Studies in Oral Tradition: History and
Prospects for the Future

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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the thesis entitled

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HISTORY AND PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE

presented by Peter A. Ramey,

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and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

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Chapter 1.
The Origins and Contexts of Studies in Oral Tradition

Historical Precedents to Parry and Lord

At the inception of the study of oral tradition stand Milman Parry and Albert B. Lord. It is they to whom we owe the compound subject "oral tradition," thanks to their inspired analysis of Homeric verse and later comparative fieldwork with the South Slavic oral traditions, out of which arose Oral-Formulaic Theory. Parry and Lord were themselves inheritors of much of what would combine to form the theory, although until Parry these components were not yet integrated into a coherent system. Oral-Formulaic Theory would be assembled from a long history of Homeric studies as well as from ethnographic fieldwork with oral traditions. John Miles Foley, in *The Theory of Oral Composition*, traces out the development of the scholarship that would eventually take shape as the Parry-Lord Theory.[1] To combat the tendency to view the Oral-Formulaic Theory as *sui generis*, and to give my subject proper scope, I will briefly outline the key figures in Foley's history, which fall into three groups—Homeric studies, philology, and anthropology.

That the Homeric epic poems were originally oral was suggested as early as Josephus (born A. D. 37/38), who argued that Homer must have composed his epics prior to writing. This claim would be echoed by European classicists at the beginning of the sixteenth century, and was again taken up by Friedrich Wolf in his 1795 *Prolegomena ad Homerum*. Wolf argued that the Homeric poems pre-dated the advent of literacy, which

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[1] Unless noted otherwise, the page numbers in this section refer to Foley 1988.

would make later editors responsible for the production of our present Homeric texts. This thesis would foment the schism among classicists between Unitarians and Analysts—the debate between a single, master poet and that of a redaction—a divide that Parry would ingeniously circumvent.

Foley has also shown how heavily Parry is indebted for his methodology to German philologists such as Johann Ernst Ellendt and Heinrich Düntzer. Ellendt, for example, pointed out the way in which Homeric language is specifically molded to fit the meter, often altering the morphology for this purpose. He would claim that this was characteristic of the poetry of pre-literates. Düntzer took this further by arguing for the evolution of a specialized poetic language, or *Kunstsprache*, for which outmoded language forms were retained for their metrical utility. This anticipates Parry's position that decisions were not primarily based on aesthetic principles (his contemporary literary ones, at any rate), but were selected to suit the metrical requirements. Foley includes with these scholars the influence of Parry's own mentor at the Sorbonne, Antoine Meillet, who noticed the formulaic composition of Homeric verse. Meillet went so far as to claim, "The Homeric epic is made up entirely of formulas which are transmitted by the poets" (Foley 1988:9). Indeed, Parry himself explains that it was Meillet who, along with Matija Murko, would direct the young scholar toward the possibility of o*ral* composition in Homer.

Finally, anthropology provided Parry with the remaining ingredient for his breakthrough: a field-drawn analogue of oral performance for the Homeric epic. In the fieldwork of Vasilii V. Radlov among the Kara-Kirghiz people of Central Asia, Parry was exposed to scholarship based on a living example of oral composition. Radlov's

observation of performance is remarkably consonant with the Parry-Lord Theory: "By virtue of extensive practice in recitation, [the singer] has in readiness entire sets of 'recitation-parts' (*Vortragstheilen*), if I may use the expression, which he joins together in fitting ways during the course of his narration" (11). Radlov goes so far as to claim that the singer merely combines these parts: "The art of the singer consists only of arranging all of these ready-made "idea-parts" coherently, as the course of events require, and in joining them together through newly composed verses" (12). Oral composition via ready-made units emerges also in the scholarship of Friedrich Krauss in his fieldwork among the South Slavic *guslari*. Krauss connects what he terms *kliches* to popular tradition, stating, "The guslar invents nothing more of importance, since the fixed formulas, from which he neither can nor wishes to vary, are available to fulfill his needs through the centuries-old bequest of oral tradition" (13). Still another scholar, Arnold van Gennep, figures the epic singer's employment of clichés in the same manner "we play with cards, … order[ing] them differently according to the use he wishes to make of them" (13). Lastly, the fieldwork and insight of Murko and Gerhard Gesemann profoundly impacted Parry's work. Gesemann, drawing on the work of Murko in Serbo-Croatian tradition, posits the *Kompositionsschema*, which Foley calls a "multiform traditional unit as large as the entire tale" (14). This, according to Gesemann, provides an entire framework, "an overall pattern to the whole (story or scene)," which includes a "beginning, middle, and end" (14). Gesemann saw his theory at work in the case of an epic singer's adaptation of the heroic *Kompositionsschema* to the death of a physician's son—a death not witnessed by the singer himself, who used the ready-made template to extemporize his song. It is Murko, however, who is most responsible for the shift in Parry's view of Homer as a

traditional poet to an oral traditional one. Murko was present at Parry's *soutenanc*e, and would, along with Meillet, direct Parry toward the idea of oral epic. Murko's annual fieldwork among the South Slavic *guslari* supplied the direct example for Parry and Lord to follow.[2]

The Work of Milman Parry

As is evident, much of Oral-Formulaic Theory was in place, albeit in disparate pieces, by the time Parry entered the scene. His contribution was to present the formulas as a functioning *system*, showing the manner in which they constitute the very mechanism of oral composition. Parry himself would arrive at his whole explanation only by degrees, and the theory would reach its fullness only with the additional work of his student and successor Albert B. Lord. But as early as his 1923 Master's thesis it is possible to see elements emerging. Pointing out that narratives like the fall of Troy "were not themselves the original fictions of certain authors, but creations of a whole people," Parry argues that in the same way "the style in which they were to be told was not a matter of individual creation, but a popular tradition, evolved by centuries of poets and audiences" (Parry 421). These poems were *traditional*, he theorized, and not merely traditional in content: the poetry that comprised them was itself traditional (Foley 1988:20). This observation was more groundbreaking than it may now seem, since at the time classicists were applying the same critical tools as were used for contemporary literary poetry. It is in respect to its traditionality, Parry writes in 1923, "that epic poetry differs diametrically from modern poetry which lays so great a value on individuality and

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[2] Murko's most comprehensive work, *Tragom srpsko-hrvatske narodne epike: Putovanja u godinama*, was published posthumously in 1951.

uniqueness of style" (422). Although not the first to make this claim, he would be the one who through systematic analysis altered the approach to Homer for good. After his work, scholars could no longer unthinkingly apply literary criteria to oral-based texts. A new set of criteria had to be set up in conjunction with this perspective—that of oral tradition.

In order to make theoretical room for this new concept, however, Parry found it necessary to construct a high-contrast definition of "oral traditional" against what he thought of as literary; for this reason he contended that tradition is "diametrically" different from modern verse. In order to come up with a competing perspective clearly distinct to the prevailing literary one, he was perhaps obliged to overstate the case, creating a "Great Divide" conceptualization that would temporarily obstruct new scholarship.

Parry does not dismiss the possibility of aesthetic quality within traditional art, but argues that it is a traditional aesthetic. He finds in classical Greek sculpture a suitable analogue for this perspective, in which "all its figures were to be modeled by the piecing together of ready-made arms, legs, heads, torsos, fingers and so on" (Parry 424). In this sense, artistic excellence is not incompatible with tradition for Parry. He locates in the sculptor Phidias his conception of traditional excellence, arguing that his work embodied "the spirit of a whole race," and adding that "it might even be said that the statue was produced by the Greeks in collaboration with Phidias" given the extent to which he "has blended his own genius with that of his race" (425). While omitting the possibility of an individually determined aesthetic, Parry, anticipating accusations of making Homer

common and artless, is taking pains to show that tradition is not incompatible with a genuine kind of artistic excellence.

To demonstrate the traditionality of Homer, he analyzes "ornamental adjectives" in Homeric verse, pointing out the way these correspond to the wider poetic tradition rather than the narrative situation in which they are found. Some of the examples given by Parry are as such: "Polyphemos lifts his hands to the starry heaven in broad daylight; ships are swift, even when drawn up on land," and so forth (426). These adjectives are not selected to describe the situation at hand, the argument continues, but to fulfill the metrical requirements of the hexameter. After a demonstration of the meticulous and detailed analysis that characterizes his scholarship, Parry moves into a peroration, closing with an image that would become emblematic for the budding theory:

> These ornamental adjectives are really the practice of an artistic principle of unquestionable value, the principle that the medium should be blended to the ideas which the medium is to express, and conversely, the blending of the ideas to the medium . . . The process of composition for the epic poet was much like that of the worker in mosaic, who, having made his outline by the use of set pieces fills in whatever odd spaces may be left by pieces which fit exactly and yet blend unobtrusively with the pattern. (428)

Via the mosaic image, he is describing a *craftsmanship* model for oral tradition. In some circles, the Parry-Lord camp has even been dubbed the "craftsmanship" approach (Holbek 39). For Parry, this early thesis supplied the vital notion of the traditional composition of Homer. What was missing was the notion of the formula as more than a component of Homeric verse, but as the very means of its composition in oral performance.

The importance of the oral origin of the Homeric poems would reveal itself only after the completion of two doctoral theses which Parry sought to prove the traditional

nature of Homer through analysis of the noun-epithet phrase. The notion of *oral*

composition in Homer is first introduced in his essay "Studies in the Epic Technique of

Oral Verse-Making. I. Homer and Homeric Style," published in 1930. Here Parry cites

his previous work with the epithet, in which he argued for a traditional Homer, but then

moves into a discussion of the formulas as a functioning system. The premises of Parry's

previous writings—that the Homeric poems are comprised of a traditional, poetic

"language" which had evolved especially to suit the hexameter—had been, he states, for

the most part granted by scholars. But from that point he announces his entrance into new

territory:

> When fault has been found, it has rather been with what has seemed to be the
> bearing of the limited conclusions on the larger problem of Homeric style. It
> has been objected that formulas are to be found in all poetry . . . . But the
> statement that a certain part of Homer's diction is almost entirely traditional is
> one which is sure to suggest larger conclusions . . . . No number of formulas
> found in later authors would disprove the fact that the fixed epithet in Homer is
> traditional; but they might keep us from saying that Homeric style is so
> formulaic that it can be understood only as a traditional and an oral style.
> (266-7)

With the addition of "oral" into his studies, Oral-Formulaic Theory was born. Parry is

well aware that what this amounts to is nothing less than an entirely new paradigm with

which to approach Homer, for it is in respect to oral tradition that previous studies had

fallen short. These Homerists, Parry explains, had "failed, I think, because they would not

see that in style and form Homeric verse is unlike that to which they are used" (268).

Parry comprehends that the "style and form" of Homer are of an entirely different *genus*

than the verse of Europe's literary tradition, and must be studied accordingly. To study

Homer, what is called for is "a new idea of poetic artistry" (269), an oral traditional

poetics, although Parry never uses this precise term. It is not in the "study of religious, or

cultural, or social, or historical details that we must look for the answer to the question of

how the poems were made," nor can we turn to literary approaches "which have gradually formed in us by the writing of later times" (269). Instead, Parry proposes that "the first move in this attempt to rebuild the Homeric idea of epic poetry will be to show that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are composed in a traditional style, and are composed orally, then to see just how such poetry differs from our own in style and form" (269). Only after this is accomplished shall we have "solid ground beneath us" with which to tackle long-standing questions of unity, redaction, dialect, etc. (269). The nature of the object of study must first be properly determined.

Parry next introduces the ingredient of exigency. "The poet who composes with only the spoken word a poem of any length must be able to fit his words into the mould of his verse after a fixed pattern," Parry explains; "unlike the poet who writes out his lines . . . he cannot think without hurry about his next word" (269). For this reason the poet "must have for his use word-groups all made to fit his verse" (269). In the process of composing, the poet "will do no more than put together for his needs" these formulas which, "grouping themselves in accordance with a fixed pattern of thought come naturally to make the sentence and the verse" (269). Both the pattern and the phrase that is specially suited to fit it are integral for oral composition—performance is dependent upon them. This poetic system provides its performers with a diction comprised of a "vast number of word-groups each of which serve two ends: it expresses a given idea in fitting terms and fills just the space in the verse" (270). Citing the work of Krauss with oral poetry in Serbia, North Africa, and Afghanistan, Parry argues that Homeric verse may also be oral and traditional, and the key to determining this character lies with the formula: "The nature of the formula will show us that the more formulas we find in a

poet's diction, the smaller is the portion of them which could be the work of a single poet" (272). We can then compare the presence of formulae in written texts with those in Homer as proof. It is here Parry gives us his famous definition of the formula as "a group of words which is regularly employed under the same metrical conditions to express a given essential idea" (272).

In Parry's thinking the formula is not merely constitutive of oral epic; it is the mechanism that runs the entire enterprise, making composition in performance possible. What distinguishes it from a merely repeated phrase is the measure of its "usefulness." Utility or function, he points out, is the defining feature of the formula, not repetition, although repetition is often a sign of usefulness. This criterion allows Parry to distinguish between repetitions and refrains as found in Shakespeare or classical drama. Quoting examples from Sophocles and Bacchylides, he shows that repetitions there are not used to fill a space in the meter, that is, by necessity, but instead "to obtain some special effect" (274). Parry devotes a large portion of his essay to providing evidence for this distinction, recognizing that his entire theory rides on this distinction. In his effort to make the argument he occasionally overplays the contrast. He will contend, for example, that since literary works use repetition to achieve a special effect, the recurring traditional formulas, in contrast to their literary counterparts, made no particular impression on the audience of the Homeric epic. Parry claimed this traditional audience is numb to the play of formulae, stating, "its constant recurrence . . . has dulled the attention of the public to its meaning" (285, footnote).

The persuasiveness of Parry's argument comes less from this "literary versus traditional" distinction and more from his ability to forcefully demonstrate the intricate

but consistent operation of formulaic systems. The numerous charts provided show a collection of interchangeable parts within a stable structure, a vast network of pre-fabricated possibilities, allowing for what Albert Lord would call "multiformity." Parry uses the charts to show the manner in which these systems are specifically adapted to fit the requirements of the Homeric line. Such a system is explained as follows: "(f)or example, one finds in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* a group of phrases which all express between the beginning of the verse and the trochaic caesura of the third foot, in words which are much alike, the idea 'but when he (we, they) had done so.'" Parry goes on to provide a table of the possible formulas that are fitted to complete the line (275-6). Each group of interchangeable formulas he terms a "system," and these smaller systems can be fitted together in a larger "system."

He then identifies two principles governing this system—length and thrift. Length simply refers to the number of interchangeable formulas of a certain metrical type, while thrift describes the lack of redundancies in the system—that is, the lack of formulas that are both metrically and denotatively alike functionally identical. For example, in the case of the noun-epithet formulas of gods and heroes, which Parry assures us is a large number, only three of these are found to be redundant (two metrically identical epithets for, say, Zeus). This simply means the same formulas are re-used in oral composition whenever the metrical needs of a particular line require it, which clearly contrasts with textual composition, where the need for "thrift" is less pressing.

In an early essay, "Enjambement in Homeric Verse" (1929), Parry isolates enjambement as another characteristic of oral composition. Homeric epic has a much lower rate of enjambed lines than later Greek literary poetry, but a higher rate of

unperiodic enjambement—lines that can optionally be continued but do not require it. But he discovers that "necessary enjambement" occurs much less frequently than in writing. This he sees as evidence of the "adding style," or parataxis of rapid composition—"Oral versemaking by its speed must be chiefly carried on in an adding style," because the "singer has not time for the nice balances and contrasts of unhurried thought" (262).

In his subsequent essay, "Studies in the Epic Technique of Oral Verse-Making. II. The Homeric Language of an Oral Poetry," Parry uses his freshly formed theory to explain the long-standing conundrum of the composite language of the Homeric epics, which included archaic, dialectical, and artificial linguistic forms. Due to the needs of the formulaic systems, Parry asserts, "the Homeric poems were composed in a poetic language wherein old and foreign forms had been kept and new forms brought in by reason of the help they gave the epic poets in making their hexameters" (328). The presence of archaisms, Arcado-Cyprian, Aeolic, and Ionic dialects, as well as artificial forms (patterned on the basis of existing formulas—a process called "analogy" by Parry), can be explained by their usefulness in the formulaic language of the poems. Parry could show that this Homeric *Kunstsprache*—like the formulas themselves—was not merely a poetic affectation but rooted in an oral traditional function. Along the way Parry touches on Greek lyric poetry as well, claiming that "(t)he same forces which created the poetic epic language of Homer created the poetic lyric language of Sappho and Alcaeus" (347). Parry emphasizes that in lyric and epic alike "the language is the work of the verse" (348). Part of the immense contribution of his work was to emphasize how pervasively function—here formulas operating in oral composition—determines to some extent

content. The metrical medium of the oral tradition, he makes clear, shapes what it will "say."

The weight of Parry's argument comes, as we have seen, from its ability to explain the workings of Homeric verse systematically, defining the formula as a unit, a working part, within that system.[3] Furthermore, the system presented by Parry accounted for the structure of Homeric material in an entirely new mode. This shift is well expressed in Parry's contrast of the literary compositional method of Euripides, who "looked for terms to express ideas," as against the compositional mode of the epic poet "thought in terms of his formulas, and did not separate the idea from the word with which it went" (298). Seen systemically, the formula is not the means of expression in Homeric epic, "but a means for making [the verse itself]" (299). A distinction in terms of function can thus be discerned: "the repeated phrase in [written] poetry . . . is an ornament of verse, not a means of making it" (299). In this formulaic system, formulas are constitutive of the verse they make possible in performance, so that "the poet is thinking in terms of the formulas" rather than trying to recall or create them (324). Formulaic composition, Parry emphasizes, is "not a desire for an easy way of making verse, but the complete need of it" (317).

There could only be one way, however, to see if this was in fact the case. From the example of Murko and others, Parry came to recognize that fieldwork with a living oral tradition would be the only opportunity to gather evidence of the theory at work, and for this purpose he would make several trips to the nation then called Yugoslavia between 1933 and 1935. His plans for further comparative study were continued by his student

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[3] Parry is similar in this to the linguistic model innovated by Saussure, which I will examine more in depth later.

and co-worker Albert B. Lord after his premature death. I now turn to the work of Lord with the understanding that it is to Parry that we owe the birth of the study of oral tradition, which, in Parry's own words, aims to "try to gain for our reading the sense of style which is proper to oral song" (418).

Albert B. Lord

The scholarship of Albert B. Lord both completes Parry's agenda, interrupted as it was by his death, and broadens its application and appeal. Although Parry inaugurated the theory, it was Lord who, according to Foley, "made Oral-Formulaic Theory a discipline of its own" by extending the work of Parry and their South Slavic fieldwork into a number of new fields (1988:36). Lord's approach is best embodied in his *Singer of Tales* (hereafter *SOT*), published in 1960 although it draws heavily from his 1948 dissertation. *SOT* had, in fact, been originally conceived of by Parry, whose aim had been "to fix with exactness the *form* of oral poetry to see wherein it differs from the *form* of written story poetry" (Parry 469, italics in original). Parry goes on to explain that his intention was to observe the process of a living oral tradition in operation within traditional society. This would serve as a basis for comparative studies with "the great poems which have come down to us as lonely relics of a dim past: we would know how to work backwards from their form so as to learn how they must have been made" (469). This served as a commission Lord would faithfully fulfill, stating in the preface his aim to "comprehend the manner in which [the singers] compose, learn, and transmit their epics" (Lord xxxv). Although it derives from Homeric studies, the spirit of this enterprise is profoundly comparative, the goal being to arrive at principles that can be applied to a host

of traditional areas. Indeed, after devoting the first half of the book to the process of oral traditional art (based on his South Slavic fieldwork), Lord spends the remainder of *SOT* applying these insights to Old English, Old French, Byzantine Greek, and Ancient Greek traditions. Although Lord had a long and prolific career, I will focus only on his *magnum opus*, primarily because this work would provide the charter for the new discipline of studies in oral tradition, and because it is the consummate example of the approaches and assumptions of the first generation of studies in oral tradition.

In his introductory chapter Lord provides a definition of "oral epic song" as a traditional, non-literate narrative poetry composed of formulas and themes. Here we are presented with an important new oral traditional unit: the theme. Lord defines these as "repeated incidents and descriptive passages in the songs" and again later as "not a fixed set of words, but a grouping of ideas" (69). Here we are also given another of Lord's premises, that oral narrative poetry owes its origins to "serious ceremonial occasions, to ritual" (6). This shows us another area in which Lord would differentiate himself from his predecessor, in his understanding of epic's origins in ritual.

Lord, following Parry, is especially intent on uncovering the form of oral traditional epic—a sense of what characteristics are proper to it, as opposed to written literature. While this emphasis leads them to ethnography, in order to find "how the way of life of a people gives rise to a poetry of a given kind of excellence," it is still the form, not the folk, which remains their primary preoccupation (Lord 4). Yet whatever their aim, the work of these scholars would be significantly shaped by their experiences in the field. The fruit of this focus would inform the first half of *SOT*, where Lord provides a very full picture of oral tradition in action, which he clearly saw—while based on his South Slavic

experiences—widely applicable to a variety of epic traditions. Just as Parry was originally drawn to the region for its corroborating evidence for his theory of Homer verse, so Lord uses it as a springboard for expanded application, although this perspective does not diminish his commitment to South Slavic verbal art, which he holds in high regard.

In applying Parry's model to various traditions, Lord would draw out the implications of his mentor's work. One of the most important examples is his employment of the language model as the master-metaphor for the formulaic system. While Parry had himself described a "poetic language," he did not capitalize fully on usefulness of the language model for oral tradition. For Lord, the language model is fundamental to his approach. After illustrating a particular example of a formulaic sub-system in South Slavic (what he calls a "substitution system") after the fashion of Parry, Lord admits that a "style thus systematized . . . . is bound to appear very mechanical" (35). To combat this mechanistic appearance, Lord turns to the example supplied by language:

> Again we may turn to language itself for a useful parallel. The classical frame of language, with its paradigms of tenses and declensions, might give us the idea that language is a mechanical process. The parallel, of course, goes even further. The method of language is like that of oral poetry, substitution in the framework of the grammar . . . . In studying the patterns and systems of oral narrative verse we are in reality observing the "grammar" of the poetry . . . . (35-36).

This idea of oral tradition as a kind of language or grammar recurs throughout *SOT*. The singer-in-training, Lord will explain, learns his art as one would a language, acquiring fluency not through memorization but through exposure and practice. As he describes the process, "Although it may seem that the more important part of the singer's training is the learning of formulas from other singers, I believe that the really significant element in

the process is rather the setting of various patterns that make the adjustment of phrase and creation of phrases by analogy possible" (37). Singers acquire the necessary structure and into this matrix the formulas are fitted.

Such thinking has important implications for transmission and acquisition, as well as the evolution of the oral traditions. Lord shows how new formulae are forged on the model of previously existing ones—a process Parry had termed "analogy." For example, Lord demonstrates how the Serbo-Croatian *ingliskoj kraljici,* "the Queen of England," although a new idea to the singer, is easily fitted into the old slot of *bagdatska kraljica*, "the Queen of Baghdad" (44). The formula, as seen in the context of its living tradition, does not circumscribe creation, as law, but enables it, as language. Lord effectively breathes life into the static concept of the formula, explaining elsewhere that for the singer, "the formula was developed to serve him as a craftsman, not to enslave him" (54). He highlights its dynamic function by explaining that, "only in performance can the formula exist and have definition" (32). Formulas are characterized by their utility, as mirrored by language itself; in fact, the very definition of "formula" arises only from its performance function—as is true with language.

What can be said of the dynamic multiformity of the formula can equally be applied to Lord's concept of theme. Theme lacks the metrical or verbal parameters of the formula and for this reason proves more difficult to define. It is characterized rather broadly as "groups of ideas regularly used in telling a tale" and elsewhere as "a recurrent element of narration or description in traditional oral poetry . . . . not restricted by metrical considerations" (Foley 1988:38). Foley offers condensed definition for theme as "a narrative formula" (1988:42). It is the recurrence, not of exact words, but of an idea-

complex. Like formulas, themes are not restricted to a single song but have a recurrent and "semi-independent life of their own" (Lord 94). The theme of "the council" is one of the most basic and widespread. Others include "the arming of the hero" and "the assembly." As with formulas, the singer-in-training "absorbs a sense of the structure of themes from his earliest days" (69) so that the song itself is nothing more than "a flexible plan of themes and formula" (99). Just as the singer thinks "in formula" so he also thinks of his song "in terms of its broader themes" (95).

But for Lord poetic composition is by no means a rote process of lining up and reciting pre-built themes in a set order. Like formulas, themes exist only in relation to the larger narrative song. While our "categorizing minds work differently," isolating and identifying themes as units, for the singer themes are identical with the epic itself. Moreover, themes build naturally toward others—the theme of "the assembly" leads into the theme of "the journey," and so on. These individual themes cohere into larger groups or "complexes," and Lord stresses that these complexes are bound together not merely by the logic of the narrative but by the "force of habitual association" (96). This somewhat numinous force constitutes the accumulated weight which past performances exert upon the present, something Lord calls "a tension of essences" (97). For example, "the return of the hero after an absence" complex will always involve disguise, deception, and recognition (or traces of them), even where all might not seem necessary for the narrative purpose. What is responsible for this "tension of essences," according to Lord, is the origin in myth and ritual that he sees as underlying their original function. For him, the "arming of the hero" theme is the vestige of a ceremony, "a survival of rites of initiation or dedication" (88). This may reflect a propensity toward the myth-ritual theory

associated with the figure of the hero, a theory that has been largely dismissed by subsequent scholarship.[4] But what is of most value here is Lord's concept of tradition not as a kind of formaldehyde but as a force that continually re-shapes the present. More so than Parry, Lord is diachronic in approach. He is interested in the structures of oral tradition not in a perpetual present, but as they relate to changes over time.

In this light, Lord's formal concerns, his pattern-seeking, are not a formalist quest for organic unity but an inquiry into the way traditional forms function to enact that tradition. This point is reiterated throughout *SOT*: "formulas themselves are perhaps less important in understanding this oral technique than the various underlying patterns of formulas and the ability to make phrases according to those patterns" (44). To Lord's thinking, theme and formula are not the goal of performance, but the means that support it, and these patterns offer insight into their functions, both surface-level and submerged. Affinities are apparent with Lévi-Strauss (whom Lord footnotes several times in *SOT*) with his interests in a more universal "deep structure." But there are also important differences. Lord is interested in formal structures as well as those more submerged, seeing the two as intimately related. All patterns, in fact, are of significance to Lord. He suggests the compilation of a formula index in the style of Aarne-Thompson, for example, and is intent on examining acoustic patterns and syntactic parallelism, among other things. Patterns are valuable for Lord because of their expositional power—they can open up and make explicit meanings only implicit. The repetition of the epithet of a divinity, such as "bright-eyed Athena," has a function even beyond metrical utility. According to him, this form was also a petition to the goddess; "its patterns were born for

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[4] This theory will be dealt with more in chapter two in my discussion of Lord Raglan.

magic productivity, not for aesthetic satisfaction" (67). In this view, the poet was first a

ritual figure, and only later became an artist.[5]

The last area of Lord's thought during this period that I wish to discuss is his view

of the relation between writing and oral tradition. In a fitting analogy, Lord identifies

oral tradition with the mythical figure of shape-shifting Proteus. Any written record of a

performance, he argues, is no more than an instant of Proteus having been

"photographed"; it is not the oral tradition itself, but a transcription of it (124). Lord is

responding to centuries that saw only the written record as the worthwhile object of

study, while ignoring the living process that brought it forth. Along with Parry, he is

responsible for carving out a cognitive space within which to approach the non-literary.

This helps explain why he feels it is necessary to keep oral traditions thoroughly

segregated from literary ones. This also can explain why Lord dismisses "transitional"

texts—works that may have been composed in writing but are nevertheless composed in

an oral traditional manner. In response to this issue he states, "the two techniques [of oral

and written composition] are, I submit, contradictory and mutually exclusive" (129).

While Lord would soften his stance in later writings, the safeguarding of this binary is

characteristic of this initial period. As a new and vulnerable perspective, oral tradition

was jealously protected.

Within this "Great Divide" mentality, formula analysis could function as a litmus

test to "indicate whether any given text is oral or 'literary'" (Lord 130). The contrast of

oral and written would result in a definition of oral tradition as the opposite of those

qualities assumed to be "literary." Lord does allow, however, for "vestigial" formulas in

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[5] In chapter three I will suggest that the ritual/aesthetic is a false binary, and as a new direction look toward
the use of the aesthetic within social ritual. But the distinction Lord makes here is refers to a High
Modernist ideal of aesthetic autonomy, and as such his point is well taken.

literature, conceding that, "We are working on a continuum of man's artistic expression in words" (130). Lord's schema leads him to view the development of literary traditions as an incursive foreign influence, not the outgrowth of a native oral tradition. The literary tradition of the European peoples "supplanted their native oral traditions; it did not develop out of them" (138). For Lord, the literary mode colonized the native oral traditions, slowly and inexorably extinguishing all but the last vestiges of them.

Saussure and the Prague School: The Linguistic Model

We can better understand the development of the Parry-Lord Theory if we place it in the broader context of structuralism. Like Ferdinand de Saussure, the Prague school constitutes an indirect but considerable influence on the way in which Oral-Formulaic Theory was conceptualized as an ordered system of replicable parts, a kind of grammar. Saussure had called for the inauguration of a new discipline, a study of signs, with "linguistics [as] the master-pattern" (Saussure 956), and indeed linguistics would emerge as a "master-pattern" for a host of approaches in the early to mid twentieth century as a result of his work. Many of these approaches would, like Saussure's own linguistic theories, grow out of dissatisfaction with the previous historical approaches. The structuralists within folklore, anthropology, Biblical studies and literature would emphasize instead the study of structural systems and patterns. We will turn to a sampling of these related fields in the final section of this chapter. But first it is necessary to examine the central concepts associated with Saussure, and then look at how these

were then applied to oral traditions and disseminated through the modifications of the Prague School.

Like Parry (and, as I will later show, Propp), Ferdinand de Saussure's linguistic innovations grew out of his discontent with the present state of the field, and stem ultimately from a desire to define with more exactness its object of study. In an 1894 letter to Antoine Meillet (who as mentor of the young Parry would later profoundly shape the Parry-Lord Theory), he complained as follows: "I am more and more aware of the immense amount of work that would be required to show the linguist *what he is doing . . . .* The utter inadequacy of the current terminology, the need to reform it and, in order to do that, to demonstrate what sort of object language is, continually spoil my pleasure in philology" (Saussure 957). This dissatisfaction grew out of a reaction against historical, comparative linguistics that taxonomized language forms but circumvented the question of what language itself might be. In an effort to answer that question, Saussure advocated the study of language as a synchronic system. This parallels Parry's own call to "re-build the idea of Homeric epic poetry" by understanding it as oral traditional prior to pursuing question of authorship, unity, redaction, etc. (Parry 269). And as with Saussure, there is a synchronic element to Parry's approach. Although he by no means dismisses historical studies, Parry's focus is on how the Homeric poems, in the form we have inherited them, function as a system, rather than on charting out how they have evolved over time (Parry 269). What is at stake here is a divergence between previous approaches with their belief that understanding can be gained through the study of origins, and the methods of Parry, Propp, Saussure, and others who argued that the study of the respective system would yield the fundamental insight.

In his *Course in General Linguistics*, Saussure makes the famous pronouncement of the arbitrary nature of the sign: "the bond between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary" (Saussure 964). Moving diametrically away from any positivistic notion of the intrinsic meaning of the sign, he re-directed linguistics toward the study of language as a system, with each unit deriving its individual meaning only by being a part of that system. Moreover, language to Saussure constitutes a system of differences—it distinguishes certain items from others, rather than naming existing items as in the Adamic concept of nomenclature. He argues that "horse," for example, is no more "natural" for the particular creature it designates than the Latin "equus," so that, in the words of Jonathan Culler, "each language organizes and articulates the world differently," not naming pre-existing categories "but articulating their own" (Culler 13). For this reason the value of the sign must therefore be located *within* the system, rather than from outside of it. Saussure states that these "values emanating from the system . . . . are purely differential and not positively defined by their content but negatively defined by their relations with other terms of the system," so that "their most precise characteristic is that they are what the others are not" (Culler 18). This is what leads him to his formulation of language as "a form and not a substance" (Saussure 974).

This Saussarian concept of language shares a number of assumptions with Parry's formulaic systems. First, the formulaic systems envision the value of the formula unit in its relation to the larger system—it functions within and as a part of a formulaic system, in conformity with the grid of the hexameter. The error of the scholars of the past, even those who had identified the abundance of clichés or formulas, lay in their approach to the formula as substantive rather than structural. For this reason, the epithetic phrase *epea*

pteroenta ("winged words") had a specific content for George M. Calhoun that Parry would dispute. Where Calhoun saw *epea pteroenta* as concise and conscious artistry on Homer's part, Parry showed that this formula has a structural function of metrically communicating "and he said" within a requisite metrical space (414). In Saussurean terms, the "value" of *epea pteroenta* derives from its ability to fulfill that function. While this interpretation does not deny that *epea pteroenta* may indeed be pleasing to the poet or the poet's audience, it remains true that of all the pleasing possibilities, only those that fulfill the structural function are acceptable. This line of argument also leads us back to Parry's notion of formulaic thrift. That the formulaic system admits very few redundancies shows that it is ordered by its systemic principle (that is, the operation of the working system governs its constituent formulae, and the value of individual formulas is found only in their relation within the larger system). If the system were "substantive," as many unnecessary (unthrifty) formulas as were pleasing would be maintained side by side (as is the case, Parry shows, in his literary examples).

The Saussurean linguistic model would be modified in the Prague school, which would emphasize this functional aspect of structure. This is important to stress in examining Parry's system as well, because it is only too easy to conceive of structure as an overly wooden "framework" or skeleton. Rather, structure is seen in this view as generative—as a framing mechanism. It is functional as well as formal, and the strength of this idea is in its viewing of the two aspects as inseparable.

Still, it is not difficult to see why both Saussure and Parry met with resistance. In both cases, the role of individual appeared—to their critics at least—to be replaced by a vast and impersonal system. Like Saussure's, Parry's breakthrough came as a result not

of his study of the Homeric material in separate parts but as the system that formed them. This broad structuralist approach would become predominant because, in moving away from the search for an "encapsulated" content (whether the ur-form of a folktale or some original, core meaning in language), scholars were able to turn to the structural properties themselves that shaped the content. The distinction between the two is best illustrated by Saussure's *langue* and *parole*. In this conceptualization, *langue* is, according to Jonathan Culler, "the language as a system of forms" while *parole* is "actual speech." Culler explains, "In the act of parole the speaker selects and combines elements of the linguistic system and gives these forms … concrete manifestation . . . as sounds and meanings" (Culler 23). *Parole,* in other words, is *langue* in performance. For Saussure, the proper object of linguistic inquiry is *langue*, and in the numerous developments and disciplines that would feel his influence, much of the task became a search in individual texts (consisting of *parole*) for the underlying structure of *langue* that gave rise to it. In Parry and Lord's work, for example, *langue* might be understood as the Homeric register, encompassing formula, theme, and all its various dialectical elements (Arcado-Cyprian, Ionic, etc). *Parole* would then represent the individual performances; in the case of Homeric verse, it would include both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. This understanding allows for the study of the Homeric epics as instances or examples—or even utterances—of the larger field of *langue*, which displaces the two epics themselves as the object of study.

I will now turn to the Prague School, which applied Saussure both within linguistics and push into areas beyond. Although often seen as strictly a linguistic group (perhaps after the group's original name, the Prague Linguistic Circle), it also concerned

itself with folklore and literature, among other things. As a marriage between the more positivist Russian Formalists, with their search for the formal identification of literature, and Saussurean linguistics, the Prague School was responsible more than any other movement for disseminating Saussure's linguistic model. The group's most important member, Roman Jakobson, was also a central figure for Russian Formalism as one of the founders of the Moscow Linguistic Circle. Political pressures would drive him west, first to Prague and eventually to the United States, where he would sit on the 1948 thesis defense of Albert Lord, who credits Jakobson with assisting him in shaping the manuscript for publication as *The Singer of Tales* (Lord xxxvi).

In 1929 Roman Jakobson and Peter Bogatyrev (both formerly of the Moscow Linguistic Circle) published an essay entitled "Folklore as a Special Form of Creativity," which applied Saussurean concepts to the study of folklore. The essay emphasizes the difference between literature and folklore, arguing, as Parry and Lord later would, that the study of "oral poetry" necessitated an approach specific to it and not modeled on literary criticism: "we project our habitual notions [of the written word] egocentrically onto folklore," they declared (Steiner 37). For Jakobson and Bogatyrev, the defining characteristic of folklore was its group function, arguing that "in folklore only those forms will be preserved that prove functional for a given community"(36). The shaping factor of folklore is the communal selection—the "communities' prophylactic censorship as a fundamental principle" (37). This is related to folklore's "mode of existence" as emerging solely in performance. Unlike the written work, the verbal art of the folk that does not meet the immediate acceptance of the group cannot survive long enough to be rediscovered.

The two authors formulate this relationship in Saussurean terms: "In folklore the relationship between the work of art and its realization, i.e, the so-called variants of the work in the performance of different persons, is completely analogous to the relationship between *langue* and *parole*" (38). The greater tradition, then, constitutes the former, while particular performances of that tradition are instances of the latter. Yet there is a secondary, more generic way these two terms apply, according to Jakobson and Bogatyrev, with folklore grouped under the rubric of *langue*, and written literature as *parole*. The immediate and absolute censorship of the community ensures that individual oral performances will adhere to the accepted, traditional structures, the *langue*, whereas the literary poet, by merit of writing, can produce individualized "utterances" of *parole*. Because of the "absolute dominance of the prophylactic censorship" of the traditional community, "the folklore poet" is not free to stray from the bounds of *langue*. This homogenizing force in folklore allows Jakobson and Bogatyrev to "resurrect the romantic concept of collective authorship" (Steiner 33).

This particular division between oral traditional and individual-literary would be an influential one among folklorists. According to Jakobson and Bogatyrev, while both *langue* and *parole* can be distinguished within folklore ("the relationship between tradition and improvisation"), they can also be categorized as aspects of *langue*, since performance is subject to tradition, at least in a way that literature is not (43).[6] Bengt Holbek, in a discussion that relates the Jakobson-Bogatyrev essay to Parry and Lord, articulates simply that "the *langue* of the performer is not his own," explaining that "if he

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[6] Fredric Jameson, in accordance with this view, states that "the crucial moment for the folktale is not that of the *parole*, that of its invention or creation, but that of the *langue*; and we may say that no matter how individualistic may be its origin, it is always anonymous or collective in essence: in Jakobsonian terminology, the individual of the folk tale is a redundant feature, its anonymity a distinctive one" (29).

wants his performance to be accepted he must shape it in accordance with the traditional expectations of his immediate audience" (Holbek 40). Lord, in reference to the Jakobson-Bogatyrev essay in *SOT* reformulates it further as: "the singer of tales is at once the tradition and an individual creator" (4).[7]

Like Parry and Lord, Jakobson and Bogatyrev share the view of structure as functional.[8] "The endurance of oral poetry," they write, "can be explained . . . . to a significant degree, functionally" (42). Using Marcel Jousse's concept of *le style oral rhythmique*, they attempt to show that the "mnemotechnical function of such rhythmic schemata" works in transmission through analogy, akin to Parry's concept.[9] This anticipates the functional structuralism of the Parry-Lord Theory:

> The relationship between *langue* and *parole* in oral poetry is clearly delineated here. In folklore, meters, stanzas, and even more complicated compositional structures are both a pillar of tradition and an effective means of improvisational technique (the two, of course, being closely related) (43).

They call subsequently for a "typology of the forms of folklore" as distinct from that of literature (430). The governing language model is made explicit, as a morphology. The language model explains, for these two, why folklore is less diverse in content and style, since "there are general structural rules which no language can violate" limiting folklore to "a relatively small number of types" as *langue*—whereas literature, as *parole*, "permits a greater variety of modifications" (44-5). This leads to a call for the synchronic systematic study of the oral repertoires of a single community (44), a study that Parry and

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[7] Lord cites this essay in *SOT* in a footnote, calling it "a somewhat different point of view" from his own, but remarks that "with Lévi-Strauss we might question whether we have something that is both *langue* and *parole* at the same time under different aspects, thus making it a third form of communication" (279-80, footnote 7).

[8] Steiner brands the Prague School's approach as "Functionalist structuralism" (xi).

[9] Jousse observes: "personal invention would then consist of the formation of other rhythmic schemata similar in form, with the same structure . . . using the transmitted rhythmic schemata as models, i.e, in analogy to the fixed period" (in Steiner 43).

Lord, to some extent, completed. Toward the end of the essay, Jakobson and Bogatyrev add a remark that Lord would confirm years later. "Oral poetry disappears," they observe, "and ceases to be collective creativity" when professionals arise who "attempt to preserve these creations without any change" (45). For Jakobson and Bogatyrev, fluidity is essential to the definition of folklore, just as it is for language.

Although less central to the subject at hand, it is necessary to mention in passing the work of Claude Lévi-Strauss, since his brand of structuralism is related to the broader movement and since Lord cites his "Structural Study of Myth" in *SOT*. Lévi-Strauss shares with Parry and Lord the dichotomized conception of written and oral, crystallized in his *Tristes Tropiques*, particularly the famous chapter, "A Writing Lesson." But Lévi-Strauss's structuralism, in its quest for universal "deep structures," looks at various traditions primarily to look beyond them. While Lord with his interest in underlying ritual structures comes closest to a kind of kinship with him, the general oral tradition approach, with its commitment to the modes and patterns of composition, parts ways with Lévi-Strauss, and for this reason he falls primarily outside the bounds of this thesis.

Related Scholarship in Folklore

Vladimir Propp is associated with the Russian Formalists and shares with them a synchronic and analytical approach, concerned with uncovering the generic distinctions and formal properties seen as underlying works of art. Less widely known is that the studies of Propp, like those of Lord and Parry, arise from a fundamental separation of the oral traditional or folkloric from the literary. Like Parry and Lord, Propp finds that Russian folktales operate according to principles similar to those of language. Folklore,

Propp claims, "possesses a most distinctive poetics, peculiar to it and different from the poetics of literary works" (quoted in Tatar, 378). He explains folklore as differing from literature by being authorless, as language is, arguing, "in its origin folklore should be likened not to literature but to language which is invented by no one and which has neither author nor authors" (Tatar 379). Propp makes a second distinction between literature and folklore: "literature is transmitted through writing and folklore by word of mouth." While this might appear, he argues, "purely technical," it in fact "captures the innermost difference between the functioning of literature and folklore" (380). Whereas the reader and writer of literature are separated by an immutable text, in folklore the performer and listener interact "without a mediating link" and are able to influence each other, which continually shapes performance. The performance "text" is fluid: "Performers do not repeat their text word for word but introduce changes into them," and these changes "are not made accidentally but in accordance with certain laws" (380). The elements that are incongruous with current ideas and tastes are eliminated. Because of this dynamic the "changeability" of folklore is its defining feature.

This distinction underlies Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale*, published in 1927 (but not translated into English until 1958). His concept of the "functions" of the folktale depends on the changeability, or multiformity, of the verbal art. It also draws heavily on the structural premise of language as a stable structure with changeable individual parts. This structure of "functions" is, as Propp puts it, the folktale's "multiformity" and at the same time its "amazing uniformity" (Propp xxv).

As Saussure and Parry had done, Propp begins by explaining the need for synchronic study in order to establish the object of study. Prior scholarship studied the

tale "genetically," and without any basis in a "preliminary, systematic description," but before inquiring into the origin of folktales "one must first answer the question as to what the tale represents" (5). Propp expresses the need for rigorous classification and categorization, but not after the fashion of his predecessors. He bases his own studies on the classifications of Antti Aarne, which he describes as a valuable "practical reference" (11). Yet he finds that Aarne's framework is "essential incorrect," believing Aarne is mistaken to index content (story-type, motif, characters) rather than structure, since it is the latter defines the folk tale (11). Propp spends the first chapter of his *Morphology* detailing why the scholarship of early folklorists such as Alexander Veselovskij is not properly grounded, basing its study on notions of motif and story types. These, Propp shows, are components of a system of functions, rather than constituting the true core of the tale, much like the function of a verb or noun within the sentence. While he admits it is possible to talk about the tales in terms of content (motifs or characters within the tales), Propp finds that in order to understand them we must turn to structure:

> Let us draw an analogy. Is it possible to speak about the life of a language without knowing anything about the parts of speech, i.e., about certain groups of words arranged according to the laws of their changes? A living language is a concrete fact—grammar is its abstract substratum. These substrata lie at the basis of a great many phenomena of life, and it is precisely to this that science turns its attention. Not a single concrete fact can be explained without the study of these abstract bases (15).

It helps to remember that morphology is, more narrowly, a linguistic term. Propp is conscious of this usage in his own definition of his morphology as "a description of the tale according to its component parts and the relationship of these components to each other and to the whole" (19). As in the study of a language, Propp proceeds to identify which elements in the tales are variable and which are stable. In his examples, whether a princess gives a ring, a tsar gives an eagle, an old man gives a horse, a sorcerer gives a

boat, and in each case whether this gift carries the protagonist to a distant land, we can identify the stable elements "according to the function of its dramatis personae" (20). These functions can only be "defined from the point of view of its significance for the course of the action" (21). From his systematic analysis of one hundred Russian folktales of the Alexander Afanasev collection, he isolates these four principles:

1. Functions of characters serve as stable constant elements in a tale, independent of how and by whom they are fulfilled. They constitute the fundamental components of a tale.
2. The number of functions known to the fairy tale is limited.
3. The sequence of functions is always identical.
4. All fairy tales are of one type in regard to their structure. (19-24)

Having then distinguished a system of thirty-one functions (abstention, interdiction, violation, etc.) and a cast of seven dramatis personae (villain, donor, hero, etc.), Propp confidently asserts that the process of indexing tales according to these elements can now properly begin.

Propp's structural kinship with Parry and Lord is apparent in several areas. His systematic and synchronic approach to folktales is the counterpart to Parry's own groundbreaking study of Homeric and South Slavic epic. Likewise, folklorist Robert Darnton claims, "Lord's investigation confirms conclusions that Vladimir Propp reached by a different mode of analysis, one that showed how variation of detail remains subordinate to stable structures in Russian folktales" (quoted in Tatar, 288). Furthermore, both the Parry-Lord Theory and Propp's own morphology look to an underlying linguistic model. What separates Propp from Parry and Lord is a more pronounced formalism. While Lord and Parry turned to ethnography, Propp, like his Russian Formalist brethren, is specifically interested in the defining features of a particular genre. Bengt Holbek, referring to Lévi-Strauss's criticism of Propp, remarks that "Propp's

analysis is clearly a one-way street: he can demonstrate common features in a diversified material, but he cannot explain the diversification, perhaps—as Lévi-Strauss suggests— because the morphological approach precludes attention to ethnographic observations" (Holbek 36). Holbek thus distinguishes Propp's morphological approach from Parry and Lord's, which he terms the "craftsmanship" viewpoint, and this distinction is helpful, if overstated. While Parry and Lord conducted fieldwork, it was primarily, for Parry at least, to bolster the theory with a kind of evidence that the long-dead Homeric poems themselves could not supply. Formal concerns were preeminent to both, as stated in Parry's original plan for the *Singer of Tales* which aimed "to fix with exactness the *form* of oral poetry to see wherein it differs from the *form* of written story poetry" (Parry 469). Yet what would emerge from their studies—particularly Lord's—was a theory that encompassed a much wider view of the oral traditional process, including the stages in the development of the singer, the role of the community, and the documentation of the multiformity of performance as it changes with time. Simply put, Oral-Formulaic Theory, in the hands of Lord, grew to be much less formalist and more thoroughly ethnographic and diachronic.

At their core, however, both the work of Propp and that of Parry and Lord show a homology that can be understood in the context of Saussurean structuralism. Language, particularly the Saussurean conception of language, allows Propp to examine the tales in terms of their "functions." These functions work systematically, so that the parts cannot be properly understood in isolation but only as part of that system. This is Propp's guiding premise, and he states that "it follows that no single theme (*sjuzet*) of a given genus of tales may be studied either morphologically or genetically without reference to

others." This is, he explains, because "one theme changes into another by means of the substitution of elements according to forms" (115).

Despite these common features, some have disputed Propp's affinity with Parry and Lord. Alsace Yen points out that Propp's analysis is concerned with plot and its organization into functions, whereas Lord's concept of theme and formula is dependent on recurrence, which are fundamentally the mechanisms of composition, not content. Yen believes that "one should not overlook the major differences between the two which arise from the crux of Lord's entire thesis: the formula and formulaic groups of words serve as basic compositional units upon which themes are built," whereas "in essence what Propp examines is the organization of the plot" (166). But Yen does not grasp the implications of Propp's study. Only superficially concerned with narrative sequence, Propp's work is a morphology, and thus examines the multiformity of the folktale by charting out its stable and variable elements. It does map out plot—as in the chronological development of narrative—but finds a kind of "grammar" of the folktale narrative, in the same way Parry and Lord uncovered the structuring principle of epic verse.

This kinship between Propp and Lord might be more evident had attempted an ethnographic investigation, which might have yielded living evidence that the functions are in fact compositional units in oral performance, a kind of narrative formulaic system. His concept was instead a deduction from the recorded body of multiform folktales. The other difference is of course generic. Propp's analysis explained the workings of folktales, not epic verse, and we must expect that the structures of the two will be distinct. But their theoretical proximity is evident in Propp's final chapter of the *Morphology*, where he ends his landmark study with a quotation from fellow folklorist

Alexander Veselovskij: "Is it permissible in this field to consider the problem of typical

schemes . . . . schemes handed down for generations as ready-made formulae capable of

becoming animated with new moods, giving rise to new formulations?" (116). Propp's

formalist inquiries led to a view of the folktale as a dynamic multiform very similar to the

epic structures of Parry and Lord.[10]

While Propp provides a more direct folkloric counterpart to the work of Parry and

Lord, a host of other folklore approaches from this period share with them a basic

structuralist approach. In order to provide a broad context for the studies of Parry and

Lord and the scholarship that would follow in their wake, I will outline several of the

most significant scholarly movements.

One of the definitive approaches for folklore in the twentieth century was the

Finnish historic-geographic method. Originated by Kaarle Krohn, this approach got under

way with the enormous tale-type index assembled by Krohn's student, Antti Aarne. After

Aarne's death, the American Stith Thompson would expand the scope of the index as

well as compile an additional index of motifs. This method studied the "variations" of a

tale type and attempted to reconstruct an archetype of the tale, literally mapping out its

migration and alteration. A famous example is Thompson's study of the North American

Indian "Star Husband Tale."[11]

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[10] We might lump the two approaches together under the term "functional formalism." Rosemary Zumwalt
groups Propp and Parry-Lord together in the "Pattern of Text" category (Zumwalt 1998:92). Alan Dundes,
in his introduction to Propp's *Morphology,* contrasts Propp's brand of structuralism with that of Lévi-
Strauss, using the Saussurean distinction of "syntagmatic" for the former and "paradigmatic" for the latter.
The first is "empirical and inductive," while the second is " speculative and deductive," and in this second
group he lists, along with Lévi-Strauss, Greimas, Leach, Sebag, Köngäs and Maranda. He then criticizes
Propp's brand of structuralism as "formalist" and "sterile," exclaiming, "Clearly, structural analysis is not
an end in itself!" (Propp xii-xiii).
[11] "The Star Husband Tale" is a folktale that narrates the celestial marriage of two women, and of their
subsequent return to earth. The tale, or the core of it, has been collected from American Indian groups all
across North America, making it very useful for the historic-geographic method of Stith Thompson. In his

The Finnish method departs from the previous approaches discussed in this thesis in a number of areas. It is structuralist in only the broadest sense. If it does correspond to a linguistic model, it is to pre-Saussurean philology that aims to diachronically re-trace the stages of a language to an earlier Indo-European, without a clear sense of what sort of object is itself being studied. From this perspective, this school is now outdated. Yet in practice if not in theory, the school of Thompson and Aarne shares a good deal with the wider current of structuralism in its painstaking compilation of what we might, in the terms of the linguistic model, describe as the oral traditional "vocabulary" of motif and story pattern. While the attempt to reconstruct an "illusory origin of the tale," as Zumwalt has it (78), proved to be misguided, the endeavor did result in a comprehensive map of the spiraling "pathways" of oral tradition, to use Foley's term.[12] This impressive body of work provides a wide-angle view, allowing the general tendencies and patterns of development in oral traditions to emerge.

As Thompson explains in his "Star Husband" study, "At first view these hundred or so of variants may seem to be filled with chance divergences—a mere kaleidoscope shifting about of motifs and episodes," but in this "seeming lawlessness," in fact, "all these variations are obeying laws" (Thompson 417). What precisely these laws are we are not given, but from the larger view of these variants we do come to see a system of ordering and re-ordering—or recurrence—of pattern, demonstrated statistically. The conclusion of Thompson's study—"how a tale like the Star Husband at once adapts itself to new conditions and takes on new forms"—is clearly demonstrated. But when he goes on to state that the tale "in spite of time and distance maintains its basic pattern" (459), it

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study of the tale, he charts out the regions and groups that demonstrate variations, and attempts to trace these back to an original archetype.

[12] This concept will be discussed more in chapter three.

appears as if Thompson has discovered what he had already determined he would find. His conclusion that "the plot outline usually shows itself clearly and seems little influenced by activities of the individual raconteurs" who "preserve the tradition most faithfully and seem merely to elaborate certain details but not change anything basically" (458-9) is arrived at only by selecting tales that fit the pattern and disregarding the rest, and flies in the face of the documented dynamics of performance.[13] But the fruit of Thompson and Aarne's labor does succeed in demonstrating the breadth of tales/versions made possible from only a small number of shared elements, all enabled by the basic patterns of verbal art. In the indexes of Aarne and Thompson lies the indelible evidence of these verbal networks, constituting no less than a lexicon of oral tradition.

As with Parry and Lord, the guiding paradigm of most folklore approaches in the early to mid twentieth century is a sharp contrast of oral tradition and literature. Thompson, for example, tells us that he has selected the Star Husband tale specifically because it was free of any influence of writing. The unstated assumption here and elsewhere is that writing is a contaminant to oral tradition. A similar view shapes the work of Axel Olrik, a Danish folklorist who in 1908 published an influential essay entitled "Epic Laws of Folk Narrative." Olrik saw these laws in operation among what he called the *Sage,* a term that groups together myths, legends, folksong and folktale—a sort of non-literary catch-all. The rules governing the *Sage,* it will be seen, are as much defined by opposition to literary values as they are from the values of the *Sagenwelt* itself.

Noting recurrent patterns in the traditional works, Olrik expressed the need for "a systematic science of a more comprehensive category: the *Sage*" (Olrik 131). This would

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[13] The elasticity of a South Slavic epic "song" is well documented by Lord in *SOT*, pp. 99-123.

encompass "myths, songs, heroic sagas and local legends" and operate in uniformity with certain laws (131). Furthermore, the laws governing the *Sage*, or folk narrative, operate in a "much different and rigid way than in our written literature" (131). Introducing the *Law of Repetition*, for example, he explains that "(i)n literature, there are many means of producing emphasis," such as detail and description. Folk narrative, on the other hand, is too "spare" to accomplish this. He writes, "for traditional oral narrative there is one alternative: repetition" (133). Likewise, oral narrative is bound by the number three for ordering and arranging, which "distinguishes the great bulk of folk narrative from modern literature." In literature this "rigid structuring" "succumbs to intellectual demands for greater realism" (134). Like Thompson and Propp, Olrik is searching for the structural properties underlying the teeming "lawlessness," as Thompson dubbed it, of traditional verbal art. Despite the negative definition of oral narrative (as that which writing is not), Olrik does bring to light some of the patterns that pervade much of European oral tradition. For example, the *Law of Contrast*, (which highlights the use of extreme opposites in traditional narrative, such as young/old, rich/poor, strong/weak), would be accepted and developed by a wide range of folklore scholarship, and figures into the later, more nuanced conceptualizations of Bengt Holbek and Max Lüthi.

It seems that for Olrik these characteristics of oral narrative, such as the single line of narrative (*Law of the Single Strand*), or the concentration on the leading character and other formal regulations, relates to its composition. Olrik sees traditional oral narrative as compositional like sculpture or architecture, particularly in its "strict subordination to number and other requirements of symmetry" (137). What folk narrative does very effectively, for Olrik, is to produce "tableaux scenes" that "possess the singular

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quality of being able to etch themselves in one's memory" (138). Furthermore, he finds

that the "epic unity" of the *Sage* "is such that each narrative element works within it so as

to create an event, the possibility of which the listener had seen right from the beginning

and which he had never lost sight of" (139). The traditional tale is built in a rule-bound

way that prefigures its own unfolding. The introduction of a prohibition, for example,

signifies nothing less than the breaking of that prohibition. Through its adherence to these

laws, the capsule of the entire tale is invoked from its opening lines.

Before ending my discussion of related work in folklore, I will mention the work

of British folklorist Lord Raglan, whose studies of the hero pattern are associated with

the Myth-Ritual Theory that stems from the writings of James Frazer, particularly *The

Golden Bough.* What Raglan has in common with the scholarship I have previously

examined is the notion of an overarching structuring principle that shapes the traditional

material, in this case, the biography of the hero.[14] For Raglan, "the hero" is the product of

the hero narrative, a chronological structure, rather than of history. Finding twenty-two

common events in the life of the hero ("the circumstances of his conception are unusual,"

"at birth he is spirited away," etc.), he collates a number of classical and biblical

characters and scores them for how well they correspond to his pattern (Raglan 145).

Although the Myth-Ritual Theory enjoyed a vogue around the time of its first appearance

in print (1934), it is less persuasive now. Raglan's view that "the pattern career for a hero

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[14] Zumwalt groups Raglan, along with Propp, Olrik, Parry, Lord and Foley in the "Pattern of Text" category, which she describes as "approaches to the study of oral tradition" which "direct[] attention to the text itself" (1998:92, 81). Aarne and Thompson, however, she includes in the twentieth-century "mechanical approaches" to the study of origins (92). Holbek and Dundes offer divergent schematizations.

was generally known" and functioned structurally to produce and define heroic characters

is reason for including him in the larger paradigm of this essay.[15]

Related Approaches in Various Disciplines

Folklore by no means offered the only analogue to the work of Parry and Lord.

Biblical Form Criticism (*Formgeschichte*), pioneered by Hermann Gunkel (1862-1932),

is in some ways an analogous movement. Dissatisfied with the literary strictures of

source criticism and literary criticism, Gunkel was in fact influenced by the folklore

approach of Jakob and Wilhelm Grimm, particularly in their classification of folk genres

(Tucker 5).[16] Form Criticism attempts to ascertain within the Biblical pericope the genre

and its function within the oral tradition in which it originated. Its basic principles,

outlined by Gene M. Tucker, aim to discover the "oral pre-history" of the present text in

an examination of structure, which includes determining the generic categories of that

oral tradition ("the appropriate, original unit for analysis" (12)) and the setting for and in

which it functioned (*Sitz im Leben*). A Form Critical approach to a biblical psalm, for

example, would consider how the genre corresponds with a particular function (temple

worship, or a coronation). Although on account of its broad, multi-generic approach,

Form Criticism lacks the compositional mechanism that Parry and Lord would provide

for their discipline, it shares many of their concerns and thus deserves mention.

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[15] Alan Dundes relates Raglan to Aarne's tale type system in *The Study of Folklore* (142). It is also possible to see a correspondence to this in literature in the archetypes of Northrop Frye, who, although a literary critic, posits the origin of literature in an archetypical paradigm structured somewhat in this manner in his "Archetypes of Literature." Robert A. Segal, in his anthology "The Myth and Ritual Theory," connects Frye to the myth-ritual theory. Other related figures of the hero pattern include Otto Rank's psychoanalytic *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero*, and Joseph Campbell's Jungian *The Hero with a Thousand Faces.*
[16] Form Criticism was, in a parallel to Parry and Lord, a decisive break with the literary approaches of the period: "LC [Literary Criticism] treated scripture . . . as the literary products of individual personalities and not as the repository of the living traditions of common people"(Soulen 71, brackets in original).

In classical studies, Eric A. Havelock used the work of Parry and Lord to construct his conception of the nature of classical philosophy and culture. In his *Preface to Plato* (1963), Havelock examines Plato's rejection of poets in the *Republic* as an illustration of the momentous historical transition in which "the Homeric state of mind [gave] way to the Platonic" (198). The force responsible for this shift is, for Havelock, the development of the Greek alphabet and the rise of literacy that accompanied it, which brought on an "intellectual revolution" in Western thought (198). In light of this, what Plato in the *Republic* is attacking, according to Havelock, is not so much poetry as "an over-all cultural condition which no longer exists" (10), that of the mental world of Greece prior to the fourth century. This pre-Platonic or "Homeric" state of mind was organized in rhythmic "units of meaning," which were "linked associatively to form an episode, but the parts of the episode are greater than the whole" (185). It is a non-hierarchal aggregation rather than a unified whole. This argument is built upon the work of Parry and Lord, in its understanding of the composition of larger epic poems from the smaller, semi-independent units of formula and theme. For Havelock, this shift from oral to written allowed for the birth of Platonic philosophy and the subsequent development of Western civilization as a whole.

Havelock's work would be formative for the studies of Walter J. Ong, best known for his *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*, published in 1982. Using as a point of departure the previous work of Parry, Lord, Havelock, and others, Ong looks at the cognitive, communicative, and cultural differences between oral and literate societies. Following Havelock, Ong argues that the consequences of literacy are much more profound than a simple shift in media, but constitute a complete re-

conceptualization of the world. In *Orality and Literacy*, Ong identifies a number of characteristics or "psychodynamics" of orality. For example, he contends that the verbal art of oral societies tends to be "additive rather than subordinative," and (as Havelock had argued) "aggregative rather than analytic" (38). In addition orality is characterized by being "agonistically toned" and "situational rather than abstract" (43, 49). Whereas Havelock had seen the distinction between orality and literacy as a historical development, Ong expanded it to describe variations in societies today.

Some of the Limitations of the Period

The work of Havelock and Ong, while opening up new thinking on the implications of writing, offer an obvious representation of the Either/Or, or "Great Divide" dichotomy that characterized the initial period of the study of oral tradition. In this binarized paradigm, the so-called literary attributes (aesthetic, individual, original, sophisticated, etc.) are contrasted to oral tradition (mechanical, traditional at the expense of individual artistry). While Parry, Lord, and others deserve credit for inaugurating the very study of oral tradition by providing an alternative to the reigning literary paradigm, the rigidity of their viewpoint held back for a while more nuanced scholarship. As a result, oral tradition came to be seen in contrast to, rather than in a continuum with, literary traditions. Oral-Formulaic Theory would be reduced to a statistical test for genuine oral tradition, admitting no intermediates.[17]

Another limitation of this period was its tone of nostalgia. Perhaps it was in part a necessary nostalgia for a field that was effectively built looking back, originally to

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[17] Lord saw the density of themes and formulas as evidence for whether or not a poem was "oral." For examples, see *SOT* pp. 30-67.

Homeric epic and later to vanishing verbal arts in the South Slavic region and elsewhere. But as a result its focus could be overly retrospective, tinged with a survivalist mentality that looked to oral traditions of the past rather than engagement with contemporary verbal art. At the same time, however, it is important to recognize that the fieldwork of Parry and Lord drew from a living tradition. While looked back to antiquity, Oral-Formulaic Theory itself focuses on the traditional process of composition, and not the collection antiquities themselves. In understanding oral tradition as process rather than product, it re-staged past unto present.

The third, and most problematic shortcoming of this period was an overly mechanical view of the oral tradition process. While Parry anticipated the charge of de-aestheticizing Homer by offering a traditional "craftsmanship" aesthetic in its place, he could not entirely escape the implications of his own theory in its emphasis of the tradition over the individual, and the pre-fabricated over the original. Parry has been described as "the Darwin of oral literature" (Lord xxxiii), which, while perhaps intended to herald his groundbreaking studies, it also expresses the sense of the mechanistic mode of oral composition that many feel robbed the Homeric poems of their beauty and meaningfulness. "Natural selection" of formulas in traditional composition seemed, for Parry's critics, to replace the purposeful creation of the poems. A good example of this shift is seen in Parry's discussion of the "winged words" formula, discussed earlier in his essay.

Parry and Lord, while inaugurating a fruitful new perspective that expanded the range of inquiry, also limited what constituted "oral tradition," slowing advancement. In its need to stake out a territory of its own, Oral-Formulaic Theory would overstate the

case, making the verbal art of oral tradition appear a depersonalized, mechanized, de-aestheticized process. Subsequent developments, to which I will discuss in the second chapter, address these limitations.

Chapter 2.
From Text to Context: Performance Theory, Ethnopoetics, and Immanent Art

For the second chapter I will limit my focus to three related theoretical developments that have profoundly shaped the studies of oral tradition. These are Performance Theory of Richard Bauman, Ethnopoetics of Dennis Tedlock and Dell Hymes, and Immanent Art or traditional referentiality as put forth by John Miles Foley. All three of these approaches place the performance arena at the heart of their inquiry, agreeing that traditional context is central to the understanding and experience of verbal art within its own terms. While these three treat various aspects of verbal art, together they can be used to significantly widen the scope of the work of Parry and Lord.

Richard Bauman and Performance Theory

Richard Bauman's Performance Theory has been utilized by a variety of disciplines and has helped to catalyze a movement toward a performance-centered approach to verbal art. Emphasizing the multi-disciplinary nature of his theory, Bauman, a linguistic anthropologist, writes in the preface to his groundbreaking *Verbal Art as Performance* that anthropology, linguistics, literature and folklore "all share a fundamental interest in the esthetic dimension of human existence" (vii). Where this "esthetic dimension" for studies in oral tradition had focused in the past on the poem or narrative—the "work" resulting from performance—Bauman's interest is in the performance aspect of this verbal art, and exploring how the aesthetic and performative parameters are set up.

Bauman situates his own essay as part of a larger movement that looks to performance for a meaning that is enacted, rather than deposited. He writes that "(i)n recent years the concept of performance has begun to assume central importance in the orientations of increasing numbers of folklorists and others interested in verbal art," citing the innovative scholarship of Roger D. Abrahams, Dan Ben-Amos, Joel Sherzer and others (4). This trend constitutes a "reorientation from folklore-as-materials to folklore-as-communication," which views folklore as *process* rather than product (4). This trend is in part a reaction to a history in folklore and related disciplines that, from Herder on, saw the detached and isolated traditional "work" as the proper object of study and preservation. These approaches to verbal art had predominately been, for Bauman, "text-centered": "For all [these approaches], the esthetic quality of an utterance resides in the way in which language is used in the construction of the textual item" (8). Often overlooked in the past was the view of verbal art as a "situated human communication, a way of speaking" (8). Bauman—along with Hymes, Tedlock, and Foley, as will be discussed—recognizes that apprehending the full significance of verbal art requires the study of its context, the performance arena where a special form of communication takes place. Those collecting the written documentation of performance had assumed, graphocentrically, that they had caught and preserved the verbal art, as if it were an exotic animal. Often ignored were the questions of *how, for whom, when,* and *why* the performance was given. It is to these questions that Bauman's theory attends.

If verbal art consists of more than a product, what kind of work is it doing, particularly for the group within which it takes place? Bauman formulates performance as a "communicative interchange which says to the auditor, 'interpret what I say in some

special sense; do not take it to mean what the words alone, taken literally, would convey" (9). Seen from this view, performance establishes a special, non-literal communicative "frame," which highlights the expressive mode. The act of performance itself draws the audience to focus on the metacommunicative "act of expression itself" (11); that is, the song or recitation is an experience that is shared, not simply a message that is transmitted. (Bauman points out that performance is but one of many possible frames: apart from the literal, there are joking, insinuation, imitation frames, etc.) This performance frame is marked by "the assumption of responsibility to an audience for a display of communicative competence," and is thus "subject to evaluation" for the performer's effectiveness (11). What will transpire within this frame is more than an action, but interaction. Whether the verbal art is stand-up comedy or South Slavic epic, the expectancy and accountability of the performer-audience relation is the sphere in which the two-way heat of performance generates meaning.

If Bauman's definition of performance strikes us as broad it is because he wishes to avoid the pitfall of definitions based on a handful of examples. Instead, Performance Theory, in its stress of a contextual performance frame, is erected on the very precept of performance variability. Furthermore, Bauman insists, quoting William Bascom, "it is not possible to assert a priori that verbal art consists of 'folktales, myths, legends, proverbs, riddles, and other literary forms'" (14). What constitutes "performance" can no longer be determined by universalized criteria. Instead, offering examples of performance variables in Malagasy, Ilongot of the Philippines and Japanese storytelling, Bauman shows how the requirements of performance are particular to culture. In an "ethnography of performance" it is necessary then to first determine "what range of speech actively is

regarded as susceptible to performance " (13-14). Bauman's aim in this is to stress the importance of the act of performance as a special form of communication. Performance is "a mode of language use, a way of speaking," he explains simply. As a result, "it is no longer necessary to begin with artful texts, identified on independent formal grounds and reinjected into situations of use in order to conceptualize verbal art in communicative terms" (11). Performance is where the meaning is to be found. For Bauman, performance itself "becomes *constitutive* of the domain of verbal art" (11, italics in original). Verbal art exists as enacted in that exchange. Written records are merely that—records of the event. We might, to select a very common example, analyze meticulously the structure of the song "Happy Birthday," but to comprehend its wider significance as a communicative act or as an experience we must also analyze the context it both invokes and functions within.

Bauman explains how this performance frame is established through the use of "culturally conventionalized" performance keys (16). Some of the most familiar include special codes, figurative language, parallelism, paralinguistic features, special formulae, appeals to tradition, and disclaimers, although Bauman warns this is hardly an exhaustive list (16). The keying of performance "binds the audience to the performer in a relationship of dependence" and "elicits the participation of an audience through the arousal of 'an attitude of collaborative expectancy'" (16). These function not only to cue the audience to expect performance but establish a certain relationship between performance and audience, a tacit contract. Foley, continuing the linguistic model, describes these keys as "the grammar of performance" (2002:85), highlighting the idea of a specialized exchange between audience and performer governed by an unspoken

understanding, all of which is lost in textualization. The textual record of performance—and the literary perspective it invites—often wholly obscure these keys. "Appeals to tradition," such as invocations or interjections in oral poetry might feel contrived or rhetorical in writing, where in performance they signal a special interchange that requires, and consists of, the relation of the audience-performer.

A brief look at some examples illustrates how this works. "Special codes," one of the most widespread performance keys can come in the form of a specific *register*, a specialized language distinct from the multifunctional language of everyday use. Often a register will include archaic or foreign elements, as in the case of the Homeric and South Slavic epic language. Performance is also frequently cued through "paralinguistic features," which can be especially vital for purposes of audience participation. These features are typically lost in performance texts, although Bauman refers in his essay to Dennis Tedlock's work with Zuni storytelling, which will be examined more in depth later in the chapter. Again, "appeals to tradition" can situate an individual performance in the greater tradition, whether as a Mandinka genealogical claim, the boast of having learned from a past master poet in South Slavic, or the invocation of the Muse in Homeric poetry. Within a literary form—especially since literature has a propensity to imitate aspects of oral poetry—these keys can strike the reader as windy rhetoric or poetic affectation. Indeed, in imitations this is frequently the case; alienated from the performance context these keys lose their proper function.

Applied to performance, however, these keys produce the opposite effect: they can "unlock" what, taken literally, appears gratuitous. Bauman proved extremely helpful in my 2005 fieldwork with a group of high school-aged rappers in the Columbia area.

Through the documentation of performances and interviews, I was able to discern

through specific keys what established performance for this group. The braggadocio

characteristic of a rapper's stance, for example, cues the others around to assume the

stance of the audience, and to respond accordingly. Insults are not perceived, in the

performance sphere, as personal attack.[18] Cory Foster, a seventeen-year-old rapper I

recorded, illustrates this in a sampling of his lyrics:

> Man, how you like me now?
> I cock my fist back and turn your smile to a frown is how I get down,
> It's young Locs, homie, creep on you with the 4-4 black Rovo tinted windows
> Kill you and your kinfolk
> (Ramey 3)

This was delivered in a parking lot, with about five other rappers taking turns

"freestyling"—which is an improvised series of rhymed, highly rhythmic phrasing, in

many cases involving the people present or the location of performance. Cory's lyric,

however, was not aimed, in a literal way, at any of us in the group, and would not have

been spoken to us had we communicated personally outside of the performance context.

His aggressive stance is conventional, which is not to suggest that it is unauthentic. It is,

rather, a particular posturing that says, as Bauman puts it, "interpret what I say in some

special sense" (9). Other performance keys are evident here as well, such as "special

codes,"—here the use of a particularized register embedded with insider slang ("Rovo,"

"Locs") and delivered in an aggressive, highly rhymed form. We might go on to point

out, as "paralinguistic features," the waving of hands at peak moments or to engage the

audience, or the solicitation of audience response, and so on. Like any form of verbal art,

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[18] The combative aspect verbal art is closely related to another African-American form of verbal dueling,
'the dozens,' which like hip hop is a contest of verbal dexterity and rapid-fire wit.

we would uncover a number of group-specific keys, not all of them among the seven

given by Bauman.

Performance Theory presents an innovative understanding of verbal art in one

other respect. Where the very idea of "tradition" seems to suggest a certain rigidity,

Bauman supplies the concept of "emergence." This aspect of performance "resides in the

interplay between communicative resources, individual competence, and the goals of the

participants, within the context of particular situations" (38). Performance, from this

vantage, is intrinsically dynamic. While it channels tradition, it also makes its appeal to

the present; it is in its essence variable—always "new," if not "novel," current, if still

traditional. Bauman suggests that Albert B. Lord was among the first to recognize this

emergent quality, and quotes Lord's claim in *Singer of Tales* that "the essential element

of the occasion of singing that influences the form of the poetry is the variability and

instability of the audience" (Bauman 38). The performance emerges out of, rather than in

spite of, these variables. Bauman highlights how social structures can be re-shaped via

performance, as power is negotiated as the performer assumes a mantle of control. In the

case of the Columbia high school rappers, performance was used both to critique existing

social structures (societal injustices, police abuse) and as a re-arranging of these

structures through the situation of performance. Through performance the performer is

able to "take control of the situation, creating a social structure with himself at the center"

(44). The control of an effective performer can be considerable, and this positioning

allows for effective social critique. We might think, within 20th century American culture,

of Lenny Bruce, Bob Dylan, or Public Enemy.[19] Whether considered "traditional" or

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[19] The emergent quality of performance can be used to explain what often makes it so threatening for
existing power structures. Bauman writes: "Perhaps there is a key hereto the persistently documented

nontraditional, verbal art in performance is never static, always a negotiation between individual and tradition, performer and audience, and past and present.

Where Parry had looked to first to the Homeric text, turning only secondarily to South Slavic epic performance to corroborate his theory, Bauman, along with others, shifts the focus to the event of performance itself. In response to the question "what difference does performance make?," Foley in his discussion of Performance Theory responds, "performance is part of the meaning" (2002:82). Bauman shows that performance must be addressed in the study of verbal art. Even in the case of texts of oral provenance, such as *Beowulf* or the *Iliad,* in order to understand them as forms we need to learn as best we can how they were formed in per*form*ance.

Dell Hymes and Dennis Tedlock: Ethnopoetics

As with Bauman, the approaches of Dell Hymes and Dennis Tedlock are profoundly performance-centered. Where Bauman provides theoretical toolkit for the direct study of performance, however, Ethnopoetics looks to restore some measure of the performance to the text. Like Performance Theory—and, as we shall see, Immanent Art—Ethnopoetics aims to examine and experience verbal art in its own terms, rather than through values or conventions imposed from without (whether they be literary or cultural).

To convey the cultural-specific qualities of Native American verbal arts, both Hymes and Tedlock trouble the notion of a detachable "content" that can be safely

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tendency for performers to be both admired and feared—admired for their artistic skill and power . . . feared because of the potential they represent for subverting and transforming the status quo. Here too may lie a reason for the equally persistent association between performers and marginality or deviance, for in the special emergent quality of performance the capacity for change may be highlighted . . ." (Bauman 45).

transferred into a textual medium—a view frequently taken for granted by folklore

studies, as in the tale-type studies of Stith Thompson.[20] In Tedlock's understanding, past

fieldwork has been "centered on 'content,' which [many folklorists] presume enjoys a

certain independence from the finer points of 'style' and translation" (1983: 40). He

illustrates this tendency with a quotation from Lévi-Strauss's influential "The Structural

Study of Myth": "The mythical value of the myth remains preserved, even through the

worst translation . . . Its substance does not lie in its style, its original music, or its syntax,

but in the *story* which it tells" (quoted in Tedlock 1983: 40). This, for oral traditional

studies, is anathema. Parry's breakthrough was his demonstration that *how* a "work" is

produced (orally and traditionally) shapes *what* it will be in form and content—in his

case, formulas that are metrically suitable. In a sense then, the three related approaches

covered in this chapter attempt to take this further, showing that *how* a work is situated in

tradition and in performance provides for its particular meanings.

Reacting to practice such as Lévi-Strauss's, Tedlock and Hymes both attempt to

carry over into performance texts more than the core narrative. Where the two of them

part ways, however, is over how precisely this is to be done. For Tedlock, as much of the

original performance as possible must be carried over. He states, "In oral tradition, the

only serious way to undertake the hermeneutical task of understanding a story is to

perform it" (1999:xliii). If indeed performance is constitutive of verbal art, as Bauman

has claimed, then the effectiveness of any textual record of that performance must

somehow convey that performance. By turning the textual record into a script or score,

this is precisely what Tedlock means to do. He declares, "The moment has arrived to put

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[20] To be fair it must be said that Thompson's express purpose was quite opposite of that of Ethnopoetics, his being a wide-angle, comparative study of folktales and their dissemination which necessitated the examination of tales for their structural, rather than performative, elements.

into practice the idea that a translation of an oral narrative should be presented as a performable script" (1983: 62). This moment—the growth of a performance-centered approach that Tedlock shares with Bauman and others—is one that is no longer satisfied with straightforward transcription. Instead, Tedlock will advocate what has been called *reperformance*—the production of a performable script that records tone and volume of voice, gesture, audience response and other elements of "being there."[21] Transcriptions of performance, Tedlock argues, work only with the view of verbal art as "raw products, ores to be mined for motifs, archetypes, social charters or mythemes, rather than as events that might be reexperienced through re-presentation in a new language" (1983: 62).[22] For the purposes of reperformance Tedlock devises a system of typographical cues. Small type represents soft voicing, capitalization signals loud voicing; each new line represents a half-second pause, while a black dot signals a two-second pause. Tedlock brackets paralinguistic features, and uses rising or falling type to represent ascending or descending pitch. A typical example can be seen in a segment of the humorous "Pelt Kid and His Grandmother," a Zuni narrative recited to Tedlock by Walter Sanchez in 1965:

> NOW WE TAKE IT UP. THERE WERE VILLAGERS AT THE
>   MIDDLE PLACE
> And
> PELT KID LIVED WITH HIS GRANDMOTHER. (tries to
> Suppress laughter)
>
>   •
> They were living together this way, and at the Middle Place

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[21] For Foley's use of the term, see Foley 2002: 96. Foley points out that reperformance seeks to "restore as fully as possible the *experience* of each poem" (italics mine), emphasizing how Ethnopoetics looks for meaning in how verbal art is experienced in the context of performance.

[22] Tedlock credits Charles Olson and the Black Mountain College as a formative influence (1999: xv). Tedlock's Ethnopoetic scores bear a striking resemblance to Olson's own mode of "projective verse," particularly in his "Maximus" poems. While it might come as a surprise that Tedlock's approach would be influenced by literary figures, the poets noted by him shared an interest in the relationship between how a poem is voiced and its formal qualities.

> The villagers
> Came down to get water
> (Tedlock 1999:217).

Such a scripting of performance is also, as Thomas DuBois points out, "a mode of analysis" (127). The script interprets the performance both by its groupings and in the elements Tedlock chooses to privilege (volume of voice, but not musical notation of chanting, for example). Yet as analysis it arguably explicates the performance much more faithfully than paragraphs of prose, so that many significant elements of the narration (such as how the narrator pauses, or emphasizes a word) are allowed to emerge. The effectiveness of Tedlock's scoring is seen in the variations on Tedlock's system that have been introduced by others since his landmark *Finding the Center* was first published in 1972, each differing according to the tradition to which it is applied. Where reperformance runs into difficulty, however, is in treating texts of oral origin. It is in this area that Dell Hymes has contributed his own version of Ethnopoetics.

Like that of Tedlock, the work of Dell Hymes attempts to textualize verbal art in its own terms. As he states gnomically in his *In Vain I Tried to Tell You*, "If we do not deal with the means, we cannot possess the meanings"—suggesting that *how* a verbal art is related and experienced cannot be separated from *what* it might be understood to mean (5). And while, like Tedlock, Hymes focuses on the verbal art of Native American groups, his version of Ethnopoetics aligns with the poetic forms more familiarly literary. Part of this divergence results from the fact that Hymes works primarily with post-performance texts—transcriptions or dictations long ago committed to a run-on prose, so that the original performance is irrecoverably lost to us. Lacking the audio recordings used by Tedlock (complete with pauses, intonations, whispers), Hymes's task has been,

more pragmatically, to determine from pages of prose the poetic unit that governs the poetry, so that the verbal art might be reformed (if not reperformed) accordingly. In attempting to restore the poetry to the text (of mostly American Indian groups of the Northwest), Hymes finds that the prosody does not rely on the familiar units of syllable, syntax, or stress, but instead what he labels "measured verse" (Foley 1995: 18). This enables him to break the poetry down into "lines, verses, stanzas, scenes, and . . . acts," explained as follows:

> A set of discourse features differentiates narratives into verses. Within these verses, lines are differentiated, commonly by distinct verbs. . . The verses themselves are grouped, commonly in threes and fives. These groupings constitute "stanzas" and, where elaboration of stanzas is such as to require a distinction, "scenes." In extended narratives, scenes themselves are organized in a series of "acts." (quoted in Foley 1995:19).

The terms "verse," "stanza" and "act" employed by Hymes here are not new to us, and this familiarity underscores where Hymes differs from Tedlock. For the former, the poetic restoration of prosified verbal art means, in part, shaping that verbal art into a form resembling literary poetry. Yet in so doing Hymes does much more than ape the Western poetic canon. Instead, he is "translating"—using the poetic units intrinsic to the poetry to restore streams of prose into a shape that is recognizable as poetry. For example, Hymes re-structures the Clackamas narrative of Grizzly Woman into the following form:

> Now Grizzly Woman arose,
>   she numbed them (with her spirit-power),
>   she got her arrow-spear.
> Now again she went among them,
>   she pierced their hearts,
>   she killed them all.
> In the morning,
>   now again she carried them
>   where she had put down those first ones;

<div align="center">all done;</div>
<div align="center">she ceased.</div>
<div align="center">(Hymes 360, stanza iv, lines 202-12).</div>

Like the poetic structure of the Western literary tradition, the verses above are organized

into recurring stanzas and lines, signaled by indentation. What Hymes intends is to

fashion a poem shaped much like a literary poem, but principled by a prosody all its own

(here parallel units set off by key words such as "now" or "she," with the verses grouped

in lines of threes and fives). In so doing Hymes attempts to restore the native aesthetics to

this verbal art, while at the same time remaining faithful to the structuring principles of

the respective tradition. Like Tedlock, he is undermining the aesthetic vs. anthropological

divide. This is, in fact, at the very core of the Ethnopoetic mission. Tedlock's journal

Alcheringa:Ethnopoetics had set out to correct the tendency in anthropology to see "oral

poetry only as data, not as art," and of literature to view oral poetry as "primitive"

(DuBois 124).

For Tedlock, however, Hymes concedes too much to the literary tradition. "In

seeking exhibition space in the gallery of literature," Tedlock writes, "Hymes specifically

addresses the jury that requires lines of poetry to show measurement when he argues that

his analysis of American Indian narratives 'makes it possible, indeed essential, to regard

such texts as literary art'" (Tedlock 1983: 61). Rather than attempting to situate Native

American oral traditions within the hallowed halls of Western literature, Tedlock

advocates instead for the expansion of what constitutes "poetry."

Still, the real distinction between these two Ethnopoetic visions is not strictly one

over technique, but grows out of a split between emphasis of the aspects of an individual

performance and those aspects of the wider tradition. As Foley points out, Tedlock

<div align="center">56</div>

attends to the particulars of a performance event (which highlights personal style and preferences) while Hymes's search is for the traditional poetic units.[23] This debate highlights a tension inherent in the study of oral tradition itself. Where is the meaning to be located—in the situation and moment of performance, as embodied by an individual within a specific time and place—or in the greater framework of the tradition? Both poles are necessary, of course, for a full picture, and Foley will aim for a synthetic view in his *The Singer of Tales in Performance*, where he formulates, evenhandedly, "performance as the enabling event, tradition as the enabling referent" (27).

In opposing the approaches of Tedlock and Hymes it is important to point out that the work of these scholars two overlaps significantly. Hymes, for example, would apply his version of Ethnopoetics to the living tradition of a Zuni performance (a performance recorded by Tedlock).[24] For his part, Tedlock has turned his Ethnopoetic eye/ear toward a representation of the ancient Mayan *Popol Vuh*, extant in textual form only. In this endeavor he has invented the study of what he has named ethnopaleography, "which involves taking a text back to the descendants of those who produced it in order to draw analogies with contemporary spoken arts and obtain commentaries from contemporary readers" (1983: 16). Finally, the two are joined in their overall commitment to restore aesthetic appreciation to traditional verbal arts. As Tedlock states in *Alcheringa: Ethnopoetics*: Ethnopoetics strives "to present tribal poetries as values in themselves

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[23] Foley argues that "Hymes's special concern with poetic principles that inform the composition and reception of verbal art over the traditional spectrum of many performances and many individual narrators seems to coalesce more closely with Oral-Formulaic Theory than does Tedlock's program, chiefly because the Parry-Lord approach has historically privileged the traditional over the immediate features of performances." Nonetheless, he remarks that both approaches valuably illustrate aspects of verbal art so that it "would seem productive, then, to pay close attention to both" (1995:26).

[24] Tedlock, while admitting that Hymes's "most impressive contribution is to show how initial particles such as 'now' and 'then' are widely used to mark off units of the size he reckons as verses and stanzas," finds his line-units to be less principled and "open to gerrymandering" (Tedlock 1983:57)

rather than as ethnographic data" (Dubois 123). Both Tedlock and Hymes, each in valuable ways, aim to do just this.

Immanent Art: Traditional Referentiality in Oral Tradition

Of the three approaches discussed in this chapter, John Miles Foley's Immanent Art descends most directly from the work of Parry and Lord. Both a continuation and a reproof, Foley's theory addresses the most looming objection to Parry and Lord's model of oral composition: that its mechanistic verse production seemed to reduce the poet to a mere shuffler of traditional materials. While Parry asserted the genuine aesthetic of the traditional performer as craftsman, he was unable to placate his critics. For those who objected to it, Oral-Formulaic Theory appeared downright Darwinian, making the artist/singer of little consequence. Parry himself was pressed to admit that "Homer sacrificed precision of thought to ease of versification" (Foley 1991:3). The singer's art, it would seem, was circumscribed by the tradition.

Immanent Art attempts to restore aesthetic considerations to Oral-Formulaic Theory. Stated simply, this approach emphasizes not merely the utility of themes and formulas for composition, but looks at these for the manner in which they idiomatically harness tradition. Whereas the theory of Parry and Lord "elucidates the structure of oral poetry, . . . Immanent Art asks how that structure means" (Foley 2002: 109). The aim is to uncover a poetics particular to oral traditions, understanding the work of composition in the context of performance—in other words, asking not simply how the poem is achieved but how the poem's *meaning* is achieved. Composition, in this view, is not the end of the story, and alone cannot entirely expound the poem's aesthetic force. A full

judgment requires a more thoughtful consideration of the dynamic performance context, which includes the tradition-fluent audience. To address this, Foley draws both from Performance Theory and Ethnopoetics.

In *Immanent Art,* Foley begins by recalling the "mechanics vs. aesthetics" debate leveled between Parry and the Classicist George M. Calhoun over the significance of the Homeric phrase "winged words." This split presented scholars with a tough choice: either one was required to ignore the erudite evidence of Parry or, if not, submit that Homer was merely a "poet-transmitter," a "slave to his phraseological and narrative idiom" (Foley 1991:3). Foley suggests, as a way out of this quandry, that the "richness" of such works "is attained *through* these conventions rather than *in spite* of them" (1991:5, italics in original). Oral traditional poetry achieves its force, then, by metonymically summoning up the greater traditional framework that is known and shared by all. Free of the burden of describing or inventing a cast of characters, as with a novel, the traditional performer invokes the common tradition, "a context that is enormously larger and more echoic than the text or work itself, that brings the lifeblood of generations of poems and performances to the individual performance or text" (1991:7). "Traditional referentiality," as Immanent Art is similarly called, is distinct from literary allusion, as Nancy Mason Bradbury explains in her ballad study, because in the former "the audience experiences a formula not in relation to a specific earlier text from which it is wholly distinct but in relation to the multiform tradition of which it is a part" (138). Where intertextuality highlights the

textual interpenetration of individual texts, the formula or theme can summon the entire tradition itself, via metonymy "wherein a part stands for the whole" (Foley 1991:7).[25]

Immanent Art reveals its origins in Oral-Formulaic Theory most significantly by continuing the language analogy that Parry and Lord employed. Foley highlights this in his "proverb"—"oral poetry works like a language, only more so"—which he demonstrates by showing how formulas constitute special, less-than-literal "words" within the particular register (2002: 127). This procedure can make sense of how "swift-footed Achilles" can be so designated even while in the situation he is so denoted Achilles may in fact be reclining. The poet is not pointing to Achilles in that particular situation, but invoking his presence in the greater tradition (Foley 2002: 133-4). Likewise, in the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes,* the freshly born divinity is proleptically epitheted as "Argos-slaying." What the poet is here doing is drawing up Hermes "in his larger mythic presence" (Foley 2002:114). In this sense "Argos-slaying Hermes" works like a linguistic sign, "only more so" due to its high degree of referentiality. The specialized language in Homer allows for a more narrowed economy than everyday language, capable of conjuring massive traditional implications with a single "word." It is able to do so "because registers are more highly coded than everyday language, because their 'words' resonate with traditional implications beyond the scope of multipurpose street language, they convey enormously more than grammars and dictionaries . . . can record" (Foley 2002:116). Building off Bauman's notion of "keys to performance," Foley explains, "noun-epithet formulas are keys or switches—not unlike links on a web page—that summon a larger context via a specialized code" (2002:113). In such a case the poet

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[25] Oral traditional forms can harness that tradition in ways literary allusion cannot, simply because they *are* the tradition, or an instance of it (the way a wave is both a wave and the sea itself). Borne up by a vast body of tradition, the singer or performer need only metonymically summon its presence.

does not "sacrifice precision to ease versification" as Parry had claimed, but wields an idiomatic power available only through access to the network of tradition. This is best illustrated by application, and Foley looks to South Slavic, Homeric, and Old English traditions to watch this at work.

Traditional referentiality operates both on the level of individual formulae as well as whole narrative structures. Often a single phrase carries an exponential significance, as when a South Slavic *guslar* designates a particular woman in his song as a *kukavica crna*, or "black cuckoo." In so doing the singer is "idiomatically affirming that she is already or soon will be widowed" (Foley 2002: 118). For those fluent in the register, this is much more than a mere literal designation. Foley explains that "in the highly patriarchal society of the South Slavic epic, the phrase speaks not only to the woman's bereavement but to her consequent loss of identity, for "(w)ithout her husband's kin network to support her, she will effectively cease to exist" (2002: 118-9). From a literal and literary perspective, "black cuckoo" appears as quaint poeticization, but it proves to be much more. Immanent Art, like Ethnopoetics, looks to discover meaning within the terms of the particular tradition, rather than taking the long literary view.

Just as the special language of oral poetries enables a wealth of traditional connotation, it requires an audience with fluency in that tradition. The use of a register keys the audience, as Bauman has it, to experience what is about to come in a special way, assuming a traditional familiarity or performance arena. For example, should the *guslar* open his poem with the statement "Ograšćić Alija was gieving," the audience is immediately cued to the entire tradition of tales regarding this hero or heroes in his

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situation, much in the way that "once upon a time" summons up the world of the fairy tale. "Ograšćić Alija was grieving," for those fluent, signifies the following:

> [A] Turkish hero, long imprisoned in a Christian ban's jail, is crying out in misery; his strident complaints are keeping the ban's infant son from nursing, thus threatening the boy's life and the continuing royal lineage; soon the banica, wife to the captor, will petition her husband for the prisoner's release. If the ban refuses to intercede or throws up his hands in resigned defeat, she will conduct the negotiations with the enemy herself (2002:118).

Unlike a work such as a novel (the term "novel" itself promises something "new"), South Slavic epic poetry works by being traditional. It functions with its particular economy not because it offers novelty, but because it doesn't. The audience already knows the multiform tale structure, or "pathways" as Foley, referencing Homer, has designated the traditional network. The epic poet's work is to summon that tradition, and his or her success depends in part upon the extent to which this is achieved. Tradition is invoked, whether formally as the Muse in Homer, the *Hwæt* (Lo!) in Old English, or the "Once upon a time" for fairy tales.

Not only is the understanding of traditional referentiality important in order to correct a literary and literalized interpretation of texts of oral origin, but it can also supply answers to questions that had confounded previous approaches. The Homeric phrase *chlôron deos*—literally "green fear"—has long posed a conundrum for translators. This difficulty is the result of a literal reading of the isolated phrase rather than a "reading" of the tradition it functions within. The customary analytical tactic of splitting the phrase into its component parts—"green" and "fear"—yields little more than would the bisection of "green" into "gre" and "en." A much richer approach is the examination of the use of this composite "word" across the wider tradition. By the study of examples of "green

fear" in the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, and the *Hymn to Demeter*, Immanent Art arrives at the

traditional implication of the phrase as "supernaturally induced fear" (2002: 121). The

difference between this approach and those previous is a careful examination of

traditional context, and seeing what is signaled within the tradition as a whole—not

restricted to a single "work." This tradition is the property of both poet and audience, and

is immediately present by its summons. It is in this sense that meaning and aesthetics in

tradition are "immanent."[26]

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All three of these approaches to verbal art attempt, in their various emphases, to

negotiate the impasse of the tradition vs. aesthetics divide, a divide that in part emerged

as a result of Parry's theory. Bauman, in his Performance Theory, views the

communicative performance event as the location of aesthetic experience. He states in the

preface to *Verbal Art as Performance*, "this volume is intended as a contribution to the

study and appreciation of artistic action in social life" (vii). The art of "verbal art" is one,

he stresses, that can only be experienced and studied as the interaction of performance.

Tedlock and Hymes also look for ways to undermine a tidy art/anthropology opposition

by presenting indigenous American traditions as a form of poetry. Finally, Foley looks at

the structure of traditional forms and examines their aesthetic weight as it is employed

within the wider tradition.

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[26] In *Immanent Art,* Foley examines some of the common ground between traditional referentiality and the Receptionalist school of Wolfgang Iser and others. The *Rezeptionsästhetik* of Iser and Jauss departs, like Immanent Art, from the "conception of the literary work as an object" and in "recognize[ing] our own complicity in bringing artistic 'objects' to life" (Foley1991: 40). The connection is a significant one, especially in its highlighting of some of the shared territory of literary and verbal arts, which will be discussed more in chapter three. Unfortunately, the focus of my thesis restricts a more in-depth treatment of this comparison of Immanent Art with the role of the reader in realizing the work.

Together, these approaches move beyond the question of how verbal art is composed into an investigation of how it functions and means within the context of tradition. In so doing they move beyond a written/oral binary, either by experimenting with ways of reperforming verbal art through text, or by examining how many of the qualities assumed to be the property of literature can be found in performance or in the traditional network. The following chapter will look at new directions that both extend and depart from these approaches.

Chapter 3.
New Directions

Having looked at the inception and growth of studies in oral tradition for chapters one and two, in chapter three I will consider some of the new directions. For this purpose I will draw primarily from *Oral Tradition*, volume 18, issues one and two, which in 2003 surveyed new directions in oral traditions across a wide range of fields. My aim is to distinguish some of the wider trends, looking at ways in which the voices of volume 18 both challenge previous assumptions and demonstrate continuities with them. As a result, the treatment of these authors will not be in any great depth, instead providing a glimpse into the diversity of voices.

Rethinking the Oral-Written Interface

In the "great divide" model that developed in the wake of Oral-Formulaic Theory, oral tradition came to be seen as a kind of anti-literature, defined in contrast to what were seen as modern literary values (oral vs. written, antiquity vs. modernity, tradition vs. individual, and so on). While the "great divide" model has since been challenged, the interface between written and oral has remained very much an area of debate. On one hand is the possibility that oral tradition will lose ground and suffer under a poorly-fitting textual criticism, while on the other is the awareness that a one-size-fits-all definition of oral tradition has limited scholarship in the past. While nothing like a consensus exists at present, recent studies have paid increasing attention to ways in which oral traditions and writing intersect, noting that "pure" orality (and for that matter "pure" textuality) appear to be the rare exception, not the rule. As a result, studies have shifted to examine more

and more the interactivity of the two. Perhaps what characterizes current approaches more than anything else is the many ways written-oral relationships are seen to intersect.

Recent work in ballad studies exemplifies some of these shifting views. The oral provenance of the Francis James Child ballad collection, the fountainhead of American folklore studies and to many minds the quintessential oral tradition, has been re-assessed in recent studies.[27] Mary Ellen Brown finds that the longstanding criteria for "authentic" ballads—those which are "held in memory, are unpublished, are learned orally"—are based less on qualities of the ballads themselves than on a definition "implicitly allied to origins and transmission" (177).[28] Authentic ballads have long been defined as those untainted by writing, in very much a "great divide" schematization. Yet Brown finds that these criteria "would eliminate many of the ballads in the Child collection" (177). For ballad studies, the relationship between writing and oral tradition now appears much more complex. William Bernard McCarthy argues that the ballad of English and Scots tradition, the source of the Child collection, has been linked to writing from its very origin. He notes that "The evidence of the written record . . . suggests that the form originated as a literate entertainment of late medieval elite culture," not being absorbed into the oral tradition until the sixteenth century—making it neither strictly oral nor the sole property of the "common folk" (178). Even apart from the issue of origin, McCarthy argues that the ballad was implicated in writing even in its putative heyday: "Ironically, the first appearance of the oral ballad tradition in the British Isles is almost exactly contemporary with the rise of popular culture, and especially a popular press." Thus

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[27] For the history of the Francis James Child ballads and their place in American folklore studies, see Zumwalt 1998.

[28] Page numbers throughout chapter three, unless otherwise identified, refer to *Oral Tradition*, volume 18, issues 1 and 2.

"from the very beginning the tradition has been 'contaminated' by popular broadside texts" (McCarthy 179). Yet these findings do not so much disqualify the Child ballads as genuine oral tradition as suggest that what constitutes genuine oral tradition depends less on oral purity than once thought. Rather than a polarity, McCarthy and Brown present a picture in which the oral and written aspects do not cancel each other out, but very often feed into one other. Such a perspective challenges the oral-written binary that underlies the original theories of Walter Ong and Eric Havelock. But a more nuanced view of oral tradition and writing doesn't necessarily invalidate these previous models; rather, by modifying these terms it permits their findings to be reintroduced with new complexity and carried into new areas, including texts. Simply put, "orality" and "literacy" are not mutually exclusive terms. This means the work of oralists can move beyond the task of determining which traditions are genuinely oral ones, and into an investigation of how oral tradition and writing intertwine across a spectrum of oral traditional forms.

New perspectives concerning the intersection of writing and oral tradition have come from the other end as well, with a growing recognition of how oral traditions influence the experience of written works, as demonstrated in recent Biblical scholarship. In New Testament studies, Richard Horsley argues that New Testament texts, even in their written form, were not "read" in the modern textual fashion. Citing recent studies that show literacy was extremely limited in Mediterranean cultures, including the Jewish population,[29] he argues that where oral tradition provided the basis of day-to-day communication, the New Testament texts themselves had a predominantly oral/aural function: "Obviously the field must come to grips with the dominant importance of oral

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[29] Horsley's citation for this study is as follows: Catherine Hezser. *Jewish Literacy in Roman Palestine*. Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 2001.

communication in the formative period of what became New Testament literature" (34). Because of this, "increasing awareness of work in other fields indicating that literacy and orality should not be understood in terms of a Great Divide, but rather were engaged in close interaction, is opening up recognition that even after a text was written, it was still 'read' or 'recited' orally to a whole community of people, not read by a solitary individual" (Horsley 34). The silent, private experience of the modern reader in a society of widespread literacy was not the way most early Christians experienced the gospels. Instead, Horsley finds, "It is much easier, moreover, to imagine the possible oral composition and regular performance of a 'text' such [as] the Gospel of Mark" (34). In the case of the dissemination and performance of the gospels, Horsley makes a case for a culture of intermingled media, where writing and reading were both attuned to the prevailing oral tradition. Where Brown and McCarthy challenge the oral origins and spread of the ballad, Horsley and others re-think the textual experience itself, in a sense re-oralizing it.

The oral, performative elements of New Testament texts also disturb the Form Critical quest for original Biblical forms and genres by challenging the very notion of an original form, even an original transcription. Scribal practices and the evolving oral tradition appear to have influenced each other to a higher degree than previously thought. According to Horsley, "several textual traditions existed simultaneously in the same scribal community" and "those textual traditions were still developing, as scribes made interpretive changes as they inscribe new manuscripts" (35). Where variant manuscripts had previously been seen as evidence of the variations of the contemporaneous oral tradition, scribal practices themselves seem to resemble and reproduce aspects of the oral

tradition. Susan Niditch, for example, relates how variant manuscripts were preserved side by side at Qumran, claiming, "Attention to oral traditional considerations leads one instead to respect textual variation as evidence of the way in which qualities of the oral continue in written traditions" (44). In addition, it seems the modern concept of text, as standardized and replicable, is a property of printing rather than writing itself. Werner Kelber finds Form Criticism "besieged with problems," particularly for its "complicity with post-Gutenberg assumptions about ancient dynamics of communication" (40). Biblical scholars are discovering that scribal traditions, like oral ones, were much more fluid and responsive to changing culture and belief. Martin Jaffee argues that medieval Rabbinic manuscripts were likewise profoundly governed by the surrounding oral traditions. He explains that "the strong mnemonic traits of the medieval manuscripts suggest that the documents preserved by them were formulated by people for whom oral textual performance was a common experience" (37).   Mounting evidence suggests oral traditions, in the Biblical and Rabbinic fields, were not expunged and replaced by the textual traditions, but continued alongside them, influencing composition, recitation, and reception.

The fundamental benefit of an oral tradition approach in Biblical studies, for Kelber, is its ability to counter—to be "suspicious of"— the prevailing textual perspectives. He remarks, "Orality studies . . . . challenge biblical scholarship to rethink fundamental concepts of the Western humanistic legacy such as text and intertextuality, reading, writing and composing, memory and imagination, speech and oral/scribal interfaces, author and tradition" (40). Used as such, oral tradition can provide an alternative to a literary criticism, approaching biblical studies not as "text-to-text-

relations" but making space for, as Kelber enumerates, "compositional dictation, memorial apperception, auditory reception, and the interfacing of memory and manuscript" (40). For example, the Two-Source Hypothesis of the synoptic gospels was "formulated as a literary problem that is to be examined in literary terms, leaving no room of oral interfacing" (41). But changes are evident. Susan Niditch states, "Scholars are now beginning to see that orality and literacy exist on a continuum and that there is an interplay between the two modalities, a feedback loop of sorts" (43). Uncovering that "interplay" will be the ongoing preoccupation of Biblical studies and related fields.

Rethinking the oral-written interface allows for new approaches to early English literature as well. Mark Amodio advocates "seeing the oral tradition and its entexted oral poetics as integral components of an extraordinarily complex cultural matrix, one in which the oral and the literate intersect with and deeply inform each other" (212). What Amodio terms "entexted oral poetics" allows for him fresh perspectives into what is indisputably literary poetry—Middle English literature. To do so Amodio argues we must squarely face the textual nature of medieval English literature, adding that "Acknowledging the non-performative nature of medieval English poetry will not forestall inquiry into the medieval English oral tradition, but will rather enable us to begin assessing more accurately the mix of oral and literate poetics found throughout the period's extant verbal art" (212). For Amodio this perspectives enables the inclusion of a larger body of literature for consideration (specifically for Amodio, post-Conquest literature). He claims it will also restore a sense of the cohesive oral tradition underlying Old and Middle English literature. Where we have only a textual remnant, as in medieval English, seeking out the "entexted oral poetics" may very well prove effective.

Yet re-mapping the oral-written relationship makes the task of the oralist undeniably more complicated. Instead of ascertaining the units of performance it might mean studying the traditional resonance of particular forms and genres. In medieval English, Lori Ann Garner explains, "Viewing 'oral tradition' as the web of associations lying behind even highly literary works enables us to uncover traditionally encoded meanings across a broad spectrum of texts" (217). For Garner, oral traditional forms are linked to their social functions and contexts, as embedded in the traditional network. This approach moves closer to uncovering the hybrid of textual and oral factors that went into composition and performance. In Garner's view, Old English charms need to be understood in their ritual context, and that the enigmatic verses of Middle English texts of carols can be understood in light of the dances traditionally performed with them. Similarly, the Anglo-Saxon *Judith* deviations from Jerome can be recognized as the wholesale translation into the oral traditional Anglo-Saxon register. Garner's approach is part of a growing movement that sees forms in the context of the larger tradition. Those approaching these long-written works thus begin by asking questions such as: Where and how were these used? What did they signify for those that composed, read, and heard them? What experiences did they allow for? While this approach does not abandon the study of compositional units, it expands that study to include traditional meaning and function.[30]

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[30] Andy Orchard, in his study of medieval Anglo-Latin texts, represents a more extreme position on the oral-written intersection. As he puts it, "In challenging the perceived binary opposition between literacy and orality in Anglo-Saxon literature, scholars have found themselves questioning assumptions about a whole set of similar binaries (verse/prose; Old English/Latin; pagan/Christian; native/imported; lay/learned)" (226). Orchard aims to do so by demonstrating that characteristics of Anglo-Saxon oral tradition can be found in the indisputably written Anglo-Latin poetry and epistolary prose. (226). The trouble with Orchard's expansion of "oral tradition" into these areas is the sublimation of any real meaning for the term.

Part of what plagued earlier attempts to ascertain with exactness what constituted "oral tradition," and how it might relate to writing, was the assumption of an all-encompassing model. Such a limited definition could not possibly accommodate the myriad forms of oral tradition, even those within the bounds of a single culture. Current approaches have, as I have discussed, rejected an either/or conception in favor of an interpenetration. What remains unstated in these current approaches, however, is the precise interrelationship of oral tradition and writing. John Miles Foley offers a graduated set of definitions, each dependent on the different mode of the oral tradition process. To meet the needs of the expansive ecology of oral traditional forms, Foley has devised what he terms a "taxonomy," categorizing the various on the basis of compositional, receptive, and performative modes. It is arranged as follows:[31]

	Composition	Performance	Reception	Example
1.Oral Performance	Oral	Oral	Aural	Tibetan paper-singer
2. Voiced Texts	Written	Oral	Aural	Slam poetry
3. Voices from the Past	O/W	O/W	A/W	Homer's *Odyssey*
4. Written Oral Poems	Written	Written	Written	Bishop Njegoš

While stipulating that these categories are in no way evaluative or evolutionary, Foley is able to filter the wide-ranging forms of oral tradition into four groups. The first,

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[31] Reproduced from the chart in Foley 2002: 39.

"Oral Performance," is probably what most people would imagine as oral tradition. This category can be represented by the Tibetan paper-singer, the South Slavic *guslar,* or any number of other performers. Both the composition and performance are oral, while the reception—to a live audience—is an aural one. In "Voiced Texts," the second category, the composition is written but performance is oral and reception are aural. Modern slam poetry, a hip hop performance, or the rendition of a folk song—to the extent that each is based, perhaps loosely, on a pre-composed text—all fall under "Voiced Texts." Also in this category we might place the Homeric *rhapsode* or any others who perform memorized song or poetry. The Homeric oems, *Beowulf,* and the *Chanson de Roland* are placed into the third grouping, "Voices from the Past." Here the modes of composition, performance, and reception are harder to ascertain due to the age and written state of the material. Yet there is a strong consensus that the works of this group were, in one state or other, oral performance, and much of the scholarly work in this area has been trying to determine their provenance with more precision. The fourth and final category, "Written Oral Poems," covers those works whose composition, performance, and reception are all in writing, yet draw primarily from oral tradition. The *Kalevala,* for example, illustrates this category since, although a written epic, it draws directly from Finnish oral tradition and needs to be read in light of that tradition to be fully and properly comprehended.

Foley's chart of the gradations of oral traditional forms is valuable because it provides concrete criteria for defining oral traditions, particularly in the gray area of the oral-written intersection. It allows texts of oral origin to be retained under the title of "oral tradition" without sacrificing accuracy. As a result, the heading of "oral tradition" itself becomes less honorific and more diagnostic. Of course, Foley's paradigm doesn't

solve everything. Questions of transmission are largely unaccounted for, resulting in the omission of the influences of oral tradition on the reading of early Christian scriptures, for example, or its influence on manuscript culture. Yet his categorization goes a long way to replace the rigid "great divide" model with a more refined, and pragmatic, schematization.

Beyond Content: Oral Traditional Forms and Contexts

In his essay "Tradition as Communication," Thomas A. McKean states that "tradition is process rather than content" (49), which suggests that tradition is less an immutable body of transmitted material and more a system of structures, much like language itself. In his own essay, McKean, who studies Gaelic and Scots song traditions, understands traditional structures as negotiation of private and public, personal and collective, new and old (49-50). Likewise, many of the new directions presented in volume 18 are less concerned with simply preserving stories, poetry and songs of the past under the assumption of a stable content, and are increasingly interested in particular traditional forms as located in their contexts. Yet this line of thinking is not new to studies in oral tradition. In earlier chapters I have demonstrated how it has been echoed since Saussure defined the sign as form rather than substance. Parry's theory of formulaic composition understood the components of Homeric verse as a system of metrical rather than substantive units. Again, Performance Theory saw how the very enactment of performance was constitutive of verbal art. Likewise, Ethnopoetics was built on the precept that how a narrative is represented structurally or performatively (as poetry rather than prose, as performance score rather than script) shapes what it means, as Tedlock

strongly asserted against the content-based view of Lévi-Strauss. In addition, Immanent Art re-examines the aesthetic power of traditional structures, looking at how meaning is embedded in the traditional network. All of these, in their respective emphases, challenge the very notion of a detachable, transferable content by viewing verbal art as process rather than product.[32] Indeed, if any single theme emerges from all of these various approaches, it is in their stress on the "how" over the "what" as regards the significance of verbal art. The notion of content assumes a stable, packaged object with a meaning distinct from tradition, audience, performance, which can be accessed by each audience apart from context. This view doesn't take into account the way that audiences and contexts realize the work, and it is in this area recent works have explored.

How is it, then, that oral traditional forms mean, if not by imparting a latent content that exists independently of styles of telling and presence? The authors of volume 18 explore a number of interrelated possibilities, looking at how traditional forms have profoundly socially-situated functions, as seen in the role of the audience, the dynamics of performance, or the traditional framework itself. But most seem to concur that traditional art is anything but autonomous.

The role of the traditional audience arises in several recent studies. Mary-Ann Constantine, finds that her study of the Welsh *Mabinogion,* "with its elliptical references to unknown heroes and events, . . . taught me that stories existed 'out there' beyond the text, and it was best not to be too literal-minded in trying to track them down" (187). The traditional network constitutes a field of significances, requiring a traditional audience to activate it. This audience must be fluent in the "connotative and metaphorical nature of song idiom" (187), so the work of scholars is aimed at gaining as much fluency with this

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[32] For Foley's discussion of oral tradition as process rather than product, Cf. 2002: 61,79.

tradition as possible to regain an experience of this process. Studies such as Constantine's restore the role of the tradition-fluent audience, in a sense the real "content" of the oral tradition, as constituents the collective memory.

Even in the case of fixed texts that are read aloud ("Voiced Texts" in Foley's paradigm), what is enacted often involves significantly more than a straightforward transfer of information. In the case of the teaching of Tibetan religious texts, Anne Klein argues that these texts are "not regarded as self-explanatory units of information that can be digested outside the community of scholarly or ritual practices" (98). She goes on to explain that the oral commentary of the teacher functions as a part of the reading, and is used to "interpret, organize, compare, critique, and make practical suggestions" in teaching these texts. What these texts "mean" then, cannot be located in the text itself, but as they are used and activated by the traditional pedagogical framework.

Among Ancient Greek studies, the social utility of oral traditional forms has taken center stage. Richard P. Martin remarks how oral tradition was embedded in Greek social praxis prior to the mid fifth century BCE: "Law, ritual, myth, education-through-dance (*khoreia*), invective, games, wisdom, praise, lament—almost every verbal institution imaginable employed stylized language, formulaic diction, characteristic rhythms, or time-honored performance habits" (70). While all of these constitute oral tradition, Martin warns against "lumping all such institutions together, as if their shared 'orality' were the primary point of interest" (70). For Martin, the significance of these forms is not that they were employed without writing, but the ways in which they were used and performed in their role in Greek society. Citing the studies of W. Robert Connor's "social-historical approach that took account of the poetics of specific social 'genres,'"

Martin announces that performance "as an overarching social-poetic concept" is the most important new direction for the field (71). In a departure from both "New Critical attitudes that prized texts as objects" and the "deep gulf" of the oral-written binary (Martin 71), the thrust of Connor, Martin, and others such as Gregory Nagy sees a more socially-embedded study of Ancient Greek forms occupying a historical and cultural context.[33]

In the movement to contextualize oral traditional forms, many scholars are interrogating and re-examining the concept of tradition itself. Folklorist Pertti Anttonen argues that more attention must be paid to the idea of "tradition," "which has tended to be used as an explanation, instead of being that which is explained" (116). Neither simple nor monolithic, the compound "oral tradition" encompasses, for Anttonen, issues of ownership, communication, transmission, social functions, and "symbolic representation of social groups," among other things (116). For Ruth Finnegan, "tradition" assumes an ethnocentric contrast to "modern/western/literate/individual/creative, implicitly highlighting transmission and the 'old,' downplaying creativity, multiple agency, politics, inventiveness" (84). Despite the drawbacks, she finds the term "oral tradition" nonetheless useful for bridging "questions of textuality, orality, voice, text, performance, verbal art in a way too often ignored elsewhere" (84). Tradition, for Timothy R. Tangherlini, is a "will to permanence" on the part of the group, citing the emergent quality of performance highlighted by Bauman (136). McKean, discussed earlier, saw

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[33] This sentiment is echoed throughout the scholarly voices in Ancient Greek. Mark. W. Edwards states, "the most interesting new direction is going beyond the accepted facts about the oral features and looking for reasons for the development of those features and the results of their use both for the art of the performer and the reception by the listener" (66). Nagy, referring to the work of Egbert Bakker and Martin, remarks: "For current research in Homeric poetry, a most interesting new direction in oral tradition studies centers on the interaction of genre and occasions of performance" (74).

tradition fundamentally as communication, "the passing on of (social) culture through shared practices and lore," occupying a space "at the intersections of memory, orality, and literacy" (49). In all of these perspectives, tradition is anything but monolithic.

New aspects of the performance-centered approach pioneered by Bauman also continue to be explored. Della Pollock, in the tradition of what she describes as the "performative turn" of the 1970's and 80's, employs in the classroom what she terms "performative epistemology, a mode of knowing by doing" (263-64). Analysis merges with the performance experience, so that performance becomes a way of knowing similar to how Tedlock emphasized the hermeneutics of reperformance. If performance is constitutive of the event, as Bauman claimed, then a viable approach to understand exploring the situation it creates will be, naturally, performance itself.

The views presented show a broad trajectory away from the notion of an indwelling "content" and increasingly toward the work of tradition-charged and socially significant forms, genres, and contexts. As such, it asks: What does performance activate? What role does audience play? What is tradition and how does it work? Facilitating these questions is the non-textual nature of oral tradition itself. In oral tradition, as one author quotes Paul Zumthor, "the voice does not describe, it acts" (194). New and recent studies in oral tradition track the ways in which it acts, and interacts, in its traditional function.

Old Media Meet New: Oral Tradition and the Internet Age

Apart from theoretical and methodological shifts, this past century saw an unprecedented development of new media, which have not only impacted our approaches to oral tradition, but have altered how we perceive of oral traditions as well.[34] The Internet and advances in computer technology continue to transform how we access and experience oral traditions. Auditory, visual, and textual files are stored and disseminated in enormous databases, and these are accessed easily and rapidly over the Internet. Many of the authors of volume 18 remark on a number of compilation projects as part of important new advances in their fields.[35] The potential for future study is enthusiastically represented by Timothy R. Tangherlini, in his essay "'Oral Tradition' in a Technologically Advanced World":

> One of the great advantages presaged by the information technology boom is an ever-increasing access to properly encoded digital archives and texts. Working in a digitalized realm allows one to answer broad questions concerning such things as vocabulary, language usage, and reception in a manner far more sophisticated than before. . . . . These textual and archival tools have great promise: they will help us discern previously unrecognized patterns in the archives, and they will help us shape new research questions. The digital archive will also move us away from a primarily text-based environment to one that incorporates aural and visual components" (136-7).

Tangherlini rightly recognizes that the ways in which we will encounter and research oral traditions will continue to rapidly change. The predominance of texts, especially in printed book form, will unquestionably give way to multiple and interactive Internet media.

For this, the study of oral tradition in particular stands to benefit, and not simply because of greater access to larger databases, or even the increase of audio-visual

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[34] Prior to the rise of the Internet Walter Ong, with the growth of the electronic media of telephones, television, and radio, identified a "secondary orality," which recalled the earlier form but "is essentially a more deliberate and self-conscious orality" (136).

[35] In volume 18, see Peterson, p. 167; Orchard p.226; Hale p. 91; Johnston p.192; Davies p. 189.

recordings. The most profound effect may be the way the Internet, as a labyrinthal network, corresponds to the networks of oral tradition. John Miles Foley links these networking strategies to the "pathways" of oral tradition, using the concept of the Greek *oimai*, "pathways," which the bard explains as enabling his art in the *Odyssey*. The similarities of these two are not superficial, but structural. Foley explains, "both depend on links rather than items, on connections rather than spatialized, warehousable objects," both allow for "multiple possibilities" (2002:220). The online medium seems a much better fit for oral tradition than the book has been. Where the book provided a single, well-trodden road, the Internet lets you pick your route: "Manifold destinations await us; alternative outcomes beckon; no single trajectory is 'correct,' each experience is different" (2002:221). The medium of the Internet reintroduces the multiformity of oral tradition. The destination, unlike the book, is anything but determined.

For Foley, the benefits of this coupling are abundant. "Cyber-editions" and "eCompanions" to written works can "restore some of the experience of oral poetry" through interactive texts, hypertextual links and multi-media. In carrying this out, the journal *Oral Tradition* is now based entirely online, available free of charge to anyone with Internet access. The journal, already accompanied by multi-media eCompanions, will continue to mine the potential of its new medium in the future, perhaps allowing a more interactive format for scholarly discourse through "third-party footnoting" and embedded links. While it is always perilous to make predictions, we can be certain that

the Internet will play an increasingly larger role in communication and scholarship of oral tradition.[36]

Conclusions

Having surveyed the growth, development, and new directions in oral traditional studies, I will conclude with some suggestions regarding what characterizes oral traditional studies, and what I find it has to offer for future inquiry.

1. A Form-Functionalist Approach

At present, an area of great promise is the study of how groups shape and order experience through oral traditional forms. Such an approach looks at how formal elements and generic categories provide meaningful social and personal experiences.[37] John Miles Foley, for example, has studied the *tužbalica,* a South Slavic funeral lament, examining how the ritualized form functions within this society as a vehicle for mourning and healing (Foley 2002: 131-2).[38] A functional approach looks at how oral traditional forms articulate social meanings, taking into account the way formal and aesthetic elements operate within the group to shape its experiences and perceptions. In this light, the *tužbalica* can be seen not simply as a traditional form, but as an affective one; it shapes how a group sees and experiences loss, providing a traditional channel in which that bereavement can be meaningfully felt.

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[36] Foley is currently working on *The Pathways Project*, which incorporates a number of these features, including a blog, a content aggregator, a full database, an eEdition and eCompanion; see further www.pathwaysproject.org. The journal *Oral Tradition* can be viewed at /http://journal.oraltradition.org.
[37] While this approach may recall aspects of biblical Form Criticism, in its quest to uncover forms and genres as situated in *Sitz-im-Leben*, it diverges by being less concerned with the goal of "original" forms, focusing instead on the social and personal dynamics of formal elements in their traditional contexts.
[38] Foley's Immanent Art works much in this way, linking traditional structures, such as Homeric formulae, to a traditionally-embedded aesthetic.

Whether religious liturgy or love lyric, oral traditions provide forms for different types of experiences. The Homeric hexameter, for instance, might identify for the traditional audience a special mode of heroic verse, and through the aesthetics of that form usher in the mythology of the group in a way particular to it. Likewise, certain rhythmic or imagistic patterns in Old English or South Slavic charms channel expectation for verbal art of a supernatural order. These are not simply containers of some magical "content," but are a means of fashioning, through image, meter, and other elements, the presence of magical power. Or we might ask, how do the aggressive forms of hip hop enable it as an effective venue for social critique? How do they allow the rapper to reconfigure his or her own position with respect to the larger society? By exploring the elements of this social form, these questions provide insight into what hip hop uniquely offers, perhaps supplying clues to why generically it has gained such cultural ascendancy. Recent scholarship seems to be moving in this direction, examining formal features for what work they do in their traditional and cultural context. Looking at the recent scholarship regarding oral tradition in folklore studies, Ülo Valk states: "A crucial step has been made from genre as a tool of archival classification to understanding it as a form of artistic expression and of verbalization of a special worldview or modality of verbal thinking" (140).

Such an approach sees form as working in concert with function. Rather than viewing form as a museum piece, a form-functionalist approach can discover how the particular form provides a necessary cultural function. It might examine how groups have used fairy tales as a kind of "discussion forum" for navigating coming of age or "collective daydreaming."[39] This diverges from certain past practices that saw oral tradition and folklore as a collectible content and looks instead at the structuring principles themselves as the unique ways that groups map out the world. The advantage

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[39] The phrase is used by Bengt Holbek. For the functions of fairy tales in their traditional context, see Holbek, "The Language of Fairy Tales."

of this approach is a more evenhanded treatment of both cultural-traditional context and formal concerns, resulting in a less belletristic view of the role of aesthetics. As Saad A. Sowayan illustrates, "A speech by Pericles is not intended to be strictly a literary piece; the aesthetic merits of the speech are not meant to stand alone, but rather to enhance its public function" (134). He relates this to Arabic oral traditions:

> A poem composed by a Bedouin chief is not just a poem. It would be considered frivolous and unbecoming for a respectable chief to compose a poem for its own sake. It has to have a dignified purpose and serious intent—to defend a case, lay a claim, exhort to action, declare war, celebrate a victory, sue for peace, and so forth (134).

Whether recognized or not, aesthetics always implies and supports cultural functions. While some modern literary perspectives obscure these functions by ascribing literary works an aesthetic autonomy, an attentive study of oral traditions can teach us that forms are never socially functionless.

2. The value of the linguistic model

The linguistic model is of particular value for studies in oral tradition because it offers the closest perspective on the oral traditional morphology, and can be used to illustrate the way oral traditional forms articulate perception and experience. Steve Zeitlin, organizer of *The People's Poetry Gathering*, connects the loss of linguistic systems to endangered oral traditions. He quotes Earl Shorris describing the plight of the Mayan language:

> There are nine different words in Maya for the color blue in the comprehensive Porrúa Spanish-Maya Dictionary but just three Spanish translations, leaving six [blue] butterflies that can be seen only by the Maya, proving beyond doubt that when a language dies six butterflies disappear from the consciousness of the earth (11).

Applied to oral tradition, we can understand traditional forms as likewise structuring

perceptions in ways that don't translate readily into other media. Furthermore, the

analogy of language demonstrates how oral tradition can be both functional and

aesthetic—that the two are not disparate at all, but feed into groups' perceptions and

experiences.[40]

From the outset, studies in oral tradition have been informed by the language

model. The current of structuralist-oriented thought has enabled oralists to understand

oral tradition as systemic rather than substantive, with the linguistic model offering an

alternative to the textual model of literary critical perspectives. This releases oral

tradition from such concepts as an "original" "or a "variant" or even, strictly speaking,

"transmission," since these concepts work from the assumptions of textual and print

systems.

At the same time, oral traditional structures, understood as generative, are less susceptible

to the collect-for-collections'-sake mentality of early folklore studies. In the structuralist

conception, tradition is less static and restraining as it is a system of ceaseless change,

like language. Albert Lord highlighted this connection in *Singer of Tales*, showing how

"oral narrative verse" operates like a form of grammar (Lord 35-36).

Finally, it is through the analogy of language that Parry, Lord, and Propp still

valuably and forcefully assert for us the way groups have highly effective and, perhaps,

inevitable means of organizing, reproducing, and reforming thought into replicable

patterns, without recourse to writing technology. From the vantage point of literate and

literary culture, this appears magical, an "oral writing" that is inscribed on the collective

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[40] While this is the case with different linguistic groups, it is also evident in the particularized language of
fields and ideologies. Marxism, psychoanalysis—or even studies in oral tradition--all provide a vocabulary
that enables a distinct patterning of perception.

memory of the unlettered "folk." But oral tradition teaches us that it is, in fact, the reverse. Oral traditional systems—tied to language itself—are basic; writing is a subspecies. This is not to diminish their differences, which are real enough, but to release them from opposition and realign them onto a continuum. Viewed in this way, the development from oral to written society is not the violent one previously imagined (as Lévi-Strauss envisaged in "A Writing Lesson"), but instead gives rise to new formats and media into which the formulaic and motific find their way and where they themselves are altered.

While the ideas of Parry, Lord, Propp, and Aarne and Thompson have been modified by subsequent periods, their works remain profoundly enriching for us, if not always in the exact manner they expected. Michael Chesnutt remarks that the folklorist Bengt Holbek has questioned "the validity of the international folktale typology of Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson, . . . stating that the nineteenth century records of oral prose tradition rather give the impression of kaleidoscopic variation of motifs and episodes" (197). Yet whatever Holbek's intention, his claim does not undermine the value of the Aarne-Thompson typology. It is precisely because it offers a "kaleidoscopic variation of motifs and episodes" that it provides an extraordinary map of the extensive pathways of oral traditional networks. It is not the narratives themselves that are the location of oral tradition, but the myriad possibilities in which (like language) they are channels of possibility.

3. Using oral tradition to re-open literature

If oral tradition is on a continuum with literature rather than opposed to it, its insights might be employed, if done carefully, as a heuristic to better understand the strategies and effects of literary forms.[41] Despite being written, literature has social functions in spite of the frequent literary affectation of disinterestedness. The fresh perspectives offered by oral tradition are numerous. How, for example, might we understand the function of literary epics by studying Homer? In so doing we might look at how written and oral poems provide similar functions, such as a sense of group identity, but do so in different ways. Or we might trace out the development of the lyric. How does modern lyric poetry relate to Greek and medieval sung lyrics—what purposes and characteristics do they share? How are they similarly used and situated? And what was altered by the process of textualization? As many of the authors of volume 18 have shown, oral and literary traditions have interacted and influenced each other more than has been assumed. J. M. Pedrosa, a scholar of Hispanic oral traditions, writes:

> I have come to the conclusion that oral literature created and influences written literatures, including contemporary works of fiction, in much more profound and decisive ways than previously recognized. Additionally, oral tradition affords scholars clear and transparent examples of different strategies for creating symbols, metaphors, and motifs. The analysis of oral literature also sheds light on the aesthetic strategies of literary authors whose stylistic sophistication tends to obscure those modes of symbolic, metaphoric, and motific production in their work, strategies that rarely differ from those manifest in oral literature (166).

Where Albert Lord saw literature as rooting up and replacing oral traditions, scholars such as Pedrosa now understand the two as profoundly linked. Oralists can greatly benefit from literary ideas, while literary criticism may very well be enriched in the future by the insights of oral tradition.

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[41] For Mark Amodio's discussion on how Oral Theory can be synthesized with current literary criticism, see Foley 1998, pp. 95-105. See also Foley's discussion of the Receptionalist school as it relates to oral tradition; Foley 1991.

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