Perspectives on Recent Work
on the Oral Traditional Formula

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The history of the study of Oral Literature has been covered well by John Miles Foley in his Introduction to *Oral Traditional Literature* (1981b), and also in his Introduction to *Oral-Formulaic Theory and Research* (1985), which includes a monumental annotated bibliography to the subject. I do not intend to recapitulate what he has already done so admirably; all the material is there, and his comments are even-handed and exemplary. There are, however, several general observations which it would perhaps be fitting to make at this juncture in the study of Oral Traditional Literature, which is marked by the inauguration of a new journal devoted to Oral Tradition.

Perusing Foley's works just mentioned, one is immediately struck by the number of language traditions and cultural areas in which the "oral theory" is now discussed, and by the diversity of forms and problems included in the study of "oral traditional literature." This is an exciting development; it is also sobering, because it carries with it a mandate to be clear in our notion of what we mean by oral traditional literature. There are some who would stress the literal sense of "oral" and include in "oral traditional literature" any literature which is "performed" orally no matter what its original manner of composition was.[1] Such an interpretation, it seems to me, overemphasizes performance to such an extent that the peculiar character of what is performed is obscured. We are told that in some cultures it is the performance that is important and that the words of what is performed are unimportant, even meaningless. If that is true, then there is no literary content in such performances, and those of us who are concerned with literature are left with an empty shell, which we should leave to other disciplines. While there may be special cases

where this is true, namely, that the words do not count, they are special cases, and it would be a mistake to generalize from the exceptional.

I hasten to affirm, however, 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. There is no doubt in my own mind that text and context are inseparable. To consider the one without showing an awareness of the other is to miss much. On the other hand, it is true that certain types of research may concentrate either on describing context or on analyzing text, but this should be done with the clear understanding that the other facet exists, and that it must be called upon wherever the description or the analysis should be taken into consideration, because the study would otherwise be inaccurate or incomplete.[2]

Just as there are those who would overemphasize "oral performance," there are those who would underemphasize, to the point of eliminating, the concept of "traditional." It seems to me shortsighted to ignore that aspect of oral traditional literature which gives it the depth of meaning set into it at its origin by previous generations. Forcing oral traditional literature, which, I submit, is traditional by its origin and nature, into the straight-jacket of synchronic observation is to distort it beyond recognition.

Turning to the last element in our subject, oral traditional literature, need it be said that we must be very clear about what we mean by literature? Must we spend time squabbling about whether "oral literature" is a contradiction in terms? Such controversy is a red herring, taking our attention away from the real issues. If we can but accept the well-recognized meaning of "literature" as "carefully structured verbal expression," then carefully structured oral verbal expression can surely qualify as literature.

This is not to say, however, that oral and written literature are indistinguishable! Let there be no doubt on this question either; for oral traditional literature without tradition is meaningless; and oral traditional literature without a clear distinction between it and "written literature" ceases to exist.

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I would like to take this opportunity to bring up to date an article on "Perspectives," which I wrote a few years ago, published in 1974 by Professor Joseph Duggan, entitled "Perspectives on Recent Work on Oral Literature." In it I expressed the opinion that we need more study of bona fide oral traditional literature. I am happy to report that there seems to be more attention being given to both collecting and studying oral traditional literature, even to the point of suggesting new models for comparative studies. If I speak mainly about epic, it is because my deepest commitment is there, but I do not mean to imply that other genres either do not exist or are unimportant.

It was my privilege last September to attend a conference at the University of Bonn on Central Asiatic epic. The specialists who participated, including Professor A. T. Hatto of London, who has edited and translated the Kirghiz epic *The Memorial Feast for Kökötöy-khan* (1977), as well as six scholars from Mongolia and China, were very impressive. It was a particular pleasure to become acquainted with the work of Professor Karl Reichl of the English Department at Bonn, a specialist on Old and Middle English, who has just published a translation of an Uzbek oral traditional epic about *Rawšan*, the grandson of Kurroglou (1985). In the introduction to it and in a recent article (1984), he has called attention to parallels in European medieval literature, especially Old French and Anglo-Saxon, and has suggested that medievalists might find in Central Asiatic epic another helpful model for comparative research in addition to the South Slavic songs. Parallels have also been drawn between Mongolian and medieval German epic by Professor Walther Heissig (1983a). Professor Heissig is the founder and prime mover of the Seminar fur Sprach- und Kulturwissenschaft Zentralasiens der Universität Bonn. His recent monumental *Geser-Studien* (1983b) is especially valuable for comparative study of European and Asiatic epic. A new body of Mongolian Geser material was collected in 1972 and published with text and German translation by S. Ju. Nekljudov and Z. Tömörceren (1985). The abundance of Geser material from Central Asia which is now available in original and translation makes this one of the richest fields for research. The *Asiatische Forschungen* of the Seminar fur Sprach- und Kultur Wissenschaften der Universität Bonn is the worthy successor to the tradition started by Radloff in the nineteenth century.

Earlier that same month, at the International Conference on

Folk Epic in Dublin, I made the acquaintance of Dr. John D. Smith of Cambridge, who has collected Pabuji epic, long oral traditional songs, from western India. He has made a comparative study of passages from four different versions, with a view to investigating whether the texts are memorized or not (1977, 1981). Smith's paper at the Dublin conference was entitled "Use of Formulaic Language in Indian Oral Epic." Professor Stuart Blackburn of Dartmouth College has collected in South India, and he had a presentation on "A Folk Ramayana in South India: Textual Transmission and Local Ideology." I have recently heard also of a study of a South Indian poem, the 5082-line Dravidian epic, the *Cilappatikaram* (The Epic of the Anklet), in Tamil, by Mr. R. Parthasarathy at the University of Texas in Austin, which treats the formulaic poetics of the poem. These texts and studies from the Indian sub-continent provide further opportunities to expand our knowledge of oral traditional poetry, and to test our hypotheses on *remembering* structured phrases and lines rather than *memorizing* a fixed text.

Needless to say, at Dublin one heard of work being done on Celtic oral traditional literatures. Among recent works which stand out are Joseph Falaky Nagy's splendid study, *The Wisdom of the Outlaw* (1985), and Kevin O'Nolan's translation of the long Irish tale *Eochair, Mac Ri in Eirinn* (1982), which was central to his conference presentation on story-telling in Ireland.

The last decade has also seen the publication of Jeff Opland's study of Xhosa oral poetry.[3] Praise poetry is not epic, of course, nor is it essentially narrative, but it offers valuable examples for the study of true improvisation, as distinct from composition by formula and theme. It is, indeed, *sui generis*, and of considerable interest in its own right.

But there is epic in Africa too. During the last decade Daniel Biebuyck of the University of Delaware has published two more versions of the *Mwindo Epic* (1969) in *Hero and Chief* (1978), and John William Johnson of Indiana University has just published *The Epic of Son-Jara* (1985). In 1979 Johnson had published two volumes of the *Epic of Sun-Jata* from Mali, and the new book enriches the material available from the Manding tradition. Five years earlier Gordon Innes had published three versions of *Sunjata* (1974), and it is gratifying to have the available material for analysis increasing so strongly within a period of ten years. In 1973 Innes wrote an article on the manner in which the *griots*

learn, compose, and perform the *Epic of Sunjata*. Foley notes in his annotated bibliography that this is "a study based on fieldwork by the author and others."

One should not leave the African scene without noting John W. Johnson's work on Somali poetry, which offers a very different body of material from the epic songs of Mali. In 1974 Johnson published a study of a kind of poetry called *Heello*. In 1980 he described the way in which Somali poetry is composed and transmitted and agreed with others that it is a completely oral and at the same time completely "memorial" tradition. This is valuable reporting from a scholar who has done extensive fieldwork in both Mali and Somalia. It is important to note, however, that the Somalis do not appear to have a tradition of long narrative poems. In the same year Johnson published a now well-known article, "Yes, Virginia, There is an Epic in Africa," defending Africa against the allegations that it has no epic poetry. I should like to add one more little book to the African "report" because it was done by one of Harvard's first PhD's in Folklore, Clement A. Okafor of Nigeria. He has published in English some Tonga tales which he himself collected and studied for his dissertation under the title *The Banished Child* (1983).

There have been some fine studies of Arabic oral poetry. The work of James T. Monroe (1972) and Michael J. Zwettler (1978) comes immediately to mind. A study has just appeared of a body of poetry which has hitherto been neglected. It is by Saad Abdullah Sowayan and focuses on Nabati poetry, which he says is "the popular vernacular poetry of Arabia. Due to the great mobility of the Arab tribes, it is not easy to confine this poetic tradition to one particular locality; it is widespread throughout the Arabian peninsula" (1985:1). Sowayan is critical of both Monroe and Zwettler, who dealt with Pre-Islamic and Classical Arabic poetry, in part because they go to alien, Yugoslav, poetry for a model for understanding composition and not to the native "continuator" of the earlier poetry, namely, the Nabati poetry. This is an interesting and valuable book, in spite of its native Arabic bias and its feeling of discomfort with the critical approaches of Westerners. It does provide a balance, and deserves careful reading.

There is considerable activity going on at present in entering Latvian *dainas* onto computers, and several helpful analyses of formulas in the Latvian quatrains have appeared. The data from

the entire nineteenth-century classical collection of Krišjānis Barons are stored at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and a very large selection, including all the sun-songs, is located at the University of Montreal. Among studies worth mentioning are the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, doctoral dissertation in 1981 by Lalita Lāce Muižniece, "Linguistic Analysis of Latvian Death and Burial Folk Songs," and two articles by the Freibergs, namely, "Formulaic Analysis of the Computer-Accessible Corpus of Latvian Sun-Song," by Vaira Vīķis-Freibergs and Imants Freibergs (1978), and "Creativity and Tradition in Oral Folklore, or the Balance of Innovation and Repetition in the Oral Poet's Art," by Vaira Vīķis-Freibergs (1984).

Thus there is a growing body of authentic source materials, and we can read new collections and up-to-date studies of oral traditional poetry and prose in Central Asia, India, Africa, Arabia, and Ireland. And there is the suggestion by scholars like Jeff Opland in South Africa, Karl Reichl in Bonn, and John D. Smith at Cambridge that the poetic traditions with which they work could serve as another model, in addition to or instead of Serbo-Croatian for comparative study in Old English and elsewhere. I welcome these suggestions, and have only one caveat, namely, that like should be compared with like. The non-narrative African praise poetry of the Xhosa or Zulus, for example, or the occasional or lyric poetry in Somaliland, may be helpful in studying the shorter Anglo-Saxon genres, or other true improvisations, but its usefulness for the study of epic would be very limited. For the epic, the Central Asiatic and Indian traditions, or the songs in Mali and the epics from Zaire, are much more apt and deserve further study in depth. I should like to add that I believe that comparatists would find the Russian and Ukrainian models also helpful, especially for Old English with which they share similar metrical bases. I am puzzled that more use has not been made of them than is the case.

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Homeric and other ancient Greek, and Old and Middle English scholarship dealing with questions of oral traditional literature continues strong. Attempts to modify Parry's definitions of the terms formula, system, and theme have been given considerable attention, especially in Old English, and contextual

studies of differing kinds are of great significance in both these areas. The following comments are intended to highlight some of what is being done in these two important fields.

In the scholarship devoted to ancient Greek and Homeric poetry there has been considerable activity in the publishing of works in which the force of oral tradition has been considered of great importance in its creation, without which it cannot be properly interpreted. One of the most outstanding books in that category is Gregory Nagy's *The Best of the Achaeans* (1979). By perceptively analyzing formulas in context in ancient Greek and other ancient Indo-Iranian traditional literature, Nagy reconstructs concepts of the hero which once characterized an entire epoch, and still have relevance today. Nagy's work is multi-faceted, profound, and far-reaching. Two recent articles by him, one "On the Death of Sarpedon" (1983) and the other on "Ancient Greek Epic and Praise Poetry: Some Typological Considerations" (1986) add further theoretical perspectives to his book. The first provides an extraordinarily apt additional illustration of principles previously set forth, and the second brings the praise poems of Pindar into the larger theoretical framework that also includes the Homeric poems. Nagy's methodology has inspired a number of others, of which I should like especially to mention Leonard Charles Muellner's *The Meaning of Homeric "eyxomai" through its Formulas* (1976) as a worthy representative. The book on Theognis of Megara, edited by Thomas Figueira and Gregory Nagy (1985), should be added here.

Another important recent book is Richard Janko's *Homer, Hesiod and the Hymns: Diachronic Development in Epic Diction* (1982). One might also mention a very useful article of his, "Equivalent Formulas in the Greek Epos" (1981). His work uses an entirely different technique from Nagy's, but one that is also based on the oral traditional nature of the material, to establish a comparative dating for the early tests.

It is especially interesting to me that one of the most significant undertakings going on at the moment in Homeric studies is being carried on by scholars well acquainted with Parry's Homeric studies and not unsympathetic to the oral-formulaic theory. The project to which I refer, of course, is the multi-volumed commentary to the *Iliad*, under the editorship of Geoffrey Kirk, the first volume of which, done by Kirk himself, has already appeared (1985). While Kirk is not comfortable with the South Slavic model, nevertheless, if I read his work correctly, he

accepts Homer as an oral traditional bard, the composer of the "monumental epic," a term which originated with him, I believe. Associated with him in the commentary are J. Bryan Hainsworth, the well-known author of *The Flexibility of the Homeric Formula* (1968), which is a landmark in Homeric studies after Parry; Mark Edwards of Stanford, who has written much on thematic structures in Homer (e.g., 1970, 1975, 1980); and Richard Janko of Columbia, whose recent book I mentioned above.

Several other books of note have been published dealing in one form or another with ancient Greek and oral tradition, including a consideration of traditional formulas and themes. Two collections of essays by a number of scholars have appeared that are pertinent here: *Homer: Tradition and Invention*, edited by Bernard C. Fenik (1978), and *Homer: Tradition und Neuerung*, edited by Joachim Latacz (1979). Fenik has just published another book on Homer and the *Nibelungenlied* (1986). Finally, special mention should be made of the work of Mario Cantilena of the Università di Venezia, *Ricerche sulla dizione epica, 1. Per uno studio della formularità degli Inni Omerici* (1982).

Old English and Middle English studies reflecting the relationship of oral traditional literature to the extant Anglo-Saxon and Middle English poetic texts continue to flourish. Beginning in 1967 with an important article by Donald K. Fry and continuing in 1969 with Ann Chalmers Watts' significant book *The Lyre and the Harp*, followed by more articles by Fry, the questions about the formula in Old English were actively being raised and discussed. Jeff Opland's *Anglo-Saxon Oral Poetry: A Study of the Traditions* appeared in 1980, and it made extensive use of the Xhosa parallel, which was to be fully described in 1983 in his *Xhosa Oral Poetry*. Robert P. Creed, in addition to his concern for Anglo-Saxon metrics (1982), recently turned his attention as well to sound-patterning in *Beowulf* and the songs of Avdo Medjedović (1981a, b). John Miles Foley has also written on Anglo-Saxon metrics in "The Scansion of *Beowulf* in its Indo-European Context" (1982), and more generally on oral traditional literature, as in "Oral Texts, Traditional Texts: Poetics and Critical Methods" (1981c). Alain Renoir also contributed to the volume on *Approaches to Beowulfian Scansion* cited above, and has expanded his interests to include the *Hildebrandslied* (e.g., 1977). He has been especially attracted by the larger subject of context, as in "Oral-Formulaic Context: Implications for the Comparative

Criticism of Mediaeval Texts" (1981). John Niles' book on *Beowulf* (1983) is the latest full-scale work on the subject, and Anita Riedinger's "The Old English Formula in Context" (1985), which appeared in *Speculum*, is the most recent article to come to my attention.

The Middle English *Alliterative Morte Arthur,* too, has been studied from the point of view of oral traditional literature. Among more recent works of importance are Jean Ritzke-Rutherford's two articles from 1981, "Formulaic Microstructure: The Cluster" and "Formulaic Macrostructure: The Theme of Battle," and Karl H. Göller's article in the same publication, "A Summary of Research," is useful. Valerie Krishna's work on the *Alliterative Morte Arthure* (1982) has also kept the study of formula density very much alive.

In the Scandinavian field, among the studies that concern themselves with problems of oral tradition one should mention Lars Lönnroth's *Njal's Saga: A Critical Introduction* (1976), as well as several articles by him, most recently "Iorð fannz aeva né upphiminn. A Formula Analysis" (1981). Here too belong Peter Buchholz's *Vorzeitkunde: Mündliches Erzählen und Überliefern im mittelalterlichen Skandinavien nach dem Zeugnis von Fornaldarsaga und eddischer Dichtung* (1980), and Jesse L. Byock's *Feud in the Icelandic Saga* (1982), which analyzes the significance of traditional patterns of feuding in the sagas. The relationship of the Old Icelandic sagas and Eddic poetry to oral tradition is discussed in several of the chapters in the recently published *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature*, edited by Carol J. Clover and John Lindow (1985), especially that on Eddic poetry by Joseph Harris.

Old French studies in this area have been led by Joseph J. Duggan, two of his recent articles being of paramount importance, namely, "La Théorie de la composition des chansons de geste: les faits et les interprétations" (1981a) and "Le Mode de composition des chansons de geste: Analyse statistique, jugement esthétique, modèles de transmission" (1981b). Duggan is also at home in medieval Spanish, as is attested by at least two articles, "Formulaic Diction in the *Cantar de Mio Cid* and the Old French Epic" (1974b) and "Legitimation and the Hero's Exemplary Function in the *Cantar de Mio Cid* and the *Chanson de Roland*" (1981c). He is presently working on a much-needed new edition of the *Chanson de Roland*.

In medieval Spanish literature, Ruth Webber pioneered

formulaic and thematic analysis beginning in 1951.[4] Recently she has returned to formulaic studies in connection with the *Mocedades de Rodrigo* (1980). In addition to stylistic studies of Spanish ballads, she has also written innovatively of their narrative structure (1978). One of her most remarkable articles (1981) has dealt with history and epic, particularly in regard to the *Cid*. In her latest paper, a discussion of the relationship between medieval Spanish and medieval French epic, she boldly suggests that together they formed the medieval Romance epic, the true "homeland" of each.

A recent long article on "The Crown-Bestower in the Iranian Book of Kings" by Olga M. Davidson (1985) brings to our attention one of the great epic traditions from the past, which still has importance today, namely, that of Persia, especially as represented by Ferdowsi's *Shahnama,* "The Book of the Kings."[5] In the first part of her study Dr. Davidson traces the elements of the Rostam narrative to Indo-European roots, and in the second she analyzes the traditional formulaic structure of parts of the epic.

The Far East is well represented by Ching-Hsien Wang's *The Bell and the Drum*: Shih Ching *as Formulaic Poetry in an Oral Tradition* (1974). Wang analyzed formulas and themes in a famous group of lyric poems from China's past. Among other articles, Alsace Yen also wrote in 1975 on "The Parry-Lord Theory Applied to Vernacular Chinese Stories" (1975).

Two or three additional areas deserve comment before we conclude this brief survey. What I have termed "the philosophical school" of orality has produced a notable book by one of its most distinguished practitioners, the Reverend Walter J. Ong, S. J., who not long ago published *Orality and Literacy* (1982). A Festschrift in his honor will soon appear.[6] A recent article by Franz Bäuml, a member of the same philosophical school, on "Medieval Text and the Two Theories of Oral-Formulaic Composition: A Proposal for a Third Theory" (1984), has some suggestions concerning the changing relationships between orality and literacy in the thirteenth century in Germany. In New Testament studies mention should be made of Werner Kelber's challenging book, *The Oral and the Written Gospel: The Hermeneutics of Speaking and Writing in the Synoptic Tradition, Mark, Paul, and Q* (1983). The work of Professor Susan Niditch at Amherst College brings to Old Testament studies the methodology of oral traditional literature. This can be seen in her recent book *Chaos and Cosmos* (1985).

Finally, there is one book which defies classification under any regional rubric, but which is comparative in a larger sense of the term, namely, David E. Bynum's *The Daemon in the Wood* (1978). It is a study of the motif of wood, both alive and dead, and its significance in story patterns through man's history and throughout the world. A learned and provocative book, it is in a class by itself. In 1974 Bynum's "Oral Literature at Harvard Since 1856" appeared, and in the same year he also published for the Parry Collection *The Wedding of Smailagić Meho*, by Avdo Medjedović (Lord 1974b, translation) and the original-language text, *Ženidba Smailagina sina* (Bynum 1974b). In 1979 he edited volume XIV of the same *Serbo-Croatian Heroic Songs* series, this one containing songs from the Bihaćka Krajina; the accompanying translation volume is now ready for publication. In 1980 volume VI appeared under his editorship, containing three more texts by Avdo Medjedović, including the 13,326-line "Osmanbeg Delibegović i Pavičević Luka," the longest in the Parry Collection. The Prolegomena to this volume include studies of metrics and melodic changes in the performance of some of the singers, as well as comparative analysis of some of the versions.

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In an article in 1974 I paid particular attention to the "theme" in oral traditional narrative song, specifically epic. It would be useful here to review some of the work on formulas over the years, because they have been the focus of the study of oral literature since Milman Parry's Sorbonne thesis, "L'Epithète traditionnelle dans Homère: Essai sur un problème de style homèrique" (1928a) and his *thèse supplémentaire*, "Les Formules et la métrique d'Homère" (1928b). I should say at the beginning that I shall be talking about the formula as defined by Parry as "a word or group of words regularly employed under the same metrical conditions to express a given essential idea" (1930:80), which does not include repeated passages, for which I use the term "theme." It is perhaps fair to begin with perspectives on my own previous work on formulas, and to comment especially on formula density, making clear my own views on the subject at the present time.

Formula Density

To the best of my memory, Parry did not mention "formula density," nor use it under that title as a test for orality, but he did make statements that implied that he was acquainted with the concept. For example, he wrote (1930:304):

> We have found that formulas are to all purposes altogether lacking in verse which we know was written, and we are now undertaking the first step in showing the particular character of Homeric style, which is to prove that Homer's verse, on the contrary, has many. We are establishing the difference between many formulas and none.

Parry was interested in noting statistical data about frequency of occurrences of formulas in a text. On occasion he counted the number of formulas in a passage, as in the following statement, after presenting his chart of formulas in the opening of the *Iliad* and of the *Odyssey* (*idem*):

> The expressions in the first twenty-five lines of the *Iliad* which are solidly underlined as being found unchanged elsewhere in Homer count up to 29, those in the passage from the *Odyssey* to 34. More than one out of every four of these is found again in eight or more places, whereas in all Euripides there was only one phrase which went so far as to appear seven times.

A little later in the article he wrote (312):

> What we have done then is to prove that the style of Homer, so far as the repeated expressions go, is altogether unlike that of any verse which we know was written.

These statements, it should be emphasized, apply to Homer and ancient Greek literature rather than to medieval epic, and as medievalists we may disagree if they are imposed on medieval vernacular literatures, but the principle of formula density as a test of orality is clearly set forth in these quotations.

Parry did not write much on formulas after his Yugoslav experience, except for his article on whole-verse formulas in Homer and South Slavic (1933). When I ventured into medieval epic after Parry's death, I brought with me what I had learned. In my doctoral dissertation in 1949, entitled *The Singer of Tales*, I

analyzed passages from the Homeric poems, *Beowulf*, the *Chanson de Roland, Digenis Akritas*, and the *Nibelungenlied*. This was published under the same title (which was originally Parry's), with revisions (1960), including the omission of the *Nibelungenlied*. Although I pointed out that there were many formulas and formulaic expressions in the passages analyzed, I did not speak of "density of formulas," nor, with the one exception noted above, did I reckon percentages. Such exact statistics had, however, been figured for *Beowulf* by Magoun in his famous *Speculum* article (1953), and by Robert Creed in his unpublished doctoral dissertation at Harvard (1955).

During the fifties and sixties, in a seminar on Medieval Epic and Romance which I gave regularly in the Comparative Literature Department at Harvard, I began, with the help of the students, to count formulas in narrative poems in the several medieval language traditions with which they were acquainted in the original, and to figure percentages. I believe that it was in this context that the term "formula density" came into being as a test of orality. We were experimenting, and the results turned out to be surprising because of the number of poems containing a high percentage of formulas or formulaic expressions. We worked not only with texts which, we were advised, might possibly belong to oral tradition, such as *Havelok the Dane* and *King Horn* in Middle English, and *Beowulf* in Anglo-Saxon, but also with those which we knew could not, such as *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and *König Rother*. The last two were clearly low in true formulas, as we had expected, and the first two were pretty high on the scale, but *Beowulf* was marginal.

The implication in our study of formula density at that time was that a poem which had many formulas was an oral poem and that one with few was not an oral poem. By an oral poem it was implied that it was a poem belonging to a tradition of oral verse-making—to use Parry's term—that is, to a tradition of singing and performing, and that the text before us was the product of a traditional singer dictating his song to a scribe. In retrospect, however, our thinking was too simplistic to cover the variety of situations in the medieval milieu. In *The Singer of Tales* I had argued against the existence of "transitional texts," a concept that constantly haunted us. That ghost has, for the moment at least, been laid to rest. There seem to be texts that can be called either transitional or belonging to the first stage of

written literature. Does that mean, then, that our discovery that many medieval texts of written origin contained a surprising number of formulas was of no value, that that discovery is meaningless? Certainly not.

What we did show very clearly about the texts which we analyzed was *the degree to which they made use of the formulaic style*. Some were very close to it, some more remote, and others moderately formulaic in their manner of making lines. The formulaic style originated, as Larry Benson agreed in his well-known article (1966), in oral traditional singing of narrative verse. When people began to write Anglo-Saxon verse, as Magoun himself had indicated, they continued to use the same traditional style, because there was as yet no other available. A new style was to evolve in time. Our analyses of formula density demonstrated the degree of involvement of any given poem in the oral traditional style, and conversely *its degree of involvement in a non-traditional style*, if we could find a way of measuring that. Benson has himself admirably discussed the debt of the poet of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* to the traditional formulaic style (1965). Formula studies, *including intelligent statistical analyses*, are an important component in the investigation of medieval vernacular poetry.

We also learned in that seminar to adapt the concept of the formula to the particular tradition with which each student was working, to translate the general terms of Parry's definition to the specific metrical and rhythmic conventions of the several cultures involved. We learned too, that there were modifications needed in the idea of "exact repetition"; for example, metathesis was frequently found in the occurrences of the formulas, and we agreed to accept a metathesized form as an "exact repetition," as Wayne O'Neil had noted in 1960. He also remarked that "formulas, since they are made up of individual words, can be declined and conjugated and compared."[7] In the seminar we also struggled with the question of whether the repetition of a phrase within a few lines of another occurrence of it should count as evidence for formulicity. Our techniques were sharpened, as was our sense of what a formula was.

Although we did not succeed in the seminar in coming to grips fully with the problems of the "transitional" text, we were acutely aware that there was a problem. In the summer of 1981 I decided to return to the study of Anglo-Saxon poetry, which I had

neglected for some time, and I prepared a paper for the Medieval Institute at Kalamazoo the following spring. I was engaged in comparing speech introductions in *Beowulf, Elene*, and *Andreas*. The paper was only a progress report, but it was well received. Since then I have written much more on the subject in manuscript. I for my part learned that the study of formula density is only part of a larger picture, and that its evidence alone may not be sufficient to determine orality. One might put it that formula density is a necessary criterion, a fundamental characteristic of orality, without which no testing would be complete or ultimately valid, but the concept of formula density needs to be expanded.

I mean by expanding the concept of formula density that it should be calculated not only on the basis of the number of the individual formulas, but it should also be reckoned in terms of larger syntactic and semantic units, such as the whole sentence, and within boundaries, therefore, that go beyond the single line, as needed to accommodate the syntactic requirements. Parry had to some extent foreseen this as an inevitable necessity when he spoke of the complexity of the formulaic style and noted that formulas would have to be adjusted to fit the constraints of the sentence: "The ways in which these formulas fit into the parts of the verse and join on to one another to make the sentence and the hexameter are very many, and vary for each type of formula" (1930:126). His idea of the formula included, in the long run, its place not only in the metrical milieu, the line, but also in the syntactic milieu, the sentence, which often went beyond the boundaries of a line. Both Hainsworth (1968) and A. Hoekstra (1964) elaborated on this for the ancient Greek tradition in their studies on the flexibility of the Homeric formula, and on the antiquity of some formulas in that tradition.

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The studies of formulas with which we have been concerned so far have dealt with the definition of the formula, with formulaic technique, and with the expansion of the concept of the formula. The study of formula density was aimed originally at demonstrating the difference between an oral and a written poem. John S. Miletich of the University of Utah has devised what he believes to be another way of making that differentiation, using repetitions,

but not formulas as such. He has attempted to add a new dimension to the problem of understanding the differences between oral traditional and written literature.

In order to evaluate properly Miletich's analyses we must look more closely at the basic tenets of his theory, at his categories of repetition and the way in which he differentiates between what he calls "elaborate" and "essential" styles (1974, 1978). He begins with "six different types of repetitive sequences . . . : (1) the 'repetitive group,' (2) 'exact repetition,' (3) 'semantic repetition,' (4) 'similar initial-internal-end repetition,' (5) 'distinct initial-internal-end repetition,' and (6) 'syntactic repetition'" (1974:112). Let us look at each of these categories.

The "repetitive group" contains a group of consecutive lines that is repeated almost exactly. For example, someone tells the hero to proceed to a certain place. The singer then recounts in about the same words that the hero went to that place. Here are some lines from a Croatian *bugarštica* which Miletich cites:

> Podji, sinu, nebore, - u te crkve svete Petke (7:33)
> (Go, son, - to the church of Saint Petka)
> ter mi vjenča' njega kralja - s kraljicom slavnom gospodom, (:34)
> (and marry the king - to the glorious lady queen)
> i krsti mu, njemu Janku, - od srdašca mlado čedo, (:36)
> (and christen for Janko, - the young child of his heart)
> Pak mi podji, moj sinu, - u cara u čestitoga." (:37)
> (and then go, my son, - to the illustrious sultan.")
>
> Tamo podje Kraljević - u te crkve svete Petke, (:40)
> (Kraljević went there - to the church of Saint Petka,)
> tere kralja vjenča - s kraljicom slavnom gospodom, (:42)
> (and he married the king - to the glorious lady queen,)
> i krstio, njemu Janku, - od srdašca mlado čedo, (:43)
> (and he christened for Janko, - the young child of his heart,)
> Pak ti podje, on Kraljević - u cara u čestitoga. (:45)
> (and then he went, Kraljević, - to the illustrious sultan.)

This type of repetition is common in oral traditional narrative poetry, and the three examples given by Miletich from Spanish, Croatian, and Russian belong to such poetry. It is easy to imitate by anyone writing "in the style of" oral traditional poetry. For that reason, its presence or absence could not be decisive in

determining oral or written style.

The second category, "exact repetition," is just what it says it is, but in describing it Miletich says it is "the recurrence of consecutive units in which the diction and syntax are the same or almost the same and the idea remains essentially unchanged" (1974:113). Examples given from Spanish and Croatian are:

> Rico Franco aragones (3 times)

> dvije ptice lastovice (3 times)
> (two swallow birds)

Such repetitions are found in both oral traditional and written poetry. They could be either formulas, and hence characteristic of oral traditional poetry or its imitation, or the kind of repetition that is characteristic of written literature.[8] Unless one can make the distinction between the two kinds, this second category does not differentiate between the two styles, because it ignores the reasons for the repetitions, a criticism which can be made of all six of the categories.

The third category, "semantic repetition," occurs "in those consecutive units in which the diction and the syntax are generally different but the basic idea is the same (1974:114), e.g., "Do not be afraid," and "Have no fear." Miletich's examples are:

> -Mentide, el rey, mentides, (13a:35)
> que no dices la verdad; (:36)

> "A ne boj me si, d'jete mlado - a nemoj se pripadati, (19:73)
> (Do not be afraid, young boy - and fear not)

These are excellent examples of parallelisms of a type characteristic of some oral traditional poetry, especially that in which couplets are cultivated; and couplets are very common in the oral traditional poetries with which I am familiar. But such parallelisms are carried over into written poetry in those traditions, and hence, as with the first and second categories, "repetitive groups" and "exact repetitions," this feature does not provide decisive information to distinguish between oral traditional and written style. I do not understand why Miletich avoids calling anaphora anaphora, a parallelism a parallelism, or a whole-line

repetition a whole-line repetition, and prefers periphrases.

The fourth and fifth categories are much alike. They are both concerned with "consecutive recurrence of identical or similar words at the beginning, middle, or final position of different units" (1974:114). "Distinct repetition" differs from "similar repetition" in that the repetition of the word does not have the same meaning as its first occurrence, and may be a different word. Here are examples of "similar repetition":

> Jurado habia *el rey*, (52:35)
> pero alli hablara *el rey* (:37)
>
> -*sinu* Marku govoriti, (5:1)
> "Kako, *sinu*, izide - (:4)
>
> -to say to her *son* Marko,
> "How, *son*, did you get out of -
>
> Molodoj *Dobrynjuška* - (78:18)
> Kak *beret* svoj tugoj luk - (:19)
> *Beret* streločki *Dobrynjuška* - (:20)
>
> young *Dobrynjuška* -
> As he *chooses* his taut bow -
> *Dobrynjuška chooses* his bow -

Before commenting on those examples, let me give examples of "distinct repetition":

> los *castellanos* quedaron (78:49)
> se volvio para *Castilla*. (:52)
>
> Da bi *sanak* ti spala - a *sanka* se ne nagledala (28:2)
>
> May you dream a *dream* - and not have surfeit
> of your *dream*.
>
>   - [*belodubovoj*] (82:16)
> Sidit *belen'ka* na nej.   (:17)

- of *white* oak
On it sits a *white* (swan).

The main problem with these two categories is that they contain a number of different things. The first three categories consisted of designated entities that were for the most part recognizable, though sometimes under other names. In categories four and five, however, that is not the case. The repetitions indicated by Miletich are often incidental and not necessarily a significant element in the passages in which they occur, whereas important items in the lines considered are ignored, and a sense of the rhetorical structure of the whole is lost. It would seem that he was seeking repetitions without regard for context.

An initial difficulty, therefore, that faces the critic in the examples of these categories given is that they do not present the whole passage; it is difficult to judge the character of the stylistic phenomena in them without having the full text. Moreover, I suspect that the examples given do not exhaust the kinds of repetitions included here. Let me take the case of the Croatian example of "similar repetition." The full text is:

Stade majka starica sinu Marku govoriti,
                              Pošten domačine,
Veseli se, domačine, veseli ti prijatelji, -
"Kako, sinu, izide iz te arapske tamnice,
                              Moj Kraljeviću?
Ali mi se otkupi tom drobnom spencom,
All mi se od'rva demeškijom britkom sabljom,
                              Gizdavi junače?"
All Marko Kraljević majci svojoj odgovori:
"Otkud meni, majko, u tamnici drobna spenca,
                              Ma mila majka?
Otkud li mi u tamnici demeškija britka sablja?"

His old mother began to speak to her son Marko:
                              "Honorable master,
Be merry, master, may your friends be merry!
How, son, did you get out of the Arabian prison,
                              My Kraljević?

> Did you ransom yourself with that bit of money,
> Or did you wrestle your way out with your sharp
>   sword,
>   Handsome hero?"
> Marko Kraljević answered his mother:
> "Whence would I have a bit of money in prison, mother,
>   my dear mother?
> Whence would I have a sharp Damascus sword in
>   prison?"

It is not clear why Miletich chose only *sinu* from this abundance of repetitions, nor why he omitted the line (or two lines) intervening between its two occurrences. By so doing he destroyed the chiastic formation that in part explains the repetition, and is very characteristic of oral traditional composition:

> sinu/domačine:domačine/sinu (son/master:master/son).

Repetitions are the very heart of the structure of these lines, a traditional structure conceived long ago for the making of oral narrative verse. Not only has Miletich ignored the repetition of *domačine* by omitting lines 3 and 4, but he has also suppressed the repetition of *veseli se (veseli ti)* in initial position in the two halves of the line. Surely these are the significant elements for measurement of the quality of a passage or of a poem rather than the arbitrary repetition of a word taken out of context! Here is an English translation of the opening lines of the passage with the repetitions marked:

> His old mother began to speak to her *son* Marko:
>   "Honorable *master,*
> *Be merry, master,* may your friends *be merry.* -
> How, *son*, did you get out of the Arabian prison,
>   My Kraljević?"

I am aware, of course, that Miletich has excluded the "refrains" in the *bugarštice* on the grounds that they are "seldom part of the narrative" —a dubious exclusion for a study of style—and that he has limited the space between occurrences of the repetitions to four immediately successive units for the Romance poems and five for the Slavic. A unit consists of eight

syllables for the Romance poems, seven or eight for the *bugarštice*, and four and six for the Slavic decasyllables. The length of a unit in the Russian *byliny* is determined by the moveable break in the line, and only two half-lines or less can separate repetitions in that tradition. It turns out, of course, that these are the natural cola in their respective traditions, and it is not incidental that they are also the basic metrical lengths of *formulas* in those traditions, although "formula" is a word Miletich avoids, even when he is describing one. Moreover, the limiting of the number of units between occurrences of a repetition is entirely arbitrary and leads to problematic exclusions and inclusions, as we have seen above. The limitations that he imposes divorce the units from the composing poet, be he oral traditional or written literary. The length of the units is compatible with the compositional formula, but the "statute of limitations," if I may use the term, among other things, takes Miletich's method of analysis out of the realm of the reality of either performance or writing into that of the contrived and artificial.

It is useful to look at the Russian example in this same category, i.e. "similar repetition," and to compare it in part with the Croatian example. I must give it with full lines, without Miletich's deletions.

> Molodoj *Dobrynjuška* Mikitinič,
> Kak *beret* svoj tugoj luk rozryvčatyj,
> *Beret* streločki *Dobrynjuška* kalenyj,
> I on pošol hodit' po gorodu po Kievu.

> Young *Dobrynjuška* Mikitinič
> *chooses* his taut carved (?) bow,
> *Dobrynjuška chooses* his well-tried bow,
> and he begins to walk through the city of Kiev.

The structure of this passage is notable, not because "beret" and "Dobrynjuška" are repeated, but because they are repeated in chiastic order; as in the previous Croatian example, this structure is apparent only when the refrains are not arbitrarily excluded:

> Dobrynjuška/beret:beret/Dobrynjuška,

More especially, the structure of the passage is notable for the

way in which the tradition expresses the essential idea "Dobrynjuška chooses his bow," using three lines. The first line is devoted entirely to the subject in the nominative, namely, Dobrynjuška, with a formulaic epithet "molodoj" (young) and the hero's patronymic, Mikitinič. The second line is the predicate, and consists of "beret" (chooses) and "svoj tugoj luk" (his taut bow), plus another epithet to complete the line. The essential idea has thus encompassed two lines, with the help of formulaic epithets. The third line repeats the essential idea of the first two: "He chooses" (*beret*) "his bow" (*streločki*) Dobrynjuška, plus another epithet, "tempered" (*kalenyj*), to complete the line. What is important is not the repetition of "beret" and "Dobrynjuška" per se, as Miletich's method implies, but rather the fact that the repetitions and their position in the line result from the way in which the traditional poet composes his lines. This is oral traditional composition of Slavic verse at its most typical. I do not understand why Miletich has suppressed an epithet in each of the three lines, further distorting the poetics of the passage.

Without knowing the character of each case included in the fourth or fifth categories of Miletich's scheme, one cannot judge what kind of repetition is involved. One can tell this only when the repetition is seen in the context in which the composing poet put it.

The sixth category, "syntactic repetition," is recognizable enough as one of the basic patterns in a formula (see Lord 1960:41ff.), but only one, and in itself not indicative of either oral traditional or written style. By itself the "syntactic repetition," or the "syntactic formula," as it is often called, or the "structural formula," as it is also sometimes known,[9] has no significance, therefore, in determining whether any given text is composed in the oral traditional or in the written style.

As we look back at Miletich's six categories, we note that they are not very useful as they stand, without further analysis, in our search for criteria to be employed in differentiating between oral traditional and written styles. It would appear, therefore, that any typing of styles as "essential" or "elaborate" on the basis of such arbitrary and contrived categories cannot help but be flawed. Nevertheless, we should comment on his types as set forth in the same article that I have been quoting.

First, however, before discussing the "elaborate" and the "essential" styles, Miletich divides his six categories, as outlined

above, into two classes. The first four categories contain repetitions in which an idea is repeated; in the last two the idea is not repeated. He calls the first group the "elaborate" mode, and the second the "essential" mode. In the elaborate mode action, or forward movement, is delayed by repetition, but in the essential mode the forward movement is not interrupted by repetition.

Miletich's next step, of course, was to analyze the five groups of texts studied in the article in order to determine to which type each belonged. He found that all four genres, that is, Romances, Croatian *bugarštice*, South Slavic decasyllabic narrative poetry, and Russian *byliny*, were "basically essential, or rapid . . . in the manner of communicating information," but that within them there was a varying tendency to retardation. There was a "fairly high frequency of elaborate style repetitions, over one quarter in the case of both groups of *romances*, and the South Slavic heroic decasyllables, and more than one third for the *bugarštica* and the *bylina*." He noted further that "the South Slavic decasyllabic poems are highest in essential style units (74.1 per cent), so that their style may be classified as properly essential, with a somewhat lesser tendency toward the elaborate style than the other four groups examined" (1974:116).

In the second article cited above, "Oral-Traditional Style and Learned Literature: A New Perspective," Miletich applied his method of analysis to six songs from the Karadžić collection as representative of the "oral style texts," "The Song of Radovan and Milovan" in Kačić-Miošić's *Razgovor ugodni naroda slovinskoga* as representative of a poem "in the style or the oral song, and the entire second canto of Mažuranić's *Smrt Smailage Čengića* as representative of "the style of a literary epic." His choice of poems from Kačić as well as of Mažuranić's "epic" is somewhat puzzling. "The Song of Radovan" is not typical of Kačić, because its epistolary form stems from the influence of Renaissance Dalmatian literature and its subject matter is very different from the more truly epic poems. It would have been useful to contrast one of Kačić's narrative poems, which are very abundant in the *Razgovor*, and were written "in the style of the traditional epic songs, and hence are more comparable with Vuk's songs. Moreover, Mažuranić's poem, with its variety of meters and poetic styles, is not really "in the style of a literary epic," because it was heavily influenced by the oral traditional poetry, even if, perhaps, not exactly written "in the style of the oral traditional songs, as

was Kačić's, and it is scarcely to be termed an epic. One would have thought that a better choice as a representative of South Slavic written literary style would have been one of the narrative poems of Petar II Petrović Njegoš (not the *Gorski Vijenac*, which presents the same problems as Mažuranić's *Smrt Smailage Čengića*). If a Croatian work is desired, one might suggest Franjo Marković's romantic epic *Kohan i Vlasta*, or even Petar Preradović's "Prvi ljudi." One of them would be truly typical of Croatian written literary style.

From the analysis of those texts Miletich concluded that "the style of the shorter oral-traditional song in the *junački deseterac* can be distinguished from learned creations by its pronounced retarding tendency resulting from the considerably higher number of elaborate style repetitions" (1978:350-51). These findings, he pointed out, were tentative, and I note that they contradict those in his earlier article in respect to the South Slavic heroic decasyllables. In his first article he used thirteen of Vuk's songs; in the second article he chose six of those thirteen.

It is not easy to see why he chose those particular thirteen songs from Vuk in the first place. Not all of the songs in Vuk's second volume are of the same kind or genre, although they are all in heroic decasyllables. Five of the first six are of a religious nature, only one, the rightly famous "Ženidba Dušanova," is truly heroic. It and one of the religious songs, "Nahod Simeun," are by Tešan Podrugović of Gacko, one of Vuk's best singers. Four of those, including the two Podrugović songs, are among the six in the second article. Of the two other songs in both articles, there is another from Podrugović, "Marko Kraljević i kči kralja arapskoga," and a 53-line Kosovo ballad—and I use the term advisedly, because it consists only of a conversation between the queen and the duke—"Kraljica Milica i Vladeta Vojvoda," from blind Stepanija from Srem, who specialized in short religious songs, which may be of doubtful traditionality. Only a few of the songs Miletich chose belong in a recognizable epic category. His findings, contradictory or not, should not be interpreted as representative of oral traditional epic songs in the Christian tradition in Serbo-Croatian. A fair number of those chosen were probably written by some cleric in the style of the oral traditional songs. Two are religious songs from blind Stepanija, "Sveci blago dijele," and "Časni krsti." Without going into further detail, I find Miletich's choice puzzling and unsatisfactory.[10]

John Miletich was seeking in South Slavic an alternative to the formula which could be used for comparative research in the field of medieval Spanish epic, and which would be applicable even more widely. His ingenuity is to be commended, but I do not think that he has found such an alternative. I am afraid that problems inherent in his method cast doubt on the validity of results obtained by applying it to ancient or medieval texts. Nevertheless, as I have discovered in reviewing the rationale for analyses of formula density in medieval epic, statistical studies may have meaning, even if it is not what one expected them to have. After all, one has been counting *something*. I think, therefore, that it might possibly be useful to identify properly and re-sort some of the components of Miletich's categories, which are themselves the components of his two groups that determine whether the style of a poem be "elaborate" or "essential."

Differentiation between Formula and Repetition

One of the subjects that in retrospect I do not believe we have explored enough, that we seem to have taken for granted, or perhaps even to have forgotten entirely, is the difference between a formula and a repetition. Parry paid great attention to this (1930:304):

> It is important at this point to remember that the formula in Homer is not necessarily a repetition, just as the repetitions of tragedy are not necessarily formulas. It is the nature of an expression which makes of it a formula, whereas its use a second time in Homer depends largely upon the hazard which led a poet, or a group of poets, to use it more than once in two given poems of a limited length. We are taking up the problem of the Homeric formulas from the side of the repetitions, but only because it is easier to recognize a formula if we find it used a second or a third time, since we can then show more easily that it is used regularly, and that it helps the poet in his verse-making.

What did Parry mean by "the nature of an expression?" The key to that is in the last clause in the above quotation. The formula "helps the poet in his verse-making." It is primarily for

that reason that it is repeated. The "repetition," on the other hand, is a phrase repeated to call attention to a previous occurrence, for an aesthetic or other purpose. *Formulas do not point to other uses of themselves; they do not recall other occurrences.* It might be said that they embody *all* previous occurrences, and, therefore, not any one other single occurrence.

One of the changes that comes about in the "transitional" stage is that gradually *formulas*, no longer being necessary for composition, give place to true *repetitions*, which are repeated for aesthetic or referential reasons rather than for ease in verse-making. The true formula, extremely complex in practice, yet simple enough in concept, can be illustrated— if illustration be necessary—by the epithets in Homer, which provide a means of expressing an essential idea, such as "Achilleus," in all the places in the dactylic hexameter in which the ancient Greek traditional poet might have wanted to use it. I can illustrate "repetition" by turning to almost any modern poet in English. Here are lines 9-11 of Robert Frost's "An Old Man's Winter Night" :

> And having *scared* the cellar under him
> *In clomping* here, he *scared* it once again
> *In clomping* off - and *scared* the outer night

Or from one of Carl Sandburg's poems:

> *Pile* the bodies *high* at Austerlitz and Waterloo!
> *Shovel them under and let me work!*
> > *I am the grass*; I cover all.

> *And pile them high at* Gettysburg,
> *And pile them high at* Ypres and Verdun!

> *Shovel them under and let me work!*
> Two years, ten years, and passengers ask the conductor
> > What place is this?
> > Where are we now?
> > *I am the grass;*
> > *Let me work!*

Or the last stanza of Robert Frost's "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening":

> The woods are lovely, dark and deep.
> But I have promises to keep
> *And miles to go before I sleep*,
> *And miles to go before I sleep*.

A note to the above lines reads: "Frost always insisted that the repetition of the line in the last stanza was not supposed to imply death but only to imply a somnolent dreaminess in the speaker."[11]

It is clear, then, that the difference between formula and repetition is crucial to oral poetics, and one of the results of not having explored sufficiently the difference between formula and repetition has been that the lines between oral and written poetics have been blurred. There is a different attitude toward repetition in an oral poetics, where repetition is tied to verse-making, not to semantic or contextual reference, or to "aesthetics." In respect to repetition, oral poetics is different from written poetics *precisely* because in it one is dealing with *formulas*, not "repetitions."

In translating Homer, for example, exact repetition of the epithets, however desirous it may be, does not reproduce Homeric style except on a very superficial level, which does not take into account the *necessity* of the formulas in Homer and the *absence* of that necessity in the translation.

From Oral to Written: What are the Signposts?

In addition to the *density* of formulas in a *transitional* text, one has to consider also *their oral-traditionality* and the *oral-traditionality of the structures or systems* in which they belong.[12] Transition has meaning only if one passes from oral-traditional *diction* and oral-traditional *systems* of formulas to non-traditional diction and non-traditional structures. In order to assess this, however, one must know the traditional elements. The task, then, is to determine what the oral-traditional diction and systems are (or were).

We have enough information in the South Slavic material to make that determination. There is an abundance of pure oral-traditional verse extending over several centuries. With Anglo-Saxon, and some other medieval traditions, we are less fortunate. Nevertheless, there are some guidelines. We have

indicated that what we were measuring in our analyses of formula density was not orality in the absolute, not whether any given text was a fully oral-traditional poem or not, although this was sometimes the case, but the degree of "orality" of that text, judging by its use of traditional formulas, which all seem to agree are characteristic of oral-traditional composition. We can, therefore, talk about formulas that are characteristic of oral-traditional composition in Anglo-Saxon, or any other tradition, only after we have determined a) which repetitions are formulas, and b) which formulas are oral-traditional, insofar as we can do so from the sometimes scanty evidence.

Conclusion

The study of Oral Literature has increased not only in quantity but also in quality. New collections in areas little cultivated by scholars except those in the particular discipline provide new models, some of which themselves represent a learned tradition of long standing. One can think of the Central Asiatic tradition, for example, from the time of Radloff to the present with Nekljudov, Heissig, and the members of the Bonn Seminar.

Formula studies, always an important ingredient for basic understanding of oral traditional poetry, have matured and become more sophisticated. And the way has been opened up to investigate the details of the creation and life of transitional texts. I have come to realize that, in fact, in such fields as Anglo-Saxon and other medieval poetries, we have been doing just that all along.

The time has come to deepen our comprehension of the role of *tradition* in oral traditional literature, lest its significance be forgotten in the present zeal for synchronic description of performance and contextuality, important though those elements may be. For it is tradition that imbues both the text and the context with a meaning profound and strong enough to demand persistence through time. The new journal *Oral Tradition* will provide a smithy on the anvils of which may be hammered out true perspectives on our present, as well as on our past.

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Notes

[1]I am referring particularly to Ruth Finnegan in her book *Oral Poetry: Its Nature, Significance and Social Context* (1977). She, however, does not by any means ignore text, as do many others in the essentially anthropological school.

[2]I am grateful to Professor Stephen A. Mitchell for providing me with the references to the recent text/context controversy in *Western Folklore*: Jones 1979a, Ben-Amos 1979, Jones 1979b, Georges 1980.

[3]1983. I am most grateful to Professor Opland for taking me last summer to hear praise poets in the Transkei and Ciskei.

[4]See also Webber 1973.

[5]See further Davidson's forthcoming study of formulaic structure in the *Shahnama*, to be published in *Oral Tradition*.

[6]The Ong Festschrift will be the January 1987 issue of *Oral Tradition*.

[7]In "Oral-Formulaic Structure in Old English Elegiac Poetry" (1960:30, 38). His examples are "fela feorhcynna," *Bwf* 2266a and "feorhcynna fela" *Maxims* I, 4 14a. I owe this reference and quotation to Fry 1967:195.

[8]See below for a discussion of this distinction.

[9]See inter alia Russo 1966 and Nagler 1974:7, 11.

[10]The following chart gives the number of the song in Vuk II, its title, and its "author"

1. Sveci blago dijele	slepica Stepanija
13. Nahod Simeun	Tešan Podrugović
17. Časni krsti	Unknown
22. Sveti Savo	Stepanija
23. (opet)	Filip Višnjić
28. Ženidba Dušanova	Tešan Podrugović
48. Carica Milica i Vladeta Vojvoda	slepica Stepanija
54. Marko Kraljević i soko (opet)	Unknown
60. Marko Kraljević i Alil-aga	slepica Živana
63. Marko Kraljević i kći kralja arapskoga	Tešan Podrugović
73. Smrt Marka Kraljevića	Filip Višnjić
80. Smrt vojvode Kajice	Unknown

[11]The verses of Frost and Saadburg are quoted from Ellmann and O'Clair 1973. The note on the last stansa of Frost's "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" is note 6 on page 205.

[12]We might add the element of artistic excellence, or aesthetics, because some scholars believe that this is a mark of the non-oral-traditional text. This is a separate subject, however, and should be treated separately as an argument to be discarded after discussion.

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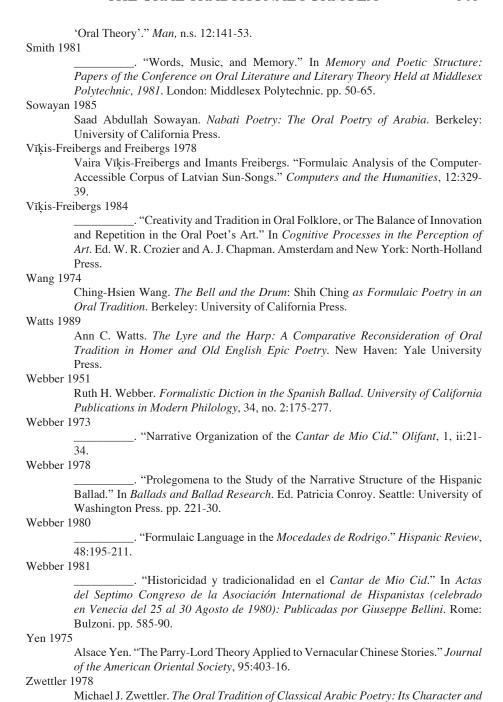
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