



# Some jottings on the pronouncements of the Delphic Oracle

## Citation

Nagy, Gregory. 2016. "Some jottings on the pronouncements of the Delphic Oracle." Classical Inquiries. [http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:hul.eresource:Classical\\_Inquiries](http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:hul.eresource:Classical_Inquiries).

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**Consultant for Images:** Jill Curry Robbins

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## Some jottings on the pronouncements of the Delphic Oracle

November 3, 2016 By Gregory Nagy listed under [By Gregory Nagy](#)

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2016.11.03 | By Gregory Nagy

These jottings—that is all they are—stem from my notes for a talk that I am presenting 2016.11.03. The title of the talk is: “The dynamism of mouvance in the pronouncements of the Delphic Oracle.”

Why do I say mouvance in my title? It is because this term captures what I plan to argue about the verbal medium used by the Pythia in making responses to inquirers in the ritual process of their consulting the Delphic Oracle. In terms of my argument, this verbal medium was a continuation of a living oral tradition.

[\[Essay continues here...\]](#)



Themis, as the prototype of the Pythia, seated on the Delphic tripod, consulted by Aigeus. Attic red-figure, attributed to the Codrus Painter, ca. 430 BCE. Antikensmuseen, Berlin. Illustration from “Illustrerad verldshistoria utgifven av E. Wallis. volume I.” 1875. Photo of illustration by Ernst Wallis et al. (own scan) [Public domain], [via Wikimedia Commons](#).

### Introduction

These jottings—that is all they are—stem from my notes for a talk that I am presenting 2016.11.03.

The title of the talk is:

**The dynamism of mouvance in the pronouncements of the Delphic Oracle.**

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### Editor

Keith Stone  
[kstone@chs.harvard.edu](mailto:kstone@chs.harvard.edu)

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I have two points to make about the title, and these points will help situate my overall argumentation here.

First, why do I say dynamism? It is because this word is preferable to words like fumes, vapors, and exhalations, used by some people even today in referring to sources of inspiration for the woman known as the Puthiā, hereafter written as 'Pythia', who officially made the pronouncements of the oracle of Apollo at Delphi. And why is the word dynamism preferable? It is because the users of alternative words like fumes, vapors, and exhalations tend to overinterpret the details given by ancient sources about the rituals and myths centering on the Delphic Oracle. The overinterpretation results from a pervasive failure to distinguish between ritual and myth. The details we learn from myths about the rituals of consulting the Oracle tend to get confused with the details we learn about the rituals themselves. The myths about the origins of the rituals—and such myths can best be described as aetiologies— can in fact picture such physical details as fumes or vapors or exhalations, but the rituals themselves show no physical indication of any such thing. In the ancient sources, we find no indication that the Pythia might have been physically inspired by fumes or vapors or exhalations that supposedly emanated from the earth below. In the ancient sources, the ritualized inspiration of the Pythia is described in a stylized way, by way of words such as *pneuma* in the vague sense of 'inspiration' and *dunamis* in the comparably vague sense of some divine 'power' that causes the inspiration, as we see for example in the wording of Plutarch On the oracles of the Pythia 402b. For Plutarch, who flourished in the second century CE, the basic idea is, simply, that the god Apollo has the power to inspire the Pythia. Plutarch should know what he is talking about: after all, he was actually a priest of Apollo at Delphi (Sylloge inscriptionum graecarum 829A, 843; Plutarch Whether an old man should engage in public affairs 792f; compare also Plutarch Table Talk 700e). Accordingly, I use the term dynamism in the title of my talk.

Second, why do I say *mouvance* in my title? It is because this term, as I define it at a later point in my exposition, captures what I plan to argue about the verbal medium used by the Pythia in making responses to inquirers in the ritual process of their consulting the Delphic Oracle. In terms of my argument, this verbal medium was a continuation of a living oral tradition.

### On the medium of the Pythia as an oral tradition

In an article, Nagy 1990a, and in a book, Nagy 1990b (Pindar's Homer: The Lyric Possession of an Epic Past), I was already making such an argument: that the medium of the Pythia was a continuation of a living oral tradition. And in two articles by Lisa Maurizio, 1995 and 1997, my argument was reinforced with her own argumentation concerning the oral traditional background of the pronouncements emanating from the Delphic Oracle. In particular, the 1997 article of Maurizio supplemented what I had argued in my 1990b book (hereafter abbreviated as PH) about the process of recomposition-in-performance that extended from the pronouncements of the Pythia to the transmission of these pronouncements by figures commonly known as *prophētai*, a rough translation for which is 'spokesmen', and by the *theōroi*, a rough translation for which is 'observers'.

The use of the word *theōros* 'observer' in contexts referring to the consultation of the Delphic Oracle is straightforward: such an 'observer' was a delegate officially sent by his native city-state to Delphi for the purpose of making an inquiry to which the Pythia was expected to make a response by way of performing an oracular pronouncement on behalf of the god Apollo. Not so straightforward, on the other hand, is the use of the word *prophētēs* 'spokesman' in comparable contexts: such a 'spokesman', as we will see later, could take on the role of speaking on behalf of the Pythia, but the references to such a role in ancient sources can easily confuse modern interpreters, leading some to infer that the typical *prophētēs* controlled the content of what the Pythia said. But the ancient sources, as we will also see later, make it explicit that the *prophētēs* did not control the content: he could re-state the content, yes, but the content was originally stated by the Pythia, because only she had mantic power, that is, the power of a *mantis* 'seer' (Nagy PH 163).

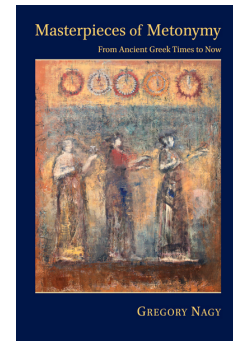
### On composition, performance, transmission, and reception in oral traditions

In an article that focused on the evolution of Homeric and Hesiodic poetry from oral traditions, Nagy 2009:282–283, I posited four essential features of oral traditions in general: composition, performance, reception, and transmission.

To elaborate, I offer in this paragraph an epitome of Nagy 2009:282–283. In any oral tradition, the process of composition is linked to the process of performance, and any given composition can be recomposed each time it is performed. The performer who recomposes the composition in performance may be the same performer who composed it earlier, or it may be a new performer, even a succession of new performers. The point is, such recomposition-in-performance is the essence of transmission in oral traditions. This kind of transmission is the key to a broader understanding of reception. Unlike what happens in literature, where reception by the public happens only after a piece of literature is transmitted, reception in oral traditions happens during as well as after transmission. That is because the process of composition in oral traditions allows for recomposition on each new occasion of performance for a public that sees and hears the performer. In oral traditions, there is an organic link between reception and performance, since no performance can succeed without a successful reception by the public that sees and hears the performer or performers.

### On recomposition-in-performance

What I just said in this epitome fits what I already said a few minutes earlier about the oral tradition that we can see at work in the pronouncements of the Delphic Oracle. In this case, as in the case of Homeric



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and Hesiodic poetry, the transmission of the oral tradition depends on the successful reception of this tradition, from one occasion of reperformance to the next. An original composition-in-performance by the Pythia needs to have a successful reception by the theōroi 'observers' who had been sent by their native city to Delphi in order to ask for a pronouncement by the Pythia, and that reception will in turn depend on the further reception of that pronouncement when it is heard by those at home who had sent the theōroi 'observers' to Delphi. Such further reception depends on some form of reperformance, which may involve some degree of recomposition-in-performance. And the potential for recomposition-in-performance at home is already there at Delphi, since the prophētai 'spokesmen' who serve Apollo there can already reperform for the theōroi 'observers' whatever it was that the Pythia had told them directly.

## On mouvance

Intending to develop further my argument that the medium of the Pythia stems from an oral tradition, I will now start to apply the concept of mouvance. The first time I applied this concept was in a different context. It happened in a book called *Poetry as Performance*, Nagy 1996 (hereafter abbreviated as PasP), where I compared the lyric traditions of medieval French and Provençal poetry with the lyric and epic traditions of ancient Greek poetry. In that book, I did not include any of my work on the poetic tradition of the Delphic Oracle, and so I did not have a chance to apply the concept of mouvance to that particular tradition. Now I hope to make up for that gap.

To start, I need to review how this concept of mouvance applies to medieval French and Provençal poetry.

What follows, then, is an epitome of PasP 9–26 (I indicate within braces the pagination of the original text, starting with {PasP 9}).

{PasP 9} The term mouvance was suggested by Paul Zumthor (1972) as a way of coming to terms with his perception that a medieval literary production like the *Chanson de Roland* is not so much a finished product, un *achèvement*, as it is a text in progress, un *texte en train de se faire*. Viewing mouvance as a widespread phenomenon in medieval manuscript transmission, Zumthor defines it as a quasi-abstraction that becomes a reality in the interplay of variant readings in different manuscripts of a given work; he pictures mouvance as a kind of "incessant vibration," a fundamental process of instability (1972:507). He links mouvance with the workings of oral tradition: for example, he suggests that certain textual variations in the *Carmina Burana* reflect the potential for actual variations in performance (1987:160–161).

{PasP 10} This noun mouvance as used by Zumthor is derived from the verb *mouvoir* 'to move'.

{PasP 11} The Provençal verb *mover* 'move', cognate of French *mouvoir*, is actually used in the poetic language of the Provençal troubadours in a way that approximates the process of mouvance as defined by Zumthor. This word *mover*, cognate with French *mouvoir*, which is the basis for Zumthor's term *mouvance*, is used in the songmaking of the troubadours in referring to its own capacity for variation.

{PasP 12} In order to analyze the use of this word Provençal word *mover* 'move', I focus on a sub-set of songs or lyric poems attributed to a twelfth-century troubadour named Jaufré Rudel, prince of Blaye. And I follow the 1978 edition of Rupert T. Pickens. (From here on, I will refer to Pickens 1978 in abbreviated form: P 1978.)

{PasP 13} This editor discovered that the Provençal word *mover* in the sense of French *mouvoir* and English *move* is actually used in the songs of Jaufré Rudel to express an idea of *mouvance*.

The most important example can be found in the ending of Jaufré Rudel's Song VI, version 1a:

bos es le sons s'ieu non menti  
 e tot qant i a, ben ista;  
 e cel qi de mi l'apenra  
 gard si non mueva ni camgi,  
 qar si l'auson en Caerzi;  
 le coms de Tolsa l'entendra. a. a.

The melody is good, if I have not lied,  
 and all there is in it goes well;  
 and the one who will learn it from me,  
 beware lest it move or change,  
 for if they hear it in Quercy,  
 the count of Toulouse will understand it. Ha! Ha!

In other attested manuscript versions of Song VI of Jaufré Rudel, it is made clear by the composer that the intermediary transmitter of the song, described in the passage just quoted as 'the one who will learn it from me', must deliver it unchanged to two noblemen, who must in turn hear it. In version 1a of Song VI, the composition ends as just quoted. In other versions, however, the references to the destined audiences are followed by further references, resulting in a longer song. Of these other available versions, let us take as one example the last eight lines of Song VI version 1 (as distinct from 1a):

bos es lo vers s'ieu no.y falhi,  
 ni tot so que.y es, ben esta;  
 e selh que de mi l'apenra,  
 quart si que res no mi cambi,  
 que si l'auson en Caerci

lo vescoms ni.l en Tolza.  
{PasP 14}  
bos es lo sos, e faran hi  
quas que don most chans gensara

Good is the poem if I did not fail in it  
and all there is in it goes well;  
and the one who will learn it from me,  
let him beware lest he change anything for me,  
for thus may they hear it in Quercy,  
the viscount and the count in the Toulousain.  
The melody is good, and they will do there  
whatever things from which my song will grow more noble.

As another example, let us take the last eight lines of Song VI version 1b:

bos es lo vers can no.i falhi,  
e tot so que.i es, ben esta,  
e sel que de mi l'apenra  
gart se no.i falha ni.l peSSI,  
qu[e] si l'auzo en Lemozi  
e Bertrans e.l coms el Tolza.  
bons er lo vers e faran y  
calsque motz que hom chantara

The poem is good, since I did not fail in it,  
and all there is in it goes well,  
and the one who will learn it from me,  
let him beware lest he fail in it and break it up,  
for thus may they hear it in the Limousin,  
both Bertran and the count in the Toulousain.  
The poem will be good, and they will make there [the Limousin or the  
Toulousain] (for it)  
whatever words someone will sing.

Whereas according to Pickens the intermediary must deliver the song unchanged to two noblemen, "those who are destined to receive it must, on the contrary, introduce changes" (P 1978:36).

{PasP 15} It is probably enough to say that the destined audience may "move" the song while the intermediary must not.

As we see from the wording of the variations in Song VI, the chance to move the song is equivalent to the chance to change it into a version different from that of the composer, even though the intermediary must keep the composer's version the same until it reaches the destined audience. The noblemen who are to be the song's audience are in turn to become the song's new performers—and thereby the song's recomposers.

The remarkable thing, moreover, is that mover 'move' can designate not only the recomposing of a song through reperformance but even its archetypal composition through its archetypal performance. As Pickens also notices, mover 'move' can refer not only to the changing of the song, as here, but also to the actual singing of the song, even to the actual beginning of the singing, as when the poet starts his song by picturing a nightingale as it sings, that is, as it moves its song. Here is the beginning, for example, of Jaufré Rudel's Song I version 1:

quant lo rosignols el fuoillos  
dona d'amor e.n quier e.n pren  
e mou so chant jauzen joios  
e remira sa par soven,  
e.ill riu son clar e.ill prat son gen,  
pel novel deport que reingna,  
me ven al cor grans jois jacer.

When the nightingale in the leafy wood  
gives of love, asks for it and takes of it  
and composes (moves) his song rejoicing and joyous  
and beholds (reflects) his she-equal often,  
and the streams are clear and the fields are pleasant,  
through the new sense of pleasure that reigns,  
great joy comes to lie in my heart.

Here in Song I of Jaufré Rudel, the symbol of the singing nightingale is drawn into a parallel with the singer who is the poet.

{PasP 16} Just as the nightingale moves his song by singing—that is, by performing—so also the poet implicitly moves his own song by composing it. This symbol provides an opportunity to compare a model developed by Albert Lord, centering on composition-in-performance, with the model of Zumthor centering on mouvance. The symbol of the nightingale, deployed as it is to launch the poet's composition,

superimposes the medium of performance on the act, the fact, of composition. By comparing himself to the nightingale, the poet presents himself as one who performs as he composes. Just as the nightingale goes about his performance, so also the poet goes about his composition by performing it, by moving it. Just as the poet composes his song, so too his model, the nightingale: in Pickens' translation, the songbird "composes (moves) his song rejoicing and joyous" (e mou so chant jauzen joios).

Just as the nightingale's song in Song I of Jaufré Rudel is an implicit model for the poet who hears him and makes his own song, so also the poet is the model for the noblemen who in turn hear him and make their own song by performing the song of the poet. To perform the song, however, is to recompose it, to change it, that is, to move it. In this light, *mouvance* is the same thing as recomposition-in-performance. The nightingale who is "composing" his song in Song I of Jaufré Rudel may serve as the model, the archetype, for the song of the poet, but even the songbird is in fact recomposing his own song by virtue of performing it. So it is apt for the nightingale to move his song, which is "original" for the poet but which is at the same time inherently recurrent and recomposed, much as every new season of spring is {PasP 17} a joyous event of inherent recurrence and recomposition, even re-creation.

In considering all the variations attested in the manuscript tradition of Song V, Pickens is willing to entertain the idea that all these variations may be "by" Jaufré Rudel; after all, Jaufré "was a troubadour who constantly reworked his material" (P 1978:32). Pursuing the question, Pickens concludes after an intensive analysis of the manuscript variations in both Songs I and V of Jaufré Rudel:

Jaufré's authorship of at least two formally and linguistically distinct versions of the former [Song I] and two of the latter [Song V] cannot be disproved; the poems have equal claims for authenticity and there is no reason to suppose that Jaufré did not compose them. If he could have produced two or three versions of the same song, then why could he not also have produced six or ten or fifteen? Corollary to the theory is the assumption that Jaufré was a troubadour-performer creating his works in an atmosphere heavy with the esthetics of oral composition. As epic criticism has suggested, orality and mutation, not writing and fixity, were the compositional medium and consequent destiny of *chanson de geste* texts. The courtly lyric is also an oral genre, performed orally and heard, not read. It is not {PasP 18} unreasonable to suppose, therefore, that Jaufré altered his works frequently in conformity with the practices of oral tradition and that, in concert with all poetic practice, he strove to 'perfect' his poetry by reworking, adding and casting out (but, like all who publish, the person who changes must still ever be confronted by what has previously been released to the public). (P 1978:32-33)

Even allowing for this much participation by the author himself in the process of variation, we are reminded of his own references to other participants, such as the noblemen in Song VI who are imagined as not only hearing the song in performance but also reperforming it themselves afterwards and thereby recomposing it. Pickens explicitly argues for the reality of such participation by invoking "the dynamic condition of the medieval poem," with specific reference to Zumthor's idea of *mouvance* (P 1978:34).

{PasP 19} If indeed Jaufré Rudel is not the only contributor to his own compositions, then how exactly is he an author? Here we may recall the striking formulation of Rupert Pickens: "The conventions and traditions of the courtly lyric have conspired to efface the author and to create at least as many Jaufré Rudels as there are medieval anthologies" (P 1978:40).

Let us go beyond the problems raised by this particular example in this particular culture and ask a more general question: what is it, in any case, to be an author in any tradition where performance is needed to make a song come to life? Applying the observation of Albert Lord (following Milman Parry) that composition and performance are aspects of the same process in oral traditions, I suggest that authority in performance is a key to the very concept of authorship in composition. Here I refer to my argumentation in PH 339-381 and to the follow-up argumentation of Maurizio 1997 with reference to the oral poetics of the Delphic Oracle.

In the present example from Jaufré Rudel as well, it is authority in performance that is crucial: the poet's song does not become authoritative until it is performed in an authorized setting. Only then does the song become real, authentic. Thus the intermediary transmitter is enjoined not to "move" the song of Jaufré Rudel because he is as yet unauthorized to do so. This injunction by the poet is presented not as a statement of fact so much as a stylized gesture to his intended audience. Thus I doubt that this unnamed intermediary is really understood by the poet to be a "mechanical" transmitter who is not a "re-creative" singer (to use the wording of P 1978:36). I propose instead that the authorization of the composer is implicitly not enough because the transmitter as performer must also be authorized by his audience, who are presumed to be authoritative members of the song culture.

{PasP 20} The intermediate transmitter of the troubadour, who is potentially a jongleur, becomes an authoritative performer through the dual authorization of composer and audience. It would be misleading, though, to generalize the jongleur as a mechanical performer who repeats the song of the authoritative composer, the troubadour; it would also be misleading to set up a strict dichotomy between a "creative" troubadour and a "re-creative" jongleur, as I argue in Nagy 1990b:55. In the troubadour traditions, the transmitter of song becomes a potential troubadour by virtue of reperforming the song. It all depends on the circumstances of reception: in Jaufré's song, for example, it is implied that the transmitter of his song must have approval from both the composer and the audience which is to hear the transmitter's performance. The transmitter is to be authorized on the grounds that both the composer and the audience of noblemen are authoritative. The noblemen may reperform and thereby recompose the song precisely because they are presumed, by the song, to be authoritative. So also the nightingale "moves" the song

because he has the authority to do so. Only, in this case, the authority is not social but elemental—even archetypal.

We see another example of performative intermediacy in Song II of Jaufré Rudel, where the song is pictured as being transmitted from the troubadour to a nobleman through an intermediary, named Fillol or 'Godson' in some versions (P 1978:103n). Here is the text of Song II, version 1, strophe v:

senes breu de pargamina,  
tramet lo vers en chantan  
plan et en lenga romana  
a.n Hugon Brun per Fillol.  
{PasP 21}  
bon m'es, car gens Peitavina,  
de Beiriu et de Bretaigna  
s'esgau per lui, e Guanna.

Without any writing on parchment,  
I transmit the poem in singing,  
plainly and in the vernacular language,  
to Lord Hugh the Swarthy, by Godson.  
I am glad, since the people of Poitou,  
of Berry, and of Brittany  
are delighted by him; and of Guyenne.

The song, as its poet stresses, is not fixed by writing on parchment (*senes breu de pargamina*), so that the intermediary is not a text but a live performer. Moreover, this performer is cherished by the poet, so that the composer implies authorization on his own part while all along presuming a reciprocal authorization on the part of his intended audience. Although we may agree that the poet's song is here being "released to the hazards of oral transmission" (to use the wording of P 1978:35) in terms of the reality of its historical setting, it is at the same time imagined to be safe and intact in terms of its own rhetoric. Here the composer is implying his certainty that the setting for the performance is to be authoritative, as surely as if it were written down on parchment, thanks to his confidence in both the performer and the intended audience.

Even in the sort of situation where the composer allows himself to express a concern that his song may be exposed to unauthorized performance, as if there were a danger that someone will "move" it in a negative sense, this concern turns out to be a rhetorical way of seeking reassurance from the audience that the performance really is authoritative, so that those who heard the song and learned to perform it can thus implicitly "move" it in a positive sense, much as the nightingale "moves" his own song.

{PasP 22} We come back to the case of Song VI, which is predicated on the poet's satisfaction with his composition: *bos es lo vers can no.i falhi* 'the poem is good, since I did not fail in it' (version 1b strophe v). The anonymous transmitter is enjoined to learn the song from the poet exactly as it was composed: in the different versions of the song, we hear that the transmitter must therefore 'beware lest he fail in it and break it up' (*gart se no.i falha ni.l pessi*, version 1b strophe v) or 'beware lest he fracture it or break it up' (*gart no.l fran[ha] ni [no.] pezi*, version 2a strophe vii) or 'beware lest it move or change' (*gard si non mueva ni camgi*, version 1a strophe iv) or even perhaps 'beware lest anything changes me' (*gart si que res no mi coambi*, version 1 strophe vii).

The fact that even this poetic injunction against variation survives by way of variants is a striking example of a paradox that is characteristic of a wide variety of oral traditions: a tradition may claim unchangeability as a founding principle while at the same time it keeps itself alive through change. Outsiders who are looking in, as it were, on a given tradition can be objective about any change that they do observe. Insiders, however, are apt to be subjective. Participants in a given tradition may of course choose to ignore any change whatsoever. If they do recognize change, however, either it must be negative or, if it is to be positive, it must not really be change after all. In other words, positive change must be a "movement" that leads back to something that is known, just as negative change leads forward to something that is unknown, uncertain, unpredictable. And yet, even if positive change is a moving back toward whatever is known, certain, and predictable, all the more will it be deemed to be an ongoing process of improvement, not deterioration, by those who participate in the tradition. In fact, it will be an improvement precisely because such positive 'movement' aims at the traditional, even the archetypal.

From this point of view, the noblemen who are to hear the song of the poet are described in Song VI of Jaufré Rudel as

{PasP 23} destined to improve that song by way of a presumed authoritativeness inherent in their reperformances. To quote from one of the variants that we have already seen, 'The melody is good, and they will do there | whatever things from which my song will grow more noble' (Rudel Song VI version 1 strophe vii). When the nightingale 'moves' his song, it is a matter of positive change because tradition is reactivated. If, however, a jongleur 'moves' the song of a troubadour in an unauthorized situation, it is a matter of negative change because tradition breaks down. For a performer of a song to 'move' it in a negative sense is to 'change' it, even to 'break' it.

Just as the idea of 'moving' a song can be turned from a negative to a positive sense, however, even the idea of 'breaking' a song can be made positive in the poetics of *mouvance*. The negative poetics of the verb *franhar* 'break', as deployed in the poet's injunction to the transmitter not to 'break' the song, are echoed by the positive poetics of the verb *refranhar*, to be interpreted in another poem of Jaufré Rudel as 'refract'



in referring specifically to the singing of the nightingale and, in response, the singing of the poet (P 1977:330–331). Before we reflect on the meaning of the metaphor inherent in the image of 'refraction', let us consider its precise context in the song (Jaufré Rudel, Song II version 1 strophe i):

qan lo rius de la fontana  
s'esclarzis si cum far sol,  
e par la flors aigentina,  
e.l rossignoletz el ram  
volf e refraing et aplana  
son doutz chantar et afina  
dreitz es q'ieu lo mieu refraigna

When the stream from the spring  
runs clear, the way it usually does,  
and the sweetbrier flower appears,  
and the little nightingale on the branch  
turns and refracts and polishes  
his sweet singing and refines it (brings it to an end),  
it is right that I should refract my own.

{PasP 24} Let us return here once again to the troubadour's image of the songbird, with one more example of the word mover 'move' in the archetypal sense of referring to birdsong. In the sole extant version of Song IV, the first four verses of the last strophe run as follows (edited by P 1978:148):

el mes d'abril e de Pascor,  
can l'auzel movon lurs dous critz,  
adoncs vueill mon chas si' auzitz;  
et aprendetz lo, cantador . . .

{PasP 25}

In the month of April, and of Easter,  
when birds compose (move) their sweet cries,  
then I wish my song to be heard:  
and learn it, singers . . .

It is time to propose a reformulation of the idea of mouvance, supplementing it with the usage of mover as we have seen it operate in a troubadour's poetics—and in light of one given editor's detailed and patient work on the texts attributed to Jaufré Rudel. I propose, then, that mouvance is the process of recomposition-in-performance as actually recognized by a living oral tradition, where the recognition implies the paradox of immediate change without ultimate change.

On the basis of his editorial experience, Rupert Pickens concludes that "at least in the case of Jaufré Rudel, mutation is appropriate to the lyric genre" (P 1978:38). According to this line of thinking, the courtly lyric of Jaufré is not "authoritative" in the same sense as Scripture, in that the work is freed to be "re-created and re-generated" (P 1978:36). I agree, though I stress that the authoritativeness of Jaufré's tradition is as real as that of Scripture, with the basic difference being that the troubadour's words do not insist on the idea of unchangeability, typical of the claims of scriptures in a wide variety of cultures.

Pickens observes about the patterns of mutation in the lyrics of Jaufré Rudel that "it is impossible to determine at what points his personal interventions ceased and his transmitters continued the process of perfecting beyond his personal intentions" (P 1978:38). Which leads to this conclusion: "Given these conditions, under which it is impossible to rediscover Jaufré's intentions (i.e., the extent of his personal involvement in the creation and regeneration of his works), each manifestation of a song must be considered to be, in its own right, as valid a whole, complete poem as any other versions" (P 1978:39).

{PasP 26} In a retrospective work, Pickens with good reason describes his own 1978 edition of Jaufré Rudel, with its "multitext format," as "the first widely recognized edition attempting to incorporate a procedure to account for re-creative textual change" (P 1994:61). For more background on the term "multitext," see Nagy 2010.

## Transition

Having applied the concept of mouvance to the medieval Provençal traditions of the troubadours, I can now prepare to apply it also to the ancient Greek traditions of prophecy as we see it at work in the pronouncements of the Pythia at the Oracle of Apollo at Delphi. What follows is an inventory of relevant passages found in ancient sources.

## An inventory of passages indicative of mouvance in the pronouncements of the Delphic Oracle

[In putting together this inventory, I invoke as background not only my own work, as listed in the Bibliography (note especially the abbreviations PH, PasP, H24H), but also the following publications, also listed in the Bibliography, on the Delphic Oracle:

Fontenrose 1978. References to pages in this book will be preceded by the initials of the author, JF. I disagree with many of his views, but I find he is consistently "good to think with." Also, his meticulous tracking of facts and theories about the Delphic Oracle supersedes most if not all of the relevant "secondary

literature" published before 1978. Finally, he gives a useful inventory of ancient references to Delphic responses—there are 535 such "responses" in the Catalogue at the end of the book, starting at JF 240.

Maurizio 1995, 1997, 2001

Parker 1985

Sissa 1990.]

#1. Theognis 805–810. Text and translation in PH 165. The man who consults the Delphic Oracle here is called a theōros 'observer', 805. The Pythia is called a hierēia 'priestess', 807, and the place in the temple from where she makes her omphē 'pronouncement', 808, is called the adyton, 808, which means literally 'the impenetrable place'—and which I will render hereafter simply as 'adyton'. The verb referring to the pronouncing of the pronouncement by the Pythia is sēmainein 'indicate'. In this context, 809–810, it is said that if you add or subtract anything from what the Pythia indicates, you will veer from what is genuine. Such adding or subtracting is typical of the poetics of *mouvance*: as we saw in the epitome above, adding or subtracting or any other kind of change may only be performed by someone who is authorized to do so.

#2. "The Vulci Cup." Attic red-figure painting, attributed to the Codrus Painter, ca. 430 BCE. Antikemuseen, Berlin. The lettering indicates the figures who are being depicted. Pictured here is Themis, divine prototype and model for the human Pythia. She is seated on a high tripod inside the temple of Apollo at Delphi, and she is being consulted by Aigeus, who is asking her directly for a pronouncement concerning his desire to beget a son. The son will turn out to be Theseus. The myth as depicted here is transmitted also by Plutarch *Life of Theseus* 3.5, where the response is being made not by Themis but by her human surrogate, the Pythia. This version of the myth as mediated by Plutarch is thus closer to the ritual of oracular consultation. But there is more to be said about Themis. In Aeschylus *Eumenides* 1–8, we find that this goddess is figured as a prototypical priestess of the Oracle at Delphi, following the goddess Earth herself, Gaia, 1–3; then Themis is followed by the goddess Phoibe, 4–7, who in turn is followed by the god Apollo in the role of Phoibos=Phoebus, 7–8. In the painting, the tripod on which Themis is sitting is not to be misread as a "cauldron" or a "kettle": the tripod here has longer legs than the three-legged structure that ordinarily holds up a cauldron or kettle, and, in the case of the Pythia, the "tripod neck" of the three-legged structure is holding up a seat upon which the Pythia is conventionally seated. For more on the tripod of the Pythia, see JF 225; see also 225n40 for an inventory of ancient sources.

#3. Herodotus 1.13, 1.19, 1.47–48, 1.55, 1.65, 1.66, 1.67, 1.85, 1.91, 1.167, 1.174, 3.57–58, 4.15, 4.150–151, 4.155–164, 5.43, 5.63, 5.66–67, 5.79, 5.82, 5.90, 5.92β, 6.34–36, 6.52, 6.66, 6.75, 6.77, 6.86γ, 6.123, 6.135–136, 6.139, 7.140, 7.142, 7.148, 7.169, 7.171, 7.220, 8.51, 9.33. I have listed here only those sections in the text of Herodotus where the Pythia is explicitly named as the one who responds to questions posed by delegates who visit the Delphic Oracle. In all these cases, as JF 204 emphasizes, the Pythia is represented as speaking directly to those who consult the Delphic Oracle, and she does so "sanely and articulately, if often ambiguously, without any indication of unusual excitement." The point being made in this formulation is that there was no explicit need for anyone else, such as a priest, to say clearly and rationally what the Pythia had already uttered in a state of possession or inspiration by the god Apollo—as if such a possession would have caused her to utter things that were unclear, even irrational. Nor was there any explicit need for a poet to restate in poetry whatever the Pythia might have already stated in non-poetic form. In some cases, as in Herodotus 1.47.3, it is even made explicit that the Pythia herself responded in the verse form of dactylic hexameter. Granted, as we will see later on, the Pythia could occasionally respond in prose as well as in verse, but the point remains that she would not need to have her pronouncements translated, as it were, by spokesmen who would need to turn her prose into verse. Similarly, as we will also see later on, the Pythia would not need anyone else to turn something that was unclear into something that was clear. In making this formulation, I find myself in agreement so far with JF 204, but now I part company with JF 234 when he goes on to say that most if not all the pronouncements uttered by the Pythia as quoted by Herodotus are historically "not authentic." Such an evaluation, which I resist, leads to an editorial decision that I consider most unhelpful: the pronouncements of the Pythia as quoted by Herodotus are as a rule assigned to the category of "quasi-historical" responses, JF 268–354, and not to the category of "historical responses," JF 244–267. In terms of my own formulation, based on a comparative perspective as outlined in my epitome about *mouvance*, the so-called quasi-historical responses of the Pythia are in fact historically valid, since they show a history of change. I argue that these responses were subject to change in the historical context of their reception by the city-states that transmitted them. The transmission of the pronouncements was not some centripetal process of retracing whatever had been spoken in verse or in prose by the Pythia at Delphi. Rather, this transmission was a centrifugal process of ongoing re-adjustment to the ever-changing political context of reception by whatever city-state it was that transmitted these pronouncements. Here is how I formulated this argument in Nagy PH 167. "The essence of oracular poetry is that it serves to uphold the existing social order; it derives its authority from such ultimate sources of authorization as Apollo's Oracle at Delphi." As an example, I cited in this context the existence of officials at Sparta who were named the Pythioi and who served as transmitters of the pronouncements uttered by the Pythia. As we learn in Herodotus 6.57.4, the two kings of Sparta were the official safekeepers of oracular poetry, sharing their knowledge with four officials, two appointed by each of them, whose duty it was to be emissaries to the Oracle at Delphi and who were known as the Puthioi 'Pythioi', 6.57.2, 4. These Pythioi were public figures, taking their meals with the kings at the public expense, 6.57.2. The existence of these officials at Sparta makes it clear that the poetry of oracular utterances, just like other poetry, was considered to be the possession of the city-state.

#4. Euripides Ion 91–93. The Pythia here is pictured as sitting on the tripod. For more about this oracular tripod, see #2. Later on in the Ion, at 369, the young hero Ion speaks guardedly of a hypothetical situation where someone might be authorized to 'be a spokesman', prophēteuein. And the hypothetical spokesman here would be speaking about whatever pronouncement is made by the Pythia. The guardedness of Ion at this point anticipates the question that he is asked by Xouthos at a later point, 413: who will 'be the spokesman' prophēteuein, of the god Apollo? Ion replies: I can be such a spokesman only on the outside of the temple, not on the inside, 414, but inside the temple are men who 'sit near the tripod', 415, and they are the best men, chosen by lot, 416. Evidently, these men who 'sit near the tripod' are imagined as the official prophētai 'spokesmen'. Here I return to the wording of Ion at an earlier point: at 371, the idea of making a pronouncement is expressed impersonally by way of the verb themisteuein 'to say what is universal law', derived from the noun themis in the sense of 'universal law'. Here we see themis in a depersonalized sense, as distinct from the personalized sense that we saw at #2 in the myths about a personified Themis who figures as a divine model for the Pythia. At a later point, 422–424, Xouthos addresses the Pythia herself, asking her to make her pronouncement; as I infer from lines 420 and 422, the Pythia has not yet entered the interior of the temple, though she is already present at the precinct, 41–42. At 1320–1323, the Pythia speaks as she emerges from the adyton, leaving her station at the tripod, 1320; in this context, she describes herself as the prophētis 'spokeswoman' of Apollo, 1322. I will analyze this word prophētis in #5.

#5. Plato Timaeus 72a: ὄθεν δὴ καὶ τὸ πῶν προφητῶν γένος ἐπὶ ταῖς ἐνθούσις μαντείαις κριτὰς ἐπικαθιστάναι νόμος 'so, it is customary to appoint the lineage of spokesmen [prophētai] to be judges [kritai] over inspired [entheia] mantic utterances [manteia]'. But these prophētai 'spokesmen' are not really mantic, it is claimed in what follows at Timaeus 72b, and the reason is this: τῆς δι' αἰνιγμῶν οὔτοι φήμης καὶ φαντάσεως ὑποκριταὶ 'they [= these prophētai] are hupokritai 'actors' of the mantic utterance [phēmē], using enigmatic-words [ainigmoi]'. As we can see from the wording here, only the mantis 'seer' was inspired by the god Apollo, whereas the prophētēs was not inspired. That is, the word prophētēs does not presuppose the possession of any mantic power. That is why, in terms of Plato's formulation, the prophētēs 'spokesman' can be seen as an actor who simply acted out the content of the mantic pronouncement—or who even interpreted such a content. On the other hand, as we can also see from wording that we find in a variety of other ancient sources, the word prophētēs can in fact refer to someone who is inspired—but only if that someone is inspired directly by the god. That is why Teiresias, for example, who is generally known as a mantis 'seer', as in Odyssey 11.99, can be described as 'the prophētēs of Zeus' in Pindar Nemean 1.60. To cite a more radical example: the mantic god Apollo is described as the prophētēs of his father Zeus in Aeschylus Eumenides 19. Moreover, even the Pythia can call herself a prophētis 'spokeswoman' of Apollo, as we have just seen in Euripides Ion 1322.

#6. Strabo 9.3.5 C419: φασι δ' εἶναι τὸ μαντεῖον ἄντρον κοῖλον κατὰ βάθους οὐ μάλα εὐρύστομον, ἀναφέρεσθαι δ' ἐξ αὐτοῦ πνεῦμα ἐνθουσιαστικόν, ὑπερκεῖσθαι δὲ τοῦ στομίου τρίποδα ὑψηλόν, ἐφ' ὃν τὴν Πυθίαν ἀναβαίνουσαν δεχομένην τὸ πνεῦμα ἀποθεσπιζειν ἔμμετρα τε καὶ ἄμμετρα· ἐντείνειν δὲ καὶ ταῦτα εἰς μέτρον ποιητὰς τινὰς ὑπουργοῦντας τῷ ἱερῷ. πρώτην δὲ Φημονόην γενέσθαι φασι Πυθίαν, κεκλήσθαι δὲ καὶ τὴν προφήτην οὐτῶ καὶ τὴν πόλιν ἀπὸ τοῦ πυθέσθαι 'They say that the Oracle [manteion] is a hollow space that does not have a very wide opening on its way down, and that, emanating from it, is an exhalation [pneuma] that-makes-inspiration [enthousiastikon], and that there is placed over the opening a long-legged tripod on which the Pythia mounts and receives the inspiration [pneuma] to make pronouncements that either have poetic meter or do not have poetic meter, and that these [pronouncements] are also put into poetic meter by some poets who are ministers [hup-ourgoúntes] of the temple. They say that the first Pythia was Phemonoe, and that the Pythia as spokeswoman [prophētis] was called Pythia [Puthiā] and that the city [of Delphi] was called Pytho [Puthō] as a result of the derivation [of both these names] from [the verb] puthesthai 'to find out, to be enlightened'. Again, we see here the Pythia described as a prophētis 'spokeswoman' of Apollo. As for the seating of the Pythia on the tripod as described here by Strabo, we may compare the reference made by Diodorus of Sicily, who dates from the first century BCE, in his Universal History 16.25.10; in the course of referring to the Pythia and to her tripod in this context, Diodorus also narrates at 16.26.1–5 an aetiological myth about a mind-altering force that emanated from a khasma 'hollow space'. This force, herdsmen noticed, made their goats giddy. So, this khasma became the adyton 'adyton' for the prototype of the temple that was eventually built for Apollo. In that adyton, Diodorus says, the worshippers set up a prototypical tripod, 16.26.4–5, and, in this context, he refers to the Pythia as the prophētis 'spokeswoman' of Apollo, 16.26.4.

#7. Plutarch On the oracles of the Pythia 397c. The Pythia is yet again described here as a prophētis 'spokeswoman' of Apollo—this time, it happens in the specific context of her 'being moved', kineisthai, by the inspiration of the god. For still further relevant attestations of this designation of the Pythia as prophētis, see Plutarch On the oracles of the Pythia 397d; see also Plutarch On the obsolescence of oracles 414b [two times] and 431b. In all these cases, it is a given that the prophētis is divinely inspired by the god Apollo. As we see from this testimony of Plutarch, then, the prophētis as the 'spokeswoman' of Apollo has a direct relationship with him. By contrast, the prophētēs 'spokesman' has only an indirect relationship with the god. Plutarch himself, who as we have seen was actually a priest of Apollo at Delphi, acknowledges that such a prophētēs as a 'spokesman' is only an intermediary for the inspiration that the god brings. In Plutarch On the oracles of the Pythia 407e, it is said that the prophētai 'spokesmen' and other hupēretai 'ministers' in the temple of Apollo are there to help make a dēlōsis 'clarification' of the god's inspired messages; what is not said, however, either here or elsewhere, is that such men were themselves inspired by Apollo. Only the prophētis as 'spokeswoman' of Apollo was inspired. This is not to say, however, that the prophētēs as 'spokesman' of the god did not have an important role. Most relevant here is another passage in Plutarch, Whether an old man should engage in public affairs, 792f, where the author actually refers to himself as a prophētēs of the Oracle. This reference comes close to indicating that Plutarch, by

virtue of his status as priest of Apollo at Delphi, understood his role to be that of a prophētēs. The use of this word prophētēs as an official title at Delphi is actually attested in the narrative of Herodotus 8.37 about a man named Akēratos, described as the prophētēs at Delphi— as if he were the only such official at the historical moment that is being narrated there. There is a comparable attestation, if the manuscript reading is accepted as it stands, in Herodotus 9.93.4, where those who consult the oracles at Delphi and at Dodona are said to be posing their questions to the prophētai stationed at those two places: it is as if these ‘spokesmen’ could be viewed here as official intermediaries for the actual consultation of the mantic source, who would be of course the Pythia in the case of the Delphic Oracle. My overall understanding, then, is that the prophētēs was a ‘spokesman’ for the prophētis who was a ‘spokeswoman’ for Apollo.

#8. Pausanias 10.24.7. ἰοῦσι δὲ ὡς ἐπὶ τὸν ναὸν αὐθις μετὰ τοῦ λίθου τὴν θεὰν ἐστὶν ἡ Κασσοτὶς καλουμένη πηγὴ· τεῖχος δὲ οὐ μέγα ἐπ’ αὐτῇ καὶ ἡ ἄνοδος διὰ τοῦ τείχους ἐστὶν ἐπὶ τὴν πηγὴν. ταύτης τῆς Κασσοτίδος δῦεσθαι τε κατὰ τῆς γῆς λέγουσι τὸ ὕδωρ καὶ ἐν τῷ ἀδύτῳ τοῦ θεοῦ τὰς γυναῖκας μαντικὰς ποιεῖν· τὴν δὲ τῆ κρήνη δεδωκυῖαν τὸ ὄνομα τῶν περὶ τὸν Παρνασσὸν νυμφῶν φασιν εἶναι. ‘Returning to the temple [nāos] after seeing the stone [lithos] [of Kronos], you come to the spring [pēgē] called Kassotis. Next to it is a wall of no great size, and the ascent to the spring [pēgē] is through the wall. It is said that the water of this Kassotis sinks under the ground and, inside the adyton [aduton] of the god, it causes the women there to become inspired [mantikai]. She [= Kassotis] who gave her name to the spring [krēnē] is said to have been one of the nymphs [numphai] of Parnassus.’ Here we see an explicit reference to the inspiration of the Pythia, but in this version the source of inspiration is merely the fresh water that gets piped in from the spring nearby, so that there is not even any need in this case to think of fumes, vapors, or exhalations. But there is a need even here for the basic notion of mantic inspiration, and the source in this case is simply the fresh water of the nearby spring.

#9. Christian sources, notably Origen Against Celsus 7.3–4 and John Chrysostom Homily 19 260B-C on First Epistle to the Corinthians, picture the Pythia as seated on the tripod that is placed over the hollow space of Apollo’s adyton and thus receiving into her genital orifice the fumes or vapors or exhalations that emanate from below. As Sissa 1990 shows, the procedure as pictured here corresponds to various ghastly pseudo-gynecological procedures used by physicians to treat female patients who are supposedly suffering from symptoms of “hysteria.” While there is no reason to suppose that the ritual of Delphic consultation involved any physical penetration of the Pythia by fumes or vapors or exhalations from down below, it is not inconceivable that the various aetiologies of the ritual in myth did in fact presuppose a vision of some kind of primal penetration. Such a vision, in any case, is not contradicted by the stylized references to inspiration as surveyed in my inventory of passages here.

## Details still to be explored further

The inventory that I have just presented is surely incomplete. And there are many more relevant details still to be explored further. I offer here merely two paragraphs concerning some such details.

More needs to be said about oracular consultations where the inquirer is not present or where the theōroi ‘observers’, as delegates, need to produce a written transcript of the oracular pronouncement. I analyze such situations in Nagy PH chapter 6. In this connection, I should add that the consultation of the Oracle at Delphi by Xenophon in 401 BCE, as reported in Xenophon Anabasis 3.1.5–8 and 6.1.22 (on which see F 1978:248), needs to be compared with the consultation by Chaerephon on behalf of Socrates, as reported especially in Plato Apology 21a-c (on which see F 1978:245). On the consultation by Chaerephon, I refer to my analysis in H24H 22§28 and 23§52–5.

More work is needed on the valuable evidence to be found in the works of Plutarch on the Delphic Oracle. A special point of interest for me is the reference in Plutarch On the oracles of the Pythia 437c to a subjective experience that is being described there: it is the sensation of a perfumed scent that seems to be wafting in the air at the moment of oracular pronouncement by the Pythia. The pneuma ‘inspiration’ as some sort of physical exhalation may have disappeared, 402b, but the sensation remains. For Longinus 13.2, that sensation is the atmos entheos ‘the aura that has the god inside it’.

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