REFORMED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY — CHARLOTTE

THE GOSPEL TRUTH OR POETRY FOR LYRES?
A CRITIQUE OF MARK AS ORAL COMPOSITION

SUBMITTED TO DR. KRUGER
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
NT508 GOSPELS

BY ALEX LOTT
DECEMBER 6, 2018

Introduction

In his great *Ecclesiastical History*, Eusebius, the fourth-century Bishop of Caeserea, famously cites a lost work by Bishop Papias of Hierapolis on the origin of Mark's Gospel:

> Peter's hearers, not satisfied with a single hearing or with the unwritten teachings of the divine message, pleaded with Mark, whose Gospel we have, to leave them a written summary of the teaching given them verbally, since he was a follower of Peter. Nor did they cease until they persuaded him and so caused the writing of what is called the Gospel according to Mark.[1]

Eusebius records in the same work Papias' teaching that "Mark did not err in writing down some things just as he recalled them" although he recorded them "without giving systematic arrangement to the Lord's sayings."[2] For generations, these well-known patristic writings have been cited as the earliest record of the provenance of Mark's Gospel. While the chronology of Mark's account of Jesus' life may have been in doubt, the fact that Mark *wrote* was not.

In modern scholarship, however, a new view of the Second Gospel has arisen, one which not only denies the traditional authorial attribution to Mark, but also denies that the Gospel was originally a written text at all. This view, associated with a small but influential circle of New Testament scholars, roots the genesis of Mark's Gospel in oral performance. Joanna Dewey, professor emerita at Episcopal Divinity School and a prominent advocate for the oral theory of Markan composition argues: "From what we know of oral literature there is no reason why [the Gospel of Mark] could not have been composed and transmitted in oral form. Thus, it is certainly possible—I would say probable—that Mark was an orally composed narrative."[3] The late University of Massachusetts professor of classics and religion Richard Horsely agrees: "As an oral composition or an oral-derived text, Mark stands in continuity with the oral tradition of Jesus' sayings and stories."[4]

Despite these confident proclamations about the unwritten tradition undoubtedly underlying the printed text of Mark's Gospel in today's critical editions of the Greek New Testament, such theories of Mark as an oral text are problematic. By labeling the Gospel "oral literature," scholars such as Dewey and Horsley are drawing on a specific discipline of literary

---

[1] Eusebius, *The Church History*, trans. Paul L. Maier (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2007), 64.

[2] Eusebius, *Church History*, 114.

[3] Joanna Dewey, "The Survival of Mark's Gospel: A Good Story?," *JBL* 123 (2004): 499.

[4] Richard A. Horsley and Jonathan A. Draper, *Whoever Hears You Hears Me: Prophets, Performance, and Tradition in Q* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press, 1999), 159.

criticism, one which has only rarely and inconsistently been applied to prose narratives and epistles as found in the New Testament. This paper will argue that the field of literary criticism generally understands oral literature as a type of verbal poetry produced in illiterate or semi-literate societies, and that, as it does not show evidence of poetic composition, the Gospel of Mark fails to meet an important traditional criterion of orality.

Background: From Homeric Question to Synoptic Problem

The formal study of oral literature in literary criticism has its origin in the continuing attempts to answer the famous Homeric Question.[5] Despite the wide-spread and long-standing renown for the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, the available information about the brilliant poet responsible for these twin masterworks is staggeringly scanty. Tradition held that a poet named Homer had composed both the great Greek epics, but even the attribution of the name is suspect. From ancient times, the identity of Homer—his home, his method of composition, the source of his narrative—was hotly debated[6], and modern scholars eventually divided into two camps: The Unitarians, who believed in a single poet as the source of both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, and the Analysts, who suspected the epics were the result of generations of redactors working and re-working separate streams of folklore into two lengthy poems. These schools dominated Homeric studies in the nineteenth century, pitting the singular genius against the traditional community.[7]

Into this ongoing debate stepped Milman Parry, a young scholar from California who proposed to cut the Gordian knot with a novel but well-researched solution.[8] In his 1928 doctoral theses, Parry outlined the presence of discrete units of meter he termed *formulae* in the Homeric epics, most typically seen in the standard epithets characteristic of the epic style—stock

---

[5] For a concise introduction to the Homeric Question and its relevance to oral theory, see John Miles Foley, *The Theory of Oral Composition* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1988), 2-18.

[6] James I. Porter, "Homer: The Very Idea," *Arion: A Journal of Humanities and the Classics* 10 (2002): 61-64 provides a diachronic treatment of the Homeric Question. To illustrate the centrality of Homer to ancient learning, Porter amusingly recounts the thirty-volume inquiry into Troy's true location produced by Demetrius of Scepsis based on nothing more than sixty-two lines from the *Iliad*.

[7] John Miles Foley, *How to Read an Oral Poem* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 110, and Irene J. F. de Jong, "Narratology and Oral Poetry: The Case of Homer," *Poetics Today* 12 (1991): 406-7. Interestingly, the First-Century Jewish historian Flavius Josephus seems to have been the forerunner of both the Analyst school and the oral-formulaic theorists, writing in *Against Apion*: "Throughout the whole range of Greek literature no undisputed work is found more ancient than the poetry of Homer. His date, however, is clearly later than the Trojan War; and even he, they say, did not leave his poems in writing. At first transmitted by memory, the scattered songs were not united until later." Flavius Josephus, *Ag. Ap* 1.11 (Thackeray, LCL).

[8] It is worth noting that Parry's views did not spring fully formed out of his research, but developed out of the linguistic work of his mentors Antoine Meillet and Matthias Murko. See Thérèse de Vet, "Parry in Paris: Structuralism, Historical Linguistics, and the Oral Theory," *Classical Antiquity* 24 (2005): 264-270.

descriptive phrases such as "swift-footed Achilles" and "ox-eyed Hera." These formulae, Parry suggested, were employed as ready-made poetic phrases to fill out metrical lines, and by picking and choosing between these stock phrases, the poet would be able to perform a lengthy heroic narrative like the *Iliad* extemporaneously.[9] To Parry, the presence of these formulae were indisputable evidence that Homer's poems were, at root, the oral compositions of a genius poet working with the established poetic traditions of the preceding generations.[10]

Convinced that traditional poetry was oral rather than written, Parry and his greatest student Albert Lord embarked on a study of the compositional techniques of the Yugoslavian *guslars*, bards who performed traditional Slavic epics which had never been recorded in writing. Lord carried on the field research after his mentor's untimely death, and their findings ultimately changed the face of Homeric studies. The formulaic similarities between the impressively lengthy improvisational poetic performances of the *guslars* and Homer's epic hexameter proved decisive, and the oral theory became the dominant view of Greek epic composition.[11]

As monumental as Parry and Lord's work proved in classicist circles, the impact of their findings was felt well beyond the realm of Homeric studies. Following Lord, philologists began applying oral-formulaic theory to a number of ancient bodies of literature and discovering evidence of orality in those poetic traditions as well, and an entire discipline developed: the study of oral literature.[12] Inevitably, as the quest to uncover the oral roots of influential bodies of

---

[9] Foley, *How to Read an Oral Poem*, 110. The possibilities of the epithets as flexible units of extemporaneous composition may be seen in the following illustration developed by Parry:

αυταρ ο μερμηριξε αθταρ ο βή δια δωμα αθταρ επει το ακουσε τον δ' αυτε προσεειπε ενθα καθεζετ' έπειτα	}	πολυτλας διος 'Οδθσσευς

By pairing the stock epithet πολυτλας διος Οδυσσευς with such formulaic expressions, the Homeric poet has a number of metrically correct options with which to creatively fill out particular divisions of the poetic foot.

[10] Foley, *Theory of Oral Composition*, 23-31. For the definitive discussion of formulae and their uses in composing oral poetry, see Albert B. Lord, *The Singer of Tales*, 2nd ed., Stephen Mitchell and Gregory Nagy, eds. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 30-67.

[11] Foley, *Theory of Oral Composition*, 57-65. Egbert T. Bakker provides a useful summary of the controversies surrounding Parry's conclusions in *Poetry and Speech: Orality and Homeric Discourse* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), 10-17.

[12] The nomenclature "oral literature" is admittedly something of a misnomer, given the etymology of *literature*. As Foley explains: "What 'oral literature' really boils down to is a name for 'letterless verbal art in letters' or 'letterless verbal art composed by a lettered person.'" See *How to Read an Oral Poem*, 27-29 for discussion. Despite Foley's objection, this essay will use the term "oral literature" for sake of clarity and simplicity.

literature proceeded, orality theorists began applying the principles established by Parry and Lord to the most widely read literary work in global history—The Bible.[13] The first efforts to discern the strata of oral tradition underlying the Scriptures focused on identifying formulae in the Hebrew poetry of the Old Testament[14], but attention soon turned toward interpreting the writings of the New Testament through the lens of oral theory.[15] In 1977, Albert Lord, the dean of oral-literary studies himself, gave a presentation to an interdisciplinary colloquy hosted by Trinity University in San Antonio, Texas, in which he proposed that observations of traditional Serbocroatian narrative singers offers the long-sought key to the Synoptic problem:

> It is clear, I believe, that Luke was not copied textually from either Matthew or Mark. On the other hand, how should we see the relationship of these two to one another? They are at times very close…. Can we explain these verses and their surrounding divergences in any way other than by copying? Possibly. In oral traditional literature, insofar as I am acquainted with it, some passages may become reasonably stable verbally in the usage of a single narrator or even perhaps of a group of narrators. These are passages that are used frequently, that exhibit special stylistic devices that bind them together, perhaps that contain the especially significant words of an important person in the story.[16]

Note, however, that Foley prefers the expression *oral poetry*, emphasizing that the "literature" of orality is poetic in essence.

[13]Many oral theorists also recognize the form criticism of Gunkel and Bultmann as parallel but distinct attempts to ascertain the "folk origins" of the canonical biblical texts. See Susan Niditch, *Oral Word and Written Word: Ancient Israelite Literature* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 1-9 and Christopher Tuckett, "Form Criticism," in *Jesus in Memory: Traditions in Oral and Scribal Perspectives*, Werner H. Kelber and Samuel Byrskog, eds. (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2009), 27-38. Thorlief Boman's critique of form criticism according to the Parry-Lord orality model is another important forerunner of the modern application of comparative-literature studies to Gospels criticism; see Leander E. Keck, "Oral Traditional Literature and the Gospels: The Seminar," in *The Relationship Among the Gospels: An Interdisciplinary Dialogue*, ed. William O. Walker (San Antonio, TX: Trinity University Press, 1978), 109-113.

[14] The pioneering work in this field is Robert C. Culley, *Oral Formulaic Language in the Biblical Psalms* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967). Though not the first to suggest an oral tradition undergirding the Old Testament, Culley's monograph on the possible presence of oral formulae in the Psalter is the first major work to apply the methods of Parry and Lord to Biblical poetry. See also Robert C. Culley, "An Approach to the Problem of Oral Tradition," *VT* 13 (1963): 113-125 and William R. Watters, *Formula Criticism and the Poetry of the Old Testament* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1976), 6-19.

[15] The most influential early effort to discuss the New Testament in light of orality and anthropology is the work of the Jesuit scholar Walter J. Ong, particularly his *The Presence of the Word: Some Prolegomena for Cultural and Religious History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1967), a collection of Ong's lectures given at Yale University in April of 1964. Ong's thesis—that the "Word of God" in Hebrew and Christian tradition was fundamentally a phenomenon of speech, even when written—seems to lie beneath many of the assumptions of the modern orality model in biblical studies.

[16] Albert B. Lord, "The Gospels as Oral Traditional Literature," in *Relationship Among the Gospels,* 86-87. The quoted remarks regard the parallels between Synoptic accounts of the Parable of the Sower in Matt 13:1-9, Mark 4:1-9, and Luke 8:4-8

Although he admitted that his study of the interrelationship of the Synoptic Gospels was cursory, Lord closed his remarks by stating his hope that someone would take up this thesis and demonstrate the oral-folklore basis of the canonical Gospels.[17] In 1983, Werner H. Kelber took up the standard planted by Lord in that address, publishing *The Oral and the Written Gospel*, the first major attempt to present a way forward for studies of oral features in the Gospels.[18] Kelber's volume laid the foundation for future orality-model analysis of the Synoptic Gospels.[19]

Following Kelber, in 1989 Joanna Dewey published in *Interpretation* an article which sought to establish the case for Mark as a work which was not merely meant for reading aloud in Christian gatherings, but one which was in fact composed as an oral performance.[20] In her article, Dewey specifically pointed to links between the Gospel of Mark and traditional Greek oral-performance literature, relying on the work of the well-known Classical Greek scholar Eric Havelock.[21] In the two decades since that influential publication, Dewey, Kelber, and a handful of other academics—including the prominent linguist and humanities professor John Miles Foley—have turned out a small shelf's worth of articles and volumes on the oral composition of Mark's Gospel and the Markan narrative as a performance piece, speculating about the "many

---

[17] Lord, "Gospels as Oral Tradition," 91. Recently James D. G. Dunn has taken a similar position, suggesting the relationship between the Synoptics may be explained by individual expressions of a common oral tradition without recourse to the Two-Source Hypothesis. See "Altering the Default Setting: Re-envisaging the Early Transmission of the Jesus Tradition," *NTS* 49 (2003): 139-75.

[18] Werner H. Kelber, *The Oral Gospel and the Written Gospel: The Hermeneutics of Speaking and Writing I the Synoptic Tradition, Mark, Paul, and Q* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989). See also Foley's recognition of Kelber's impact in *Theory of Oral Composition*, 86. Influenced by both Ong and Robert W. Funk, Kelber's thesis is that Mark's Gospel is a written response to the oral-traditional "sayings gospels" preserved in the *Gospel of Thomas*, but still retains evidence of its origins in oral culture. In many ways, Kelber's efforts represent an attempt to synthesize the form-critical presuppositions of Bultmann and Dibelius with Birger Gerhardsson's findings on transmission and memory in Judaism and Christianity. See the author's own retrospective of his landmark work in "*The Oral and the Written Gospel:* Fifteen Years Afterward," in *Imprints*, *Voiceprints, and Footprints of Memory: The Collected Essays of Werner H. Kelber* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2013), 167-86 for a useful summary of his arguments.

[19] See Horsley's comments on the importance of Kelber's work in *Whoever Hears You*, 152-157.

[20] Joanna Dewey, "Oral Methods of Structuring Narrative in Mark," *Int* 43 (1989): 32-44.

[21] Despite her reliance on his work, Dewey's use of Havelock is suspect. For example, she cites him in her statement "Oral narrative 'operates on the acoustic principle of the echo,'" in "Oral Methods of Structuring," 38. A reading of Havelock's article reveals, however, that he was not writing of the structure of oral narrative, but of the role of rhythm in poetic composition: "It is this formulary aspect of oral verse-making, which once noted by Milman Parry, that has attracted most attention from scholars. One can say that it operates on the acoustic principle of the echo, which assists recall and so memorization by either repeating a verbal formula already used or giving its acoustic equivalent with some change of meaning which yet resembles a previous meaning." See Eric A. Havelock, "Oral Composition in the *Oedipus Tyrannus* of Sophocles," *New Literary History* 16 (1984): 182.

settings in which a performance might occur… issues related to the memorization of text, voice modulation, gestures, pace, and the crafted interaction between audience and performer."[22]

Definitions of Oral Literature

Underlying these contemporary theories about the oral composition of Mark's Gospel, however, is the nearly century-old work of Milman Parry, a foundation which regards oral literature as essentially poetic rather than prosaic in character. Recognizing this poetic essence, oral literature has traditionally been defined as: "Poetry [which is] composed orally, or made up as the poet goes along. As a rule, it is the product of illiterate or semi-literate societies. It is usually sung or chanted (often to musical accompaniment) and is the earliest of all poetry in the sense that it precedes written poetry."[23]

As the study of oral literature has moved from the province of classicists into the broader field of folklore studies, the definition of "oral literature" has expanded to include any body of "stories, songs, folk tales, myths, and rituals within a culture that are transmitted by word of mouth from one generation to another."[24] Parry and Lord's notions of a strict dichotomy between "oral" cultures and "literary" cultures have also been modified to reflect a commingling of orality and literacy now perceived in many ancient cultures.[25] Almost all of the proponents of the

---

[22] Holly E. Hearon, describing the work of Whitney Shiner, in "The Implications of Orality for Studies of the Biblical Text," in *Performing the Gospel: Orality, Memory, and Mark*, Richard A. Horsley, Jonathan A. Draper, and John Miles Foley, eds. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2006), 12. This "performance" hypothesis is not to be confused with more conservative proposals that suggest a controlled but unfixed oral transmission of the Jesus tradition by the apostles. See Kenneth E. Bailey, "Informal Controlled Oral Tradition and the Synoptic Gospels," *Them* 20 (1995): 4-11; cf. Dunn's proposal in "Altering the Default Setting," 147-55, and Terrence C. Mournet, "Jesus Tradition as Oral Tradition," *Jesus and Memory*, 39-61.

[23] J.A. Cuddon, *Penguin Book of Literary Terms and Literary Theory,*

[24] X.J. Kennedy, Dana Gioia, and Mark Bauerlein, eds., "Oral Tradition," *Handbook of Literary Terms: Literature, Language, Theory*, 111.

[25] This divergence from oral-theory orthodoxy seems to seek a compromise between anthropological hypothesis regarding the literacy rates of various ancient people groups. The watershed work on this subject is Ruth Finnegan, "How Oral is Oral Literature?," *BSOAS* 37 (1974): 52-64. Despite its widespread rejection, Lord's insistence on a sharp contrast between orality and literacy still seems well-founded, especially given his field research demonstrating that illiterate Slavic *guslars* lost their gift for extemporaneous composition when they learned to write their songs. For Lord's account of this phenomenon, see *Singer of Tales*, 124-38. In Biblical studies, the overwhelming illiteracy of both the ancient Hebrews and the early Christians is still regarded as an important indicator of the necessary fundamental orality of Old and New Testament texts. William V. Harris' *Ancient Literacy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989) is regularly cited as the authority on literacy rates in first-century Palestine; however, Alan Millard has provided a persuasive response to Harris' thesis in *Reading and Writing in the Time of Jesus* (New York: New York University Press, 2000).

contemporary New Testament orality-model school accept this expanded definition of "oral literature."[26]

Rather than the more nebulous conception of oral literature as a catch-all category for folklore, this paper will consider the Second Gospel according to a traditional understanding of oral literature.

There are three principal reasons for this approach:

1. The theories and methods on which the identification and analysis of oral literature are based were specifically developed through the systematic study of traditional oral poetry rather than prose.
2. Despite the claims of folklorists that oral literature includes prose as well as poetry, the field of orality studies has historically dealt almost exclusively with poetics rather than prosody, and even much of the non-poetic media studied by oral theorists is analyzed in practice as if it were actually an unconventional form of poetry[27] (likely because the best-attested and most-universal methods of studying oral literature are drawn from the foundational work of Parry and Lord).[28]
3. The model of composition, performance, and transmission of Mark's Gospel proposed by New Testament orality theorists such as Kelber, Dewey, and Horsley is better understood in the categories of traditional oral-poetic literature than as a conglomeration of disparate prosaic folklore forms.[29]

---

[26] As noted above, John Miles Foley is a significant exception to this trend, preferring to talk of even the New Testament in terms of "oral poetry."

[27] "Although this freer form of [oral] transmission is used for both prose and poetry, it has been studied most thoroughly as it applies to poetry," writes Culley in *Oral Formulaic Language*, 6. Thirty-five years later, John Miles Foley spoke of the necessity of taking "a broad view of poetry… to include parts of the Hebrew Bible and New Testament" under the study of oral performance in *How to Read an Oral Poem*, 46.

[28] See Elaine J. Lawless on the "'application' of the Parry-Lord oral-formulaic theory to to tape-recorded texts that are non-narrative, non-metered forms that have not been conceived as poetic" in "Oral 'Character' and 'Literary' Art: A Call for a New Reciprocity Between Oral Literature and Folklore," *Western Folklore* 44 (1985): 79. Lawless' concern in the essay is to show how the extemporaneous sermons of fundamentalist women preachers may be understood as a kind of oral poetry and therefore studied as oral literature.

[29] Many advocates of oral Gospel tradition seem to implicitly understand this point as well. See Mournet's tacit appropriation of "oral performance… not [as] the wooden or rigid recitation of a text memorized verbatim, but the use of mnemonically appropriate phrases which could be used in varied fashion to meet the metrical and thematic needs in performance" to serve as the basis for an oral model of Jesus-story transmission in "The Jesus Tradition as Oral Tradition," 48-50.

For the purpose of this paper, oral literature is understood according to the following definition:

> Oral literature is poetry composed in performance through the use of formulas and themes under the constraints of meter, or melody, or music, regardless of the poet's literacy; although oral poems bear hallmarks of orality, they may also be influenced by written sources.[30]

Mark as Metrical Greek Poetry

If, as the oral theorists claim, the text preserved in fourth-century manuscripts such as P^{45} and Codex Sinaiticus is actually the written record of a tradition orally composed and transmitted in Christian communities for generations,[31] it is most likely that the original form of the Gospel was handed down as a performance set to music. In the Hellenistic and post-Hellenistic era the standard form of oral performance—including dramatic dialogues and recitations—involved musical accompaniment.[32] This, as the research of Parry and Lord persuasively demonstrated, is the common and nearly universal form of oral literature in cultures as disparate as Ancient Greece and twentieth-century Yugoslavia. A Gospel composed and performed in an unfixed format analogous to the epic songs of Homeric bards, Slavic *guslars*, and Anglo-Saxon *scops*[33] would—like the *Odyssey*—certainly bear distinct traces of its extemporaneous poetic origin.

Although meter, the pattern of syllabic emphasis that gives poetry its rhythmic quality, is out of vogue in modern poetry, it was absolutely crucial to the composition of any work recognizable as poetry in the ancient world. Unlike English verse written for the page, in which the rhythm is a creation of the words' meter, the meter of Greek poetry derived from the rhythm which drove its performance.[34] Historically, the art of poetry developed out of song, and the

---

[30] Adapted from a "reformulation of the Oral Theory that incorporates modern anthropological scholarship" proposed by Thérèse de Vet in "Parry in Paris," 281.

[31] Pieter J. J. Botha has suggested, "it is quite possible that the Gospel of Mark is a casual transcription of what has been performed orally." See "Mark's Story as Oral Traditional Literature: Rethinking the Transmission of Some Traditions about Jesus," *HvTSt* 47 (1991): 322.

[32] See the catalogue of surviving first and second-century papyri containing speeches and recitations marked in the Ancient Greek musical notation to indicate the rhythm that accompanied the words in West, *Ancient Greek Music*, 279-83. Also note Aristotle's contention that imitation ought to be considered the defining mark of the poet, given that even philosophers such as Empedocles employ meter in their treatises. See *The Poetics of Aristotle*, trans. Preston H. Epps (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1970), 2-3.

[33] John Miles Foley provides a useful survey of traditional narrative singers from various cultures in "Memory in Oral Tradition," in *Performing the Gospel*, 83-96.

[34] "[The] close inter-relation between music and verse was always recognized in earlier days. It is only in comparatively modern times that we have lost the sense of it. The Greeks sang or chanted their lyrics to the sound of the lyre or other instrument, and [quoting J. A. Symonds] 'the Bacchic songs of alternating mirth and sadness gave birth, through the dithyramb, to tragedy, and, through the Comus hymn, to comedy,'" writes J. P. Dabney in

poetry of antiquity, being closer to its musical forebears was *sung*, not merely read.[35] The epics of Homer, the great tragedies of Sophocles and Aeschylus, the comedies of Aristophanes—all were sung to musical accompaniment, and it was the repetition of these musical rhythms that naturally led to the patterns of meter in poetic verses. In a work of Greek poetry, the meter is the shadow of the music; therefore, works which were performed in traditional Greek fashion almost inevitably contain discernible metrical evidence of the original accompanying music,[36] and if Mark's Gospel is indeed a transcription of a traditional oral composition from the first century, it should feature vestiges of the music to which it was performed.

Meter in the Prologue of Mark

The first place to look for indicators of poetic genre in the Second Gospel is Mark's prologue, as formulaic openings are characteristic of sung narrative.[37] In an orally composed hero narrative, the opening lines establish the work's principal rhythmic thrust. What follows is a scansion of Mark 1:1-2, which introduce the prophetic quotations of Isaiah and Malachi. Meter is notated according to Greek poetic conventions by designating individual syllables as either long (¯) or short (˘) as follows:

Αρ-χη του ευ-αγ-γε-λι-ου Ι-ησ-ου Χρι-στου υι-ου θε-ου.
˘ ¯ ¯ ¯ ˘ ˘ ˘ ¯ ˘ ¯ ¯ ˘ ¯ ¯ ¯ ˘ ¯

Κα-θως γε-γρα-πται εν τω Ησ-αι-α προ-φη-τη[38]
˘ ¯ ˘ ˘ ¯ ˘ ¯ ¯ ¯ ¯ ˘ ¯ ¯

These clauses may further be divided into groups of six feet:

˘ ¯ ¯ | ¯ ˘ | ˘ ˘ ¯ | ˘ ¯ ¯ | ˘ ¯ ¯ | ¯ ˘ ¯
˘ ¯ | ˘ ˘ | ¯ ˘ | ¯ ¯ | ¯ ¯ | ˘ ¯ ¯

"The Relation between Music and Poetry," *The Musical Quarterly* 13 (1927): 379. Despite its age, Dabney's essay is well worth reading in full, as the history of poetry has not changed significantly since its original publication.

[35] Hence Lord's famous title: *The Singer of Tales*. In the terminology of Parry and Lord, the expression "singer" is synonymous with "oral poet."

[36] Dabney, "Music and Poetry," 379-80. Cf. Raymond Monelle, "Musical Notation and the Poetic Foot," *Comparative Literature* 41 (1989): 261-63.

[37] Again, see Foley, "Memory in Oral Tradition," 84-94.

[38] Author's scansion, following the rules for syllabification and meter outlined in Martin L. West, *Ancient Greek Music* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992), 127-53, and Thomas J. Mathiesen, "Rhythm and Meter in Ancient Greek Music," *Music Theory Spectrum* 7 (1985): 163-65.

While both of these introductory clauses may be divided into a traditional six-foot poetic line—similar to the number of feet in the famous dactylic hexameter of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*[39]—the resulting feet do not represent a regular metrical pattern at all, much less one that would be recognizable to an audience accustomed to Hellenic poetic performance.

This division according to a line length common in Greek poetry yields four bacchic feet[40] occurring at intervals far too few and irregular to constitute the rhythmic backbone of a hexametrical poetic line; divisions of the feet at different points result in an even less consistent meter. Further, if provision is made for an additional short syllable (known as the *arsis*) at the front of the first foot and a final long syllable (the *thesis*) at the end—as was common in Ancient Greek metrical poetry[41]—then even the semblance of a consistent hexameter in these clauses is lost. For contrast, compare the seemingly random clusters of shorts and longs seen in the opening lines of Mark's Gospel above to the stately regularity of the following poem by the 5th-century Greek poet Anacreon:

Πο-λι-οι μὲν ‘ημ-ιν ηδ-η

Κρο-τα-φοι κα-ρη τε λευ-κον[42]

As the above notation clearly demonstrates, each line of Anacreon's lyric follows the same pattern, an iambic trimeter[43] featuring both an beginning *arsis* and a final *thesis*, representing the initial upbeat and terminal downbeat of the rhythm to which the words were performed.[44] This meter is common enough to have a name—anacreonic meter, after the poet

---

[39] The dactyl is a poetic foot of one long syllable followed by two short syllables (¯ ˘ ˘). See Lord, *Singer of Tales*, 142-45: "The Greek hexameter is probably the best known meter in all literature."

[40] The *bacchic* foot (˘ ¯ ¯) is relatively rare variation of the *iambus* (˘ ¯). See William Packard, *The Poet's Dictionary: A Handbook of Prosody and Poetic Devices* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1994), 128.

[41] Mathiesen, "Rhythm and Meter," 165-168.

[42] West, *Ancient Greek Music*, 132-33. Though he lived in the fifth century BC, Anacreon's lyric poetry was well-known and highly popular during the Hellenistic period, and fragments of his poetry dating to the second century AD have been found among the Oxyrhynchus papyri. See Hans Bernsdorff, "Notes on P.Oxy. 3722 (Commentary on Anacreon)," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 178 (2011): 29-34. Given this, it is entirely possible that the Hellenistic Christian audience of Mark's Gospel was familiar with Anacreon's drinking and satyr songs.

[43] That is, the line is composed of three sets of iambs (˘ ¯). Again, consult Packard, *Poet's Dictionary*, 124.

[44] West, *Ancient Greek Music*, 133-35.

who popularized it.[45] It is this kind of regularity and rhythm which readers should expect of an oral composition performed for Greco-Roman audiences. If anything, the oral poetry of Mark's day should be more metrically homogenous than that of preceding eras, as the great majority of the Hellenistic and Roman period musical texts and fragments we possess display remarkable rhythmic regularity compared to some of the more adventuresome extant Archaic works.[46]

Evidence of the prominence of rhythmically homogenous Greek metrical poetry in the culture of the apostolic age may be seen in Paul's use of a line from the Greek poet Epimenides of Knossos[47] in his letter to Titus: "Κρητες αει ψευσται, κακα θηρια, γαστερες αργαι."[48] As seen here and in Acts 17:28, Paul was well-versed in the poetry of the Hellenistic world and evidently expected his protégé Titus to be familiar with the works of Ancient Greek poets and hymn-writers as well. Apparently, Paul was not only concerned with Greco-Roman philosophy, but with prosody as well, as his citation scans in dactylic hexameter:

Κρη-τες α-ει ψευ-σται, κα-κα θη-ρι-α, γα-στε-ρες αρ-γαι
— ◡ ◡| — — | — ◡ ◡ | — ◡ ◡ | — ◡ ◡ | — —

Interestingly, Paul's quotation bears striking resemblance to a pair of lines found in the third-century poet Callimachus' *Hymn to Zeus*:

> Κρητες αει ψεθσται και γαρ ταφον ω ανα σειο
> Κρητες ετεκταναντο συ δ' ου θανες εσσι γαρ αιει (Callimachus, *Hymn. Jov.* 7-8).[49]

Like Paul's citation in Titus, Callimachus' lines are also composed in dactylic hexameter and scan similarly, demonstrating the apostle's faithfulness to the poetic meter of Epimenides' original. When considering the oral-performance culture of the first-century world that produced the New Testament, the fact that "where Paul quotes a Greek text, he is able to preserve the

---

[45] West, *Ancient Greek Music*, 145-47.

[46] West, *Ancient Greek Music*, 153.

[47] This saying is widely thought to be drawn from a lost work of Epimenides. See S.M. Baugh, *Ephesians*, Evangelical Exegetical Commentary (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), 591-92.

[48] Titus 1:12. "Cretans [are] constantly liars, evil beasts, lazy stomachs," author's translation.

[49] "'Cretans are ever liars.' Yes, a tomb, O Lord, for thee the Cretans builder; but thou didst not die, for thou art for ever," translated by A.W. Mair and G.R. Mair (LCL). Scholars have speculated that Callimachus used Epimenides' original line as a source for this section of his hymn. See the discussion in Baugh, *Ephesians*, 591-92.

meter properly, for meter was a central feature of Greek hymns,"[50] must influence any possible reading of the Gospels as oral literature.

Further evidence for the influence of Greek metrical performance on the early church may be seen in the existence of the papyrus P.Oxy. 1786, containing some six lines of a Trinitarian song[51] copied in the late third century, but likely composed some time earlier. In a fascinating confluence, this fragmentary papyrus represents both one of the last examples of Ancient Greek musical notation and one of the earliest extant Christian hymns. Composed in an anapestic meter, this hymn again suggests that the worship of the early Christian community was influenced by Greek music and the metered verse it produced.[52]

Meter in the Markan Account of Christ's Death

Though the introductory clauses of Mark's Gospel do not immediately announce the following work as a poetic composition, there is still a possibility that elements of Greek metrical poetry may yet manifest themselves in the text. One of the most likely places for poetic grandeur in the narrative of Mark is the story's climax—the crucifixion of Jesus. As can be seen in the doxologies of Paul's epistles,[53] the ancient world almost invariably treated sublime and sacred material in a poetic register. What follows is a scansion of Mark 15:37-38:

ὁ δὲ Ἰη-σοῦς ἀφ-εὶς φω-νὴν με-γά-λην ἐξ-έπ-νευ-σεν

Καὶ τὸ κα-τα-πέ-τα-σμα τοῦ να-οῦ ἐ-σχί-σθη εἰς δύ-ο ἀπ᾽ ἄ-νω-θεν ἕ-ως κά-τω.

These clauses resist division into regular metrical lines, there being no obvious place to break the second clause. While there does seem to be a consistent presence of iambic feet in Mark's language, both in these verses and in the prologue introduction, iambs do not in isolation confer poetic status. As Aristotle explained in his *Poetics*: "Of all metres iambic is the one best suited for spoken parts. This is shown by the fact that in ordinary conversation we use iambs frequently but seldom use a hexameter, and even then we have to depart from the intonation of

[50] Baugh, *Ephesians*, 592.

[51] "Let it be silent, let the luminous stars not shine, let the winds (?) and all the noisy rivers die down; and as we hymn the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, let all the powers add 'Amen, amen.' Empire, praise always, and glory to God, the sole giver of all good things. Amen, amen," translated by M.L. West in *Ancient Greek Music*, 325.

[52] West, *Ancient Greek Music*, 324-26.

[53] E.g. Rom 11:33-36; Col 2:15-20.

ordinary conversation."[54] According to Aristotle's standards, then, Mark's account of the moment of Jesus' death conforms more closely to "ordinary conversation" than to the rhetoric and poetry of Greek oral performance.[55]

Mark as Semitic Poetry

Although the Gospel of Mark clearly fails to meet the criteria for consideration as Greek metrical poetry, scholars of the Ong-Kelber school of orality continue to insist that Mark's text manifests definite traces of oral origin. The feature which is most frequently cited as evidence of the Gospel's oral character is the prominence of paratactic construction in the Markan narrative style. Mark's depiction of events is built out of clauses strung together one after the other, usually with the simple connective και joining them.[56] This, advocates of the oral theory exclaim, demonstrates the text's roots in extemporaneous performance, as parataxis has long been considered one of the true hallmarks of oral composition. [57] Dewey made the additive constructions of Mark's sentences one of her early centerpiece arguments for an oral composition in the influential 1989 *Interpretation* article[58], and Horsley and Draper have hung an entire case for Q as a series of oral discourses on the frequency of και and γαρ in Jesus' teaching as recorded by Matthew and Luke.[59] Though his argument for orality differs from that of Kelber's disciples, Gilbert Bilezikian cites the same tendency toward parataxis as the leading indicator that Mark's Gospel was "composed in writing… [and] intended to be read aloud" in his monograph *The Liberated Gospel*, a study of parallels between Greek tragedy and the Second Gospel.[60]

---

[54] Aristotle, *Poetics*, 8.

[55] The same conclusion has been reached by earlier observers. "With the exception of such rare snatches as the quotations in Acts 17:18 and Titus 1:12 the New Testament contains nothing which would have been considered poetry by those familiar with the standards of Greek verse. The New Testament is in Greek, but it contains only the briefest echoes of Greek poetry or poetry patterns." Floyd V. Filson, "How Much of the New Testament is Poetry?," *JBL* 67 (1948): 126.

[56] See G. B. Caird's discussion of parataxis in *The Language and Imagery of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 117-121.

[57] "The poetic grammar of oral epic is and must be based on the formula. It is a grammar of parataxis and of frequently used and useful phrases," writes Lord in *Singer of Tales*, 65.

[58] Dewey, "Oral Methods of Structuring," 36-38.

[59] Horsley and Draper, *Whoever Hears You*, 190-91.

[60] Gilbert G. Bilezikian, *The Liberated Gospel: A Comparison of the Gospel of Mark and Greek Tragedy* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977), 115. Dewey disagrees with Bilezkian's conclusions about Mark as a document meant for corporate reading, arguing that the *scriptio continua* of the early manuscripts is incompatible with public reading. See Dewey, "Survival of Mark's Gospel," 504. Gregory Nagy suggests, on the other hand, that *scriptio continua* was "not a disadvantage but an advantage for the mechanics of reading, especially reading aloud" in

However, the mere presence of additive construction in a text is not a reliable indicator of orality[61], particularly when that text emerges from a Semitic context. As G. B. Caird notes, parataxis is ingrained in the Hebraic mode of thinking, speaking, and writing, and Mark's use of Greek conjunctions likely parallels the prominence of the consecutive ו.[62] Does this, then, mean that Mark's Gospel is a kind of crude rendering of Hebrew or Aramaic poetry into the language of the Hellenistic world? This solution—although intriguing—is unlikely. While the additive style of Mark is almost certainly indicative of the author's Jewish background, the use of the consecutive ו is more closely linked with Hebrew narrative prose than Old Testament poetry.[63] Poetic parataxis in the Hebrew Bible is overwhelmingly manifest in parallelism rather than clausal strings.[64]

In addition to the paratactic episodes characteristic of Mark's structuring of his material also lacks the occurrence of word pairs which oral theorists have postulated as the oral formulae of Semitic poetry in both oral and written compositions.[65] For example, Ronald Hyman has demonstrated that the parallel use of קצר ("sow") with זרע ("reap") is one of the most basic word pairs in Old Testament poetic texts.[66] While this pair is used four times in Matthew's Gospel, two times in Luke, and once in John,[67] the combination of σπείρω with θερίζω never appears in Mark's text—supposedly the most primitive and obviously oral work of the canonical

---

"Reading Greek Poetry Aloud: Evidence from the Bacchylides Papyri," *Quaderni Urbinati di Cultura Classica* 64 (2000): 7-28.

[61] Consider this passage from Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*: "Anon Balin and his brother met with the king, and smote him down, and wounded him fiercely, and laid him to the ground; and there they slew on the right hand and the left hand, and slew more than forty of his men, and the remnant fled. Then went they again to King Rience and would have slain him had he not yielded unto their grace." Sir Thomas Malory, *Le Morte d'Arthur* (repr., New York: Modern Library, 1999), 61. Far from being an improvised oral composition, Malory's masterwork is largely a translation and reworking of Old French prose romances. See Robert H. Wilson, "Malory's 'French Book' Again," *Comparative Literature* 2 (1950): 172-181.

[62] "Parataxis also occurs in vernacular Greek, but its relative frequency in the New Testament is almost certainly due to Semitic influence."Caird, *Language and Imagery of the Bible*, 118.

[63] See the discussion of the Hebrew historical narrative genre and its application to Gen 1-3 by John D. Currid, "Theistic Evolution is Incompatible with the Teachings of the Old Testament," in *Theistic Evolution: A Scientific, Philosophical, and Theological Critique*, J.P. Moreland et al., eds. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 860-62; cf. Watters, *Formula Criticism and Poetry of the Old Testament*, 117-126.

[64] Caird, *Language and Imagery of the Bible*, 118-119.

[65] Watters, *Formula Criticism and Poetry of the Old Testament*, 39-80. Also consult David Noel Freedman, "Pottery, Poetry, and Prophecy: An Essay on Biblical Poetry," *JBL* 96 (1977): 5-26.

[66] Ronald T. Hyman, "Two Fundamental Word Pairs: Sow/Reap and Plow/Reap," *JBQ* 31 (2003): 237-44.

[67] Matt 6:26, 13:39, 25:24-26; Luke 12:24, 19:21; and John 4:36. Interestingly, each time this word pair appears in the Gospels it is on the lips of Jesus himself.

Gospel quartet. Surely if Mark's additive narrative and rough Greek are truly relics of an underlying Hebrew oral tradition, he wouldn't omit a common Hebrew word pair retained in both of the other Synoptics and John.

In truth, evidence of Hebraic literary devices in Mark's Gospel still do not fit the criteria for a traditional work of oral literature, as, if anything, Mark's narrative seems to replicate patterns of Hebrew prose rather than poetry. It is also worth considering the appropriateness of a mock-Davidic poetic style for the original audience of Mark's Gospel, which was almost certainly intended for a Greek-speaking population more familiar with Latin customs than Jewish ones.[68] Given his habit of translating Aramaic phrases into Greek and his use of distinctively Latin terminology such as *praetorium*, the author of Mark is much more likely to have followed Greco-Roman poetic tradition than Hebrew conventions.[69]

Mythology and Orality: The Assumptions of Performance Theory

If, as careful analysis demonstrates, the Gospel of Mark is neither Greco-Roman nor Semitic poetry, why are academics such as Kelber, Dewey, Horsley, and Draper so intent to treating it as an artifact of oral composition? What rationale lies behind their declarations of Mark as a Gospel "composed orally and transmitted orally for decades"[70] when Mark barely fits the criteria of an oral text, even under many expanded definitions of oral literature?[71] The answer seems to lie in the implications of orality for the historical reliability of Mark's account. If the Gospel of Mark can be labeled an "oral text," then it automatically falls under the heading of "folklore," and the supernatural content of the text is easily written off as typical mythic ornamentation of a traditional hero story. Indeed, some scholars have openly announced their essentially radical view that the "orality" of the Gospel almost certainly negates its historicity.[72]

---

[68] Ben Witherington III offers a detailed but concise discussion of the Markan audience in *The Gospel of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 20-31. Also see Bruce M. Metzger's *The New Testament: Its Background, Growth, and Content*, 2nd. ed. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1983), 91-92.

[69] It is worth noting contemporary efforts to structure Jesus' teachings in poetic form. Horsley and Draper attempt to block a critical Q text comprised of gleanings from the Gospels of Matthew and Luke into a stanza of couplets, but their efforts also fail to resolve into a recognizable meter, *Whoever Hears You*, 189-91. More recently, Michael Wade Martin proposed a restructuring of the Lord's Prayer according to its perceived use of poetic devices in "The Poetry of the Lord's Prayer: A Study in Poetic Device," *JBL* 134 (2015): 347-372.

[70] Joanna Dewey, "The Gospel of Mark as an Oral/Aural Narrative: Implications for Preaching," *CurTM* 44 (2017): 7.

[71] See Stephen D. Moore's discussion of "the descriptive poetics of a gospel" in *Literary Criticism and the Gospels: The Theoretical Challenge* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 41-43.

[72] For example, in Kelber, *Oral and Written Gospel*, 71: "The issue of the *historical* Jesus is of no import to the tellers and hearers of stories. The modern stance which separates 'authentic' from 'inauthentic' words or

As the elder statesman of oral literature announced to the 1977 Colloquy on the Relationships among the Gospels:

> The mythic pattern most relevant to the New Testament… is that of the dying and resurrected god. While the myth of the establishment of order stresses the birth of the god and his ascendance to power, the myth of the dying and resurrected god stresses his death. Also involved here is the idea of the scapegoat and of sacrifice. All such accounts that tell part or even all of the life story of a divine being in verse or prose genres are to be regarded as oral traditional literature rather than oral history.[73]

What the contemporary orality model school embodies is a return to the assumptions of Bultmann and Dibelius, and the indebtedness of the oral theorists to form criticism is evident from their writings, which overflow with references to Bultmann and *formgeschichte*. Their particular concern seems to be merging Bultmann's conception of oral tradition with the literary criticism of Parry and Lord as a way of side-stepping the implications of Birger Gerhardsson's daunting conclusions regarding writing and memory in first-century Palestine.[74] By embracing the broadest possible definition of oral literature and dismissing Lord's conception of a fundamental difference between oral culture and literacy culture, the performance-transmission advocates liberate the essential conclusions of form criticism from the baggage of pericopes and story-forms. Labeling Mark an oral composition allows the orality theorist to proclaim that "what the Churches preserved of the words of their Master as rules and for teaching purposes shows *the sign of a teacher rather than a god*"[75] without the messy business of building taxonomies of miracle-stories, apothegms, and proverbs.

---

searches for the 'real' Jesus behind texts is alien to oral mentality." More concisely, Joanna Dewey declares her opinion that "orality does not support historicity," in "Survival of Mark's Gospel," 500; and Robert C. Culley applies the same presuppositions to the Old Testament in "An Approach to the Problem of Oral Tradition," *VT* 13 (1963): 118, writing: "Oral literature is merely literature which has come into existence in an oral culture or group without the use of writing. Sometimes such literature is called folklore."

[73] Lord, "Gospels as Oral Tradition," 36.

[74] Mournet summarizes this position well: "The only way in which we are able to dismiss the orality model of tradition transmission is if we are willing, and able, to argue for an undisturbed, unbroken, continuous chain of transmission and control exerted by Jesus himself, and continuing within a formalized context for several decades until the time of the writing of the Gospels themselves. Advocates of orality are unable to envision such a uniform, sustained process of tradition transmission," in "Jesus Tradition as Oral Tradition," 60. See also Kelber's illuminating explanation of the influences of Bultmann, Lord, Gerhardsson, and Ong on the study of Biblical orality in the first chapter of *Oral and Written Gospel*, 1-34. For Gerhardsson's conclusions, consult Birger Gerhardsson, *Memory and Manuscript: Oral Tradition and Written Tradition in Rabbinic Judaism and Early Christianity*, 2nd ed. (Livonia, MI: Dove Booksellers; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989).

[75] Martin Dibelius, *From Tradition to Gospel*, trans. Bertram Lee Woolf, 2nd ed. (London: Ivor Nicholson and Watson, 1934), 267. Emphasis original.

Conclusions

Despite the often-unstated assumptions of Bultmann's modern oral-school heirs, the historicity of the Gospels does not hinge on their status as fundamentally literary texts. As can be seen from Aristotle, even natural philosophers of the Greek-speaking world delivered their treatises in metered poetry that was at least derived from oral tradition if not orally composed. Even Horsley and Draper admit that, "[musical poetry] of all kinds, dramas, and even history, moreover were performed at particular occasions."[76] Whether it is a "written summary of [Peter's] teaching" as Papias claimed or an "oral composition… in continuity with the oral tradition of Jesus' sayings and stories" as Horsley suggests, the Gospel of Mark may be read as an accurate record of Jesus' life and teachings.

Concerns of historicity aside, however, Mark's Gospel does not bear the hallmarks of either Greek or Semitic verse. While it may, as some have suggested, been written to be read aloud,[77] Mark's Gospel almost certainly was not orally composed for extemporaneous performance or dramatic recital, else the text would bear the metrical evidence of the musical rhythm to which it was performed. For this reason, interpretations of Mark according to the standard oral-formulaic literary methods are unlikely to yield profitable insights into the Gospel's meaning. Instead, following Albert Lord's traditional categories, Mark should be understood and analyzed as a "literary text" as opposed to an "oral text." As Lord himself wrote:

> Formula analysis, providing, of course, that one has sufficient material for significant results, is, therefore, able to indicate whether any given text is oral or "literary." An *oral* text will yield a predominance of clearly demonstrable formulas, with the bulk of the remainder "formulaic," and a small number of nonformulaic expressions. A *literary* text will show a predominance of nonformulaic expressions, with some formulaic expressions, and a very few clear formulas.[78]

[76] Horsley, *Whoever Hears You*, 133.

[77] A clever discussion of audience and event may be found in Danelle Nightingale, "'Don't Be Late!': Assessing the Cost of Missing the Prologue in the Gospel of Mark," *EQ* 84 (2012): 108-111.

[78] Lord, *Singer of Tales*, 130.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Aristotle. *The Poetics of Aristotle*. Translated by Preston H. Epps. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1970.

Bailey, Kenneth E. "Informal Controlled Oral Tradition and the Synoptic Gospels." *Themelios* 20 (1995): 4-1.1

Bakker, Egbert T. *Poetry and Speech: Orality and Homeric Discourse.* Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997.

Baugh, S.M. *Ephesians*. Evangelical Exegetical Commentary. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016.

Bernsdorff, Hans. "Notes on P.Oxy. 3722 (Commentary on Anacreon)." *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 178 (2011): 29-34.

Bilezikian, Gilbert G. *The Liberated Gospel: A Comparison of the Gospel of Mark and Greek Tragedy*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1977.

Botha, Pieter J. J. "Mark's Story as Oral Traditional Literature: Rethinking the Transmission of Some Traditions about Jesus." *Hervermde teologiese studies* 47 (1991): 304-330.

Caird, G. B. *The Language and Imagery of the Bible.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980.

Callimachus. *Hymns and Epigrams*. Translated by A. W. Mair and G. R. Mair. LCL. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1921.

Cuddon, J. A., ed. *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory.* New York, Random House, 2015.

Culley, Robert C. *Oral Formulaic Language in the Biblical Psalms*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967.

———. "An Approach to the Problem of Oral Tradition." *Vestus Testamentum* 13 (1963): 113-125.

Currid, John D. "Theistic Evolution is Incompatible with the Teachings of the Old Testament." Pages 839-878 in *Theistic Evolution: A Scientific, Philosophical, and Theological Critique*. Edited by J.P. Moreland, Stephen C. Meyer, Christopher Shaw, Anne K. Gaguer, and Wayne Grudem. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017.

Dabney, J. P. "The Relation between Music and Poetry." *The Musical Quarterly 13* (1927): 377-383.

De Jong, Irene J. F. "Narratology and Oral Poetry: The Case of Homer." *Poetics Today* 12 (1991): 405-423.

De Vet, Thérèse. "Parry in Paris: Structuralism, Historical Linguistics, and the Oral Theory." *Classical Antiquity* 24 (2005): 257-284.

Dewey, Joanna. "Oral Methods of Structuring Narrative in Mark." *Interpretation* 43 (1989): 32-44.

———. "The Survival of Mark's Gospel: A Good Story?" *Journal of Biblical Literature* 123 (2004): 495-507.

———. "The Gospel of Mark as an Oral/Aural Narrative: Implications for Preaching." *Currents in Theology and Missions* 44 (2017): 7-10.

Dibelius, Martin. *From Tradition to Gospel*. Translated by Bertram Lee Woolf. 2rd ed. London: Ivor Nicholson and Watson, 1934.

Dunn, James D. G. "Altering the Default Setting: Re-envisaging the Early Transmission of the Jesus Tradition." *New Testament Studies* 49 (2003): 139-75.

Eusbebius. *The Church History*. Translated by Paul L. Maier. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2007.

Filson, Floyd V. "How Much of the New Testament is Poetry?" *Journal of Biblical Literature* 67 (1948): 125-134.

Finnegan, Ruth. "How Oral is Oral Literature?" *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 37 (1974): 52-64.

Flavius Josephus. *Against Apion*. Translated by Henry St. J. Thackeray. LCL. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1926.

Foley, John Miles. *How to Read an Oral Poem*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2002.

———. *The Theory of Oral Composition*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1988.

———. "Memory in Oral Tradition." Pages 83-96 in *Performing the Gospel: Orality, Memory, and Mark*. Edited by Richard A. Horsley, Jonathan A. Draper, and John Miles Foley. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2006.

Freedman, David Noel. "Pottery, Poetry, and Prophecy: An Essay on Biblical Poetry." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 96 (1977): 5-26.

Gerhardsson, Birger. *Memory and Manuscript: Oral Tradition and Written Tradition in Rabbinic Judaism and Early Christianity*. 2nd ed. Livonia, MI: Dove Booksellers; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989.

Harris, William V. *Ancient Literacy*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989.

Havelock, Eric A."Oral Composition in the Oedipus Tyrannus of Sophocles." *New Literary History* 16 (1984): 175-197.

Hearon, Holly E. "The Implications of Orality for Studies of the Biblical Text." Pages 3-20 in *Performing the Gospel: Orality, Memory, and Mark*. Edited by Richard A. Horsley, Jonathan A. Draper, and John Miles Foley. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2006.

Horsley, Richard A., and Jonathan A. Draper. *Whoever Hears You Hears Me: Prophets, Performance, and Tradition in Q.* Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press, 1999.

Hyman, Ronald T. "Two Fundamental Word Pairs: Sow/Reap and Plow/Reap." *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 31 (2003): 237-244.

Keck, Leander E. "Oral Traditional Literature and the Gospels: The Seminar." Pages 103-122 in *The Relationship Among the Gospels: An Interdisciplinary Dialogue*. Edited by William O. Walker, Jr. San Antonio, TX: Trinity University Press, 1978.

Kelber, Werner H. *The Oral and the Written Gospel: The Hermenutics of Speaking and Writing in the Synoptic Tradition, Mark, Paul, and Q*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989.

———. "The Oral and the Written Gospel: Fifteen Years Afterward." Pages 167-186 in *Imprints, Voiceprints, and Footprints of Memory: Collected Essays of Werner H. Kelber.* Atlanta: SBL Press, 2013.

Kennedy, X.J., Dana Gioia, and Mark Bauerlein, eds. *Handbook of Literary Terms: Literature, Language, Theory*. 2nd ed. San Francisco: Pearson Longman, 2009.

Lawless, Elaine J. "Oral 'Character' and 'Literary' Art: A Call for a New Reciprocity Between Oral Literature and Folklore." *Western Folklore* 44 (1985): 77-96.

Lord, Albert B. "The Gospels as Oral Traditional Literature." Pages 33-91in *The Relationship Among the Gospels: An Interdisciplinary Dialogue*. Edited by William O. Walker, Jr. San Antonio, TX: Trinity University Press, 1978.

———. *The Singer of Tales*. 2nd ed. Edited by Stephen Mitchell and Gregory Nagy. Harvard Studies in Comparative Literature 24. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000.

Malory, Sir Thomas. *Le Morte d'Arthur.* Repr., New York: Modern Library, 1999.

Martin, Michael Wade. "The Poetry of the Lord's Prayer: A Study in Poetic Device." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 134 (2015): 347-372.

Mathiesen, Thomas J. "Rhythm and Meter in Ancient Greek Music." *Music Theory Spectrum* 7 (1985): 159-180.

Metzger, Bruce M. *The New Testament: Its Background, Growth, and Content.* 2nd ed. Nashville: Abingdon, 1983.

Millard, Alan. *Reading and Writing in the Time of Jesus.* New York: New York University Press, 2000.

Monelle, Raymond. "Musical Notation and the Poetic Foot." *Comparative Literature* 41 (1989): 252-269.

Moore, Stephen D. *Literary Criticism and the Gospels: The Theoretical Challenge.* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989).

Mournet, Terrence C. "Jesus Tradition as Oral Tradition." Pages 39-61 in *Jesus and Memory: Traditions in Oral and Scribal Perspectives*. Edited by Werner H. Kelber and Samuel Byrskog. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press.

Nagy, Gregory. "Reading Greek Poetry Aloud: Evidence from the Bacchylides Papyri." *Quaderni Urbinati di Cultura Classica* 64 (2000): 7-28.

Niditch, Susan. *Oral Word and Written Word: Ancient Israelite Literature*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996.

Nightingale, Danelle. "'Don't Be Late!': Assessing the Cost of Missing the Prologue in the Gospel of Mark." *Evangelical Quarterly* 84 (2012): 107-118.

Ong, Walter J. *The Presence of the Word: Some Prolegomena for Cultural and Religious History.* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1967.

Packard, William. *The Poet's Dictionary: A Handbook of Prosody and Poetic Devices*. New York: HarperPerennial, 1994.

Porter, James I. "Homer: The Very Idea." *Arion: A Journal of Humanities and the Classics* 10 (2002): 57-86.

Tuckett, Christopher. "Form Criticism," Pages 21-38 in *Jesus in Memory: Traditions in Oral and Scribal Perspectives*. Edited by Werner H. Kelber and Samuel Byrskog. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2009.

Watters, William R. *Formula Criticism and the Poetry of the Old Testament*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1976.

West, Martin L. *Ancient Greek Music.* Oxford: Clarendon, 1992.

Wilson, Robert H. “Malory’s ‘French Book’ Again.” *Comparative Literature* 2 (1950): 172-181.

Witherington III, Ben. *The Gospel of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001.