

Introduction and *Tabula Gratulatoria*

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Tamo bez njeg' hoda ne imade.

Our journey there is impossible without him.

adapted from *The Wedding of Mustajbey's Son Bećirbey* (Foley 2004:line 412)

For John Miles Foley, oral tradition has always been about the journey—for scholars and teachers as well as for verbal artists and their audiences—and as he himself puts it in *Immanent Art*, “long journeys are also the most pleasant and the most rewarding” (1991:ix). The important role of such travel is perhaps referred to most explicitly in his recent work, *The Pathways Project*, which through its very title explores the “thought technologies” of oral tradition and electronic communication as complex navigation systems with infinitely variable routes; however, the metaphor of a journey to conceptualize scholarly work and even the verbal arts we study—never static, always in motion—has characterized his work for decades. Scholarship itself a journey, Milman Parry’s and Albert Lord’s influential work was described as “pathbreaking” (Foley 1995:xiv), and John Foley’s earliest goals for extending this path were cast in terms of a road for travel: “I hope to have succeeded in telling the tale *pravo* (straightforwardly) and not *krivo* (crookedly, falsely), as the South Slavic *guslari* would say” (1988:xiv). Later, as part of his unceasing effort to pave the way for oral traditions to be studied more readily in the classroom, he envisioned his edited *Teaching Oral Traditions* volume as “an avenue into the study of oral traditions” (1998b:1). And, of course, even the storytellers themselves can be understood in terms of their narrative voyage, such as is the case for the ancient Greek bard who “navigates through the maze of traditional story” (1998a:20).

In honor of John’s 65th birthday and his recent retirement (though a retirement largely in name only), the current surprise special issue of *Oral Tradition* celebrates and continues this journey among the world’s widely diverse oral traditions through a series of essays contributed entirely by his former and current students. Collectively, the essays that follow explore ancient Greek, Old English, Middle English, Latin, South Slavic, Old Irish, modern Irish, Old Norse, and Hungarian traditions as well as issues related to Biblical Studies, modern media, rhetoric, folk speech, occupational humor, pedagogy, ethnopoetics, and eighteenth-century British literature. Seldom do the students of any given scholar work in such a wide array of fields, and one might

well wonder how a single mentor could inspire and influence research across such a diverse range of subjects. But as a starting point for understanding this phenomenon, it seems best to begin by turning toward a pair of traditions held most dear by John himself.

First, we have the South Slavic proverb that appears above as an epigraph to this introduction. Taken from *The Wedding of Mustajbey's Son Bećirbey*, a traditional Moslem oral epic performed by Halil Bajgorić in 1935 and then translated by Foley as part of his award-winning edition in 2004, this proverb is spoken by the character Mustajbey and works to anticipate the essential role that Tale of Orašac will play in the requisite military campaign leading up to the wedding of Bećirbey to Zlata.¹ As a “larger-than-life trickster figure” (Foley 2004:40), Tale is revered as a hero despite—and, to a certain extent, because of—his unconventional and unpredictable ways of presenting himself and handling challenging situations. Whereas his horsemen wear sterling silver and gold, Tale himself spurns impractical grandiosity, dressing in goatskin trousers and employing as his weapon of choice a simple “nail-studded walking stick” (line 693). The horses of more conventional warriors may carry grand and stately weaponry themselves, but Tale’s dun-colored horse is more accustomed to carrying flour-meal on his back. And as the perfect witness to Tale’s defiance of any easy stereotype, his standard-bearer aptly rides backward and carries an upside-down standard. Yet in spite of Tale’s seemingly counter-heroic behavior and demeanor, he is still recognized upon his arrival as a hero (*junak*, line 457). Indeed it is clear that Tale is the hero without which the epic journey to defend Zlata against the villainous Baturić ban cannot, and will not, begin. And in fact it is Tale’s command—Let’s start traveling now! (*Da jidemo sada putovati!*, line 476)—that finally spurs the party into action.

In the end, it is precisely Tale’s refusal to conform that saves the day and allows for the successful conclusion of the wedding song. Traveling up a mountain with seven sponsors to protect Zlata, Mustajbey and his men unknowingly encounter Baturić himself, so convincingly disguised as a blind beggar that, at Mustajbey’s behest, all seven sponsors and even the bride and groom themselves generously share with him their riches. It is only the unassuming and nonconforming Tale who sees through the disguise, exposing the terrified Baturić with the help of his nail-studded walking stick before giving thanks to god for the cloak he then obtains from his fleeing enemy. Because of Tale’s fortuitous intervention, it is now possible for the journey to proceed so that Mustajbey’s troops can avenge themselves against the forces of Baturić, with the great hero Djerdelez Alija bravely killing Baturić himself and thus enabling the happy and long-awaited union of Zlata and Bećirbey. A trickster-hero defined by his readiness to push boundaries, Tale is, in Foley’s words “a combatant of unmatched bravery and achievement” (107).

As is true for Tale, John’s success in facilitating successful journeys—both for himself and for his students—derives in large part from his refusal to follow convention purely for convention’s sake, a decision made quite apparent in *Immanent Art*: “I now declare my independence, for better or for worse, from any of the modern critical schools” despite the “price

¹ As Foley explains, “this line is proverbially attached to Tale, and Tale alone, in many epics” and “it speaks idiomatically to the necessity of his presence and contribution in battle” (2004:107).

one has to pay for nonalignment” (1991:xiii). Further departures from scholarly norms soon followed, both in his bringing together of unlikely comparanda within *Singer of Tales in Performance* because “contexts that lie outside the received version or text are most certainly active and crucially important” (1995:xi) and in his choice to bridge the gap between academic scholarship and a general readership in *How to Read an Oral Poem* through the utilization of a more readable style: “If in championing the cause of the nonspecialist this book errs on the side of simplicity and availability, then so be it” (2002:ix). Similarly, The Pathways Project was described from its outset as “a provocation, not a solution” (Foley 2011-:“Preface” node) that “follows its own credo” (“Responses” node).

Accordingly, John Foley has also long found it necessary to remind his students and his readers that, like Tale’s journey, the study of verbal art has, unfortunately, often been more akin to warfare than to dialogue. Noting the etymological connection between *cannon* and *canon*, he astutely observed early on that “*canon* has come to designate a battlefield, an intellectual fortress under siege, a primary site for cultural combat” (1988a:13). But just like Tale, at the heart of the battle but refusing to accept its polarizing terms, Foley removes the entire question away from the battlefield of the *canon*, comparing oral tradition instead to Proteus who “exists only in his shape-shifting and resists the captivity of canonical form” (22). As he explains in *Traditional Oral Epic*, the “danger” involved with broad comparative studies is a “risk occasionally worth taking” (1990:ix), but only when it involves “honest appraisal of differences as well as similarities” (ix).

We mustn’t press the connection too far, however, for Tale, to put it mildly, is neither collaborator nor teacher. Although his seemingly counter-intuitive methods “inevitably prove essential to any mission’s success” (2004:40), this “trickster-hero” acts largely in his own self-interest, and it is here that John Miles Foley sharply parts ways with Tale of Orašac. At this juncture, then, we are compelled to turn to another tradition held dear by John, that of Old English poetry. Poetically affirming the mutual enrichment of open dialogue, *Maxims I* opens with the sage assertion that “Wise men shall exchange *gieds*” (*Gleawe men sceolon gieddum wrixlan*, line 4a²), *gied* signaling, in Foley’s words, “the nexus of song and wisdom” (1995:205). And it is just such exchanges of songs and wisdom that he himself has helped to facilitate by establishing and directing the Center for Studies in Oral Tradition, which has served for more 25 years “to foster conversations and exchanges about oral tradition that would not otherwise take place” (<http://oraltradition.org/about>). John further sought in 2006 “to democratize academic research” and “to remove barriers to learning and knowledge-sharing” (<http://www.e-researchcenter.org>) by founding the Center for eResearch, and these goals were then achieved to an even greater extent in 2011 when John created the International Society for Studies in Oral Tradition as “an online, universally accessible, and free-of-charge facility” designed to “create and maintain an open, democratic network for understanding the world’s oral traditions” (<http://oraltradition.org/articles/issot>). And of course as the general editor and founder of several book series—including the Albert Bates Lord Studies on Oral Tradition (Garland, 1987-98), the Voices in Performance and Text series (University of Illinois Press and Indiana University Press,

² *Maxims I* quotation from Krapp and Dobbie 1936. Translation follows Foley 1995:205.

1994-99), the Poetics of Orality and Literacy series (Notre Dame, since 2004), and numerous other edited volumes³—John Foley has been vigilant in creating every opportunity possible for exchange and in nourishing truly interdisciplinary dialogue.

Perhaps nowhere is his generosity in providing opportunities for productive exchange more apparent than in his teaching. Joining the Department of English at the University of Missouri-Columbia in 1979, John Foley has gone on to influence students in numerous departments, as he eventually was named as a professor of Classical Studies in 1991, an adjunct professor of Anthropology in 1992, and a professor of Germanic and Slavic Languages in 2003. His thoughtful mentorship has therefore enabled numerous undergraduate and graduate students in these various departments to reach beyond their established curricular boundaries and aggressively pursue research enhanced by multiple theoretical approaches and finely nuanced interdisciplinary insights. But his dedication to the exchange of ideas through teaching does not stop at his home institution. He has dedicated numerous summers to even more wide-reaching exchanges, now leading workshops and summer schools in places as far-flung as Finland and China, but perhaps his most intensive efforts were those involved with his direction of six National Endowment of the Humanities Summer Seminars on oral traditional literatures in 1987, 1989, 1991, 1992, 1994, and 1996. But whether at home or abroad, John Foley has always understood teaching and research to be inextricably connected, and even very early in his career he noted of teachers that “it is the light of their learning that was kindled and burns yet within us” (1983:7). By conceiving of pedagogy and scholarship as dual aspects of “‘learning’ in the most essential meaning of the word” (5), he has thus always inspired his students to maintain a commitment toward mutually nourishing teaching, research, and learning “because we are doing what we believe in and contributing to a long and distinguished tradition, whatever individual roles fate prescribes for us” (6).

Throughout his career, John Foley has always acknowledged and celebrated the contributions of his own mentors and those of the field more broadly, dedicating numerous volumes as tributes.⁴ Therefore, in honor of his 65th birthday and his “semi-retirement,” our hope was to turn the tables on John and allow his students the opportunity to demonstrate their own appreciation for all he has done to help each of us as we proceed on our own individual journeys, whether we first encountered him as a student at the University of Missouri-Columbia or as a participant in one of his NEH seminars. However, because we have each been influenced by John in so many different ways, we did not want to limit ourselves to a venue where only lengthy, in-depth essays would be appropriate. Instead, we wished to have the freedom to include such pieces, of course, but to complement them with shorter pieces as well, contributions that fearlessly struck out into less familiar—and perhaps in some cases, more personally meaningful—territory as they examined connections that John’s efforts had either directly or indirectly helped make apparent. And it became clear at this point that the most fitting place for such a

³ See further the annotated bibliography of John Miles Foley’s work at the end of this volume.

⁴ *Oral Traditional Literature: A Festschrift for Albert Bates Lord* (Slavica Publishers, 1981); *Comparative Research on Oral Traditions: A Memorial for Milman Parry* (Slavica Publishers, 1987); *A Festschrift for Walter J. Ong* (special issue of *Oral Tradition*, 2.1, 1987); *De Gustibus: Essays for Alain Renoir* (Garland, 1992); *Oral Tradition*, volume 18, dedicated as a *Festschrift* to Robert Payson Creed, “who introduced me to Old English poetry and oral tradition” (Foley 2003, n.p.).

tribute would be as a special issue of *Oral Tradition* itself, the multi-disciplinary and ever-innovative journal that John Foley has now edited for more than 25 years. As readers will see, this journal's wonderful flexibility has allowed us not only to incorporate more than a dozen full-length investigations into a wide range of issues related to oral traditions and the works of verbal art that they engender, but also to follow its well-established precedent of grouping together shorter pieces within a unified cluster—in this case, through an arrangement of essays entitled “Further Explorations” that is meant to follow John's lead of always pushing scholarship into that next uncharted area for the benefit of specialists and non-specialists alike. The issue then concludes with a short personal reflection by his first Ph.D. student, Ward Parks, and an annotated bibliography devoted to the still quickly-expanding body of John's scholarship. This present issue of *Oral Tradition* is thus meant to serve both as a testament of and a tribute to that rare combination embodied in John Miles Foley of Tale's willingness to push boundaries and the Anglo-Saxons' firm belief in the wisdom of shared knowledge and shared song.

As we pursued this project, we wished to preserve for as long as possible the surprise nature of this special issue, and, thus, as noble as our intentions may have been, we were unfortunately in the end forced to depart from the publicly heroic acts of any South Slavic or Anglo-Saxon hero and instead emulate the evil Baturić and his kidnapping tendencies by hijacking John's journal, with the esteemed editor remaining unaware of our intentions for several months as we solicited contributions, saw them through the journal's normal review and editorial process, and eventually finalized the issue's contents. But though we must accept ultimate culpability for this clandestine enterprise, we have not acted alone. The tremendously dedicated group of contributing authors themselves were of course complicit throughout the entire endeavor, and we would like to express our deepest thanks to them and to all of the former and current students listed in the *tabula gratulatoria* that follows. Among the many others who have generously shared their time, support, and invaluable knowledge with us in planning and executing this special issue, the following deserve special mention: Mark Amodio, Leslie Arnovick, Geoff Bakewell, Margaret Beissinger, Mark Bender, Chogjin, Casey Dué Hackney, David Elmer, Larry Evers, Terry Gunnell, Holly Hearon, Dan Hooley, Andrea Lively, Heather Maring, Richard Martin, Joseph Nagy, Susan Niditch, Brian O'Broin, Pat Okker, Chad Oness, Kenan Padgett, Thomas Pettitt, Catherine Quick, Karl Reichl, Seth Rudy, Michael Saenger, David Schenker, Aaron Tate, Ron Turner, and Barbara Wallach. We must also incriminate and thank the staff at the Center for Studies in Oral Tradition, who provided expert copy-editing and proof-reading as well as a contagious enthusiasm for this project, most especially managing editor Justin Arft and editorial assistants Peter Ramey, Sarah Zurhellen, and Morgan Grey, as well as *Oral Tradition*'s associate editor, John Zemke. Finally, as co-conspirators with us from the very beginning, Mark Jarvis and Anne-Marie Foley not only helped us in our planning at every stage, but they also took extreme measures to keep the special issue secret from John himself until the compilation was fairly close to completion.

Quite fittingly, John Foley recently described the approach toward scholarship that he has always instilled in his students as part of their own journeys (Foley 2011-:“Response” node):

In my view any contribution or intervention worth the name has as its most basic responsibility the stimulation of dialogue—more accurately, polylogue—that will lead to greater understanding than any single contribution can ever engender.

It is our sincere hope that he will accept this special issue as our modest thanks for making such conversations and their encompassing journey possible, and as evidence that the paths he blazed do indeed wind on in ever-new and always-surprising directions.

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Tabula Gratulatoria

*The following former and current students of John Miles Foley wish to enter their names in this Tabula Gratulatoria as an expression of their gratitude for his mentorship and as a tribute to his impact on studies in oral traditions throughout the world.**

Justin Arft	Edward Mallot
Michael Barnes	Heather Maring
Timothy Boyd	Eric Montenyohl
Julie Christenson	Rebecca Richardson Mouser
Dave Collier	Lea Olsan
Jackie Dana	Chad Oness
Adam Brooke Davis	Ward Parks
Erin Davis	Raymond F. Person, Jr.
Keith Dickson	Andrew Porter
Michael D. C. Drout	Catherine Quick
Adam M. Dubé	Peter Ramey
Thomas DuBois	Roslyn Raney
Amy Elifrits	Melissa Range
Lori Ann Garner	Steve Reece
R. Scott Garner	John Roth
Morgan E. Grey	Marjorie Rubright
Nancy Hadfield	Claire Schmidt
David Heckel	Casey Shamey
Dave Henderson	Bruce Shields
Kendy Hess	Jamie Stephens
Holly Hobbs	Denise Stodola
Carolyn Higbie	Leslie Stratyner
Bonnie D. Irwin	Aaron P. Tate
Ruth Knezevich	Sybil Thornton
Wayne Kraft	Lee Edgar Tyler
Lynn C. Lewis	Derek Updegraff
Xianting Li	S. Matthew Wharton
Randolph Lumppp	Sarah Zurhellen
Zaid Mahir	

* While we did our best to reach all those students who worked closely with John at the University of Missouri-Columbia or participated in one the NEH Summer Seminars that he directed, we did not always succeed and know that this list doubtless represents only a fraction of those whose lives and work have been greatly enriched by his teaching and scholarship.