

[NB: The following review essay, as originally published in *Western Folklore*, Vol. 83, no. 2, pp. 225-65, contained several errors of detail. The version of it presented here corrects those mistakes.]

Review Essay

Parry, Lord, and Their Legacy: The Human Face of Extraordinary Scholarship

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Hearing Homer's Song: The Brief Life and Big Idea of Milman Parry. By Robert Kanigel. New York: Knopf, 2021. Pp. 325, acknowledgments, photographs, notes, index. \$28.95, hardbound.

Wild Songs, Sweet Songs: The Albanian Epic in the Collections of Milman Parry and Albert B. Lord. Edited by Nicola Scaldaferri with the collaboration of Victor A. Friedman, John Kolsti, and Zymer U. Neziri. Cambridge MA: Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature and Harvard University Press, 2021. Pp. xii + 419, preface and acknowledgments, introduction, photographs, appendices, glossary, bibliography, indexes. \$28.32, paperback.

Orality, Textuality, and the Homeric Epics: An Interdisciplinary Study of Oral Texts, Dictated Texts, and Wild Texts. By Jonathan L. Ready. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019. Pp. xii + 358, preface, acknowledgments, introduction, works cited, indexes. \$140, hardbound.

It is impossible to contemplate the accomplishments of Albert B. Lord (1912–1991) without at the same time calling to mind his teacher and mentor, the brilliant Homeric scholar Milman Parry (1902–1935). Few men of comparable academic stature have been so closely linked both in life and in their scholarly work. This is true even though Lord outlived Parry by fifty-six years and during this time, he developed Parry's seminal insights concerning the making of the Homeric epics into a comprehensive inquiry into the nature of oral poetry across the boundaries of time, space, and language.

If Parry, as has been said, was the Darwin of oral literary studies, then Lord, ten years younger, is the one who extended his mentor's theories into literary and folkloric contexts both past and present: testing and modifying, where necessary, those theories in the course of over half a century of original research. Folklorists as well as classicists, Slavicists, medievalists, and specialists in comparative literature (among many others) have reason to be grateful for the scholarly legacy of these two men. Folklorists should likewise need no reminding that Lord was instrumental in establishing, at Harvard in 1967, the first undergraduate major in folklore and mythology in the USA—a reflection both of his commitment to comparative ethnographic research, and of his belief that much of the early literature and oral poetry of the world is rooted in more ancient myths and sacral practices.

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The achievements of Parry and Lord—arguably the most significant dyad in American humanistic scholarship of the last century—are worth revisiting in the light of the publication of a cluster of recent books. These include (1) a masterful biography of Parry by the professional biographer Robert Kanigel; (2) the first edition of selections from the corpus of heroic songs that Lord collected in Albania in 1937, together with much ancillary material, including selections from Parry’s previous fieldwork involving speakers of Albanian; and (3) a wide-ranging study by the classicist and comparatist Jonathan L. Ready, taking inspiration from the work of Parry and Lord, on how oral art forms come to be preserved in writing. The first two of these books, in particular, go far toward revealing the human dimension of the work undertaken by two gifted scholars of very different backgrounds and sensibilities. Parry was the son of an unassuming druggist living in downtown Oakland, California, and was the first of his family to attend college, while Lord, the son of a candy manufacturer, grew up in relatively privileged circumstances at a small farm in New Hampshire and in the Boston suburb of Alston, across the river from Harvard University.

A reassessment of the kind offered in the following pages ought to be welcome, seeing that Lord played out much of his career in the shade cast by Parry. In particular, those who consult Parry’s complete writings, as assembled posthumously by his son, the classicist Adam Parry (1971), will find that when Adam Parry writes of Albert Lord’s accomplishments in his introduction to that volume, he does so in a somewhat grudging manner (as Kanigel points out), as if words spoken in praise of Lord might diminish the stature of his father (Parry 1971). This tendency on Adam Parry’s part may have influenced subsequent assessments of the work of these two men, especially among classicists, with the result that—to take a casual and perhaps fleeting example—the current Wikipedia entry for “Milman Parry” runs to roughly twice the length of the corresponding entry for “Albert B. Lord.”

The present review essay, while in no way diminishing Parry’s status or achievements, is meant to redress that imbalance.

PARRY AND LORD’S LIVES INTERSECT

When Lord and Parry first met (as Kanigel relates in his biography of Parry, bringing to light new details about the personal lives of both men), Lord was a Harvard undergraduate student lacking as yet a clear direction in his studies or his life, but well educated in Latin and Greek classical philology as well as in French, German, and English literature, and open to fresh possibilities. Parry, first Lecturer and then Assistant Professor of Classics at Harvard, was a nonresident tutor at Kirkland House, where Lord resided for the last three years of his undergraduate career. The two men appear to have got along well at this time, though little is known of their interactions other than that Lord provided incidental assistance to Parry during the 1933–34 academic year, his senior year, when Parry was preparing for a major fieldwork project in the Balkans for which he had obtained external funding from the American Council of Learned Societies.

Parry’s project, as is well known, was to collect songs from singers of heroic songs in certain parts of what was then the state of Yugoslavia, with the chief aim of testing his theories about how the ancient Homeric epics had been composed. During his senior year in college,

Lord joined Parry on trips by car to Waterbury, Connecticut, to commission, test, and eventually purchase an innovative system of audio recording, one that proved to be crucial to Parry's subsequent success in the field. The system depended on use of a pair of turntables capable of inscribing sound waves as grooves in the surface of aluminum discs. A toggle switch linking the two machines made possible the continuous recording of live performances regardless of their length, while an external microphone ensured that the recordings would be of superior quality. This was a novel means to capture the audible component of songs of epic length; previous folksong collectors working with phonograph discs had been limited to a maximum recording time of four minutes. Moreover, by ordering over three thousand aluminum discs to bring with him to Yugoslavia, Parry set the stage for an experiment of unprecedented scale as well as kind, for he planned to use nonperishable materials to capture not just songs in their entirety (along with their music, sometimes in multiple performances recorded on different dates) but also to make faithful records of conversations with singers concerning their background, lives, and repertoires. These measures ensured—assuming that all went well—that Parry's collection would be of lasting ethnographic, musicological, and linguistic value in addition to being a useful resource for Homeric studies.

Lord must have taken a keen interest in these preparations. After his graduation from Harvard in the spring of 1934, the spirit of adventure, augmented by some financial assistance from his parents, led him first of all to tour several European capitals, and then to volunteer his services as one of Parry's assistants in the field. Parry, who by then had set up base at the coastal city of Dubrovnik in southern Croatia, accepted the offer at once, as he was already overwhelmed by the "logistical nightmare," as Kanigel puts it, of documenting his collection while at the same time adding to it week by week through forays into the nearby countryside. Lord proved his worth as a technical and clerical assistant, staying on (at the pay rate of \$21.86 per month) through to the end of the fifteen-month-long expedition. His chief job was to run the audio recording equipment, while Parry, in another room, dealt directly with the singers. Parry did so with the assistance of Nicola Vujnović, a Hercegovinian Croat who was a capable singer of epic songs himself. Vujnović became an invaluable member of the team, working as a transcriber and translator not just on this expedition but also, after Parry's death, in both Massachusetts and Yugoslavia.

After his return to the USA in the late summer of 1935, Lord enrolled in the graduate program in Classics at Harvard, later shifting his departmental affiliation to the young field of Comparative Literature (one that his career helped to shape). Later that same year, word reached him of Parry's tragic death on December 3, 1935, as a result of a gunshot wound suffered in a hotel room in Los Angeles. The news of Parry's death came as a blow to everyone who had known him. One can only imagine how stunned Lord must have been. Moreover, Lord must have been in a state of shock when he realized that, at the age of twenty-three, he was the only person who could carry on with the main thrust of Parry's work, seeing that this involved research in two very distinct fields, Classics and Balkan Studies. Lord understood all that Parry had to say about the intricacies of Homeric meter and the Homeric style; he had participated in the day-by-day conduct of Parry's fieldwork; he had gained a knowledge of the basics of Serbo-Croatian speech, as well as the traditional poetic diction of South Slavic epic songs; and he was conversant with the notes for future research that Parry had either drafted or had recorded via

dictaphone. Moreover, Lord had gained a deep respect for Parry the man. There was no one else on either side of the Atlantic with anything resembling qualifications of this kind.

Over time, the burden of this realization proved to be almost intolerable for Lord to bear, as Kanigel sets forth. By April 1940, stretched to the limit in an effort to process Parry's huge field collection while at the same time pursuing his individual doctoral studies, Lord suffered a nervous breakdown, one that required a brief period of hospitalization followed by extended rest at his family's farm in New London, New Hampshire. Ordered by his doctors to take leave from Harvard and confronted by the prospect of an approaching war, in 1941 he began work as a supply clerk at the Boston naval shipyard in Charleston, remaining in that job for the duration of World War II and somewhat longer. He did not resume his graduate studies until 1948. The very next year, he presented and defended his Harvard doctoral thesis, which was titled, as was his 1960 book, *The Singer of Tales*.

In the meantime, Lord had not entirely restricted his work-life to earning a living while aiding the war effort. In 1949, an article of his titled "Homer, Parry, and Huso" appeared in *American Journal of Philology* (Lord 1948:23-44). This piece alerted classicists, particularly, to the full scope and importance of Parry's fieldwork in Yugoslavia. For some while before that, too, Lord had evidently been at work on a volume jointly edited by Parry and the celebrated composer Béla Bartók (Bartók and Lord, 1951). The publication of this anthology of so-called "women's songs," or non-heroic songs sung by either men or women, signaled to musicologists, Slavicists, and folklorists alike that there was much in the Parry Collection that was of keen interest, whether in its own right or for the sake of comparative research. Since Bartók had died in New York in 1945, it must have been Lord who saw this book through to completion.

By the time that Lord resumed his graduate studies in 1948, then, he was clearly committed to doing justice to the research program that Parry had initiated and that he was now embracing as his own, carrying his mentor's work forward in ways that could not have been foreseen.

THE YOUNG ALBERT LORD IN ALBANIA

Lord's initial response to Parry's death was not to despair over his relative youth and inexperience and his inadequacies as a presumptive heir to his mentor. Nor was it to groan over the mountain of labor that would be required for Parry's field collection—"a half ton of epic song" recorded on aluminum disks, plus a large set of notebooks, preliminary transcriptions, photographs, and the like—to be processed so as to become available to other researchers. Rather, in 1937, he set out for the Balkans again, this time as a Harvard Junior Fellow, planning to extend Parry's program of fieldwork into an adjacent geographical and linguistic region: the mountainous interior of Albania.

Lord's declared purpose in setting out on this solo excursion was to trace what happened when heroic songs crossed language barriers, as they often did when mediated by bilingual singers. Parry had started research along these lines in the summer of 1935, working with the bilingual singer Salih Ugljanin in particular, and Lord carried on with it in greater depth in

Northern Albania, starting in Dubrovnik with a crash tutorial course in the Albanian language. In addition, Lord commissioned Nicola Vujnović to transcribe many of Parry's previous recordings.

Is one mistaken in suspecting that Lord also simply fancied the notion of getting out again into this little-known and fascinating region of the world, this time on his own? Once in Albania, travelling sometimes by horseback on back roads, he recorded heroic songs from the repertoires of thirty-eight traditional singers. Working with the assistance of an amanuensis named Peter Preka, who spoke both Serbian and Albanian, he made his recordings by a process of oral dictation. After all, he had no access to bulky and expensive recording equipment of the kind that had been used by Parry, who had brought his own car over to Dubrovnik from the USA—"a boxy black 1932 Ford," as Kanigel notes—to transport a cartload of gear while out in the field.

Selections from Lord's Albanian notebooks make up the bulk of *Wild Songs, Sweet Songs*, a volume edited by Nicola Scaldaferri, Associate Professor of Ethnomusicology at the University of Milan, as a result of research he conducted off and on from 2006 to 2017 at the Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature at Harvard University (Elmer 2013).¹ Seven representative heroic songs of a legendary or historical genre are included here in a facing-page format, out of the total of 114 dictated items that compose Lord's field collection as a whole. This latter figure includes not just the texts of songs, but also conversations with singers concerning their life histories and repertoires. Featured in the front part of the book, after a substantial introduction, are critical essays by Scaldaferri, John Kolsti, Zymer U. Neziri, and Victor A. Friedman. These address linguistic or musical aspects of the songs; offer an overview of Parry's and Lord's collections and how they were made; and assess Lord's achievement against the background of other collections of Albanian songs and the phenomenon of early twentieth-century Albanian nationalism. Two additional features of the volume are its catalogues of the Albanian-language recordings made by either Parry or Lord, plus texts and English translations of five songs sung in Albanian that Parry recorded in 1934–35, along with musical transcriptions where available.

The book's title—*Wild Songs, Sweet Songs*—alludes to a twofold generic division in Albanian traditional song. "Wild songs" is a term for men's songs in the heroic mode, while "sweet songs" refers to all songs of a lyrical type, sung most often by women. While Lord took down songs of both types, his particular interest, like Parry's, was in the longer men's narrative songs as evidence for the art of *composition in performance*.

This term, here italicized for the sake of emphasis, denotes a free yet disciplined art that rests on the performer's ability to generate—line after line, while in the heat of performance—a voiced narrative that satisfies audience expectations, particularly as regards the metrical requirements of its genre, through the deployment of stylized formulaic language and stylized themes of a conventional kind. This was the key concept that Parry articulated in preliminary form and that Lord elaborated on during his entire scholarly career. It is a disciplined mode of poetic performance that can be distinguished from at least three other modes, each of which has its own legitimacy, power, and potential audiences: namely, the arts of *written composition*, of *memorization*, and of *spontaneous improvisation*.

Not all oral poetry operates in the manner described by Parry and Lord with reference to the Homeric poems and other Western epic traditions, as both advocates and critics of their theories have pointed out. Nor does everyone agree as to just what constitutes “formulaic diction” or “set themes” in a given tradition—or, even, as to what constitutes a “song.” Many different species of fish swim in the ocean of oral poetry. Indeed, if there is anything that the criticism of the past fifty years has made clear, it is that each oral genre in a given tradition, and to some extent each individual poet working in that genre, must be approached in culturally specific terms, without fixed ideas on the part of the researcher as to what creative mechanisms are at work. Granting that point, for Parry and Lord to have given a convincing account of how a large and distinguished body of heroic narrative poetry in the Western tradition may have been produced, whether in the past or the present, is no minor accomplishment.

In a later section of this essay, I will have something to say about the character of the poems anthologized in *Wild Songs, Sweet Songs*, along with a brief critique of the editorial methods underlying the presentation of those texts. Worth observing here is that Lord himself never set out systematically to prepare his collection of Albanian songs for print. His edited volume *Serbo-Croatian Folk Songs*—the book he co-edited with Bartók—consists entirely of songs in the Slavic tradition that Parry recorded. Moreover, the five additional volumes of songs from the Parry Collection that Lord edited or co-edited during his lifetime likewise pertain to Parry’s Slavic collection, not to the songs in the Albanian language that Lord collected on his own (Parry and Lord 1954).²

Was this exclusive focus on the Slavic-language materials due to modesty or reticence on Lord’s part, combined with his sense of duty as regards doing justice to Parry’s achievement? Or could it have had to do with the problematic nature of these Albanian texts, which had been taken down by a scribe, Peter Preka, about whom little is known? In any event, Lord never prepared the songs in his own collection for print. Their partial publication here (totaling 4,247 lines of verse), grouped alongside the five Albanian-language songs that Parry had collected at an earlier date (totaling another 656 lines), is a labor of love for which Scaldaferri and the other contributors to this volume deserve the warmest thanks.

Included as an appendix to *Wild Songs, Sweet Songs* is a set of twenty photographs relating to Parry’s and Lord’s fieldwork in the Balkans. Brought to light only in 2017, the photos were graciously made available to the public by members of Lord’s family. Thirteen of them were taken by Lord during his 1937 expedition, while a fourteenth (355, plate 9), taken by an unknown photographer, is of Lord himself dressed in traditional Albanian style. This last photo makes for an instructive counterpart to a photo of Parry, likewise in traditional Balkan dress, that dates from two years earlier (Parry 1971; photo tipped in between pp. 438 and 439). While the photo of Parry is almost Byronic in conception (for Parry enjoyed playing the hero), the one of Lord is less prepossessing, for he seems somewhat ill at ease wearing this bold outfit on his slender frame. The young Lord, unlike his Harvard mentor, could never have been mistaken for one of the banditti haunting the back roads of Albania.

Also featured at the back of *Wild Songs, Sweet Songs* is a set of letters, likewise only recently brought to light, written by Lord to members of his family in Massachusetts during his 1937 expedition. These provide unexpected insights into Lord’s character and the conditions in

which he conducted his fieldwork. When reading the letters, one should keep in mind that they are not the work of a seasoned scholar writing with their prospective publication in mind. Rather, they are the casual reflections of a twenty-five-year-old American graduate student who is enjoying a splendid adventure, and who wants to share some of his impressions with family members whom he loves and trusts. Here for example, is an excerpt from a letter that Lord wrote to his parents on June 30, 1937, while in Dubrovnik getting ready to head into the field (364):

You know, I have not forgotten that Dad's birthday is July 5, but I really do not know what to send through the mails. I think that the best is to send some money with this letter, consigning it to registered mail. We have sent valuable manuscripts that way before with no trouble. So, my dear, here's a five spot for ye, and may God bless it to you, and grant you long life. Have a good time with it. I shall cable you a message on the auspicious day, that you won't think your son has forgotten.

And here is Lord writing on August 1 of that year, again from Dubrovnik and again to his parents, after an outing with a friend named Jack to the nearby town of Chapljina, from which point they proceeded to Stolac, a village that he had visited with Parry two years before (365):

Getting to Chapljina we refused to pay the exorbitant price asked for a car to Stolac, about twenty miles, and so walked. Got about six kilometers, and Jack sort of caved in. We got a horse from there, and took turns riding him. Lot of fun. Jack recuperated shortly, so we went all the distance that night, getting to Stolac just about midnight. The moon was beautiful, the landscape, as always, mysterious beyond words.

Later in that same letter, Lord writes about how he spent the next day and evening (365):

The next day was spent in looking up old friends, singers, and sitting about in the cafes, eating canteloupe and drinking coffee. That night we went to hear one of our guslars sing. It was a glorious experience again, lying at ease on heavy woolen blankets—like those I brought back to America—hearing our Moslem friend, an old man of seventy, sitting beside his fireplace, on the floor, of course, cross-legged, singing the old songs we know so well. There was a thrill in it, the thrill which comes from meeting an old acquaintance after long years have passed.

Writing home again six weeks later, Lord had entered a mountainous region of northern Albania where one could only proceed by horseback. On the topic of his personal safety, after remarking that “the gendarmes will furnish us with guns if it is necessary against wolves, or with an escort, whenever we need it,” he goes on to write: “Yesterday the wolves ate 16 sheep on the mountains near here! But they won't attack men until dead winter, so we are quite safe” (371). It seems that in the guise of reassuring his parents that he was perfectly safe and well, Lord managed to compose a letter sure to achieve the opposite effect.

In vivid contrast to this last letter is one that Lord wrote to his parents on August 25, when about to leave Dubrovnik for Tirana, the capital of Albania (367):

First of all, before I forget, I want you to get in oil for heating the house this winter—and let me take care of the bill—I will not have you fiddling around with those smelly and unhealthy stoves this coming winter. Heat your house as you should and I'll worry about the money.... Your letters seem cheerful, and business must be good from the number of chickens you tell of selling. How about eggs? Are you putting up a lot of vegetables and things for winter?

One of the pleasures of reading these personal letters is that they offer glimpses into the heart of a young man who was to go on to become one of the most admired humanistic scholars of his generation—but who at this moment, amidst his first great solo adventure, was thoughtful enough to remember to ask his mother about her chickens.

During the remainder of his career, after his appointment to the faculty of Harvard University that quickly followed his dissertation defense in 1949, Lord developed (step by step) a path of comparative scholarship that Parry had initiated but that extended well beyond anything that his mentor had envisioned. This involved him in the development of philological competence not just in Greek (whether ancient, Byzantine, or modern), nor just in the Slavic languages and modern Albanian, but also in Old English, Old French, and Middle High German, among other fields of learning, including folkloristics and comparative mythology. Parry himself, with his Homeric preoccupations and his weight of professional responsibilities, never had the chance, though he did have the will, to pursue the comparative study of oral poetry in such an ambitious manner as this. Over time, in recognition of his achievements in a constellation of related fields, Lord was named professor of Slavic and Comparative Literature, and Classics at Harvard, and the wide range of his published works speaks for itself.

One aspect of Lord's scholarship that might be overlooked, all the same, is its self-effacing character. He always granted that he was working as Parry's successor, even when his research owed very little to anything written by Parry. In a way, through his many writings, Lord helped to create a Parry who then, continuing long after his tragic death in 1935, could be revered as the maker of Lord.

PARRY, PARIS, AND BERKELEY

One facet of Parry's character that Kanigel brings out is the passion that he brought to his scholarship, particularly in his work on Homeric diction. The leading idea that he articulated in his study of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*—that with their stylized and efficient poetic language, these poems must have been the creation of generations of poets building on one another's work, not of a single poet of genius—is one that he formulated when just embarking on his graduate work in the fall of 1923. He promoted and developed that basic concept, which Kanigel terms “this Mozartian inspiration, this flash of insight at age twenty-one” (98), in an almost obsessive manner until his death at age thirty-three.

Parry's graduate studies took him from U.C. Berkeley, where he was awarded the M.A. degree for a 65-page master's thesis, to Paris and the Sorbonne. There, in the spring of 1928, he was awarded the doctorate after his successful defense of a pair of theses, written in French, in which he presented evidence supporting his claims about the traditional language of Homer. The

evidence was of an almost excruciatingly detailed kind, enough to convince a panel of five distinguished specialists that his ideas had a firm basis in linguistics and stylistics. Parry's theses were awarded the highest honor, a *mention très honorable*.

When it was then posed to Parry that the traditional language of Homer must also have been an *oral* language and, moreover, that fieldwork among living epic singers might enhance the plausibility of his claims, he shortly began contemplating a trip to the Balkans to encounter such singers face to face. This was to be no casual endeavor; rather, what he eventually set out to do was to make faithful recordings of heroic songs through the best available audio technology. It was the distinguished French linguist Antoine Meillet who prompted Parry to make explicit this connection between traditionality and orality, while it was the Slavacist and folklorist Matija Murko (who happened to be in Paris at the time of Parry's thesis defense) who directed him to the former Yugoslavia as a place where such singers could be found. Parry found additional inspiration in the work of Marcel Jousse, the French anthropologist whose emphasis on the significance of gesture in live performance paved the way for much future research in the field of performance studies.

In the summer of 1933, once his professional duties permitted (for in the meantime, he had been appointed to the faculty in Classics, first at Drake University and then at Harvard University), Parry scouted out the ground in Yugoslavia. The next year, having secured the necessary funding, he began his fieldwork there in earnest, eventually amassing what is perhaps the most extensive collection of South Slavic folklore that has ever been generated.

Parry, then, was not just a brilliant thinker. As Kanigel emphasizes, he was also a man of action, unafraid to advance his ideas through bold steps, whether through his largely independent program of studies in Paris or through his major program of ethnographic fieldwork in an out-of-the-way part of the world. This latter endeavor was practically unheard of among the classicists who were his mentors or peers.

In this latter connection, Parry's intellectual development was profoundly affected by his familiarity with the best current work being done in anthropology, a field that was then in its infancy. Parry's initial exposure to anthropological ways of thought took place not in Paris but at Berkeley, in the form of three classes he took as an undergraduate with Alfred Kroeber (1876–1960), the leading North American scholar of his generation in the field of cultural anthropology. Kroeber had completed his doctorate at Columbia University under the direction of the distinguished linguistic anthropologist Franz Boas, who had pioneered the use of audio recording equipment to capture the speech and song (and with them the myths and stories) of speakers of threatened Native American languages. Kroeber was aware of the value of fieldwork along such lines and had himself recorded the native languages of indigenous North American groups. Moreover, especially as the author of the textbook *Anthropology* (the first edition of which came out in 1923, the year of Parry's graduation), he had gained wide respect for his synthesis of knowledge concerning the origin and development of civilization. This was a topic that he approached not just from historical and archaeological evidence, but also from a comparative ethnological perspective, with particular attention to the transition from unlettered societies to ones where the craft of writing was practiced. While two of the anthropology courses in which

Parry enrolled at Berkeley were of an introductory nature, the third was a small class where he would have studied face to face with Kroeber.

Parry's classes with Kroeber clearly made a deep impression on him, for they initiated a series of contacts between the two men that continued to the end of Parry's life. The connection between them was more than an intellectual one, for Parry seems to have met his future wife, Marian (born Marian Thanhouser), through their shared interests in anthropology while the two of them were undergraduates at Berkeley. Kanigel makes a point of addressing Marian Parry's background, character, and point of view (as far as the evidence permits) as an integral part of his biography of Parry. Marian took four courses in anthropology at Berkeley and was an active member of what Kanigel calls "the anthropology crowd" on campus. This was a group of students, faculty, and hangers-on who shared easy companionability and "advanced views" on sex. Their faculty mentors or heroes were Alfred Kroeber and Kroeber's colleague Robert Lowie. While little is known about the details of Marian's relationship with Parry at this time, it is a fact that during Milman's senior year, Marian informed him that she was pregnant with a child whom they both accepted as his. The two were married that May. They spent the next several months living first in the Berkeley hills, then at a former poultry farm near Santa Cruz, and then in Mill Valley. Their first child, Adam, was born that fall.

Five years later, once Parry had successfully defended his doctoral theses in Paris and had received an invitation to join the faculty at Drake University in Iowa, he wrote to Kroeber to inform him of this good news. He also sent his former teacher a copy of his newly printed doctoral thesis. He wrote: "I am sending you a copy of my doctor's thesis, for reasons personal and not at all academic," adding then: "Marian sent her love." Clearly Parry did not expect Kroeber to have any use for the thesis, which was written in French in a highly technical mode appropriate to advanced studies in classical philology. His gesture in sending a copy of it to Kroeber is suggestive of a deep level of esteem and affection, probably on the part of both Marian and himself, coupled with personal gratitude for Kroeber's having stimulated Parry's ambitions for an academic career.

In the days before his death, when Milman and Marian had a chance to spend a few days in the Bay Area between stays in Los Angeles, Parry visited his former Classics professor, Ivan Linforth, and had a talk in his garden. In addition, according to what Marian had to say in a much later interview, Parry paid a visit to Kroeber. If this is so, then Kroeber would have been one of the last of Parry's friends or acquaintances to see him before his death.

It is a matter of interest, as John F. García pointed out in an article published over twenty years ago in the journal *Oral Tradition*, that among Kroeber's books, kept in his intact personal library after his death, was a set of Homer's works from the Oxford Classical Texts series (Garcia 2001:58-84). At the head of the first volume is written, in red ink, "Milman Parry," with no further inscription. The book contains detailed markings that represent Parry's observations on Homer's phraseology and meter.

Kroeber was not a classicist. How and why these volumes from Parry's personal library came into his hands is not known. One wonders if Parry's widow Marian gave them to their former teacher Kroeber as a token of remembrance and esteem. This would probably have been

after her return to Berkeley to resume work toward her B.A. degree starting in the fall of 1935, some nine months after her husband's death. Of additional interest in this regard is the fact that Kroeber himself, after his retirement from regular teaching duties in 1946, once taught a course in metrics and prosody. Well aware of the phenomenal career of Milman Parry, his former student and friend, he may even have taken some inspiration from it, applying to the realm of anthropology certain insights that Parry had developed in the course of his meticulous studies of early Greek versification.

That is a thought, at any rate. What can be stated with confidence is that if Parry had not encountered the intellectual world inhabited by Kroeber, Lowie, and their colleagues in the Department of Anthropology at Berkeley—that is, if his horizons had been restricted to the standard curriculum in classical philology, such as it was at that time—he was unlikely ever to have formulated his theory about the evolution of the Homeric poems as a result of the interactions of generations of singers working in an oral tradition.

Nor is that all. As García suggests, it is probably not coincidental that Parry's fieldwork methods were reminiscent of the methods devised by Franz Boas, Kroeber's mentor, for the recording of Native American languages. Boas used a technique of capturing a single song or story across a pair of cylinders, thereby increasing the duration of his recordings. Parry was able to record a song of just about any length by toggling between a pair of recording machines, each of which was fed by a virtually limitless stream of aluminum disks. Parry's innovative system may have owed its inspiration to Boas's example, as communicated to him by Kroeber, who had a strong interest in the applications of new audio and video technologies to ethnographic fieldwork.

PARRY'S OAKLAND ROOTS

A different but related matter that emerges from Kanigel's biography is the significance of Parry's childhood and schooling in Oakland, very far indeed from the bastions of classical learning in the universities of the Northeast. This topic too may be of particular interest to readers of *Western Folklore*.

Parry was scarcely one of the blue-blooded New Englanders who were groomed to pass smoothly from a prestigious private academy into a career in business, finance, or Ivy League academia. Instead, he grew up as the fourth child of parents living unpretentiously in downtown Oakland, California. Neither of his parents had attended college. In fact, his father Isaac had started working at age eleven to contribute to his family's finances. All the same, Isaac was a great reader and something of an intellectual, and he knew how to apply himself to studies with a practical aim. As a young adult, he taught himself enough about pharmaceutical science to pass a State of California exam that permitted him to practice as a licensed druggist. He then set up a shop near the junction of Broadway and Telegraph avenues in Oakland, concocting his own medicines in the back of the shop, as was the custom of the day.

It was in this bustling downtown Oakland neighborhood—now altered beyond recognition by demographic changes and urban blight/renewal—that Parry grew up after his birth in 1902. Oakland at this time was a booming young municipality that had become a major

center of commerce, with shipyards and rail yards within easy reach of its downtown streets. The city's school system was growing at an impressive rate and was in many ways superior to other public-school systems in the country. Though from a family of very moderate income, Parry did not grow up culturally deprived. At the same time, as Kanigel points out, he gained an education—in a broad sense—that was unavailable to the more privileged children of his milieu. During summers or after school, he worked at a sawmill near Mount Shasta, as an electrician's helper, and as a riveter's helper on the railroad. He was also active in Scouts, learning rough-and-tumble skills that he put to use in later life.

Beginning in 1916, Parry attended high school at Oakland Technical High School, Located a mile and a half up Broadway and easily reached by streetcar from his parents' home, this was reputed to be the third largest high school in the USA at the time. There were three Latin teachers plus a Latin Club. Parry took four years of Latin, plus a year of French and a wide range of other subjects including mathematics and history. As the school's name implies, this was a place where anyone could gain an education suited to that person's aptitudes, whether in intellectual pursuits or in preparation for a trade.

As one of fifty graduating seniors who were awarded the school's top scholastic honor, Parry then enrolled at the University of California, Berkeley. To get to that campus, all he had to do was to take a streetcar up Telegraph Avenue from his parents' home, where he continued to live for his first two years of college.

My point in dwelling on these matters is probably self-evident. When Parry later went on to join the faculty at Harvard University, where he taught from the start of the fall term of 1929 to the end of the fall term of 1935, he came there as a distinct outsider. His mindset, like his skill sets, must have been very different from that of his colleagues in Harvard's Department of Classics. This is not just because of his studies at the Sorbonne, though the years he had spent absorbing the culture of the museum city of Paris must have offered him an extraordinary education in its own way. Nor was it because his wife Marian was Jewish, in an era when antisemitism was in fashion among certain members of the Eastern elite. It was also because he had grown up in a down-to-earth West Coast milieu where hands-on, practical skills were part of the rhythm of life. Mechanics, electronics, practical mathematics—such subjects as these presented no mysteries to him.

Marian commented on this side of her husband's character in a later account of their life together. "He could fix anything," she remarked to an interviewer. Parry's success as a fieldworker, dealing with the logistics of travel and battery-driven recording equipment in a remote mountainous district where much could go wrong (and some things did), is hard to understand unless one reflects on his background as the confident, self-reliant son of a self-made Oakland shopkeeper.

CONVERTING SONG TO PRINT: JONATHAN L. READY'S CONTRIBUTION

One question pursued by both Parry and Lord, though in a selective and pioneering way rather than systematically, was that of the textualization of oral art forms. If the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were indeed the products of an early Greek tradition of oral epic poetry that existed before the

making of those texts, then by what process did those songs crystalize into their extant written forms? Moreover, what changes might have been involved in that process, whether as regards the length of the extant works, their style (including their degree of ornamentation), their narrative complexity, their degree of metrical regularity or eccentricity, or other factors?

Parry and Lord approached this historical question in an ethnographically informed way, adopting methods not unlike those of “living history” or ethno-archaeology, both of which owe their inspiration to scientific models pioneered in the field of physical geology. That is, they conducted experiments involving observation of processes that can be witnessed today. They made a point of recording epic and lyric texts in a variety of social contexts and by several different means, recording some performances on audio recording equipment, while others they recorded by hand through a process of oral dictation to a scribe competent in the language. Lord reported on his findings in his seminal essay, “Homer’s Originality: Oral Dictated Texts” (Lord 1953:124-134), published not long after the completion of his doctoral dissertation in 1949. Here he presented a hypothesis concerning how an epic song of the length and complexity of one of the Homeric poems could have been recorded through a process of dictation, postulating that a singer—a recognized master in his trade—could have sung or recited a poem of this character to a team of intelligent and capable scribes over a period of some days, followed by the publication of a collated version of those results in the form of a fair copy meant for posterity. This system of collection and text-making, Lord maintained, could result in version of a poem that is actually superior, from an aesthetic perspective, to one that might be heard in an extempore oral setting, given both the factors that can disrupt a live performance and those that can encourage amplitude and thoughtfulness of expression, as well as narrative continuity and consistency of detail, in a text designed for the eyes of future readers. Questions and problems attendant on the textualization of oral literary forms have naturally continued to abound, however.³

Questions along such lines are addressed in an admirably comprehensive fashion by Jonathan L. Ready in his 2019 book, *Orality, Textuality, and the Homeric Epics*. The book’s subtitle, *An Interdisciplinary Study of Oral Texts, Dictated Texts, and Wild Texts*, makes clear that Ready embraces the ethnographic methods adopted by Parry and Lord. Indeed, with its 53-page list of Works Cited, Ready’s book confirms the vast impact that the work of Parry and Lord has had not just among classicists, but also among scholars specializing in any number of time periods and geographical areas of the world where the dynamics of the interface of oral and literary art forms require consideration. With its close citational reference to the work of such scholars as the folklorists Lauri Honko, Jeff Todd Titon, and Amy Schuman; the medievalist and Central Asian specialist Karl Reichl; the Africanists Harold Scheub and Karin Barber; the South Asian religious studies specialist Linda Hess; and the Old English specialist Carol Pasternack (insights by all of whom are cited pertinently in the first three pages of the book), Ready makes clear how deeply the legacy of Parry and Lord has pervaded the humanistic scholarship of the past half century. Drawing as well on the work of such other specialists in oral poetry and poetics as John Miles Foley, Richard Bauman, and Dennis Tedlock, Ready directs precise attention to the question of what happens, or what can be expected to happen, when an oral art form is transmuted into a textual equivalent through the mediation (normally) of persons other than the singer. Indeed, Ready’s book can be viewed as a textbook example of how crucial it is to employ a comparative and cross-disciplinary approach, one that collapses the distinction of past and present and that freely crosses geographic, ethnic, or linguistic boundaries, when seeking

answers to foundational questions regarding the relation of literature to the realm of oral art forms.

Aware of the multiformity of oral traditions, Ready makes a useful distinction between “the *Iliad*” and “the *Odyssey*,” with the titles of those works italicized in recognition of their fixed form in modern editions, and “the Iliad” and “the Odyssey,” with reference to the multiple versions and variants of these two poems or song-clusters that are likely to have existed in prehistory, before the advent of a single authorized version of each. When we turn to other traditions than the ancient Greek, a distinction of such a kind is self-evident, with or without the special use of italics. Scholars already speak of “the Oxford *Roland*” (Bodleian Digby 23), for example, to distinguish one particularly prized manuscript version of the *Chanson de Roland* from other versions and variants of that song that have survived.

Somewhat provocatively, when Ready speaks of “oral texts,” he makes clear that he is not only thinking of songs that have been preserved in writing. In Part I of his book, Ready directs his attention to passages of oral poetry that have been “entextualized,” or solidified into memorable and repeatable forms, without the intervention of writing. This dimension of his research might at first cause confusion among readers unaccustomed to distinguishing (as he does) between a singer *entextualizing* certain memorable words or passages in the course of repeated oral performance, and a collector’s *textualizing* those same words by writing them down. Still the phenomenon in question must be reckoned with. This aspect of Ready’s study works somewhat against Parry’s and Lord’s argument that a skilled singer of tales (as opposed to a memorizer) incrementally creates a new version of a song, always along disciplined traditional lines, each time he sings it. Without disputing that general point, Ready refines it by arguing for a model of oral epic composition that leaves more room for the workings of memory, citing examples of a singer’s use of more-or-less fixed blocks of verse that can be incorporated into a narrative either by a process of self-quotation, as it were, or in a kind of dialogue with other singers. Verbatim recall of whole passages too, then, is an aspect of the art of the singer of tales.

By the term “dictated texts,” Ready refers more strictly to the words of songs that have been captured in writing. As for what Ready calls “wild texts,” this term pertains to classical studies. These are records of the two great Homeric poems that have been preserved on papyrus that happen to have survived in fragmentary form, chiefly thanks to the arid conditions in which they were stored. These stray texts are “wild” by virtue of being inconsistent, in certain details at least, with the canonical versions of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* that can be read in modern critical editions, which are based on the medieval manuscript tradition. Ready argues that these variant papyrus texts are scribal in origin: they represent the efforts of individual scribes, ones who were competent in the conventions of Homeric verse-making, to reshape parts of these poems according to their own aims and aesthetics. Here he draws on work done in Old English studies by A.N. Doane and others who have sought to extend Parry’s and Lord’s insights into the area of manuscript studies.

Although the first and last of the three main parts of Ready’s book present many arresting insights—these are the parts where he develops his thoughts concerning the “entextualized” (or most memorable) parts of Homer’s oral compositions and concerning “wild texts,” respectively—the main interest of Ready’s book for folklorists is likely to reside in the long

central part titled “The Emergence of Written Texts.” Here he engages with a great deal of evidence concerning the processes by which written versions of orally produced songs are generated.

Departing from assumptions that others have adopted in the past, Ready rightly emphasizes how distinct the two realms of orality and literacy/textuality are, whether considered from a sociological or from a philological perspective. In particular, he demolishes the assumption that the act of collection involves only a modest impact on the character of a text. Instead, he calls attention to the fact that many examples of “oral literature” have been subject to editorial intervention to such an extent as to constitute a new kind of literature, neither oral nor written in nature but rather a hybrid of some kind. In my own writings, correspondingly, I have referred to texts produced through acts of oral dictation, or via audio recordings in recent times, as examples of “literature of the third domain”; and I have suggested that this “third” category, ontologically distinct from either live performance or works of elite literature, is a major one, seeing that such a great proportion of world literature pertains to it. In like manner, Ready emphasizes that collectors are *text-makers*, not just passive recorders of oral literature. He draws on numerous examples to show that the assumption that collectors edit their texts only minimally is “exceedingly unlikely,” given that so many examples of more aggressive editing are at hand.

Ready is to be commended, then, for highlighting what he calls “the messy realities” of textualization. Attention to this aspect of oral literary studies forbids easy generalizations concerning the fidelity of a written record of an oral poem to its real or putative source. It also affects one’s focus when viewing the processes by which works of the third domain are produced. If we want to understand the making and the character of many of the great works of “oral literature” that have been produced in the past or that have been created and recorded in our own time, then this may mean focusing attention not just on the skilled singer of tales, the poised master of his craft—the one whom I have elsewhere called the strong tradition-bearer, capable both of perpetuating his tradition and of urging it into new forms—nor just the collector in the field or at a desk, but also the whole team of scribes, patrons, editors, and publishers who are potentially involved in the transmutation of word into print, often in roles that overlap with one another.

An ancillary benefit of Ready’s book is that, working in the Parry/Lord tradition, it demonstrates the power of studies in folklore, linguistic anthropology, and ethnography to illuminate the dynamics by which major literary works of the past are likely to have come into being: works for which texts survive, but with no solid information as to how those texts were made.

EDITING WILD SONGS, SWEET SONGS

In a previous section of this essay, I characterized the volume *Wild Songs, Sweet Songs*, which presents significant parts of Albert Lord’s 1937 Albanian fieldwork to the public for the first time, as a “labor of love.” The volume includes texts and translations of seven songs collected by Lord by hand, including one, titled *Kanga e Sirotin Alis* or “The Song of Sirotin Ali,” that numbers no fewer than 2,163 lines of verse. These texts are presented alongside an additional five songs sung in Albanian that Parry recorded from bilingual singers during his 1934–35

expedition. The methods by which this welcome collection of songs is presented to the public could have been improved, however, if the songs had been presented according to editorial standards commensurate with those adopted by Lord and David E. Bynum when editing or co-editing the volumes of *Serbocroatian Heroic Songs* that have been published under the auspices of the Parry Collection.

To begin with, the texts lack explanatory notes. Readers encountering these poems for the first time might therefore not know what to think, for example, when one and the same character is named by different names; or when a named character enters the scene who was evidently well known to the original audience but who is a blank to us; or when a king (in the climactic action of *Kanga e Sirotin Alis*) assembles a large army to defend his city, even though a man who was evidently that same king was previously sliced into two parts. Nor will the reader necessarily know at once what to make of such a passage as the following one, when Ali's bride-to-be and her mother are looking down from the ramparts of their fortress in the direction of an unknown figure riding toward them (268–69):

And the girl said to her mother:
 “Do you know of anything you can tell me, mother?
 Something is coming across the plain like lightning
 and it looks redder than blood. 740
 On its back it has a white dove,
 and a black raven is trapping it.”
 She made no room for her mother.
 The mother addressed the girl and said:
 “Your two eyes are getting old, mother dearest. 745
 That which is redder than blood,
 coming across the plain like lightning,
 is Ali's bay horse, mother.
 And the dove that has jumped on its back
 are the white clothes Ali has. 750
 And the black raven behind him
 Is Kapitan Milosh taken prisoner.”
 The girl rejoiced and rose to her feet!

While the gist of this scene is clear enough, one looks in vain for an editorial note to explain that when the mother addresses her daughter as “mother dearest” and again as “mother” (at lines 745 and 748), what the singer must have meant to say is “daughter dearest” and “daughter.” The presence of such a slip as this in the heat of performance is not surprising, especially if wine or raki had been flowing on the occasion when the song was recorded (for the laws of hospitality demanded that Lord keep his informants supplied with liquid refreshment, a major draw for them). The stumbling block at this point in the song arises from no more than the lack of a note to flag the singer's mistake.

The lack of a substantial introduction to each of these songs is likewise regrettable. To take up the same song *Kanga e Sirotin Alis* as an example: all that we are told in the brief headnote to this song is that the singer was Adem Brahimi, the genre is “Legendary song,” and

the song was taken down by dictation at Tropoja—an otherwise unidentified place—beginning on September 24, 1937. Only when one consults other sections of the book does one come across the information that Lord took down eighteen additional songs from Brahimi, who was fifty-seven years old at the time, and that Brahimi was born in Vuthaj (present-day Gucinje), Montenegro, and began to sing at age sixteen, having learned the art of singing heroic songs from his father and others (information from p. 112). Another bit of relevant information that one can pick up elsewhere in the book is that in a letter dated September 23, 1937—the day before *Kanga e Sirotin Alis* was taken down—Lord wrote about the singer as follows: “There are three of us now, myself, Peter [Peter Preka, Lord’s scribe and interpreter], and an old man, Adem, who has a horse. He’s a Moslem, knows this region well, is the best singer we’ve struck yet, and his horse carries our baggage. He gets no salary, but volunteered his services from love, and whatever we wanted to give him” (373). Yet elsewhere in the book (381), one comes across a facsimile of the first page of Lord’s notebook copy of *Kanga e Sirotin Alis*. Finally, only if one consults the map (385) does one learn that Tropoja is a municipality in the northeast highlands of Albania, close by Montenegro to the northwest and Kosovo to the east. Perhaps at least some of this scattered information could have been gathered in a more substantial headnote, or at least alluded to by way of cross-reference?

Mishaps in the English-language translations of these Albanian texts are an occasional distraction, whether these are typographical in origin or result from someone’s less-than-perfect command of idiomatic English. What is one to make of such lines as these, to cite two examples? (The italics are mine; the examples are from *Kanga e Sirotin Alis*.)

- “Have you come here to kill each other / and to *defiling* our house?” (lines 422–23)
- “He jumped on the back of his bay horse/ and *them* extended his *had* to the Beg” (lines 486–87).

Another round of proofing might have eliminated slips of such a kind. Granted, these incidental mishaps fade into insignificance when one puts into the scales what a courageous and demanding step it was for anyone to venture to publish these songs, with their linguistic and cultural challenges, given that Lord himself never did so.

One point of interest regarding the songs in *Wild Songs, Sweet Songs* is worth stating explicitly, despite its self-evident character. This is that these songs are meant to be *entertaining*. In prior centuries, when Western heroic songs have been mediated to the public in printed editions, their rough edges are likely to have been smoothed out as lacking sufficient *gravitas* or decorum. And yet when one reads certain of the more rough-and-tumble Middle English popular romances, certain *chansons de geste* of the Charlemagne cycle, or the Old French *Chanson de Guillaume* (to cite just three examples), what one finds is that bawdy or scatological elements rub shoulders with marvels and with high seriousness, yielding a mix that anyone in a listening audience must have found colorful.

Much the same is true of the Albanian heroic songs that Lord collected in 1937. It is easy to see why these are called “wild songs.” At one point in *Kanga e Sirotin Alis*, for example, when the hero Ali wants to gain access to a fortress in order to kill his enemy the king, he disguises himself as a girl, shaving off his moustache and donning women’s clothing and shoes.

He then joins a dance of thirty girls in the palace gardens. There, smitten with the beauty of the king's daughter, he bites her on the cheek, and in response he is roundly told off: "May God strike you dead, girl! You are a big whore indeed!" But the princess is pacified when Ali risks his life by revealing to her his true identity. Now allied by a lightning-bolt of love, the two of them manage to make their way up to a high room of the citadel, where Ali dispatches her father the king in the course of a ferocious duel. He then asks the girl, "Are you sorry that I have killed the king?" "I am a little sorry," she concedes, but evidently that is it for her mourning. This episode is among many that confirm that a song like this, though indeed heroic in genre, is scarcely weighed down by high seriousness. It is perhaps best read in the spirit in which one might listen to a wonder tale being told, for it blends comic or even farcical elements with scenes capable of arousing emotions of joy and terror. This would have been especially true, one imagines, in the days when songs of the kind were sung out boldly in a coffeehouse setting where time and work were of no consequence and men were in their cups.

THE DYNAMICS OF WOMEN'S SONGS: THE BURNING OF FATIMA'S CAKES

Even though the chief motivation for Parry's fieldwork in 1934–35 was to test his hypothesis concerning how unlettered singers in ancient Greece were able to create heroic songs on the scale of the Homeric epics, once he launched into his work in the field, the plenitude of his results far exceeded his original purpose. The same is true of Lord's fieldwork in Albania. Before concluding this essay, I wish to call attention to one aspect of the capacious Parry/Lord collections that might seem peripheral but is not. This is the set of lyric songs sung chiefly by women: the "sweet songs" of Nicola Scaldaferri's book title, as opposed to the male genre of heroic songs. Attention to an incident involving just one pair of these songs, made available in print only now as a connected unit, opens up a window into the exceptionally creative dynamics of women's singing traditions in the southern Balkans.

As part of his contributions to his (and Bartók's) *Serbo-Croatian Folk Songs*, Lord provides capsule descriptions of five Moslem female singers whom Parry recorded in April and May, 1935. The sessions took place in two rooms on the second story of an old stone house in Gacko, in East Herzegovina. One of the rooms was set up as the place where Parry and his assistant Nicola Vujnović interviewed the singers, while the other contained the recording apparatus that Lord was monitoring. "These," Lord writes, "were by far the most comfortable surroundings in which we worked during our entire stay in Yugoslavia" (250). The standout singer among the five women was Fatima Biberović, who sang both Turkish and Albanian songs. As Lord notes, she had been married four times. "Her husbands had been a motley crew," he writes (252). "One was a highway robber; he had been caught and hanged. Another was a baker, and respectable. Biberović, the incumbent in 1935, was a gypsy, a worthless individual who was languishing in jail in Dubrovnik for having knifed one of his fellows."

Parry recorded fourteen songs sung by Fatima in Albanian⁴. Since none is included in the volume *Serbo-Croatian Folk Songs*, which includes only Slavic-language songs, one has had to wait until the publication of *Wild Songs Sweet Songs* to see any of these in print. Three are included there. In a substantive footnote in *Serbo-Croatian Folk Songs*, however, one learns of a colorful incident involving Fatima and Parry's hostess at the time, whose name was Almassa Zvizdić and who too was a singer. The footnote reads as follows (367, note 1):

While we were recording at Salih Zvizdić's house, Professor Parry asked Fatima Biberović to make us some Turkish cakes. The pastry was prepared with fond care, as his request was felt to be a great honor, a compliment to Fatima's ability as a cook. But after the cakes had been placed in the oven, Fatima became absorbed in the singing and recording, and forgot her cooking until it was too late. The cakes were burnt to a crisp. Fata burst into tears of bitter humiliation. Our hostess, Almassa, deftly turned this tragic situation into an amusing incident by making up a song about it (Bartók and Lord 1951:367n1).

Since the song composed by Almassa Zvizdić and sung by her that same day was in Serbian, it is included in *Serbo-Croatian Folk Songs* as item 31c (with no title). Its whole text reads as follows; its tune is transcribed by Bartók elsewhere in the book (367,179).

“O Fatima, may the thunder strike you,
For you tried to make sweet pastry,
To bake it, may the thunder strike you!
What was the use of putting wood in the stove,
That sorrow might seize your heart!”
When Fatima took out the pan,
She threw it to the ground.
I came to talk with Fatima,
And Fatima was sitting in the kitchen.
What need to put honey on the pastry?
Fata has drowned it with her tears!

Lord goes on to note that Almassa's singing of this mock-tragic song was not the end of the matter, for “Fatima retaliated later the same day with a song of her own in Albanian, which has not yet been transcribed.” The text of this song—Parry Collection PN 6467, *Pjesma o Kolaćima*, “The Song of the Turkish Cakes”—is now available as the first of the three songs sung by Fatima that are included in *Wild Songs, Sweet Songs* (143–48). At 84 lines in length, it is far too long to be quoted here in its entirety, but the gist of it can be paraphrased as follows.

Yes, Fatima volunteered to make cakes for the master's pleasure (that is, for Parry). Yes, she bought the correct ingredients, at the master's expense. Yes, she made the griddle red hot, “for I knew how to cook.” Yes, the cakes were burnt to a crisp. Yes, she then began weeping: “What have I done, woe is me! / I have burned the cake!” Almaza then came downstairs to comfort her; Sarko (an unidentified person) did so as well; Nicola (that is, Parry's assistant Nicola Vujnović) came too and took her hand. Then Nicola spoke comforting words:⁵

But Nikolla said it isn't spoiled:
“Fatima, don't be in pain;
you haven't spoiled anything at all,
it is very well cooked.”

With its comic twist in the last two lines, Fatima's song leaves one with the impression that Nicola, whom Lord characterizes as “our faithful and wise Hercegovinian interpreter” (Bartók

and Lord 1951:250), was an accomplished liar as well as being as a kindly friend to have in these circumstances.

One wonders how to characterize this exchange of swiftly composed songs. The exchange is clearly a playful one, with elements of self-mockery on Fatima's part that deflect the possibility of her being mocked by others. An amusing amount of collective self-referentiality is involved as well, for most of the company present at the time (Almassa, Parry, Nicola, and of course Fatima herself) figure as participants in the drama, each one but Parry ("the master") being named by name. If I am not mistaken, what this song-contest adds up to is not just confirmation that Fatima was indeed the superior song-composer. It also confirms that the women's songs of this region, like the men's songs (though in a lighter vein), constitute a celebration of the social bonds that joined the participants in the day's activities, enhancing their mutual enjoyment despite the tragedy (in this instance) of their having only burnt crumbs to go along with their coffee.

The exchange of songs highlighted in the previous paragraphs gives some insight, then, into the energy and creativity that pervade the world of women's songs in the southern Balkans. It also points to the fact that, as Lord always maintained, there are fantastic opportunities for productive research involving the whole of the Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature, whether or not this research engages directly with Parry's initial purposes and with the corpus of heroic songs. One hopes that the publication of *Wild Songs, Sweet Songs* is the prelude to additional work drawing in fresh ways on this rich and multifaceted resource.

CODA: IS THERE A FILMMAKER IN THE HOUSE?

Rereading Kanigel's biography of Parry with Albert Lord's letters and photographs from Albania in front of me, right beside my copy of the latest edition of *The Singer of Tales* (Lord 2019), the thought occurs to me that if ever a film producer were to contemplate making a movie—a substantive and yet also entertaining one—on the intertwined lives of two North American humanists, that person need look no further than to the careers of Milman Parry and Albert Lord.

A pipe dream, I hear you say. Perhaps so; and yet comparable films about leading academics or intellectuals have been made, several of them to critical acclaim.⁶ Why not take a moment, then, to contemplate the possible outcome if a smart script about Parry, Lord, and their collaboration were put in the hands of an imaginative director?

One approach to such a film would be to let the lives of these two men unfold through juxtaposed scenes viewed in retrospect. A good anchoring point might be a pair of deathbed scenes: first, as Parry's life flashes before his eyes when he lies bleeding to death on the floor of a Los Angeles hotel room, and second, as Lord, passing away peacefully many years later at his home in Massachusetts, looks back on his childhood days in New Hampshire, his first encounters with Parry as an undergraduate student at Harvard, and his adventures in the Balkans as a young man.

For a moment, let's consider the changing scenes that might dramatize the main episodes of Parry's life, starting from his creekside home in downtown Oakland in the early 1900s. The

scene would then shift to the corridors of Berkeley's Wheeler Hall, where the Department of Classics was based in the 1920s, with passing attention to the imagined adventures of the sexually venturesome "anthropology crowd." Another change of scene would bring us to the hills of Santa Cruz County, where Parry evidently had his initial Homeric epiphany while living on a chicken farm with his young, pregnant wife, Marian. The scene could then shift to the cosmopolitan ferment of Paris in the 1920s, when Parry was living in Europe's cultural capital largely untethered by any academic affiliation or constraint. With another change of scene, we could be projected into the New England of Harvard University in the 1930s, where Parry and his Jewish wife Marian had to tiptoe their way among a brilliant but not necessarily congenial academic elite. Finally, we could be transported to a sustained scene, taking place only a short while before Parry's death, among the isolated villages of rural Montenegro or Herzegovina, with their kafanas, their bearded singers, their tobacco and raki, and their semi-resident gypsies. Here, one likes to think, is where Parry, ever the romantic scientist, came to enjoy life at its fullest.

A selective evocation of Lord's life might emphasize its relative tranquility. Viewers could be treated to an instructive lesson in civility, with images of continuity and change in American social history from the Boston region of the 1910s to that of the 1980s. A glimpse at the routine of Lord's desk-work at the Naval Shipyards of Charleston Harbor during the war years could be juxtaposed with Lord's fleeting final memories, or waking dreams, of wolves on the prowl on the Albanian mountainsides, or of his mother feeding her chickens on the family farm, or of armed banditti huddled in a gorge, poised to waylay a young American scholar bold enough to cross their territory on horseback without a police escort.

Occupying center stage for at least part of the film, naturally, would be simulated footage of Parry and Lord at their collecting work in the years 1934–35 in the reimagined town (let us say) of Novi Pazar. We might see the two men listening intently as the aged Moslem singer Salih Ugljanin performs the climax of the song of "Marko and Musa," one of the rightly named "wild songs" of Scaldaferrri's edition:

Then Musa toppled Mark Milani
stepping right onto his chest.
What did poor Marko do?
He put his hand into Musa's boots,
he took a dagger,
he stabbed Musa in his right side
carving him right up to the throat.
Musa fell to the ground dead!
Marko felt terrible;
then when he saw his chance
he found three snakes
entwined around Musa's hearts,
for three hearts Musa had—
he had them in his stomach,
with three snakes wrapped around the hearts.
Two were sleeping and had no consciousness.

Then young Marco was wailing:
“Woe be it that I have cut down such a man
who was much better than myself!”⁷

Staging such a scene as this for a present-day movie-going audience ought to present any imaginative director, actors, production designers, and costume designers with the opportunity of a lifetime.

The apparently dim prospects of there being a lively feminine dimension to the story of Parry and Lord might at first dampen enthusiasm for such a project; and yet opportunities beckon here as well. One can scarcely imagine, for example, a more colorful inset narrative than might be culled from what Fatima Biberović, the Moslem singer whom Parry recorded in the spring of 1935, said on the topic of her four marriages. Who would not relish viewing a re-creation of her recounting her life story, then starting in on one of her lyric songs?

A creative director could readily highlight other scenes or themes of special interest to women. An example is the starkly contrasting relationships of the two leading couples in the saga: Milman Parry and his wife Marian, and Albert Lord and his wife Mary Louise. The marriage of Albert and Mary Louise Lord was not just a model of tranquility and mutual support; it was also a remarkable intellectual partnership, for Mary Louise Lord took it on herself to advance her late husband's research after his death in 1991, in particular as editor of Lord's posthumously issued essay collection, *The Singer Resumes the Tale* (Lord 1995). This is scarcely how one would characterize the tumultuous relationship of Milman and Marian Parry, for theirs was a marriage that evidently began in erotic passion and continued through, and in spite of, periods of alienation, jealousy, and even rage on Marian's part. These moods on her part were evidently met by her husband with spells of iron-hard coldness. Only with Milman's death was Marian Parry free to pursue her independent life by returning to Berkeley, with her children, in order to fulfill her long-time dream of resuming her own studies there. Although every marriage has its ups and downs, that of Milman and Marian Parry almost begs for the talents of a screenwriter.

Importantly, in his biography of Parry, Kanigel makes extensive use of transcriptions of three days of interviews with Marian Parry that took place in 1981, forty-five years after Milman's death. The interviews were conducted at the home on Dwight Way in Berkeley where Marian had evidently lived since late 1935, the year after she was widowed. The interviewer was a Classics student, Pamela Newhouse, who had ambitions (never realized) of writing a biography of Parry (see Newhouse n.d.).⁸ An inventive director could draw on those transcriptions to introduce a third leading voice to our phantom film: that of the aged Marian Parry. Marian was an intelligent woman, three years older than Milman, with a gift for poetry and other genres of creative writing. A sickly child, she had grown up in Milwaukee as the only daughter of parents who were far wealthier and higher in social standing than Milman's. When she and her husband moved to Paris for five years after he had completed his M.A. degree at Berkeley, it was chiefly thanks to a small inheritance from her deceased father that the couple were able to pay their rent; for her father had died when she was young, much as Milman's mother had died when he was still in his teens. A good screenwriter might well succeed in presenting Marian Parry as a complex, volatile, and yet sympathetic character.

What is one to do, though, with Parry's death and the events that led up to it? Is our imagined film director to represent Parry's death as a suicide, as a murder, or as an accident? These are the three scenarios that Kanigel holds up for contemplation, not committing himself to any conclusion.

Here is where one might have recourse to the Rashomon effect. As film buffs and legal experts will know, this term refers to Akira Kurosawa's 1950 film *Rashomon*, which juxtaposes four contradictory versions of the same event as related by four different witnesses. Whose version of the event is the "true" one—or is there any way to tell? I see no way of re-enacting the scene of Parry's death other than to take shelter in such a stratagem as this. In tribute to Kurosawa, one could even introduce a fourth version of these events, one in which, when trying to play the hero, Parry is shot dead while resisting a Los Angeles gangster who is out to get his claws on Marian's mother's money. While a low-life scenario like this is fictive, the attempt to swindle Marian's mother's money appears to be factual, as readers of Kanigel's biography will be aware. This was evidently the reason why Parry was carrying a loaded gun with him in Los Angeles, as he had done in the mountainous interior of Yugoslavia. Moreover, the gangster scenario is just about as plausible a one as either Parry's suicide, a most unlikely event; or the theory of his murder by his wife Marian in a fit of rage, almost equally unlikely though not to be ruled out; or—the default conclusion, in the end—his death by an accidental self-inflicted gunshot wound, as was determined by the two experienced L.A. police officers who investigated the scene.

Leaving aside as unanswerable the question of the circumstances of Parry's death, I hope to have convinced any skeptics that there is enough drama in the story of Parry's and Lord's intertwined lives to yield an hour and three quarters of solid entertainment to a movie-going audience. In addition, the wide dissemination of the story of these two men and their accomplishments would introduce the public at large to one of the most fascinating chapters in the history of North American humanistic scholarship.

To begin with, this story features a quest for the answers to two questions: "Who was Homer?" and "How were the two great epic poems, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, composed and preserved?" As happens with numerous quests, however, the discoveries to which this one led turned out to be something other than what the seekers looked for at the start. Through an innovative regimen of what might be termed ethnophilology, Parry and Lord introduced the Western world to some remarkably talented people who would otherwise have lived out their lives in relative obscurity: people of the likes of the old singer of tales Salih Ugljanin and the colorful figure Fatima Biberović, the gifted singer and composer of "sweet" songs.

Perhaps more significantly, the careers of Parry and Lord led to a marked increase in our knowledge about the human species and its capacity for storytelling-in-song. This is thanks in part to their having stimulated other scholars, including some of major stature in the profession, to trace the evolution of this narrative ability from a state of primary orality—that is, from the primacy of the spoken or intoned word, with its sacral or quasi-sacral associations—into the complex forms of hybrid orality and textuality that characterize the world's civilizations today.

As Kanigel argues with much justice, Parry and Lord engineered a scientific revolution, the effects of which are still being felt today. This revolution was made possible through the marriage of philology and anthropology. While the present essay has sought to bring out certain aspects of the human side of the scholarship of these two men—a fascinating story in its own right—it is their intellectual legacy that matters most and that is of lasting value.

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Notes

- ¹ Information about the Parry Collection can be accessed at <https://mpc.chs.harvard.edu/>. See also Elmer 2013. I am indebted to David Elmer for having read the present essay in advance of publication, thus saving me from several errors of detail.
- ² Seven volumes have been published to date in the series initiated under the title *Serbocroatian Heroic Songs*, collected by Milman Parry, ed. and trans. by Albert B. Lord (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press and Belgrade: Serbian Academy of Sciences, 1954). Certain volumes in the series were edited by Lord, others by David E. Bynum, and others jointly by Lord and Bynum.
- ³ Among publications worth citing in this connection are Lauri Honko, *Textualising the Siri Epic* (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedekatemia, 1998); *Textualization of Oral Epics*, ed. Lauri Honko (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2000); *Oral Art Forms and their Passage into Writing*, eds. Else Mundal and Jonas Wellendorf (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2008); “From Word to Print—and Beyond,” special issue of *Western Folklore* edited by myself (vol. 72, number 3, summer 2013); and my chapter “Orality” in *The Cambridge Companion to Textual Scholarship*, eds. Neil Fraistat and Julia Flanders (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 205–23.
- ⁴ See the catalogue “Albanian Recordings in the Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature,” in *Wild Songs, Sweet Songs*, 103–104.
- ⁵ Page 146; I have taken the liberty of adjusting the punctuation according to what seem to me English-language norms.
- ⁶ Examples include “The Theory of Everything,” about the theoretical physicist and cosmologist Stephen Hawking, and “The Man Who Knew Infinity,” about a young Indian mathematician and an older British mathematician who collaborated at Trinity College Cambridge.
- ⁷ Cf. *Wild Songs, Sweet Songs*, 125–30 (at 129–30); not a verbatim quotation from the book; rather, I have taken the liberty of retelling lines 121–44 of the song in slightly abridged form.