



On a new book by Richard P. Martin, draft of a Foreword written by an admiring editor

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2017.12.09 | By Gregory Nagy

Presented here is a preliminary draft of a Foreword I am writing for Richard P. Martin's new book, *Mythologizing Performance*, to be published by Cornell University Press in early 2018.

[\[Essay continues here...\]](#)



Richard P. Martin

As I write in the foreword to each book included in the series *Myth and Poetics II*, published by Cornell University Press, the driving force that inspired my original project of editing such a series stems from an understanding of myth and poetics as formulated by Richard P. Martin in his book *The Language of Heroes: Speech and Performance* in the "Iliad," 1989, which was the first volume to appear in the original *Myth and Poetics* series. That book has been for me the inspiration not only for *MP I* but also for the second phase of the same series, *MP II*—which I see as *Myth and Poetics 2.0*, as it were. And now comes Martin's new book, *Mythologizing Performance*, which is just as foundational for the overall project of *Myth and Poetics*.

Although this book appears chronologically as the third, not the first, in the new series, it takes pride of place in tracing the intellectual genealogy of *Myth and Poetics 2.0*. That is why I felt the need to write a separate foreword to this particular volume, above and beyond the uniform foreword that I write for all the volumes in the series. The task of writing such a special text is difficult for me, since so much of my own thinking about myth and poetics is indebted to the discoveries and discovery procedures of Richard P. Martin. How can I write, in just one brief paragraph that I have set as my goal, an adequate statement of my indebtedness to Martin's work?

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What makes my task even more difficult is that I discovered, as I was reading the page proofs for *Mythologizing Performance*, that the author has actually dedicated his book to me, his editor. That does not seem right, I first thought to myself when I made my surprise discovery of his gracious dedication. But then, on second thought, it all made sense to me: you see, Richard Martin was once, long ago, my student. And, I now tell myself, teachers should ideally learn more from their students than the other way around—and such an ideal is after all exactly what I have experienced over so many years of intellectual collaboration with my dear colleague Richard. So, without any further self-consciousness about the inherent difficulties of my task, I proceed with an attempt to capture, in one paragraph, the importance of this new book.

In *Mythologizing Performance*, what Richard P. Martin has given his readers is a dazzlingly concise and yet far-ranging overview of the earliest phases of ancient Greek verbal art. In the course of the seventeen essays contained in this riveting book, Martin delves into the fundamentals for understanding the poetry attributed to Homer and Hesiod, which he analyzes in terms of the traditions that went into the performing as well as the composing of ancient Greek myths in the context of their ritual settings. In addition, he deftly connects Homeric and Hesiodic poetry with the far less known poetic and prosaic traditions underlying the kinds of lore that the Greeks attributed mostly to the mystical figure of Orpheus. All along, Martin keeps in mind the performativity of ancient Greek verbal art, revealing brilliant new insights about ancient Greek performers known as citharodes, that is, singers who accompany themselves on the stringed instrument known as the kithara, and rhapsodes, that is, reciters of poetry that is musically unaccompanied. And the absolutized model for such performers, as Martin demonstrates most convincingly, is none other than Apollo himself, whose divinity comes to life in his charismatic role as god of mythologizing performance.

Tags: [Apollo](#), [Hesiod](#), [Homer](#), [Myth and Poetics](#), [Myth and Poetics II](#), [Orpheus](#), [Ricard P. Martin](#)

