

IMAGERY AND STRUCTURE IN ESKIMO SONG TEXTS

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Songs are thoughts, sung out with the breath when people are moved by great forces and ordinary speech no longer suffices. (R8:321)¹

There are so many occasions in one's life when a joy or a sorrow is felt in such a way that the desire comes to sing . . . All my being is songs, and I sing as I draw breath. (R8:16)

These are the captivating words of Orpingalik, the great Eskimo shaman whom the Danish explorer, Knud Rasmussen, first encountered as he neared Pelly Bay in 1923. The understanding which developed between these two men, indeed the rapport which Rasmussen established with Eskimo people across the entire North American arctic and Greenland, resulted in many uniquely perceptive studies of the Eskimo people. Among the greatest legacies of Rasmussen are his collections of song texts. Quoted in numerous publications of the past decades, his sensitive and poetic translations have become synonymous with Eskimo poetry. In spite of their intrinsic poetic value, however, this has unfortunately resulted in some distortion of the truth. First and foremost, the fact that they were all sung and the very importance of song in the lives of the Eskimo (expressed so clearly and beautifully by Orpingalik) has been ignored and forgotten. Second, Rasmussen's admirable command of both English and Eskimo allowed him to convert the prose-like originals into concise and vivid poetry. In this manner he did convey the soul and meaning of the songs more adequately; but the style and form of the original song texts, which bear the mark of the Eskimo personality almost as deeply as the song content, is lost. Third, he chose for free translation only a limited number of texts. Although he published literal translations of many more texts, these are little known by non-specialists because they appear only in the report of the Fifth Thule Expedition (see bibliography under Thule Report).

This discussion is based on Eskimo song texts with literal English translations published by Rasmussen and Jenness², and on field transcriptions of my own collection made in Gjoa Haven, Spence Bay and Pelly Bay in the fall of 1972. It attempts to illustrate some of the most significant and consistent features of the texts of various central Canadian Eskimos (mainly the Netsilik, Copper, Caribou, and Iglulik), to analyze some aspects of their style and structure, and to examine the relationship of text and music. The validity of comparing material collected in 1914-24 with that collected in 1972 might be questioned, but comparing Rasmussen's Pelly Bay collection with mine made there approximately fifty years later, there is a remarkable

¹References to the fifth Thule Report (see "Thule Report" in bibliography) are in parenthesis following the quotation and are abbreviated as follows:

R (for Rasmussen) Volume Number: Page Number.

Therefore, (R8:330). for example, is in volume 8 of the report on page 330.

²Thule Report, Volumes 7-9.

Roberts, H. and D. Jenness. *Songs of the Copper Eskimo*.

continuity of style and structure. Furthermore, several song texts appear in both collections in a virtually identical form. Transcriptions and translations of texts from my field recordings were made with the kind and patient assistance of the Anglican minister's wife at Gjoa Haven.

Eskimo songs of the central Canadian Arctic, unlike many North American Indian songs where large portions of text consist of burden syllables, have predominantly meaningful texts. It is hardly surprising that almost all of these deal with the animals and the land upon which the people subsist; however, the degree of sophistication and variety with which this precarious inter-relationship of man and his environment is expressed is noteworthy.

To the Eskimo, the distinction between man and animal is not very significant. The adoption of animal features and ways by men and the personification of beasts is a principal type of song imagery. In the following examples animals adopt the human attributes of pride and fearful imagination; they speak to humans and sing songs against one another where they deride the other's deficiencies (as in the Eskimo drum dispute):

amutigituva – (in reference to the pin-tail duck) – trying to show off
pivigaqluni – (in reference to a wolf, sung by a wolverine) – trying hard and proud of itself
kiggiukungmingmara imma – (referring to the fish which carried the legendary hero, Kiviug, across the sea) – He told me to jump off there.³

On the other hand, animal features are frequently attributed to man.

tirlillarama – I stayed close to the people like a tame animal (R8:330)
qinalukpakkaluarpi – Why does no one “bark” at me? (R8:341)
kiggalirtunga – I feel caught in a trap. (R9:89)
huqulasuiquq niblirtinajuqtuq – He never sings but only howls. (R9:170)

Finally I shall cite the beginning of a song in which the distinction between man and animal is obliterated in the mind of the composer:

The singer describes how he is out on a hunt, and sees every thing he longs for passing by. He stands by a breathing hole waiting for seals, and in the form of seals swim the women he longs for and the men he is thinking of. (R8:338)

pijumalillartuni – I longed for something –
arnarulillartuni – for women,
angutiqama! – *ingma* – (for) my comrades!

³Examples without indication of a published source are from my collection.

The phonetic chart appended to this paper will serve as a guide to pronunciation of the Eskimo texts. I have respelled some of Rasmussen texts to conform to my phonetic symbols and validate comparison. The translations of all examples are relatively free since, due to the structure of the Eskimo language, a very literal translation would be, at best, difficult to understand. Especially in longer examples, however, I have attempted to maintain the general style, patterns of repetition and ambiguities of the original at the expense of some awkwardness in translation.

<i>arnautait ingma</i>	– and then, their women . . .
<i>ikliriarsinarpanga</i>	– yes then, they swam past me,
<i>imarsuarvianut</i>	– out to their great sea,
<i>tainunga</i>	– out yonder. (R8:336)

A second source of imagery is the omnipotent weather. In this free translation (by Rasmussen) of an Iglulik Eskimo song, the miseries of both winter and summer, “cold and mosquitoes”, symbolize the constant hardship of life.

*Cold and mosquitoes,
These two pests
Come never together.
I lay me down on the ice,
Lay me down on the snow and the ice,
Till my teeth fall chattering. (R7:232)*

Later in the song, there is an abrupt change in symbolism with the “cooking pot” becoming the central image, a symbol of survival and reprise from the cold and mosquitoes.

Song imagery has kept pace with the changing environment which now includes the white man and all the machinery of his civilization. The rifle and skidoo replace the harpoon and the dog team. Sometimes human and/or animal characteristics are attributed to machines. A complex example is a song by Bernard Iquqaqtuq of Pelly Bay in which he compares the take-off of an airplane to a dog shaking its tail, and, at one point, to a man sinking into the snow on snowshoes.

The updating of subject matter in newly composed songs is an expected and rather obvious result of acculturation. What is more astounding, however, is the *resistance* to change in songs of older ancestry. Compare, for example these two versions of the “Song of the Wolverine to the Wolf”, the first collected by Rasmussen in Pelly Bay, and the second by myself in Gjoa Haven. Despite the half century which elapsed between performances of the two and the different location, there is no loss of text and only two minor differences: a word repetition is omitted in the second, and the description of the “young rabbit” is expanded.

Rasmussen (1923)
*amaruli pivagaqluni
ukaliqli malikalauramiuk
angungikali
ivnaup angma qanganut
majuraqtuqangmat
angungikali
piugungikiga*

The wolf is conceited.
Once he was chasing a rabbit.
He ran quickly but did not catch
it. He ran up to the summit of
that mountain, but could not catch it.
I'll never forget that. (R8:352)

Cavanagh (1972)
*amaruli pivagaqluni
uvigaluqtuq uvaisukpuqsuitiuniqluni
uqaliqli malikalauramiuk
inamima qanganut
majuraqtuqangmat
angungikali
piugungikiga*

The wolf is conceited.
Once he was chasing a very small rabbit.
They ran up to the summit of that
mountain but he could not catch it.
I'll never forget that.

One reason for this accurate preservation of song texts is, perhaps, their traditional association with taboo and the spirit world. Rasmussen states that songs were thought to originate in the voices of the spirits, and that all objects – animate and inanimate – had spirits (R7:228-9). Although this belief was replaced with the coming of the Christian church, it is still remembered and respected.

Explicit reference to the supernatural occurs more frequently in women's songs than in men's, perhaps because of the large proportion of taboo traditionally associated with menstruation, child bearing and child rearing. The most frequent occasion for song was the birth of a child. The new song served as protection for the child. A recent song of this type was made by a Pelly Bay woman when her family moved into its government house in the mid-1960's. Uncertain of white man's accommodations, she composed the song about two legendary children as protection for her own two recently adopted children. Women often make up songs to bring good luck to their sons while hunting. It is curious that they never seem to do the same for their husbands.

In traditional times, ambiguity in speech or song was often associated with spiritual power. Ellipses, for example, is frequently so severe that a text without commentary is incomprehensible even to a modern-day Eskimo. A narrative song will include a mere skeletal description of an incident. However, lest we overemphasize "taboo" as a cause, it should be noted that the omission of significant details in a narrative can be explained in part by the common knowledge of the community concerning the event about which the song was composed.

An even more inaccessible form of ambiguity is in the actual vocabulary of the songs. Descriptive phrases (which, incidentally, Rasmussen lists as "angakoq" or shaman words) are always substituted for objects:

The black one -- musk ox
piece of fat -- seal
precious skin, antlers -- caribou
little frozen one -- child
big meat for me -- I spotted a caribou

These circumlocutions are used as abundantly in newly composed songs as in the oldest ones. Other difficulties result from the profusion of place names and names in general. For example, in Eskimo, animals have different names for other animals and for humans. (This is a fascinating aspect of the transferral of human attributes, that is, the development of language, to animals.) As far as I could observe, these names were never used in ordinary speech but did occur in the song texts, especially in the animal songs. Other words in songs are simply untranslatable for modern singers. And yet, the amazing fact is that the Eskimos remember these words which are meaningless to them. There is little doubt that memory is aided partly by a persistent belief in the power of the words.

Ambiguity is but one of the pitfalls awaiting the translator or interpreter of an Eskimo song text. Another is the very frequent use of irony. Perhaps the most characteristic feature of Eskimo expression, the ironic statement, is used for humour and for criticism. Since the impact of any double meaning

depends upon the first hand knowledge of the listeners about the persons or incidents concerned, the irony of Eskimo song texts has sometimes been misunderstood.

The most consistent and the most easily misinterpreted examples of Eskimo irony are in the phrases of self-belittlement which most often begin Netsilik drum dance songs. Some typical opening phrases are:

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| <i>uvunga ajungmitiginariga</i> | – I won't catch anything. (R8:335) |
| <i>ingilirivunga piunnalirani</i> | – I am going to sing but will not be able to do it properly. (R8:345) |

These are not humble words of modest men (a deduction made by Thalbitzer in relation to the same phenomenon in Greenland Eskimo songs)⁴; rather, they are quiet but proud pieces of irony. Rasmussen carefully notes that the singers who complain of their dogs have the best dogs in the settlement, while the ones who lament their inability to catch anything are the greatest hunters (R8:336). Their modest statements are, ironically, self-praise. This manner of beginning gives a more dramatic impact to the conclusion of the song which might, for example, mock the faults of one's song opponent or prove the hunting prowess of the composer by relating an actual experience. In relation to the Iglulik Eskimo Rasmussen discusses the impact of this technique:

The singer generally opens with a modest declaration to the effect that he cannot remember his insignificant songs. This is intended to suggest that he considers himself but a poor singer; the idea being, that the less one leads the audience to expect, the humbler one's estimation of one's own performance, the more likelihood there will be of producing a good effect. A conceited singer, who thinks himself a master of his art, has little power over his audience (R7:229).

I encountered another form of ironic modesty during conversations prior to recording songs. Very frequently an informant would make excuses about the poor quality of his voice, shortness of breath, or the difficulty of singing, but would then proceed to sing for an hour or more without any of the alleged deficiencies and with sureness and enthusiasm. I had suspected, first, that these remarks were hints that the informant did not wish to sing or have his songs recorded but begin to recognize the ironic pride in most similar statements.

Another behavioural aspect which influenced the style and tone of older songs was the Eskimo penchant for rivalry. Described by Rasmussen as the "dominant passion" (R7:227), rivalry was manifested in many competitive games (for example, arm pulling and boxing matches), in a spirit of competition on the hunt, in the custom of song cousins, and in the more (emotionally and often physically) violent moral confrontation at a song dispute.

The custom of song partners or cousins is one of the dyadic relationships cited by Asen Balikci as the social foundation of a traditional Netsilik community:

⁴Thalbitzer. "Eskimomusik und Dichtkunst in Gronland," p. 485.

Of all the patterned dyadic relationships that the Netsilik knew, the song partnerships and the wife-exchange practices that frequently went with them were the most complex and gave rise to the most ambiguous relations . . . The song fellows stood in the middle (of the dance house) holding each other by waist, smiling at the audience, and crying "Hi, hi" as a sign of joy and friendship. They rubbed noses, called each other repeatedly *idluarjuga* (my song cousin), and then one of the wives started singing, with the refrain repeated by a group of women behind her. . . With the end of the first song, the partners embraced again, and the first dancer handed the drum to his song fellow, this direct passing of the drum a characteristic trait of the song fellowship. Then the wife of the second song fellow proceeded with her husband's song. These performances took place in an atmosphere of communal enjoyment and laughter. . . Generally these were not aggressive or derisive songs, although some slight mockery may have been insinuated.⁵

Although, as Balikci suggests in the final statement quoted, competitiveness between song partners is often discernible in their songs, this was nothing like the song dispute, a kind of forum for legal action. When an unjust action had been committed, victim and accused would gather in the dance house along with the whole community, and sing songs of derision and degradation against one another. The verdict (that is, the balance of community support) was determined partly by the very number of songs, partly by the bitterness and humour of the mockery, and partly by the justness of the cause.

The existence of pairs of dialogue songs can also be traced to song rivalries. One song in which 'B' disparages 'A' will be followed by 'A's song mocking 'B'. Such pairs of songs occur not only in the drum dance of humans but in animal songs and thus constitute another example of the transference of human customs and values to the animal realm. One of the best known of these pairs consists of the song of the wolf to the wolverine and the wolverine's reply:

The wolverine who looks like a grizzly bear steals food from the cache, and is a menace. It makes you really angry. She should be hanged.

The wolf is conceited. But once he was running after a very young rabbit. They ran up a hill but he could not even catch that little rabbit. I won't forget that.

These songs meet all the requirements of good human songs of derision except that the mockery is less severe.

Although most neglected in the past, the study of structure in Eskimo song texts has not only intrinsic interest but also significance in relation to musical structure. I shall first deal with patterns in the progression of ideas and then with the use of formula phrases, and repetition patterns.

Irony is again the key word in the progression of thought in Netsilik songs. Phrases of self belittlement generally occur at the beginning of a song as mentioned above. These are sometimes replaced or accompanied by a tentative sounding phrase which defeats (ironically arouses) expectation about the creation of the song or the abilities of the composer. For example:

⁵Balikci. *The Netsilik Eskimo*, pp. 140-41. 8

- uvunga ilisaringa* – I am arranging,
sanavakkaluariga pisiq una – I am trying to put together this song.
 (R8:332)
- qakuli* – (literally) When. I wonder . . .
tikilaugajuilaq pisiqsara the one that will not come of itself . . .
 my song
 (more freely translated)
 My song is difficult to make up.

Sometimes the song will begin with an episode completely incidental to the main episode(s), thus prolonging, still more, the anticipation of the listeners. The Netsilik singer eventually narrates one or several major incidents using a series of fairly consistent descriptive conventions. First, the setting is specified; this often involves a whole list of place names, and details as to the season of the year. Then comes the most intense moment in the song: the composer sings of scarcity and hunger, or hard times with every implication that tragedy seems unavoidable. But juxtaposed to every apparently imminent disaster is a dramatic turn of events in which the heroic actions of the composer – perhaps the capture of a seal or caribou – result in joy and plenty for all. Most frequently, several such incidents are related successively, each forming a new stanza. The pattern can be summarized as follows:

- A. *Negation of Expectation* (a) self-belittlement
 (b) tentative statement
 (c) relating of trivial and incidental episode.
- B. *Narrative* (a) setting
 (b) implications of tragedy or helplessness
 (c) change of fortune brought about by the heroic actions of the composer.

During a performance this constant increase in excitement is paralleled by a gradual increase in vocal tension and loudness and acceleration of the drum beat.

The following transcription and free translation of a complete song reveals the pattern in operation. It should be emphasized that while this pattern may frequently be found in the songs of Copper, Iglulik, and Caribou Eskimos, it is most consistent in those of the Netsiliks.

Song of Arnaluaq

Sung by his Step-grand-daughter Lucy Avingak Kuptana, of Gjoa Haven in 1972.

[A] Negation of Expectation

- | | | |
|---|-------|---|
| <i>Una aya . . .</i>
<i>ilisaraluariga</i>
<i>sanavakkaluariga</i>
<i>qanuq uvungakjuuna</i>
<i>qagginimmarilunga</i>
<i>nijataukpagu masukhlugu</i>
<i>ilisarniaqpqughlugu</i> | (b) { | I learned this song.
worked at it and made it really mine.
Now I want to sing it in the dance
house,
but when shall I learn it? |
| | (a) { | Perhaps I shall forget the words:
Perhaps I am not able to do it. |

naluliqpangurariga
Una aya . . .

Una atanginiqtunga
atuqlugu
naqirusirisarhlugu (?)
sanamajajjagagu
ingiraqugu janaguqaq (?)
ili(si)mmarilunga
nijataukpagumasukhlugu
ilisarniaqpuqhlugu
naluliqpangurariga
Una yai . . .

- (a) { I created it but it is imperfect.
I am still only learning it.
Now I want to sing but when shall
I learn it?
Perhaps I shall forget . . .

[B] Narrative

Una aya . . . (a) + (b)
ujjirqnarqaluarivuuq
ujjiluliqpangujuktunga
upirngasaruni
narngutsarari (?)
narngutsakpuqqama (?)
innuillamut
samungagu
Una aya . . .

{ I am without contentment.
Spring is an anxious time
when the people are travelling,
always moving to the hunting grounds,
to the places where no one lives.

Aya . . .
takujumagaluamut
qangalannuarmik imma
qingaruktillunga saktumik (?)
sangaraminakupqqama (?)
innuillamut
samungagu
Una aya . . .

{ Eager to see caribou shedding old fur,
I moved to higher ground,
and faced the hunting grounds.
the old hunting places of winter.

Yai . . .
takujumagaluamut
uksulingmik
pijiksailirijumik
tuakjuk qangani
takujumagaluamut
qangalanuarmik
pijiksailirijumik
Una aya . . .

{ Eagerly, I looked for something with
fat, —
a seal, on the thick ice, waiting
to be caught,
eagerly, for a caribou waiting to
be caught.

Aya una . . .
takuvakkalauhlugit
nasipakalauhlugit (?)
nuna juitavamut(?)

{ I went to the hilltop to look over
the land —
the place where skins are dried,
the caribou crossings,

pauktugvit
nalluarjut
takkuanunga
qimitjet
narngujaarajuit(ut)
uqsunaluit
qadlutiaq qangiqhluttiarik
iglinrgnaluniaquqnarlualu(?)
qanilaaqjuara
avamudli
takujakpatillugu
innillaaqtararivunga(?)
qipqurulli(?)
uqquanut(?)
tusangiarigniaranga
qungniangiaranga
puqilasaktumik
immaringiraumisaktumik(?)
Aya. . .

down there – the place for drying
 fish,
 But all the places were empty.
 I saw the landmarks –
 Qadlutiaq Bay,
 the bird's nest on the ledge of
 the cliff,
 the ledge closest to the big hill.
 To each place I journeyed,
 looking for game.
 I rested at the hunter's shelter.
 At the place used for shelter
 I would not hear anything
 I would not see anything.

Aya . . .
angutinarasariga
aqigiasuli imma
aputillu qangani
uksuliktut
illillugu
amiliktut
illillugu
Aya . . .

(c) { But there was something emerging
 from the water,
 something splashing.
 I ran after it, chasing it hard,
 chasing a little ptarmigan on
 top of the snow
 as if it was a seal or a precious
 caribou.

Aya . . .
piqatisaturamagu
iqalutiiarmik
iqalujjungminilli
suqalulimajatunga(?)
aniqamut
saranama
uksuliktut
illillugu
niqiliktut
illillugu
Una aya. . .

(c) { Another time I caught something else
 A good fish, but a rather small fish
 I hurried home as if it was a fat
 seal,
 a seal with plenty of meat.

(originally 2 semitones lower) Quarter note = MM 92

Strophe 1

U - na a - ya a - yai - ya i - li - sa ra - lu [ariga]

A - ya - i a - tang - i - niq - tung - a a - tuq - lu - gu na - qi - ru - si - ra - sar - lu - gu

A - ya - i sa - na - vak - ka - lu - ar - i - ga
 Sa - na - ma - ja - a - ya - jjang - a - gu

qa - nuq u - vung - ak - ju - a - na qa-ggi - ni-mma -
 ing - ir - a - qu - gu ja - na - gu - qaq

ri - lung - a ni - ja - tauk - pa - gu ma - suk -
 i - ti [si] ma - ri - lung

hlu - gu i - li - sam - ni - aq - puq - hlu - gu na - lu -
 a ni - ja - tauk - pa - gu ma - suk - hlu [gu] i - li - sam - ni - aq - puq -

liq - pang - u - ra - ri - ga u - na - i -
 lu - gu na - lu - liq - pang - u - ra - ri - ga u na

ya ai - ya - ai ya - a - i ya - a - i ya
 ya a - ya ya - ai ya - i ya - i yai - ya -

ya - i yai yai yai ya - i ya - i yai - yai - ya - i ya - ai yai ay
 - i ya - i yai ya - i yai yai yai ya - i ya - i yai yay.

Any purely abstract poetic structure aside from this systematic progression of events in most song texts is difficult to recognize. The difficulty lies in the asymmetrical and prose-like nature of the texts. Almost all central Canadian Eskimo song texts are stanzaic. Stanzas, however, vary in length within a song and from one performance to another. There is repetition within a stanza and from one stanza to the next, giving the text coherence, but this is seldom exact. Copper Eskimo songs have the most repetition and are the most predictable. Frequently there will be only one or two phrases, repeated with slight variation for each stanza. In the following song translation by Diamond Jenness, the main elements of variation are respectively the seasons (a) and the type of animal hunted (b):

- (a) *Through here I should like to know
How to reach people who secure seals
I should like to know.
Through here I should like to know,
The season now when it began to be summer.
Through here I should like to know,
The season now when it began to be winter.
The season now when it began to be winter,
In our house I remained idle
Through here I should like to know,
The season now when it began to be spring.
Through here it was pleasant
. . . My bow, it, I accomplished nothing [with it].
My winged arrow when it failed to strike anything,
The young fawns I simply caught with my hands[?] (sic!)
Through here*
- (b) *I did not know how to secure it;
The caribou, I did not know how to secure it.
With my bow I tried to kill it.
The caribou I did not know how to secure it.
I did not know how to secure it.
The seal I did not know how to secure it.
With my big weapon (harpoon) I tried to pull it up.
The caribou I did not know how to secure it.⁶*

In Arnaluaq's song note the parallel beginnings of stanzas two and three and the endings of the last two stanzas. Sometimes the initial phrases of a song will be repeated in the course or at the end of a song. Frequently a word stem will occur repeatedly but with different infixes and verb endings, as in (a) and (b), or two different verbs might be structurally parallel with the same or rhyming endings, as in (c). Here are three examples from Arnaluaq's song:

- (a) *narngutsarari – narngutsakpuqkama*
 (b) *ujjirnalaruivuuq – ujgilulipangujaktunga*
 (c) *tusangnarilniaranga – qungniassangniaranga*

⁶Roberts and Jenness. *Songs of the Copper Eskimo*, p. 411-12 and p. 424.

None of the repetition patterns in Netsilik songs are predictable, however. Rather, repetition might best be described as organic – growing out of the words which precede and into those that follow.

Asymmetry is a major feature of musical as well as textual structure. Paralleling the stanzaic texts, the music consists of strophes which vary with regard to length and internal detail. The intermediate refrains which have the greatest range and are, melodically, the most varied and interesting parts of the song have the meaningless text, "Aya, ya, ya. . .". The extent of variation between strophes of a single song can be seen in the transcription of the first two strophes of Arnaluaq's song. The melodic contour is basically the same but the number of tone reiterations, rhythmic details, and the places where phrases begin and end all vary. Note, for example, that phrases two and three of strophe one are combined in strophe two. The varied repetition of melodic motives occurs in much the same manner as the unpredictable word repetitions. (It may also be noted that Eskimo music has some formula phrases which recur from one song to another, giving the whole repertoire stylistic unity.) Repeated motives are labelled 'x' in the example and formula phrases are indicated 'Y'. Finally, the main areas of structural consistency of both melody and text are at the beginnings and ends of the stanzas with more musical and textual diversity in the middle.

However, the astonishing fact about these seemingly parallel aspects of musical and textual structure is that THEY DO NOT COINCIDE. Only in the case of the stanza does a relationship of one poetic stanza to one musical strophe occur. Even here, the end of the musical refrain usually overlaps with the beginning of the textual stanza. Word repetition does not coincide with the repetition of musical or rhythmic motives. Textual phrases do not end at cadence points; in fact, a musical phrase often ends in the middle of a word. There is an example of this in the fifth line of stanza one of Arnaluaq's song. The participial ending "lugo" on "samniaqpuqlugo" is interrupted by the end of the musical phrase, the final syllable "go" initiating the next phrase. This disregard for the text can be explained by the fact that the end of a musical phrase is determined only by the singer's need to take a breath. Orpingalik's beautiful declaration, "I sing as I draw breath" has a literal as well as a symbolic meaning. Two singers will break the phrases of the same song in different places depending on their lung capacity. A younger man invariably creates longer phrases than his elders. In fact, in two recordings of the same song by the same informant made some twelve years apart, the more recent version had shorter phrases and shorter stanzas. The same textual material was divided into eight stanzas in the earlier and twelve stanzas in the later version, indicating some shortness of breath as the man aged. Although none of the Eskimo singers specifically cited long-windedness as a quality of a good singer, endurance *is* considered a merit in many areas of musical activity: the best drum dances are the longest and the best dancers the men who can dance while wielding the heavy drum for a long time; the winner of a drum dispute was most often he who sang the most songs, hence outlasting his opponent. Considering all this, it would seem reasonable that the same attitude might also apply to phrases within the song. Notwithstanding the reason for this variation in phrase and stanza length, the performance practice results in an

astounding complexity of musical structure, a kind of musical prose with constantly varying places of punctuation.

Even the need to breathe is hardly an explanation for the wide variation in the length of phrases since one normally breathes at relatively regular intervals. Furthermore, these long strophic songs are all dance music to be accompanied by the steady duple pulse of the drum. (The duple effect is caused by the turning of the drum from side to side which creates a slight change of pitch and timbre on alternate beats.) The songs were, by and large, composed to the rhythm of walking, since, according to my informants, most songs are made up while travelling. Considering these facts, the absence of metric or rhythmic regularity, periodicity, or melodic symmetry, indeed the actual defeat of symmetry and predictability by the contrariety of textual and musical structure is astounding. Perhaps the capacity for the ironic, for the defeat of expectation is so basic to Eskimo social relations and cultural expression, so ingrained in the very character of the Inuit people, that it is manifested not just in the content and imagery of songs, but in their very structure.

PHONETIC CHART

a – as in father

i – as “ee”

u – in between “oo” and “oh”

hl – voiceless “l”; place the tongue as if to say “l” and exhale.

j – like “y” in “yard”

ll – almost like “dl”

ng – as in sung

q – as “rk”

rq – “r” pronounced further back in the throat

s – pronunciation varies between English ‘s’, ‘sh’, or ‘h’

v – like “v” or “w”

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Résumé: *Madame Cavanagh, qui rédige actuellement sa thèse de Doctorat sur la musique Esquimaude Netsilik, fait l'analyse de quelques aspects du style et de la structure textuelle de chants venant de différents centres Esquimaux du Canada; elle établit la relation qui existe entre la musique et la structure du texte.*

YIVO FOLKSONG PROJECT: New York, Montreal, Toronto

BARBARA KIRSHENBLATT-GIMBLETT

The National Endowment for the Humanities is currently funding a project sponsored by the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research in New York City to study Yiddish folksongs: "East European Jewish Folksong Performance in Its Social Context: An Analysis of the Social Systematization of Folksong Performance." The purpose of the project is to analyze Yiddish folksong performance in its social context on the basis of field data never before gathered. This study will integrate folksong with the other components involved in its use (participants, settings, linguistic and musical codes, performance styles, norms of interaction and interpretation, standards of excellence, and other factors outlined by Dell Hymes, "Models of the Interaction of Language and Social Setting," *Journal of Social Issues* 23 (1967): 8-28).

Through direct observation of actual performances and in-depth interviews (10-20 hours for each informant), we will attempt to construct a model of the social systematization of Yiddish folksong performance which should approximate the way the participants themselves view it. This analysis should have implications for the study of expressive behavior cross-culturally, especially in multilingual societies.

The interviewing will be conducted in Montreal and Toronto as well as in New York City. We have already begun working with several Canadian informants – Mariam Nirenberg (Toronto) and Solomon Ary (Montreal), to mention but two – and have recorded some interesting immigrant and emigrant folksongs. We are now nearing completion of the first stage of the project, the preparation of questionnaires, field guides, and check lists, and the processing of pilot interviews. We would be grateful for leads regarding informants in Winnipeg, Toronto, and Montreal as we are still in the process of making contacts.

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