

Toward True Diversity in Frame of Reference

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Introduction

On May 16th and 17th, 2003, the first symposium on Basque orally improvised poetry was held in Reno, Nevada, organized by the University of Nevada's Center for Basque Studies. At the symposium, Andoni Egaña, Jon Sarasua, and I gave a presentation about our book, *The Art of Bertsolaritza: Improvised Basque Verse Singing* (2001).

Following our presentation, I had a friendly and, at least for me, highly profitable private conversation with Professor John Zemke, who, among other things, asked me "against whom" the book was written. The question surprised me, but I must admit that the mere fact that it was asked revealed John Zemke's extraordinary insight in having been able to perceive in our book something that the authors themselves had overlooked.

Professor Zemke is right: our book does have a certain air of protest, something perhaps not so common in the academic world, and, needless to say, not something we purposefully set out to achieve (so unconscious was it on our part that we had not even realized it was there until he pointed it out). In fact, the tone of the book is determined both by the nature of the research from which it arose, and by the context in which it was published.

Regarding the nature of our research, it is, to say the least, heterodox. First, and although I work at the University of the Basque Country, our investigations were not carried out under the auspices of any research organization, but rather in collaboration with the Association of Friends of Bertsolaritza, the Bertsozale Elkarte.

Second, our research was mainly informal and was carried out "from within." Indeed, for approximately ten years now, I and my two fellow authors have been personally involved with improvised *bertsolaritza*—Sarasua and Egaña as *bertsolaris* (*bertso* performers) and myself as a theme-prompter at festivals and the head of the television program about *bertsolaritza*, *Hitzetik Hartzera*.

It was never our intention to create a theory about *bertsolaritza*. Rather, it was our active participation in all kinds of performances that raised the following questions (or, if you prefer, working hypotheses): Why do certain details seem out of place in the traditional vision of *bertsolaritza*? What are the advantages and disadvantages of *bertsolaritza*'s adaptation to the media? What were the reasons behind the boom in *bertsolaritza* at the beginning of the '90s? What are the consequences of widening and renewing *bertsolaritza*'s audience? What role should *bertsolaritza* play within the small yet complex Basque cultural scene?

In short, our research was based around these and many other questions, always asked on the basis of our direct experience with the art of *bertsolaritza*. Many initial responses to this type of question often arose during the long, passionate, informal gatherings held after performances, or at the countless meetings of the Association of Friends of Bertsolaritza. Our method was as follows: to share our questions and sketch out (always provisional) answers, taking what we deemed most appropriate from each theory. Little by little, the pieces of puzzle began to fall into place,¹ and the book we presented in Reno reflects our position at the beginning of this decade.

Meanwhile, the “official” authorities continued to cling to the old way of seeing things, and *bertsolaritza* continued to be considered as a sub-genre of Basque poetry. In regard to orality, the most modern references were those of Marcel Jousse (1925) and Walter J. Ong (1982). In this context, I believe that the somewhat protest-like tone of our book is, if not excusable, at least understandable.

The enthusiasm with which our presentation was received by the participants of the Reno Symposium was a source of great satisfaction, and an even greater relief; all our work had been worth it, and our intuition had taken us to the same terrain in which figures as imposing as John Miles Foley, James W. Fernández, Samuel G. Armistead, Joseba Zulaika, and even John Zemke himself focused their research. Of course, this does not mean that we agree about everything, but the mere confirmation that we speak the same language, use the same parameters, and share the same vision of the phenomenon of oral poetry is, for us, reward enough.

Since that symposium in Reno, we have been lucky enough to have the opportunity to continue discussing thoughts and questions with some of the more prominent figures present at the meeting, in particular with Professor Foley.²

Among many other things, we have learned that many of the points of view that we expressed in a critical or demanding tone in our book (the inability of written poetry to understand *bertsolaritza*, the need to overcome the extreme perspective of the so-called oral-formulaic theory, and so on) were postulates accepted as completely normal by leading researchers in the field of orality, including Professor Foley, whose work *How To Read An Oral Poem* (2002) is obligatory reading for anyone interested in keeping abreast of the latest thinking with regard to oral poetry.

In light of this situation, I believe that to simply repeat that which was expressed in both our previous book and at the Reno Symposium would not be an honest contribution on my part, and I have therefore decided to write this article on the theory of oral poetry as a dialogue with Professor Foley’s book. I will attempt to “rethink” John Foley’s work from the point of view of its adaptation to improvised *bertsolaritza*.

Before I begin, I would like to make one last preliminary observation: nothing that is written below should be taken as a criticism or disparagement of Professor Foley’s stimulating

¹ Some earlier publications that we drew from in our own research include Egaña and Sarasua 1997, Garzia and Sarasua 1998, and Garzia 2000.

² Professor Foley was one of the speakers at the Intercultural Meeting, “Oral Improvisation in the World,” organized by the Association of Friends of Bertsolaritza and held in San Sebastián in November 2003. The idea of compiling this collection of articles on *bertsolaritza* for the journal *Oral Tradition* arose during the week of this event, for which we are extremely grateful to its editor, John Foley.

work. In fact, it is quite the opposite: my reflections arise from my immense gratitude to and admiration for both the work and its author, and I hope no one will feel the need to ask me, as did Professor Zemke in Reno, “against whom” this chapter is written.

The Common Substratum for Oral Poetry Genres

In my opinion, one of the most important contributions of the many made by *How to Read an Oral Poem* is its proposal for a four-section taxonomy, a “system of media categories” (Oral Performances, Voiced Texts, Voices from the Past, and Written Oral Poems), whose aim, in the words of the author himself, is to offer “a reasonable middle ground: a set of models that together offer a rough outline of various media possibilities, a flexible taxonomy that can boost our understanding by organizing myriad individual cases under a few meaningful headings” (39).

The value of such a proposal is immediately evident. On the one hand, as Foley himself says, interpreted with due rigor and the necessary flexibility, this taxonomy “can serve as a sort of filing system for the diverse collection of oral poetries from around the world and from ancient times to the present” (39).

In this sense, Foley’s proposal specifies and visualizes the overcoming of the Great Divide. Where before there was a categorical divide between written and oral poetry, we now see the advent of what we could call the Great Continuum: a progressive grading of phenomena and manifestations of differing degrees of orality, in which there is much overlapping between genres and a fair degree of fusion between orality and writing. This is, without a doubt, a much more appropriate instrument with which to analyze the complex reality of oral tradition in modern-day, developed societies, due to a large degree to the influx of new media channels.

Oral Poetry: From the Ecosystem to Genres

The identification of this substratum common to all genres does not free us from the need to analyze in depth each individual genre. This need is expressed clearly and precisely in the last of the ten *proverbs* in which Foley sums up his belief that “true diversity demands diversity in frame of reference” (141-44).

I do not believe it is a coincidence that this proverb has been placed last. In fact, I am convinced that by placing it at the end, Foley is suggesting that its contribution is merely a starting point in itself, and that there is still much out there waiting to be discovered.

Indeed, in *How to Read and Oral Poem*, Foley provides us with the substratum common to all genres of oral poetry. From here on, it is up to us to delve deeper into each one, always bearing in mind that oral poetry genres do not tend to flourish in isolation; instead, they make up what Foley calls “an ecology of oral poetry” in each situation and in each culture. Foley also proposes an analytical method for carrying out future research. It is a method that brings together the best contributions made by three great disciplines: Performance Theory, Ethnopoetics, and Inmanent Art. Strictly applied, this method enables an adequate exploration of the diverse ecosystems that make up oral poetry in different cultures.

In my case, after having barely sketched the main outlines of the ecology of Basque oral poetry, I shall now attempt to explore in more detail the characteristics of improvised *bertsolaritza*, the central theme in this issue of *Oral Tradition*.

The Place of Improvised *Bertsolaritza* in the Taxonomy of Oral Poetry Genres

There can be no doubt that, as other authors in this collection have also asserted, improvised *bertsolaritza* is located within the category of Oral Performances. This category, however, continues to be too heterogeneous for us to draw any specific conclusions regarding each of the genres included within it.

Indeed, the Oral Performances category includes, on the one hand, Grags-pa seng-ge, a Tibetan paper-singer whose image illustrates the cover of *How to Read an Oral Poem*, and on the other hand, Andoni Egaña, the champion of the last four *bertsolari* championships (1993, 1997, 2001, and 2005), whose creative process is described by the poet himself later on in this special issue.

Any comparison between these two genres reveals, in my opinion, more differences than similarities. My aim, however, is not to question the validity of the taxonomy, which fully complies with the objective for which it was established, but rather to move on from it towards an individual understanding of the diverse genres it contains—in our case, improvised *bertsolaritza*. In this sense, the aim is to identify both those traits that improvised *bertsolaritza* shares with other oral performance genres and those that differentiate *bertsolaritza* from them.

It is clear that improvised *bertsolaritza* has many traits in common with the other genres in its category: oral method of composition and performance; aural mode of reception; its own clear and well-defined register; its own way of “creating meaning”; its subjection to the here-and-now, the context in which the performance takes place, and so forth. Nevertheless, I believe it would be more interesting in the context of this article to explore the traits that differentiate improvised *bertsolaritza* from the other genres in its category, such as the Tibetan paper-singers or the Cuban improvisers.

A *Bertsolari*'s Oral Mode of Production

If we compare a *bertsolari*'s mode of production with, say, that of a Tibetan paper-singer, the first thing that stands out is the different degree of improvisation involved in each. Despite not knowing how to read, Tibetan paper-singers need a piece of paper on which to fix their eyes in order to be able to project in this format, rather like a film, as the story develops during the performance. In some ways, we could say that their minds already contain a kind of pre-script, which their memory projects onto the paper and their voice converts into a story.

Modern-day *bertsolari*s, on the other hand, despite often being university graduates, have no need of any physical support during their performance. If we think about it, this is hardly surprising because *bertsolari*s have nothing to project, largely because they do not even know the theme around which they will have to construct their verses until the last minute.

If I am not mistaken, this basic difference in the mode of production (improvisation vs. projection) can be found at the heart of most of the aspects that make improvised *bertsolaritza* a genre very different from all the others. In this sense, the difference between oral production and written production needs, in my opinion, to be complemented by other additional criteria. The following sections are an initial overview of those aspects that set improvised *bertsolaritza* apart from the other genres in its category.

What is a “Word” in Contemporary *Bertsolaritza*?

Based on the declarations of various *guslari*, Foley warns that, unlike what occurs in the writing-based mentality, “a word in oral poetry is a unit of utterance, an irreducible atom of performance, a speech-act” (13). This “extensive” concept of the oral word recalls the so-called formulae of oral-formulaic theory, although the meaning of both is clearly different. In any case, neither the formulae nor this conception of a “word” seem to fit in with what the *bertsolari* Andoni Egaña says in his article included in this collection.

If we take Egaña’s explanation seriously (and I see no reason to give more credibility to the words of some witnesses than to others), then it becomes clear that the words used by *bertsolari*s during their creative process are ordinary, common words, understood in the same way as they are understood in the culture of writing. See, for example, the category-based organization of different rhyme-words or the highly conscious way in which the poet attempts to make an idea, and the rhyme-word associated with it, fit into a grammatical sentence that complies with the metrical requirements of the corresponding stanza.

In short, *bertsolari*s improvise with the same mental categories as those who choose the path of written production (perhaps this also explains the abundance and success of so many *bertsolari*s as newspaper columnists). Of course, improvised *bertsolari*s use wider units than the word in the strictest sense of the term, but they do not do so to any greater extent than we ourselves do in our everyday language, or if they do it is with a specific, conscious, rhetorical-communicative purpose. In any case, these supra-lexical units do not seem to be a basic element in the *bertsolari*’s improvisation.

The fundamental thing about the *bertsolari* is not the formulaic repertory, but the capacity to continually create new formulae, such as the capacity to fit any cognitive content, however new or complex, within the most common metrical structures (currently those of 5-5/8 syllables and 7/6). Part of this work may be carried out prior to the improvisation, but as has been made clear elsewhere, a large part of this work of fitting together the *bertso* is carried out by means of improvisation.

Understood in this way, the formulaic nature of *bertsolaritza* does not, in any way, impede its capacity for analysis and in fact acts as an analytical tool. In reality, the task of the improvising *bertsolari* is basically one of a double formulaic skill. On the one hand, the *bertsolari* has to be able to improvise convincing and suitable formulae as he or she goes along. Second, he or she has to astutely manage the rhetoric of the formulae that have been previously mentally constructed.

The prior and conscious construction of formulae to be used seconds or minutes later in the sung improvisation is, perhaps, one of the distinguishing aspects of present-day *bertsolaritza* with respect to the art as practiced in the past. Another is the rhetorical use that the modern *bertsolari* makes of these more or less pre-constructed formulae.

In this last aspect, as in so many others, the case of the *bertsolari* Xabier Amuriza is paradigmatic. Far from using formulae as mere technique to help express platitudinous situations or values, Amuriza charges them with a great sense of poetry and rhetoric, whereby the formulae acquire great communicative importance in the *bertsos* when sung, and are used to reinforce ideas and content that are in no way platitudinous or commonplace.

His solo performances are outstanding when the event is totally, as it were, under his control. In the final of the 1980 championship, when he was lucky enough to have the theme *bihotzean min dut* (“my heart aches”), Amuriza improvised three *bertsos*, two of which I have included below.

We have seen how *bertsolari*s are accustomed to placing the key of their rhetorical strategy. And it is precisely here that Amuriza places his formulae, full of expressive force. The formula is frequently a direct appeal to the public:

*Sentimentua sartu zitzaidan
bihotzeraino umetan,
geroztik hainbat gauza mingarri
ikusi mundu honetan.
Euskalerriaz batera nago
bihotz barneko penetan;
anaiak alkar hartu ezinik,
etsaiak su eta ketan,
esan dudana gezurra bada
urka nazazue bertan. (bis).*

(Emotions entered / my heart as a lad, / since then, I’ve seen much suffering / in this world. / My heart goes out to / that of the Basque Country; / we can’t be as brothers / as the enemy beats us black and blue; / if what I say is a lie, / hang me here and now.)

At other times, it is an emotional reinforcement of something previously said:

*Sentimentua nola dugun guk
haize hotzeko orbela,
mingainetikan bihotz barnera
doa herriko kordela;
esperantza dut zerbait hoberik
bearbada datorrela,
mundu hontara sortu zen bati
bizitzea ere zor dela;
bihur bekizkit hesteak harri*

*hori ez bada horrela (bis).*³

(Our emotions are like / leaves in the cold wind, / the thread of our people runs / from the tongue to the bottom of the heart; / I like to think / better times are coming, / that which has come into this world / deserves a life as well; / may my guts turn to stone / if this not be true.)

It seems clear that the last two lines of the *bertso* could well have been prepared by Amuriza before the start of the championship. In effect, they are applicable to any theme with epic/tragedy in mind. Their function is not to develop the theme but to reinforce what has been stated beforehand. This, far from being a demerit, is perhaps Amuriza's greatest virtue. It involves, among other things, the conscious use of rhetorical strategies. Amuriza does no more than make maximum use of the most typically oral resources, adapting them to the new expressive needs.

Another example of modern formulaic use, applied in this case to a much more playful and less serious theme, is the following *bertso* by Andoni Egaña, improvised in one of those new-style exercises or assignments. In this case, Egaña was asked to imagine what the infancy of his fellow *bertsolaris* had been like. One of the other artists was Mañukorta, a *bertsolari* whose public image is that of the eternal bachelor with a natural sense of humor that could not have been taught in school:

*Mañu eskolan ikusten det nik
sari ezin erantzunda:
eme ta a, ma; eme ta i, mi;
letzen ikasi nahi zun-da.
Eme ta i, mi; eme ta o, mo;
arrotz zitzaion burrunda;
mu bakarrikan ikasi zuen
etxeko behiei entzunda.*⁴

(I can see Mañu at school now / unable to answer the questions: / em and a, ma, em and i, mi; / as Mañu wanted to learn. / Em and i, mi; em and o, mo; / it all sounded strange; / the only one he learned was mu, / he had heard it at home from the cows.)

It would seem evident that, in order to improvise this *bertso*, Andoni Egaña would have had to experiment with the names of the letters beforehand, trying to fit them into groups of five syllables. This evidently reveals a capacity for analysis and a conception of a "word" much closer to the written mentality than to the oral one.

³ See *Txapelketa* 1980.

⁴ *Bapatean* 97, Donostia, EHBE, 1998, 101.

The Role of Tradition in Contemporary *Bertsolaritza*

Tradition is something increasingly heterogeneous and diaphanous in modern-day society, and improvised *bertsolaritza* is by no means immune to this effect. Indeed, I would say that today the role played by tradition in the production of meaning during *bertsolari* performances is becoming increasingly irrelevant.

As the *bertsolari* Jon Sarasua says, just a few decades ago *bertsolaris* sang for the people. Today the perception of *bertsolaris* is that they no longer even sing for a single public, but rather for diverse publics that make up the audience present at each performance. The one feature that characterizes all these different publics is their different values and perspectives—in other words, their different traditions. This situation forces the *bertsolari* to become more broad in scope, to speak more generally in order to accommodate the great diversity of these audiences. It is this “distancing” that is precisely the principal feature of today’s improvised *bertsolaritza*.

In the championship where Egaña was declared champion for the first time, he had to play the part of a father who had lost his young son, his only child, through illness. In contrast to the dead child’s mother (played by Jon Enbeita), who found some consolation in her religious faith, the father (Egaña) is afflicted with all kinds of doubt:

*Bizitzaren merkatua...
nago neka-nekatua;
ez zen handia, inola ere,
haurran pekatua.
Zein puta degun patua:
gure ume sagratua...
lotan al zeunden, ene Jaungoiko
madarikatua?*⁵

(Life is but a marketplace . . . / I can’t go on; / so great / was the child’s sin? / Fate is a damned joke: / our adorable child! / Were you sleeping when it happened, / damned God?)

That was the *bertso* that started the improvised oral confrontation. And this is Egaña’s third and last *bertso*:

*Sinimentsu dago ama,
haurra lurpean etzana;
nola arraio kendu digute
hain haurtxo otsana?
Hossana eta hossana,
hainbat alditan esana!*

⁵ Bertsolari Txapelketa 1993, 223.

*Damu bat daukat: garai batean
fededun izana!*

(The mother persists in her faith, / the child lies buried below; / why the hell did you take
/ our innocent child? / “Hosanna, hosanna!” / so many times intoned! / I now regret /
having once been a believer!)

It might be thought that the distancing in religious themes is due to modern society’s more relaxed attitude toward religion. But *bertsolaritza* is not free of thoughts that were unthinkable (or unutterable) only a few decades ago. The following are two *bertsos* improvised by Sarasua and Egaña at a dinner in Arantza (Navarre) in 1992. Egaña is defending the need to continue singing until the listeners say stop. Sarasua is trying to finish the session as soon as possible. Sarasua sings first:

*Honek jarraitu egin nahi luke
ene, hau da martingala!
Aitortzen dizut azken-aurreko
nere bertsoa dedala.
Ta honek berriz eman nahi luke
oraindik joku zabala,
hau begiratu gaur erizten dut
lehen beldur nintzen bezala,
bertsolaria ta prostituta
antzerakoak dirala.⁶*

(This one wants to go on, / my, what a to-do here! / I’m telling you / this is my last *bertso*
but one. / And this one wants to carry on / dragging out the improvised oral
confrontation, / when I see him now I’m confirmed / in what I feared from the beginning,
/ that *bertsolaris* are / nothing more than prostitutes.)

*Sarasuaren aldetik dator
ez dakit zenbat atake,
errez salduko naizela eta
hor ari zaigu jo ta ke;
lantegi honek berekin dauka
hainbat izerdi ta neke,
bertsoalriek ta prostitutek
sufritzen dakite fuerte,
baina gustora dauden unean
gozatu egiten dute.*

⁶ *Bapatean* 92, Donostia, EHBE, 1993, 216.

(You see that Sarasua / doesn't stop attacking me, / maybe he thinks / I'm easily bribed; / in this art of ours / there is sweat and tears, / both *bertsolaris* and prostitutes / know what suffering is, / but they also have moments / of great satisfaction.)

In Aretxabaleta in 1994, Egaña improvised in the following *bertso* about the death (a presumed suicide) of the cyclist, Luis Ocaña. This *bertso* is also a good example of the strategic complexity of *bertsos* with more than five rhymes:

*Geure buruen txontxongillo ta
sarri besteren titere,
ustez antuxun ginanak ere
bihurtzen gara titare;
Luis Ocaña hor joana zaigu
isilik bezin suabe:
pistola bat parez pare,
zigilurik jarri gabe,
ez lore ta ez aldare;
baina inortxo ez asaldatu,
egin zazute mesede,
askatasunak mugarik ez du
heriotz orduan ere.⁷*

(At times we are but a replica of ourselves / at others, puppets pulled by the whims of others, / Luis Ocaña has gone from us, / discreetly saying nothing: / a pistol to the temple, / the safety catch off, / not a flower, not an altar. / But let nobody be scandalized, / do me this favor, / freedom has no limits / not even at the moment of death.)

It would not be particularly useful to give more examples. We can say, in conclusion, that the “distancing” that oral theory regards as exclusive to written literature is the prime characteristic of improvised *bertsolaritza* as practiced since the 1980s: a distancing with respect to cultural/textual values, untouchable previously, but also in regard to other, more situational elements.

Rhetoric and Oral Poetry

Whether we like it or not, it is clear that *bertsolaris* improvise with categories that do not seem to fit into our preconceived notion of orality. The same can be said of Cuban improvisers. In general, the more developed an oral art, the further it tends to be from what appear to be the

⁷ *Bapatean* 94, Donostia, EHBE, 1995, 216.

universal postulates of oral poetry. And, inversely, this typically oral mode of production (based on extended words and formulae) seems to mesh better with less developed manifestations.

To resolve this *aporia*, the easiest thing would be to deny the reality that seems to contradict our theory. How much more productive it would be, however, to try to enrich the theory in order to enable the observed phenomenon to fit comfortably inside it. In this sense, I believe that rhetoric may prove a valuable tool when trying to adapt the general framework provided by Professor Foley in *How to Read an Oral Poem* and attempting to follow the path that leads from the general aspects of oral poetry to the specific aspects of each genre.

Elsewhere,⁸ we defined improvised *bertsolaritza* as “a rhetorical genre of an epideictic, oral, sung and improvised nature.” As we know, classical rhetoric, more than a purely theoretical construction, is a critical and meticulous description of the mechanisms and procedures of the orators of the time. We are not trying to apply these instruments and procedures in a mechanistic way to improvised *bertsolaritza*. It is more a case of constructing our own critical description from the direct observation of the tasks undertaken by today’s *bertsolaris*. It is here that classical rhetoric can offer us a methodology that has admirably proven itself to be both fruitful and effective. Furthermore, “the study of rhetoric, most seem to agree, is essentially the study of rhetoric’s five canons They provide a structure that allows rhetors and rhetoricians to analyze and study separately the various parts of a complete rhetorical system” (Reynolds 1993).

In the case of oral poetry, it is best to analyze how these five canons of rhetoric are developed in each genre. This would, among other things, enable us to perceive and systemize the differences between the different genres, thus compiling a comparative study of the diverse ecosystems of oral poetry. For example, an exploration of the first canon, *inventio*, would reveal the different degree of improvisation in each genre; *elocutio* would clarify the degree of formularity; and *actio* would, quite naturally, integrate the contributions of Ethnopoetics.

In summary, my proposal would be to incorporate rhetoric into the group of instruments that Professor Foley proposes in *How to Read an Oral Poem*, so that rhetoric would join Performance Theory, Ethnopoetics, and Inmanent Art as a theoretical paradigm.

General Bibliographic Note

Although some progress has been made over recent years, any non-Basque-speaker wanting to study *bertsolaritza* in depth is still faced with a severe lack of bibliographic material. Despite the fact that, in our explanation, we say that *bertsolaritza* is currently living through a golden age, we must also admit that the study of *bertsolaritza* is by far its least developed facet. In an era in which orality is so fashionable, the scarce attention paid to *bertsolaritza* by the academic field seems paradoxical.

It is the more technical aspects of *bertsolaritza* that have been studied in most depth. Patri Urkizu, Patxi Altuna, Pello Esnal, and Juan Mari Lekuona, among others, have conducted and published a series of interesting studies on the metrics and stanzas used by *bertsolaris*. This

⁸ See Garzia, Sarasua, and Egaña 2001.

technical part of *bertsolaritza*, however, falls outside the purposes and objectives of this present work.

There are also a relatively large number of descriptive works focusing on the history of *bertsolaritza*. The ones consulted most in the Basque language are those by Joanito Dorronsoro (1981 and 1988) and Juan Mari Lekuona (1982). Xabier Amuriza has published a brief history of *bertsolaritza* (1996), and the Elhuyar publishing house released a CD of *bertsolaritza* performances (Bertsoen Mundua) containing information regarding the history of the championships, biographies of key *bertsolaris*, a large anthology of *bertsos*, and an enjoyable and educational application based on improvised pieces. Dorronsoro is also author of a catalogue of around 3,000 *bertso* melodies (1997), complete with their corresponding sheet music and comments—a monumental work of enormous value. The melodies can be accessed online at <http://www.bertsozale.com/>.

In Spanish, the most popular works on the history of *bertsolaritza* are those by Zavala (1964) and Aulestia (1990), both of which are descriptive in nature. The work by Father Zavala fails, for obvious reasons, to encompass the more recent changes that have taken place in *bertsolaritza*, and Aulestia, for his part, hardly pays the *bertsolaris* who came after Amuriza any heed at all. Perhaps the most comprehensive history of the art form is that written by Patricio Urquizo (2000).

Since 1988, an annual anthology in the form of a book has been published of all the *bertsos* improvised each year. The collection is issued by the Association of Friends of Bertsolaritza, and is entitled *Bapatean*.

The publications corresponding to the *bertsolari* championships, on the other hand, form a heterogeneous series. The publication on the first championships and challenges is as interesting as it is chaotic.⁹ The works focusing on the last two championships (2001 and 2005), however, were published by the Association of Friends of Bertsolaritza and are much more ambitious and consistent in nature, offering an excellent portrait of contemporary *bertsolaritza*.

Both the books in the *Bapatean* series and the works focusing on the most recent championships are published with their corresponding CDs, where listeners can hear the transcribed verses. The majority of these texts can also be viewed online in the catalogue of the *Xenpelar* Documentation Center's digital library, which is the property of the Association of Friends of Bertsolaritza. Access to these digital texts of the different publications can be found online at <http://www.bertsozale.com/>. This website also offers a wealth of information in four languages (English, Basque, Spanish, and French) about everything related to *bertsolaritza*. The journal *Jakin* has published three monographic issues on *bertsolaritza* (see *Jakin* in the complementary bibliography). Another magazine, *Bertsolari*, offers a more journalistic vision of *bertsolaritza*, although it also contains materials of enormous interest, such as, for example, articles on genres similar to *bertsolaritza* in other parts of the world.

The greatest lack is in that area related to the more theoretical aspects of *bertsolaritza*. Up until a few years ago, all of the most interesting studies were published in Basque. In fact, our book, *The Art of Bertsolaritza* (2001), is nothing more than a rather blatant effort to address this

⁹ See Etxezarreta 1993.

lack. Some years earlier, the Cuban improviser Alexis Díaz Pimienta (1998) published a book that represented a giant leap forward in the way in which we approach the study of improvised oral genres. The minutes of the First Symposium on Basque orally improvised poetry, organized by the University of Reno's Center for Basque Studies, took us a little further down this path. These minutes were published in 2005 under the title *Voicing the Moment: Improvised Oral Poetry and Basque Tradition*, edited by Samuel G. Armistead and Joseba Zulaika. The publication contains a wide-ranging and excellent bibliographical section.

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