

Public Abstract

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This thesis discusses the inauguration, development, and recent directions in studies in oral tradition. The first chapter focuses on the advancements of Milman Parry and Albert B. Lord, first examining briefly the history of scholarship leading up to their studies. Following an overview of their contributions, this thesis surveys several related developments in linguistics, folklore, and other related fields, in an effort to understand the work of Parry and Lord in the larger context of structuralist scholarship. By structuralism here I refer, most basically, to approaches developing out of, or concurrent with, the linguistic innovations of Saussure, concerned primarily with the study and discovery of structures or systems, often with language serving as a model for that structure.

Oral-Formulaic Theory, I attempt to show, was not an isolated innovation, but can be located within the larger historical and contemporary framework of the early to mid twentieth century. In chapters two I discuss some of the more significant developments in the study of oral tradition subsequent to Parry, Lord and their period, focusing lastly on some new directions in the discipline for chapter three.