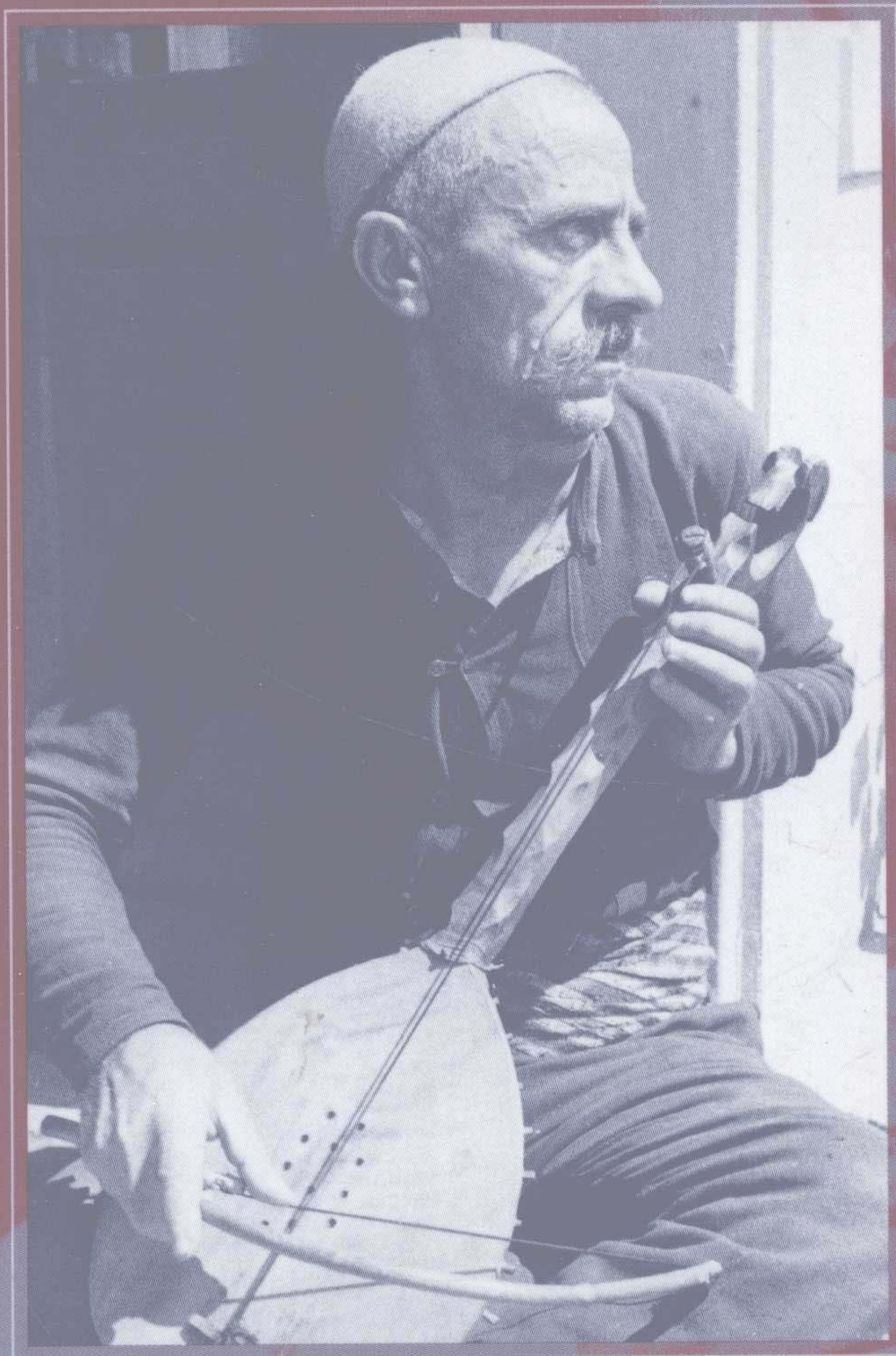


ALBERT B. LORD

THE SINGER OF TALES



SECOND EDITION

Stephen Mitchell & Gregory Nagy, editors

WITH AUDIO AND VIDEO CD

THE SINGER OF TALES

»Albert B. Lord«

SECOND EDITION

Stephen Mitchell and Gregory Nagy, Editors

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INTRODUCTION

TO THE SECOND EDITION

by Stephen Mitchell and Gregory Nagy

This new edition of *The Singer of Tales* marks the fortieth anniversary of the original publication of Albert B. Lord's book (1960). The words of Lord, as well as the original pagination, have been preserved unchanged. Important new features, however, have been added.

The first of these features involves the principal evidence that Lord had at his disposal, the audio recordings of South Slavic heroic songs made by his teacher, Milman Parry, in 1933–1935, and his own audio recordings, made in 1950–1951. This recorded treasury is housed in the Milman Parry Collection in Widener Library (Room C) at Harvard University. The editors of *The Singer of Tales* 2000, who are also the Curators of the Milman Parry Collection, are publishing all the recorded passages of heroic song—as well as the conversations—quoted at length by Lord in the ten chapters of his original 1960 book (pp. 17, 18, 26–27, 39–42, 46, 55, 58–63, 69–70, 72–77, 82–83, 109–110, 126, 286–288). This “audio publication” is featured in the compact disk (CD) that accompanies this new edition of *The Singer of Tales*.¹

Second, the CD contains a unique video publication of what is referred to in Parry's fieldnotes (PN 12470) as a “kino” that, on August 10, 1935, recorded part of a song performance by the *guslar* (singer) Avdo Međedović, whom Parry and Lord valued as the most accomplished of all the South Slavic singers they encountered.²

Third, the CD contains selected photographs from the Collection, with Albert Lord's original typed captions; these photos were meant to accompany an essay Lord drafted in 1937 on their collecting project in the former Yugoslavia.³

1. Production of the accompanying CD was made possible by a generous grant from the Ilex Foundation. The editors also wish to thank Casey Dué, David Elmer, Thomas Jenkins, Matthew Kay, and especially Mary Louise Lord.

2. PN, “Parry Number,” is used by The Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature, Harvard University (hereafter abbreviated as MPCOL), to organize and archive the more than 12,500 texts Parry collected in the former Yugoslavia from 1933 to 1935. See Kay 1995 (new edition forthcoming), which contains complete contextual information (for example, dates, locations, singers, and type of record) about each of the epics in the collection.

3. This essay, “Across Montenegro Searching for Gusle Songs,” was intended for a popular audience but was never published. The word *gusle* designates the string instrument of the *guslar* (see Chap. 2, p. 18, below).

Fourth, the CD contains facsimiles of Béla Bartók's handwritten transcriptions of selected songs quoted by Lord in *The Singer of Tales*.

Milman Parry had no preconceived plans for establishing one of the world's preeminent collections of oral tradition; that he did so was a by-product of his main purpose. By the early 1930s he was carefully planning, as he himself wrote, to set "lore against literature" in a rational and scientific analysis of the mechanisms and aesthetics of oral poetry.⁴ For Parry, who was a Classics scholar by training, the backdrop for this project was the famous "Homeric Question": How had the poet or poets of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* composed those two great poems at the very beginning of European literary tradition? Before Parry, the competing theories about the genesis of Homeric poetry had been formulated primarily in terms of "unitarians" and "analysts," opponents and advocates of "Liedertheorie," and so on. Against this backdrop, Parry sought to immerse himself in the actual living oral traditions of epic songmaking, an idea that he developed in his days as a doctoral student in Paris (1925–1928).⁵

What distinguished Parry from most earlier Classicists who had posed the "Homeric Question" was not only his hypothesis that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were originally the products of an oral tradition that was older than any written literature; it was also his formulation of a method for *testing* this hypothesis, a discovery procedure capable of moving the debate from the content of orally produced songs to the actual process through which such songs are produced in performance. Indeed, it is rare in humanistic endeavors to find instances in which the conception and execution of the work adhere so closely to the scientific method (observation of phenomena; hypothesis formulation; experimentation to test the hypothesis; and a conclusion that validates, or modifies, the hypothesis). This goal Parry and Lord pursued vigorously by examining a living tradition of oral poetry and learning how it worked. In Parry's own formulation, the overall problem is this:

If we put lore against literature it follows that we should put oral poetry against written poetry, but the critics so far have rarely done this, chiefly because it happened that the same man rarely knew both kinds of poetry, and if he did he was rather looking for that in which they were alike. That is, the men who were likely to meet with the songs of an unlettered people were not ordinarily of the sort who could judge soundly how good or bad they were, while the men with a literary background who published oral poems wanted above all to show that they were good as literature. It was only the students of the "early" poems who were brought in touch at the same time with both lore and literature.⁶

4. From the 1935 typescript of Milman Parry's "The Singer of Tales" (on which more later) in the MPCOL, p. 3. The person closest to Parry in this project, Albert Lord, has on several occasions outlined its history—in greatest detail, for example, in his "General Introduction" to Parry [1954]:5–15, as well as in his retrospective and personal remarks, "The Legacy of Milman Parry," made at the centennial meeting of the American Folklore Society in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in 1988.

5. Antoine Meillet, with whom Parry associated closely in these years, had great influence on the young scholar's ideas. See Harry Levin's Preface to this volume.

6. Parry, "The Singer of Tales," MPCOL, p. 3. We see here the germ of a method that we associate today with the academic discipline of "ethnopoetics."

During his years in Paris (1925–1928), Parry had made contact with Matija Murko, who at that time was the most eminent ethnographer working on South Slavic (Serbo-Croatian) oral traditions in the former Yugoslavia.⁷ Still, the South Slavic Balkans were not Parry's first choice for his scientific experiment. According to his student Albert Lord, Parry had hoped to conduct his project in the former Soviet Union (following up on ethnographic work that dated back to the late nineteenth century, especially Radloff's collection of Kara Kirghiz epics from Central Asia).⁸ Political events in that part of the world made it difficult to obtain a visa, however, and Parry was in the end forced to look elsewhere. Once he had settled on the South Slavic area, he began to design a master plan for testing his hypotheses on the still-vibrant traditions of oral epic in the Balkans. Parry elegantly lays out his thoughts in his initial report on this work entitled "Project for a Study of Yugoslavian Popular Oral Poetry":⁹

My purpose in undertaking the study of this poetry was as follows. My Homeric studies¹⁰ have from the beginning shown me that Homeric poetry, and indeed all early Greek poetry, is oral, and so can be properly understood, criticized, and edited only when we have a complete knowledge of the processes of oral poetry; this is also true for other early poetries such as Anglo-Saxon, French, or Norse, to the extent they are oral. This knowledge of the processes of an oral poetry can be had up to a certain point by the study of the character of a style, e.g., of the Homeric poems; but a full knowledge can be had only by the accumulation from a living poetry of a body of experimental texts sought after in accordance with a fixed plan to show, for example: (a) to what extent an oral poet who composes a new poem is dependent upon the traditional poetry as a whole for his phraseology, his scheme of composition, and the thought of his poem; (b) to what extent a poem, original or traditional, is stable in successive recitations of a given singer; (c) how a poem is changed in a given locality over a number of years; (d) how it is changed in the course of its travels from one region to another; (e) in what ways a given poem travels from one region to another, and the extent to which the poetry travels; (f) the different sources of the material from which a given heroic cycle is created; (g) the factors that determine the creation, growth, and decline of the heroic cycle; (h) the relation of the events of an historical cycle to the actual events; and so on and so on. I found the Yugoslavian poetry ideal for the collection of such experimental texts. In certain regions more open to occidental influences the poetry has been largely lost, e.g. in Dalmatia and in the northern regions about Belgrade and Zagreb; but in Hercegovina, Bosnia, Montenegro, southern Serbia, and particularly in the border region where the Serbo-Croatian dialects shade off into Bulgarian, the old ways of life and with it the poetry have been affected very little. [. . .] The greater number of older men do not read; the younger men have been taught the barest elements and read and write only by ear; there were no books sold in the three towns which I visited and few newspapers. The influence of the printed texts has been slight and sporadic, and it is easily recognized when there has been any.

7. See the bibliography on Murko provided by Lord in Chap. 1, pp. 280–281n1, and Chap. 3, p. 283n12, below.

8. See below at Chap. 2, p. 281n4, for a basic bibliography on Radloff; for the same on Žirmunskij see Chap. 2, p. 281n4 and Chap. 10, p. 296n1.

9. "Project for a Study of Yugoslavian Popular Oral Poetry" is one of three typewritten reports from Parry in the MPCOL detailing aspects of his project, as well as the budget issues connected with it.

10. Parry at this point lists his publications to date (see below at Chap. 1, p. 279nn3 and 4), along with references to reviews. The publications have been collected by his son, Adam Parry: see Parry 1971 in the Bibliography that immediately follows this Introduction; the reviews of Parry's work have been tracked and analyzed by Lamberterie 1997.

I was able to obtain in the few weeks of the summer a number of the sort of texts I sought, e.g. several recitations of the same poem by the same singer; recitation by a singer of a poem which he had just heard for the first time; recitations of the same poem from uncle and nephew; several recitations of the same poem from the same region and from neighboring regions; versions from uncontaminated traditions of certain of the more famous poems which have been printed in other versions over the period of a hundred years that the poetry has been noted; a poem composed immediately after the narration of an event; and so on. When I shall have enough suitable material of this sort I propose to make from [it] a book illustrating the process of traditional oral poetry. Such a book, I believe, will be indispensable to anyone who pretends to deal with any of the early literatures. [. . .] In my own field of Homeric study criticism can not go ahead until such a book is written; and I believe that this is more or less true of the other early literatures.¹¹

As late as the mid-1930s, no one had collected songs of this sort in what might be regarded as a natural way, that is, without artificial breaks necessitated by the demands of the limited recording technology available. To this end, Parry commissioned Sound Specialties Company of Waterbury, Connecticut, to prepare a recording device for him consisting of two turntables connected by a toggle switch. The careful back-and-forth alternation of the turntables allowed the normal time limit of several minutes of recording on a twelve-inch disk to be expanded virtually infinitely. In an age when most fieldworkers—whether linguists, folklorists, anthropologists, or ethnomusicologists—employ various miniaturized recording devices, such as videocameras, a comment by Parry in one of his field reports is eye-opening: “I have already written to the purchasing agent at Harvard instructing him to order for me from the aluminum company *another half-ton of discs*, which will be approximately 3,000 discs” (emphasis added).¹² As awkward in design, although not in fidelity, as such a device may seem by contemporary standards, it quite remarkably allowed the singers Parry met to continue their songs as fit their designs as composers rather than the necessities of the sound-recording medium. Suddenly there was available something very close to epic in its natural environment with respect to such important facets of performance as length, rests, and the character of composition. Although it might be imagined that the equipment Parry and Lord were using was inferior, they took great care to procure the highest quality of materials. In annotating the detailed listings of his budget, for example, Parry notes that

. . . the sound apparatus which I am using, which was made by the Sound Specialties Company of Waterbury, Connecticut, was designed so that it obtained a plate voltage of 300 volts from a motor-generator operated by a six volt automobile battery. It was the designer's original plan to choke back the static of the motor-generator by means of condensers, but he by no means succeeded in doing so, and from the very beginning the noise from the motor-generator made its way into the loud-speaker and the cutting head. I was, however, able, by constant care of the condensers and the motor-generators and by a very particular use of the microphone, to obtain recordings free of motor disturbances. Of late, however, the motor disturbance had increased to such a point that it seemed altogether necessary, if we were to continue our recordings under conditions of sufficient freedom and were to obtain records of the highest quality, to make some

11. Parry, “Project for a Study of Yugoslavian Popular Oral Poetry,” MPCOL, pp. 1–3.

12. Parry, “Report on Work in Yugoslavia, June 18–October 19 [1934],” MPCOL, p. 15.

radical change in the design of the apparatus. I accordingly took it to Zagreb, and consulted with the technician of the Bell Edison phonograph works in that place. The result was the elimination of the motor-generators, and the substitution of a 300 volt battery. I have now been working for some time with this new equipment, and I consider that while my previous discs were good, those which I am now making are even finer, and indeed are altogether as good a quality as can be obtained on aluminum.¹³

Although the equipment Parry used may have been cumbersome, that does not mean that it was inadequate to its important task, as those who listen to the accompanying CD will readily attest.

Following an initial study in the summer of 1933, Parry returned for a longer stay in the former Yugoslavia from June 1934 to September 1935. This time, he was assisted by Albert Lord, Nikola Vujnović (a *guslar* from Stolac, Hercegovina), Ibro Beča (also a *guslar* from Hercegovina), Hamdija Šaković and Ibrahim Hrustanović ("two young Moslems" who collected many of the women's songs), Ilija Kutuzov (a Russian émigré teaching in the gymnasium in Dubrovnik, who moved to Belgrade in September 1934), and a number of typists.¹⁴ During their fifteen-month collecting trip, Parry and his team of assistants assembled more than 12,500 individual texts, mostly in written form, but also a great number through sound recordings on more than 3,500 individual twelve-inch aluminum disks.

The number of heroic songs (*junačke pjesme*), women's songs (*ženske pjesme*), conversations with singers, and instrumental pieces they recorded is itself quite astonishing, but the sheer magnitude of their work can sometimes mask more important elements of what they accomplished. In line with Parry's intention of not merely observing and recording oral tradition, he and his co-workers were rigorous about what they collected, as well as experimental in their approach to the materials. Indeed, Parry's notes and reports display great satisfaction with the materials he was encountering and recording, but it is from the draft of a text written in 1937 by Parry's assistant Albert Lord and intended for a popular audience that we form the liveliest impression of how events unfolded (the numbering of the figures cited here matches the photographs accompanying the essay; these are on the CD):

The best method of finding singers was to visit a Turkish coffee house, and make inquiries there. This is the center for the peasant on market day, and the scene of entertainment during the evening of the month of Ramazan. We found such a place on a side street, dropped in, and ordered coffee. Lying on the bench not far from us was a Turk smoking a cigarette in an antique silver "cigarluk" (cigarette holder). He was a tall, lean and impressive person (Fig. 27). At a break in our conversation he joined in. He knew of singers. The best, he said, was a certain Avdo Međedović, a peasant farmer who lived an hour away. How old is he? Sixty, sixty-five. Does he know how to read or write? *Ne zna, brate!* (No, brother!). And so we went for him and ordered coffee for our new friend, Began Ljuca Nikšić. Began was a find. The son of famous Captain Mehmed of Nikšić who had

13. Parry, "Report on Work in Yugoslavia, October 20, 1934–March 24, 1935," MPCOL, pp. 10–11.

14. Unquestionably, the most important figures among the assistants were Lord and Vujnović. It was Vujnović who transcribed the more than 3,500 phonograph recordings in Dubrovnik in 1934–1935 and the summer of 1937, and later at Harvard in 1938–1940.

led the Turks in the defense of that city, he had been chosen by King Nikola to be an adjutant in his court (Fig. 28). While we were waiting for Avdo to arrive Began told of his life.

Finally Avdo came (Fig. 29), and he sang for us old Salih's favorite of the taking of Bagdad in the days of Sultan Selim. We listened with increasing interest to this short homely farmer, whose throat was disfigured by a large goiter. He sat cross-legged on the bench, sawing the *gusle*, swaying in rhythm with the music. He sang very fast, sometimes deserting the melody, and while the bow went lightly back and forth over the string, he recited the verses at top speed. A crowd gathered. A card game, played by some of the modern young men of the town, noisily kept on, but was finally broken up.

The next few days were a revelation. Avdo's songs were longer and finer than any we had heard before. He could prolong one for days, and some of them reached fifteen or sixteen thousand lines. Other singers came, but none could equal Avdo, our Yugoslav Homer.¹⁵

The expression "our Yugoslav Homer" is telling: it encapsulates the Parry-Lord "theory," which has become the germ of an ongoing academic debate among Classicists concerning the definition of *their* Homer. Even in its ethnography, *The Singer of Tales* reveals its Classical roots: Lord's Foreword begins, "This book is about Homer. He is our Singer of Tales." At the end of his first paragraph, Avdo becomes the Yugoslav Homer: "He is our present-day Balkan Singer of Tales." What makes Avdo special is his Homeric aura, and the influence of Classicism is palpable.¹⁶

Further, the expression "our Yugoslav Homer" is relevant to the ongoing political debates and ideological struggles in the Balkans, despite the fact that both Parry and Lord studiously avoided politics or ideology in their ethnographic work. To understand this relevance, we may start with a political formulation by a Balkanist concerning the South Slavic oral traditions: "Both Muslims and Christians sing in the same language and according to the same metrical constraints, and they utilize the same formulaic and thematic material. The differences between them are in the ethnic identity of hero and villain and in the length of the songs."¹⁷ It is important to add that the official designation of Muslim (regularly spelled Moslem by Parry and Lord) was initiated by the former Yugoslav government only in 1971.¹⁸

In the case of the Christian traditions of oral poetry, a preeminent figure is the Serbian ethnographer and cultural leader Vuk Stefanović Karadžić (1787–1864), who published a canonical four-volume collection, *Srpske narodne pjesme* (Serbian folksongs), that highlights the so-called Kosovo songs. The political significance of this publication may be conventionally formulated as follows:

Serbian Christian songs are seen by Serbs as a unique expression of Serbian national identity. This is especially true for Kosovo songs. These songs related events and emotions surrounding the Battle of Kosovo in 1389, which the Serbs lost to the Turks. According to the song texts, the Serbian Prince Lazar was offered a choice between victory on earth and loss on

15. Lord, "Across Montenegro Searching for Gusle Songs" (typewritten manuscript, March 1937), MPCOL.

16. Compare Hainsworth 1991 on Classical models of "epic."

17. Alexander 1998:274, with reference to Coote 1978.

18. Alexander 1998:273.

earth coupled with victory in heaven. The Serbian defeat is therefore glorified in these songs, and in the Serbian consciousness, as a moral victory.¹⁹

Another preeminent figure in the publication of Serbian oral traditions was Petar Petrović Njegoš (1813–1851). He, too, along with Vuk, is key to the formation of Serbian Christian national identity.²⁰

In the case of the Muslim traditions of oral poetry, Lord himself observes even-handedly in *The Singer of Tales*: “In Sarajevo, too, the Moslems were busy reproducing songs from the *Matica Hrvatska* collection and from [Kosta] Hörmann. Most of this activity has taken place since the turn of the century, particularly since 1918.”²¹ Lord’s point about the Muslim oral traditions, however, is that they were relatively less influenced by the printed text of canonical publications than were the corresponding Christian traditions. Lord’s main point remains that Parry concentrated on collecting songs from the Muslim tradition for precisely that reason. Like Parry, Lord makes no value judgment about the actual content of conflicting Christian and Muslim world-views or ideologies.²² Rather, he is following Parry in developing scientific approaches to studying the effects of the printed word on oral traditions. For Parry and Lord, empirical evidence showed that the ideology of the printed word destabilized the oral traditions of the various South Slavic cultures that they were analyzing. When Lord speaks of this destabilization as a “disease” that afflicts oral tradition, he is referring to the ideology of the printed word, not to the printed word itself: “There are very few younger singers, particularly among the Christian population, who have not been infected by this disease. This is somewhat less true among the Moslems, because none of their collections has been given the almost sacred authority of Vuk’s or Njegoš’s.” Commenting on later historical developments, this time in the Communist era of Yugoslavia, Lord observes: “Common fare in all school books have been the songs from Vuk’s collection or, to a lesser extent, from Njegoš’s work. School teachers played a large role in collecting and they and the younger generation have been the chief purveyors of the songs in their printed forms.”²³

19. Alexander 1998:274. See further Ređep 1991.

20. It is a Serbian convention to refer to Vuk Karadžić simply as Vuk: see Alexander 1998:277.

21. See below at Chap. 6, p. 291n32, where Lord explains that volumes III and IV of the Croatian *Matica* (edited by Luka Marjanović), published in 1898 and 1899, respectively, contain Muslim songs from northwest Bosnia; as Lord mentions, the collection by Kosta Hörmann of Muslim material from Bosnia and Hercegovina was first published in 1888 and 1889. Lord is here drawing attention to the new ideological frame of the Sarajevo second edition of 1933. Note too the important observations of Lord pp. 136–137 (and p. 290n13) on the Franciscan monk Andrija Kačić-Miošić (1704–1760) and the publication of his *Razgovor ugodni naroda slovinskoga* (first edition 1756). See also his remarks at p. 136 on the inclusion of some of the songs from the *Razgovor* in Johann Gottfried Herder’s *Stimmen der Völker in Liedern* (Leipzig, 1778–1779). On the “romanticism” of Herder and his contemporaries, see in general Bausinger 1980.

22. The rubric Christian has to be subdivided further from the historical perspective of cultural and political antagonisms between Orthodox and Roman Catholic points of view, which shape respectively the various Serbian and Croatian models of ethnic and national identity.

23. See below at pp. 136–137.

In addition to the question of the influence of print culture on the actual form of a given oral tradition, Parry and Lord systematically and evenhandedly studied the more general question of the influence of ideology on the actual content of the oral traditions of Christian as well as Muslim communities in the Balkans. A salient case in point is their comparison of the Kosovo songs of the Christian Serbs with the corresponding Kosovo songs of the Muslim communities, including the versions sung in Albanian.²⁴

In light of this historical background, we can better appreciate the perspective of Balkan specialists concerning the Parry-Lord approach to the South Slavic oral tradition:

The perceived dichotomy between the work of Vuk and the Parry-Lord enterprise is due more to the reception of the work of each (both in the West and in the former Yugoslavia) than to the material itself. The songs collected by Vuk are viewed almost as literary, inviolate texts, certainly as part of a canon; they also are inextricably connected with the question of Serbian identity. The songs collected by Parry and Lord are viewed as the raw field data on which a theory was constructed, and some scholars (significantly, those lacking a knowledge of the original language) criticize the songs as falling short of the aesthetic standards associated with Western epic.²⁵

Such criticism has proved to be a persistent obstacle to the Parry-Lord legacy. Moreover, it is actually an understatement to say that some Western scholars criticize the aesthetic standards of South Slavic oral songmaking traditions merely because they do not know the language. Much of this kind of criticism, as Lord documents in his later books, has also been shaped by an overall ignorance of the historical facts concerning literacy and its cultural implications in the Balkans.²⁶ Besides this additional obstacle, there is yet another, closely related one: many scholars romanticize literacy itself as if it were some kind of uniform and even universal phenomenon—exempt from the historical contingencies of cultural and even cognitive variations.²⁷ Such romanticism, combined with an ignorance of the ideological implications of literacy in the South Slavic world, has led to a variety of deadly prejudices against any and all kinds of oral traditions.²⁸ In some cases, these prejudices have gone hand in hand with a resolute blindness to the potential ideological agenda of literacy in its historical contexts. From the very beginning of their work on the South Slavic oral traditions, Parry and Lord had to contend with such obstacles.

24. See especially Lord 1984; also Lord 1991:108–109 and n. 12. Cf. Lord, Chap. 1, p. 10, below.

25. Alexander 1998:277. For an overview of ethnographic work on the South Slavic oral traditions before Parry and Lord, see Koljević 1980. This book, published by Oxford University Press, has been promoted by some Oxford scholars as an alternative to, or even a replacement for, Lord's *Singer of Tales*. As Koljević's introduction makes clear, however, his book is not about the ethnographic evidence and its theoretical ramifications, but about the history of the ethnography itself (pp. 7–8).

26. See Lord 1991 and 1995.

27. Conversely, others have romanticized oral tradition itself as if it, too, were some kind of universal phenomenon in and of itself: for further discussion, see Lord at pp. 8 and 136 below. See also in general Bausinger 1980.

28. Lord's 1995 book (especially chap. 8) confronts many of these prejudices.

After the unforeseen death of Milman Parry on December 5, 1935, soon after his return to the United States, the project of continuing his work suddenly fell on the shoulders of the young Albert Lord. Lord confronted his teacher's unfinished research agenda by conscientiously following through on Parry's own evolving priorities.²⁹

As we have seen, one salient fact that had increasingly engaged the attention of Parry was that the most accomplished singing in the former Yugoslavia seemed to come mainly from the Muslim areas, and even there, some of the best singers—such as Salih Ugljanin—were bilingual speakers of Albanian and “Bosnian” (the term used by Parry's informants to designate their dialect of the language spoken throughout Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Serbia). As Parry writes in his unpublished notes, “In Novi Pazar I found a Moslem who had been raised in the area of Southern Serbia which is largely bilingual, who could sing the same song either in Serbian or Albanian, and accordingly I hope to obtain some definite evidence on the passage of songs between peoples of different languages.”³⁰

In 1937, when Lord was a Junior Fellow in Harvard's Society of Fellows, he finally had the chance to return to the Balkans and pursue the implications of this seminal observation by Parry. He traveled through northern Albania and collected a corpus of recorded songs now housed in the Milman Parry Collection along with their South Slavic counterparts.³¹ Then, on several occasions after the Second World War, he went back to Yugoslavia and made numerous further recordings there, supplementing Parry's original recordings from the 1930s. It was especially during his work there in 1950 and 1951 that Lord most successfully fulfilled Parry's overall research design. Despite the upheaval and disruption created by the war, Lord was able in a number of cases to return to the same areas of Yugoslavia that Parry's expedition had visited in the 1930s and even to record some of the same singers, including Avdo Međedović.³²

In all his accomplishments during those years, Lord was following a blueprint implied by the book (also titled “The Singer of Tales”) begun by Parry in 1935, only to be interrupted by his untimely death.³³ In an article published in 1948,

29. He outlines these priorities in an early article, Lord 1948 (see pp. 40–44); reprinted in Parry 1971:465–478 (see pp. 473–478).

30. Milman Parry, “Report on Work in Yugoslavia, June 18–October 19,” MPCOL, p. 4. On the vital topic of bilingualism in Albanian and Serbo-Croatian oral traditions, the work of Parry and Lord has been continued by John Kolsti in his 1990 book, *The Bilingual Singer: A Study in Albanian and Serbo-Croatian Oral Epic Traditions*.

31. See Lord 1948, p. 43: “While in Dubrovnik in the summer of 1937 I had an opportunity to study Albanian and in September and October of that year I travelled through the mountains of northern Albania. [. . .] I collected about one hundred narrative songs, many of them short, but a few between five hundred and a thousand lines in length. We found out that there are some songs common to both Serbo-Croatian and Albanian tradition and that a number of the Moslem heroes of the Yugoslav poetry, such as Mujo and Halil Hrnjica and Đerđez Alija, are found also in Albanian.”

32. See Lord, Chap. 4, p. 94, below.

33. See Lord's description of this book at Chap. 1, p. 279n1.

Lord reprinted the seven typewritten pages that Parry had finished.³⁴ In 1949, Lord submitted his own “Singer of Tales” as a Ph.D. thesis for the Department of Comparative Literature at Harvard. The Foreword to his 1960 book sets the historical context for the evolution of that 1949 thesis into the finished book. In his Preface to this book, Harry Levin gives further context, especially in terms of three of the four Harvard departments that were to become integral parts of Lord’s academic life: Classics, Slavic, and Comparative Literature (the fourth, Folklore, took shape later, in 1967). Meanwhile, beyond the 1948 article, Lord was systematically following through on further projects initiated by Parry.³⁵

With the publication of *The Singer of Tales* in 1960, Lord’s continuation of Parry’s unfinished projects reached a milestone. *Singer* covers most of the agenda envisioned by Parry when he undertook to write his own “Singer.” Meanwhile, the organization of what became the Milman Parry Collection at Harvard University in 1936 had in effect institutionalized Parry’s legacy.³⁶ This legacy, it is important to note, represents the combined efforts of Parry and Lord, despite Lord’s consistent self-effacement. The Parry-Lord legacy is self-evident in Lord’s *The Singer of Tales*.

The clear picture of an integral Parry-Lord legacy became somewhat clouded with the publication, in 1971, of the writings of Milman Parry as collected by his son, Adam Parry, under the title *The Making of Homeric Verse*.³⁷ In his fifty-three-page Introduction to his father’s collected writings, the son questions the links that connect the work of Parry and Lord. Lord’s *The Singer of Tales* is pictured as something quite different from the book that Milman Parry had intended.³⁸ Adam Parry tends to detach his father’s work from Lord’s and to attach it instead to the work of Classicists who resist the comparison of South Slavic traditions with Homer.³⁹ According to Adam Parry, “not the slightest proof has yet appeared that the texts of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* as we have them, or any substantial connected portion of these texts, were composed by oral improvisation of the kind observed and described by Parry and Lord and others in Yugoslavia and elsewhere.”⁴⁰ He finds it “quite conceivable” that “Homer made use of writing to compose a poem in a style which had been developed by an oral tradition.”

34. Lord 1948:37–40.

35. For a basic bibliography on Lord’s work in these early years of his career, see below: Chap. 1, p. 279n2; Chap. 3, p. 284nn17 and 18; Chap. 4, p. 284n1; Chap. 7, p. 293nn4–6.

36. There is an informal accounting in Lord’s unpublished 1988 essay, “The Legacy of Milman Parry.” In 1936, following Parry’s death and the subsequent donation to the university by Parry’s widow, Mrs. Marion Parry, of his recordings, books, papers, and other materials, a faculty committee was formed to oversee the care and use of what became The Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature.

37. Parry [1971]; hereafter abbreviated as *MHV*.

38. See Adam Parry in *MHV*, pp. xxxvii (n. 3), xlii (n. 1), xliii (n. 1), and xlviii. On Milman Parry’s unfinished “Singer of Tales,” see the comments of Adam Parry, *MHV* pp. xxxix, xli.

39. Adam Parry, *MHV*, p. xxxviii, citing (Adam) Parry 1966 and Kirk 1962.

40. Adam Parry, *MHV*, p. lxi, n. 1. On the dangers of using the word “improvisation” in reference to oral traditions, see Lord 1991:76–77.

Lord's subsequent work, especially his books of 1991 and 1995, has countered such claims by way of comparative research. As he announced already in his Foreword to *Singer* 1960, Lord's methodology is fundamentally comparative: "This book is about Homer. He is our Singer of tales. Yet, in a larger sense, he represents all singers of tales from time immemorial and unrecorded to the present." Lord's phrasing, "in a larger sense," refers to the comparative evidence, for the study of which he deploys comparative methodology.

The integral legacy of Parry and Lord emerges most clearly if we look more closely at their comparative methods, which typify the academic discipline of Comparative Literature.⁴¹ This point is driven home by Harry Levin's Preface. Lord, during his years as a professor at Harvard University, was in fact an active member of the Comparative Literature Department as well as the Departments of Classics and Slavic Languages and Literatures. His thesis, as we have seen, was produced under the aegis of the Comparative Literature Department, and *The Singer of Tales* was originally published as volume 24 (1960) of that department's monograph series, Harvard Studies in Comparative Literature. Lord's methodology, like Parry's, is fundamentally comparative in nature. *The Singer of Tales* is a premier example.

The comparative methods of Parry and Lord are closely connected to the *méthode comparative* of historical linguistics, especially as exemplified by Antoine Meillet.⁴² In the collected writings of Milman Parry, we can see explicit references to the decisive influence of Meillet. The most telling instance can be found in Parry's "Ćor Huso: A Study of Southslavic Song," an unfinished work dating from his final years, 1933 to 1935.⁴³ In his preliminary notes for the planned foreword to that work, Parry explicitly recognizes the importance of the living South Slavic oral traditions as a central comparandum for the study of Homer, and he attributes to Meillet the impetus for this recognition.⁴⁴ On the other hand, in his Introduction to his father's work, Adam Parry discounts the influence of Meillet.⁴⁵ Indeed, as we have seen, he generally discounts the comparative aspects of Milman Parry's methodology. By contrast, Lord's *The Singer of Tales* continues and extends Parry's comparative approaches, and his later books (Lord 1991 and 1995) extend

41. On this discipline, see Guillén 1993, especially pp. 173–179, with reference to Parry and Lord.

42. A fundamental work on the comparative method is Meillet 1925.

43. Fragments of this work of Milman Parry's have been published by Adam Parry in *MHV*, pp. 437–464, who describes these fragments as "extracts" (*MHV*, p. xxxix). Mary Louise Lord is planning a full edition of Milman Parry's "Ćor Huso," which will be published by MPCOL.

44. Milman Parry, *MHV*, p. 439. See also his remarks in *MHV*, pp. 8–9, 20–21, 244, and 326n3. Parry (*MHV*, p. 439) acknowledges that it was Meillet who introduced him to the works of Matija Murko (on whom see again Lord, Chap. 1, pp. 280–281n1, and Chap. 3, p. 283n12, below).

45. See especially *MHV*, p. xxiii. For extensive documentation of the undervaluing of Meillet's methodology in Adam Parry's Introduction, see Lamberterie 1997 (especially p. 15), whose work vindicates Levin's observation on Parry and Meillet in the Preface.

these approaches even further. In sum, the Parry legacy is in fact the Parry-Lord legacy not only in Classics and Slavic but also in Comparative Literature.

Since the publication of *The Singer of Tales* in 1960, the Parry-Lord legacy has extended well beyond the disciplines of Classics, Slavic Studies, and even Comparative Literature. The book has become relevant to the study of a wide variety of literatures for their own sake—written as well as “oral.” Part II of *Singer* (“The Application”), for example, makes specific reference to the ancient Greek epic tradition and the medieval traditions in Old English, Old French, and so on.

The engagement of medievalists in the applications of the Parry-Lord approach is particularly fraught with controversy. The Parry-Lord demonstration of a popular or “democratic” aesthetic in oral traditions has met with some measure of hostility toward the extension of that model to medieval Europe, where it suggests the possibility of literature outside the domination of the church and court hierarchies, with their strangleholds on the presumed sine qua non for authorship, namely, literacy.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, the ongoing debates between these points of view have considerably expanded our understanding of the interplay that often existed between the vernacular oral traditions and the Latin and Latinate literatures of the élite.⁴⁷ In response to the vast variety of debates concerning the medieval applications of *The Singer of Tales*, Lord follows up with a spirited survey in *The Singer Resumes* (1995), notably in chapter 8 of that book. Of particular interest are his references to the work of Daniel Donoghue (1987), John Miles Foley (1985), Joseph Harris (1983), Lars Lönnroth (1971), Stephen Mitchell (1987), Jeff Opland (1980), Alain Renoir (1988), and Fred C. Robinson (1985).⁴⁸

The exponential growth of comparative studies in oral “literature” and its relationship to written literature is conveyed in Lord’s 1986 survey, “Perspectives on Recent Work,” published in the influential journal *Oral Tradition*.⁴⁹ In this article, Lord singles out a wide variety of scholars who work in these fields: Karl Reichl (1985) on Central Asian epics, especially Uzbek; John D. Smith (1981) on the Pabuji epic of western India;⁵⁰ Joseph F. Nagy (1985) on medieval Irish traditions;⁵¹ Daniel P. Biebuyck (1969), John William Johnson (1985), and Gordon Innes (1974) on “epic” in Africa;⁵² James T. Monroe (1972) and Michael Zwettler (1978) on early Arabic traditions;⁵³ Leonard Muellner (1976), Gregory Nagy

46. See especially Lord 1986a.

47. On this important point, see, for example, Ziolkowski 1991. For a discussion of the debate among medievalists in northern Europe, see Mitchell 1991:1–6 et passim.

48. In other chapters of Lord 1995, he also surveys applications in other areas. Especially noteworthy is his discussion, in chap. 2, of oral lyric poetry, with specific reference to a comparison of Serbo-Croatian women’s songs with Latvian *dainas* (on which see also Vikis-Freibergs 1984).

49. Lord 1986b. For further bibliography on theories and applications connected with the work of Parry and Lord, see Foley 1985; also Haymes 1973.

50. See also Blackburn 1989.

51. See also MacCana 1980.

52. See also Okpewho 1979; also Opland 1988 and 1989.

53. See also Slymovics 1987 and Reynolds 1995 on latter-day Arabic oral “epic.”

(1979), and Richard Janko (1980) on ancient Greek epic;⁵⁴ Donald K. Fry (1967), Robert Creed (1982), John M. Foley (1981), John Niles (1983), and Alain Renoir (1981) on Old English epic and lyric;⁵⁵ Lars Lönnroth (1976), Peter Buchholz (1980), and Jesse Byock (1982) on Old Norse poetics;⁵⁶ Joseph Duggan (1981) on Old French *chansons de geste*; Ruth Webber on the Spanish ballad (1951);⁵⁷ Olga M. Davidson (1985) on classical Persian epic;⁵⁸ and Ching-Hsien Wang on Chinese lyric (1974).⁵⁹

The Singer of Tales has not only become a classic for the general study of oral and written literatures but has also evolved into a standard textbook within folkloristics. In addition to his tight focus on discovering the process by which oral tradition is composed, Parry was intensely aware, as his reports make clear, of the important ethnological and folkloristic dimensions of his project (for example, the supernatural, belief systems, and so on).⁶⁰ Already in Parry's early writings we can sense the respect for, and the curiosity about, *both* the mechanism *and* the matter of oral traditional literature, and this unified, synergistic view of folklore is fully elaborated in Lord's continuation of Parry's work. The intellectual ramifications of this point, together with the fact that Parry and Lord were assiduous fieldworkers, are significant, even if they are occasionally lost on critics within the "literature versus anthropology" debate of American folklore studies who assume that Parry and Lord are "mere" literary scholars.⁶¹

54. See also Nagler 1974; Martin 1984 and 1989; Hainsworth 1991.

55. See also, for example, Krishna 1982 on Middle English traditions.

56. See also Mitchell 1991 and 1997.

57. See also Webber 1986 on Spanish epic.

58. Lord also cites Davidson 1988, then forthcoming (cf. Davidson 2000); now see also Skjærvø 1994 and 1998.

59. Lord's death in 1991 preceded the publication of important works-in-progress prominently mentioned by him in other similar contexts, including those of Margaret Beissinger (1991), David Bynum (1993), Matthew Kay (1995), and Susan Niditch (1996).

60. Parry, "Project for a Study of Yugoslavian Popular Oral Poetry," MPCOL, p. 6.

61. Zumwalt 1988:110–111 notes that it was Albert Lord, who in her dichotomy is conceived of solely as a literary scholar, who objected at the Midcentury International Folklore Congress held at Indiana University from July 21 to August 4, 1950, to interpretations and approaches that decontextualize texts and leave the folk out of folklore—yet surely Lord, who had already at that point spent a number of years collecting materials in the Balkans, had at least as much practical fieldwork experience as most of those approaching folklore from a more directly anthropological perspective. To the idea that one should focus on a search for archetypes, Lord objected, "I wonder whether it is possible to arrive at any archetype of a tale or a song or an epic, if we consider that in every performance of an art form in oral tradition, whether it be a tale or an epic, the individual singer introduces variations" (Thompson 1953:275). Lord presented a plenary paper at the Fourth Symposium (pp. 305–310), but it is perhaps especially in his remarks as a participant in the recorded sessions (pp. 13, 28, 62–63, 96, 103, 116, 137, 140, 169–170, 296, 313, 316, in addition to 275) that one sees his sophisticated sense of both ethnographic fieldwork and the folk who are the object of that work: "Everything in the poem belongs to the group, but the poem itself and the formula in which it happens in a particular performance is the singer's. Every item is the tradition. But when a great singer is sitting in front of an audience, his music, the expression of his face, and his particular version of the poem at the time is his" (p. 316).

Harvard University's long history of engagement with the study of folklore, exemplified by the fact that the American Folklore Society itself was founded at a meeting in Harvard's University Hall early in 1888,⁶² provided a deeply supportive atmosphere for the kind of work *The Singer of Tales* represents, even in its first formulation as Lord's Ph.D. dissertation. The submission of this first version of *Singer* was itself a revolutionary event: "His thesis defense, which was a defense in the real sense of a new and controversial thesis, called on all of Lord's expertise and powers of persuasion, and many of the committee members—Maurice Bowra, John Finley, Roman Jakobson, Harry Levin, Francis Magoun, and Renato Poggioli—left the room with their points of view changed."⁶³ The completion and acceptance of Lord's dissertation, and his subsequent appointment to the faculty at Harvard, were to have a profound influence on folklore studies in the United States.

Indeed, according to a man who was considered the dean of American folklore studies during his lifetime, there exists a direct line of development from Parry and Lord's 1933–1935 expedition in Yugoslavia through *The Singer of Tales* to the formation of the first undergraduate major in folklore and mythology in the United States. Commenting on the founding of Harvard's Committee on Degrees in Folklore and Mythology in 1967, Richard Dorson notes: "The folklore program at Harvard University, making available the first undergraduate major in folklore and mythology in the United States, developed from the strong research interests in the Yugoslav oral epic of the Slavic department's Albert Lord. His well-known book, *The Singer of Tales*, followed the guidelines of Lord's colleague in classics, Milman Parry, who conceived the idea of illuminating the Homeric epics through the study of living folk epics."⁶⁴

The publication in 1960 of *The Singer of Tales* coincided with an important cultural moment in Western folklore scholarship. In the immediately preceding years, such vital and durable landmarks in the field as the English translation of Vladimir Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale* (1958) and Richard Dorson's *American Folklore* (1959) appeared. Although these seminal folklore studies approach the topic from different formulations of the issues facing folkloristics, scholars were suddenly presented with multiple opportunities to revisit well-worked problems and see them from fresh new angles. Like these two earlier works, Lord's *The Singer of Tales* was adopted for use in a variety of introductory and

62. The American Folklore Society was organized in Cambridge, Mass., on January 4, 1888, and those present included Harvard professor Francis James Child (the society's first president), George Lyman Kittredge, recently appointed as lecturer in the College, and Cambridge resident and Harvard alumnus William Wells Newell (the organizer of the society and the first editor of *The Journal of American Folklore*).

63. "Albert Bates Lord, Memorial Minute," presented to the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Harvard University, on February 14, 1995 (published in the *Harvard Gazette*, March 30, 1995) and written by a faculty committee consisting of Frank M. Cross, Jr., Joseph C. Harris, Harry T. Levin, John E. Malmstad, Stephen Mitchell, Gregory Nagy, and Rulan Pian.

64. Dorson 1972:5.