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Improvisation, Typology, Culture, and 'The New Orthodoxy': How 'Oral' Is Homer? by D. Gary Miller

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J. N. Adams. *The Latin Sexual Vocabulary*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982. Pp. xii, 272. \$27.50.

This book presents a comprehensive survey of the primary obscenities in Latin and of those metaphorical expressions that relate to the male and female genitalia, the anus, and various sexual acts, together with an appendix on the vocabulary of bodily functions. For the most part, Adams restricts himself to collecting and defining terminology and establishing its sphere of usage, although he sometimes makes important general observations (e.g., pp. 132-34, on the weakening of the cognitive force of sexual terms in certain circumstances). Treatment of the sociological and literary aspects of the topic is confined to some valuable but brief remarks in the introductory and concluding chapters. Although it goes beyond the task the author set himself, I would have welcomed more discussion of Latin obscenity in its broader cultural context.

One can quibble with Adams over a few points. On pp. 32-33 he denies a double-entendre in both the *passer* of Catullus 2 and 3 and *passerem Catulli* at Martial 11.6.16. Granted, Catullus probably did not intend the reader to find an obscene meaning in his two texts (the argument Adams provides for that contention is, however, weak). Martial's pun, nevertheless, is self-evident—and outrageous precisely because of the novel meaning it imposes on what had been a pair of innocently sentimental love poems. Since he does not stop to determine the tone of each passage, Adams fails to observe how Martial's expression will in fact support his position on Catullus. I am also not convinced by the suggestion (pp. 173-74) that the Greek loan-words *calare*, *eugium* and *strutheum* were introduced into Latin specifically by Greek prostitutes; surely Latin speakers could have heard those words in other places than the brothel.

Usually, however, I find myself in agreement with the author. Certainly he displays an exceptional command of philology and linguistics and a sound critical judgment. Thus his book should prove an essential reference work for all students of the Latin language and promote a better literary understanding of such writers as Catullus and Martial.

I was rather dismayed by the occasional virulence shown toward scholars with whom the author disagrees. The worthiest research combines a reverence for Housman's exacting standards of scholarship with generous professional courtesy.

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D. Gary Miller. *Improvisation, Typology, Culture, and 'The New Orthodoxy': How 'Oral' is Homer?* Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1982. Pp. xiv, 118. \$19.75 (hb), \$8.25 (pb).

This is an odd little book. Miller aims to clarify Milman Parry's theory of oral composition and to eliminate misconceptions put about by other, unenlightened scholars. But the "new orthodoxy" promised in the title is in fact the old orthodoxy, "hard Parryism", overlaid by a thin veneer of "cognitive science" and comparative epic.

Chapters I-III provide a clear and mostly accurate account of the principal tenets of oral theory, and the author's insistence on an improvised/non-improvised spectrum *within* a given oral tradition is salutary. But these chapters offer little original material (the discussion of enjambment, e.g., adds nothing much to Parry's own 1929 *TAPA* paper).

Chapter IV treats four "textual problems" in Homer: break of symmetry in *Il.* 5; Athena's instructions in *Od.* 1.271-296; the allegedly unfriendly Phaeacians; insertion of the *Nekyia*. Although there is some astute explication here, particularly in the demonstration of correspondences in the narrative, the peculiarity of such patterns to oral poetry is not proved but merely asserted, in part on the strength of certain unelaborated "cognitive principles."

Two concluding chapters pursue further a vituperative critique, begun in chapters I-III, of the "simple-minded", "nonsensical", and "vacuous" speculations of various "anti-Parryites". R. Finnegan, G. P. Goold, A. Heubeck, J. Russo, and D. Wender come in for particularly hard knocks.

It is difficult to know for whom this book was designed. On the one hand, the professional scholar, or even graduate student, will not in 1982 need to be told that, in the course of Homeric scholarship, "there emerged a classicist by the name of Milman Parry" (p. xiii); neither will he be edified by a formulaic analysis of "The Long and Winding Road" (Lennon-McCartney) or by a revival of the old quarrels between hard Parryists and revisionists (significantly, Anne and Adam Parry receive no notice).

On the other hand, undergraduate readers, though they might find chapters I-III a helpful general introduction to the essentials of Parry's theory, will not be well served by the pietistic attitude toward Albert Lord and James Notopoulos and concomitant anathematizing of (very fine) scholars holding "heretical" views. Such an audience would do better to read Lord himself together with Adam Parry's invaluable introduction to his father's collected papers.

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M. Byron Raizis. *From Caucasus to Pittsburgh: The Prometheus Theme in British and American Poetry*. Athens: "Gnosis" Publishing Co. (no date listed). Pp. xvi, 290. No price listed (pb).

Of all the heroes of Greek myth, it is paradoxically the most itinerant and the most stationary who have engaged most of our poetic imagination. While Odysseus ranges the Mediterranean and the stretches of human experience, the Prometheus of Aeschylus' surviving play never moves from the Caucasian rock to which he is bound. In English poetry, however, Prometheus, too, becomes a hero of many turns: from romantic revolutionary to Victorian progressive to despairing tenant of the age of anxiety. M. Byron Raizis is now our best guide through these transformations.

Raizis has done his homework. With research beyond the dissertation that was completed in 1966, he discusses in detail some seventy dramatic, lyric, and narrative poems of the Promethean corpus. Most striking are his treatments of Milton, whose Satan resembles Prometheus enough to tempt our admiration; of Byron and Shelley, the first poets in English fully to understand and exploit the potential of the Prometheus legend; and of Robert Lowell, whose 1967 prose drama *Prometheus Bound* maps the malaise of the age. "Beyond here," says Force early in the play, "everything is downhill." Prometheus/Lowell foresees no final redemption, however distant:

"Nothing new. Zeus will fall as they all do. . . .but this time he will beget a son, the usual, inevitable son who is always better than his father, a son who will throw Zeus into ruin and forgetfulness."