

*The Spoken Word and the Work of Interpretation*, Dennis Tedlock. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983. xi + 365 pp. Illustrations; Appendices; Notes; Bibliography; Index; \$15.95 (paper).

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Dennis Tedlock's book falls into the tradition initiated by the studies of Milman Parry and Albert Lord which called attention to the meaning potential of performance. Lord's insights (1960), obtained in the mythography of Yugoslav folk narratives, unravelled the performative importance of the Greek epic poems. Tedlock's ideas draw on contemporary communities where the storytelling is current, Zuni in New Mexico and Mayan Quiché in Guatemala, and reveal a great interest in style of narration and in phonography. The author examines the transformations that a narrative text undergoes from its written version to performance, from presentation to recording, and so on. The book is divided into four parts ("Transcription and Translation," "Poetics," "Hermeneutics," and "Toward Dialogue") and sixteen chapters. The main goal of Tedlock's argument is to show the iridescent effects of performance in oral narrative, both from the point of view of live delivery to an audience and of representation of that performance through different media such as the printed page or the tape-recorder. He works in the direction of developing techniques and strategies for accurately recording the narratives, and wishes to move beyond the realm of representation into that of presentation in which the mythographer's voice, rather than cannibalizing the native's, is given its proper due, that is, expresses itself as a component of the audience. This reduction of the mythographic loudness would create conditions for the emergence of dialogue within anthropology by breaking the monopoly of reporting on the part of the ethnographer/writer, and by creating a noble space in the anthropological essay for an *ipsis litteris*, or even better, an *ipsis verbis et sonus* presentation of the native's voice. The effort is kindred to several attempts to recast anthropology as a voice in dialogue with other voices, an interest which evolved in recent years as a kind of sequel to interpretive anthropology. The issue, however, resides in that we do not have yet a dialogical anthropology, and propositions such as Tedlock's, however stimulating they may be, cannot conceal their tentative nature. Tedlock indeed is aware of the experimental character of his endeavor and writes "toward dialogue" and about "the emergence of dialogical anthropology."

The chapters in Part I focus on transcription and translation. Here the author develops a notation for the transcription of "performance scripts" and proposes an "ethnopaleography" consisting in showing the ancient texts to the contemporary storytellers within the same cultural tradition in order to shed light on both the erstwhile and the coeval. In the second part he raises a serious objection to Derrida's deconstruction of language as a written undertaking. The French philosopher has argued that the linguistic unit at the root of our conception of language is the phoneme, not a sound but the viabilization of sound through a graphic unit. Tedlock presents arguments against the Aristotelian-Derridean way of thinking, and harnesses poesis back to its original oral tandem. He discusses a wide variety of performative maneuvers generating poetic meaning in Zuni and in Quiché. Part III takes us to the question of hermeneutics. Since the performative aspect of narrative is emphasized, the storyteller can be regarded at the same time as narrator

and interpreter. This naturally renders hermeneutics unfathomable, thereby opening the way for the next and final part of the book, on dialogue. Here the mythographer emerges as an interlocutor of the storyteller, and thus it would be the responsibility of a dialogical anthropologist to acknowledge his role as participant in that dialogue, instead of recording the narrative as a pretending outside observer. Tedlock agrees that the transcription of the dialogue, no matter how accurate, loses a great deal, but undauntingly suggests that transcriptions can be transformed from the defensiveness brought about by precariousness into scripts for new performances. Thus, by eliminating the spurious element represented by the text, which becomes replaced by a score, the flow of dialogue would be re-established in its full recalcitrance against past and future.

Tedlock reminds us of the Malinowskian principle of kinship between anthropologist and missionary according to which the anthropologist's task is to translate the native's point of view to the Europeans while the missionaries translate in the opposite direction. However, we must keep in mind that the persuasive zeal of each translator is different, and that translation always betrays that which is translated by attempting to convey the said through the written, the narrative through essay, the life experience through a scientific explanation. Malinowski himself fell into the trap of representation—as have so many anthropologists who have begun to regard their métier as dialogical—by trying to write down the dialogues they had with the natives concerned with the verisimilitude of their accounts. The difficulty in the representation of dialogue begins with the founding document of dialogue, Plato's report of the debates entertained by Socrates. The reported dialogue is never the same as the dialogue, and the report written down is different in yet another way. Dialogue in process presupposes immediacy, open-endedness and wholeness. The written dialogue, in turn, is mediated by text, closed and fragmentary. Tedlock does not merely propose a more accurate procedure for transcribing dialogues, but suggests that the transcription be rendered as a score serving as the basis for future performances. (His style throughout the book is reminiscent of an author constantly aware of the performative aspects of his writing as well as of the difficulties brewing in the process of writing that which was said, of writing about saying, and of writing as closely as possible to speaking.)

Poetics and performance are but two angles in the polygon of reconstructed dialogue. The content of the discussion, the participants, as well as the several levels of cultural, social and historical encasement of the situation are also very important. Narrative is the stock-in-trade of Tedlock's notion of dialogue. Narration, however, does not mix well with dialogue. Narrative is the speech genre of the poet whose objective is to evoke collectively shared memories within a community of knowledge. Narrative is consensual, monological, and deeply underscored by play with time and space. The narrator tells what is already known, he speaks without the expectation of getting either replies or objections, he delivers a monological discourse which is always about another time and another place. In dialogue, on the contrary, there must be dissent for the conversation to proceed, the speech interventions must be shorter than narratives in order to allow for the frequent participation of all speakers, and the dimensions of time and space are blown away, as dialogue is self-referential and completely identified with the here and now of the communicative situation. Tedlock's book is very entertaining and represents a courageous and important step in the direction of reconstructed dialogue. The challenge which lies ahead is that of dialogue

itself, and the attempt to meet that challenge may dissolve anthropological discourse and the disciplinary identity of its authors, because in dialogue the themes for discussion are constantly renegotiated and the directions the conversation takes are unpredictable.

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*Commonplace and Creativity*, Flemming G. Andersen. Odense University Studies from the Medieval Centre, vol. 1. Odense: Odense University Press, 1985. x + 404 pp. Preface; List of sources, abbreviations; Introduction; Summary in Danish; List of references; Index of ballads and songs; Index of names and topics.

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In *Commonplace and Creativity* Flemming G. Andersen has provided an excellent analysis of the aesthetics of the Anglo-Scottish ballad. His principal subject is the artful use of commonplace phrases and stanzas by traditional singers in creative individual interpretations of the ballad tradition. In this discussion he restricts himself to the Anglo-Scottish tradition, eliminating Irish and American texts from consideration for methodological reasons, and asserting that some of the aesthetic elements he discusses are not even found in the related Danish tradition. He here provides far and away the most extensive analysis ever of the commonplace and of other such attractive elements of ballad style as incremental repetition, "leaping and lingering," and the renowned ballad objectivity. He is perhaps the first writer ever to do more than extend an invitation to share mystical contemplation of these mysterious and elusive qualities of Anglo-Scottish balladry which so caught the imagination of the late eighteenth century, affected the formulation of the Romantic aesthetic, and still capture our imagination today.

Andersen sees repetition as a structural mechanism with mnemonic as well as narrative and expressive functions. Incremental repetition is part of a system of five types of repetition. The first, repetition for emphasis (e.g. successive stanzas beginning "Word is to her father gone....Word is to her mother gone") is static. The other four are dynamic. What he calls narrative repetition (e.g. "She mounted and rode away....She mounted and rode home") frames narrative, while causative repetition (e.g. "Where will I get a bonny boy?...Here am I, a bonny boy") builds scenes. Ballad "leaping" is effected by recurrent repetition (e.g. "When he came to her gates....When she came to her father's gates"), which serves to mark the ends of scenes and link scene to scene. Ballad "lingering," on the other hand, he ties to progressive or incremental repetition building suspense.

The elements most commonly subject to repetition are the ballad commonplaces, that is, those phrases and stanzas repeated not only within individual ballads, but from version to version, ballad to ballad, across the tradition. Andersen reserves the term “formula” for his discussion of these commonplace phrases and stanzas. Dissatisfied with the substitutional model of formulaic diction he finds in Albert B. Lord’s *The Singer of Tales* (1960) he creates a new, genre-specific model to deal with the complexities of the commonplace, or “formula family.” The principal inspiration for this model seems to be Nagler’s (1974) bi-level model in which a common gestalt on the deep level generates multiple allomorphs on the surface level. Andersen parts company with Nagler in admitting metrically diverse allomorphs and in insisting on a Chomskian semantic identity rather than a gestalt of unactualized common characteristics as the deep foundation of formula families. Moreover, his model seems to be more descriptive, while Nagler’s is generative. This model, then, has a deep level comprising the basic narrative idea, and a surface level comprising the multitude of lines and stanzas in various ballads which express that single narrative idea. But over and above these levels Andersen posits a third supra-narrative level comprising the unified complex of associations that the formula family calls up. The actions described in commonplace lines and stanzas have definable emphases, overtones, implications, and significance, and create definable expectations. Calling up these associations is the supra-narrative function of formulas. The theory of supra-narrative functions is the most original contribution of the book, and over half of the text is given to cataloguing these functions.

Having presented his model, Andersen is then ready to define the ballad formula and formula family as “a recurrent, multiform unit expressing a significant narrative idea, with more or less pronounced supra-narrative function. And formulas may be grouped into families on the basis of similarity in form and identity of underlying narrative idea” (37). Thus, for example, to take a simple case, the WHAT NEWS, WHAT NEWS formula family is unified on the level of idea: somebody asks a messenger for the news. On the surface level the expression of the formula takes various forms, including among its many members both

What news, what news, my little pages,  
What news hae ye brought to me?

from the quatrain ballad (Child 99M), and

What news, what news, my auld beggar man,  
What news, what news, by sea or by lan?

from a couplet ballad (Child 17D). Other families are even more diverse on the surface level. But on the supra-narrative level the family is united again, for this formula always presages disaster. Sometimes the news itself tells of disaster; sometimes it tells of a confrontation which will prove disastrous. But even when the news seems good, disaster follows hard upon it. The supra-narrative function of this formula, then, is to create a mood of foreboding and suspense.

Andersen has identified only twenty-six such formula families in Anglo-Scottish balladry. Since the underlying idea is a narrative idea, the families tend to fall into four categories according to narrative function. Some provide introductions, some transitions, some conclusions, and some descriptions of situations. Folk and popular song includes many phrases with

the same idea content as the formula families: dressing in red, reading letters, making beds, dying and being buried, and so on. Non-formulaic expressions of these ideas can even be found in balladry. Such non-formulaic expressions cannot always be eliminated on the basis of diction, because on the surface level the formula is quite varied in its wording. But on the supra-narrative level the authentic formulas will express the affect of the family. "What news" will not be good news, and "looking over the castle wall" will not lead to a happy reunion. Moreover, the narrative idea will be expressed only in its proper place. An introductory formula such as "Sewing a silken seam" will not be part of a narrative situation, nor will a situational formula such as "He's taken her by the milkwhite hand" serve simply as a transition.

Andersen recognizes, of course, that ballad language includes formulaic diction beyond the formula family. He distinguishes the formula from the fixed phrase expletives such as "An ill death may you die," because these latter repetitions do not denote action, and do not change in phraseology. Inquits such as "Out and spoke..." vary only in the identification of the speaker, and serve as simple introductions, without any emotional overtones, as do phrases of time, such as "It fell about the Martinmas." Context-bound formulations are distinguished on the basis of their limitation to one ballad or complex of ballads, as the "Four Maries" stanza is associated only with *Mary Hamilton*. A closely related phenomenon is "context-bound formulaic diction," by which Andersen means a variation of a formula (in his sense of the word), but a variation particular to a single ballad complex, though multiform within that complex, as is the special variation of the WHAT NEWS formula in *Johnie Cock*. Finally, he dismisses stock epithets as "merely ornamental" and of "no significance for the ballad narrative" (26). This treatment of other levels of formulaic diction reveals the limit (and limitation?) of Andersen's work. Only members of formula families are "genuine ballad formulas" (40) in his system. But a common-sense approach would suggest that these others might also properly be called formulas, even if they must be distinguished carefully from the ballad element that Andersen has made the subject of his work. Moreover, a generative as opposed to a descriptive discussion of formulaic language in the ballad would need to account for all levels of formulaic diction.

The significance of particular formula families for creativity is summarized at the end of his discussion of narrative function. "Context-free formulas...belong to the entire ballad genre. It is within the latter category that ballad singers and their particular style come out most clearly.... 'Creativity' is revealed in the *degree* to which the singers are able to exploit the potential flexibility of formulaic diction.... Formulas are conservative, stabilizing elements because they are recurrent phrases, but because they are flexible units they are also a vehicle for the singer's personal interpretations of the ballad tradition" (100). Putting it another way, singers within the Anglo-Scottish tradition find greatest scope for artistry in sensitive utilization of formulaic diction to take skillful advantage of that diction's supra-narrative potential.

As narrative units these formula families do not have any counterpart, according to Andersen, in the cognate Scandinavian tradition. Even in Anglo-Scottish balladry most do not appear until the seventeenth century. Those which do appear in earlier texts, such as HE FELL LOW DOWN ON HIS KNEE, function differently in those early texts. In the Robin Hood and related ballads, for instance, "lines denoting the act of kneeling" (the deep idea) are accompanied by "lines specifying the significance of that act" (240).

In other words, the formula does not suffice to express both the narrative idea and the supra-narrative affect. Thus, in Child 119, “He kneled down vpon his kne” (action) is followed by “God zow saue, my lege lorde” (explicit statement of meaning of action).

Andersen establishes fairly convincingly that the formula is the principal medium of narrative in the classic ballads, and that such hallmarks of ballad style as objectivity and “leaping and lingering” are due to this technique of formula-based narrative. Yet, judging from the evidence of the earlier ballads, the system of formulas upon which classic ballad style depends evolved only in the British Isles and was not firmly in place until about 1650. If Andersen is right, then the classic ballad, in the form which caught the European imagination, was not a relic of some earlier era, but a product of the very age in which the great ballads were collected (c. 1650-1850). In short, what we have in Child are not “waifs and strays,” but products of a golden age.

A study like Andersen’s raises many questions for one interested in oral-formulaic studies. The positive content of the book seems to mesh well with current scholarship in the field. And yet he explicitly disassociates himself from the oral-formulaic approach. Why? Part of the problem seems to be that some have equated oral-formulaic studies exclusively with the Parry-Lord model. *The Singer of Tales* is indeed suggestive for scholars in many fields, but the model which it describes is, properly speaking, applicable chiefly to South Slavic and related traditions, including the Homeric. In applying and disputing the application of that model to balladry, Jones (1961) and Friedman (1961; 1983), among others, have become entangled in the bugaboo false dichotomy of improvised versus memorized. In this context Andersen’s comparison of two texts of *Earl Crawford*, Child 229Aa and Child 229Ab, is instructive. Mrs. Thompson’s text is so close to her mother’s that most readers, including Andersen, would conclude that it is a memorized version of a text which her mother in turn had memorized. And yet her version is two stanzas longer, with enough differences in use of the formulas for Andersen to consider the daughter the more skillful balladeer, and to conclude that the two versions “present two distinct pictures of the two women as ballad singers and as tradition bearers” (91). Oral composition is not nearly so monolithic as certain readers of Lord would have us believe. The kind of creative recomposition Andersen describes should be able to find a place in any rational discussion of the oral process.

Andersen’s book forces us to confront the crisis of terminology in oral-formulaic studies. As we discuss an ever-widening world of oral composition processes we still use two terms, *formula* and *theme*, which were hammered out in the development of the theory of one particular process—to say nothing of being inherently ambiguous to begin with. The “formulas” which Andersen describes are very unlike the formulas Parry first described (e.g., 1928). That difference seems to be one of the reasons Andersen parts company with the oral-formulaic school. Parry’s formulas are substitutional and generative. Andersen’s are descriptive and multiform; in fact, they are much more like the themes which Lord describes. A single idea is expressed in a multitude of possible ways, as in the theme. Furthermore, the supra-narrative function is closely related to the fixed affective value and foreshadowing function which Alain Renoir (e.g., 1980), among others, has been studying in epic themes, though Andersen does not cite Renoir in his bibliography. The chief difference from Renoir’s method is that the supra-narrative function is ballad-specific rather than cultural and cross-cultural. Yet, despite these obvious similarities on all three levels

between theme and ballad commonplace, I cannot really fault Andersen for calling these units formulas. To apply the term *theme* to a six-syllable line such as “Sewing a silken seam” would take considerable chutzpah. *Formula* and *theme* are old skins. They cannot contain the new wine which is constantly being fermented in the oral vineyard.

Though obviously I do not agree with every point, I thoroughly enjoyed this book. The writing is engaging and clear, the insights are exciting, and even the cover is striking. In presenting his thesis Andersen is ever controlled and careful to avoid overstatement. His summaries of oral-formulaic theory in Part I are fair and generous, even when seasoned with disagreement. Throughout his discussion, notes at the foot of the page regularly and evenhandedly call attention to stray bits of data which do not fit neatly into his compartments. The exhaustive catalog of occurrences of each formula, designed for reference, goes beyond Child to include occurrences in later collections from England and Scotland as well. A final section of the book looks in detail at the use of formulaic stanzas in a wide sampling of English and Scottish texts. I recommend this book to anyone interested in the aesthetics of oral composition, and to anyone interested in the ballad (which should include any English-speaking student of the oral-formulaic approach to traditional verbal art).

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