Child's legacy enlarged: Oral literary studies at Harvard since 1856

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Child's Legacy Enlarged: Oral Literary Studies at Harvard Since 1856

David E. Bynum

POETRY and storytelling began so long ago in prehistoric time that no one can scientifically even guess how or when they originated. But one thing is certain. Our biological ancestors did not cease to be a mere species of animal and become *mankind* until the capacity for rhythmic language and narration had evolved in them. In myth the world over, these mental powers are said to be god-given and divine. They are at the very least indispensable to any practical definition of humanity.

For many millenia the only instrument of rhythmic words and narrative known in any part of the world was the tongue men were born with, not the stylus or the pen, for writing was not invented until too late in human evolution for it to reveal anything about the origin of speech. So for long ages the only way *any* knowledge could survive from one generation to another was through *oral tradition*. Rhythmical speech was the world's first great medium of communication for complex ideas, and there were certainly media men of astonishing skill long before anyone on earth knew how to write.

In North America the scientific study of oral traditions began at Harvard College just a little more than a century ago. For 116 years, Harvard College has been collecting oral traditions and disseminating knowledge about them to anyone who could use that knowledge to good purpose. Three men of the Harvard faculty launched this brilliant movement in American intellectual life. They were Francis James Child, George Lyman Kittredge, and Milman Parry. The following pages are about those three men, their ideas, and their continuing impact on the life of our own time.

More than any literate men before them, Professors Child, Kittredge, and Parry saw the protean shapes of pre-literate speech at work in the

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earliest creations of thought and literature. Where others saw only the figures of written or printed words on paper, they had a vision of voices out of the past sounding those words in the ancient rhythms of oral tradition.

What Oral Literature Is

One of the most important developments in this century in both the popular and academic understanding of culture has been the wide growth of awareness that only a tiny percentage of man's total creative achievement has depended on literacy. Writing is at most a comparatively recent invention, and while it is useful for keeping records of all sorts, it is a cumbersome and inefficient means of cultural communication, even with the help of printing.

Despite their mechanical awkwardness and inefficiency, writing and printing are undeniably two great tools of civilization. But they are not basic assets of human nature. The more fundamental and most distinctive cultural property of men everywhere remains their innate power of speech. Spoken words are the ultimate source of graphic communication, and any decay or diminution of the arts of speech immediately erodes the value of graphic culture. We live in an age when, moreover, other potentially civilizing inventions based on electrical recording and electrical dissemination of speech have only begun to be used and appreciated.

A large part of current speech in any language is ephemeral, and is employed for merely transient purposes. But a certain proportion of spoken communication is enduring, whether or not any record is made of it in writing or otherwise. It expresses ideas of such proven, lasting utility that special, *poetic* modes of speech exist in every language to assure the remembrance and continuation of those vital ideas in *oral traditions. Oral literature* is the material recorded from oral traditions in every age and in every language.

The Harvard Tradition

Harvard University is today internationally known and respected as a center for the collection and study of oral literature.

The University's prominence in this field arises partly from the devoted work of its numerous present members who are engaged in oral literary studies, and partly from an older tradition of scholarship

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on oral literature that goes back more than a hundred years in the history of Harvard College. Much of the best work now being done, whether at Harvard or elsewhere, is only a fulfillment and deepening of the research on oral literature that began at Harvard about the year 1856.

The entire faculty of Harvard College in 1856 numbered only fourteen men, including the President of the University, who was then James Walker. Yet within that small company of scholars there were men whose energy and ideas are still felt among the best influences on higher education in America. Benjamin Peirce, to whom the teaching of natural science at Harvard owed so much, was a member of the faculty at that time. So too was Charles William Eliot, the man who would in later years guide Harvard's development as it grew to be one of the world's great institutions of learning. But in 1856 Eliot was still only a Tutor in Mathematics who had himself graduated from Harvard College just three years earlier. Another, older member of the faculty of fourteen was Eliot's forerunner as Tutor in Mathematics, Francis James Child (Harvard 1846). Professor Child had given up teaching numbers to become in 1851 the Boylston Professor of Rhetoric and Oratory, and it was while he occupied this chair that he began the study of oral literature at Harvard.

A faculty of fourteen men in a college with an enrollment of 382 undergraduates was not so large that any member of the faculty could give himself exclusively to his own intellectual pursuits. Still, it was large enough for this one man, Francis Child, to begin a forty-year career dedicated to study and publication of the so-called "popular" ballads of Britain.

Francis James Child

Professor Child, the former mathematician, came to his consummate interest in what he variously called "popular," "primitive," or "traditional" balladry not by accident but by force of logic. His valedictory address in 1846 to his own graduating class at Harvard College shows how absorbed and how extraordinarily skilled in the arts of expression he was even then. He was a right choice to be Professor of Rhetoric and Oratory in later years. Child well understood how indispensable good writing and good speaking are to civilization, or as many would now prefer to say, to society. For him, writing and speaking were not only the practical means by which men share useful information, but

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also the means whereby they formulate and share values, including the higher order of values that give meaning to life and purpose to human activities of all sorts. Concerned as he thus so greatly was with rhetoric, oratory, and the motives of those mental disciplines, Child was inevitably drawn into pondering the essential differences between speech and writing, and to searching for the origins of thoughtful expression in English.

The obvious sources of well expressed thought in English were of course the classics of English literature. Then as now, an important service which a man like Professor Child could render to the general public was to select and edit for publication works of literature that would encourage his own generation to good thinking, good expression, and good understanding of lasting human values. So Child became the general editor of "The British Poets," a series of more than a hundred printings and reprintings of classic English poetry issued for the general public by Little, Brown, and Company. His first personal contribution to that series was an edition of the poetry of Edmund Spenser in five small volumes.

But important as such literary poetry was for Professor Child's aims, he knew that it was only the aftermath of an earlier and more original kind of poetic expression in English. By 1856, he was already at work on his second contribution to "The British Poets," an edition of more than 300 *English and Scottish Ballads*, published in eight volumes during the years 1856–1859. Some of the fine poetic narratives which Child put into these volumes were as much the products of writing and of print as the poetry of Spenser, Chaucer, or Shakespeare. But the real meat of the edition, the pieces which Child himself believed were best, belonged to another kind of poetry — the poetry of a British oral tradition that had in the course of previous centuries "found its way into writing and into print," but which was not in fact the product of either writing or printing. Child said about this oral traditional literature that it is

> a distinct and very important species of poetry. Its historical and natural place is anterior to the appearance of the poetry of art, to which it has formed a step, and by which it has been regularly displaced, and, in some cases, all but extinguished. Whenever a people in the course of its development reaches a certain intellectual and moral stage, it will feel an impulse to express itself, and the form of expression to which it is first impelled is, as is well known, not prose, but verse, and in fact narrative verse. Such poetry . . . is in its essence an expres-

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sion of our common human nature, and so of universal and indestructible interest.[1]

Thus Child discovered in British ballads an original, pre-literary form of intellectual and moral expression. But although Child knew that the "popular" ballads of Britain belonged in principle to an immemorial oral tradition and not at all to written literature, they had nevertheless been the objects of literary tampering and imitation by so many generations of literary collectors, editors, and scribblers that it was hard work indeed to find any pure examples of oral composition, much less to reconstruct the history of oral tradition in Britain. Still, if it were ever going to be possible to understand the sources and content of our primary "literary" legacy — the oral literature in our own language — then pure examples of it had to be searched out, and a thorough survey of the surviving material had to be made and published, at whatever expense. It was so when Child began his work on British oral traditions in 1856, and it has remained so for scholars of oral literature in every other part of the world ever since.

From 1859 onward, Professor Child did all that he could do in a long lifetime to satisfy these two urgent needs of humanistic science: to secure the best existing evidence of the earlier British oral tradition, and to publish as complete an analytical survey of that evidence as he could compile. George Lyman Kittredge, Child's successor at Harvard in the same work, has described Child's great enterprise:

> The book [*English and Scottish Ballads*] circulated widely, and was at once admitted to supersede all previous attempts in the same field. To Mr. Child, however, it was but the starting-point for further researches. He soon formed the plan of a much more extensive collection on an altogether different model. This was to include every obtainable version of every extant English or Scottish ballad, with the fullest possible discussion of related songs or stories in the "popular" literature of all nations. To this enterprise he resolved, if need were, to devote the rest of his life. His first care was to secure trustworthy texts. In his earlier collection he had been forced to depend almost entirely on printed books. No progress, he was convinced, could be made till recourse could be had to manuscripts. . . . It was clear to Mr. Child that he could not safely take anything at second hand, and he determined not to print a line of his projected work till he had exhausted every effort to get hold of whatever manuscript material might be in existence. . . . A number of manuscripts were in private hands; of others the existence was not suspected. But Mr. Child was untiring. He was cordially assisted by various scholars, antiquaries, and private gentlemen. . . .

[1] Walter Morris Hart, "Professor Child and the Ballad," *PMLA*, XXI (1906), 756.

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> Some manuscripts were secured for the Library of Harvard University, and of others careful copies were made, which became the property of the same library. Gradually . . . the manuscript materials came in, until at last, in 1882, Mr. Child felt justified in beginning to print. Other important documents were, however, discovered or made accessible as time went on.
>
> In addition, Mr. Child made an effort to stimulate the collection of such remains of the traditional ballad as still live on the lips of the people in this country and in the British Islands.[2]

It thus took Professor Child together with his backers and collaborators no less than twenty-two years to locate and gather a bare minimum of the textual evidence of British ballad tradition, and even then the toil of securing the necessary documentation was not over. Such an expense of human and financial resources would seem prodigal if one did not remember that, unlike written literature, oral traditions do not come neatly packaged and ready-to-hand in printed books or other prepared forms. Yet nothing can be known for certain about oral tradition in any language until hundreds of texts have been recorded, collected, and carefully compared. The task of oral literary researchers in this respect has not diminished since Child's time.

By 1882, Child had been deeply engaged in the study of British oral literature for more than a quarter-century. Even some of his admirers reproached him for being too uncreative in so long a time. But he was the first pioneer of his subject and, while others carped, he wrought the foundations upon which all the principal departments of activity essential to oral literary studies still rest. He did a little collecting of his own, writing down the words and tunes of a few oral ballad performances from living singers, but he was in addition an unequalled collector of other, earlier collectors' manuscripts. The time, ingenuity, and critical acumen which scholars in simpler fields might expend freely on direct "creativity" Child gave gladly to the inconspicuous but indispensable business of *collecting*. Then, when the collecting was thoroughly done, there came the demanding process of *comparative analysis* to establish what relationships various texts had to one another in oral tradition. For as one of Child's own best students later wrote: "It is well known that ballad-texts are kittle-cattle to shoe; it is easy to print all the versions, but when selection is attempted, a hundred questions rise." *Publication* was of course the motive for so much painstaking preliminary work. But when at last in 1882 Child began to

[2] G. L. Kittredge, "Francis James Child," in F. J. Child, *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, V, Part X (Boston, 1898), xxvii–xxviii.

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publish, what he printed was a monument that both excelled and outlasted the published work of all his contemporaries.

It is a curious and — in retrospect — an absurd fact that for nearly a hundred years none of Harvard's great scholars of oral literature ever taught in the curriculum what they spent decades of their mature lives studying in private — the texts and facts of oral traditions. Child did not pioneer in the development of formal *instruction* on oral literature. But he was nevertheless the founder of *public education* in this field. Throughout the more than forty years of his publishing career from 1856 to 1898, his editions of ballads were never mere textbooks. He meant his editions to be, and they were, of lasting utility to an educated, reading public at large. His extracurricular lectures both in and away from Cambridge were another influential contribution toward the improvement of common knowledge outside of universities.

All of Professor Child's accomplishments in founding oral literary studies have endured the passage of time, but none has so increased in value since his era as the Folklore Collection which he created in the Harvard College Library. Decades before men like Archibald Cary Coolidge made fashionable the donation and procurement of large lots of books on specialized subjects for the College Library, Child had already formed the nucleus of the polyglot Folklore Collection. With the help of such supporters as Charles Minot, that collection had grown to more than 7,000 volumes by the end of Child's career, and many of the books which he gathered in the nineteenth century are today the Collection's most precious properties.

Professor Child's interest in developing *a library of printed book resources* was the direct outgrowth of his conviction that the study of oral literature could not be departmentalized by languages or nationalities. British balladry was the focus of his lifelong research on oral traditions, but it was a focus that gathered light from hundreds of sources outside Britain. When at last his collection of British manuscripts had proceeded far enough to give him some confidence in his own understanding of that tradition, he wrote: "There remains the very curious question of the origin of the resemblances which are found in the ballads of different nations, the recurrence of the same incidents or even the same story, among races distinct in blood and history and geographically far separated." [3] For that reason, as G. L. Kittredge later reported, ". . . concurrently with the toil of amassing,

[3] Hart, *op. cit.*, 758.

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collating, and arranging texts, went on the far more arduous labor of comparative study of the ballads of all nations; for, in accordance with Mr. Child's plan it was requisite to determine, in the fullest manner, the history and foreign relations of every piece included in his collection." [4] So from his initial studies in British balladry Child found himself obliged by that tradition itself to enlarge the scope of his research and to examine the wider European oral tradition of which the ballads of England and Scotland were only a part. In the end, there was scarcely any language of Europe which Child had not managed in some way to consult for various details of its oral literature. In this too his experience a hundred years ago was typical for scholars of oral literature ever since, whose subject simply cannot be defined by ethnic or linguistic frontiers. The Folklore Collection in the Harvard College Library is today four times the size it was when Child died in 1896, but its polyglot heterogeneity is still its greatest virtue in service to comparative research on oral traditions.

Francis James Child was still working on the tenth and final volume of his definitive edition of *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads* when his death occurred in the autumn of 1896. It was his fiftieth year of continuous service to Harvard College, and the fortieth year of his continuous service to oral literary scholarship as editor, accumulator, and comparativist of British and European balladry.

The Kittredge Era

The passage of Child caused no interruption of the work which he had begun. Even before the death of his teacher, George Lyman Kittredge (Harvard 1882), Child's former student, was already pressing on with the same activities of collecting, publishing, public education, and library improvement.

Kittredge began his long career at Harvard as an Instructor in 1888, and by 1894 he had succeeded to the professorship in English which Child had occupied since its inception in 1876. It was Kittredge who completed the last volume of Child's great ballad compendium and saw it through to publication.

But that was only the beginning. Child had left behind a wealth of manuscripts, copies, and other material pertaining to his studies in ballad, much of it in the working disarray that is inevitable in the

[4] Kittredge, *op. cit.*, xxviii.

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papers of an active scholar. Kittredge spent hundreds of hours organizing this material for the Harvard College Library, and the order which he imposed upon it may still be seen in the thirty-three folio volumes of Child's papers kept in the Houghton Library.

Like his teacher, Kittredge was an untiring accumulator of data. The Harvard University Archives hold no less than sixty-four volumes of his notes and collectanea, and more than half of these pertain to oral literature and folklore. As would be expected, ballad and other sung verse have the place of honor in these volumes, accounting for twenty of the sixty-four. Under "Kitty's" constant tending, the Folklore Collection in the Library also grew to more than 20,000 volumes, or thrice the size it had been when he inherited the responsibility for it from Child.

But Kittredge was not content just to continue Child's various enterprises; his interest in oral traditions was even broader than Child's had been. The focus of Child's work was balladry, and Kittredge gathered new material and published on that subject amply. But other *genres* of oral tradition occupied more of Kittredge's mind, including such diverse subjects as proverbs, folktales, and the history of witchcraft beliefs. Besides the eight volumes of material he gathered into his notes and scrapbooks relevant to witchcraft beliefs and trials, he published three important monographs on that subject between 1907 and 1917.

Kittredge ranged beyond the scope of Child's activity in other ways too. More than Child, he was interested in the continuation of British and European oral literature and folklore in America. And he paid particular attention throughout his career to works of ancient and medieval literature which had the stamp of close association with oral tradition. His published works in this department ranged from his edition of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* to his several writings on Arthurian legends. He kept abreast of the work of other prominent folklorists of his time such as Andrew Lang, and he was for a time President of the American Folklore Society. Kittredge is perhaps most often remembered for his work in English, but his awareness and his writings on oral literature and folklore extended well beyond the English-speaking peoples to include such diverse materials as Old Norse, Finnish, Russian, and even Japanese folklore.

Those who knew him agree that Kittredge had an unusual capacity for work, and he worked hard on oral literature. But he exerted his

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most lasting influence on future oral literary studies through his recruitment of disciples for this field and his *encouragement of graduate learning.* It is ironic that his greatest success should be measured in the later work of his students when one recalls how many of them remember him for the distinctive acerbity of his public dealings with them. But his sometimes brusque manner was rarely mistaken for malice, and "Kitty" was an able patron when he chose to be. Few American scholars have promoted humanistic learning so decisively in so many fields as he did through his students and protégés.

The recruitment of disciples and sponsoring of graduate work on oral literature was another of the activities inherited from Child. Kittredge himself was a product of it, for the soft-spoken, mild-mannered Child had personally chosen "Kitty" to continue his work, and despite their very different manners, the two men were close friends. Kittredge's staunchest ally in ballad studies after Child's death was another of Child's disciples, Francis Barton Gummere (Harvard 1875), who was for a few years Instructor in English at Harvard before he went permanently to be Professor of English at Haverford College in Pennsylvania. A lifelong scholar of oral literature and patron in turn of other, younger men in the same field, Gummere did not cease to contribute to the welfare of these studies at Harvard when he removed to Pennsylvania. In time he sent his son, Richard Mott Gummere, to study the Classics at Harvard, and Richard Gummere stayed to become the Dean of Admissions at Harvard College, an office which he held for 18 years. It was he who during his long tenure "nationalized" the admissions program of the College, bringing the ablest young men he could find from all parts of the country to study for Harvard's A.B. degree. More than one young scholar of oral literature in the present generation owes his place in this field, however indirectly, to Richard Gummere's thorough reform of admissions policy.

Others of Child's protégés advanced the cause of oral literary studies in major American institutions besides Harvard. Perhaps the most prominent of these was a very early disciple indeed, Jeremiah Curtin of the Class of 1863. Curtin was a polymathic personality, and he arguably did more in his time for the "public relations" of oral literary learning than any man before or after him. As collector, translator, and publicist, he was able to gain the interest and even the financial support of such prominent individuals as Charles H. Dana, the famous publisher of the New York *Sun*, and of such prominent public institu-

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tions as the Smithsonian Institution in Washington. Curtin was no great interpreter of oral traditions, and his scholarship was no match for his practical enthusiasm. But he travelled indefatigably throughout his entire lifetime of 71 years, motivated mainly by his interest in oral literature. Besides the usual facility in ancient and foreign languages of educated men in his time, he spoke Irish Gaelic and Russian, and knew a good deal of American Indian languages. His principal works of translation and commentary on oral traditions were from American Indians, from Russian and Siberian peoples of the Russian Empire, and from Ireland. He knew all of these peoples at first hand. In Ireland, where with American backing he collected Gaelic oral traditions, Curtin's advanced collecting procedures set a new standard for fieldwork that was ultimately incorporated into the working methodology of the Irish Folklore Commission, the institution which has the largest single national archive of oral literature in the world today.

During the few years in the early 1890s when Child and Kittredge were together on the faculty of Harvard's English Department, several young scholars of oral traditions enjoyed the sponsorship of both men. The most eminent of these was Fred Norris Robinson of the Class of 1891. He took his Master's and Doctor's degrees at Harvard in quick succession (1892 and 1894), then Child and Kittredge sent him to Freiburg in Germany to learn the principles of Celtic philology in what was the world's foremost school of Celtic languages in that era. Child and Kittredge both regretted knowing no Celtic, and they were determined that the time had come when the Celtic component of British and other European oral traditions must be scientifically understood. The enthusiastic but inexact work in Celtic of such earlier lights as Curtin could no longer satisfy Harvard's two doyens of oral literature, and so they delegated Robinson to bring Celtic studies to Cambridge. Robinson's return to Harvard in the fall of 1896 with an appointment as instructor coincided with the death of Child, but Child like Kittredge would have been delighted with Robinson's success. From that time until his retirement in 1939 Robinson remained at Harvard, training one generation after another in Celtic. Almost singlehandedly he established Celtic studies as a permanent department of humanistic learning in America.

The study of oral literature had begun at Harvard as the personal preoccupation of one man, and as such it was one of the oldest *foci* of intellectual effort in the modern University. But after 1890 it became

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also a major generator of new technical disciplines not only for Harvard but also for higher learning in the nation as a whole.

As the drive to learn more about the contents and origins of oral literature gained momentum over the decades, it set in motion many new subsidiary developments and careers like that of Robinson in Celtic. Kittredge loomed as the presiding genius of this new phase.

Child's followers had for the most part enlisted in his cause one by one, and their careers were mainly independent of each other. But in the years from 1900 to the beginning of the Great Depression, a veritable constellation of diverse personalities and talents formed around Kittredge. Through the force of his persuasion and example, "Kitty" attracted and shaped the first coherent *cadre* of oral literary scholars in America. His students and followers began to specialize in particular *genres* of oral literature, and a vigorous commerce of knowledge and ideas arose among them. Gradually the members of Kittredge's pleiad dispersed to other centers of learning and education throughout the United States, but the friendships and intellectual alliances formed under his aegis in Cambridge persisted.

Walter Morris Hart was one of Kittredge's early disciples who became a considerable figure in the West as Professor of English at the University of California. Hart's specialty was the still-debated relationship between ballads and epic poetry, and in his search for solutions to that problem he developed and taught a method in the philology of medieval English which helped many generations of students to read the epic and romance literature of England. Another of Kittredge's students who went west was Sigurd Bernhard Hustvedt, a second-generation Norwegian-American from the Mid-West who worked under Kittredge during the years 1912–1915. He went afterwards as Professor of English to the University of California at Los Angeles, where he taught until 1949. His book *Ballad Books and Ballad Men* is still a landmark.

Another senior member of the Kittredge constellation was Archer Taylor, who specialized in Germanic traditions and studied closely some of the basic forms of wisdom literature, such as the poetry of proverbs. Taylor followed Hart to the University of California at Berkeley, where he remained active into the closing years of the 1960s. Taylor and Stith Thompson of Indiana University are generally regarded as the founders of modern folklore scholarship in America. They met at Harvard in 1912, later travelled together overseas, and

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Young Bearwell.

When two lovers love each other well,
Great sin it were them to twine;
And this I speak from young Bearwell;
He loved a lady young,
The mayor's daughter o' Birtleham brae,
That lovely leesome thing.

One day when she was lookin out,
When washing her milk-white hands,
That she beheld him, young Bearwell,
As he came in the strands.

Says,—Wae's me for you young Bearwell,
Such tales of you are tauld;
They'll cause you sail the salt sea so far,
As beyond Yorkisfauld.

O shall I bide in good green wood,
Or stay in bower with thee?
The leaves are thick in good green wood,
Would hold you from the rain;
And if you stay in bower with me,
You will be taken and slain.

PLATE I

A TYPICAL PAGE

FROM THE BUCHAN MANUSCRIPT,
ONE OF PROFESSOR CHILD'S MAIN SOURCES OF TEXTS,
NOW IN THE HOUGHTON LIBRARY

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PLATE II

FRANCIS JAMES CHILD

THIS PHOTOGRAPH, APPARENTLY TAKEN BY CHARLES ELIOT NORTON, WAS FOUND AMONG KITTREDGE'S PAPERS IN THE HOUGHTON LIBRARY; IT SHOWS CHILD, WHO WAS FAMOUS FOR HIS ROSE-GARDENING, IN THE YARD OF HIS HOME ON KIRKLAND STREET.

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Pach Bro's

Plate III

GEORGE LYMAN KITTREDGE

IN 1882

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Plate IV

GEORGE LYMAN KITTREDGE

IN 1926, PORTRAIT BY CHARLES S. HOPKINSON,

REPRODUCED BY PERMISSION OF FOGG ART MUSEUM, HARVARD UNIVERSITY

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PLATE V

MILMAN PARRY

FROM A PHOTOGRAPH IN THE HERBERT WEIR SMYTH CLASSICAL LIBRARY, HARVARD UNIVERSITY

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Plate VI

THREE MODERN ORAL POETS
WHOSE WORKS ARE RECORDED IN THE
MILMAN PARRY COLLECTION

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thus struck up a friendship that has continued ever since — they vying amicably with each other throughout their lives as to which of them would live longest and do most for folklore studies. At this writing, both are still living and their contest is undecided.[5]

Some of Kittredge's disciples, like Taylor and Thompson, have been great codifiers of oral literature, whose major energies have gone toward establishing typologies and classifications for the various kinds of texts derived from oral traditions. They have also tried to determine how the contents of oral tradition have spread or diffused from place to place and people to people in the course of history.

Others of the Kittredge constellation, such as Newman Ivey White of North Carolina, became great editors of oral literature, continuing the Child tradition of publishing definitive compendiums to make the various forms of oral tradition besides ballad available in print.

The field of musicology is especially indebted to the Kittredge constellation for a whole series of outstanding specialists in folk music — the musical component of many forms of oral literature. After William Weld Newell, who began work in Child's era, came Phillips Barry, Helen Hartness Flanders, Fannie Hardy Eckstorm, Bertrand Harris Bronson, and Samuel Bayard, to name but a few exceptionally prominent musicologists of oral tradition from the Age of Kittredge. But to name only a few is misleading. D. K. Wilgus, Sigurd Hustvedt's continuator at the University of California in Los Angeles, has best described how the example of Child and the active encouragement of Kittredge created a national movement of folksong collecting and research:

> The most important single fact of American collection has been its close relationship to educational institutions. The institutions themselves have not always officially approved and supported folksong collection; but academic folklore interest encouraged teachers to take advantage of the American emphasis on universal education, which brought into the classroom informants and contacts with traditional culture. In the early years of the century the work of Professors Child and Kittredge had made Harvard University an unofficial center of folksong study. . . . The direct and indirect influence of Harvard University produced results which, when archives and theses are eventually surveyed, will be truly staggering.[6]

[5] Between the writing and publication of this paper, Archer Taylor died, 30 September 1973.

[6] D. K. Wilgus, *Anglo-American Folksong Scholarship Since 1898* (New Brunswick, 1959), pp. 173–174.

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Not all of Kittredge's disciples in folksong research were professional scholars and academics. John Avery Lomax and his son Alan James represent another kind of following that added a distinctive lustre of its own to the Kittredge constellation. John Lomax was a Mississippian who got his A.M. degree under Kittredge in 1907. As a boy John had lived on the Chisholm trail in Texas, and after finishing his preparatory work on ballad for his degree at Harvard, he was eager to collect the oral traditional singing of the cattlemen in the country where he had been raised. Kittredge got him three summer fellowships from Harvard for that purpose, and Lomax used them to discover and record on his portable phonograph innumerable pieces of American song tradition including such now-famous songs as "Home on the Range," "Git Along, Little Dogies," "The Old Chisholm Trail," and "The Boll Weevil." John Lomax's vocation for folksong remained the dominant purpose in his life from then on. He continued to collect until his death in 1948 at the age of 80, and eventually extended his range to include all parts of the United States where oral traditions of song could be found. His son Alan, who came to Harvard College in 1931, inherited his father's same engrossment with the collection and popularization of folksong, with the difference that whereas John Lomax confined his activity to North America, Alan has undertaken to popularize folksong from all corners of the world for Anglo-American audiences.

Professor Kittredge launched one productive career after another by securing a little fellowship money for the right student at the right moment. His aim was ever to improve oral literary studies in some facet where he sensed a deficiency, but the accomplishments that rewarded his patronage usually far outran the limited goals which he set for his protégés. A case in point was Ernest J. Simmons, '25. As earlier he had regretted knowing no Celtic, so too Kittredge regretted that he knew no Russian, because Russian oral narrative had come to interest him greatly in his later years. He promised Ernest Simmons that if Ernest would learn Russian, he would find a way to send him to Russia, and in 1928 he kept that promise. The experience of a year in Russia was decisive for Simmons, who thereafter turned entirely to Slavic studies. In the years after 1945, Simmons was the guiding force in the rapid growth of Russian and Soviet studies at Columbia University, which was the hotbed from which the scions of this new field were transplanted to Harvard and subsequently to other academic

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centers throughout the United States. Perhaps too often, Kittredge's protégés were, like Simmons, carried so far afield by the impetus which "Kitty" imparted to them that the originally intended service to oral literary studies never materialized. Russian oral narrative, which is among the most richly attested in all of Europe and Asia, remains today a virgin field for comparative study in the Harvard tradition.

In an age rife with literary ethnocentricity, Kittredge was as readily and as genuinely interested in Russian ballads or American Indian folktales as in the plays of Shakespeare. There was, moreover, within the broad circle of his influence no great chasm between literary populists and élitists such as afflicts contemporary literary scholarship. Kittredge's intellectual hospitality toward "foreign" traditions and his equanimity toward "vulgar" ones appear in retrospect as perhaps the most important sources of his influence.

Not all the students who responded to Kittredge's philoxenia were catapulted as suddenly into foreign studies as were F. N. Robinson and Ernest Simmons. Some reacted to it more gradually, while others who withstood its effects in their own careers nevertheless fostered it in those who in turn came under their tutelage.

Two of Kittredge's disciples who stayed at Harvard continued his tradition of oral literary studies in English after his retirement in 1936.

One of these was Francis Peabody Magoun, Jr. (Harvard 1916). A specialist in Anglo-Saxon and Old English literature, Professor Magoun was later to be the first influential figure in his field who recognized the applicability of Parry's Oral Theory to such works of Anglo-Saxon poetry as *Beowulf*. His understanding of oral literature was thus a unique fusion of the early Kittredge and later Parry legacies. Together with Alexander Krappe, he was the first scholarly English translator of the Grimm Brothers' German folktales. While looking among Britain's neighbors in Europe for possible modern analogues to old English epic poetry, Magoun also became interested in the oral poetry of Finland which the Finn Elias Lönnrot had collected and published in the nineteenth century under the title *The Kalevala*.

So in middle age Magoun set about learning Finnish, for he retained throughout his life the same willingness that Kittredge had to work in whatever materials would best serve the enlargement of knowledge about oral traditions. Gradually books in Finnish began to displace the volumes on medieval English in the library at Magoun's home on Reservoir Street. His studies and translations of *The Kalevala* won

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him singular recognition not only in the English-speaking world but also in Finland itself. Long after his retirement in 1961, Magoun was still publishing new work in the field of Finnish oral literature.

A decade younger than Magoun, Bartlett Jere Whiting came to Harvard College as a freshman in 1921. First as student and then as teacher, he remained in the English Department continuously from that time until his retirement in 1975. Whiting first attracted Kittredge's attention with an undergraduate paper on traditional wisdom — the lore of proverbs — in Chaucer. The same unusual fidelity which those who later knew Whiting experienced in his personal friendship, expressed itself also in his intellectual activities. He remained true to both Chaucer and the English proverb throughout his long subsequent professional career of fifty years. Shortly after graduating, Whiting became F. N. Robinson's assistant in the English Department's large undergraduate course on Chaucer, and when Robinson retired, Whiting became and remained head of that course until 1975.

Another form of English literature that was oral or depended heavily on oral tradition was the Middle English romances — the long metrical and prose tales in Middle English about such legendary figures as Sir Gawain, Havelok the Dane, and Bevis of Hamtoun. These were a central personal interest of Kittredge, who taught this subject in the English Department until 1928, when he relinquished it to Whiting. Here again Whiting was tenaciously faithful to his commission, continuing to teach and propagate research on the romances without interruption for the next forty-six years.

Meanwhile, in his own research, Whiting worked steadily on proverbs and traditional wisdom, painstakingly compiling piece by piece his definitive reconstruction of English oral wisdom from the period between the Norman Conquest and 1500. The book resulting from this life-long work, *Proverbs, Sentences, and Proverbial Phrases from English Writings Mainly Before 1500* (Cambridge, 1968), is a unique accomplishment in oral literary historiography.

In no other single career was Child's and Kittredge's legacy so directly enlarged as in that of B. J. Whiting. Several times chairman of the English Department, Whiting not only sustained Child's, Kittredge's, and Robinson's tradition of English oral literary studies for half a century, but also freely used his considerable influence to help and encourage the work of innumerable other scholars in this field. More than anything else, this spirit of collaboration and mutual en-

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couragement, so apparent in the Kittredge constellation, created the tradition of oral literary studies at Harvard.

Kittredge, his students, and his associates collaborated in every development of knowledge that might improve understanding of oral literature and popular culture. As a devoted member and sometimes President of the Massachusetts Historical Society, Kittredge promoted awareness of folklore as a force in the local history of New England. In addition to languages, literature, folklore, musicology, and regional history, he and his allies took a lively interest also in the history of religions. From its beginning about 1899, Kittredge, W. W. Newell, and F. N. Robinson were faithful members of the Harvard Religions Club, a group of about a dozen Harvard faculty members who met on one evening a month during term-time to dine together and hear accounts of each other's work on topics in religion. Subsequently renamed the History of Religions Club, this unofficial alliance of faculty members for the promotion of religious studies still functions at Harvard. Clifford Herschel Moore (Harvard 1889), another early member of the Club, later shared with his fellow classicist C. N. Jackson the initiative that brought Milman Parry to Harvard's Department of the Classics.

By the time of his retirement in 1936, Kittredge, like Child before him, had given forty years of his energy and thought to oral tradition and its various cognates in both written literature and unwritten popular culture. From the very beginning, he had grasped the essential object of oral literary studies. As early as 1898 he wrote in connection with his own and Francis Child's work on balladry:

> Few persons understand the difficulties of ballad investigation. . . . What is needed is . . . a complete understanding of the "popular" genius, a sympathetic recognition of the traits that characterize oral literature wherever and in whatever degree they exist.[7]

Since "the traits that characterize oral literature" were neither confined to any one place or people nor necessarily the same from one people to another, the man who would know those traits would have to transcend conventional limits of nationality in his quest for "a complete understanding of the 'popular' genius."

[7] Kittredge, *op. cit.*, xxx.

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Milman Parry

While Kittredge discerned perfectly what should be the goal of oral literary studies, he also knew that no one in his day, not even the most cosmopolitan of literary scholars, possessed any such complete understanding of oral literature as he had specified. There was no lack of the will to understand in Kittredge or in other men like him. But in spite of the tireless effort of Child to accumulate all the texts of oral poetry that he could obtain from Britain, and the heartening growth of the Harvard Library's Folklore Collection, there was still a crippling lack of essential information. Wherever in the world writing had come into use for literary purposes and some form of *belles lettres* had been developed, there had been some writing down of texts from oral tradition; the amount was more or less, depending upon local factors such as the intrinsic ease or difficulty of particular writing systems, or the attitude of local religions toward oral tradition. In some parts of the world, like Britain, there had been a lot of random collecting of this kind for centuries, and it might well take a lifetime, as it had taken Child, to accumulate a substantial amount of that *sporadic* evidence of oral literature. Nevertheless, as late as 1930, there had still never been anyone who had systematically collected a *whole* oral tradition anywhere in the world — or, if there had been, his collections had not survived intact to inform literate and educated men in Europe and America.

Thus it was one thing to know, as Child and Kittredge knew from the many dismembered bits and pieces of oral poetries, that oral traditions existed in various languages, but it was something else again to know first-hand how such literature came into being in the traditional, unwritten poetic performances of oral bards. Without being able to consult the full record of an oral tradition, one could never know with even approximate certainty the origins of anything in it, or distinguish between the effects of precedent and the effects of individual invention in traditional compositions. And without the direct, personal experience of oral poetic performances, it was not possible to formulate an exact discrimination between literature created by writing on the one hand, and literature created by traditional modes of poetic speech on the other. Those accomplishments in "recognition of the traits that characterize oral literature" had to await the coming of some great collector with a methodical turn of mind who would investigate not

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only the fossilized texts of dead oral traditions, but also the live acts of oral traditional composition performed by living oral poets. The primary focus of oral literary studies had to be shifted from research on the static contents of oral traditions to research on the dynamic processes that gave life to a tradition. The contemplation of dead literary specimens had to give way to observation of living poetries in their natural settings.

So the vision of a general theory of oral literature which Kittredge had glimpsed in 1898 could not even begin to be realized at that time. It fell to the lot of another, younger man to be America's first great collector of oral traditions in Europe, and to formulate the first principles of what has since become known as the Oral Theory.

That younger man was the classicist Milman Parry, and he represented the third generation in the growth of oral literary scholarship at Harvard.

Milman Parry's early intellectual development paralleled Child's in several fateful ways. The similarity of their minds had roots in the similar circumstances of their childhood. Child's father, a sailmaker, and Parry's father, a carpenter, were both independent artisans whose modest incomes afforded no material luxury or educational advantage for their children. Born to the idea of reliance on their own talent and work, both Child and Parry were practical men as well as extraordinary scholars. Both men had also a constitutional appreciation of custom and usage that revealed itself in their personalities at an early age. By the time they had finished their college studies, each had developed a keen awareness of the power of tradition in shaping not only literature but also the patterns of real experience which literature symbolized. Imbued with this strong consciousness of tradition, Child and Parry both went to great European centers of learning soon after the conclusion of their college studies to gain more knowledge about the mechanisms of literary language. The difference of eighty years between the careers of Child and Parry was not so great as the likeness of their motivation to the study of languages and literature.

Child went to Germany in 1849 — his first journey to Europe — to meet the famous Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm and to hear their lectures at the University of Berlin. Germanic philology and classical antiquity were the subjects which Child followed for two years at Berlin and in the lectures of the Grimms' close associates at the older University of Göttingen. The comparison of ancient and modern European cul-

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ture implicit in this combination of interests was no accident; such historicism was a cardinal principle with the Grimm brothers and informed all their learned work in the various fields of medieval literature, historical linguistics, legal history, comparative mythology, and folklore. The stimulation which Child derived in those two years from the Grimms and their circle remained by his own admission the dominant force in his intellectual activity from that time on. Kittredge tells us that for the rest of his life Child kept a portrait of Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm on the mantel over the fireplace in his study.

In regard to higher literary learning, Cambridge, Massachusetts, in 1851 was still a wilderness, and Child had found in the Brothers Grimm and in their circle of like-minded German scholars a true Mecca for comparative study of literary traditions. But it was not just the example of their historicism or their comparative studies of literature that Child esteemed so much, for he had known about that before he went to Germany. Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm exercised a lifelong influence on him because they were the first great modern collectors of oral traditions in Europe. Through their famous collection of German folktales, which had already been published in three successive editions by 1849, and in their related scholarly writings, the Grimms had taught the world how much of European culture owed nothing to literacy, and how much literature itself might be indebted for its best traditions to *Volkspoesie* — the unwritten poetic compositions of ordinary, unlettered people.[8] Francis Child went to Germany with the idea that tradition was responsible for what was best in European literature. He came home to Cambridge with the more specific idea that oral tradition was an older and more fertile constituent of European culture than even literature. In this sense Kittredge's judgment was correct, that Child's own greatest contribution to learning, his ten-volume edition of *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, was the fruit of his two-year stay in Germany.

The Brothers Grimm gave Child all the inspiration he needed for a lifetime, but another man, a Danish ballad collector named Svend Grundtvig, later taught him other things which he could not do without. The eminent Dane was a source of invaluable practical advice on

[8] The Grimm brothers in turn owed their first knowledge of oral tradition to their professor of law at Marburg University, Friedrich Karl von Savigny, who introduced them in 1803 to the two momentous, cognate ideas: the importance of unwritten custom in the history of law, and of unwritten poetry — *Volkspoesie* — in the formation of literature.

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the whereabouts of texts, and Grundtvig taught Child most of the working methodology he ever knew.

Eighty years later, Milman Parry similarly went to Paris to study philology at the Sorbonne under Jacob Grimm's intellectual descendant, the renowned historical linguist and Indo-Europeanist, Antoine Meillet. Parry was a Hellenist whose interest in literary tradition came to a focus in his study of Homer. But like Child, he saw tradition at work most plainly in those mechanisms of literary language that distinguish literature from common discourse. Parry was in Paris for three years, from 1925 to 1928. He described the evolution of his own ideas during those years in these words:

> My first studies were on the style of the Homeric poems and led me to understand that so highly formulaic a style could be only traditional. I failed, however, at the time to understand as fully as I should have that a style such as that of Homer must not only be traditional but also must be oral. It was largely due to the remarks of my teacher M. Antoine Meillet that I came to see, dimly at first, that a true understanding of the Homeric poems could only come with a full understanding of the nature of oral poetry. It happened that a week or so before I defended my theses for the doctorate at the Sorbonne that Professor Mathias Murko of the University of Prague delivered in Paris the series of conferences which later appeared as his book "La poésie populaire épique en Yougoslavie au début du XXe siècle." I had seen the poster for these lectures but at the time I saw in them no great meaning for myself. However, Professor Murko, doubtless due to some remark of M. Meillet, was present at my soutenance and at that time M. Meillet as a member of my jury pointed out with his usual ease and clarity this failing in my two books. It was the writings of Professor Murko more than those of any other which in the following years led me to the study of oral poetry in itself and to the heroic poems of the South Slavs.[9]

So Paris was to Parry what Berlin and Göttingen had been to Child, and Parry's Jacob Grimm and Svend Grundtvig were Antoine Meillet and Mathias Murko. Parry returned to the United States in 1928 as Child had in 1851 with the new idea of *orality* firmly wedded in his mind to the old idea of *tradition* which he had taken with him to Europe. In both cases, a prominent European collector of oral literature and an eminent philologist had together catalyzed the fusion of those two ideas in the Americans' thinking. Jacob Grimm, Svend Grundtvig, and Mathias Murko were all men who had personally seen

[9] Milman Parry's unpublished autograph typescript in the Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature in the Harvard College Library, quoted in A. B. Lord, *The Singer of Tales* (Cambridge, 1960), pp. 11–12.

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and heard oral traditional poetry performed, and collected the performances with their own hands. Neither Child nor Parry shared the experience of collecting during their student years in Europe, but their indirect knowledge of it gave decisive new direction to their careers. In the end, the two Americans excelled even their European teachers in putting that knowledge to use.

But putting the knowledge to use was not easy. It meant a serious deflection of thought and energy from the customary preoccupations of academic literary studies, and such deflections were then, as they are now, professionally very perilous for the young scholar who was not yet established in the eyes of his academic elders.

For five years from 1851 to 1856, Child's new awareness of the oral traditional component in European culture lay hidden from view, with no notable consequences in his teaching or publication. In a similar manner, Parry returned to the United States in 1928 to the beginning of what seemed at first an unexceptional career as a teacher of the Latin and Greek classics. For five years from 1928 to 1933, Parry's teaching and publication revealed nothing of the new enterprise to which he was privately committed: a concerted program of field-collecting in the Old World. After a year of teaching at Drake University in Iowa, Parry joined the faculty of Harvard's Department of the Classics in the autumn of 1929 with the rank of Instructor. He was promoted to Assistant Professor in 1932, and then in the summer of 1933, after years of quietly preparing himself, he set out on a brief journey that was to have remarkable consequences not only for his own field of Homeric studies but also for the whole of humanistic science in the twentieth century.

Parry's path to his first knowledge of oral tradition was the same as Child's, but once he had that knowledge, his response to it was quite different. Child became a great editor and accumulator of old books, manuscripts, and broadsides relating to oral tradition. Parry too accumulated material of that kind, but he was not satisfied with merely collecting other peoples' collections. To some extent Child had always remained subject to the nineteenth-century bourgeois prejudice that rural or agrarian life was incompatible with culture of high quality. Parry, who had been a poultry farmer for a year before he went to Paris, had no such prejudice. So although he set out along the same path that Child had followed, he soon went much further along that path than Child had. Parry knew how radical his procedure had to be

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if he was to break through the charmed circle of scholarly ignorance about the mechanisms of oral tradition that had persisted for centuries in Europe and America. Though a Classicist by profession, he preferred to think of himself as a professional hybrid — a "literary anthropologist." It was an apt expression.

As a scholar of Homeric poetry, Parry was initially interested in the problem of how the author of the ancient Greek *Iliad* and *Odyssey* had composed those two great narrative poems at the very beginning of European literary tradition. His study of that problem led him to the hypothesis that the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were not originally literary at all, but rather the products of an archaic Greek oral tradition that was older than any written literature in Europe. In order to test that theory, and to learn the distinctive traits of oral literature from a living oral tradition, Parry went in 1933 into the hinterland of Yugoslavia where he had heard five years previously from Meillet and Murko that an oral tradition of heroic poetry still persisted. There he observed and recorded in writing numerous live performances by illiterate masters of the traditional epic mode of speech in South Slavic dialects. By analogy with this evidence from a modern Balkan culture, Professor Parry was convinced that indeed Homer had been an oral poet whose superb knowledge of archaic Greek oral tradition made any dependence on writing not only unnecessary but even impossible in the original composition of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. This hypothesis, which Parry argued with masterly technical precision, quickly became known among the international brotherhood of classical scholars as the Oral Theory. It is today widely recognized as the single most important theoretical advance in classical studies in this century. But its effects were not confined to classical learning.

Parry's discovery of an analogy between modern South Slavic and ancient Greek oral epos, and his corollary suggestion that literature began in Europe with the writing down of an oral tradition, amazed and stimulated scholars of the humanities everywhere. For centuries it had been common knowledge among educated men that oral traditions existed among the illiterate classes in Europe and elsewhere. Child, Kittredge, and all of their wide circle of students and allies had thrived on that knowledge. But if oral traditions were ever capable of producing such masterpieces as the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, then it was suddenly very important to understand exactly how such traditions worked, and what kinds of "literature" belonged to them. Parry knew

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that he would need more detailed proof than he had brought from Yugoslavia in 1933 to sustain his theory, and to demonstrate all the mechanics of oral literature — literature totally without writing. A momentous shift of emphasis was taking place in the fundamental direction of oral literary research — from the study of *content* to the study of *process* in oral traditions.

So with the financial backing of Harvard and the American Council of Learned Societies, Parry returned in 1934 to the outlying mountain districts of Yugoslavia with a specially designed sound-recording apparatus, determined to make a thorough collection of the South Slavic oral literature. Using the new technology of recording sound on aluminum discs, he devoted fifteen months in 1934 and 1935 to a complete exploration of the modern oral epic tradition throughout the Slavic-speaking region of the western Balkans. The collection which he thus formed was not only the most complete that had ever been made in terms of that region, but also the first large, durable collection of sound-recordings in the entire history of oral literary studies.

Parry's monumental collection from the years 1933–1935 is the nucleus of the present Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature in the Harvard College Library.

That nucleus is, of course, unique and irreplaceable, because nothing in it, if lost, could ever be duplicated from any other source whatsoever. It contains more than 12,000 individual texts, and more than 3,500 recorded twelve-inch aluminum discs. The longest epic songs ever recorded in sound anywhere in the world are in this collection, alive and complete; the longest of these exceeds 13,000 verses in length.

The Present Generation

Since Parry's death in 1935 there have been a number of important additions to his collection, with the result that it is now several times its original size.

In 1937, the Honorary Curator, Albert B. Lord, added more than a hundred epic and ballad texts from northern Albania. They are invaluable for studying the processes by which stories pass from one language to another. After World War II, Lord returned to Yugoslavia to revisit in 1950 and 1951 most of the places where Parry had collected; this was in accord with the plan of further field work which Parry himself had envisaged. During these two years Lord added to

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the Collection many new texts by recording on magnetic wire. Later, in 1958 and 1959, he also added texts from field recording in Bulgaria, so that the evidence of Balkan oral tradition in the Parry Collection now reaches from the Adriatic to the Black Sea.

The decade of the sixties saw the greatest additions to the Collection in number of texts recorded, in areas covered, and in chronological depth. The present curators of the Collection, Albert B. Lord and David Bynum, made an intensive effort during the five years 1962–1967 to acquire evidence of oral tradition from localities and singers which Parry had not been able to study in the 1930s. Some of these were in areas that were inaccessible to Parry; in more than one Balkan village which they visited in 1963 and 1964, Lord and Bynum were the only foreigners who had come there within living memory. A number of the epic singers collected in these years had been raw youths in Parry's time, but matured into good oral traditional poets in the thirty-year interval. Several had learned their traditions from Parry's singers, and so represented the rare and invaluable opportunity to study the direct passage of oral literary tradition from one generation to another. The five years of carefully planned field-work in 1962–1967 brought in a rich harvest of new recordings from Serbia, Bosnia, Hercegovina, and Montenegro. Whole new tracts of territory were closely surveyed, linking together for the first time such prominent centers of Parry's original collecting as Novi Pazar and Bijelo Polje.

Parry chose to make his field study of oral literature in the mountains of the western Balkans because, of all places in the world where oral epic tradition was known to persist in this century, the Balkans promised the surest immediate results for use in his analogical study of Homeric poetry. He fully intended to make similar field studies elsewhere at a later time; Africa and the Middle East were uppermost in his mind. The Balkans were thus only the first of several regions where he wanted to gather texts and facts about oral literature.

But having made the western Balkans his first choice, he quickly became the most methodical and comprehensive collector of oral tradition who ever worked there. He was not the first or only collector; scores of others before and after him made more limited manuscript collections from the same tradition. A majority of these manuscripts had by 1960 been gathered into State archives in the two principal metropolitan centers of Yugoslavia: Belgrade and Zagreb. During the period from 1963 to 1972, microfilm copies of these holdings were

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acquired for the Parry Collection, thus extending its coverage of the western Balkan tradition to include most of the existing manuscripts from the very beginnings of collecting in the Napoleonic era down to the present day. With the financial backing of the National Endowment for the Humanities and Arts, much of this material has been electro-printed to facilitate its use, and the prints bound in durable volumes.

With the microfilms from Yugoslavia and the earlier recordings from the thirties, fifties, and sixties, the Milman Parry Collection is by far the finest collection of any one oral poetic tradition anywhere in the world.

Milman Parry's untimely death in a tragic accident with a firearm in December of 1935 prevented his using his own collection for the intended purpose. He lived long enough to write only a few pages of general observations on his epoch-making first-hand experience with a living tradition of oral epic poetry. Those pages have been published, reprinted, and quoted numerous times since 1935.

Parry also left a typescript of about 275 pages consisting of eight short South Slavic texts with his own detailed commentary on them. Extensive excerpts from this typescript have been published; a verbatim edition of it is to be published soon by the Parry Collection and the Harvard University Press.

Luckily, Parry did not go alone to collect in the Balkans in 1934–1935. He took with him one of his former students just graduated from Harvard College, Albert B. Lord, '34, as a technical assistant and bookkeeper. As an honors student of the Classics under Parry, Lord had learned at first-hand about his teacher's aims in cultural exploration of the Balkans. When Parry was killed, Lord was the obvious choice to carry out Parry's intended exposition of the dynamics of oral literature from the Parry Collection.

A number of time-consuming preliminary clerical operations had to be performed before the collection could be put to systematic use. First, the Slavic texts had to be written down, or *transcribed*, word for word from the aluminum records. Next, the rough transcriptions needed to be *typed* to provide fair working copies. Then the stenography — transcription and typing — had to be *checked* for accuracy; the language was often difficult and mistakes easily crept into even the most conscientious stenography. All this preliminary work had to be done for the total content of the aluminum records, which was more

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than 360,000 typed lines in various South Slavic dialects. After that, each of the nearly 13,000 texts in the collection required *cataloguing.* And when that was done, Lord next made complete *inventories* of all the oral poets and all the individual narratives represented in the collection. Even with expert stenographic help in this labor it naturally took Lord many months to put the collection into usable form. All this *archival processing and analysis* was a new department of activity added to the more familiar ones of collecting, publishing, library improvement, and public education established by Child.

Even before the archival chores were done, Lord began to collaborate with the Hungarian composer and musicologist Béla Bartók on a joint volume of music, texts, and translations from the Parry Collection. After years of work by both men, and after the disruption of World War II, that book was published by the Columbia University Press: Béla Bartók and Albert B. Lord, *Serbo-Croatian Folk Songs; Texts and Transcriptions of Seventy-Five Folk Songs from the Milman Parry Collection and a Morphology of Serbo-Croatian Folk Melodies* (New York, 1951). The appearance of this book marked a new stage in the growth of the musicological branch of oral traditional studies at Harvard. For the first time, an important tradition of sung oral poetry outside the Anglo-American world had been studied and published. In this respect too, Parry and his followers accomplished what Kittredge had been unable to do, expanding Harvard's tradition of oral literary studies to include discovery and research on materials from all parts of the world, not just Britain and America. Child's habit, continued by Kittredge, of relying entirely on foreign scholars for information about foreign oral traditions, had now to be abandoned. Oral literary studies at Harvard had advanced to a point where foreign scholars were no longer able to supply the necessary data, and henceforth the men from Cambridge would themselves range the globe in search of oral poets and composers. The reason for the quest was as universal as the quest itself, for as Parry had written in 1934 about the purpose of his collection:

> . . . the present collection of oral texts has . . . been made . . . with the thought of obtaining evidence on the basis of which could be drawn a series of generalities applicable to all oral poetries; which would allow me, in the case of a poetry for which there was not enough evidence outside the poems themselves of the way in which they were made, to say whether that poetry was oral or not, and *how* it should be understood if it was oral. In other words the

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study of the South Slavic poetry was meant to provide me an exact knowledge of the characteristics of oral style, in the hope that when such characteristics were known exactly their presence or absence could definitely be ascertained in other poetries. . . .[10]

In short, the Parry Collection was meant to benefit the study of oral literature in all languages, not just Slavic. Like Child and Kittredge before him, Parry perceived from the outset that oral literary studies had to be comparative in character.

There were two ways to render Parry's intended contribution to comparative studies, and both ways were equally essential. One way was to publish a series of representative texts and translations. Through a consistent program of publication covering the whole tradition in all its regions, a knowledgeable editor could in some twenty volumes reconstitute the anatomy of South Slavic oral tradition in book form. Other scholars who could read English or Slavic could then see for themselves what an oral literature was in its entirety and reach their own conclusions about it. Lord had already made a good beginning in this task through his collaboration with Bartók. In 1953 and 1954 he issued a further installment in two volumes of his own editing and translation: *SerboCroatian Heroic Songs*, volume one (Novi Pazar: English Translations) and volume two (Novi Pazar: SerboCroatian Texts) published simultaneously in Cambridge and Belgrade. A third and fourth volume of texts and translations, this time from Montenegro, are at this writing also about to be published by the Harvard University Press. A fifth and sixth volume, representing the oral epic tradition of northern Bosnia, are in preparation.

Besides publishing, the other way to make the benefits of the Parry Collection broadly available was, as Parry had said, by "drawing a series of generalities applicable to all oral poetries." This meant a major work of research and textual analysis in the Parry Collection, with some supplementary study of other possibly oral poetry in other languages. Lord began to meet this responsibility too with the publication of his book *The Singer of Tales* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960).

But Parry's legacy at Harvard was not limited to his Collection nor to those who continued the particular work that he had intended to do with it. A rich treasure of rare books passed from his personal

[10] Milman Parry, *op. cit.*, quoted in Parry and Lord, *Serbocroatian Heroic Songs*, I (Cambridge and Belgrade, 1954), 4.

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library to the College Library's Folklore Collection at the time of his death. Moreover, a number of distinguished senior professors in the present Faculty of Arts and Sciences were associates or students of Parry during the five years that he taught at Harvard. Joining a faculty where such lights from the Kittredge constellation as Bartlett Jere Whiting still shone, the new men of the Parry era have been greatly instrumental in the continuing infusion of oral literary studies throughout Harvard's humanistic curriculum. Among these influential continuators of Parry's purpose are Reuben A. Brower, Cabot Professor of English Literature, John H. Finley, Eliot Professor of Greek Literature, Daniel H. H. Ingalls, Wales Professor of Sanskrit, and Harry T. Levin, Irving Babbitt Professor of Comparative Literature. Another of this number is Robert S. Fitzgerald, Boylston Professor of Rhetoric and Oratory, the man who now occupies that same professorial chair upon which Child began Harvard's great tradition of oral literary studies more than a hundred years ago.

The total influence of this century-old scholarly tradition is difficult to appraise exactly, because it has been so profound and far-reaching. The initial effects at each new stage of the tradition were felt most keenly in the world of higher learning, which was as it should be, for it was preeminently an *academic* tradition. But few academic traditions at Harvard or at any other American university have palpably influenced *common culture* in the English-speaking world to such a degree as this one has. In the twentieth century, one does not need to be a student or a professional academic to feel the influence of Harvard's oral literary scholarship. That influence touches the daily lives of ordinary Americans in numerous ways.

Leaving aside the professorial personalities who have given their genius and energy to oral literary studies at Harvard, it is possible to describe the academic tradition which they have created as a tradition of successful research — a series of basic discoveries, each discovery laying the ground for the next one. Child discovered the common denominator of myriad English poetic fragments, which was the fact that they all derived from an oral tradition. Kittredge discovered the co-existence in the same oral tradition of other poetry and other ideas besides the poetry and ideas found in ballads. Parry discovered how the minds of traditional oral poets work to create simultaneously a great poetry and a great understanding of the life which those poets share with their audiences. The world-wide impact on learning of just

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the latest phase of Harvard's oral literary studies can be measured exactly in another of the Milman Parry Collection's publications, the *Haymes Bibliography of the Oral Theory*, which is Number One in the *Planning and Documentation Series* of the Milman Parry Collection. Thus the study of oral literature at Harvard has been one hundred and twenty years of constant research that has constantly spawned other research in the same directions at other locations and in other institutions throughout the world.

But basic research in the humanities is like any other basic research — the dividends are always exponentially greater than the investment, and they accrue in unpredictable ways. Child's research on the ballad was highly esoteric when he performed it in the nineteenth century. Yet in the twentieth century it was the mother of the so-called Ballad Revival that has done so much to enrich popular musical life throughout the western world. The fusion of local historiography and folklore study which Kittredge pioneered academically has entered into popular awareness and continues today to do as it has done for more than fifty years, shaping the attitudes of millions in America toward their ancestral past and their own identities. Parry's and Lord's technical research on oral tradition has had a similar unexpected impact outside academic life. The publication in 1962 of Herbert Marshall McLuhan's book, *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, marked the beginning of a widespread popular interest in the implications of oral traditions for modern communications. Thus the professional cinema and television script-writer who recently wanted to attend a popular Harvard course on oral narrative is only one of many people who have realized that as the visual effects and spoken words of electronic media increasingly displace printed matter in everyday cultural communication, there is much of practical utility to be learned from a previous age when *all* cultural expression was necessarily oral.

Nor is it surprising that the academic study of oral tradition should incidentally enrich cultural life outside as well as within the colleges and universities of America. The study of oral tradition is ultimately a study of common culture. The only thing esoteric about such a study is the uncommon application of rigorous intellectual discipline to the analysis of common culture in a humanistic curriculum such as Harvard's, which is otherwise devoted mostly to esoteric art and literature.

If four consecutive generations of oral literary studies at Harvard

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have proven anything conclusive about the relationship between literature and oral traditions, it is that neither form of expression can be properly understood without the other. The study of oral literature must continue at Harvard, because it continues to be needed. It is especially necessary at a time when young people are so much concerned as they are in the present era with witnessing and achieving "authentic experience," and when books are too often thought to be artificial and dehumanizingly impersonal. It is necessary at such a time as this to go on discovering in our academic research and to teach in our programs of humanistic education how living men's facility with oral traditions has been the foundation of philosophy and the arts throughout cultural history. The contemporary eagerness of the young to understand every cultural achievement in personal terms makes this an ideal time to learn and to teach more fully than we have the content and the mechanics of those cultural traditions that have sustained men solely by word of mouth for longer than writing has been in existence.

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