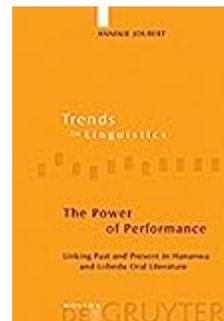


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in the Humanities & Social Sciences



Annie Joubert. *The Power of Performance: Linking Past and Present in Hananwa and Lobedu Oral Literature.* Berlin and New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 2004. xiv + 484 pp. \$142.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-3-11-017998-9.



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This book presents a solid integration of empirical and interdisciplinary theoretical material. In this lies its strength. The book is divided into four parts made up of eight in-depth chapters. There is also a general conclusion, references, and index. This work is well set out, with the exception of the index, which is rather sparse and contains a limited amount of information, for example many author names appearing in the text have been omitted from the index, which makes cross-referencing difficult. An innovative and striking feature of the book is the inclusion of a DVD, photographs, and many tables. This supportive material assists in making the text come alive as performance, rather than just merely as textual analysis. The objective is to go beyond the textual analysis. In this regard, Annie Joubert builds on the contextualized works (to varying degrees) of other contemporary southern African scholars in the field, for example, David Coplan's *In the Time of Cannibals: The Word Music of South Africa's Basotho Migrants* (1994); Duncan Brown's *Voicing the Text: South African Oral Poetry and Performance* (1998); and Russell Kaschula's *The Bones of the Ancestors are Shaking: Xhosa Oral Poetry in Context* (2002). The latter work includes access to an amateur video production, but only from university archives. To my knowledge, Joubert's inclusion of an elaborate DVD production is a first in any southern African scholarly at-

tempt to capture oral literature in context. The publisher should be commended for allowing this lateral-minded approach, and breaking with the notion of "the book" as a sufficient entity in the publication process contributing to the understanding of oral literature.

Part 1 of the book contains the introduction, entitled "The 'Textmaker' and the Oral Text." This chapter outlines the general methodology followed in this work. The specific, detailed, and scholarly approach followed by the author is immediately apparent. There is a detailed exposition of the justification for the study; the chosen research design, recording equipment used, the status of research in Northern Sotho, the field research conducted and the research team, the various phases of documentation and the transcription process, as well as more general analysis of current research on oral art. The discrepancies between the studying of written literature as opposed to oral studies are outlined. Joubert also provides some reflection on current research taking place in African oral literature. In the process she explains her own methods of documentation. The latter part of this chapter is supported by four inserts of audio-visual material displayed on DVD.

It is also noteworthy that the point is made that the "research team" were fluent in Northern Sotho (pp. 8-

9) and that they “never experienced any communication barriers whatsoever.” This seems to contrast with what follows: “we *tried* to integrate ourselves into their worlds and lives” (p. 10, emphasis added). This indicates the difficulties and complexities of ethnographic research even where the researchers are fluent in the given languages of the research subjects. Perhaps the author is suggesting that there can be difficulties in creating the perfect ethnography—hence the need for interdisciplinary studies. This point could have been elucidated more clearly.

Part 2 of the book presents the theoretical orientation with which the work grapples. Chapter 2 is appropriately titled “Can a Performance Event Be Textualised? A Review of Insufficient Answers and Open Questions.” This chapter begins with the origins of the folkloristic “text,” through to the development of ethnolinguistic and more contemporary ethnographic approaches, where the performance is seen as a communicative event. An investigation of the historical development of the major conceptual models of the folklore text since 1888 in America, as well as the precursors of the performance approach, is undertaken. The chapter also looks at the importance of text, context, and contextualization in understanding performance as text within a wider system of analysis. This very important academic debate is deftly handled in this chapter. A strong argument is presented for interdisciplinary approaches to the study of oral art.

Chapter 3 brings a new perspective to the study of oral literature, namely, an in-depth analysis of the relationship between semiotics and the oral interface. This chapter also includes guidelines in textualizing a performance event. For example, creating a pre-text for the performance event; taking into account the situation, participants, ends, act sequence, key, instrumentalities, etc. in order to create the interpretive text. It is the reviewer’s opinion that in this approach scholars can find the key to understanding performance in context. Essentially, this chapter looks at what happens in the transformation process where a text is created from live performance. In other words the movement from one semiotic system to another is investigated. This chapter is supported by twenty-five inserts displayed on the accompanying DVD.

Annie Joubert continues her interdisciplinary approach in chapter 4, where the author explores the development of the use of visual systems in the study of human behaviour, from the early scholars up to the present. Joubert presents a general folkloric/anthropological framework for filmmaking. Again, this approach, together with the accompanying DVD, adds to the continued

quest by the author for creating an analytical paradigm, which takes into account performance in context. The use of film, video, and photography are explored as part of the study of oral art, linking the debate to the discipline of visual anthropology.

Parts 3 and 4 of the book move from the theoretical issues to a more applied empirical approach. This is evidenced in the respective titles of those parts, namely “Linking the Past and the Present: The Hananwa of Maleboho and the Lobedu of Queen Modjadji,” and “The Display of Hananwa and Lobedu Performance Events.” Part 3 is made up of chapters 5 and 6. In chapter 5, Joubert provides a solid historical and geographical background to the Hananwa people. The author outlines the main influences on Hananwa life and culture over the past decades. These include the influence of the Buys people of Mara, the influence of the Boer settlers and the Berlin missionaries, as well as conflict with the Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek. Chapter 6 contains the same contextualized historiography of the Lobedu of Queen Modjadji. This chapter also includes a genealogy of the Lobedu kings and queens, as well as an analysis of transformation in their society, and the creation of their own identity. Each chapter offers a documentary program on the Hananwa. These amount to part 2 of the DVD, which looks at Hananwa society, and part 3, which looks at Lobedu society.

The final and fourth part of this book looks at actual performance events among these two communities. Chapter 7 analyses Hananwa and Lobedu song and dance, while chapter 8 provides an analysis of praise poetry within these respective communities. Chapter 7 includes the transcription and analysis of entertainment songs, work songs, ceremonial songs, as well as individual songs. The complexities of kiba performances are outlined. Joubert’s work could also have benefited further from consulting Sello Galane’s in-depth analysis of the kiba genre.[1] Chapter 8 takes into account self-praises from Hananwa oral art as well as praises in honor of chiefs, queens, and groups within both cultures. Joubert appropriately allows her work to culminate in these two empirical chapters in order to bolster and show how these performances relate to the initial theoretical approaches outlined in this book. There is extensive use of photographs and analytical inserts in italics, which help to explain and contextualize the performances as well as capture the extra-linguistic facets of each performance. The transcribed text is carefully numbered, line by line, with the indigenous language in bold and the translation immediately following, in normal text. A general conclu-

sion to the book follows.

Joubert provides the reader with an excellent, well-researched, theoretical manuscript, which is interdisciplinary. In the reviewer's opinion, the book would be an inspiration to sociolinguists, literary critics, ethnographers, and those involved in participant observation, students of ethnomethodology, semiotics, anthropology (both visual and literary), and discourse analysis, as well as those interested in the orality-literacy debate. Much of the research covers both historical and contemporary facets of Hananwa and Lobedu societies.

The reviewer suggests further that this book amounts to a contemporaneous, holistic, seminal, and groundbreaking work. In the same way as the author has succeeded in providing the reader with an original and vibrant manuscript, perhaps the publisher could consider a more lively and representative cover for the book, especially if a paperback edition is envisaged. Along with many other academic titles, the cover remains uninteresting for such an imaginative book. Another feature of

contemporary oral literature, which is alluded to in the book, is the notion of the commercialization of oral art. This is raised on page 17, where it is indicated that the South African Broadcasting Corporation had purchased broadcasting rights to the recorded material. One wonders what the broader implications of the commercialization of oral art may be. The crucial point would be to guard against the trivialization of this material for popular consumption. A further question of copyright and royalties is raised here, which requires further exploration. This presents a future area of research in itself. Finally, this valuable book would appeal to scholars in the following fields: African studies, history, sociolinguistics, literary discourse, oral literature, performance studies, media studies, visual anthropology, ethnography, and literary studies in general.

Note

[1]. Sello Galane, "A Critical Analysis of the Kiba (Song-Dance-Drama) Discourse" (master's thesis, University of Cape Town, 2003).

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