



A personal checklist of memorable wordings in Parts I and II of Richard P. Martin's Mythologizing Performance

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Editors: Angelia Hanhardt and Keith Stone

Consultant for Images: Jill Curry Robbins

Online Consultant: Noel Spencer

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A personal checklist of memorable wordings in Parts I and II of Richard P. Martin's *Mythologizing Performance*

April 12, 2019 By Gregory Nagy listed under By Gregory Nagy

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2019.04.12 | By Gregory Nagy

50. In an earlier posting, *Classical Inquiries* [2017.12.09](#), I have already expressed the intellectual debt I owe to Richard P. Martin's book, *Mythologizing Performance* (Cornell University Press 2018). In the present posting, I follow up with a checklist of memorable wordings culled from Parts I and II of Martin's book, to be followed in a later posting by a complementary checklist for Parts III and IV. My choice of illustration for the cover here is inspired by a central theme that Martin analyzes in Chapters 8 and 9 of Part II in his book. That theme, which shows its influence in the Homeric *Odyssey*, concerns the mystical descent of Orpheus into the world below in a sadly vain quest to recover his beloved Eurydice.



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Editor

Keith Stone
kstone@chs.harvard.edu

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Orpheus and Eurydice (modeled before 1887, carved 1893). Auguste Rodin (1840–1917). [Image via Flickr](#), under a [CC BY-NC 2.0](#) license.

Here, then, is my personal checklist of some of Martin’s wordings, directly quoted (his wordings are preceded by the page-number in the book as printed):

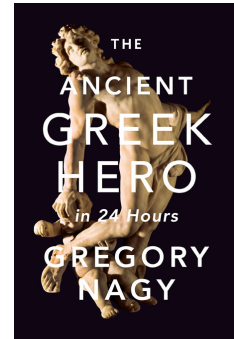
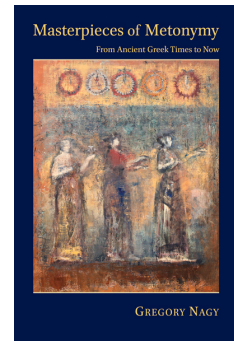
2... The notion of verbal-artistic “performance” thus can be viewed as part of a continuum that merges with other, primarily non-verbal, routines and enacted relationships (for instance, ritual and kinship protocols)—phenomena that can decisively affect the conditions for verbal art. But the core of the analysis will remain linguistic communication.

24... Good philology and intellectual honesty require the reconstruction of contexts nearest to antiquity, rather than the privileging of our own thought-worlds.

26... The genre inhered in its performers. Neither formal nor thematic boundaries prevented rhapsodic cross-pollination.

28... The performer in a very tangible way embodies all earlier performers.

34... Long similes—seemingly the stock-in-trade of “epic” composition—turn out in many cultures to be poetic interludes consciously imported from companion traditions (what one might call “lyric”).



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41... Epic stands out as the most pervasive, "unmarked" genre, in terms of when and where it can be performed, while at the same time it is the culturally most significant and "marked" form in terms of its ambitions and attitudes.

42... It can be argued that Greek epic not only can be framed by but itself consciously embeds such sub-genres as praise and blame poetry, maxims, and lyric similes.

44... As dozens of field studies show, the total "epic" is, in fact, never performed unless elicited by an outsider, such as the folklorist. Yet even when it is brought forth, as usually, in shorter episodic form, the performance depends on an audience and performer's unspoken awareness of the totality of a story and its conceivable permutations.

48... As in any comparative enterprise, we must begin with an internal analysis. What do similes accomplish within the Homeric poems? Given the tendency in Classics for interpretive modes to drop from sight and return generations later unchanged by subsequent advances in literary theory, it will be more efficient to sketch out the three basic modes of answering this question, rather than attempt a chronological history of critical stances.

50... We might have imagined that the study of similes would change radically after Parry and Lord's work became assimilated by a generation of classicists. Instead, what happened shows how a dominant intellectual paradigm redirects new advances.

54... Similes do not occur in the middle of an action: they either draw attention to the start of an action or to its finish. Put another way, similes are not like freeze frames or slow-motion sequences in film, but like transition shots, often accompanied by theme music.



Detail of Orpheus and Eurydice (modeled before 1887, carved 1893). Auguste Rodin (1840–1917). [Image](#) via Flickr, under a [CC BY-NC 2.0 license](#).

81... Speeches, which so often respond to previous speeches, are much more complex than narratives in Homer.

88... While some critics, from Plato on, labored to save their innocent audiences from the wickedness or absurdity of Homer, others (moderns as well as ancients) tried to save the Poet from himself, in the form of his contradictions, "mistakes," or the alleged defacements of later versifiers. Both types of corrective effort meant manhandling the text as it was known, whether in the 4th century BCE or the nineteenth century.

169... In a very real sense, reciting Homeric epic is itself a ritual act.

205... Orpheus—we know him as a poet, a musician, and a myth. Yet we must recall that all three of these media—poetry, music, and myth—arise, at some point, out of an act of performance.



Orpheus and Eurydice (modeled before 1887, carved 1893). Auguste Rodin (1840–1917).
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