

FOLEY, JOHN MILES. *The Singer of Tales in Performance*. Voices in Performance and Text, J. M. Foley, General Editor. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995. xvi + 235 pages. Bibliography, index. Cloth US\$29.95; ISBN 0-253-32225-1. Paper US\$14.95; ISBN 0-253-20931-5. (Higher prices outside North America)

Inaugurating a new series from Indiana University Press entitled "Voices in Performance and Text," Foley's most recent book is an ambitious attempt to devise a composite theory of Word-Power as derived from the performance itself on the one hand, and from tradition (the so-called enabling referent) on the other. Foley takes as his starting point three approaches to analyzing traditional oral works: the ethnography of speaking, the oral-formulaic theory of Lord-Parry, and the ethnopoetics of Dennis Tedlock and Dell Hymes (scholars of Native American verbal art). His specific goal is to address the possibility of formulating a new theory whereby the "intersemiotic translation from experience to text" can be adequately accounted for.

Along these lines Foley organizes his book into two parts, each consisting of three chapters. Chapter 1, "Common Ground," sketches the shared concerns of the three above-mentioned approaches, especially their insistence on the value-added significance of linguistic integers as presented in performance. This, for Foley, opens the door to understanding the problems created when verbal artifacts in oral tradition are reduced to texts. The second chapter can be viewed as the methodology chapter; besides outlining the analytical apparatus to be used in subsequent chapters, it also reveals Foley's indebtedness to reception theory, as adumbrated by literary theorists like Jauss and Iser. The climax of his theoretical discussion, chapter 3, not only tackles head-on the enigmatic issue of how oral traditional text is related to oral traditional performance, but does so via a wide-ranging analysis of materials bedeviled by such an oral element: Native American, South Slavic, Ancient and Medieval, Anglo-Saxon, and Homeric texts (66-78).

On the whole, it must be conceded that in the theoretical portion of his book Foley argues persuasively against the so-called great divide, or oral versus written, theory. He then sets out to provide, in the three remaining chapters of the book, actual examples through which he can solve the "riddle of incipient textuality" (66). In chapter 4 he focuses on the Serbian genre of *bajanje* (magical charms); in chapter 5 on the Homeric hymn dedicated to the goddess Demeter; and in chapter 6 on the old English verse hagiography, *Andreas*. It must be said that of these chapters the last two deal more powerfully with the intriguing phenomenon of oral-tradition-become-text. In his reading of the Homeric hymn to Demeter, Foley resorts to a series of comparisons with other texts in the epos tradition in order to identify the "keys" to understanding the poem, while by a close study of the correspondences and divergences between *Andreas* and its Greek source he explicates the register used by the poet to index the context against which the text is to be read. (By the way, the coinage "indexed translation" is likely to gain currency not just in the field of folklore studies but in translatology as well.)

Despite the abundant merits of the book, certain reservations need to be expressed. The analytical apparatus he employs throughout the book is three-pronged. He identifies, early in the second chapter, the three elements that interact to create the Word-Power in a performance, namely, the performance arena (the setting against which a performance takes place), the register (the "contextually appropriate" signals for institutionalized meanings), and communicative economy. Foley seems alert to the difficulty of defining his last item, since he begins by differentiating it from Lord-Parry's "thrift" (see footnote on page 53) and refers by way of illustration to Walter Ong's study of drum language in sub-Saharan Africa.

Nevertheless, when one reads that “once the nodes are activated, the work issues forth with surpassing communicative economy” (54), or that “communication within a performance tradition is uniquely economical” (55), one is left wondering whether such economy is more hypothetical than measurable, and, indeed, whether it even stands on the same plane as the other two items. (Again, on page 127, communicative economy is vaguely described as something engendered by the performance keys and metonymic signals.)

Foley talks time and again about the “intersemiotic translation from experience to text” (viii), as well as the “intersemiotic translation from event to object” (18). More appropriately, however, intersemiotic translation should be understood in the sense defined by Roman Jakobson, as “an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal sign systems” (JAKOBSON 1959). Foley is of course using the term in a more vague and generalized way. But why not simply use “intralingual translation”—the interpretation of verbal signs by means of other signs of the same language (the oral by the written)?

One might also take issue with Foley’s choice of a less-than-informative title. Since such a great part of the book deals with the ways in which traditional oral integers persist in textual cenotaphs, and since in any case Foley is most perceptive in his discussion of textualization, one cannot help but wish that at least some reference had been made in the title (even just as a subtitle) to the “text,” to tip the balance away from the emphasis on the “singer” and the “performance.”

For all this, *The Singer of Tales in Performance* must be adjudged a groundbreaking work of scholarship that clears the path for solving the perennial problem of the interpretation of oral-derived texts. In arguing for a pluralistic approach, for the use of a spectrum model and a syncretic poetics, Foley has dismantled the binary model of orality versus literacy, moving this age-old debate onto a new plane of discussion. The book will be of immense value to students of folklore and literature, and to those seriously interested in the interface of the two traditionally divided disciplines.

REFERENCE CITED

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LORD, ALBERT BATES. *The Singer Resumes the Tale*. Edited by Mary Louise Lord. Myth and Poetics Series. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995. xiii + 258 pages. Frontispiece, bibliography, index. Cloth US\$43.95; ISBN 0-8014-3103-4.

“This is Albert B. Lord’s book,” says its editor in the preface (xi). Most of it was written by Lord himself, and Mary Louise Lord made every attempt to bring it close to what her husband had planned. The book consists of ten chapters, two of which were unpublished lectures (chapters 4 and 8). Three other chapters (5, 7, and 10) consist of lectures and parts of lectures that Lord regarded as preparation for the work he long intended as a sequel to *The Singer of Tales*.

The book is a clear reflection of Lord’s belief in literary criticism based closely upon the text. This is discernible in the meticulous textual analyses of passages from Anglo-Saxon