

historical reputations, which is actually a specific instance of (b), above. The overarching concern throughout has been to explicate the way in which social memory research over the last two decades has problematized and explored how memory functions in re(-)presenting the past. As Kirk and Thatcher (2005a) take pains to demonstrate, New Testament research has seriously underestimated, and marginalized, memory as an analytical category useful for exploring the 'historical Jesus' (and other related topics).

We have not yet arrived at the point where we can approach the memorial artefacts of the early communities of Jesus' followers with the tools and perspectives supplied by social memory research. While we have a more complicated and sophisticated appreciation for the phenomenon of memory – what it is, how it works and why – we have not yet adequately explored the nature of the evidence before us: the extant gospel texts. How were these texts produced? How were they received? What contexts functioned most determinatively as interpretative frames for the traditions contained in them? How did they function within their communal contexts, whether as material or traditional artefacts, as cultural or polemical resources, etc.? While these issues are indeed very complicated, one consensually admitted fact provides a useful starting point: the Jesus tradition, with whatever relation to the extant texts, was originally *oral* tradition.

The study of oral tradition, and especially folklore studies, has had a demonstrably more significant impact on New Testament studies than has social memory theory, especially in gospels and Jesus research. Research into the functions and dynamics of oral tradition have not been static during the last eighty years. The next chapter explores some recent developments of oral traditional research and addresses the related field of oral historical research, a field which has itself had an impact on Jesus research in Byrskog's significant monograph, *Story as History – History as Story* (2000). Once we have examined the dynamics of oral tradition and oral history and attempted to distil their implications for our approach to and apprehension of the written gospels, we will turn to those texts, and specifically to their depiction of Jesus' statements regarding his healings/exorcisms and their significance (Chs. 5–7).

#### 4. PERFORMANCE, STRUCTURE, MEANING AND TEXT

Where literacy is limited, the telling of a story is mediated to those who cannot easily read by those who can. The reported story is a base for such storytelling. Where the length of a text is limited, the telling of a story will necessarily be expanded beyond the text on which it is based.

Antony F. Campbell,  
*'The Storyteller's Role'*, 429

As an artistic matter, we can't hope to read ancient, medieval, and other manuscript-based but oral-connected poetry without considering its true dynamics. Much is at stake here.

John Miles Foley,  
*How to Read an Oral Poem*, 46

##### 4.1. Introduction: Oral Tradition and New Testament Research

As we have seen, memory is a complex phenomenon (or range of phenomena) rooted in but not limited to psychological processes within an individual. As we turn our attention to concepts whose importance for biblical research has been waxing for over two decades (especially 'orality', 'literacy', 'performance' and 'text'), we will see that each of these is likewise complex. Unlike social memory research, New Testament scholarship has taken some account of 'orality studies'. The influence of oral traditional research on our field has both positive and negative consequences. Positively, many of the concepts and questions discussed in this chapter will be familiar to New Testament critics. Negatively, considerable confusion attaches to many of the central concerns facing us, not least the nature of 'orality' and its significance for exegesis and historical reconstruction. The current chapter attempts to cut through this confusion and offer a reading programme that nuances contemporary critical reception of the gospels.

Memory will continue to serve an important analytical function in our discussion of oral tradition and history. Beyond memory, however,

questions arise about how oral messages (traditional, autobiographical and so on) function in society. To complicate matters further, oral messages rarely, if ever, operate without relation to written texts and the social functions of literacy (except, perhaps, in pre-literate societies).<sup>1</sup> The relationship between the spoken and written word has been at the centre of discussions of oral tradition for over three decades, though scholars have not yet developed a generally accepted theory of orality, literacy and the integration of the two in society.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps, then, we ought to begin by surveying how recent work on written and oral verbal art have understood some of the key issues involved.<sup>3</sup>

#### 4.2. Performance Theory and the Jesus Tradition

In our terms, performance *actualizes* tradition, brings it from potentiality to actuality. In this perspective, a number of interpretative questions arise.<sup>4</sup> The first involves the question of performance and its relation to traditional composition. In the light of our concern for oral Jesus tradition, both *before* the first written gospel and *continuing through* the multiplicity of written gospels, in what sense does the tradition (at the concrete level of wording and sequence) take shape in the moment of oral performance? In other words, in what sense does the *content* of oral tradition arise out of the interactive performative moment? My use of the term 'actualization' already suggests my position vis-à-vis the question of what happens to the *content* of tradition within a performative context.<sup>5</sup> Actualization has the advantage of affirming the extra-performative existence of the material being performed while simultaneously reminding us that, outside of performance, that existence is 'unactualized'. It exists as

1 Ong (e.g., 1982: 6) refers to pre-literate groups as 'primary oral cultures', which he distinguishes from 'secondary oral cultures' (the electronic 'orality' of radio, television, etc.) and 'residual orality'.

2 The term 'orality' is unfortunate, if primarily because it is so widespread (even the area of inquiry with which we are concerned is frequently labelled 'orality studies') and yet difficult to define. In general, 'orality' is frequently understood as the opposite of 'literacy', but both terms refer to realities that are so conceptually broad and diverse that the labels signify too much, and therefore signify anything at all only vaguely and with difficulty. We will, therefore, restrict as much as possible the use of 'orality'; 'literacy' will require definition in the contexts in which it appears. Cf. the discussions in Thomas 1989: 9; 1992: 6-8; Tonkin: 1992: 14. Foley (esp. 1995a) rarely refers to 'orality' in his analyses.

3 See my discussion of literacy and orality, both problematic concepts in New Testament research, in 'Reading and Hearing in Ancient Contexts', *JSNT*, forthcoming.

4 What follows is heavily indebted, directly and indirectly, on the pioneering work of Milman Parry and Albert Lord. For a summary of the Parry-Lord (or Oral-Formulaic) Theory of oral tradition, as well as a comprehensive bibliography, cf. Foley 1988.

5 Cf. Heaton 2006, who also uses 'actualization' to describe what happens to the Jesus tradition in performance.

potential. 'The tradition', of course, is no less real for being 'unactualized'. If we may anticipate the results of this section's discussion, we will conceptualize 'what is spoken' in a given oral performance of the Jesus tradition as 'particular realized cases' of the abstract 'set [*tableau*] of possible literary objects'.<sup>6</sup>

##### 4.2.a. Actualizing Tradition in Performance

Kelber emphasizes performance as the moment of composition: 'transmission and composition converge in oral performance. Although the speaker used traditional materials, she or he was composing while speaking ... *The idea was not to reproduce what was said previously, but to (re)compose so as to affect the present circumstance.*' (Kelber 1995: 150, citing Lord 1960: 5, 101; emphasis added). But why does Kelber oppose 'reproduc[ing] what was said previously' with 'affect[ing] the present'?<sup>7</sup> This opposition is not only unnecessary, it jars against Kelber's helpful recognition of 'traditional materials' in oral performance. Communities of Jesus' followers valued and repeatedly performed their traditions with the conviction that 'what was said previously', in broad strokes if not with verbatim exactitude, was relevant and ought to 'affect the present circumstance'.<sup>8</sup> So our question remains unanswered: in what sense is the

6 Chatman 1978: 18, quoting Todorov 1971: 103. Though Chatman (and Todorov) are explicitly engaged in literary criticism, the phrase 'literary objects', in this book, refers to 'verbal art' that exhibits 'pretensions beyond ordinary speech' (cf. Jaffee's definition of 'oral-literary tradition' [2001: 8]; the notion of 'verbal art' is discussed at length in Foley 1991; 1995a; 2002). More importantly, Chatman in this section argues for deductive poetics in which, 'definitions are to be made, not discovered ... We need not expect actual works to be pure examples of our categories. *The categories plot the abstract network upon which individual works find their place*' (1978: 18; emphasis added). That conception bears similarities to the concept here of an abstract 'Jesus tradition' contextualizing and infusing performances of the tradition with significance.

7 I suspect Kelber's comment is intended to highlight the variability of performance, in which case his point is well-taken. As we have said, nothing about our evidence suggests that Jesus' tradents felt any anxiety to reproduce previous traditional performances or even to conform to a written text. Even so, we are arguing here that each performance was received in a present already constituted by past performances, including any written texts to which a particular audience had previously been exposed.

8 The concept of 'verbatim exactitude' is itself problematic. Though 'word-for-word' copying or reproduction has been an important concept for the practice of source criticism (and for every analysis that assumes its results) anthropologists and Homericists have long known that the definition of a 'word' varies between cultures and is not limited to our notion of a lexically distinct linguistic atom. Foley points out that a number of South Slavic bards, 'claimed verbatim accuracy without fulfilling that claim. Further questioning, however, made it apparent that their concept of "word" was of a larger expression, usually a line or more in length, which could itself undergo substitution and modification. From their point of view, then, the claim of "word-for-word" accuracy was quite correct' (1988: 115, fn 21; cf. also Foley 1995a: 2; 1997: 58, 239; 2002: 11-21).

tradition 'composed', and its content and structure determined, in performance?

Despite the need to qualify Kelber's work, we affirm that 'transmission and composition converge in oral performance' (Kelber 1995: 150).<sup>9</sup> Transmission refers precisely to the (re)construction and (re)verbalization of what already exists within memory. Performance does not compose tradition *de novo* but retells it from memory as performer and audience interact in the shadow of the tradition's performative history. As Jan Vansina argues, 'oral tradition consists of information existing in memory. It is in memory most of the time, and only now and then are those parts recalled which the needs of the moment require' (1985: 147).<sup>10</sup> Oral tradition is not 'composed' *ex nihilo*, as it were, in performance; rather, the tradition, which lacks a fixed textual form outside of performance, is embodied in the performative act.<sup>11</sup> Once written versions of the Jesus tradition began to proliferate within early Christian communities throughout Palestine and beyond, these texts were not received as *the fixed form* of the Jesus tradition (Sanders 1969: 36-37). Our written gospels suggest that, when accessing and transmitting the Jesus tradition, a fixed verbal or sequential corpus of tradition mattered less than did the story and proclamation of Jesus, both of his message and of his person (Schröter 2006: 116).

In a very real sense, then, oral performance *instantiates* the verbal and structural form of the tradition. Jesus' tradents actualized the story of Jesus' life – his teachings, what he had done and what had been done to him – in performance. The words necessary to actualize this story, or these stories, were not the primary focus; they served the tradition being performed. Not that we should understand each performance as a decontextualized event, cut loose from previous performances or from the non-performative forms the tradition took (sacred material objects, communal institutional structure, sacred art or music, etc.). But if the tradition lacked a fixed textual form, then we must look elsewhere to

<sup>9</sup> Cf. also Lord 1960: 5. Lord later reminds us that, 'performance is indeed significant, that context is important, and that without a sympathetic knowledge of context the text may well be misunderstood and misinterpreted.' (Lord 1986: 380). This is the point we are currently trying to bring to contemporary gospels research.

<sup>10</sup> Vansina's model of memory is helpful: 'Memory is not an inert storage system like a tape recorder or a computer. Remembering is an activity, a re-creation of what once was. It uses for this purpose not just this or that bit of information, but everything available in the information pool that is needed in this circumstance, reshaped as needed for this particular re-creation' (1985: 147-148).

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Foley 1988: 11: 'As a careful fieldworker who made a practice of listening to many versions of the same narrative, [Vasilii V.] Radlov noticed that a singer's rendition of a given song was neither purely memorized nor created wholly anew with each performance, but that bards practiced an art that allowed variation within limits, without realizing, of course, that they were not reciting a song "word for word".'

understand the inseparable dynamics of stability and variability within traditional units as well as within the gospel tradition as a whole. Recent Oral-Formulaic research suggests performance (rather than text) may hold the key to these dynamics of tradition: 'performance involves both performer and audience and it is the very interaction of these two that results in a given text' (Dundes 1988: x). This perspective, where the text *results from* the interaction of performer and audience, differs dramatically from that of standard gospel criticism, where the text *mediates* author/reader (or author/audience) interaction.

I propose that the tradition's stability and variability is rooted in early Christian memory, the memory of Jesus' teaching and healing activity in Galilee *as well as* the memory of various performances (i.e., retellings) of that activity and the force those performances exerted on the community itself.<sup>12</sup> A particular performance of tradition transmits *the same thing* that earlier performances transmitted, even if the verbal and sequential structure of the latter performance did not, and could not have, reproduced exactly the verbal and sequential structure of earlier performances. The tradition is the story; the tradition is the memory. It is not confined to the oral- or written-textual shape of any particular performance.<sup>13</sup>

When we affirm, then, that oral tradition is composed in performance, we mean that the performative environment forges the tradition's textual shape. But that textual shape is one embodiment of the tradition; the tradition itself – its essence – transcends that textual shape. Performance actualizes tradition, and both performer and audience enter into and perceive the performance in reference to its ambient tradition. The performance, then, does not simply give expression to a tradition that exists only in the memories of a performer and his audience; performance takes place in 'the context of a special social event' (Bakker 1997: 27) and draws together past and present, reaffirms traditional social values and understandings, and connects a group (in its present) with its traditions (its past). These traditions already surround the group in forms other than the memories of its members (for example, in its material, institutional,

<sup>12</sup> We are inquiring into what lends, for example, the story of the healing of the paralytic (Mark 2.1-12 *parr.*) its unity and makes it recognizable as *that* story across multiple performances, if not its textual identity, which shifts across the extant examples we have before us. Cf. §4.2.b., below.

<sup>13</sup> Thus Mark 2.1-12 is not 'the Markan version' of the healing of the paralytic, nor Mt. 9.1-8 'the Matthean version', nor Luke 5.17-26 'the Lukan version'. While each passage may exhibit traces of the performative tendencies of their respective evangelists, we have no basis upon which to presume that Mark felt constrained, each time he performed this story, to do so exactly as it was found in Mark 2.1-12. Neither can we presume Matthew and Luke felt such constraints. Even the Two-Source Hypothesis makes obvious that neither Matthew nor Luke felt constrained to recreate the tradition as it appeared in Mark or Q.

and behavioural traditions).<sup>14</sup> The tradition's textual shape arises in performance, but the tradition itself exists prior to and outside of performance. If we may import an analogy from structural linguistics, the tradition exists as *langue*; performance forges *parole*. That is, 'the tradition', as *langue*, refers to the semiotic system within which and according to which individual expressions generate meaning; the 'text-in-performance', as *parole*, refers to individual utterances that instantiate the larger system. We can understand Foley's comments in terms of this analogy: 'any performance/version is fundamentally a "tale within a tale," with the avenues of implication necessarily running both ways. The present tale both enriches and is enriched by the larger, implied tale – itself unperformed (and unperformable) but metonymically present to the performer and audience' (1995a: 48, fn 44). A linguistic system does not exist apart from its actualizations in concrete, individual utterances, but that system transcends and contextualizes individual utterances. So it is with the Jesus tradition and its actualization in performance (including our written gospels).

#### 4.2.b. *Sedimenting Performance through Time*

In our attempt to nuance our approach to the tradition's 'composition-in-performance', we encountered a second interpretative question: how does the iterative, diachronic experience of recurring performances affect the shape and reception of the tradition? Bakker calls attention to the ways in which memory and the act of remembering link 'the verbalizing consciousness in the present and the perceiving consciousness in the past' (1997: 14). In other words, the consciousness of the performer is aware at once of being in both the present (in the current performative context) and the past (of perceiving and participating in the events being narrated *as well as* being aware of earlier performances). Thus multiple experiences are implicated in and resonate with each traditional performance; performance brings the past near and fuses it with the ever-increasing multiplicity of previous performances.<sup>15</sup> Thus even 'bits' of the

<sup>14</sup> My assertion that 'traditional social values and understandings' are reaffirmed in performance does not deny that oral tradition and oral performance can be subversive (cf. Kelber 2005: 228). When oral tradition subverts (rather than expresses) previous tradition and social structures, however, it does not, and cannot, rely as heavily on previous performances of that tradition, within those structures, to generate meaning (cf. Foley 1991; 1995a).

<sup>15</sup> The concept of the 'nearness' of the past in oral performance must be kept in balance with a recognition that people in the ancient world were more than capable of also recognizing the difference between the present and the past. Bakker refers to, 'the tension between the idea of the past as something *near* and recreated in the context of the performance yet at the same time something *distant*, something with regard to which one can adopt an "objective" stance' (1997: 12).

tradition are received in terms of the tradition *in toto*; the performance of, for example, the straightening of the 'bent' woman in Luke 13.11-13 would have evoked not simply the contextualizing Israelite tradition but also the entire tradition of Jesus as healer and exorcist. Loveday Alexander, echoing Lord 1978, notes:

Oral tradition should not be thought of simply as a series of unconnected units. *The individual episodes presuppose the existence of a connected narrative, a cycle of tales related to a particular individual ...* The 'life' [i.e., the 'connected narrative'] is in some sense implicit in the individual episodes – even, in broad outline, the sequence from birth to death. (L. Alexander 2006: 20; emphasis added)<sup>16</sup>

Gregory Nagy (1997) demonstrates the diachrony of traditional performance, in which various perspectives and meanings are layered (or, better, intertwined and simultaneously invoked) in each performance. Similarly, Bakker's distinction between, 'the original, extroverted consciousness perceiving or undergoing the real event ... and the verbalizing, introverted, and understanding consciousness that is active in the present' (Bakker 1997: 26–27) helps us appreciate the interaction between previous performances and performance in the present. 'The evidence presented to [the performing] consciousness, in fact, is not only the *present discourse* but also, and more so, the memory of *previous discourses*, the cumulative total of all the previous re-experiences, in short, the epic tradition' (1997: 27).<sup>17</sup> Each performance finds itself under the ever-increasing constraint of previous performances, so that the tradition itself becomes institutionalized over time. We do not suggest that, over time, performances succumb to the pressure to exactly replicate previous performances; after all, 'the tradition' that is institutionalized includes the interplay of stability and fluidity.

We thus understand more readily the continuity and development of the tradition. First, any given textual embodiment of the tradition does not limit the tradition itself. Second, the experience and memory of previous performances constrain future performances without limiting the tradition

<sup>16</sup> In her discussion of 'the gospels as school tradition', Alexander will reconfirm the present point: 'what the anecdotes do imply, as Lord noted with the epic cycles, is an underlying story, acting as a mental frame of reference for assessing the significance of a particular anecdote' (2006: 24).

<sup>17</sup> Notice Bakker's equation of 'the cumulative total of all the previous re-experiences' with 'the epic tradition'; this is an important point: the memory of previous performances, which imposes itself on subsequent performances, *is* the Jesus tradition and not simply the memory of that tradition at one remove. Cf. also Lord 1960: 13, who emphasizes that singers are a part of the tradition itself, rather than merely its handlers.

to particular verbal expressions.<sup>18</sup> Even within this context of verbal multiformity, certain words, phrases, scenes and themes appear especially salient as aspects of the tradition, but this in no way detracts from the tradition's multiformity. The tradition is itself both an organic unity, capable of being actualized in various contexts and circumstances without becoming unrecognizable as 'the tradition', as well as multiform, capable of variegated and diverse expression without excessive pressure to either mirror or correct other performances.<sup>19</sup> Multiplicity of performances by a single storyteller and performance by a multiplicity of storytellers imbues each particular performance with a metonymic quality that invokes the memory of earlier performances and establishes expectations for future ones.

#### 4.2.c. Referencing Tradition within Performance

Now a third interpretative question arises: what relationship connects the actualized, embodied text-in-performance and the abstract tradition of which it is but one expression? Kelber's earliest treatment of the oral Jesus tradition, in which he approaches Mark as a rupture of the oral gospel tradition, attests this question's importance.<sup>20</sup> In Kelber's larger programme this 'rupture' is a function of his analysis of Mark's disruption of the 'oral synthesis' characteristic of the oral gospel tradition;<sup>21</sup> it functions as part of his dichotomy of *reading* tradition versus *hearing* tradition, a

18 Social memory theory also acknowledges the role of previous acts of remembrance in the future remembering of past events; cf. the discussion of the past's constraint of the present in §3.3.b.

19 The reference to 'excessive' pressure is, of course, problematic; when does the weight that previous performances bear upon subsequent performances become 'excessive'? While this is certainly a valid objection, the point here is that performances do constrain what comes after – that is, performances stabilize over time – but the Jesus tradition in the first century nowhere exhibits the compunction to reproduce the textual shape of previous performances. This point is especially important considering our own predilections for exact verbatim citation and attribution and the corollary presumptions of redaction and ideological critique which have been determinative for twentieth and twenty-first century analyses of the synoptic texts.

20 E.g., 1983: 14–15; see also 1987a; 1987b. I have here taken a particular stand regarding Kelber's conceptualization of the relation between the oral and the written gospel (esp. Mark); Kelber's own position, however, fluctuates and is at least somewhat contradictory (cf. the statements that firmly distinguish oral and written traditions [e.g., 1983: 14–15, 19, 91, 93–94, 115] with those that blur such distinctions [e.g., 1983: 17, 23, 44, 70]).

21 'Language and being, speaker, message and words are joined together into a kind of unity. This powerful and binding quality of oral speech we shall henceforth refer to as *oral synthesis*. It is not a universal rule governing orality, but it is more nearly true of spoken words than of written ones' (Kelber 1983: 19).

dichotomy now largely discredited.<sup>22</sup> We shall have cause to consider the larger relationship between oral and written tradition later, but if we can posit for the moment that even a written gospel is, in effect, a performance of the Jesus tradition, the question remains: how does one instance of the Jesus tradition, as *parole*, relate to the abstract Jesus tradition, as *langue*? By what means does a performance refer to, express, assume, comment upon, correct, emphasize, incorporate, excise, subvert, etc. the tradition as a whole? Before we turn to these questions, a more basic one requires our attention: ought we to look for any relation at all between an embodied text and an abstract tradition?

#### 4.2.c.i. Relating Performance and Tradition

The question of whether a text-in-performance relates to the tradition it actualizes presents no challenges; to what else could it relate? Not that orally performed traditions bear this relationship to an 'ambient tradition' while written traditions do not. Current research in 'intertextuality' testifies to the extra-textual reference every written work must make. A written work severed from all literary precedent is both unimaginable and socially incomprehensible. Nevertheless, as we took pains to demonstrate in §2.3., New Testament scholarship largely assumes that the traditions textualized with in the written gospels are relatively free of larger traditional connections,<sup>23</sup> or, if connections with the contextualizing tradition are admitted, that tradition is conceived of as a *textual* entity.<sup>24</sup> The near-equivalent, returning to the analogy from structural linguistics, would be to analyse *parole* in terms of (and in comparison to) similar

22 Cf. Finnegan 1990; Foley 1997: 61–62; 2002: 65–66; even Kelber 1995: 159–160.

23 For example, scholars frequently attribute this or that unit of Jesus tradition to 'post-Easter faith' as if that faith was not itself already contextualized by Israelite tradition more generally and the Jesus tradition in particular.

24 For example, inasmuch as the traditions found in Luke's gospel do not originate from the evangelist, they stem from his literary sources (Mark and Q, [or, according to neo-Griesbachians, Matthew], perhaps also L). Thus the question is simply pushed back further, so that any tradition that does not originate with the authors of Mark or Q (or, again, Matthew) stem from their sources, until we have reached the end of our ability to postulate written sources for our extant texts. This approach is most brilliantly employed by Crossan (1991), whose 'bracketing of singularity' is motivated by the recognition that 'something found [in Crossan's earliest chronological stratum] but only in single attestation can have been created by that source itself'. This makes multiply attested traditions safer for the 'determination' of the historical Jesus (see the book's cover [Crossan 1991]) because 'something found in at least two independent sources from the primary stratum cannot have been created by either of them'. Thus the logic of bracketing singularity: 'Plural attestation in the first stratum pushes the trajectory back as far as it can go with at least formal objectivity' (1991: xxxii–xxxiii). Crossan's conception of the Jesus tradition developing along 'trajectories' will also prove determinative for his book, but it becomes evident as we read *The Historical Jesus* that the identification and analysis of those trajectories are based on the assumptions that (a) the Jesus tradition exhibited development from text to text, (b) that



*parole* without recognizing the connections of both to the *langue* of which they are but individual instances.<sup>25</sup> When we approach the gospels as primarily related to that hypothetical, abstract construct (the Jesus tradition) and conceive their interrelationships not as editions or redactions of one another but as interdependent, embodied expressions of that abstract tradition, we effect a critical paradigmatic shift that challenges both the methods and the results of previous analyses. The written gospel traditions are not 'formally bounded, complete items' (Foley 1995a: xi); they refer to and incorporate the abstract Jesus tradition they instantiate, and they must be read accordingly. The gospels do not refer primarily or exclusively to other 'formally bounded, complete items', that is, to other written gospels or sources.

We thus find ourselves reading our texts not primarily in reference to other extant texts, which have a concrete, tangible existence, but in reference to a hypothetical construct: the abstract, untextualizable Jesus tradition.<sup>26</sup> We ought not set out to reconstruct the 'Jesus tradition' itself—establishing its contents and structure and, if it were possible, its verbal shape—as such a project would be akin to writing not *parole* but *langue* itself. That such a task is, by definition, inconceivable does not prevent us from understanding *parole* in reference to the language-system it instantiates. Still less does it relegate our linguistic analyses to myopic readings of one utterance against other, similar utterances on the basis that linguistic systems are hypothetical constructs unavailable for analysis.<sup>27</sup> Similarly for New Testament research, we ought not read extant expressions of the Jesus tradition against (or in relation to) each other but

innovation was the result of an author's historical and/or theological genius, and (c) that the tradition existed primarily, if not exclusively, within the extant and hypothetical texts Crossan utilizes in his analyses. All of these assumptions are problematic.

25 From another angle, Foley makes a similar charge against 'intertextuality' (1995a: xi): 'Even in an age learning to prize "intertextuality," we can observe that the very etymology of that critical term denominates two or more formally bounded, complete items that interact — so that their separate contexts are more or less sharply defined, and the individual text maintains an absolute status uniquely its own. Even though the field of interpretation is enlarged and deepened, textual heuristics tacitly demands that we privilege the individual document above all else.' (Cf. also Esler 2005: 155.)

26 Though in fact New Testament scholars have, to varying degrees, been comfortable reading the gospels against hypothetical reconstructions of traditional sources. Q simply being the most widely accepted and vigorously defended example.

27 Though we could never write everything a linguistic system (i.e., *langue*) enables us to write — attempting to do so misunderstands what *langue* 'is' — we can write grammars which systematize abstract language structures (I owe this point to Loveday Alexander). Thus we probably ought to analyse our gospels in terms of establishing a *grammar* of the Jesus tradition — looking for *how* Jesus' earliest tradents generated meaningful statements about him — rather than in terms of establishing the *redaction* of the Jesus tradition.

in terms of the larger traditional corpus itself. That this corpus does not exist in one authoritative, definitive textual edition complicates, but does not obviate, our task. Instead, we begin to perceive the problem inherent in the scholarship that establishes one expression of the Jesus tradition (Mark or Q, for example) as the standard against which other expressions are read simply on the basis that Mark or Q is the 'earliest' gospel or is 'closest to the historical Jesus'.

If we approach the written gospels, like oral performances of the Jesus tradition, as traditional expressions received in the context of an abstract traditional potentiality, then the stability and variability of the synoptic traditions begin to take on a different significance. The twin phenomena of stability and variability have motivated much synoptic criticism and lie at the root of the synoptic problem. Now, instead of approaching the similarities and differences between the synoptics in an attempt to understand the evangelists' editorial practices, we come to the texts as expressions of a larger tradition, itself capable of multiform and variegated instantiation. In institutional gospel research Mark's gospel (or whatever text-form we employ as the standard of comparison) is not capable of multiform expression,<sup>28</sup> and so scholars suppose that changes from Mark's text are ideologically, theologically or stylistically motivated. Within the new perspective of the gospels as texts rooted in a living oral tradition, the gospel-texts now emerge as 'immanent' texts,<sup>29</sup> created 'by a process of composition and reception in which a simple, concrete part stands for a complex, intangible reality' (Foley 1997: 63). The texts of the gospels, then, for all their similarities and differences, reference the same traditional corpus, though in different ways, for different purposes, and, often, to different ends. 'In effect', says Foley, 'the immediate context, always an artificially limited horizon for the play of this kind of verbal art,

28 Even theories involving *Ur-Markus* or Deutero-Mark (or any other early or revised gospel edition) postulate standardized, fixed textual forms rather than emphasizing the fluid textual form of Mark's gospel. Many studies emphasizing the gospels' 'orality' similarly posit the fixity of the written text.

29 Foley defines the 'immanence' of traditional verbal art as: 'the set of metonymic, associative meanings institutionally delivered and received through a dedicated idiom or register either during or on the authority of traditional oral performance. The grammars of "words" at various levels — the formulaic phraseology, the typical narrative scenes, and the story-pattern as a whole — are understood as highly focused, densely encoded systems of integers that open onto implicit and ever-impinging worlds of signification.'

(1995a: 7)

opens onto the more realistic "text" of the ambient tradition.' (1997: 66).<sup>30</sup>

We hypothesize, then, that the gospels, as actualizations of the abstract corpus of Jesus tradition, open onto and incorporate that larger, abstract corpus, '*pars pro toto*, as it were' (Foley 1997: 63), on the basis of two observations, one literary and one historical. Literarily, the situated nature of words demands that those words both occur in context and recur with reference to their appearance in other contexts (Foley 1995a: xi). Intertextual research into the gospels draws attention to the way the gospel texts refer to and incorporate other texts, especially Hebrew/Israelite traditions that figure differently into the gospel texts. Few critics today, then, would deny that the gospels make traditional references—at stake here is the nature of those references. Historically, for nearly a century and in varying degrees, critical scholarship has attempted to account for the historical near-certainty of oral gospel traditions in its readings of written gospel texts. New Testament scholarship, in a rare consensus, recognizes that people were *telling* Jesus stories before, during, and even after, they were *writing* Jesus stories. While a significant portion of that scholarship has implicitly assumed the evangelists were not individuals with considerable experience performing these traditions,<sup>31</sup> we ought to consider the probability that the evangelists were tradents of the oral Jesus traditions and that their texts relate to the history of their performative experiences.<sup>32</sup> While we will shortly affirm that the gospel texts represent performances, of a sort, of the Jesus tradition, we emphasize here that the *authors* of the gospel traditions were also *performers* of the Jesus tradition. They were not merely writers composing in a traditional idiom; they were performers speaking and living (as well as writing) within that idiom.

30 'The immediate context' to which Foley refers translates, for this project, into the actual 'text' of the gospel, whether in oral performance or as written text, as well as the context of its reception (i.e., the performance arena, the social and rhetorical location in which reading occurs, etc.).

31 That is, references abound in the secondary literature to the evangelists 'being familiar with' or 'incorporating' oral tradition, phrases which imply, at least, that they were outsiders with respect to oral Jesus traditions and that they inserted those traditions, or were influenced by them, primarily as authors and not as teachers who themselves each had a history of performing those traditions in communal contexts.

32 The fragments of Papias' writings preserved in Eusebius suggest that Mark, at least, was familiar with the oral proclamation of the Jesus tradition (through Peter); our gospels' traditional ascriptions likewise connect the texts with authoritative (i.e., experienced) sources of the Jesus tradition. Even if we reject Papias remarks regarding the gospels' authorship, we can find no reason to assume any of our extant written texts represent any of the evangelists' 'first try' at composing Jesus' story. For extensive treatments of the Papias fragments, as well as a defence of our gospels' ascriptions, cf. Bauckham 2006.

#### 4.2.c.ii. Receiving Tradition within Performance

If the gospel texts open up wider vistas upon the expansive landscape of the Jesus tradition as an organic whole,<sup>33</sup> how do they do so? This question strikes at the heart of the present discussion. A performative approach to the gospels, and an inquiry into the oral traditions' relation to the historical Jesus, has the potential to transform how we envisage the processes by which the texts make references to extra-textual realities (whether traditional realities or historical ones, though these are not categorically discrete). Even more, a performative approach to written gospel traditions affects how we assess the quality of those references. For now, however, we return to the work of John Miles Foley, whose seminal work turns a spotlight upon the ways in which traditional verbal art makes gestures beyond itself and situates itself firmly within traditional universes.<sup>34</sup>

As we try to understand how gospel texts generate meaning, Foley's emphasis on the mutual responsibility of the reader/audience, as a partner in the communicative circuit, in interaction with the author/performer offers a promising first step. For oral-derived texts, the author must be sufficiently fluent in the traditional idiom to signal to his or her audience what is being written and how they ought to receive the text. The audience, however, must also be conversant in the traditional idiom in order to pick up the author's cues and to properly apprehend the text. Foley builds upon the observation that context and words interact to generate meaning and goes on to argue that, for oral-derived texts, 'the interaction of item and context mutes the denotative force of traditional units of utterance and foregrounds the special metonymic, performance-based meaning selected by the situated "words"' (1995a: 9).<sup>35</sup> More will be said presently about 'performance arena' and the 'special metonymic, performance-based meaning' of oral-performative language; here we emphasize that the audience of oral-derived texts must be able to access the metonymic meaning of oral traditional language to apprehend the text

33 In case it has not yet been made clear, this positive affirmation is one of the working hypotheses of this book; my purpose has not been to set out to prove this affirmation but rather, upon a presumption of its plausibility, to work out its consequences for gospel and historical Jesus research.

34 We first introduced Foley's work in §2.2.b., and we have interacted with him off and on since then. We turn now to an extensive consideration of the contribution his work can make to 'historical Jesus' and gospels research (cf. Horsley and Draper 1999, as well as the works of Horsley and of Kelber, for New Testament scholarship that takes account of Foley's research).

35 For a discussion of Foley's very specific use of the terms 'denotative' and 'connotative', cf. Foley 1991: xiv-xv.

as performance. Failure to do so results in 'denaturing' the text, that is, in reading the text outside its contextualizing tradition.<sup>36</sup>

To understand how oral-derived texts 'instruct' their audiences regarding their proper engagement and interpretation, Foley turns to the receptionalist theories of Hans-Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser (1991: 38–60; 1995a: 42ff.).<sup>37</sup> In this perspective, the multiform tradition is actualized verbally, including cues and signals that instruct the audience how to apprehend the particular text in the context of the ambient tradition.<sup>38</sup> Note that a plurality of readers introduces a plurality of 'works' in regard to a single literary text; for oral-derived texts the text-in-performance is itself multiform, complicating and variegating the interpretations possible as performer and audience interact to produce traditional meaning. Foley, recognizing the instability that such a theoretical approach can quickly import into our analyses, counters by citing the stabilizing influence of performance and tradition. Interpretation is constrained by:

the unifying roles of performance, the event that frames the communicative exchange, and tradition, the body of immanent meaning that always impinges upon the linguistic integers of the metonymic idiom.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Foley 1995b: 171.

<sup>37</sup> Foley will later refer to 'self-tutorials' on how to read a particular text; cf. 1995a: 140–141. Foley readily admits that theories of Receptionalism were developed in regard to strictly literary verbal art forms (cf. 1995a: 42), and he proposes certain modifications to the works of Jauss and Iser in order to make their theories appropriate for the analysis of oral traditions and oral-derived works (cf. 1991: 39; 1995a: 45–47). The usefulness of a Receptionalist perspective, then, is that it:

'entails a full consideration of the dynamics of performance and tradition. Instead of the text we have the performance, instead of the implied reader the implied audience. Signals and gaps in the libretto are still the focus of the methodology, but the signals have metonymic, immanent meaning, and the negotiation of gaps depends not only on a given audience member's individual preparation but on strategies in place under the interpretive contract of the performance tradition. With these qualifications, or accommodations, central tenants of Reception still hold: the performance and audience member co-create the "work," and that experience is set in motion by the recognition of a response to cues that constitute the "text".'

(1995a: 46)

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Kelber 1995: 159; Foley 1995b: 171. The audience's role in shaping the tradition in performance is not merely as a stimulus to which the performer reacts or adjusts; the audience, as an integral component of the communicative circuit, is a critical factor not just for the work's *reception* but also its *production* (cf. N. White 1994: 173–175; Foley 1997: 58–59). Similarly, Bakker and Kahane call attention to the 'complex interactions between the "makers" of discourse and their addressees: literary discourses and ordinary spoken utterances alike are increasingly seen as not exclusively composed by an author or generated by a speaker but as "jointly created" by the two parties in the communicative process' (1997a: 3).

The single performance of a traditional oral work is both something unique, a thing in itself, and the realization of patterns, characters, and situations that are known to the audience through prior acquaintance with other performances. The performer will surely contribute importantly to this or that instance or event, making the single occurrence in many ways unparalleled, and we should most certainly not make the mistake of assuming that originality is only a rare feature of traditional oral art. Nonetheless, the performer of such a work depends much more heavily upon the encoded, immanent reading of his or her idiomatic language than does a highly literary artist. (Foley 1995a: 45–46)

We can, therefore, address the problem of interpretation via the ongoing dialogue between performer and audience, who meet at the nexus of performance and tradition to actualize tradition and generate meaning.<sup>39</sup> This is fine for actual oral performances and the analysis of living oral traditions, in which critical interpreters can still observe their performative dimensions and incorporate those dimensions into analyses of the text-in-performance. But how does this translate to our circumstances, where the objects of our analyses are not oral performances but *written texts* that bear some relation to oral performances of the Jesus tradition? Foley proposes a typological spectrum of written texts rooted in oral tradition, from the transcribed performance, on one extreme, to 'literary' texts composed outside of performance but rooted in oral tradition at the other.<sup>40</sup> We stress that we refer not to two or more 'categories' of oral traditional verbal art but rather to hypothetical points along a spectrum. Though our determination of a text's location along that spectrum invariably affects our analyses of the performative dynamics affecting a text's composition and reception, those dynamics will be operative for any type of text with roots in oral tradition.<sup>41</sup> Here lies the heart of our criticism of literary approaches to the synoptic gospels and the synoptic problem, itself a literary problem: not only that continuing oral tradition was one of a number of 'sources' for our extant gospels, but that the gospels themselves are rooted in, and expressions of, the organic, unified, multiform tradition.

Returning to Foley's appeal to receptionalist theories of reading, we note that apprehending and interpreting traditional verbal art, for Foley,

<sup>39</sup> Note Foley's programmatic statement: '*The Singer of Tales in Performance* is first a book about *word-power*, that is, about how words engage contexts and mediate communication in verbal art from oral tradition. It is also, and crucially, about the enabling event – *performance* – and the enabling referent – *tradition* – that give meaning to word-power.' (1995a: 1). The latter two concepts – performance as the enabling event and tradition as the enabling referent of oral traditional verbal art – are determinative for the analysis of *The Singer of Tales in Performance* as well as for this book.

<sup>40</sup> E.g., 1995a: 82; cf. Foley's taxonomy in 2002: 39 (which we discuss in §4.2.d.i., below).

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Foley 2002: 39–52.



is not simply a task of attending to textual signals, even with one eye out for those signals' metonymic reference. Understanding traditional verbal art also involves attending to lacunae within the text, lacunae that require the audience to enter into and fill out the text-in-performance.<sup>42</sup> Any work, 'lacking opportunities for the perceiver to contribute from his or her own experience to the fashioning of a coherent present apprehension will appear over-determined and expressively pallid' (1995a: 6). Foley refers to Iser's 'gaps of indeterminacy' and emphasizes again the requirement of the audience to 'depend on their working knowledge of traditional implications' (1995a: 7) to successfully apprehend a traditional text. Here the positive (registering and decoding textual signals) and negative (filling in a text's 'gaps of indeterminacy') aspects of interpretation constrain each other, so that the text does not determine its interpretation and the audience cannot interpret it willy-nilly. Instead, the audience fills in the text's gaps in a manner consistent with the text's positive signals, a process Foley, following Iser, calls 'consistency-building'.<sup>43</sup> New Testament scholarship has long been aware of the presence of lacunae within the gospel texts themselves, but the failure to focus attention on the texts' rootedness in oral traditional performance, and the consequences entailed therein, has left many of our efforts at consistency-building anaemic, severed from the texts' traditional environment.

Nevertheless, we only have written texts; the oral traditional milieu framing our texts are beyond our reach, and we can only approximate our texts' relationships to oral performances. The primary difficulty such an admission presents to gospel criticism regards our efforts to understand how our extant texts were composed, and in fact we spent some time clarifying how we conceptualize the composition and actualization of gospel traditions in oral performance.<sup>44</sup> However our inability to enter into and experience ancient performances of the Jesus tradition does not mitigate the importance of looking for and analysing textual strategies that facilitate the texts' reception. New Testament research needs to broaden its focus from the texts' *composition* to consider the texts' *reception*. Both the evangelists and their audiences would have been familiar with and participants in oral performances of the Jesus tradition. Once the texts of the gospels were committed to writing, is it really likely

42 Cf. Foley 1995a: 29–30, 43. Much research into 'orality' exaggerates the distance from which a 'reader' accesses a written text in order to distinguish more sharply 'orality' from 'literacy' (e.g., Kelber 1983; Shiner 2003: 171; inter alios). Iser's work, as well as Foley's adaptation of it, suggests that readers are much more involved in the reception of written texts, and that this involvement is similar to (though not exactly the same as) an audience's involvement in oral performance.

43 Cf. Foley 1995a: 43.

44 §4.2.a., above.

that those texts represented radical departures from the oral tradition that preceded and continued to develop alongside them?<sup>45</sup> We cannot presume that our texts preserve records of single performances, such that 'gospel composition' becomes transcription; still less can we continue to presume that our gospels are *the* 'Markan', 'Matthean', or 'Lukan' version of the tradition. Rather, our texts were written in the context of oral performances of the Jesus tradition and would have been received by their audiences as performances that, though transformed into written texts, preserved extra-textual references to the Jesus tradition as a whole.

#### 4.2.c.iii. Signifying Tradition through Performance

The question still remains: how do oral-derived texts extend beyond the denotative meanings of their textual signals to signify metonymically, and how do they suggest to their audiences this wider significative force? Foley proposes *word-power* as an explanatory concept: broadly conceived, word-power is a textual signal's ability, under specific circumstances, to evoke wider contexts and enable communication between performer and audience. Word-power operates in the conjunction of performance as the enabling event and tradition as the enabling referent; oral-derived texts facilitate meaning within the context of performance, in which the work is actualized, and in reference to the organic unity that is 'the tradition'. Word-power is the ability of traditional terms, themes and story-patterns to make reference to the tradition efficiently and effectively, provided that performer and audience are both sufficiently fluent in the traditional idiom to communicate in the performative register.

As an entry into the dynamic associations between oral-derived text, the tradition contextualizing the text, and the textual and extra-textual strategies that facilitate communication between performer and audience, Foley delineates three aspects of oral performance that bear upon the interpretation of oral traditional verbal art: performance arena, register and communicative economy.<sup>46</sup> Each of these mark off performance as the occasion in which words take on larger, traditional meanings, and they empower words to incorporate those traditional significances implicitly (Foley 1995a: 9). Let us briefly turn to these three aspects of oral performance to understand how they function in actual performance; then

45 Kelber's (1983) thesis that the written gospel tradition was related more by contrast than consistency to the oral gospel tradition was difficult to sustain throughout his book; that thesis was all but retracted by Kelber's later comments on *The Oral and the Written Gospel* (cf. 1995: 159–160). See also Downing 1985: 97, who, toward different ends, also questions implicit but dominant assumptions in New Testament scholarship regarding texts authors of texts, and the relative social isolation of authors who, according to these assumptions, exercise almost tyrannical control over the content and form of their texts (e.g., Kelber 1983: 14–15; 2005: 227–228).

46 For a condensed discussion see Foley 2002: 114–117.

we can begin to postulate how they might be transformed as they are encoded within a particular tradition's entextualization.<sup>47</sup>

1. *Performance arena* refers to the locus of oral traditional performance. The emphasis here is not upon *place* but upon *situation*; the performance arena can delineate the-place where performance takes place, but it does so as an aspect of its larger function of setting apart a particular circumstance for the performance and reception of tradition. 'Performance arena', then, conveys 'geographical and ritualistic overtones' and 'implies a recurrent forum dedicated to a specific kind of activity, a *defined and defining site* in which enactment can occur again and again without devolution into a repetitive, solely chronological series' (Foley 1995a: 47; emphasis added). The performance arena thus enables the significance of *repetition* in oral tradition, a concept that figures prominently in the work of many New Testament scholars concerned with the oral Jesus tradition.<sup>48</sup> Performances are not simply repetitions of what has gone before, but are semi-autonomous events in themselves, events that are apprehended in reference to the tradition.<sup>49</sup> Thus, 'for events that are not repeated but *re-created*, the performance arena describes the place

47 The modulation from traditional performance to traditional text is, indeed, one of Foley's primary concerns in *The Singer of Tales in Performance*; that is, he builds upon ethnographic work done among Native American cultures that attempts, 'to open up more faithful understanding of certain species of verbal art by attention to their "untextuality," that is, to their richly contexted array of meanings that can be communicated only through the special, "dedicated" set of channels that constitute the multivalent experience of performance, and that ... can be accessed in diminished but still resonant form through the augmented rhetoric of the oral-derived traditional text.' (1995a: 27-28). This 'richly contexted array of meanings' is an aspect of the traditional text, but it is also incumbent upon the audience to be able to access these meanings within performance or within their own reading experiences. Thus Foley appeals, 'to what lies beyond any collection of linguistic integers by insisting on the value-added signification of these integers as perceived by an audience suitably equipped to accord them their special valences' (1995a: 28).

48 E.g., the works of Kelber and Gerhardtsson, cited in the bibliography.

49 W.J. Ong, of course, draws strong links between repetitive oral tradition and the oral mentality that depends on repetition in order to prevent the past from slipping away from memory: in an oral noetic economy, 'better too much repetition than too little. Too little repetition is fatal: knowledge not repeated enough vanishes' (1977: 120). It is, however, more probable that factors other than an oral, even evanescent, mentality are at play in the repetitive and formulaic nature of much of oral as well as textual tradition. B. Rosenberg suggests that repetitive, predictable language in sermons that are 'spontaneously composed and orally performed', 'enables members of the congregation ... to participate in the performance, to contribute to it ... to help make what is at the moment being created.' (1986: 139, 150). Repetitive language is, then, not simply a property of an oral mindset nor a means of comforting an audience listening to narratives with which it is already familiar, rather, it enables and defines the audience's role in the traditional performance and signals the invocation of the ambient tradition.

one goes to perform them and the place the audience goes to experience them' (Foley 1995a: 47).<sup>50</sup>

As indicated above, performance arena does not simply demarcate 'sacred' or performative space; neither does it separate 'ritual' or 'sacred time'. While it can perform these functions, it does so as an aspect of its larger task of framing performance. Thus it can set apart the 'here' and 'now' of performance, but it also sets apart the performance as a special sphere of discourse. The performance arena demarcates a new 'way of speaking' that 'is focused and made coherent as an idiom redolent with preselected, emergent kinds of meaning. Within this situating frame the performer and audience adopt a language and behavior uniquely suited (because specifically dedicated) to a certain channel of communication' (Foley 1995a: 47-48). The significance of textual signals and cues (i.e., words) within the performance arena shifts from those signals' denotative reference and toward their traditional, connotative reference that, from an etic perspective, are external to those signals' lexical 'meaning'.<sup>51</sup> Additionally, gaps within the text-in-performance are 'filled in' with reference to the tradition that is the enabling referent of that text. The performance arena is the site (or sites) in which the communication between performer and audience shifts from the unmarked, 'everyday' level of discourse to the special discourse of tradition, a discourse which is itself designed to function precisely within that arena.<sup>52</sup>

2. *Register* refers to the idiom of oral traditional performance. If the performance arena marks off traditional performance from the 'ordinary' world, then the register is the dedicated traditional discourse distinct from 'unmarked' discourse. Within the contextualizing influences of the performance arena, 'the interaction of item and context mutes the denotative force of traditional units of utterance and foregrounds the special metonymic, performance-based meaning selected by the situated "words"' (Foley 1995a: 9). The 'primary burden' of a traditional register, according to Foley, 'is to stimulate the audience to an experience of a particular sort, based on the syntax of the event situated in a performance tradition' (1995a: 49). Of course, for a reader of texts, especially of ancient texts, to whom access into the performance arena is prohibited, even recognizing the presence of a traditional metonymic idiom is difficult, let

50 Similarly, Bakker refers to performance as the spatial and temporal location in which the past is re-presented: the past is brought into the present 'within the context of a special social event and through the actions of a special, authoritative speaker' (Bakker 1997: 15).

51 Cf. Foley 1995a: 133.

52 'The discrete verbal sign ... can bloom into its full, pars pro toto signification only within the performance arena. Attending the event of traditional oral narrative in the "wrong" arena means, necessarily, misunderstanding that event; the rules, frame, all that constitutes the infelicitous context will prove impertinent and misleading as the reader or audience tries to fashion coherency on the basis of disparate codes' (Foley 1995a: 48).

alone analysing the register and mapping out the ways in which it opens onto the immanent tradition. Thus we do not attempt to comprehensively determine the relationship between the oral-derived text and its situating tradition; understanding the performative register is a matter of dialogue and continuing investigative effort. Nevertheless, we presuppose, if only as a working hypothesis, that the language preserved in the written gospels is traditional language and functions as a register that enables the oral-derived text to signify the tradition it actualizes.

We ought not suppose, however, that the relationship between performance arena and register is one-directional, that stepping into the performance arena signals that everyday discourse is being set aside and the traditional idiom taken up. Modulating from the unmarked idiom to the special discourse of performance itself also signals to both performer and audience that the performance arena has been entered.<sup>53</sup> The distinction may appear superficial, except that, in our efforts to determine more precisely the relationship between our gospels and the ancient performance of Jesus traditions, the identification of a traditional idiom in the text may open up for us some insight into that relationship. As Foley explains:

all linguistic features that make an idiom a dedicated register also comprise its ability to function as a dedicated medium for conveyance of meaning within the performance arena. Maintenance of the illusion of verbal art depends upon fluency – both the compositional fluency of the performer and the receptive fluency of his or her co-creating audience. To step outside that idiom is thus to exit the performance arena and to leave behind the register's unique ability to provide access to implied signification. In terms of the *Ethnography of Speaking*, it is in such code-switching that the secret of keying performance (as the enabling event) lies; with respect to Immanent Art, it is through such bi- or even multilingualism that metonymic connotations resident in tradition (as the enabling referent) are activated. (Foley 1995a: 53)

Inasmuch as the gospels preserve traces of the traditional register of oral performance, we can begin to inquire (a) how that register incorporates traditional metonymic signification, and (b) how the texts relate to the oral performative practices of the early communities of Jesus' followers who, whether or not they had access to written sources or gospels, regularly performed the Jesus tradition in communal contexts. If we can show that the texts were composed in the traditional idiom, then we have some ground for supposing that the compositional and receptional

53 Foley (2002: 15) provides an interesting example of an oral traditional performer modulating from the traditional idiom of epic song-making to the 'unmarked' language of everyday speech, all without any observable shift of location. Departure from the performance arena has been signalled by the change in linguistic registers.

strategies of these communities were similar for both oral and written versions of the tradition.

3. *Communicative economy* is enabled by the performance arena and register. Communicative economy is not morphology but metonymy,<sup>54</sup> a way to refer to the 'value-added signification' of traditional integers within a performative context, whether an oral event within a performance arena that utilizes a traditional register or an oral-derived text that keys performance via textual signals and utilizes a traditional register transposed into textual rhetoric. Foley, returning to the Receptionalist perspective he advocated earlier, identifies the economy of meaning intrinsic to traditional verbal art as 'perhaps the most crucial' aspect of the oral-traditional idiom, though it is also perhaps the most foreign to critical scholars, literate and print-oriented as we are:

Precisely because both performer and reader/audience enter the same arena and have recourse strictly to the dedicated language and presentational mode of the speech act they are undertaking, signals are decoded and gaps are bridged with extraordinary fluency, that is, economy. While from the perspective of post-traditional,<sup>55</sup> textual communications such verbal signals as 'swift-footed Achilleus' might seem cumbersome and unwieldy, sacrificing descriptive accuracy to the necessity to maintain the reusable 'building block' of generic connotation, in fact each metonymic integer functions as an index-point or node in a grand, untextualizable network of traditional associations. Activation of any single node brings into play an enormous wellspring of meaning that can be tapped in no other way, no matter how talented or assiduous the performer may be; everything depends upon engaging the cognitive fields linked by institutionalized association to the phrase, scene, paralinguistic gesture, archaism, or whatever signal the performer deploys to key audience reception. Once those signals are deployed,

54 In the Oral-Formulaic Theory, Milman Parry defined 'thrift', or 'economy', as 'the degree in which [a formula type or system] is free of phrases which, having the same metrical value and expressing the same idea, could replace one another.' (Foley 1988: 24–25, citing Milman Parry). The emphasis of the Parry-Lord concept of 'economy', then, is placed on the lack of choice to express a given idea in a particular metrical condition and is employed to facilitate understanding of oral composition-in-performance (Lord [1960] and Kelber [1983] also emphasize the rapidity of composition-in-performance). Foley, however, is keen to distinguish 'formulaic economy' from 'communicative economy', noting that 'Parry-Lord economy ... is a morphological feature of the register, while the term "communicative economy" speaks to the dedicated, focused relationship between the register and its traditional, performance-centered array of meanings.' (1995a: 53, fn 58).

55 Foley defines 'post-traditional' as, 'the kind of work whose meaning derives chiefly from a single text created by a single author and specifically without active dependence on an oral tradition. In the case of transitional or oral-derived texts one would distinguish between traditional and post-traditional modes of meaning, the former deriving from the work's dependence on its roots and the latter from its textuality.' (Foley 1991: 6, fn 12; cf. 1995a: 54, fn 59).

once the nodes are activated, the work issues forth with surpassing communicative economy, as the way of speaking becomes a way of meaning. (Foley 1995a: 53–54)

The point is not simply that the formula is neither unwieldy nor uncreative; indeed, the point is not simply in reference to integers which have otherwise been the focus of Oral-Formulaic research. Rather, communicative economy refers to the traditional register as such, the idiom of traditional communication that marks off and is signalled by speaking within the performance arena. Whereas the Parry-Lord concept of economy or thrift drew attention to traditional 'ways of speaking', the concept of communicative economy as it applies to the singer of tales in performance and his audience draws our focus onto traditional 'ways of meaning'.

#### 4.2.d. *Modulating Traditional Performance into Textual Rhetoric*

The point thus far has been that Jesus' followers actualized the Jesus tradition in and through performance, and that understanding our gospels must take this into account. We must read the gospel traditions, in Foley's words, in light of performance as their enabling event and tradition as their enabling referent. The gospels do not preserve transcripts of individual performances; neither are they scripts enabling subsequent performances. The relationship between our written texts and oral-performative events is not, then, straightforward:

No, the manuscripts are not performances, not experiences; but yes, they not only retain the linguistic integers that constituted the meaning-laden idiom of the actual events in oral tradition, but, even more crucially, they hold open the possibility of access to the implied array of associative, metonymic signification that such a medium or register is uniquely licensed to convey. The "way of speaking" . . . once fashioned as a communicative instrument that promoted highly focused and highly economical interchange, is also a "way of signifying," and its word-power, though necessarily diminished by the shift from performance to text, may survive. (Foley 1995a: 64–65)

If we grant that a tradition of performance already preceded our gospels and that this tradition would have continued to develop alongside and in relation to the gospel texts, the following question now demands our attention: how would the gospels, as texts, have been received by their first-century audiences? Would a first-century auditor have perceived the gospel of, for example, Mark as radically different from oral performances of the Jesus tradition she had already experienced? Did early Jesus communities receive Mark's messages differently than they received the orally performed traditions? Did the gospels' earliest readers have to choose between the messages of the oral and the written gospel?

Though neither the oral nor the written gospel traditions enjoyed monolithic reception in the earliest communities of Jesus' followers, the written gospels presented images of Jesus within the context of already-established images of Jesus, and these latter images were established precisely in multiple contexts of oral performance. If the written gospels did break with representations of Jesus in the earliest Christian communities, we would then have to explain how our texts became so widely accepted, and this early on. Not that the development of the oral Jesus tradition marched inevitably and directly toward the written (and especially the synoptic) gospel tradition, nor did written gospel texts represent transcribed records of oral performances. We affirm, rather, that 'the multiformity that is the lifeblood of oral tradition still nourishes the ongoing process of textualization' (Foley 1995a: 75). In other words, 'a continuity of reception across the supposed gulf between oral traditional performance and manuscript record means that mere commission to writing entails neither the final fossilization nor the wholesale shift in poetics that early studies in oral tradition had assumed as matters of course' (Foley 1995a: 75).<sup>56</sup>

We will pursue how the gospels, 'continue traditions of reception' (Foley 1995a: 61). Unlike the event and experience of oral performance within the performance arena, the oral-derived written gospel must signal its extratextual context rhetorically if it is to preserve any trace of its performance arena. Inasmuch as the communicative event-become-text continues to utilize the traditional register, our responsibility will be to understand how the register invokes the performance arena and maps it onto the written text so that its phraseology maintains, for the audience with ears to hear, its metonymic character. In other words, the text written in the traditional register adopts familiar significant patterns that facilitate communication using densely coded traditional signals. Though we do not have immediate access to the ways in which their auditors would have

<sup>56</sup> Foley (1995a: 79) is very helpful regarding problematic reifications of 'orality' and 'literacy':

'The old model of the Great Divide between orality and literacy has given way in most quarters, pointing toward the accompanying demise of the absolutist dichotomy of performance versus document. One of the preconditions for this shift from a model of contrasts to one of spectra has been the exposure of writing and literacy as complex technologies that are certainly neither monolithic nor deserving of unqualified reduction across cultures, but which, as generalized abstractions, harbor virtually innumerable differences according to tradition, genre, function, and the like. Consequently, text can no longer be separated out as something different by species from the oral tradition it records or draws upon; the question becomes not whether but how performance and document speak to one another'

(emphasis added). See also my discussion in 'Reading and Hearing in Ancient Contexts', *JSNT* (forthcoming).

decoded these signals, any attempt to reconstruct the gospels' generative contexts and to read them within those contexts requires us to begin to perceive their communicative economy.<sup>57</sup> The problem, of course, is that these features of oral-derived texts are matters of *reception* at least as much as they are matters of the text itself.

#### 4.2.d.i. Modelling the Textualization of Oral Traditions

Foley has developed a fourfold typology to open up analytically the dynamics by which oral-derived texts maintain their roots in the oral traditional soil in which they have been nurtured.<sup>58</sup> The following table visualizes Foley's model:

	<u>Composition</u>	<u>Performance</u>	<u>Reception</u>
ORAL PERFORMANCE:	oral	oral	aural
VOICED TEXTS:	written	oral	aural
VOICES FROM THE PAST:	oral/written	oral/written	aural/written
WRITTEN ORAL POEMS:	written	written	written

This model distinguishes points on a spectrum rather than four distinct categories of texts (Foley 2002: 40) and significantly complicates our approach to the gospels, which has tended to focus on compositional dynamics. But where on this spectrum ought we locate our written gospels? Our analysis of the gospels as *texts* clearly differs from analyses of 'oral performance'; we are not dealing solely with oral/aural phenomena. Similarly, 'voiced texts' does not seem an appropriate classification of the gospels, either.<sup>59</sup> The category 'voices from the past' 'covers those

57 In no way would I suggest that this is a facile objective or that we, as twenty-first century critical readers, could ever be satisfied that we have successfully mapped out our texts' originative contexts and understood them within those contexts. 'Since texts are already removed from the performance and preserve only a limited and decontextualized record of that performance, they in effect make even the scholar closest to them an "outsider" who can never recover the multifaceted reality that lies behind them' (Foley 1995a: 61). Nevertheless, inasmuch as we are attempting to account not only for the composition but also the reception of the texts in the first century, and still more if we are questing after the historical Jesus – in other words, inasmuch as we are attempting to do history – we must attempt to discern as much as we can of their original contexts and their significant patterns within those contexts.

58 Cf. Foley 2002: 38–53; 2006b: 137; the table comes from 2002: 39; 2006b: 137.

59 This is not as arbitrary as it sounds. 'Voiced texts' are composed with oral performance as their goal; something about oral performance necessitates the presence of a written text, whether that 'something' pertains to the performance's genre (cf. Foley's discussions of slam poetry and Tibetan paper singing [2002]), or the high cultural status of the texts, etc. When gospels were being written, nothing about the oral performance of the Jesus tradition appears to require the presence of those texts, so our gospels were not, originally at least, 'voiced texts'.

ancient and medieval (and later) works that stem from oral tradition but survive only as texts' (Foley 2006b: 137). This category has obvious relevance for gospels research; even scholars who prefer a literary perspective of gospel origins recognize that the tradition was orally performed between the historical Jesus and the writing of the earliest gospel sources. The difference between such scholars and this book lies primarily in the judgement of whether Matthew, Mark, Luke and/or John retain the dynamics of 'voices from the past' or whether they efface these dynamics, which characterized their sources, in the processes of their composition. 'Written oral poems', then, are texts proper, written by an author and read by readers. Inasmuch as oral-derived texts bear in their textual layer symptoms (or relics) of their oral contexts, 'written oral poems' preserve (some of) these symptoms as habits of language rather than cues to signification. For the reader familiar with these symptoms, the text may evoke reminiscences of oral performance, but the text does not necessarily intend and certainly does not depend upon these for their word-power.

In his essay on Q, Foley writes: 'strictly speaking, then, I would characterize the oral-derived gospel texts as *voices from the past*, that is, works based in oral tradition but interacting in some way(s) with the technology of the written word.' (2006b: 137–138). We can identify at least two consequences of approaching our written gospel texts as 'voices from the past', one negative and one positive. First, and negatively, labelling our gospels as 'voices from the past' requires scholars to acknowledge a level of agnosticism vis-à-vis our texts (their composition, performance and reception) that we have hitherto been unwilling to accept. Despite our incessant quest for answers, 'so many of the facts surrounding the history of performances and traditions are lost to us'; thus, 'we must be willing to accept some blind spots in our knowledge of these works as we try to "hear" oral poetries exclusively through the texts they have left behind.' (Foley 2002: 47).<sup>60</sup> This must necessarily be true because all we have left are the textual remains of the tradition we analyse, in addition to the material remains unearthed by archaeologists, materials whose connection to the texts and their traditions are equally problematic. While we have the texts, our evidence regarding processes of the texts' performance and reception remain elusive, and our knowledge about the texts can only suffer because of that elusiveness.

Second, and positively, recognizing our texts as 'voices from the past'

60 The reference to 'poetries' ought not distract us; Foley is not concerned with 'poetry' as necessarily metrical or structured phenomena (as opposed to prose), rather, Foley examines specifically 'oral poetry' as a broad range of phenomena that have, 'always been an essential technology for the transmission and expression of ideas of all kinds' (2002: 28). The model we propose here assumes the gospels are just such a technology.



enables us to appreciate something of their complexity and their originative contexts, an appreciation gospels and 'historical Jesus' scholarship has often lacked. The negative point of the previous paragraph does not mean we know even less about our texts than we thought we did; rather, just the awareness of additional dynamics factoring into the composition, performance and reception of our texts itself advances our knowledge about the texts, even if we have to resign ourselves to tentative statements about these dynamics. 'This category renders a crucial service by helping us face up to the real-world challenge of fundamental diversity in human expressive forms . . . If we attempt to force too much order on such diversity, if we try to impose too much from the outside by making assertions we can't substantiate, any system of media dynamics will be compromised' (Foley 2002: 47). As we open ourselves up to the diversity of gospel production *as well as* gospel performance and reception, the category 'voices from the past' requires us to recognize that the texts were composed according to the rules of actualizing the Jesus tradition in oral performance. Even if some dynamics of the tradition's actualization had to be reconfigured during the translation into a textual rhetoric, both a continuity of composition and a continuity of reception characterized the movement between the oral and written Jesus tradition. No perfect continuity existed between the oral and written Jesus tradition, either with regard to the gospels' composition or their reception, but there was continuity nonetheless. How could it be otherwise? The present in which the gospel texts were written was itself constituted by the past in which Jesus traditions were performed orally.

#### 4.2.d.ii. *Turning to the Gospels as Oral-Derived Texts*

How, then, do the texts teach us how to read them? How do their textual signals guide us in navigating their gaps? How, in other words, do the gospels key their performative dynamics, and how can we hear the voices of performance in their traditions?<sup>61</sup> With respect to the arena framing performance and bound up with the event taking place therein, the shift to written text necessarily entails the loss of the experience at the root of oral performance's word-power. 'The "place" where the work is experienced by a reader, the event that is re-created, must be summoned solely by

61 The shift in perspective here needs to be appreciated: the questions here will not be concerned predominantly with the gospels' *composition* but with their *reception*. Even after over a century of source criticism our understanding of the gospels' composition is debated; perhaps we ought, 'to focus instead on what can be inferred about the reception of [the gospels] from the persistence of traditional forms as a textual rhetoric. This emphasis entails a reversal of the usual heuristic perspectives: instead of trying to gauge how much has been preserved or lost, we need rather to ask what the documents can tell us about how they should be read' (Foley 1995a: 73).

textual signals' (Foley 1995a: 80). We need to make an important caveat here; the gospel texts, in their original contexts, would have been read aloud or reperformed in the same or similar contexts in which oral traditions were performed, so that the shift to written tradition did not necessarily entail the loss of the experience of a performative event. For modern critics, however, this experience is precisely what we have lost. We have access to the performance arena within which the Jesus tradition was actualized only inasmuch as that arena can be 'summoned solely by textual signals'. This is inevitably an alienating factor that extends beyond the recognition of social-scientific New Testament research that our texts are from other times and places.

The phenomenological present conferred by actual performance context . . . vanishes, and along with it the unique and enriching primal connection between this particular visit to the performance arena and the traditional sense of having been there before. The face-to-face interaction, not only between performer and audience but also among audience members, cannot be played out in a written text, no matter how multi-channeled that document may be. Nothing can wholly replace the personal exploration of an oral traditional performance by a person steeped in the significant geography of the event. (Foley 1995a: 80)

Lest we understand 'significant geography' too literally, we must remember that the performance arena is not merely the *place* where performance happens. It circumscribes the event itself: the occasion of the performance, the shift from an everyday, unmarked idiom to the traditional, metonymic register, the ritual procedures of performance, and so on.

Approaching the canonical gospels with an eye out for how they signal their performance arenas yields immediate fruit. In view of the circumscribing nature of a performance arena, which both signals a performative context and is signalled by that context, might the beginnings of our gospels have cued the reader to receive what has been written as a specific type of communication, as a traditional work situated within the ambient tradition? The beginnings of each of the gospels are both well known and distinctive. Matthew 1.1 begins: Βίβλος γενέσεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ υἱοῦ Δαυὶδ υἱοῦ Ἀβραάμ ['The record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.'], a generic heading that closely likens Matthew's gospel to the Hebrew Bible (especially the LXX). Genesis 2.4 begins: αὕτη ἡ βίβλος γενέσεως οὐρανοῦ καὶ γῆς ['This is the record of the genealogy of the sky and earth.']; similarly, Gen. 5.1 reads: αὕτη ἡ βίβλος γενέσεως ἀνθρώπων ἣ ἡμέρα ἐποίησεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν Ἀδὰμ ['This is the record of the genealogy of humanity, in the day in which God created Adam.']. Not that Mt. 1.1 signals links to the *texts* of Gen. 2.4 and 5.1, but rather

Mt. 1.1 is situated, and situates the gospel that follows, within its encompassing Israelite tradition of YHWH's creation of the world and its subsequent history.<sup>62</sup> Matthew's gospel thus calls forth metonymically Israelite tradition and encourages its audience to apprehend the story 'of Jesus, the Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham' within that tradition. In addition, the text of Matthew's gospel makes its situation within Israelite tradition explicit at numerous points, perhaps most famously in the Matthean passages about fulfilment, especially the Matthean ἵνα/ὅπως πληρωθῆ [‘so that it might be fulfilled’]<sup>63</sup> and γεγράφται [‘it is written’]<sup>64</sup> formulae. The beginnings of Mark<sup>65</sup> and John<sup>66</sup> similarly situate those gospels (and their stories of Jesus) within the enveloping Israelite tradition.

Luke's preface, however, bears both similarities and differences vis-à-vis the beginnings of the other gospels. It is similar in that it likewise situates the gospel within the ambient tradition within which the performer and the audience apprehend the performance of the Jesus tradition; it is different in that the ambient tradition, signalled by the preface, is less clearly Jewish tradition than in the other three canonical gospels. On the one hand:

At surface level the preface actually does little to arouse anybody's expectations, at least as regards the content of what is to follow. . . . All the reader is told to expect is an account of tradition, carefully (or accurately) 'followed' and then written down 'in an orderly fashion', a written confirmation of something the dedicatee (and by implication the reader) has already heard. (L. Alexander 1993: 201)

Note Alexander's larger thesis: Luke's preface is less Greek-historiographical and more Greek-scientific.<sup>67</sup> The association of Luke's preface (and therefore Luke's gospel) with the scientific writings impacts our approach to and classification of the text: not that Luke is primarily a medical or geographical text but rather that its *approach to tradition* is more closely linked to the Greek scientific writings. 'Luke's respect for tradition, his

62 In addition to these two texts, which are the only two in the LXX to mention a βιβλος γενέσεως, there are dozens of references to important γενέσεις, to the relationship οὐρανοῦ καὶ γῆς to their creator, and of God's relationship to humanity (Ἀδάμ) throughout Jewish tradition.

63 Cf. Mt. 1.22; 2.15, 23; 4.14; 8.17; 12.17; 13.35; 21.4.

64 Cf. Mt. 2.5; [4.4, 6-7, 10]; 11.10; 21.13; 26.24; 26.31.

65 Mark 1.1: Ἀρχὴ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ [νιού θεοῦ] [‘The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ (the son of God)’]. Cf. also Mark 1.2-8.

66 John 1.1: Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος, καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν, καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος [‘In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God’].

67 Both Byrskog (2000: 48-49, *passim*) and Bauckham (2006: 117-119, *passim*) criticize her work precisely here, but their focus on genre classification is different than our focus on the approach to tradition signalled by genre classification.

lack of polemic against his predecessors, his lack of concern for originality: all of these . . . can be paralleled in the scientific tradition' (L. Alexander 1993: 205).<sup>68</sup>

On the other hand, the gospel as a whole is so thoroughly steeped within biblical tradition that the preface cannot be allowed to link the gospel with Greek scientific traditions *at the expense of* recognizing Luke's thoroughly Hellenistic Jewish flavour.<sup>69</sup> Luke's preface does not locate the gospel within a specific corpus of generically similar *texts* (Greek scientific, Hellenistic Jewish, or whatever) but rather within a *traditional milieu*, which includes other texts but also evinces commitments to, 'living [oral] teaching tradition', the conservative preservation of that tradition, the adaptability of that tradition to changing social circumstances, the ongoing performance of tradition and much else besides.<sup>70</sup> All four canonical gospels, from their opening words, situate themselves within a performance arena, either to reinforce the point that the Jesus tradition is performed in the context of Israelite tradition as a whole (as is the case for Matthew, Mark and John, though in differing ways) or to highlight the similarities between the transmission of the Jesus tradition and that of the Greek scientific traditions (as in Luke). The gospels' ways of speaking have signalled to their audiences their ways of meaning, communicating to the sufficiently prepared reader how (that is, within which performance arena) they ought to be received.

In terms of register, a written text communicates in the oral traditional idiom inasmuch as it receives its word-power from the enabling event of performance and the enabling referent of tradition. Of course, as writing moves further from oral tradition and reception becomes a matter of reading strategies rather than experiences of traditional performance, the significant force of the text's phraseology derives increasingly from the

68 Alexander continues (1993: 205):

'Behind the words of the preface lies a whole cultural world with a distinctive approach to literature, a world in which an oral teaching tradition is more important than written sources, a world in which even the logos so revered by most cultured Greeks is treated with suspicion. It is a world in which the content of the tradition, continually presented afresh and updated by the "living voice" of a succession of teachers, is more important than verbal fidelity to any particular written crystallization of it, and in which, therefore, the written text itself can be treated as transitional, subject to continual revision in the light of new insights or changing circumstances.'

It is well said that what lies behind Luke's preface is not a whole corpus of *texts* but rather a 'whole cultural world'; Luke's preface – and the gospel as a whole – is not situated over and against other texts but within a traditional perspective. Also, as Alexander has pointed out, it is the *content* of the tradition, and not its *verbal shape*, that requires fidelity from members of the community.

69 Cf. L. Alexander 1993: 147-167.

70 Cf. L. Alexander 1993: 209-210.

bounded text itself, even if we account for the text's intertexts. 'A textual rhetoric of traditional, performance-derived forms will keep the delicate umbilical of metonym and meaning in place temporarily, but as textuality develops its own significant dynamics, that umbilical will wither and eventually lose its function as a conduit of extra-textual meaning' (Foley 1995a: 80–81).<sup>71</sup> The problem, then, belongs not just to the traditional text's author (how will she compose in the traditional register, including its metonymic, connotative reference?) but also to its readers (how will they recognize and properly decode its value-laden signals?).<sup>72</sup> The gospels do not transcribe, and cannot have transcribed, all of their performative features into text, but their original audiences would have been familiar with those features and would have employed them in their reception of the texts. As Foley observed:

The more densely coded and functionally focused a speech act, the more 'additional' information is required to receive it in something approaching its cultural context. For members of the society, and especially for those skilled in performance of the particular genre, that enabling context is never 'additional' but always implied, always immanent. Whether it constitutes a part of the utterance amounts, in other words, to a phenomenological question: for outsiders no, for insiders yes. (Foley 1995a: 133)

#### 4.3. Concluding Remarks

Before moving on to consider traditions of Jesus' healing and exorcistic activities, we need to draw some loose ends together. First, the programme laid out here, and pursued in the next three chapters, doesn't seek to gauge the gospels' 'orality', a task which, if it means anything at all, attempts to describe the texts' composition.<sup>73</sup> Instead, we have begun with a double admission: (a) that we do not have access to (and cannot reconstruct) ancient performances of the Jesus tradition; and (b) that what we have to deal with are texts. With those two stipulations made explicit, the task before us becomes to determine how early Christian audiences,

71 The point here is not simply that, the greater the separation of the author from the oral traditional context, the more 'literary' the written work will be; it is also (and more importantly) that as the separation of the audience from its oral traditional roots increases, the connection between the oral-derived text and its originative, oral traditional context will diminish (cf. Foley 1995a: 82). In other words, our task is not simply to gauge the gospels' 'orality', as if that were really something helpful at all; rather, we investigate ways in which learning to appreciate the gospels in light of performance (their 'enabling event') and tradition (their 'enabling referent') transforms and reinvigorates our readings of them.

72 Cf. Foley 2002: 138–139: 'Composition and reception are two sides of the same coin'.

73 E.g., that they were composed rapidly, under the specific constraints of oral performance, etc.; cf. Lord 1960; Kelber 1983.

who were already quite familiar with the Jesus tradition in performance, would have received those texts. Here two more stipulations became appropriate: (a) that our gospel texts are not transcriptions of actual performances, written records of an oral presentation,<sup>74</sup> and (b) that neither were the gospels intended to function as scripts to facilitate subsequent performances.<sup>75</sup> Instead, the gospels were received as performances, instances, of the tradition; they were not received as canonized textual expressions, as the tradition in themselves.<sup>76</sup> This differs from the dominant approach to the gospels in several important ways, the most obvious being that the gospel texts are *instances* of the ambient Jesus tradition rather than *editions* or *redactions* of each other.<sup>77</sup> Inasmuch as one performer of the tradition can be aware of others' performances as well as written versions of the tradition, this perspective does not preclude a literary relationship between the gospel texts. It does, however, preclude analysing the texts against each other – identifying the tradition's 'tendencies' or 'trajectories'<sup>78</sup> – rather than in relation to the tradition of which they are but individual instances.

Second, as we concern ourselves with the 'continuity of reception' between the oral Jesus tradition in performance and the written gospels as instances of performance, let us focus our attention on the entire communicative moment suggested by the texts: performer/author, performance/text, and audience/reader. Earlier research into the oral gospel tradition<sup>79</sup> dichotomized the oral and the written tradition, a perspective that has now been declared defunct.<sup>80</sup> Nevertheless, we must maintain our guard against perspectives that suggest that oral tradition is the result of performer/audience interaction in a way that written texts are not. If we jettison 'literary' and 'oral' as categories of texts and think instead in terms of a spectrum, with oral performance at one extreme and text composed-in-writing at the other, the possibility opens up of texts which were composed in the shadow cast by its audience, whether by the audience's fictional presence, internalized by the author, or by the

74 Foley, appreciatively responding to Horsley 2006d and Draper 2006, warns against 'committing to the gospels as transcribed oral performances ([which] we cannot responsibly do)' (2006b: 138).

75 Cf. G. Nagy 1996a: 32–34.

76 Cf. G. Nagy 1996a: 35; L. Alexander 1993: 209–210.

77 Cf. Dunn 2000: 296, 322–323.

78 Sanders 1969 ought to have put us off such identifications, though Crossan is prolific in its reconstruction of the social and literary 'trajectories' and 'vectors' – 'tendencies' thinly disguised – of the Jesus tradition and has even built such reconstructions into its methodology (cf. 1991: xxxii–xxxiii; 1991: 254–255, 276–277 as instances, nearly at random, of Crossan's evolutionary approach to the Jesus tradition).

79 Esp. Kelber 1983.

80 Cf. Foley 1995a; 1995b; Kelber 1995.

audience's very real presence in the 'text-fixation' of the oral tradition prior to it being written down.<sup>81</sup> In other words, 'while a written text does become a thing unto itself in some respects, it only has existence and meaning insofar as it is pitched at, and appreciated by, an "audience"' (J. Nagy 1990: 222). The more we read the written gospel traditions as subverting and challenging the oral Jesus tradition, the more we have to reckon with the question of the audience and how they so willingly accepted written texts that contradicted their already established traditions. Here, then, is another reason for presupposing continuity between the images and patterns of signification across the oral and written traditions.

Third, in light of the discussion thus far, Jaffee's distinctions regarding 'Torah in the Mouth' may clarify and distinguish various aspects of the Jesus tradition.<sup>82</sup> First, Jaffee identifies the 'oral-literary tradition', which he defines as 'verbal products with pretensions beyond ordinary speech [that] are cultivated for preservation and sharing in public settings'. With regard to oral-literary tradition, this chapter has proposed a distinction between tradition and traditional accounts, similar to Lord's 'songs and the song' (1960: 99–123) and Foley's 'tale within a tale' (1995a: 48, fn 44). Thus Jaffee's 'oral-literary tradition' resembles 'tradition' as defined above; the 'text-in-performance' equates formally to the 'oral-literary traditional account'. Second, Jaffee defines the 'oral-performative tradition' as 'the sum of performative strategies through which oral-literary tradition exists in and through its public performances'. The oral-performative tradition exhibits a particular 'inertia' in that the weight of previous performances constrains the flexibility of, and exerts pressure upon the wording, sequential structure and development of subsequent performances.<sup>83</sup> Finally, Jaffee defines 'text-interpretive tradition' as, 'a body of interpretive understandings that arise from multiple performances of a text (written or oral). They come to be so closely associated with public renderings of a text as to constitute its self-evident meaning.' These distinctions help facilitate the preservation and continued meaningfulness of tradition within a community or social group, though they do so in varying measure.

In what follows we will approach the texts of the synoptic gospels as oral-derived texts. We will place different accounts of the synoptic tradition in parallel columns not so much to make more visually accessible the evangelists' editorial practices but rather to suggest something of the tradition of which the individual accounts are singular instances. The Jesus tradition was a living, dynamic, organically unified entity capable of

81 Pace Kelber 2005: 227–228; cf. G. Nagy 1996a: 40.

82 For the following paragraph, cf. Jaffee 2001: 8.

83 Cf. §4.2.b., above.

variable expression for various purposes. Jesus' tradents could express differing, even conflicting, images of Jesus through this tradition. But the multiformity of the tradition had its limits; it was possible to propose images that were unacceptable within those limits. To do so always raises the question of reception, and, insofar as the canonical gospels represent widely accepted traditional performances, they ought to be approached as expressions within the limits of the tradition's malleability and flexibility. Most importantly, the traditions from and about Jesus were forged in the contexts of multiple oral performances. In these contexts performers and audiences converged and, together, entered into what they considered the appropriate performance arenas, communicated in the traditional, institutionalized registers and communicated with a level of economy masked by the denotative surface of the texts that survive today. These texts preserve in various ways and to varying degrees of success these aspects of oral performance, and it is our responsibility to discern and reconstruct as much as possible this originative oral-performative context if we hope to hear the voices of tradition echoing through our texts.