpus. In this process, all the songs become hybrids, similar to each other [Čolaković (2007) 1.447]:

Vujnović: And then, you say that Avdo [sc. composed] this poem in this way?

Vlahovljak: Let those who know what poems are listen to your recording! Then you will hear [sc. the answer].

This is Vlahovljak's challenge to Parry and Vujnović. He knows that both versions of the song *Bećiragić Meho* were recorded. He mockingly affirms that anyone who knows the traditional epics, after listening to the recordings, will prefer his version [sc. the traditional one that he heard from Ćor Huso]. He did not pretend to be an extraordinary singer. Next, Vujnović asks whether Međedović, in addition to 'improper' embellishment, made any 'mistakes' within the plot of his poem. Vlahovljak refuses to answer. This part of the conversation ends with Vlahovljak's statement that he sings in the way that he learned from Ćor Huso [Čolaković (2007) 1.448]. In Bosniac tradition the older singers carefully observed the younger and tried to transmit their knowledge to the most talented. When the young Kurtagić showed that he loved epic song, the old and famous singer Suleiman Makić protected him and insisted that the young boy sit with others to listen to the songs. According to Kurtagić's statement, when he, aged 20, 'discovered that he could sing', the older singers cried with joy. Each of them hoped that the younger singer would adopt their songs, give them new life and continue the traditional composition [Čolaković (2004a) 285]:

Vujnović: Then, you sing in the same way that Ćor Huso did.

Vlahovljak: I do not sing differently.

Vujnović: All of it, word for word?

Vlahovljak: All, word for word; I do not take anything out, nor do I put anything in.

Vujnović: But what does it mean, this 'word for word'?

Vlahovljak: That is how I heard it, which is how I sing it.

Finally, Vujnović asks Vlahovljak what ‘word’ means [Čolaković (2007) 1.449]:

Vlahovljak: Word? I have heard: ‘thirty men of the borderland drank wine’.

Vujnović: Yes.

Vlahovljak: I cannot say ‘thirty four’.

Vujnović: Yes.

Vlahovljak: But ‘thirty’. And I always sing: ‘thirty men of the borderland ...’ I cannot say what I have not heard. There it is, brother!

Vujnović: And that is proper!

Vlahovljak: Eh, that’s it, if you ask me to answer.

This is a direct criticism of Međedović’s composition. [It is important to note that when other singers spoke to Vujnović and Parry about embellishment, they were not presented with a particular song for comparison as Vlahovljak was; they spoke in general terms about embellishment, each with their own understanding of the question.] Vlahovljak began his song with a description of 30 men of the borderland who drank wine. He lists in particular Mustajbey of the Lika, Mujo and Halil, Durutađić Ahmo and their standard-bearers. Međedović began his song, immediately after Vlahovljak, with a description of 36 men of the borderland who drank wine; beside those listed by Vlahovljak, he lists in particular Ajan of Kanidža, Kozlić Hurem, Arap Mehmedaga, Dizdar from Kanidža and Ramo from Glamoč. The *aghas* boast and he describes their boasts. While Vlahovljak sang this theme in only 19 verses, Međedović prolonged it to 100 verses. Similarly, Međedović lengthens the whole song, building up the theme and the thematic structures in his [own post-traditional] manner with much more description and the free inclusion of themes from other songs (see Lord (1960) Appendix I).

Before the appearance of printed songs, the singers could build their repertoire only by listening to other, mostly older singers. The repertoire of a region was clearly defined. The traditional singers and their audience knew this repertoire, and did not allow any singer to change the songs or transfer the plot or a part of one song to another. Only the best singers, like Ćor Huso in Sandžak or Ćerim Ćaić in Bihać Krajina, who travelled all over Bosnia, were permitted to introduce new traditional songs and plots. Singers who did not sing ‘the truth’ were rejected or silenced because they were not ‘historians’. The songs contained all knowledge of ethics, history, geography and the best Bosniac heroes. Therefore the songs could not be changed. Moreover, some songs were considered sacred, for example the songs about the death-warrant (*katal firman*) for Đerđelez Alija [Čolaković (2004a) 282].

A-XII

A comparison of the openings of *The Wedding of Smailagić Meho* by Ašir Ćorović (649 verses, in Bašić (2003) 2.119–28) and that by Avdo Međedović (12,311 verses). In Međedović’s song *The Wedding of Smailagić Meho* the introduction is followed by a gathering at Kanidža, in a tavern, a description of the Bosniac elders and nobles, and a description of Smailagić Meho; then Hasan-pasha Tiro watches the sad Meho. Only at verse 287 does he ask Meho why he is sad (see Lord (1974)). In Ćorović’s version, Mustajbey of Lika questions Meho about his sadness in verse 29. The styles of the two versions of the song are very different.

Ašir Ćorović: the opening of *The Wedding of Smailagić Meho*:

Skupili se age i begovi

U Kajniži, u donjoj mahali,

A na kuli starog Smail-age,

Trides’t aga i četiri više,

Redom ti se oni pokupiše:

Do pendžera buljugbaša Mujo,

Pa uz njega od Glamoča Ramo,

A do Rama lički Mustaj-beže,

A do bega od Orašca Tale,

Pa do Tala Bojičić Alija,

Malo niže Ibro Hamajlija,

U dno kola jedno momče mlado,

To je, kažu, Smailović Meho.
 O svačemu age eglenišu,
 Eglenišu kako beglenišu:
 Neki od njih priča o junaštvu,
 O junaštvu i o siromaštvu,
 Neki priča o dugu mejdanu,
 Ko je boljeg konja dobio,
 Ko li bolje svijetlo oružje, 20
 Doklena je koji dolazio,
 Ko je više zemlje pregazio,
 I ljudskija glava pogubio.
 Samo Meho sjedi neveselo,
 U krilu je glavu oborio,
 Niti pije niti razgovara,
 Bože mio, čehre izgubio!
 Pita njega s Like Mustaj-beže:
 'O, moj Meho, što si neveseo ...' 29

The aghas and beys gathered
 in Kajniža, in the lower quarter,
 and at the tower of old Smail-bey,
 thirty aghas and four more.
 They gathered in order:
 beside the window commander Mujo,
 and near him Ramo from Glamoča,
 and near Ramo Mustajbey of Lika,
 and near the bey Tale from Orašac,
 and next to Tale Bojičić Alija, 10
 a little lower Ibro Hamajlija.
 At the bottom of the circle one young lad,
 This is, they say, Smailović Meho.
 Of everything the aghas speak,
 they speak of what they want:
 one of them speaks of heroism,
 of heroism and poverty,
 one of them speaks of a long duel,
 who obtained a better horse,
 whose weaponry is shinier, 20
 whence did someone come,
 who trod through more countries
 and who executed the most men.
 Only Meho sits cheerless.
 In his lap he bends his head,
 neither does he drink nor talk,
 dear God, the face he lost!
 Asks him the Mustajbey of Lika:
 'Oh my Meho, why are you cheerless ...' 29

A-XIII

In *The Death of Mustajbey of Lika* Međedović is extremely critical in depicting Mustajbey: he is arrogant and haughty; he is drunk and insults his best warriors. Whereas in Bijelo Polje the songs about Mustajbey's death depict Mustajbey as mildly guilty, in other areas of the Sandžak and Montenegro Mustajbey is guiltless. In his criticism Međedović goes totally against the character of Mustajbey as it was traditionally depicted. According to him, Mustajbey is not a hero, but a hubristic villain, and it is unfortunate that Mustajbey is an

embodiment of a Bosniac man. Here Međedović gives his opinion about not only Mustajbey but also the Bosniacs. In a repeated theme, the drunken Mustajbey insults Mujo and Tale, the Bosniacs' heroes [Čolaković (2007) 2.804]:

A beglerbeg pijan bez hesapa. 2041
 Talu s Mujom riječ besedijo:
 'Pričekajte, dvije strašljivice,
 Čekajte, ne se prepanite!'

And the beglerbey [is] drunk without judgement. 2041
 To Tale and Mujo he speaks a word:
 'Wait, you two cowards,
 Wait, do not be frightened!'

This time, the insults are even harsher [Čolaković (2007) 2.805]:

'Aman, beže, tursko ogledalo,
 Kreći, vakat ti povešči vojsku,
 Jaš' Goluba, kreći u Krajinu! 2080
 Vidiš de si izgubijo glavu?'
 Beg se Muju smije kladuškom:
 'Komandar si, ali strašljiv, Mujo!
 Bog ubijo cara čestitoga,
 Na kog Bosni dade komandarstvo? 2085
 Da si žena bi li bolji bio!'

'Please, bey, mirror of the Turks,
 Go, it's time to take the army,
 Ride Golub [Mustajbey's horse], go to Krajina! 2080
 You see that you will lose your head?'
 The bey laughs at Mujo from Kladuša:
 'You are commander, but frightened, Mujo!
 Were God to kill the honorable czar,
 to whom would he give command of Bosnia? 2085
 If you were a woman, you would be better!'

In the following verse, Međedović directly blames the Bosniacs' arrogance for the downfall of Krajina, with Mustajbey as their embodiment [Čolaković (2007) 2.806]:

'Beg je tursko lice i naličje' 2148

'The bey is the image and mirror of the Turks [sc. the Bosniacs]!' 2148

Appendix B: Catalogues, ekphrasis, the destruction of myth in post-traditionality and post-traditional poets as proto-historians [from the unpublished manuscript of Čolaković]

1. Catalogues

Hajro Ferizović was a nonagenarian to centenarian traditional singer of tales when Parry met him. He recited to Parry his list of all the places of Montenegro and Sandžak, as he carried that list in his mind. Parry asked Vujnović to record Ferizović's list. Vujnović was surprised when he heard it, and asked Ferizović: 'Why did you recite to me the names of all the places? I can look them up on the map!' [Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature, PN 12469]. Vujnović forgot that Hajro and other illiterate singers could not look up places on a map.

Parry later asked Međedović if he had ever seen a map. Međedović replied that he had indeed once seen one, hung on a wall in a railway station in Bosnia [reference not found]. Of course, he could not read it.

Međedović, however, listed in his catalogue¹⁷⁵ heroes from [not only Montenegro and Sandžak, but Bosnia and beyond]: Travnik, Lika, Vrlika, Banja Luka, Jajce, Livno, Duvno, 12 districts beyond the river Una, Janja, Bijeljina, Gornja Tuzla and Donja Tuzla, Gradašac, Brčko(vo) in the vicinity of the river Sava, Osijek and Krajina, Cazin, Bihać, Klis, Sarajevo, Visoko, Zenica, Maglaj, Doboj, Donja Derventa, Konjic, Mostar, Nevesinje, Trebinje, Cetinja, Kladaša, Orlujce (between Lika and Vrlika), Udbina, Donja Udbina, Meki Dol (next to the Udbina valley), Otoka, Ribnik, Orahovo village, Žuta Stijena, Čekrk, Pripor and Orašac. The heroes with their army arrive from all these places at the town of Kanidža (now in Hungary). Međedović listed in his catalogue heroes from over 40 towns and villages in Bosnia. A few places cannot be identified, like Orlujce or 'Eagle's Place' and Žuta Stijena or 'Yellow Rock'; one of them is surely a mythical place (Čekrk or 'Chain Bridge'), as an ever-young invincible hero usually arrives from this sacred location that houses a spring of water that arrests ageing. Many other Bosnian localities are mentioned in Međedović's poems.

Međedović's lengthy catalogues, so similar to Homer's *Catalogue of Ships*, are unique in the Bosnian tradition. One can even argue that some of them are more lively and genuine than Homer's catalogue, which gives the impression of being somewhat petrified. Međedović's catalogue represents a map of Bosnia, and he organizes his list of heroes and places according to a spatial image that he had constructed in his mind. Međedović had many ways of introducing catalogues, including several forms of *teichoskopia* (Aeschylus' tragedy *Seven against Thebes* [375–676] shows that *teichoskopia* was used as an introduction to a catalogue in the cyclic epics.)

2. Ekphrasis

Međedović's poems contain developed ekphraseis, which existed in his tradition only in a rudimentary form, namely as a relatively short poetic description of objects. The purpose of an ekphrasis is to arrest the flow of the narrative and to beautify a poem. The audience love hearing them, and admire the singers' knowledge and artistry. Such descriptions in both Homer's (*The Shield of Achilles*, *Il.* 18.478–608) and Međedović's epics are long and very elaborate. There is also a unique case of ekphrasis as a description of a picture. Only Međedović developed this, not the other singers.

As figurative representation in art is not permissible among Muslims, in Bosniac tradition a portrait of a hero is said to have been woven by a Christian girl, who fell in love with a Muslim hero. She usually recognizes the hero by comparing his looks with the image she had woven;¹⁷⁶ as she based the image upon someone else's description of her favourite hero, the recognition is indeed improbable, but the audience accept this. In Međedović's poem *The Wedding of Vlahinjić Alija*,¹⁷⁷ a Christian girl weaves not only a picture of her beloved hero, but images of all the other Bosnian heroes. In fact, she decorates the walls of her maiden-chamber with these images (this, again, is an opportunity for Međedović to create a catalogue). Under each picture, the hero's name is inscribed.¹⁷⁸ The image in which the main hero is depicted consists of a traditional scene: the hero sits next to the girl's father, and she is present as well, serving them wine. Danek rightly concludes that this picture represents the girl's dream of union in marriage with a hero of a different faith, with her father's blessing.¹⁷⁹ Thus this particular ekphrasis has a significant role in the development of the plot. Moreover, the scene in which the Christian father and his daughter drink wine together with her bridegroom is one of the traditional themes. Thus Međedović turns this scene into a pictorial presentation (as Homer does in the *Shield of Achilles*).

¹⁷⁵ See my edition of *The Wedding of Smailagić Meho* (Čolaković (2007) [1.165–347]).

¹⁷⁶ Just as 'text' and 'textile' have the same root, such is the case in Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian with the word 'plot' (*pletivo*, *plet* with the verb *plesti*) and the plot's beginning and end, which is something woven and unwoven (*zaplet* and *rasplet*). Penelope weaves a 'plot', and is cunningly plotting with her weaving and unweaving, and the Christian girl in Međedović's ekphrasis weaves her wishes into the plot of the poem.

¹⁷⁷ Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature, PN 6841 [in Bynum (1980); cf. Danek (2002)].

¹⁷⁸ Homerists have made much of the fact that Homer never mentions writing except in the digression

on Bellerophon [*Il.* 6.169], and many believe that he had no knowledge of writing. However, Bosnian singers like Međedović, who were illiterate, often mention writing, and their heroes 'write' and 'read' messages; they even make a series of official letters, and some poems contain a small collection of correspondence. Writing a message simply became an important and useful theme, which obviated the need for a messenger. Let us suppose that in Homer's eighth century, or even earlier, some epic poets already wrote; none of them would have made Achilles write, because it would have been recognized as an anachronism, just as none of my singers mention machine-guns, television or radio in their epics.

¹⁷⁹ Danek (2006).

Međedović has a second ekphrasis [this time in *The Arrival of the Vizier in Travnik*].¹⁸⁰ An image of the sultan is painted on the flags carried by the sultan's janissaries: the righteous sultan, with a smile on his face, embraces Bosnia! After reading this wonderful poetic description, Parry severely criticized Međedović's technique of ekphrasis and discouraged him from further use of it. He told Međedović that, as a faithful Muslim, he should not have included the description of such a flag in his epic, as it is not permissible according to Islam [Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature, PN 6802, 12380, 12400, 12423, 12431, 12434; exact reference not found]! Afterwards, Međedović avoided his peculiar forms of ekphrasis. He apologetically tried to explain to Parry and Vujnović that the depiction of a flag on which the sultan embraces Bosnia existed only in his own imagination, and surely not in reality.¹⁸¹ It is unfortunate that Parry did not ask Međedović what Bosnia looked like, when she was depicted as being in the sultan's embrace, for what Međedović did within his ekphrasis is a kind of concretization of an abstract notion.

3. *The destruction of myth in post-traditionality*

I was privileged to record an epic that has never been influenced by a published text. Its plot describes events from the 15th century and records a mythical adventure of Bosnian heroes on an expedition to a place in a faraway Romania (which was then Wallachia). Fortunately, Parry recorded Međedović's version of the same epic. I recorded it twice on 30 June 1989 from the traditional singer Kurtagić. Kurtagić learnt it from his grandfather as a young boy, sometime in the early 1920s.

Kurtagić's story starts as follows. Early in the morning, a messenger brings the sultan's firman to Mujo, the famous Bosniac hero. The sultan orders Mujo to capture or kill the dangerous villain Bristle the Chieftain (*Kostreš harambaša*). Mujo is desperate because he knows that he cannot accomplish this task, for 12 years earlier he lost his brother (the theme of the absence of a sacred hero) and his magnificent horse. When his mother asks about the contents of the sultan's letter, he states that he cannot capture Bristle without his brother and his horse. This villain and his warriors live in a cave, in a mystical mountain, where no one can enter, as long as the sun moves across the sky.

After a farewell to his mother, wife and sister, the hero mounts a horse and begins his journey. On the mystical mountain Jadika (Mount 'Misery') he meets a dangerous Christian hero. This enemy sits under a fir tree, with his magnificent horse tied to a spear that is stuck into the ground. He decides to let the enemy know of his presence and challenges him to a heroic duel. An *anagnorisis* follows: the Christian hero refuses the duel and reveals his true identity: his 12-years absent brother, Halil, disguised as a Christian hero. The much-needed powerful horse is disguised too. Mujo tests his identity by asking him to recite words from the Quran. After the words have been recited, the brothers embrace. The sun halts its journey across the sky 'because of the two brothers' overwhelming sorrow':¹⁸²

He had just passed halfway through Misery –	480
Misery it was called by name –	
when Mujo saw something with his eyes:	
now on the road, just on the mountain,	
a fir tree was near the path,	
and under that fir tree a powerful chieftain.	485
...	
Mujo threw his rifle to the ground.	
'Woe to me, oh dear God,	
I almost killed my own brother!'	
They cried, their arms they spread,	600
then they embraced, they kissed their faces,	

¹⁸⁰ See Međedović's *Dolazak vezira u Travnik*, in Čolaković (2007) [2.655–769].

¹⁸¹ Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature, PN 12445.

¹⁸² For Kurtagić's poem, entitled *Bristle the Chieftain*, in its original form and in English translation, see

Čolaković (2004a) [229–56; 511–68; the versions are in the Čolaković Collection: www.zlatan-colakovic.com]. Međedović's poem, entitled *Raven the Chieftain and Mujo the Sirdar* (Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature, PN 12427), is published only in the original: see Čolaković (2004a) [381–432].

with tears they flooded their faces.
 The bright Sun halted on the mountain
 because of the two brothers' sorrow.

Međedović's version too starts with the reading of the sultan's firman. Mujo's brother, Halil, the sacred hero, however, is absent for only a week and his powerful horse is resting in its stable. The sacred hero is absent because he went to Udbina to chase after girls. After receiving the same decree as above, Mujo walks to Udbina to find his brother. When he sees him dancing with girls, he is overwhelmed with fury and threatens to kill his youthful brother, but does not, because the girls hide Halil behind them and he then runs away. Mujo, still angry, calls him and asks whether he knows anything about Raven the Chieftain (*Kostreš* or *Gavran harambaša*):¹⁸³

Tu igraše trides' đevojaka, Sve sestara udbinskih glavara	656
...	
Mujo odma' ugleda Halila, A težak ga hizmet pritiskao	672
...	
Pa Halila baci za plećima. Pritište ga trides' đevojaka, Zakloniše brata od serdara	695
Here thirty girls dance All sisters of Udbina chiefs	656
...	
Mujo at once sees Halil, And a heavy task weighed on him	672
...	
So [Fatima] hides Halil behind her. The thirty girls pressed against him, They sheltered the brother [Halil] from the serdar [Mujo]	695

Međedović makes a colourful new scene which is highly comical and elaborate. Such a scene, i.e. the description of beautiful girls dancing a *kolo*, is included in other poems; it is a well-known scene, and all singers know how to create it, although not as finely as Međedović. What is missing in Međedović's version? Mount Jadika, the halting of the sun, the 12-year absence of the sacred hero and his magic horse, the tragic motif of the possibility that ignorance could have led to fratricide and the recognition between brothers are all absent. In fact the myth is lost, and that myth, as it unfolds in Kurtagić's version, possesses many similarities to the epic of Gilgamesh.

I submit that in Homer's poems the myth is lost as well, and that he ceased to believe in his own tradition. This is where the analogy between Međedović and Homer primarily resides. In place of the lost myth there is radical innovation and the rationalization of myth. Instead of myth, we get long catalogues, elaborate similes and ekphrasis, extended and inverted traditional themes (often duplicated), the inclusion of non-epic material, developed speeches and characterization, and so forth. Međedović, again like Homer, retains some elements of the traditional myth, but he purposely diminishes or even eliminates its meaning: the sacred hero is indeed missing, but not for 12 years, only for a few days (the mythic relevance of the 12-year absence of the sacred hero is unimportant for Međedović); the horse is not missing, but resting in his stable (a reversal of tradition); Mujo walks a long distance instead of riding his horse, which is unusual; brother attempts to kill brother, but not seriously (criticism of a theme important to the tradition, where a potentially tragic theme becomes comic). Međedović depicts both characters realistically; moreover, we can observe character development in the portrait of the sacred hero. Homer follows the same path of destroying myth. Achilles

¹⁸³ [Čolaković (2004a) 388–89].

is neither absent nor presumed to be dead or missing. His horses rest near the ships, instead of being captured by the Trojans. Hector does not become invincible after killing Patroclus and obtaining Achilles' armour. Patroclus' role of 'double' and 'substitute' is immediately recognized and thus purposely diminished. Lastly, we can observe character development in Achilles.

4. *Post-traditional poets as proto-historians*

I have mentioned that both Homer and Međedović each ceased to believe in their own tradition. What this really means is not that they totally abandoned it, but that they started to question some parts of it. However, tradition does not let itself be questioned, any more than religion does, as religion is tradition's offspring. Tradition allows only interpretation. The following examples will make this clear. All the great traditional singers are also interpreters of the tradition. Many parts of their poems need interpretation, not just troubling parts of their plots that do not seem credible.

For example, Halil, the ever-young favourite hero of Bosniac poems, remains ever-young in dozens of poems (how is it that Neoptolemos grows up so quickly?). The audience kept probing the problem of Halil's eternal youth, and the singers found only one plausible answer: there were seven Halils. Who first advanced this interpretation? According to the singers, it was one of the greatest singers in the tradition, namely Ćor Huso himself. Međedović, as we have seen, solves this problem in a different way – he omits Halil's 12-year absence in order to keep him ever-young. That is not a permissible interpretation [within the tradition], and amounts to questioning the Resurrection or the virginity of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Halil ceases to be the sacred mythic hero, just as Achilles ceases to be the sacred hero in Homer. As soon as Međedović did this, he stepped out of his tradition, and this move made him a proto-historian like Homer and Hesiod. One of these forbidden moves necessarily leads to another, and consequently to the reduction and elimination of the number of poems and to the fixation of a single unique plot. Instead of being a true interpreter of the tradition of singing truthful tales, a post-traditional poet becomes a proto-historian, and a liar (as Plato noticed), because he is, paradoxically, sincerely searching for the truth in myth-history.

Parry and Vujnović understood this fact when they asked Međedović the following questions. How can you sing anything that you have not heard? Does this not amount to lying? What gives you the right to do it? Međedović's answers were not convincing. He answered that he had the right, as he had heard many poems and knew, even better than the singer from whom he had learnt a particular poem, what the heroes should have said or done, how they were dressed etc. Moreover, he stated that he had the right to put into the poem parts 'from his own mind', not learnt from anyone, as long as he did not state that a hero 'flew', when he had heard that the hero was at that moment 'sitting'. He even boasted to Parry and Vujnović that he had made up the vivid descriptions of wars and battles himself; no singer anywhere could match his knowledge of tactics and of strategic and topographical detail in his descriptions of the movements of military contingents.¹⁸⁴ Ancient Greek proto-historians also made up such parts of their histories. As Mary Lefkowitz writes, 'For example, orators in fourth-century B.C. Athens spoke of the story of the Amazons' invasion of Attica as if it were as historical (in our terms) as the Persian invasion of 480 ... Precise strategic and topographical details of the battle were supplied by Cleidemus, author of an early history of Attica, from his own imagination.'¹⁸⁵

Logical thinking can lead to false conclusions, as history is full of senseless surprises and often does not seem as truthful as mythical stories, while mythic stories appear to be truthful, but are often illogical and miraculous. For example, there is a well-known historical character in Bosniac epics, Ćuprilić the vizier; he is a well-liked character, a wise sultan's counsellor, in many poems. Several viziers from the Ćuprilić (Köprülü) family played very important roles in Bosniac history for a few centuries. In this case, the traditional explanation that there were many Ćuprilić viziers is historically correct. In Međedović's 'realistic' interpretation, there was only one vizier of this name, although he appears in poems describing Đerđelez's deeds (end of the 15th century) and in events from the 16th century, as well as in poems about Halil's deeds (17th century). Međedović firmly believed that there was only one Ćuprilić, as the singers depicted him similarly in [all] their epics.¹⁸⁶ In one of his poems he made him so old that his 'brain was already sinking into his throat'¹⁸⁷ (the case of Nestor in Homer is very similar). Thus Međedović totally blurs the chronology

¹⁸⁴ See *The Questions from Bijelo Polje* [in Čolaković (2007) 1.349–428, especially 383–84].

¹⁸⁵ Lefkowitz (2007) 8.

¹⁸⁶ [Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature, PN 6802, 12395.]

¹⁸⁷ [Reference not found.]

of mythic-historical events in his poems. His 'historicizing' impoverished his own tradition, as is apparent even in the relatively small sample of epics collected by Parry. He repeats his themes constantly, using the same characters, and the same disguises appear repeatedly, including his long and sometimes tedious catalogues and descriptions.

One case of a post-traditional singer's critical attitude toward his own tradition is especially instructive. Međedović had heard the epic *The Siege of Baghdad* from a famous old singer, Kasum Rebronja, who learnt it from Ćor Huso.¹⁸⁸ However, Međedović refused to sing it afterward, and it awoke Parry's curiosity.¹⁸⁹

The octogenarian traditional singer Rebronja, who was an esteemed singer in the area, visited Parry only once. He decided not to sing for Parry as soon as he had seen Međedović, his younger rival, with Parry. Fortunately, his son had learnt *The Siege of Baghdad* from his father, and his grandson, the late poet and collector Ismet Rebronja, wrote it down and published it.¹⁹⁰ Today, this particular epic is considered one of the finest Bosniac poems ever recorded. It contains the important Amazonian theme of a heroic and invincible woman-warrior, and Parry collected a few versions of this poem.

After Parry had posed a series of questions, Međedović finally explained why he did not want to sing this poem: he felt that it did not contain a true story. How is it that Baghdad was conquered by a girl instead of by Đerđelez, the greatest hero of the Bosniacs? How is it that she rode a miraculous horse and traversed the huge distance from Istanbul to Baghdad in only one day? Parry and Vujnović were not satisfied with this answer, and replied that if a hero can be 'sacred' and achieve such miraculous deeds, why could a heroine too not be sacred and achieve similar deeds, for it can happen? Moreover, if Međedović thought that the old singer did not make a poem good and true enough, could he make it truer and better? Međedović answered that it would be impossible, because he was not a 'liar'.¹⁹¹ Thus Međedović, as a proto-historian, tossed away and refused to take over a purely traditional poem about the siege of Baghdad, since he did not believe that it recounted true events.

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¹⁸⁸ [Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature, PN 12436, 12443, in Čolaković (2007) 1.103.]

¹⁸⁹ [Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature, *Pitanja za Avdin kunst*, in Čolaković (2007) 1.369–70.]

¹⁹⁰ [Rebronja (2003).]

¹⁹¹ Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature, PN 12467, *Pričanje za kunst* [in Čolaković (2007) 1.369–70, 416].

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