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Oral—Formulaic Research in Old English Studies: II

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The first four sections of this study, which appeared in the May 1986 issue of *Oral Tradition*, considered several problems. The initial one discussed whether Old English poetry was composed orally or in writing and whether it was presented to a listening audience or to an audience of readers, and the second reviewed the origin and development of the study of oral composition in Old English. The third section studied the basic units of oral composition, the formula and the formulaic system, and the fourth the level above the formula, that of the theme and type-scene.

This second half of the study has five parts beginning with V, “Levels Above the Theme,” which discusses Ring Structure, the Envelope Pattern, and mythic structures. Section VI, “The Case Against the Oral-Formulaic Theory,” treats scholarly objections either to the idea of formulaicity or to the idea that Old English poetry might have been composed orally. It also confronts the controversies as to whether formulaic poetry can be artistic and whether literate formulaic composition can exist. Section VII, “The Comparative Method,” discusses the studies of other literatures which have been used to illuminate Old English poetry, emphasizing that scholars must be aware of differences as well as similarities. It also considers the way that the comparative method illuminates two questions: whether all oral-formulaic poetry must be improvisational or whether it can be memorial, and how the Germanic and the Graeco-Roman Christian traditions came together in Old English poetry. Section VIII, “Present Trends in Oral-Formulaic Research,” discusses current trends which reopen questions about such points as the nature of the formula and the influence of linguistic theory on the oral-formulaic theory. Section

IX, "Future Directions," focuses on work which should introduce a new and productive era in oral-formulaic studies in Old English.

V. Levels Above the Theme

Speaking of oral-formulaic elements in ancient Greek, H. Ward Tonsfeldt points out that "ring composition . . . is 'pervasively present' in the literature suspected to be oral, and 'relatively absent' in later literature. The structures are occasionally made by repeating actual formulae, but more often a single verb and most frequently a substantive or idea is the unit of repetition. As a technique of oral composition, ring structure would seem to operate on the next level of complexity above the theme." (1977:443) Tonsfeldt argues that ring structures are used in *Beowulf* in a way similar to that typical of the Homeric poems and that "the repetitious arrangement of narrative elements within a nearly static structure is the essence of the poet's technique" (452). John D. Niles (1979) has also discussed ring structure in *Beowulf*, suggesting that the poet used it to give order to his most important points and arguing that it is a type of patterning that must have been useful to an improvising scop or a performer who recited memorized poems.

As in the case of aural patterning, most of the work on the higher structures of Old English poetry has been done, not by oral-formulaists, but by those scholars whose work runs parallel, but is not identical, to the oral-formulaic theory. The earliest such work is Adeline C. Bartlett's *The Larger Rhetorical Patterns in Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, which identifies the envelope pattern, "any logically unified group of verses bound together by the repetition at the end of (1) words or (2) ideas or (3) words and ideas which are employed at the beginning" (1935:9). She argues that "for appreciation of this Anglo-Saxon poetic style, . . . a basic assumption [is] that the tapestry is not purely Germanic but is woven from both Germanic and classical threads and follows both Germanic and classical patterns" (110). Constance B. Heatt has recently studied the artistic use of the envelope patterns in *Beowulf* (1975) and *Judith* (1980).¹ In respect to *Beowulf* she notes that ten of the manuscript divisions are bounded by envelope patterns and suggests that the divisions confirm that the envelope patterns were significant elements in the composition of *Beowulf*. In respect to *Judith*, she notes that the envelope patterns and the hypermetric lines demonstrate the poet's artistry. She also points out that most

Old English poems “make use of hypermetrics, with or without accompanying envelope patterns or similar reinforcing devices, to draw attention to significant symbols, key concepts, central themes, ironies, and so forth” (1980:252).

The rhetorical level above that of the theme that has most interested oral-formulaists has been that of myth. Albert B. Lord has argued that the value of oral poetry comes from “the myth, or myths, which first determined the themes of oral narrative poetry, which provided the story material and gave it significance. For the myths brought it into being and kept it living long after they themselves had officially been declared dead.” (1959:6) He suggests that “the enriching of meaning of a theme or song. . . comes directly from the myth and is *inevitable* in all traditional narrative song” (1). Lord notes that “the essential patterns of. . . mythic subjects” like the initiatory hero and the returning hero “survive and form the meaningful frame of many oral traditional epics” (1980b:145), including *Beowulf*: “The interlocking of these two patterns from the deep past of the story, modulating from the hopeful eternal return of the cyclical myth of annual renewal, through the death of the substitute, to the eventual acceptance of man’s mortality, provides a mythic base both for the triumph of Beowulf over the evil generations of Cain and for the inevitable death of the hero in old age, still fighting against destructive forces” (1980a:141). Michael N. Nagler also reads *Beowulf* in the context of its mythic background, pointing out that “when epics, especially ‘primary’ or oral epics, follow the same myth they seem to show parallelism not only in themes, plot, and the larger framework of narrative organization, but often in the most surprising and unpredictable details” (1980:144). In addition to studying the sleep-feast theme in *Beowulf*, Joanne De Lavan (1981) argues that the formulaic systems are organized in such a way that there is a relationship between formulaic content and mythic content.

Thomas A. Shippey and Daniel R. Barnes have analyzed *Beowulf* in terms of the morphological structure proposed by Vladimir Propp and have suggested that *Beowulf* has larger traditional patterns than many scholars have noted. Shippey, influenced by Francis P. Magoun, Jr.’s study of the presence of oral formulas in Old English poetry, wishes to extend our knowledge of Old English formularity by discussing the narrative level of *Beowulf*. He contends that analyzing *Beowulf* in Propp’s

terms shows “a kind of formulaic, controlled structure in the poem’s narrative” (1969:10). Barnes suggests generally that Propp’s morphology helps us understand oral-derived poems like *Beowulf* and in particular that the study of morphological functions helps “to delineate more precisely those areas in which the poet as conscious artist. . . is free to create, as opposed to those which have been bequeathed to him by oral tradition and which remain substantially unaffected” (1970:432).

Several critics have given warnings about the tendency of critics to be naive in the search for oral origins and mythic backgrounds of medieval narrative. Francis L. Utley warns scholars that “casual appeal to ‘oral tradition’ can be . . . a device to slow down genuine criticism, genuine consideration of the poet’s own creativity” (1960:104-5), suggesting that scholars concerned with Old and Middle English works must be sensitive both to the poets’ use of oral-formulaic and mythic elements and to their artistic handling of the materials. Bruce A. Rosenberg (1974) specifically challenges Barnes’ application of Proppian morphology to *Beowulf* because he feels that it is an inappropriate standard by which to judge a literary work as opposed to a folktale.

VI. The Case Against the Oral-Formulaic Theory

Jeff Opland observes that “many critics of Parry and Lord have denied this theory a sympathetic hearing” and that “the excesses of Magoun and his supporters, as well as the weaknesses in some of Lord’s arguments, have tended to bring the whole ‘oral theory’ into disrepute, so that a charged atmosphere now exists in medieval or classical studies in which it is difficult to discuss any aspect of the oral origins of the western European literatures with objectivity” (1980a:2). An example of such “excesses” lies in the two articles in which Magoun uses the oral-formulaic theory to divide *Beowulf* into shorter poems. In the first article, Magoun argues that in ll. 2069-2199 of *Beowulf*, “an anthologizing scribe” (1958:100) inserted material that was not fully relevant into an existing poem; in the second, he maintains that “the Béowulf material in manuscript Cotton Vitellius A. XV” was compiled from “independent songs by different singers” (1963:127). Opland points out that Magoun has a tendency to “assume that the Anglo-Saxon poetic tradition can be reduced to a simple monolithic definition” (1980:10), a tendency shown in Magoun’s 1963 argument that few

oral poets compose cyclic poems whereas our extant *Beowulf* is cyclic, with the result that he believes that *Beowulf* is a composite.

Indeed, Magoun's overstatements have been countered by arguments made by oral-formulaists. Charles Witke (1966) observes that the passage between 2069 and 2199 can be explained as normal to find in a poem composed orally. In a more important argument, Robert P. Creed uses formulaic evidence from *Beowulf* itself to disprove the validity of Magoun's "dismemberment of the poem as it has come down to us" (1966:131). He contends that *Beowulf* itself indicates that the Anglo-Saxons liked cyclic poems on the adventures of a single hero and that although "the organizing principle implied both in *wél-hwelc zecwæp* and in the whole passage may be more primitive than that proclaimed in the opening lines of the *Iliad*" (135), it is such a principle. Since "it is almost the only notion of structure mentioned or alluded to within the corpus of Old English poetry," students of *Beowulf* should "give to this hint a priority higher than generalizations based on our study of other traditional poetries" (135).

Some scholars have expressed opposition to Magoun's extremism rather than to the oral-formulaic theory itself. Kemp Malone, for example, criticizes Magoun's views about Caedmon because they "spring from his dictum that 'formulas are created only slowly and no one singer ever invents many, often none at all,'" a "dictum [that] works well enough when applied to a singer who keeps to the traditional themes but does not work at all when applied to a singer who breaks with tradition by choosing Christian themes. Whoever composed the first Christian song in English had to make up his formulas as he went along." (1961:195) —as Caedmon is traditionally credited with having done.

The opposition to the oral-formulaic theory includes folklorists and linguists, even though the studies of other folklorists and linguists have helped validate aspects of the theory. Roger D. Abrahams, for example, a folklorist who collects oral texts, argues that the oral-formulaists use "naive and outdated models of the socio-psychological experience of composition and performance" (1978:9) and that the theory is only a hypothesis that does not describe reality. In the course of a linguistic study of the metrical systems of Old English poetry, J. Kerling argues that the oral-formulaic theory is invalid because Old English poetry is merely "the spoken language tidied up" (1982:129). In a similar vein, John Schwetman, who performs a transformational analysis of

10% of the extant Old English poetry, argues that “the oral-formulaic theory seems an unnecessary complication” (1980:98).

Critics who are interested in the classical and Patristic backgrounds of Old English poetry tend either to ignore the oral-formulaic theory or to dismiss it as untenable. James W. Earl, for example, says that although “the heroic school of *Andreas* criticism is still alive and well,” it merely “reflects the old opinion” and provides “a tribute to the Anglo-centric world view” (1980:167), criticizing those who say that “the power of Old English poetry derives solely or mainly from its Germanic primitiveness in relation to the other Christian literature of the early Middle Ages” (89) without countering the arguments specifically. Wormald (1978) says that the oral-formulaic theory has no relevance to Old English studies because formulas appear in literate contexts and therefore that the composition of *Beowulf* during performance seems unlikely. In a study claiming to show how Alcuin would have read *Beowulf*, Whitney F. Bolton states that he has refuted the oral-formulaic theory of the composition of Old English poetry by showing that Alcuin is formulaic although he is “not in any way oral; on the contrary, his formulaicity is strictly literary” (1978:62); he adds in a footnote that “both the theory and the bibliography of oral formulism are, in their different ways, unreal” (62), with no explanation of what he means.

In addition to simply dismissing the theory, Bolton tries to counter the very idea that oral formulas exist in Old English poetry, primarily by confusing the ideas of repetition and the formula. In reference to the phrase “on þæm dæge þysses lifes” (“on that day of this life”), he states that the Latin equivalent occurs in prose texts so that the formula “is not necessarily either poetic or oral” (63). G. C. Britton (1974), in an attempt to prove that *Genesis B* was of written origin, ignores the oral-formulaic theory while calling attention to the poet’s habit of repetition and near-repetition, and James L. Rosier argues that the “contiguous recurrence of forms” in many Old English poems differs from oral formulas, defining the former as “clustered, varied, and sustained figurations” which are found in “structurally distinct narrative units” (1977:199). The attempt to disprove the existence of formulas is most closely linked to the criticism of H. L. Rogers (see, for example, his 1971 review of Ann Chalmers Watts’ *The Lyre and the Harp*). Rogers attacks Magoun’s definition of the formula (ignoring refinements of the definition made between the

publication of Magoun's article in 1953 and that of his own in 1966) as a way to attack the oral-formulaic theory itself. In a psycholinguistic argument aimed at showing that the formula is without existential reality, he argues that "the fatal weakness in it was engendered by Parry's constant preoccupation with hypothetical psychology, with the poet's supposed mental processes, and by Parry's belief that an 'idea' could infallibly be separated from its 'expression'" (1966a:90-91). He further argues that "as semantic theory and linguistic psychology, this is quite unacceptable. Words do not 'mean ideas'; speakers can hardly be said to 'think of ideas'; the theory that 'real meanings' are a kind of mental 'reflex action' will not stand examination. The crucial and specific objection, though, is that Lord is supposing the singers to have certain ideas, when the testimony of the singers themselves points . . . to a lack of analytical self-awareness." (92) Because oral singers are unable to reify their own formulaic poetic language and discuss their poetry critically, Rogers dismisses the oral-formulaic theory and its application to Old English studies. As Carol Edwards points out, "to argue as Rogers does, that the singers' inability to discuss these structures means that they don't exist, is to argue that performers are somehow more adept than scholars at categorizing their own material" (1983:157).

In many cases, the argument against the oral-formulaic theory is caused by concern about "how far an 'oral-formulaic style' is indeed a sign of 'oral composition'" (Finnegan 1977:69). Rogers, concerned not only about the applicability of Parry's and Magoun's definitions of the formula to Old English poetry but also about the accuracy of the Serbo-Croatian analog and the division between oral and written poetry, has argued that "the formula is an unreliable touchstone" (1966b:199) for differences between oral and written poetry. P. R. Orton examines the manuscript presentation of the *Soul and Body* poems and argues that "comparison of the texts in their deployment of certain scribal devices . . . reveals a number of correspondences" (1979:173), with the result that it is unlikely that oral transmission accounts for the differences between the versions. In another study, Orton (1983) argues that scholars should not use verses from poems composed later than *Cædmon's Hymn* to prove the formularity thereof because the formularity of such phrases might have arisen after the composition of the *Hymn* rather than before and therefore have been purely literate. Many of the arguments against the

oral-formulaic theory, however, are directed against orality, in part because Anglo-Saxonists—ignoring such works as Lord’s “Homer’s Originality: Oral Dictated Texts” (1953), which argues that orality and artistry are not incompatible—believe that *Beowulf* is too artistic to have been composed orally. Larry D. Benson (1970), for example, argues that oral-formulaic studies deny the originality of the *Beowulf* poet and that the poet is both traditional and artistic.

The question about the relationship between formularity of diction and artistry has been an issue in Old English studies since before the oral-formulaic theory came to the fore. In 1929, William F. Bryan examined “the epithetic compound folk-names in *Beowulf*” in order “to determine to what extent these names were formed or selected by the poet because of their appropriateness to their particular context, and to what extent they were used as purely general, stylistic devices or as forced by the exigencies of poetic form, especially by the demands of alliteration” (120). He argues that “in *Beowulf* there are occasions when the exigencies of the verse-form forced the poet to a somewhat mechanical use of purely conventional words and phrases; but, on the whole, there is no question as to the fresh vigor and effectiveness of his phraseology” and that “no aspect of his artistry seems . . . more notable than his sure mastery of such stubborn material as folk- and national names” (134). In a similar argument, Storms, who accepts the premise that *Beowulf* was improvised during performance, studies fifteen compounded names that occur in twenty-nine instances in *Beowulf* and concludes that “their use is justified, not only as far as sense and metre is concerned, but also as to poetic connotation and artistic significance” (1957:22).

In contrast to Storms, many scholars argue that oral composition and literary artistry are incompatible. Ralph W. V. Elliott, although primarily interested in showing the artistry of Middle English romance, says of *Beowulf* that “no amount of fashionable emphasis upon the ‘oral-formulaic’ nature of Old English poetry can explain such art away” (1961:65). In a study of *Maldon*, Elliott argues that “even where situations are similar and formulaic verses recur, . . . the final poetic result differs in every case. It is the context which determines the singer’s choice of word and phrase.” (1962:54) He feels that the best Old English poets were “masters of their conventions, not slaves” (55).

In 1978, Rudy Spraycar re-examined the oral-formulaic theory as applied to medieval literature, specifically the arguments

that formularity of diction proves orality of composition and that poems from different traditions can be compared in an attempt “to show how various formulaic techniques can underscore overall poetic structure” (388). Many scholars who have accepted the application of formulaic techniques to classical and medieval poetry have emphasized how those techniques actually underscore the artistry of the poems. In Homeric studies, Joseph A. Russo has pointed out that “the truly gifted oral poet finds himself no more restricted in handling his subject matter than was Shakespeare in having to write in iambic pentameter, and he is just as free to produce great poetry” (1963:247). Russo’s view is echoed in Old English studies by James P. Holoka, who argues that *The Wife’s Lament* and *The Husband’s Message* are composed not of formulas but of the “allusive verbal nuances one associates with literate artistry” (1976:571), which are undoubtedly the result of the poet’s planning but which are not incompatible with the oral origins of the poems: a singer would have been able to remember “a set piece of some one hundred verses; he could review, polish, revise, rework until finally his method closely approximated that of his more educated counterpart. Thus, short, elegiac poems could conceivably attain a fixity indistinguishable from that of a written text.” (572)

Stanley B. Greenfield was one of the first Anglo-Saxonists to call attention to the fact that formularity is compatible with artistry and that Anglo-Saxonists needed to pay close attention to the artistry of the texts rather than merely listing formulaic devices. In his seminal study of the theme of Exile, he states that he intends to show how *The Wife’s Lament* and *Christ I* develop Exile thematically and structurally in order “to extend Mr. Magoun’s investigation into the subject of conventionality in Old English poetry, with the hope that still further studies will blossom forth and enlarge our understanding and appreciation of the aesthetic values of that poetry” (1955:206). In an equally important study (1963), Greenfield analyzes the syntax of one sentence of *The Wanderer*, arguing on the basis of his analysis that an Old English poet “could use and did use, consciously or unconsciously, these linguistic counters, as he did diction, formulas, and themes, to contribute uniquely, in many cases, to his poetic effect” (378). The study demonstrates that “despite the fact that Old English poetry is highly conventional, stylized, and formulaic, it was possible . . . for the poets writing in that tradition to be

individual in their stylistic talent” (373). Later, in “The Canons of Old English Criticism” (1967a), Greenfield points to weaknesses in the critical methodology of Creed, Whallon, and Cassidy, and he observes that because oral theorists concentrate on formulaic repetition, they concentrate “on the phrasing and ‘grammetrical’ patterns that a poem has in common with other poems rather than on the appropriateness of those patterns in their immediate context” (142). Greenfield states as axiomatic that “even if a poem like *Beowulf* were to be convincingly demonstrated as of oral composition . . . the case for abandoning standard critical techniques in analyses of its poetic values remains unproved” (143-44) and that “close analysis of verbal and grammatical patterns is . . . not incompatible with the nature of Old English poetry; and understanding of the special techniques of that poetry rather helps the critic, as it enabled the Anglo-Saxon auditor, to evaluate the effectiveness of individual instances” (154-55). His aesthetic investigation continued in “Grendel’s Approach to Heorot” (1967b), in which he maintains that “the poet’s manipulation of diction and syntax achieves subtle poetic effects” and that the verse and syntactic formulas were only “counters for the Old English poet to use either conventionally, in the worst sense of that word, or brilliantly and strikingly, as the *Beowulf* poet has used them in presenting Grendel’s approach to Heorot” (283). In his second book, *The Interpretation of Old English Poems* (1972), Greenfield examines lexical, formulaic, and dictional matters, pointing out that the formulaic nature of Old English poetry does not “militate against our praising a scop for having chosen *le mot juste*” (31) and arguing convincingly that Old English poetry is both formulaic and artistic.

Like Greenfield, Godfrid Storms has identified formularity and artistry as compatible, contending that although “a traditional and formulaic style is of great technical assistance to less gifted poets . . ., the influence of tradition does not prevent the poet from expressing the particular meaning and the special tone demanded by the occasion” (1963:171), and, like Greenfield, illustrating the way that the *Beowulf* poet has manipulated traditional diction for artistic purposes. Storms also argues that an oral performance would not prevent an audience from appreciating the artistry of a poem like *Beowulf* “at a first hearing. Poetry was one of their principal entertainments; it was frequently and generally practiced An audience trained and educated to make their own songs

and to listen to those of others would certainly have developed an ear for poetry and would . . . appreciate the finer points of a popular art.” (1966:136)

As Greenfield has shown, part of the artistry of Old English poetry comes from the manipulation of formulaic language; in a related argument, John W. Ehrstine suggests that the aesthetic appeal of Old English poetry derives from the fact that it “is more oral than . . . modern English verse” (1965:151). He states that “the modern investigations into formulaic diction and structural analysis have probably provided us our first opportunity of fully seeing the technique and brilliance of a poem such as *Beowulf*” (162) and of appreciating its excellence. Rosier (1963) points out that although formulaic alliterative poetry places certain limitations on a poet, a good poet could use the formulaic elements artistically, a position echoed by Lars Malmberg, who states that “originality was well within the power of good Anglo-Saxon poets” (1973:223; see also Reinhard 1976). Likewise, Bernard Van’t Hul and Dennis S. Mitchell contend that the description of the eagle in *The Battle of Brunanburh* is unique in our extant corpus and that the poet “seems capable of evoking other than purely literary responses, and ought therefore to be considered a rather more original literary artist than much of previous criticism has allowed” (1980:390). Robert W. Hanning (1973) argues that the use of words with roots *dæl-* and *scear* proves that a poet could manipulate his formulaic poetic diction and themes for artistic purpose. In a related study Claude Schneider suggests that terms like *æþeling*, *bealdor*, *ealdor*, *eorl*, *hæleþ*, *þegn*, *þeoden*, and *wiga* in poems like *Juliana* contrast Christian and heroic values, thereby countering “a not infrequent observation in criticism about Old English Christian poems [which] holds that a body of diction which was inherited from a Germanic, military and heroic past forced the poets to describe Christian characters inappropriately in terms belonging to the ideals of a warrior society” (1978:107).

Pierre-Eric Monnin has argued that comparison of the *Meters of Boethius* with their source “shows variations that are in fact too numerous and substantial to allow for the idea of a versifier solely concerned with the prosodic correctness of a close rendering” so that we may assume that the poet was familiar “with the motifs and movements recurrent in oral-formulaic poetry” (1979:347) and was evidently concerned with artistry. Donald K. Fry (1968) suggests that an awareness of formularity heightens our appreciation

of the artistry of a poem like *Beowulf*, whose poet uses his traditional diction and his themes and type-scenes aesthetically, and Isaacs (1968) uses oral-formulaic techniques to analyze Old English poetics. Isaacs argues that since the oral-formulaic theory has demonstrated how Old English poems were composed, the time has come to “re-examine the art of the *Beowulf* poet and other Anglo-Saxon singers within the framework of their poetic conventions, examining the conventional formulas and themes they use in order that we may find the methods of composition in a narrower sense” (1967:215). He suggests that formulas and themes had both denotations and connotations, the latter “evoked from the common store of suggestions, emotional and intellectual, that the particular formulas and themes hold in the hearts and minds of hearers and singers” (216), maintaining in particular that the poetic use of personification shows us how Old English poets manipulate their conventional poetic devices for artistic effect.

Alain Renoir has been especially sensitive to what Isaacs calls the connotative and denotative (that is, the traditional and the particular) meanings of oral-formulaic poetic elements. In a study of Grendel’s approach to Heorot, he points out that “under the conditions of oral-formulaic composition and presentation, the *Beowulf* poet masterfully succeeds not only in selecting immediately effective details but also in presenting them from such points of view as are likely to arouse the most appropriate emotional reactions in the audience” (1962b:158). His study of Grendel’s approach demonstrates that the poet’s technique is basically cinematographic, and he makes a similar point in respect to the artistry of *Judith*, arguing in particular that “in actual recitation, both the accompanying music and the intonations of the voice must have lent an audible quality to the sounds which are so powerfully suggested by the visual elements of the poem” (1962a:153). In “The Heroic Oath in *Beowulf*, the *Chanson de Roland*, and the *Nibelungenlied*” (1963), Renoir examines a stock feature as the source of action in the poems and shows how three poets manipulate the same heroic commonplace using oral-formulaic devices of composition for different artistic purposes. Renoir and many other oral-formulaists are interested in what Opland has recently called “the *exploitation* of tradition, . . . the deliberate use of a traditional element in order to extend or deny its relevance in altered circumstances” (1984:45).

The concern over the relationship between formularity and artistry” is related to another concern that scholars have voiced about the oral-formulaic theory, namely, the relationship between formularity and written composition, with what Ute Schwab has called “the transformation of oral poetry into literature” (1983:5). Thomas G. Rosenmeyer has pointed out that literate poets “use patterns that are identical with formulas” (1965:303), with the result that readers are unsure about the orality of ancient Greek poems, and the same idea has been voiced by Claes Schaar in respect to Old English studies. Schaar argues that it is not necessary “to assume that all formulaic Old English poetry is oral” because “there is some internal evidence pointing to a literary, a lettered, origin of at least a certain group of formulaic Anglo-Saxon poems, those composed by Cynewulf and some of those associated with him” (1956:303). He finds it inconceivable that the use of formulaic patterns would have been abandoned when writing was introduced, a point reiterated by Anglo-Saxonists like Adrien Bonjour (1957b), who feels that there must have been an intermediate state between purely oral and purely literate poetry and that the *Beowulf* poet, like Cynewulf, was “a lettered author” using traditional formulaic techniques (1957a:573; see also Bonjour 1958).

The idea that oral-formulaic poetry must have been improvised during performance has exercised many Anglo-Saxonists, such as Malone, who argued that “the use of traditional diction is one thing; improvisation is something else again. The two need not go together and in *Beowulf* they most emphatically do not” (1960:204). Arthur G. Brodeur contended that an Old English poet could have been both a trained *scop* and a literate poet: “The language of *Beowulf* . . . indicates that its author had been trained as a professional *scop*; and it is most unlikely that a man so trained should ever lose the ability to express himself in the conventional modes of traditional poetry under the influence of a Christian education” (1959:4). Like many other Anglo-Saxonists, he believes that Magoun’s doctrine that a literate poet could not have composed formulaically is incorrect. Jackson J. Campbell points out that “the history of the Old English poetic conventions after the introduction of the tradition of written literature must have been very complex, . . . for lettered men at some period began writing and singing in the native form, introducing ideas and narrative material from Latin literature” (1960:87) and suggests

that formulaic elements undoubtedly remained after poets became literate.

Alistair Campbell spoke in 1962 of “the literate formulaic poet” (75), and O’Neil noted that from internal evidence, we can only “separate the traditional formulaic poetry from the non-formulaic” (1962:596). Robert E. Diamond contributed several studies of formulaic diction, noting that his analysis of Cynewulf’s diction shows that the poems were composed “in the traditional formulaic style” (1959:228), although “it is impossible to determine whether the Cynewulf poems were composed orally and written down by a scribe, were composed with pen in hand in the ordinary modern way, or were composed by a learned poet who was making use of the traditional poetic formulas handed down to him from an age when all poems were oral” (229). In a study of the metrical Psalms, a body of material which he assumes represents a literary but formulaic translation, Diamond suggests that “detailed analysis of . . . [the poet’s] diction makes one fact very clear: much of his choice of words depends more on mechanical considerations than on taste or ‘inspiration’” (1963:8). He even suggests that it is “likely that there is more of this element of mechanical compulsion in even the great Anglo-Saxon poems than is usually recognized” (8).

A turning point in the controversy came in 1966 with the publication of Larry D. Benson’s “The Literary Character of Anglo-Saxon Formulaic Poetry,” an article of great importance which has influenced the course of Old English studies ever since. Benson comments that “there are many for whom the demonstration that the techniques of analyzing oral verse can be applied to Old English poetry is proof that this poetry was itself orally composed” (334). By an analysis of the metrical preface to the *Pastoral Care*, *Riddle 85*, *The Phoenix*, and *The Meters of Boethius*, all of which are demonstrably literate, Benson shows that “to prove that an Old English poem is formulaic is only to prove that it is an Old English poem” (336) and that “not only can literate poets write formulaic verse, they can write it pen in hand in the same way any writer observes a literary tradition” (337). He argues that “because Old English poetry is formulaic, our study of it must begin with the exciting and useful techniques developed by students of oral verse; but because this poetry is also literature, our study need not end there” and that “a recognition that Old English poetry is both formulaic and lettered would lead to an

even more exciting and fruitful development in our discipline” (340).

Benson’s work paralleled that in classical and other medieval languages, for in 1966 G. S. Kirk argued that the contrast between “oral” and “literate” composition was causing confusion because “literate composition has come to stand as the only alternative to oral poetry . . . , [whereas] a truer and less confusing antithesis . . . is between natural composition in a formulaic tradition (that is, ‘oral poetry’ in its primary sense) and deliberate, self-conscious composition in a formulaic style, whether with the aid of writing or not” (174). Similarly, in Old French studies, Stephen G. Nichols (echoing Rychner 1955) had argued in 1961 that *The Song of Roland* was written down by someone who had been trained in oral-formulaic techniques and who reorganized parts of the poem, a point reiterated by Spraycar in 1976 when he observed that the oral-formulaic style of *Roland* suggests that a literate redactor adapted a traditional narrative for his own purposes.

In articles which were published in the same year as Benson’s, Jackson Campbell, R. F. Lawrence, and E. G. Stanley made similar statements about written formulaic poetry, although without Benson’s impressive documentary evidence. Campbell asserts that “the formulaic technique . . . thrived in the period of post-conversion learning. The fact that lettered, even learned, men composed poetry of this type, using all the characteristics of the formulaic style, is incontrovertible. . . . We cannot assume, simply because there are an appreciable number of formulas in the poem, that the poem was composed orally. We have too many formulaic poems where the poet obviously translated a Latin original very closely.” (1966:191) He adds that Anglo-Saxonists need to approach Old English poetry carefully because “in many formulaic poems a conscious rhetorical artificer is at work” (201). Lawrence (1966), responding to the fact that Creed (1959) used different formulas to rewrite a passage from *Beowulf*, wonders whether, since Creed is able to use oral-formulaic techniques, an “Anglo-Saxon monk [might] have done likewise” (178) in an even more effective manner. Stanley (1966) argues that there were two stages in the development of formulaic diction, oral and written, warning that genuine preliterate poetry may not help us to understand Old English poetry, which he assumes to be literate.

In the late 1960’s many scholars examined the question of literate formulaic composition in Old English. Morton W.

Bloomfield considered that although our extant *Beowulf* was not orally composed, “there can be no question but that an oral tradition lies behind it” (1968:15). Brodeur (1968), acknowledging that all Old English poems are highly formulaic, argues that literate poets would have been able to compose formulaically and that *Andreas* resembles *Beowulf* not because the two poems derived from a common oral-formulaic tradition but because the poet of the former was familiar with the latter. In 1969, Marcia Bullard voiced her objections to the fact that the oral-formulaic theory differentiates between “formulaic” and “literary” composition, and Whallon suggested that the idea that a poem can be formulaic and lettered means that oral-formulaic texts were not necessarily dictated: “as soon as we entertain editors and interpolators, all of them able to compose formulaic poetry in the manner that had been widely known and customary, the illiterate bard and his amanuensis no longer have the place of honor” (1969:470).

In an article from 1969 that incorporates Benson’s thesis, Helmut A. Hatzfeld maintained that medieval poets, whether composing orally or in writing, utilized traditional conventions and that literate artists used a formulaic style derived from an earlier oral tradition. In the 1970’s, many scholars began their work with the assumption that Old English poetry was both formulaic and lettered. In a response to Magoun’s theory that *Beowulf* is a collation of three separate poems, Brodeur comments that the “argument is obviously dependent upon the assumption that the author of *Beowulf* was a ‘folksinger, composing extemporaneously without benefit of writing materials’—an assumption . . . which many competent critics reject” (1970:14); he dismisses, in other words, a necessary connection between formularity and orality. In a study of *The Meters of Boethius*, John W. Conlee (1970) states that Old English poetry was created in a literate tradition which had assimilated the formulaic style, and Allan A. Metcalf (1970) uses the theories advanced by Benson to study the *Meters* as a formulaic and lettered poem and to show how the poet used his traditional poetic elements to turn prose into poetry. Influenced by the “argument that it would be possible in certain conditions for a literate person to write formulaic poetry” (1970:97), Lawrence extends the analysis to the Middle English *Wars of Alexander*, considering both its formularity and its learned literary elements. Hoyt N. Duggan also uses Benson’s ideas to argue that the same poem is both formulaic and literate, stating that “the *Wars*-poet

was able to do with pen and ink what generations of oral poets had done in extemporaneous performances. He did not just draw on a tradition of formulaic diction or borrow fixed formulas from other poems but wrote formulaically” (1976:281). The Middle English studies are of interest to Anglo-Saxonists because they suggest that poetry can be both formulaic and lettered.²

Alistair Campbell uses the idea that Old English poetry is both formulaic and lettered to contend not simply that *Beowulf* was a written work, but also that it was influenced by Virgil and other classical texts. He suggests that “the style of *Beowulf*, with its artistic control of the formula, its avoidance of long repetitions and its careful building of paragraphs, recalls, not so much oral epic verse, as the sophisticated development of the Homeric style found in late Greek epic” (1971:292). Thomas Gardner, like Campbell viewing the *Beowulf* poet as literate, suggests that oral formulas used in literary works “must have been expected and enjoyed by at least some of the ‘consumers’ of the poem” (1973:111) and that the use of formulas may have resembled puns. Gardner argues, however, that because the poet “was not a prisoner of the oral-formulaic tradition” but “was free to think about the words he was using” (121), he must have been literate. J. D. A. Ogilvy and Donald C. Baker have recently stated that “the formulaic qualities of Old English are of a kind that has its origin in nonliterate poetry” but that “the great majority of scholars would maintain that *Beowulf*’s enormous variety of epithet would in itself likely preclude oral composition of the poem” (1983:193).

In the 1970’s scholars found reasons to agree with Benson’s thesis that Old English poetry is both formulaic and lettered. Thomas E. Hart attempts to show that “numerous repetitions of words, formulae, other collocations, and themes in ‘Beowulf’ are governed by extensive and mathematically precise tectonic . . . patterns” (1972:2). He suggests that his findings demonstrate that *Beowulf* was not composed orally, a statement echoed throughout the 1970’s by scholars like Whitman, who in 1975 asserted that no extant Old English poetry was composed orally. Anatoly Liberman (1977) argues that an original oral tradition had given way to a stage in which poets used oral-formulaic materials like themes to compose written poems aesthetically, and in another article (1978) he specifically criticizes those who try to prove the oral origin of *Beowulf*. Richard C. Payne suggests that the survival of formulaic

poetry in Old English demonstrates that the formulaic tradition was continued in monastic settings, arguing in particular that “the question of oral versus written methods of actual composition can be seen as an anachronistic and inappropriate one, since our own rigid distinction between oral and literary modes was not shared in that [monastic] environment. . . . It seems likely that most poems were produced by authors with pen in hand, though frequent communal reading of such works must be assumed to maintain the vitality of the formulaic tradition.” (1977:46) Michael Lapidge finds corroboration of Benson’s thesis in the Latin poetry of Aldhelm, which contains “certain repeated features which might properly be called ‘formulas,’ that is, ‘groups of words which are regularly employed under the same metrical conditions to express a given essential idea’” (1979:225). He suggests that since “literate poets writing in Latin could make continual use of formulas . . . , it is surely not inconceivable that Old English poets might do so as well” (229-30).

In addition, scholars were motivated by Benson’s work to re-examine Old English poetic techniques and poems other than *Beowulf*. Richard A. Lewis, observing that Old English poetry gives evidence of formularity as well as literate craftsmanship, reasons that “the poets quite consciously retained metrical and stylistic conventions from the earlier period while uniting them to real changes in narrative syntax and the language generally” (1975:589), especially plurilinear alliteration. Shippey (1972) discusses the poets of the *Psalter* and *The Meters of Boethius* as literate translators who worked formulaically; Metcalf points out that “the Old English poet used only one verse form and the traditional vocabulary that went with it” (1973:3) whether composing a vernacular poem or translating a Latin source; and Edward M. Palumbo (1977) studies *Guthlac A* and *B*, finding evidence that formularity and literacy were compatible and indeed suggesting that the literate poet of *B* used more formulas than the poet of *A*, who may have been illiterate.

The result of this line of investigation has been the “realization that many a presumably-written work includes elements clearly typical of oral-formulaic composition” (Renoir 1976b:338) because “oral-formulaic features are necessary but not sufficient to demonstrate orality within a formulaic tradition” (Renoir 1978:101). Such texts have come to be called “transitional texts,” defined as texts which “show the characteristics of oral

composition, although they might have been composed pen in hand and subject to overall planning which the process of additive oral composition does not permit" (Curschmann 1967:45). Not all scholars, however, accept the premise that transitional texts can and do exist. Barnes, following the distinction between oral epic and written fiction proposed by Northrop Frye, comments that "the most distinctive feature of oral narrative—that which immediately differentiates it from literary narrative—is the simple, self-evident fact that it *is* 'oral' and *not* 'written'" (1979:9). As a result, he argues that Frye's "valid and useful" distinction means that "we must accordingly rule out the possibility of any such thing as a 'transitional text.' . . . We must accept a given narrative as *either* oral *or* written, and never somehow a combination of both." (10) Barnes' overly rigid distinction is clearly of little use to Anglo-Saxonists, but his idea has been stated by other scholars as well. Miletich points out that the distinction between oral and written works "appears of prime importance for those critics who maintain that a different criterion must be employed for a proper critical understanding of orally composed works, namely a separate system of oral poetics" (1976:111). Lord argues that the question as to whether formulas exist outside of oral traditional poetry might be answered by using more precise definitions: "If one discovers repeated phrases in texts known not to be oral traditional texts, then they should be called repeated phrases rather than formulas. . . . When one has said that, however, while one has clarified the terminology, one has not clarified the situation in the texts nor answered the question"; he also maintains that "one must consider not only repetitions as such but the specific formulas used, or ideas expressed by them" (1974:204).

Recent studies on contemporary poetry have found examples of literate poets who write formulaic poetry, that is, examples of transitional texts. Opland points out that "literacy is a fairly recent development among the urban Bantu, and the written literature is in its infancy. But literate Bantu poets are using traditional praise songs as a basis for their poetry. . . . Their poetry conforms metrically and stylistically to the traditional praise poems sung by the *imbongi*." (1971:177) In an investigation of Serbo-Croatian texts, Haymes has shown that Bishop Njekoš wrote "in conscious and direct imitation of a living tradition," a fact which suggests that it is "possible that much medieval formulaic poetry was composed in the same way" (1980:400). Miletich has

made an even more interesting suggestion based on his study of Serbo-Croatian texts, that there are actually three categories of poetry; oral, written, and “texts composed by learned writers who have either deliberately imitated, i.e., written ‘*na narodnu*,’ ‘in the style of’ the oral narrative tradition or who have created literary epics by drawing to some degree on the folk tradition” (1978:345). Such work helps to validate an approach that treats “the hybrid products now extant in Anglo-Saxon manuscripts” (Opland 1980b:43) as transitional texts.

Haymes points out that the study of such transitional texts is of value because “the written poem can . . . tell us much about the tradition of oral poetry alive at the time it was composed, even if the surviving poem itself was the product of a writing poet who only imitated the oral style” (1981:342). As a result, this kind of investigation parallels the study of the possible oral composition and transmission of our extant Old English poems—for example, Christopher Knipp’s study of the formulaic and repetitive structure of *Beowulf*, which he feels proves the poem’s oral composition because “in oral poetry it is not possible to ‘turn back’ and savour a fine moment with the eye” (1972:778); Robert D. Stevick’s concern (1965) that scholars need to determine both the extent of the formularity of *The Seafarer* and the manner of composition of the poem; or Alison G. Jones’ argument that *Daniel* and *Azarias* provide “evidence for oral transmission of verse” while leaving “the question of method of composition the problem it has always been” (1966:95).

VII. The Comparative Method

Just as comparative studies have helped Anglo-Saxonists learn that transitional texts do indeed exist, so they have illuminated many aspects of Old English poetry. Renoir points out that cases exist “where the comparatist may do at least as well by working within the factual oral-formulaic context as he would within the hypothetical chronological context” (1981c:424). The comparative method was first used to illuminate Homer by comparing him to Serbo-Croatian poets, as Lord says, “to reconstruct more exactly Homer’s milieu, his tradition, his technique” (1936:113) and, for example, to illuminate his style by showing that “necessary enjambement is more frequent in Homer than in the Southslavic poetry” because “Homeric style is richer in traditional devices for carrying the thought beyond the end of the line” (1948:123).
Kirk

warns Homeric scholars that “inferences based on modern oral traditions must be founded on a . . . careful assessment of the true nature of those traditions” (1960:281), and David E. Bynum (1969) has also warned that scholars must be aware of differences as well as similarities, noting, for example, that what is called oral epic poetry in one region is not necessarily the same as what is called oral epic poetry in other regions.

Despite such caveats, however, the comparative method continues to be used to illuminate Old English poetry, and Renoir (1966) suggests that such an approach is extremely valuable because it reduces scholarly dependence on finding literary models for extant texts. Serbo-Croatian poetry has provided an extremely productive analog for Old English; Foley, for example, has used poems in the Parry-Lord collection to explain problems concerning the unity of the *Odyssey* and *Beowulf*, emphasizing that “the creation and re-creation of oral epic is an ongoing *process*, and our concept of narrativity must take account of that distinction” (1981b:300). Recently, Foley and Barbara Kerewsky-Halpern (1976) have published field research that has helped scholars appreciate both the *guslar* and other oral poets. Other Indo-European traditions have also provided useful analogs. Arthur T. Hatto (1973) has compared Old English and Middle High German texts to Kirghiz heroic poetry, which he describes as improvisational.

The most useful Indo-European analogs for Old English poetry are found in the cognate evidence of other Germanic peoples and in the poetry of the Finns. Magoun (1954) examines four versions of Hygelac’s raid on the Rhine, three of which are in Latin, and concludes that the story must have circulated orally before the composition of any of the texts. Tauno F. Mustanoja (1959) reviews evidence about the manner of presentation of Finnish popular poetry in order to suggest how ancient Germanic poetry may have been presented, and Creed reinterprets *Widsith* as follows: “There was a singer at Ermanaric’s court. There was also one at Alboin’s court two centuries later. There was also one whose song we have in the Exeter Book. All were indeed wide-ranging. And all were, in a way, one, because each was, while he lived, the living voice of Germanic oral tradition.” (1975:384) Some scholars have compared the Old English and Old Norse traditions; George Clark (1973), for example, shows that *Njalssaga* and *Beowulf* both use a common Germanic narrative

pattern about dragon-slaying, and Renoir applies the comparative context of South Germanic—including Old English—oral poetry to the *Hildebrandslied*, arguing that the usual definition of the word *fragment* can be inadequate “when applied to the critical interpretation of literary works not composed here and now in our own language” (1981a:49). Three scholars have updated Sievers’ study of Old English and Old Saxon formulas. Kellogg points out that “the close similarity between the formulas of *Heliand* and those of the Anglo-Saxon corpus reflects the extreme conservatism of the South Germanic alliterative tradition” (1965:72); Michael J. Capek (1970) suggests that comparison of Old English and Old Saxon formulas shows that they have a common origin but developed differently in the two languages; and Roland Zanni (1980) studies the way that South Germanic formulaic phraseology was adapted to religious purposes.

A profitable non-Indo-European analog for Old English poetry has been found in texts from various African cultures. Margaret E. Goldsmith argues that research shows that poetry composed in the Congo resembles heroic Germanic poetry and that it proves that there was a cultural change after the Conversion of England which “altered the function of heroic poetry, and at the same time inevitably changed the meaning of traditional secular symbols” (1970:64) so that we must regard the extant Old English poetry as literate and learned. Hazel Carter (1974) attempts to show that Shona praise poetry resembles Old English poetry more closely than does Scandinavian skaldic poetry and therefore provides a more useful analog than the latter. The most important comparative studies on African and Old English poetry have been performed by Opland, who proposed numerous ideas in early articles and developed them more fully in his 1980 *Anglo-Saxon Oral Poetry: A Study of the Traditions*. In 1973, he pointed out that “a study of local oral traditions can lead us to understand through first-hand experience a phenomenon that is an all-too-misunderstood aspect of mediaeval life” (88), and he studied in particular the Xhosa “tribal poet, or *imbongi*, who generally has the ability to compose his poetry while he is performing, on the spur of the moment” (1975:186). In 1977, he compared Cædmon to the Xhosa poet Ntsikana to validate his assertion that the Xhosa tradition can illuminate medieval oral traditions, and he has further compared Bantu eulogy and medieval formulaic poetry, concluding that “the Anglo-Saxon *scop*, like the

Norse skald and the Irish *fili*, was a vatic eulogizer originally serving a sacral ruler” (1980c:304). One advantage of Opland’s scholarship has been that it has helped scholars realize that the oral-formulaic theory must explain not just long epics, but indeed all oral poetry. It has also led him to propose that the Germanic peoples had practices similar to those of the Xhosa and that the most important form of common Germanic poetry was “eulogistic poems of the court or tribal poet” (1980a:38) like those found in South Africa, an intriguing idea which should lead to fruitful debate in the future.

The comparative method has shed light on the tangled problems of oral-formulaic studies, namely, whether all oral-formulaic poetry must be improvisational or whether a memorial tradition can be a genuinely oral one. Before Parry introduced the idea that poetry could be transmitted by improvisation, scholars had assumed that the transmission of medieval oral poetry must have been memorial (see, for example, Heusler 1969). As recently as 1965, Sisam was able to argue that *Beowulf* was “composed without writing, and recited from memory by trained entertainers until it was recorded” (67) since he did not accept the Parry-Lord theory that all oral poetry must be improvised because “what is important is not the oral performance but rather the composition *during* performance” (Lord 1960:5).

In a recent essay, Lord re-examines the question of the role of memorization in oral-formulaic poetry, pointing out that Serbo-Croatian singers “compose their verses by means of formulas. They remember phrases,” but “this ‘remembering’” is “as unconscious as our use of certain phrases in ordinary speech, and should be distinguished from ‘memorization’” (1981:451). Lord indicates that he has been “speaking of the Serbo-Croatian tradition, of sung epic narrative, but the principle is applicable in those other traditions which are composed and performed in the same manner as the Serbo-Croatian” (459). The important phrase here is “in the same manner as the Serbo-Croatian”; an important question is whether the Serbo-Croatian analog holds for all oral traditions, and Anglo-Saxonists should remember that Homeric *thrif* is not applicable to the Old English formula. Lord points out that there are “cases where a poem is composed in the poet’s head without benefit of writing—and memorized and recited. This applies to short poems. . .” (460) rather than to long epics, and Anglo-Saxonists should also remember that many poems of the Old

English corpus are short and should not be compared to long epic (cp. Foley 1983).

In 1969 Alan Jabbour pointed out that “no attention has been given to the possibility of any kind of transmission but oral-improvisational or textual,” even though “folklorists have long recognized the presence . . . of stability as well as variation and of memory as well as improvisation in the oral transmission of poetry” (177); he notes that oral tradition includes some forms that are primarily memorial and others that are primarily improvisational. Arguing that the Serbo-Croatian analog is not appropriate for comparative study of Old English oral poetry, Jabbour proposed that the British ballad tradition is the appropriate analog. In a study of the Germanic *Heldenlied*, Haymes made an argument similar to Jabbour’s, suggesting that, not only is “not all formulaic poetry . . . oral,” but also there is “oral poetry which is not formulaic and not improvisational” (1976:49) but which is memorized.

Haymes finds evidence for a memorial tradition of oral poetry in Germanic tradition, and several scholars have adduced evidence for memorial transmission in other traditions as well. Opland argues that “one unfortunate result of Lord’s definition of an oral poet . . . is that it focused attention on the improvising singer and ignored completely the memorizer. A study of contemporary Xhosa poetry reveals . . . that memorizers do exist . . . [and] that these poets have a significant role to play in the full oral tradition.” (1973:90) Opland believes that “the facts of the Xhosa tradition call for a broader definition of oral poetry, one that would include a variety of non-literate poetic activities” (90). He states that “we need to break free of the monolithic view of oral poetic traditions derived from Parry and Lord” (90), a call also made by John D. Smith. Smith writes that there is an epic tradition in west India which resembles Yugoslav epic but is not improvisational: “in the epic of Pābūji we have an oral epic which is non-improvisatory but formulaic (and also thematic)” (1977:150). In this memorized text, he identifies “identical or closely related phrases [which] recur very frequently in every performance” (147), although he has not yet published close analyses of the formulas and themes for the benefit of those who are unable to read the epic. As a result, his suggestions are tentative, and his research is at the point where Opland’s was when he first identified the Xhosa analog: more study

of the Pābūji epic is needed before we can be certain that it provides a good parallel for Old English poetry.

The comparative method is also of use in the study of Old English verse because, as Edward B. Irving, Jr., says, the poetry “was formed by the collision of two cultures and is always. . . a mixed kind of poetry” (1967:153). The fact that certain poems merge heroic and Christian elements has long been noticed by Anglo-Saxonists. Diamond, for example, notes that the section of *The Dream of the Rood* that describes the crucifixion includes most of the heroic diction; he believes that when the poet “set himself to compose a song on a Christian subject, it was natural that diction reflecting an earlier society should creep in” because “a poet who was accustomed to compose songs on heroic subjects would quite naturally apply all the old heroic epithets and formulas to his matter” (1958:5). Rosemary Woolf argues that heroic formulas were used only for decorative purposes in Christian poetry except when applied to the devil, who, “because of the characteristics already attributed to him by the Church Fathers . . . had natural affinities with characters in both northern mythology and northern literature” (1968:164). Lester Faigley (1978) calls attention to the fact that Cynewulf uses formulaic diction appropriately to describe religious subjects, and Lisa Kiser comments that “interpreting Old English poetry . . . often requires of us an ability to see how individual poets succeeded in making this synthesis work, how their skillful manipulations of the native word-hoard stretch the language of Germanic antiquity far enough to meet and enter new conceptual worlds” (1984:65).

Many Anglo-Saxonists have been concerned with the way that the Old English poets who composed poetry about Christian subjects adapted the native verse-form to their purposes (see, for example, Derolez 1961) and achieved “the happy blend of Christian sentiment and traditional method in the telling of a story [which] is a distinctive characteristic of Old English literature” (Norman 1969:3). Kenneth A. Bleeth (1969) suggests that *Juliana* exemplifies Cynewulf’s skill in adapting the Old English poetic language to depict material drawn from Patristic sources, and in a discussion of the Germanic background of Old English poetry, Milton McC. Gatch (1971) takes into account the use of formulaic elements in the poems. Walter H. Beale argues that scholars must be aware of both “the tradition of formulaic composition, with its origins in Germanic oral poetry” and “the learned Latin rhetorical

tradition, with its origins in the Hellenistic schools and the Church Fathers" (1979:134), and especially of the devices "through which diverse rhetorical traditions were fused and made one" (142).

A number of studies published in the 1970's and 1980's have made us more aware of the composite tradition of Old English poetry, the seminal one being Cherniss' 1972 *Ingeld and Christ: Heroic Concepts and Values in Old English Christian Poetry*, which demonstrates conclusively that "one finds within single poems both Germanic and Christian concepts and motifs" (8) and contends that scholars do not need to show that the Christian poems are "totally formulaic or orally composed so long as we can agree that they are heavily influenced by the tradition of oral-formulaic composition" (20). In 1981, Alexandra Hennessey Olsen argued that the *Guthlac* poems of the *Exeter Book* express the religious ideas derived from Latin works formulaically, and Daniel G. Calder maintained that Cynewulf worked within the old formulaic poetic tradition and "embraced the centuries-old habits of diction and style the Germanic invaders brought to England in the fifth century. Cynewulf is manifestly a literate poet, but the style he adopted was originally both oral and formulaic, and by his time it had crystallized into a stable, though expressive, manner" (1981:11). In a 1983 study, Earl R. Anderson pointed out that "Cynewulf's integration of concepts and details from various sources has a reflex in his style of composition, . . . a blend of Germanic formulaic techniques with Latin rhetorical patterns and with a syntactic control also characteristic of his Latin sources" (24-25), and in 1984 Olsen studied the verbs of speech in the poems of the Cynewulf canon in comparison to those of the sources and analogs to show the effect of formulaic composition on the literary artistry of the Old English versions of traditional narratives.

VIII. Present Trends in Oral-Formulaic Research

One of the values of studying scholarship which uses the composite technique is that one realizes that the oral-formulaic theory has at last gained acceptance in Anglo-Saxon studies, whether one argues as Joseph Harris does in respect to Old Norse studies that "the term 'Oral Theory' seems a desirable loosening of 'oral-formulaic theory'" (1983:234), thereby emphasizing the orality of the poetry, or whether one argues as Olsen does that "the term 'formulaic composition' rather than 'oral-formulaic composition'" should be used because "the question of orality is irrelevant"

(1984:158) to the study of certain poems. Even scholars like Kiser and Bleeth, who acknowledge that one must be aware of both sides of the composite tradition but who deal almost exclusively with the Christian Latin side of the poetry, feel the necessity at least to pay lip-service to the importance of the oral-formulaic theory. It seems reasonable, therefore, to say that the current trends in oral-formulaic research—which re-open questions about the nature of the formula, the possible orality of the poetry, the influence of linguistic theory on the oral-formulaic theory, and many other points—will be as influential in future Old English studies as the research of the last thirty-odd years has been.

In 1956 Lord pointed out that “an awareness of sound patterns is of particular use to the scholar in trying to answer the question as to why a singer has chosen one formula rather than another which might have served his purpose just as well” (304), but sound patterns have been little studied as oral elements. In a 1975 study of ancient Greek, Berkley Peabody reminded students of oral-formulaic epic about the amount of work that needs to be done on traditional elements other than formulas and themes. Peabody argues that there are five “tests” for an oral traditional narrative: “The *phonemic test* requires consistency in the patterns of language-sounds used by a singer. . . . The *formulaic test* requires consistency in the patterns of word-forms used by a singer. . . . The *enjambement test* requires consistency in the patterns of syntactic periods used by a singer. . . . The *thematic test* requires consistency in the patterns of lexical clumps used by a singer. . . . The *song test* requires consistency in the patterns of discourse generated by a singer.” (3-4) He argues that the formulaic test has been overemphasized to the detriment of the study of the other areas. Peabody’s study influenced a 1981 article by Creed that deals with the same five levels in respect to *Beowulf*, with a particular emphasis on sound-patterning, Peabody’s phonemic test. Creed points out that Peabody’s study is “a systematic approach to the study of techniques when words are *heard*, not seen, *sounded*, not written. . . . Peabody relentlessly forces us to ask, is our way of apprehending the situation that of traditional, of *aural* societies?” (1981:194-95) Creed suggests that the most important impact of Peabody’s study for those interested in Germanic oral tradition is “to remind us how much remains to be done in the exploration of sound-patterning, localization, syntax, clustering. . . . The idea of the *Beowulf*-poet as a *singer* can be

tested in new ways.” (214) Influenced by both Peabody and Creed, Foley has argued that a profitable new approach to oral literature involves “the demonstration of *sound-patterns*. . . , recurrence of sounds at the level of individual words and even smaller units” (1980b:75). He points out that Peabody and Creed “assign sound-patterning its own place in the hierarchy of traditional structures in ancient Greek and Old English, respectively, thus freeing it from dependence on the formula and viewing it as a dynamic process in itself” (75).

In addition to the five levels of oral traditional narrative outlined by Peabody, scholars have suggested the existence of other levels. Susan Wittig, for example, using tagmemic grammar to explain how formulaic systems work, argues that traditional narratives consist of a “hierarchical structure of narrative patterns” above the level of the formula consisting of “the type-scene, the motifeme, . . . the syntagme, . . . [and the] episode” (1978:106). Jean Ritzke-Rutherford (1981) suggests that Old and Middle English alliterative poetry had six levels—the formula, the formulaic system, the motif, the type-scene, the theme, and the cluster, this last unit consisting of a group of words which expresses a given idea but is not restricted to a form, sequence, or number of lines and which demonstrates that there is continuity between Old and Middle English alliterative poetry. Foley suggests that there is a level of formulaic discourse which he calls the “responion” and which he maintains explains why in some cases a “half-line structure” has “superseded its whole-line counterpart, a modulation to which the hybrid matrix of the [Serbo-Croatian] decasyllable is always potentially subject” (1980c:285). Agreeing with A. J. Bliss’ 1971 argument that one does not need to eliminate single half-lines in Old English poems by emendation, Foley suggests that “‘responion’ of root-related words” similar to that in the Serbo-Croatian wisdom poetry “is a motivating force behind at least eight of the twenty-six half-lines in Junius” (287). He later defines “responion” as “morphemic repetition” (1981d:78), arguing that “rather than being attached to a certain narrative event or pattern and echoing traditionally against other occurrences of the event or pattern, these words respond to proximate partners, lexical relatives usually no more than twenty lines away” and that “many rhetorical figures thought by some critics to be direct borrowings from Latin authors can be derived from the interaction

between responson and other aspects of Germanic verse form” (1980a:132).

Foley contends that in Old English oral poetry, there are “(1) metrical and (2) verbal formulas and systems” as well as “a ‘responson’ of stressed elements which may or may not be involved in verbal formulas” (1980d:49) and that themes have both “the abstract pattern of action, situation, or detail” and “morphemic redundancy” (50). His analysis allows him to posit four levels of traditional formulaic patterns, “(1) metrical formulas and systems, (2) verbal formulas and systems, (3) responson between nearby elements, and (4) theme” (50). He argues that “each structure is dependent in various ways upon the natural language characteristics of Old English, and while they may be in differing degrees compared to analogs in Serbo-Croatian and Greek, they are also tradition-dependent and therefore deserving of their own definitions and dynamics” (50). His study leads him to suggest that Anglo-Saxonists must use two criteria when they apply the comparative method. The first is “the criterion of *tradition-dependence*, which demands an examination of the differences as well as the similarities among the . . . oral poetries to be compared” (47), a criterion somewhat similar to that applied to Homeric research by Adam Parry, who points out “an external difference in the traditions of ancient Greek and Yugoslav poetry” (1966:212). Foley’s second criterion is “*genre-dependence*, the extent to which the poems . . . match in genre” (1980d:47).

Stating that the comparative method “must *compare* rather than *reduce*” (53), Foley applies his own insights in two excellent articles about minor genres in Old English and Serbo-Croatian. In a study of sound patterns (1980b), he points out that charms depend for their efficacy on sound patterns during oral performance, and he later (1981a) specifically compares charms in Old English and Yugoslav, pointing out that their power depends on their sound. He also makes a careful tradition-dependent study of *Beowulf*, arguing that “the primary site for consistency and patterning is in Old English not the colon of syllabic extent and internal structure but the *stress maximum position* and *secondary stress maximum position*. The SM and SSM have a finite length; each consists of the root of either a single, uncompounded word or an element of a compound—in other words, each is usually a single morpheme. . . . The result will then agree with what has been observed in Old English: a lower percentage of classically

defined formulas and a higher index of variability among systems” (1980a:120).

Some recent critical studies have addressed the question of the nature of the Old English formula. Elizabeth S. Sklar (1975), studying the use in *Maldon* of rhymed formulas like those found in Layamon’s *Brut*, implicitly calls for a new theory about Old English formulas to account for rhymed Middle English formulas. Foley points out that “the books and articles stimulated by Lord’s *The Singer of Tales* have modified his original insights into an oversimplified model, a *synchronic* bundle of formulas complete in itself, whole, and integral. As Lord and others, especially Peabody, have said repeatedly, however, they are describing a *tradition* rather than one or a group of texts, and a tradition is nothing if not also *diachronic* rather than synchronic only” (1979:10). He emphasizes that we must “develop definitions and models for traditional units that are both faithful to each literature . . . and, in broad terms, comparable to those posited for other literatures” (11). In an important study, Anita Riedinger attempts “to isolate the characteristics of the formula within the Old English, rather than the Homeric, poetic tradition” (1985:294), also identifying a formulaic level she calls a “set,” which she defines as “the repetition of one general concept + one system + one function” (317); the idea needs further exploration and refinement but is extremely promising. In another article, Foley uses computer analysis to provide a new approach to the formularity of *Beowulf*. His computer study shows that “*Beowulf* reveals, upon computer analysis, conclusive evidence of a single rhythmic template which generates 94% of all lines metrically recoverable from the unique manuscript and the Thorkelin transcriptions” (1976:207) and that “the metrical template in Anglo-Saxon . . . is by nature an oral-aural template” (219). His work enables him to propose a new definition of the Old English formula: “A verbal formula in Old English poetry is a recurrent substitutable phrase one half-line in length which results from the intersection of two compositional parameters—a morphemic focus at positions of metrical stress and a limited number of metrical formulas” (1981e:274).

Because of the oral-aural nature of *Beowulf*, Foley speculates that even literate Old English poets must have “depended to a much more significant degree on aural intake and oral output than on visual apprehension and written expression” (1976:220) than do modern poets, so that Old English poems must be approached as

oral. Rosenberg suggests that more study of contemporary oral literature would assist medievalists in their quest to define the formula and to determine which works are oral: “Is the oral formula a poetic device exclusively? Professor İlhan Başgöz has found formulas among the prose narrative *hikaye* of Turkey which are not metrical at all—at least not metrically organized throughout the performance—and actually many of these narratives are blends of poetry and prose.” (1981:444) He also argues that oral narrative can be non-traditional and that oral poets composing original songs may not contribute to a tradition, suggesting that “the folklorist or anthropologist will tell us more about the responses and expectations of the traditional audience The cognitive psychologist can help us understand the dynamics of the input, storage, and retrieval processes in memory.” (448) In just such a study, David C. Rubin discusses cognitive psychology, especially “coding, [which] refers to what is stored in memory during learning” (1981:174) and which determines what people remember accurately and what they remember erroneously. Similarly, Fry discusses Bede’s story of Cædmon in terms of theories that memory is divided into perception and recall and that Homer played an educative role in his society. Speaking of Old English poetry, Fry points out that “the scholars did not memorize the poems and then write them down. Rather they wrote them down from Cædmon’s memory in order to memorize them for themselves. . . . The scholars feed Cædmon sacred narrative and/or doctrine, and he manufactures palatable verse, which they record and memorize.” (1981:289) Fry’s studies produce a revolutionary theory for oral-formulaic studies in Old English, namely that “the English church used written poetry as an educational device, transmitted largely in memorized form. And Cædmon and his memory began the whole process.” (288) He postulates that “Anglo-Saxon Christian poets . . . wrote in the inherited formulaic style, whose familiarity and formal properties made the poems easy to memorize. Christian learning spread through an illiterate population by means of memory and recitation, all radiating from an author’s original manuscript. . . . The manuscript of a traditional society, of the nonliterate Anglo-Saxons, was memory.” (291)

Several scholars have proposed new ideas about oral-formulaic research which promise to be of influence in the future. Joshua H. Bonner argues that scholars should define the “grammar” which

was used during the Old English period rather than look for explanations of literary devices in Latin rhetorical handbooks, and should study the poetry in terms of both the grammatical and the oral-formulaic theories. He suggests that “to imply that the Germanic oral traditions, poetic and forensic, could not have developed grammatical devices which enhance poetic expression and the power to persuade closes off fruitful avenues of enquiry” (1976:226). His article has the potential to revolutionize Old English studies should scholars follow his advice. Francelia Clark calls for a more careful application of the terminology concerning themes and type-scenes to Old English poetry, arguing that themes as Lord defines them are not found in *Beowulf*; like Foley, she points out that “the oral theory is expanding to show us that oral literatures are composed on different principles, that Serbo-Croatian epic is *a* model but not *the* model” (1981:189) and calls for tradition-dependent research on oral-formulaic features. Olsen has reasoned that it is probable that Old English poetry affected Anglo-Latin prose because both were composed in the same monasteries, with the result that “the relationship between Old English poetry and Latin prose is far more complex than has hitherto been assumed” (1983:273), a suggestion that should promote more dynamic study of both Anglo-Latin and Old English works. In a brilliant study of *The Husband’s Message*, Renoir argues that we must read Old English poetry with an awareness of both its oral-formulaic nature and “the context of its original manuscript text” (1981b:75) because there is a deliberate contrast between the message of the poem and “the disheartening prospect evoked by the logic of the presumed external situation” (76) in the manuscript. Although Nist in 1957 called attention to the fact that “*Beowulf*, as transmitted in *Vitellius A.xv*, indicates its accentual system by means of word division, its line organization by means of periods, and its semantic interpretation and frequently its scansional and sound-pattern details by means of acute accent marks” (338), thus showing that the manuscript itself was set up to perpetuate the oral tradition of *Beowulf*, Renoir’s article reminds Anglo-Saxonists that they must be sensitive to many contexts—including that of the manuscripts—as they seek to understand Old English poetry. In particular, Renoir reminds us that “familiarity with oral-formulaic elements will enable us to sense much more through association than is explicitly stated in a text composed within the oral-formulaic tradition” (1987:541).

IX. Future Directions

At the beginning of this study, I posed certain questions addressed during the controversy over the oral-formulaic nature of Old English poetry. Were the poems composed orally or in writing? Were they improvised during performance or composed beforehand and memorized? Were they heard by their audience or read in manuscript form? Was the most important influence on their style and content a native tradition deriving from the common Germanic past or a learned Latin rhetorical tradition? What is the relationship between their possible orality and their obvious aesthetic excellence? Although these questions have not been answered to the satisfaction of all scholars, it seems possible that they may be in the future with the work of a new generation of scholars, unprejudiced by the controversies of the past. Foley points out that the “pioneering statements” of the oral-formulaic theory were “in need of elaboration and, in some areas, of recasting” (1983:184), and the “elaboration” and “recasting” have been done by such scholars as Foley, Fry, Creed, and Renoir, although there remains more of both to do.

In the area of research concerning the nature of the Old English oral formula, Bynum has challenged oral-formulaists to bypass the work of Magoun and his followers and to re-examine Parry’s definition of the formula and apply it to Old English poetry. He argues that “even a moderately strict constructionist of Parry’s method must admit that work in Anglo-Saxon *has yet to be begun* in a mode faithful to the original model. And until Parry’s own method (rather than the mechanistically imitative, unreasoning one devised by Magoun) has actually been applied to the one text in Anglo-Saxon that is by its genre clearly appropriate to the Parry Test, namely *Beowulf*, and the results of that application are carefully compared with Parry’s results for Homer, there can be no basis for speculation about the orality of any other texts in Anglo-Saxon within the framework of the Parry theory.” (1978:10-11) This challenge suggests that Anglo-Saxonists need to study the formulas in *Beowulf* again to determine both their relationship to Homer’s formulas and their tradition-dependent nature. Lord comments that “in Anglo-Saxon research needs to be done not merely in numbers of formulas . . . but also, and more particularly in specific formulas. . . . It would be useful to know . . . what formulas are common to *Beowulf* and

to the religious poems. . . . It would be helpful to know what formulas occur only in the religious poems—and so forth. The purpose is to determine not only whether a tradition exists but what its content is.” (1974:204) Although Lord made this call more than ten years ago, the research is still to be done. In addition, there is a need for studies that discuss the functions played by formulas in various poems, research like that carried out by Sharon Elizabeth Butler in her 1976 dissertation, “Distribution and Rhetorical Function of Formulas in Cynewulf’s Signed Poems,” and by Olsen in *Speech, Song, and Poetic Craft: The Artistry of the Cynewulf Canon* (1984).

Linguistic study has made many contributions which have in turn enabled scholars to develop more precise definitions of the formula, and it seems likely that linguistics will continue to help us understand oral-formulaic composition in the future. Janet Duthie Collins, for example, points out that because Old English poetry was oral, it had to conform to ordinary speech patterns in order to communicate its ideas and theorizes that “for Old English the poetic works of one man should present related linguistic profiles” and that “no two poets, even though of the same time period, should show exactly the same linguistic profile. Idiosyncratic differences in usage should distinguish between two poets.” (1983:534) Although, as Fry points out, we must be careful not to deny “the essence of formulaic poetry, its function as a group activity, as a means of education and cohesion with tribal associates, alive and ancestral” because “the traditional poet performs with diction and structures borrowed from others, within inherited patterns” and because “isolating the traditional poet within his own corpus smacks of Romantic and post-Romantic notions of poetry and unique genius” (1979:3), the linguistic perception that there are “idiosyncratic differences in usage” should help us refine the definition of the formula.

Disciplines other than linguistics have influenced Old English oral-formulaic research and should continue to do so. Creed argues that one must study the composition of *Beowulf* as part of “an all-embracing attempt to theorize about natural language communication” (1987:140). Analyzing *Beowulf* in terms of Information Theory, and arguing that “*Beowulf* represents a point of contact between two different technologies,” the oral and the written, he states that *Beowulf* is “a link to one of the most powerful forces that have shaped ourselves and our cultures:

memorable speech” (140, 157). The application of Information Theory to other Old English poems should provide fruitful insights about the intersection of oral and written poetry.

Rosenberg (1981) has stated that he wishes to encourage scholars to re-examine living oral traditions in order to understand how medieval poetry may have been composed, but few medievalists perform such research. Foley, an expert in Serbo-Croatian studies as well as in Old English, has proposed a broadening of the Yugoslav model for oral poetry. He suggests that an appropriate model, which “diverges from the Parry-Lord orthodoxy on a number of issues,” comes from “the Christian oral epic in the South Slavic tradition, as opposed to the longer Muslim epic . . . that Lord has made the primary and nearly exclusive comparand in his studies” (1983:189). Foley suggests that poets like the Yugoslav oral poets in the Christian tradition “composed some of the more finely-worked Anglo-Saxon poems, and in particular the shorter lyrics” (202), and that the briefer oral songs “add a crucially important dimension to the comparison by illustrating how a poet can in fact combine oral traditional structure with a literary sensitivity to produce memorable poetry” (214). Fieldwork should continue to provide us with such insights into the oral-formulaic nature of Old English poetry.

Anglo-Saxonists interested in the traditional and formulaic nature of Old English poetry need to make more use of computers in their discussions of formularity. One model is that proposed by Foley for Serbo-Croatian and other texts; he argues that since “the key to understanding the text is to recreate the poem, and for oral traditional epic recreating the poem means reinvesting the text with traditional meaning” (1984:83), a computer can be used to restore “traditional context to a work” (85) by researching occurrences of a particular pattern in the data bank. He suggests that a similar procedure could be used to illuminate ancient Greek and Old English texts. In his computer study that identifies the metrical formula, Foley points out that computer analysis can show whether “the same rhythmic idea pervades . . . the entire poetic corpus” (1976:219). Since the study leads Foley to conclude that Old English poetry may indeed have been composed orally, and since the question of orality is still a vexed one, it seems reasonable that further computer studies of the metrical formulas of Old English poetry—particularly of the poems of Cynewulf, which have always been problematic because of the runic signatures—

should be made to validate, expand, or deny the validity of Foley's research. In addition, scholars who are interested in the orality of various texts should expand the schema of oral-formulaic structure used by Peabody and Creed to make it applicable to other poems in the corpus, again especially the poems of Cynewulf. If the five tests are indeed "tests of traditional orality" (Creed 1981:197), then they should demonstrate whether the poems of Cynewulf are oral or written. Creed points out that "what is at stake is *Beowulf*'s relationship both to the past of the Indo-European linguistic community . . . and also to us" and an understanding of the entire range of Old English poetry, both oral and written, would help us understand the "diachronic depth" (207) of all Old English poems.

Foley argues that future Old English and oral-formulaic research should involve "an increased awareness of methodological preliminaries in oral studies," and he proposes "that three principles be observed in formulating this kind of comparison: tradition-dependence, genre-dependence, and text-dependence" (1985:68). In addition, in an effort to open oral literature research up to "ideas of poetics and critical methodology" (1981c:144), he proposes "a 'program for reading' traditional texts" (122) depending on whether the text exists in a manuscript, a taped recording, or some other medium and whether it is definitely of oral provenance or simply oral-derived. Following Gregory Nagy (1979) in Homeric studies, Foley argues that scholars must recognize "that a traditional text is not simply a synchronic latticework . . . but also a diachronic document of great age and depth." (124) Foley reminds us that "it does not follow that tradition, even *oral* tradition, ends with the poet's or culture's first draught of literacy What continues . . . is some vestige of orality and some vestige of tradition. . . . Texts which exhibit undeniably oral traditional features, no matter how uncertain a provenance a fair examination of their known history may produce, cannot be treated as or classed with literary works of a much later time." (127-28)

Another promising method lies in a more sophisticated use of the composite method than many scholars have made, an appreciation of the complex mixture of traditions that lies behind, for example, formulaic hagiographic poetry. With the growing sophistication of oral-formulaic studies, it seems that there should be a corresponding sophistication in the study of classical and Patristic backgrounds of Old English poetry so that a blend of the two methods would help us to understand the poetry in new and

exciting ways. For example, Kathryn Hume's excellent analysis of the theme of the hall in Old English poetry, which shows that "when chaos and violence take the form of a definite antagonist, a malignant being, its dwelling becomes an anti-hall" (1974:68), could be merged with oral-formulaic thematic studies to explain the theme in its widest possible context. Or, to take another example, Peter R. Schroeder's insight that "Old English art and poetry are outgrowths or expressions of the same culture, and that similarities between the two may result from an identical aesthetic impulse" (1974:185) could be expanded to construct an interdisciplinary analogy of great value. As Schroeder observes, "we sense a difference between Old English (or more generally, early Germanic) poetry and other, at least equally Christian literatures" (195-96), and "a great deal of work must still be done to define a stylistic tradition that can include *Beowulf*, *Exodus*, and the Eddic poems" (197), and the use of the composite method, as well as greater sophistication in oral-formulaic studies as suggested by scholars like Creed and Foley, should, in the future, help define that tradition. Renoir points out that "certain rhetorical features are clearly oral-formulaic, but we have thus far devised no test capable of demonstrating to everybody's satisfaction that any particular poem was composed either orally or in writing" (539); it is to be hoped that as we enter this new era of oral-formulaic studies, scholars will devise such tests, as well as tests that will provide definitive answers to the other questions concerning oral-formularity in Old English poetry.

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Notes

¹In a 1987 article that appeared after this essay was written, Heatt makes a further contribution to the study of the envelope pattern as "an important rhetorical device arising out of the formulaic nature of oral poetry" (256).

²See further the survey article on oral studies and Middle English literature by Ward Parks, in *Oral Tradition*, 1:636-94.

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