

## **The Oral Tradition and Middle High German Literature**

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Serious concern with the oral tradition as it existed before and side by side with Middle High German written literature is linked in Middle High German studies to the introduction of the theory of oral-formulaic composition (henceforth referred to as the Theory).<sup>1</sup> True, the existence of an oral tradition has never seriously been doubted, but, beyond rather general notions of recurrent structural elements and hypotheses of a development of oral narrative texts in verse from song to epic,<sup>2</sup> hypotheses which saw the oral text for the most part through the spectacles of literacy as a basically stable unit subject to alteration and adulteration, the mechanics of an oral tradition played no role in research concerned with Middle High German literature. And to this day we know practically nothing about the oral performances of the vernacular lyric of the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries.<sup>3</sup> Research on the oral tradition of epic poetry and its relationship to the written transmission, however, received more than a negligible impetus from the Theory, despite its general rejection, particularly on the part of German germanists.<sup>4</sup> In this survey of the impact of the Theory on Middle High German studies, I shall therefore neither pass over the sins of the representatives of the Theory in silence, nor suppress my own view that the application of the Theory, amended and stripped of its early enthusiasms, has set in motion a current of research on the interrelationships between literacy and orality which promises to illuminate more than one dark corner of literary and social history.<sup>5</sup>

The initial approaches to Middle High German texts with the concepts of the Theory were rather scattered. One of the earliest was Alain Renoir's essay, "Oral-Formulaic Theme Survival. A Possible Instance in the *'Nibelungenlied'*" (1964), which identifies

the theme of “the hero on the beach,” a fairly frequent occurrence in Anglo-Saxon poetry, in stanza 1837, 1-3 of the *Nibelungenlied*. Renoir considers the “point-to-point correspondence between the Anglo-Saxon oral-formulaic theme . . . and the occurrence in that poem a survival rather than a mere coincidence” (75). If this is so, then, as Renoir suggests, “that theme must necessarily go back to a time antedating the Anglo-Saxon invasion of Britain” (*idem*). This argument would be unassailable, were there not one weakness in it: the “point-to-point correspondence” of the theme’s formulation in the *Nibelungenlied* to its Anglo-Saxon formulations is less than perfect. Crowne (1960) describes the theme as involving (1) a hero on the beach, (2) with his retainers, (3) in the presence of a flashing light, (4) at the beginning or end of a journey. All of this fits the passage of the *Nibelungenlied*, except point (1): Volker is not on a beach, but standing at a door. Whether Renoir’s suggestion that he therefore “stands at the junction between two worlds exactly like the ‘hero on the beach’” is sufficient to establish a correspondence capable of carrying the rest of the argument must be left to the individual judgment.

Michael J. Capek’s aim, in “A Note on Oral Formulism in the *Nibelungenlied*” (1965) is modest. Suspecting that “at least one of the epic poems of the Middle High German period, the *Nibelungenlied*, may . . . reflect an oral tradition” (487), Capek shows how an A-line frame may consist of a variety of forms of a formulaic system, and cites numerous examples of A-lines containing “mære” -all of them representing one or another of three types of syntactic patterns. The stress on the syntactic pattern as the essence of the oral formula is noteworthy.

In the same year there appeared “Notes on Formulaic Expressions in Middle High German Poetry” by W. Schwarz.<sup>6</sup> The author’s purpose is “to enquire into the history of individual formulae and to observe how variants are introduced into the word pattern and how, in spite of these changes, the essential idea of the formula is preserved and how its traditional language fits in with the tenor of the new literary work.”<sup>7</sup> The basis for his investigation is the formula “liep als der lîp” with its variation “lieber dan der lîp.” The evidence suggests that, with few exceptions, the phrase (1) “implies man’s superiority” (65) and “indicates man’s attitude toward his wife” (63); or (2) refers “to a person’s nearest relations or to friends” (66). Schwarz concludes that the formula was generally “known to the poets and to the

public,” and that its meaning “was modified under the impact of courtly poetry” (68), when its use diminished and where it could refer to intensity of feeling, only to revive later in its older sense.

In 1967 Michael Curschmann published one of the most important essays on the Theory. A critical review of research, the article expands the area of discussion to include several theoretical issues. Noteworthy, in this respect, is Curschmann’s introduction of the work of Maximilian Braun and Theodor Frings on Serbo-Croatian heroic song and the Russian *bylina* into the discussion of the Theory. His suggestion that Frings’ and Braun’s terminology “enables us to arrive at a clearer picture of the manner in which oral poetry is composed,” that is, “back and forth between the spheres of content and form” (40), has unfortunately not been heeded; an investigation of orally composed medieval texts in the light of Frings’ and Braun’s concepts of “theme” (*Thema*), “pattern of action” (*Handlungsschema*), “motifs” (*Motive*), and “formulas of action” (*Handlungsformeln*) might have benefitted some structural analyses of texts presumed to have been orally composed.

Of particular significance is Curschmann’s rhetorical question: “Is it really possible to make a strict and methodologically valid distinction between written and oral poetry on the basis of composition by motif and pattern, and consequently, by formula?” (44). The distinction between oral and written composition as “contradictory and mutually exclusive” (Lord 1960:129) is peculiar to the Theory, and is obviously of the greatest consequence for medieval texts, some of which exhibit evidence of oral composition, but all of which are transmitted in writing. Therefore a comparison “between twentieth-century Yugoslavian singers and . . . Caedmon or Cynewulf would be purely hypothetical;” hence also the difficulty of generalizing the observation of Milman Parry and Albert B. Lord that Yugoslavian singers “find it difficult either to recite slowly enough for someone to follow in long-hand or (if they are literate) to write their songs down themselves (Curschmann 1967:45). If one assumes with Francis P. Magoun that certain Anglo-Saxon poems are written recordings of oral performances, “the singer would have had to recite very slowly, much slower in fact than he would have to in our days of better transcribing techniques . . . . Can we expect him to have tried carefully to preserve in this process the oral nature of his composition? The same reservations apply if we assume that he

dictated to himself . . . . In either case, for the finished product to be strictly oral, the singer would have had to possess the modern scholar's awareness of an absolute difference between written and oral. And if the singer had simply sung, without paying attention to the scribe's capacity, these texts would be even more garbled than we think they are" (*idem*).

As a consequence of these difficulties, Curschmann appears at one point to favor the notion of "transitional texts," by which he understands texts showing "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" (*idem*). An example is J. Rychner's view of the conditions of diffusion of the *chansons de geste*, the texts of which are written down "par des jongleurs pour des jongleurs, heureux de soulager leur mémoire et d'assurer la conservation de leur répertoire, dans d'authentiques manuscrits de jongleurs" —though Rychner makes no use of the term "transitional" (1955:36; see also Pàroli 1975a:147-68). Curschmann notes the difference in stress between Rychner's study and the work of Parry and Lord: Rychner is concerned mainly with the diffusion of the *chansons de geste*; Parry and Lord concentrate on the process of composition. But of course to the extent that for Rychner the *chansons de geste* are oral compositions recreated in individual performances, these re-compositions in performance are part of their diffusion, and to the extent that for Parry and Lord the process of oral-formulaic composition is traditional, it is likewise part of the diffusion of oral texts.

Here an issue emerges, which, though largely unrecognized, was to become ever more pressing in the years to come: the necessity of a more precise definition of the processes involved in the oral transmission of texts. Curschmann's recognition of this need becomes obvious in his brief discussion of the functions of the Old French *laisse* and the Old English and Old Saxon *fit* as both a text-internal and an external (recitative) organizing element (Rychner), not only as part of the process of oral composition and performance but also as a characteristic of "literary" texts. For

even a "writer" would do well to organize his material in the same way for easy consumption . . . . He may then try to copy as faithfully as possible the version of a given poem existing in his mind or accessible to him during someone else's performance. This is the

scribe-poet as opposed to the singer-poet and the writer-poet. As has been said before, he is likely to produce a garbled “oral” text. The *Hildebrandslied* is a good example. The writer-poet, on the other hand, uses the same method of adopting oral characteristics of style for compositional purposes beyond the scope of oral poetry. How do we distinguish between their works? At worst they will show no significant difference; at best the writer-poet’s deliberate use of formulaic language, composition by motifs, and standard patterns, etc., will be recognizable as such, . . . Most Anglo-Saxon poetic texts would in one way or another fall into this group. Perhaps we should not speak of transitional texts at all.<sup>8</sup>

Since the view that the Old Saxon *Heliand* is orally composed is untenable in light of its numerical-symbolic structure (Rathofer 1962), it serves Curschmann as example of a “case in which formulaic diction, lack of enjambement, etc., are clearly not indicative of the mode of composition” (50-51), and as a clear illustration of the importance of Claes Schaar’s (1956) often ignored dictum, that the formulaicity of oral poetry does not imply the orality of formulaic poetry. The complexity of this issue is further illustrated by the examples of the *Orendel* and of *Salman und Morolf*: formulaic diction combined with literal repetition of passages of considerable length and cross-references of motifs and symbols, making “ad hoc oral composition . . . almost out of the question” (51). Curschmann’s explanation of instances in which “many of the formulas are coined by this particular author for this particular poem and then constantly repeated” (*idem*) by reference to M. Delbouille’s (1959) findings in the *chansons de geste*, however, has the weakness of resting on a very limited total fund of transmitted formulae. It is therefore entirely hypothetical to conclude that “some are adaptations of more widely-known ones, others are known from this poem only” (*idem*). To some degree, of course, such a statement is necessarily hypothetical, no matter how plentiful our bases of comparison are, since we can never be sure of untransmitted evidence. The limitations of the evidence from Middle High German sources render such a conclusion exceedingly insecure. But be this as it may, Curschmann’s illustrations of the complexity of the questions posed by the theory of oral-formulaic composition—a considerable complexity even if

the questions were limited to the process of composition and not extended to other facets of transmission — serves as a warning, not always heeded, against oversimplification.

Also in 1967 the first extensive application of the Theory to the text of the *Nibelungenlied* appeared in an article by Franz H. Bäuml and Donald J. Ward. It is the primary purpose of this essay to aim the concepts of the Theory at the various theories of the transmission of the *Nibelungenlied* in developmental layers, represented by the once all but monolithic theory advanced by Andreas Heusler (1929). The concept used for this purpose is primarily the formula, aside from some remarks about narrative themes and the use of enjambement.

Since a formula is recognizable as such only on the basis of its recurrence, the formulaic analysis of any text requires a basis of comparison. Two such bases are possible: either the text as a whole, or the entire tradition as far as it is transmitted in the form of the genre of the text to be analyzed. The choice will be determined by the purpose of the analysis and the sufficiency of the text. Bäuml and Ward limit their basis of comparison to the Bd-text of the *Nibelungenlied*, which, with its 9,516 verses, is ample for the purpose (cp. 365, n. 42). Had their purpose been to analyze the formulaic content of the *Nibelungenlied* as a whole, rather than merely a selection of stanzas of particular significance to Heusler's theory, a more comprehensive basis of comparison would have been desirable. The more limited choice, however, appears suitable for the purpose of pointing out the untenability of Heusler's theory, since it necessarily results in an underestimation of the formulaic content of the text.<sup>9</sup>

Since the essay is designed to cast doubt upon Heusler's theory by demonstrating the role of oral-formulaic composition in the transmission of passages regarded by Heusler as "late," "written," and textually stable, establishment of sufficient formulaic densities (which, moreover, are underestimated) for those passages was thought to accomplish the purpose. But its fundamental mistake is that it identifies a high density of oral formulae with oral composition (363-364 and n. 37). Nevertheless, the formulicity of the *Nibelungen*-text, even if it must be considered—as now appears to be the case—a written stylistic device, is a reflection of oral formulism. If this oral formulism characterized the oral tradition, the Heuslerian theory is untenable, even though one cannot establish its untenability by a line-by-line formulaic

analysis; the mechanics of oral-formulaic composition negate the possibilities of textual stability so necessary to Heusler's theory.

In view of the misunderstandings it has generated, it should be noted that this essay is not guilty of maintaining that the *Nibelungenlied* is an oral poem or a record of one; nor does it show the *Nibelungenlied* to be an oral poem while maintaining that it is written; nor is it the first essay on the *Nibelungenlied* to claim its descent from oral transmission: this last assumption has been common since the beginning of *Nibelungen*-studies with Karl Lachmann, and Andreas Heusler is no exception (353). And nowhere does the essay claim that the extant texts of the *Nibelungenlied* are written records of oral performances (cf. 363, 382). It merely claims that the *Nibelungenlied*, as we have it, is the work of a writing poet (362, 363) with an oral past (which probably extended into contemporaneity with written transmission) in the sense of the Theory.

In 1970 Edward R. Haymes' dissertation (Erlangen) was published under the title *Mündliches Epos in mittelhochdeutscher Zeit*.<sup>10</sup> The first part of the book is essentially a summary of the theory of oral-formulaic composition with brief glances at the work of Maximilian Braun, Alois Schmaus (1953, 1956, 1960), and the early studies devoted to the application of the theory to Old English texts. The discussion turns around the definition and function of the formula, formulaic density as indicator of oral composition, the definition of the narrative theme, and transitionality, without a critical analysis of the problems posed by these topics. At the same time a certain amount of conceptual inaccuracy, particularly in the definitions of "oral" and "written," confuses the issues here and throughout the work.

The second part of Haymes' study is devoted to a comparison of the formula "liute unde lant" in the *Nibelungenlied* and in Gottfried's *Tristan*, and to the fact that the use of this formula in the *Nibelungenlied* is metrically bound, that is, recurrent in three metrical patterns, whereas in *Tristan* "the poet had to work the formula into a line specifically designed for the purpose in every instance" (46). The question which has subsequently become increasingly important, namely why a writing poet should do this, does not arise. Instead, Haymes extends his illustration of formulism by comparing examples of "sprach," "-liche," and "-lich" in the *Nibelungenlied*, *Kudrun*, *Tristan*, and one hundred stanzas each of *Wolfdietrich A* and *Ortnit A*, with similar results.

The discussion of themes is devoted to brief analyses of the courtly festival, the action surrounding the delivery of a message (arrival and departure of the messenger and the delivery of his message), the arrival of a stranger, the council, the journey up and down the Danube, the theme of battle, and the war against the Saxons and Danes.

In his discussion of the formula and its function in oral composition, Haymes, following A. Schmaus, represents the view of the formula as “metrical-syntactic system,” as distinct from a lexical-semantic definition of the formula. Of course, the formula serves the function of providing a rhythmical/metrical/syntactic organization for an utterance which is to be part of a rhythmically/metrically organized (oral) text. But a recurrence of a limited number of such systems is to be expected in a rhythmically/metrically organized text. And this, of course, is precisely the reason for the organizing function of the formula. An exclusion of meaning from the constitution of a formula, however, is neither required nor made possible by its function as metrical/syntactic system (cp. Minton 1965). A short concluding chapter is devoted to a discussion of the essay by Bäuml and Ward (1967), which, however, is again marred by a lack of conceptual clarity (see Bäuml 1978b).

In an augmentation (1968) of his critical review of research on the *Spielmannsepen* of 1966, M. Curschmann criticizes some of the weaknesses of Bäuml and Ward (1967), particularly the uncritical application of a method abstracted from a living oral tradition to a written medieval text, and the equally uncritical identification of formulaic usage with the oral tradition. In connection with the latter, Curschmann correctly refers to the existence of formulae in written poetry—an existence not denied, but for the *Nibelungen*-text mistakenly discounted by Bäuml and Ward (363). Such formulae can be assimilated by oral-formulaic style. Curschmann lists as examples (1) formulations of social norms, e.g., alliterating duplexes of legal terminology; (2) formulae of Latin rhetoric, often difficult to recognize in the vernacular; (3) short-lived formulae belonging to a certain literary sphere, such as the courtly lyric, and formulaic expressions reflecting the courtly lexicon, which Bäuml and Ward include in their concept of oral-formulaic diction; (4) formulae of daily speech used orally and in writing; (5) formulations determined at least to some extent by rhyme; and (6) formulae which are characteristic of a single author.



Any statistical survey concerned with establishing the orality of a text on the basis of its formulaic density should include such formulae in its count only with reservations (106).

Certainly Curschmann is correct in this contention, but all of these formulations, though perhaps not in their origin part of the oral tradition, can enter that tradition by being converted into oral formulae. This is precisely the reason which led Bäuml and Ward to include formulae of “courtly” origin in their count: if relatively dense formulicity (whatever its origin) in an epic text is (rightly or wrongly) identified with oral transmission, then its occurrence in passages previously thought to be composed “late,” “in writing,” or by “the last poet” shows these passages to emanate from, or reflect, a process of composition that is at variance with the traditional view. Even if a close identification of formulicity and oral composition is, as it has been shown to be, quite untenable, densely formulaic passages in such a text raise the question of its relationship to the oral tradition; for, whether a text was orally composed or not, dense formulicity links that text to the oral tradition from which its formulae, their structure and their density, come. The fact remains, however, that these are texts that are statistically scarcely distinguishable from oral texts, and for which the oral-formulaic style is not an exclusive determinant of existence but in which it fulfills a “literary” function—such as the *Nibelungenlied* and the *Spielmannsepen*.

The vexing notions of the mutual exclusivity of oral-formulaic and written composition and of the transitional text are the primary concern of Bäuml’s “Der Übergang mündlicher zur artes-bestimmten Literatur des Mittelalters: Gedanken and Bedenken” (1968). The problems raised by Lord’s (and Parry’s) view of the contradictory nature of oral and written composition, and Lord’s denial of the possibility of transitional texts (but see Lord 1975:23), are most concisely expressed in the following passage from the *The Singer of Tales* (129):

. . . the question we have asked ourselves is whether there can be such a thing as a transitional *text*; not a *period* of transition between oral and written style, . . . but a *text*, product of the creative brain of a single individual. When this emphasis is clear, it becomes possible to turn the question into whether there can be a single individual who in composing an epic would think now in one way and now in another, or, perhaps,

in a manner that is a combination of two techniques. I believe that the answer must be in the negative, because the two techniques are . . . contradictory and mutually exclusive. Once the oral technique is lost, it is never regained. The written technique, on the other hand, is not compatible with the oral technique. . . .

What, then, of texts with high formulaic density composed in writing, like the *Heliand* or *Orendel*? Bäuml seeks to resolve the apparent contradiction between Lord's statement and the undeniable existence of formulaic epic texts composed in writing by distinguishing between "text" and the "process of composition." The process of composition is necessarily either oral in the sense of the Theory, or written; the text, however, may be written and yet belong to the oral tradition if it consists of the elements constituting that tradition, that is, lexical and thematic stereotypes. For the oral tradition not only serves the process of composition by providing a fund of formulae and themes, it also conditions the process of text-reception by the same means. And although the use of formulae by a writing poet can generally be distinguished from that of an oral poet (*Orendel* is a good example), the reason for such use by a writing poet is to be sought in the process of reception. An "oral public" is as dependent on formulism for its understanding of an epic text as an oral poet is for composing one. The introduction of the process of text-reception into the discussion of orality vs. literacy is extended in Bäuml's postscript to the reprint of 1979. Here he advocates increased terminological precision and the consideration of performance, reception, the public's "horizons of expectation" (after Hans Robert Jauss), and the social functions of the types of transmission arising from such considerations, in order to approach medieval literature—both oral and written—in terms of the linguistic manipulation inherent in communication.

In agreement with Curschmann's caution "to begin any further experimentation with a criticism of method" (1968:104), Bäuml and Agnes M. Bruno turn to a number of methodological problems in "Weiteres zur mündlichen Überlieferung des *Nibelungenliedes*" (1972). Among the areas discussed are primarily (1) the social implications of the distinction between preliteracy (e.g. that of Homeric Greece) and illiteracy within a literate society (e.g. medieval and modern Yugoslav illiteracy), (2) the transference of the Theory from its empirical basis in modern South Slavic oral

poetry to an application to medieval texts, (3) the “transitional text” and the existence of written formulaic composition, and (4) the problem of identifying formulae as such on the basis of an inevitably incomplete transmission of recurrences, and a computer-based method of arriving at a hypothetical solution.

The distinction between preliteracy and illiteracy is characterized in its social effects as a distinction between a condition to which all members of a preliterate society are subject, and one which affects only those members of a literate society who are not dependent on the written word for the performance of their social function. And within a literate society, that is, within a society whose myths and rules of conduct are transmitted in writing, the latter are disadvantaged (481). The dependence on literacy of the “privileged” in a literate society does not imply their literacy as individuals: one does not have to be able to read in order to make use of a document, provided one can rely on someone else who can read (488). The notion of illiteracy as linked to a socially disadvantaged condition within a literate society such as that of post-tribal medieval Europe (as distinct from the condition of preliteracy in a preliterate tribal society) is therefore not anachronistic: certainly many in a position to make social decisions of consequence in medieval society around 1200 were individually illiterate, but they all had to have access to the written word. It is one of the consequences of this notion of literacy and illiteracy that it transforms the relationship between orality and writtleness into a social relationship; the transmutation of an orally performed text into writing is accompanied by a new form of reception conditioned by different conventions, and hence by a change in function—a transformation that the notion of a “transitional text” does nothing to define.

The application of the Theory to medieval texts, that is, to texts beyond the contemporary empirical basis on which the theory is based, is still occasionally regarded as methodologically problematic. With the *Nibelungenlied* as point of reference, Bäuml and Bruno see three positions which could be maintained regarding a medieval text exhibiting the characteristics of oral-formulaic composition observed in the South Slavic oral epic: (1) the medieval text was transmitted orally before (and probably also after) its fixation in writing in the manner posited by the Theory; it has always been transmitted in writing and not orally; and it was transmitted orally before (and probably after) its fixation

in writing, but in a manner different from that posited by the Theory. The first position follows logically from the observation that a given medieval epic (in this case the *Nibelungenlied*) (a) exhibits the symptoms of oral composition as stated by the Theory on an empirical basis, (b) is likely to have been transmitted orally for socio-historical reasons, given the illiteracy of the bulk of the population during the period of the transmission of its content from the migrations to the twelfth century, and (c) suddenly appears in written form around 1200 without any evidence of having existed in writing previously. The second position requires the task of making the writtleness of such an epic probable from the period of the migrations to the twelfth century, in defiance of everything we know of medieval culture of that period, as well as of explaining the total loss of such evidence from the period before 1200, after which a relatively plentiful transmission develops. And, of course, the presence of the symptoms of oral transmission in a text transmitted exclusively in writing would have to be explained. The third position, exemplified by Heusler's theory, likewise requires that the function of the symptoms of oral transmission in the sense of the Theory be explained as serving an entirely different function in the service of a different theory of transmission, which, moreover, would be supported rather than negated by empirical evidence. It is true that Bäuml and Bruno neglect to consider the possibility of written formulaic composition and its implications for the existence of an oral tradition as described by the Theory. But the objections to the application of that Theory to medieval texts because it is contemporary and rests on an empirical basis (and they are medieval) raise the question of the legitimacy of employing the modern process of reading, with all its post-medieval, print-derived conventions, on medieval texts. Surely one does not have to be a medieval exegete, dead for seven centuries, to analyze a thirteenth-century text. And surely the applicability of a theory is to be judged in accordance with its explanatory capability.

Bäuml and Bruno deal with the existence of formulaic texts of written origin and the notion of transitionality in the same manner as Bäuml (1968), as basically a matter of definition. In this connection they point out the irrelevance of the examples of written formulaic non-epic texts cited by some critics in opposition to the Theory: the Theory and its criteria of orality are derived from the observation of the composition and performance of epics;

they can therefore be considered as valid only for narrative poetry, no matter how suggestive they may be for other genres.<sup>11</sup>

The problem posed by inevitably incomplete transmission for an identification of formulae was addressed by Bruno's (1974) design and use of a computer program capable of first and second degree statistical analyses, and the employment of multivariate techniques on an input of 19 sample stanzas of the *Nibelungenlied*. Bruno's investigation was designed to distinguish between two stylistic categories, not between oral and written origin of the analyzed texts. Bäuml and Bruno (1972) summarize the results of the investigation, which indicates that a stepwise discriminant analysis and a cluster analysis according to Bruno's model can indeed lead to significant stylistic distinctions and therefore aid in establishing a probability that a given segment of text is or is not formulaically dense.

At present, the concern with the Theory in Middle High German studies can be described diachronically as consisting of two overlapping phases: (1) an introduction of the Theory and attempts at its application to Middle High German texts, primarily the *Nibelungenlied*, and (2) a clarification of concepts and an increasing concentration on the functions of literacy and orality in the Middle Ages in general as well as in specific texts. In this connection the *Nibelungenlied* itself may still, on occasion, play an exemplary role, but it is now subordinated to the more general, and methodologically far more significant, historical and critical concerns with medieval literacy and illiteracy. At the juncture of these two phases stands an article by Hans Fromm (1974).

Fromm devotes himself to a discussion of two challenges to the accepted notion of one poet who was "responsible" for the *Nibelungenlied*, and to a closed, written transmission following a reconstructable oral tradition consisting of stable, memorized texts: the challenge emanating from the criticism by Helmut Brackert (1963) of the assumptions underlying the accepted notions of the written transmission,<sup>12</sup> and that posed by the Theory, represented primarily by the work of Bäuml. The two are not unrelated, for Brackert sees the written transmission of the *Nibelungenlied* neither as emanating from an original and an archetype, nor as closed, but open to interference from the oral tradition at every point. Fromm's criticism of Bäuml's studies is, apart from some possible as well as unquestionable misunderstandings, not only constructive, but it indicates a position toward which Bäuml, not least under

the influence of the work of Curschmann, has moved steadily in the course of time.

First the misunderstandings, both possible and certain. First, in reference to Bäuml and Ward (1967), Fromm describes their position as including the assumption, on the basis of formulaic density, that the written text of the *Nibelungenlied* originated as dictation from orality (54). This is a possible, though not unquestionable, misreading of their position. If Fromm means by “the written text” the transmitted text(s), he misunderstands Bäuml, who sees the transmitted text(s) as the product of an adapting, literate poet. If, however, Fromm refers to the first written text, whenever and wherever it was produced and whatever it may have looked like, he is quite right: Bäuml and Ward regard such a text as originating in the form of a dictation out of the oral tradition. If such a text is presumed to be originally oral, there appears to be no other way of imagining its written origin. Second, Fromm, agreeing with Curschmann, criticizes Bäuml and Ward and all of the scholarship representing the Theory for ignoring the studies of Frings and Braun (55). Certainly, as indicated above, an inclusion of some of the notions of Frings and Braun in the structural-thematic studies concerned with the oral tradition would have been conceptually helpful. Methodologically, however, such an inclusion could easily be regarded as at least irrelevant and at most inappropriate, since the Theory rests on an empirical foundation, whereas the analyses of Frings and Braun do not.

Third, the transferability of Parry’s and Lord’s definition of the formula, questioned by Fromm, is discussed by Bäuml in a later study (1984). Here it is sufficient to point out that Parry and Lord certainly formulated this definition on the basis of orality empirically observed, but their purpose in doing so was to transfer it to the written texts of Homer. Fourth, Fromm’s contention that such a transference of the mechanism of formulaic analysis overlooks the fact that verse itself imposes constraints is correct, and this is, of course, an argument against the employment of purely syntactic patterns as criterion. But this is not the case with the examples Fromm gives (56): all of them are not only syntactically but also semantically formulaic. And since the Homeric texts are subject to similar constraints, it is difficult to see why linguistic variation should be evaluated differently there, as Fromm suggests. Fifth, Fromm’s characterization of the literate

vernacular medieval cultures as requiring patterned expression and thus distilling the multiplicity of phenomena into a limited number of patterned expressions (56) is, of course, also correct, and applies to a degree to every culture. But these patterns are not to be equated to the aggregate of formulae constituting a formulaic text. Surely nobody spoke “Nibelungian,” and the significant difference between the employment of patterned expression in the romances and in texts such as the *Nibelungenlied* has often been noted.<sup>13</sup>

Sixth, Bäuml’s and Ward’s definition of “literate” and “illiterate” is not based on the ability or inability of individuals to read or write, hence Fromm’s argument (58-59), designed to counter their characterization of literates as “privileged” and illiterates as “disadvantaged,” that the emperor Henry II, Philip of Swabia, and others were illiterate, misses the point. They certainly could not have fulfilled their social function without recourse to the written word. It is true that the difference between literates and illiterates was not a matter of prestige, but the argument does not turn on a question of prestige. Seventh, in a series of significant paragraphs Fromm points out the importance for medieval culture of hybrid forms of transmission, such as those of the romances of Chrétien and Hartmann: “It is not fixation in writing that is important, but the fact that the thought-patterns of symbolically transferred reception are transposed into the imaginary realm of exemplary heroic action” (59; my translation). Since the manner in which this realm is imagined, however, depends on its perception, Bäuml would reverse this statement to read: “It is fixation in writing that is important, since the imaginary realm of exemplary heroic action is transposed into the thought-patterns of symbolically transferred reception.”

But it is Fromm’s elaboration of his notion of hybrid forms of transmission, arising from the “Symbiose von mündlicher and schriftlicher Kultur” (“symbiosis of oral and literate culture,” *idem*) that is of particular importance. Hybrid forms are above all to be sought in the realm of “Spielmansdichtung” (“minstrel poetry”), about which the quantity of scholarship and the extent of our knowledge are best described by saying that the mountain labored and brought forth a mouse. Fromm envisages the origin of the Nibelungen epic in this realm of minstrelsy. This is no doubt so, but two aspects of this supposition must be noted: (1) Fromm speaks of the “Nibelungenepos” in this respect (60), not our transmitted *Nibelungenlied*, and unquestionably he is right in doing

so; and (2) the shadowy realm of "Spielmannsdichtung" itself changed in the course of time and under the pressure of vernacular literacy. Certainly the "Spielmann," the popular performer/reciter of vernacular narrative poetry, whatever his more precise attributes, was all but timeless, but his function and the manner in which he performed it necessarily also changed under the influence of increasing vernacular literacy.

The earlier stages in the transmission of the epic therefore cannot have shared the characteristics of the later stages of, say, the late twelfth century. And it is only in reference to these later stages that one can speak of a symbiotic relationship between literacy and illiteracy. Here, however, in the later stages, performances cannot be assumed to have been quite as socially homogeneous as Fromm sees them in his description of this symbiotic culture: "This symbiotic culture possessed a mediating institution whose significance cannot be overestimated: this was the recitation in the circle of a noble audience. Here written literature and orally transmitted material was received by the same public in the same process" (60; my translation). Certainly it is true that a courtly audience was familiar with both read texts and orally performed texts. But it does not follow that a non-courtly audience was as familiar with readings of written texts as a courtly public. The costs of production of written texts alone limited their use to those circles who could afford them—and these were, of course, the "literate" circles, the members of which required access, direct or indirect, to the written word in the exercise of their social function. That such a situation, and indeed the symbiosis of literacy and orality itself, whatever its structure, necessarily led to differentiation among its constituents, even as it mediated among them, seems clear. But however one may see this process in detail, certainly the *Nibelungen* epic emanated from the realm of "Spielmannsdichtung," and certainly Fromm is right in postulating a written original of the transmitted versions of the *Nibelungenlied* (61-62). Whether this original itself is a product of the realm of "Spielmannsepik," as Fromm surmises (62), is debatable, since it depends on one's concept of the symbiosis of literacy and orality which characterized that realm in the late twelfth century.

In any case, Fromm is certainly correct in his judgment that the redactions of the *Nibelungenlied* cannot simply reflect different oral versions (61), and that the written original, whatever its literary-historical provenience, was the work of one author. All



this, however, must not be mistaken for a return to the theory of Andreas Heusler: one no longer imagines the roles of single authors of single versions, composed word for word and “gedächtnismäßig überliefert” (“transmitted by memory,” Heusler’s phrase), to be isolatable in the transmitted text; similarly, the much more problematic but much more realistic view of the oral transmission of the epic provided by the empirical foundation of the Theory and by Brackert’s research compels a rejection of the simplistically neat Heuslerian theory and of the assumptions and methods of this theory’s foundation; not least, it unmasks as methodologically and historically naive the positivistic exercise of “reconstructing” hypothetical texts for use as tailor-made textual “evidence.”

Unique in research concerning the application of the Theory to Middle High German texts is the article by Hans Dieter Lutz (1974), “Zur Formelhaftigkeit mittelhochdeutscher Texte and zur ‘theory of oral-formulaic composition’.” Lutz concentrates on the methodological basis of the application of the Theory and on the methodological aspects of its structure. After a survey of the role of the formula-exemplified here by the common adjective-substantive combination (cp. Lutz 1975)-in Middle High German studies, and a division of this role into two parts (before Parry and Lord and after Parry and Lord), Lutz turns to a basic methodological question: “The discussion surrounding the ‘theory of oral-formulaic composition’ makes it . . . obvious that the problem of formulicity is extended to become ‘the problem of the explanation of texts’ and thus leads to a specific question: ‘Does formulicity explain the orality of Middle High German texts?’” (440, my translation).

Lutz sees the Theory as developed from three “presuppositions”: (1) Parry and Lord could deduce their Theory from an experimental basis and could test it experimentally; (2) the texts which they analyzed were known to be South Slavic and “oral”; and (3) the central issues of the analyses were the functions, the compositional technique, the structure, the performance, the principles of transmission of these epics. With its several elements the Theory works as a descriptive mechanism for the input “oral epic,” and the output describes the organization of this input as resting on themes, formulas, and so forth. It is therefore a descriptive, functional model. The decisive factor in the function of such a model is its purely descriptive nature: Lutz

characterizes it as not conceived to determine the “orality” or “literacy” of a text, for the “orality” of the input is known, and the output merely describes its structural principles (442).

This is obviously not the case when the Theory is applied to Middle High German texts. The question becomes: “Why is a Middle High German text formulaic or not formulaic?” The three “presuppositions” of the Theory thus become irrelevant; the Theory is no longer adequate to the new presuppositions and therefore cannot be used for this purpose. In short, as Claes Schaar (1956) had remarked almost two decades earlier, the terms of the proposition “oral poetry is formulaic” cannot be reversed. A substitute theory is therefore necessary. But the metrical structure of Middle High German verses is free and can be altered by the demands of a formula, whereas the Theory and its concept of a formula is based on a system of an unalterable ten-syllable verse which may affect the structure of a formula, but cannot be affected by it. In short, the substitute theory must be based on a concept of the formula which, in its relationship to metrical structure, is reversible and not asymmetrical. A new definition of the formula must therefore be sought, deduced from a structural description of the texts and containing syntactical, strophic, metrical, rhythmical and verse-combinatorial factors as well as the statistical operations based on these factors. Thus one can achieve not only a structural description of a text or texts, but also a typology of texts and formulae. Where source problems prevent such a procedure, one must have recourse to phenomenological description, and socio-historical, poetological, reception-historical, and communicational analyses, all of which must be kept strictly apart from one another. On this basis the hypothetical definition of the formula can be tested and, if necessary, modified. Only then can a theory be constructed which could replace the Theory and be adequate for all Middle High German texts, epic or not.

Although Lutz’ reasoning is correct,<sup>14</sup> the direction which research in this area has taken in recent years may render moot his recommendation for the formation of such a “substitute theory” for Middle High German texts. It should be pointed out, nevertheless, that there is a difference between the application of criteria of formulicity (1) to determine whether a given passage transmitted in writing was part of the oral tradition in its transmitted form, and (2) to determine the nature of the “orality” of certain Middle High German epics before their fixation in

writing. Lutz' formulation of the specific question posed by the problem of formulaicity (440) is therefore not sufficiently precise. For there was never any question regarding the oral transmission of certain Middle High German epics such as the *Nibelungenlied*, which preceded and continued alongside their written transmission. The Theory cannot well serve to establish the former orality of the transmission of such texts if it was never in doubt. But the Theory *does* reveal certain characteristics of orality never before brought to bear on these texts by illuminating similarities in the written transmission of certain Middle High German epics (the former oral transmission of which must, for cultural and historical reasons, be assumed) and empirically observed and tested oral transmission. These characteristics are of consequence for an understanding of the literary and social function of oral poetry, the consequences of its fixation in writing, and its reception by the publics of both media, the oral performance and the written text. They may also be of consequence for the establishment of the former orality of certain passages of formerly oral epics with varying degrees of probability, but they are of no consequence for the establishment of the formerly oral transmission of these epics. It is clear that this contradicts some of my earlier statements regarding the possibilities of determining the orality of certain texts previous to their written transmission on the basis of formulaic density. I should have said that formulaic density may indicate the type of oral transmission of such texts previous to their fixation in writing, or the type of oral transmission in existence at the time of their written composition. This type of oral transmission is at variance with previous assumptions, and therefore has a number of critical consequences for our understanding of the evolution of these epics.

Teresa Pàroli, in her monumental study, *Sull'elemento formulare nella poesia germanica antica* (1975b; revs. by Curschmann 1978 and Schwab 1978), treats Old Norse, Old English, Old High German, Old Saxon formulaic texts, as well as the *Nibelungenlied*, to which she devotes some 259 pages. She is principally concerned with formulae introducing direct or indirect speech. This limitation has a number of undeniable advantages, but, in addition to the lack of a clear definition of the concept "formula," one great disadvantage: the ultimate "orality" of such formulae is, if anything, even more difficult to determine than that of less common, less "necessary" formulae. Her aim, however, is

not to establish the “orality” of the *Nibelungenlied* (or of the other texts discussed), but to examine the operation of formulism in the process of composition. In this connection she is able to show the difference in formulism of the principal versions of the *Nibelungenlied*, a difference which leads her to assume several oral traditions at work concurrently with the first written versions. Formulicity itself is to be defined variously, in accordance with the structural conditions determining the procedure of oral composition in various types of texts: alliterative, metrical, end-rhymed, strophic. This, in itself, is very persuasive as a methodological principle, far more persuasive than the contention that, since formulism in South Slavic texts is dependent on the decasyllabic line, its function is not comparable to formulism in Germanic texts. As far as the *Nibelungenlied* is concerned, however, it presupposes that—as Curschmann has pointed out (1978:303)—the “poet” of the extant text(s) of the *Nibelungenlied* who, according to Pàroli, is responsible for its strophic, rhyming double-hemistichs, must have been conversant with two distinct processes of formulaic composition: the process given by the stichic, alliterative form of the traditional texts and its new, strophic, rhyming transformation. It seems more likely that, as Curschmann suggests, the formulaic content of the extant versions is a matter of written style, derived, of course, from the oral tradition.

Edward R. Haymes' *Das mündliche Epos. Eine Einführung in die “Oral Poetry” Forschung* appeared in 1977 (revs. by Green 1979 and Mewes 1980). Its purpose is to provide a historical, methodological, and bibliographical introduction to research concerning the oral epic. It exceeds the primarily descriptive and explanatory function of such an introduction in several respects, of which the following are noteworthy in the present context: the sufficiency of formulaic density as an indication of the oral provenience of a text is placed in doubt (14-17); formulaic analysis as it has been practiced on the basis of Parry's definition of the formula is viewed as problematic (7-13); and among the problems cited as awaiting solutions are the consequences of the Theory for literary and social history, and the cultural consequences of the introduction of writing to a previously non-literate society. In this regard Haymes' introductory volume hints at the direction which the second phase of research in the area of orality and Middle High German literature had begun to take.

K. H. R. Borghart's book on the traces of orality in the

*Nibelungenlied* (1977)<sup>15</sup> is an instance of the overlap of the earlier into the later phase of research in this area: “The same basis as for the South-Slavic oral epic transmission could also be used for the Germanic epic. Seen from this viewpoint the *Nibelungenlied* as representative of the Middle High German heroic epic, ‘though fixed in writing, would be basically the poem of an oral tradition, composed by an oral poet’” (18, my translation; with citation from Lee 1970:341 ff., 348). Testing the validity of this assumption is the burden of the book: “The extent to which such an assumption can claim to be valid for the *Nibelungenlied* shall be shown by an investigation of the formulae and formulaic expressions . . .” (18; my translation)—in short, by an investigation which pays little or no heed to its own problematical nature. An analysis of 10 stanzas from each of three narrative themes, and comparisons of these to other stanzas from other instances of the same narrative themes, yields a formulaic density of 54%. Noteworthy is the relatively strong variation in density among the samples and within each sample. This suggests, among other things, that the transmitted *Nibelungen*-texts are not descended from a “Vortragsexemplar,” a “recitation copy,” or directly from a dictation or a copy of a dictation, as Borghart surmises (155, 157-158), but that they are descendants from an adaptation, a composition of a writing poet. A comparative investigation of formulism in Hartmann’s *Iwein* yields a not surprising total density of 15%. And a comparison of “significant” and “insignificant” words, dislocations of words, and so on in 10 stanzas chosen at random from Mss. A, B, and C understandably leads to no certain conclusion other than a confirmation of the suspicion that the notion of copies of a dictation from an oral performance as basis for the transmission can safely be rejected in favor of the assumption of a written, adapting, composition.

The papers presented at the Fifth International Congress of Germanists in Cambridge, England, in 1975 appeared two years later, including Bäuml’s essay on “Lesefähigkeit und Analphabetismus als rezeptionsbestimmende Elemente: Zur Problematik mittelalterlicher Epik” (1977a). The Theory forms the basis of Bäuml’s remarks, but not their subject matter. He therefore does not concern himself with a clarification of the problems he admits it poses as a means for determining an oral origin of written medieval epics, and regards it instead as a tool for establishing the hypothesis of an oral transmission *of a certain kind*. For, in the

first place, it is not necessary to “establish” the orality of the transmission of narratives such as the *Nibelungenlied* before their fixation in writing: their oral transmission has not been questioned, and must be assumed in light of the culture of early medieval northern and central Europe. That this oral transmission, however, resembled that indicated or implied by the Theory has not been recognized. Secondly, the hypothesis of this resemblance between medieval oral transmission of some epic texts and the oral transmission implied by the Theory is methodologically not only “safe”; it is logically called for: it is logical (and analogical) to explain the presence in written texts of characteristics identical with those of oral transmission as characteristics of oral transmission, rather than as characteristics of something else, which would leave the functions of these characteristics to be explained in terms of this “something else,” since they could no longer be explained by the empirically demonstrated functions of the characteristics of oral transmission. The Theory is therefore significant, inasmuch as it sheds light upon the mechanics and the function of oral epic transmission from a basis of empirical observation, and thus significantly alters previous assumptions in this respect.

Bäumel examines these mechanics and functions in the light of the reception of oral and written texts in various circumstances: reduction of distance between oral narrative and public; homeostasis in a preliterate context; stability; creation of the fictional narrator; split of the oral unity of poet, narrator, performer, and text in a literate context; possibilities of literate ironization of the oral tradition; increase in the distance between text and public; creation of anachronisms by the transition from orality to literacy; and formation of an implied author and an implied public.<sup>16</sup>

An example of an extensive application of some of these concepts in the light of the Theory to elucidate a series of complex problems in literary history—the relationships between orality and the vernacular courtly romance in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries—is Green (1978; revs. by Cambridge 1980 and Minis 1980). To be sure, Green still relies heavily on Herbert Grundmann’s (1958) excessively neat distinction between *litteratus* and *illitteratus*, which should now be corrected by the findings of M. T. Clanchy (1979), but his very careful and constructive use of the notion of transitionality clarifies for the texts what Grundmann’s definition threatens to obfuscate for medieval society.

In light of the development of methodological self-consciousness in research devoted to the Theory, a critical look at the path followed in its application to Middle High German texts was appropriate; it was promptly forthcoming in Curschmann (1977). Curschmann begins his criticism by raising the “most fundamental” question, i.e., “whether it is legitimate at all to apply a theory developed pragmatically in the field of a living tradition to medieval literary production” (64), and illustrates the various attitudes taken toward the problem of orality in medieval texts with three examples: Armin Wishard’s (1972) “unquestioning acceptance” of the Theory, Ruth Hartzell Firestone’s “reservations regarding the direct applicability of the Theory” to texts from the Dietrich-cycle and her application of Proppian analysis,<sup>17</sup> and Lars Lönnroth’s taking “full account of the special living conditions of his sources, that is, the specifically North-Germanic combination of poetry and prose in the Sagas” (*idem*).<sup>18</sup> The trouble is, however, that the “special living conditions” of any medieval text cannot be identified on the basis of the text alone. We cannot even be certain of the manner in which any medieval text was read, if we do not look beyond it. In the absence of a knowledge of a medieval text’s function in the social context for which it was produced, we are reduced to one of three alternatives: (1) we can admit our ignorance, as is increasingly the case with regard to *Minnesang* (see note 3 above); (2) we can anachronize the text by not attempting to correct for the inevitable intrusion of modern (literate) notions of cohesion, as in the case of Heusler’s theory of the transmission of the *Nibelungenlied*; or (3) we can test the characteristics of known functions of a text against the medieval text in question, and, if a comparison of these characteristics and the possibility of their analogical function in the medieval text permit it, we can form a hypothesis regarding the “living conditions” of that text; if this hypothesis is supported by the historical data already known, we can accept the hypothesis as an explanation of the possible function of the medieval text in its original cultural environment—until a better hypothesis *with a better functional and historical validation* comes along.

The main concern of Curschmann (1977) is with the applications of the Theory to the transmitted *Nibelungenlied*, with the development of the material “from the late Migration Period to the time around 1200” and the textual diversity existing among its three basic versions (65). Brackert’s analysis, being based “on

simple, if highly imaginative and trenchant, textual criticism,” is credited with yielding the “most persuasive evidence so far of the presence of a strong oral element in the *Nibelungenlied* tradition well into the thirteenth century,” since it is not based “on any particular theory of poetic diction” (*idem*). It is therefore here, “in the area of manuscript diffusion . . . , that any further explication of the *Nibelungenlied* should have begun or, at the very least, looked for support or corrective evidence” (*idem*). Here Curschmann is no doubt correct: Brackert’s analysis could have provided considerable support for some early applications of the Theory to the *Nibelungenlied* by providing at least hypothetical historical validation for an assumption of several oral versions as sources for the written transmission.

After a critical review of some conclusions drawn by Haymes and Bäuml, and of the differences between their positions, however, Curschmann finds it “remarkable-and revealing-that two studies for which formulaic usage is the common critical denominator can come to such different conclusions . . . . Moreover, the formulations used by both scholars to characterize as oral the dictated text assumed by both in effect dispose of the Theory as a meaningful tool of literary criticism, for they actually blur the theoretical distinction between written and oral without realizing its critical potential” (66). Of these two points it is the second that is the more important: the remarkability of the differences between Haymes’ and Bäuml’s conclusions is somewhat lessened if one considers their different aims, methods, samples, and general orientation. That “the formulations used by both . . . to characterize as oral the dictated text” are problematic cannot be denied. And certainly something must be done about the manner in which the Theory’s concepts are still commonly formulated, despite all the water that has passed under the bridge since 1967, when these early studies by Bäuml and Ward, Haymes, and Bäuml and Bruno began to appear. But insufficient precision of terms or concepts, inaccuracy, even outright sloppiness in their use, are not sufficient reason to abandon the Theory. They are ample reason for refinement of the concepts and terminology, the burden of later work by Bäuml. That some of these refinements may lead to, or accompany, new dichotomies, such as the notion of the relationship of a disadvantaged illiterate population within a literate culture, and that “it is beginning to look as though the chief purpose of these investigations into the oral character of the *Nibelungenlied* has



been . . . to stress the literary character of the extant text,” as Curschmann remarks in reference to Bäuml and Spielmann’s article (67), is quite true. But it can scarcely be denied that, partly as a result of precisely these “investigations into the oral character of the *Nibelungenlied*,” the extant text and its “literary character” have come to be viewed in a new perspective, that is, as preceded and surrounded by an orality which it reflects in historically significant ways.

Curschmann then summarizes Fromm’s argument against Bäuml’s contention that illiteracy in the sense of a lack of need for access to written texts implies a disadvantaged status in a literate society. The argument that “literacy did not confer social status” (67) is, of course, quite correct, but not to the point, since it allies “social status” with individual literacy rather than with a social function which requires access (direct or indirect) to written texts as a condition for the exercise of that function. Curschmann’s elaborations of Fromm’s notion of a symbiotic relationship between literacy and illiteracy are indeed illustrative of such a relationship, but also illustrate its inevitable one-sidedness: *litterati* as well as *illitterati* who required access to writing to fulfill their social duties are amply documented as public for narratives from oral tradition, while the *illitterati* who did not require such access rarely become visible as public for the “courtly” romances. Whether the reason is the obvious economic disadvantage of those who required no access to writing for the exercise of their social function, or the equally obvious disregard of these social groups by the authors of written documentation, or the fact that their circumstances normally excluded them from the circle of auditors at court, the cause and the effect of these reasons is their disadvantaged social status in comparison with those groups whose social function required direct or indirect access to the written word.

Nevertheless, Curschmann is correct in emphasizing that “the idea of a symbiotic culture leads to several general conclusions regarding the applicability of the Theory to medieval situations. Any such attempt must be preceded by careful study of the living conditions and cultural ambience of the document in question . . . . Second, the chief obstacle in the path of this seemingly self-evident approach is the concept of the poetic formula itself and the way in which it is linked to the concept ‘oral’” (68-69). The reason for Curschmann’s view of the formula as such an “impediment” is that the “definition of formulaic usage . . . is

bound to be at variance with what is formulaic in medieval poetic usage” (69). It can scarcely be denied that an identification of the formulicity of a given text with the oral composition of that text—even if that oral composition is located at some distance from the extant text as in the view of the *Nibelungenlied* advocated by Bäuml, Ward, Bruno, and Spielmann—leads into a cul-de-sac, since it cannot do justice to the historical fact of at least one aspect of the medieval symbiosis of literacy and illiteracy: the unquestionable written-formulaic composition of some vernacular narrative texts in verse. And, as Curschmann points out, Lutz’ investigations (1974, 1975) have clarified the degree of applicability of the Theory in methodological respects, and his operational definition of the formula would at least lay to statistical rest several vexing problems of formulaic analysis.

Furthermore, he is certainly correct in his third conclusion: “We have become so mesmerized by the specificity of the claim made by the Theory—absolute distinction between written and oral creation—that we have forgotten all the other aspects of oral culture which pertain to the production and dissemination of vernacular literature in the Middle Ages—aspects that . . . are just as or more important than that of how, exactly, the text was composed” (70-71). How, for instance, “does the institution of oral performance influence the external proportions (and internal cohesion) of written texts?” And what of “the sources and . . . purpose behind the directness of address and repartee with which a poet like Wolfram communicates with his audience?” Curschmann then returns to the *Nibelungenlied* to demonstrate how “the more relaxed attitude advocated by Fromm and implicit in Brackert’s analysis may develop new perspectives . . .” (*idem*): on the basis of the disagreement of the versions A, B, and C regarding the beginning of Aventure 6, he postulates a hypothetical “Short Lay of Brunhild” which repeatedly crossed the path of the written *Nibelungenlied*. The resulting debate, not only between different versions, but between written and oral narratives, exemplifies the situation described in the *Klage*, which Curschmann sees as “the record of the situation in which a written tradition begins serious competition with oral ones” (74).

Curschmann’s criticism of the overemphasis on oral composition is certainly justified, and indeed a shift in emphasis to other aspects of transmission, particularly reception, had already become noticeable. It is doubtful, however, that a “more relaxed

attitude” is the answer to the complexity of the symbiotic relationship between orality and literacy. Just the opposite: it seems more likely that increased rigor, above all in the definition of terms and concepts, will lead the application of the Theory out of its cul-de-sac and render it useful for an analysis of the relationship between orality and literacy. The distinctions—and the similarities—between, say, the oral performance of an oral poet in the sense of the Theory and the reading aloud of a formulaic text, or between the oral tradition in the sense of the Theory and the existence of formulaic written texts for the purpose of being read aloud, or between the implications of the reception of the one and that of the other, must be rendered explicit: the notions “oral” or “written” are not only no longer sufficient, they are, as Curschmann points out, misleading if they are thought of as opposites.

Joachim Heinzle (1978:67-96)<sup>20</sup> misses an opportunity to use the Theory to similarly constructive ends, in part precisely because he regards “orality” and “literariness” as opposites. He regards the Theory as potentially relevant for medieval texts in two respects: the conclusion that a text is orally composed rests either on an analogy between divergences in the transmission of the medieval text and those among various oral performances, or on stylistic aspects of the medieval texts analogous to those of the oral epic (69). He next asks if in the texts he investigates (the Middle High German Dietrich epics) means of composition are used which are analogous to those of the oral epic and could be conceived of as remnants of an oral tradition (77).<sup>21</sup> Assuming the *mündliche Kompositionsmittel* (“oral means of composition”) could be found in these texts in quantity, it would be possible to regard them as remnants of the oral tradition, but this would only be probable if the existence of such an oral tradition “der in den Texten behandelten Stoffe” (“of the matter treated in the texts”) were confirmed by other means (*idem*).

There follows a curious statement with an even more curious footnote: “If—as in the texts at hand—this is not the case, one can never exclude the possibility with sufficient certainty that ‘literary’ authors availed themselves, as it were, of ‘artificially’ oral stylistic devices, perhaps because the public ‘expected exactly this stylistic attitude in connection with certain themes and narrative material’ [ref. to Curschmann 1968]” (77; my translation). The curious footnote (n. 61) refers to the fact that we do have evidence

of a poetic Dietrich-tradition in the vernacular antedating the thirteenth century-but “Beziehungen zu unseren Texten [sind] nicht greifbar” (“connections with our texts [are] not tangible”). One may ask oneself what is more probable before the thirteenth century, written or oral vernacular versions of the Dietrich material? And precisely what is meant by “connections with our texts” and why such connections, other than the themes themselves, should be so significant, is unclear. But Heinzle is right: the existence of such an oral tradition is unproven.

In the preceding section of this chapter on “Unwritten Tradition,” Heinzle had cited passages from Konrad von Wurzburg, the Marner, from the texts themselves (*Eckenlied*, *Laurin*, *Rosengarten*, *Virginal*, *Wunderer*), and the titles of printed versions of the *Eckenlied*, *Sigenot*, and *Wunderer*, as well as frequent designations of melodies, such as “Im thon Deterichs von Bern . . .,” referring to the singability of these narratives (73-74), and other evidence supporting an oral transmission. Finally, after showing that over half of the transmitted texts remain within the limits of 2,000-3,000 verses—the assumed maximum singable at one time—he concludes: “The existence of song-versions of our texts must for the present be regarded as unproven” (76; my translation).

Again Heinzle is right: the existence of song-versions of our texts is unproven. Again it is unclear what is meant by “song-versions of our texts” and why the existence of such versions specifically of “our texts” is necessary to establish the existence of a “rein mündliche Tradition *vor* and *neben* unseren Texten . . .” (“a purely oral tradition *before* and *contemporaneous* [Heinzle’s emphases] with our texts . . .,” 70), of a “genuin mündliche Tradition der in unseren Texten behandelten Stoffe” (“a genuine oral tradition of the narrative matter treated in our texts,” 71). In the course of Heinzle’s argument, these (quite correct) formulations disappear, and their place is taken by demands for evidence of the existence of oral “versions of our texts,” which is a different matter altogether. And as far as such evidence as the cited references to the singability of Dietrich-material is concerned, while it does not irrefutably “prove” the existence of an oral tradition of such narrative matter—nothing is irrefutable—it certainly establishes a very high degree of probability for it. For, if it did not exist, what is the evidence cited by Heinzle actually evidence of?

More important in terms of the Theory itself, however, is

Heinzle's contention that the Theory rests on circular reasoning (78), and that "even the most extensive agreements between medieval texts and oral epics do not, in principle, have to assert anything about oral tradition in the Middle Ages" (79; my translation). He bases his first contention on his view that "on the basis of the textual evidence one infers orality, and on the basis of the latter one again explains the textual evidence" (*idem*; my translation). This, of course, is not so: orality is not inferred on the basis of the evidence of a given written text, but on the basis of an analogy of certain characteristics of such a text with those of texts known to be orally composed. Once this inference is made, certain aspects of the written text can be explained in terms of an orality not inferred on the basis of the evidence of the written text, but on that of the evidence of texts known to be oral.

Heinzle's contention that characteristics of orality in written medieval texts are irrelevant as far as medieval orality is concerned is itself the product of a methodological error. He expresses it most concisely in one sentence with a supporting quotation from M. Delbouille (1959): "Zunächst einmal haben wir es doch offenbar mit *Literatur* zu tun, and wir sind gehalten, die stereotypen Darstellungsmittel der Texte vor allem anderen als Stilphänomene im literarischen Sinn aufzufassen" ("First of all we are confronted by *literature* [Heinzle's emphasis], and are obliged to regard the stereotypical devices of the texts above all else as stylistic phenomena in the literary sense," 78). It may be noted in passing that Heinzle's insistence that the texts in question are *Literatur* and therefore distinct from non-literature, is perhaps an example of circular reasoning and certainly an anachronism; if his criteria for their literariness are abstracted from the texts themselves, then it is a case of inferring literariness on the basis of the textual evidence, which is then explained on the basis of literariness. If, however, Heinzle's criteria of literariness, of what constitutes *Literatur*, are based—as are all our notions of what constitutes *Literatur*—on convention, on conventional notions of cohesion, of form, of the function of "literature," then the question arises whether they are based on modern conventions or on conventions contemporaneous with the texts in question: if the former, then his criteria are clearly anachronistic; if the latter, then it is by no means clear that these texts confront us with *Literatur*. And the quotation from Delbouille with which Heinzle supports his contention is similarly used to close a circle of reasoning: "So hat

Delbouille mit Recht darauf aufmerksam gemacht, dab sich in diesen 'Standardversen' and Wiederholungen ein allgemeines Prinzip mittelalterlicher Kunst manifestiert: 'la stylisation des formes, volontiers simplifiées dans leurs traites essentiels' " (78). Here "la stylisation des formes . . ." is simply declared to be a "general principle of medieval art," which, being general, results in the "stylisation des formes" in the texts in question.

That stylization, repetition, and stereotypical formulation constitute "a general principle of medieval art" is true enough. But the question at hand is: what function does such stylization, such stereotypical formulation, serve in the texts under consideration? And here it becomes obvious that, even though the stereotypical devices of these texts cannot be regarded as remnants of oral composition, even though, as Heinzle puts it, they are to be regarded as stylistic devices in the written texts, they necessarily refer to the oral tradition and hence comment on it. This function of the formula and the theme in pseudo-oral texts, that is, in texts which not only are written but which were composed by writing authors, has come to be far more significant than the alternative of oral or written composition of a given text which dominated the earlier phases of research. For it is becoming ever more obvious that the formulaic epic texts in Middle High German are either some distance removed from the oral epic tradition at the point to which we can trace their written transmission or they are written formulaic texts to begin with.<sup>22</sup> Since there demonstrably existed an oral epic tradition, and since there is every reason to assume the mechanics of Middle High German oral epic composition and transmission to have resembled that observed by Parry and Lord in Yugoslavia (else the pervasiveness of lexical and thematic stereotypes in such Middle High German epics has to be explained in terms of a different function), the question of the function of these stereotypes in texts composed in writing becomes urgent. By regarding the written Dietrichepics as *Literatur*, as existentially distinct from oral epic, by contending that written formulaic texts need not assert anything about the oral tradition, Heinzle prevents himself from viewing the written formulaic texts as necessarily a comment on the oral tradition, a part of the symbiosis of orality and literacy, and perhaps an indicator of the varying relationships between oral tradition and medieval writtleness.

Curschmann takes a decisive step in one direction out of the

cul-de-sac of the older applications of the Theory with his essay “‘*Nibelungenlied*’ and ‘*Nibelungenklage*.’ Über Mündlichkeit und Schriftlichkeit im Prozess der Episierung” (1979). On the basis of a formulaic analysis of stanza 1731, 1b in versions AB (*sprach der küene man*), he concludes that one cannot decide without arbitrariness how many and which elements of the clause have to remain identical so that the hemistich may fulfill the requirements of formulicity. In short, one can define the concept of the formula only in terms of the two extremes: exact lexical recurrence or exact recurrence of the syntactical structure without regard to the lexicon. In the latter case, not only would all such syntactical structures in the text have to be regarded as equally formulaic, but also every statement in everyday speech of the same syntactical structure (91).<sup>23</sup> Of course, one could object that the requirement of recurrence under identical metrical conditions would presumably not be met under everyday conditions since the Bourgeois Gentilhomme is not unique in “speaking prose without knowing it,” but Curschmann is certainly correct in essence: not much remains of the possibility of a purely quantitative verification of the “orality” of the *Nibelungenlied* on the basis of purely syntactically defined formulicity. And any other definition will require a degree of arbitrariness.

As far as the relevance of this statement for earlier studies is concerned, one can argue that formulicity, no matter how defined, did not serve to establish the “orality” of the *Nibelungenlied*, but rather to establish the kind of orality with which it was transmitted—non-memorizing, fluid recomposition with the aid of stereotypes—and its consequences. The point here, however, is that the formulicity of the text is closely related to the strophic organization of the text and to its rhyme-structure, and that, despite its superficial similarities to oral formulism in the literal sense, the multitude of intratextual interdependences mark the text as a literarization of an oral narrative style (93); the language of the text is not that of an oral tradition in the sense of a fund from which any number of texts can be composed, but rather it is specifically “*Nibelungian*” (94). So conceived, the *Nibelungenlied* appears in a new perspective if seen through the *Klage*, with its obsession with the notion of “source”: Curschmann makes a generally convincing argument for the priority of the *Klage* as an experiment in the vernacular written formulation of (oral) narrative matter, which was followed by the “literarization” of the traditional

narrative in the form of the *Nibelungenlied*.<sup>24</sup> A critical use of components of the Theory thus serves an elucidation of relationships between literacy and orality in a specific literary-historical context.

Bäumel, on the other hand—and in keeping with his view of literature as primarily a social phenomenon, has tended to use the concepts of the Theory in a cultural-historical context, with a specifically perception/reception-oriented bent. The cultural-historical context is given by his definition of literacy and illiteracy not in the problematic terms of an individual ability to read and write, but in terms of the necessity for a given individual to make use—himself or through an intermediary—of the written word for the exercise of his social function. The emphasis on the difference in the perception/reception of oral and of written texts is in part given by the historical circumstance that the majority of the medieval Western and Central European population was illiterate and yet belonged to a literate society in the sense that its codes of conduct and beliefs were primarily transmitted in writing: in part by the differences in perception between oral texts heard, written texts heard, and written texts read (and, no doubt, formerly oral texts read);<sup>25</sup> and in part by the differences in reception between written Latin, oral vernacular, and written vernacular texts. A combination of these approaches and a delineation of some of the literary-critical consequences arising from them may be found in Bäumel (1980).<sup>26</sup> Here he has left the domain of the Theory proper for a concern with the problems arising from the coexistence of a Latin literacy, an emergent vernacular literacy, and an oral epic tradition with the characteristics suggested by the Theory.<sup>27</sup>

A highly critical survey of applications of the Theory to Middle High German studies forms the first part of Stein (1981a). Certain of his criticisms form the point of departure for his essay: the problematic application of observations from one cultural context in another; the different significance of the formula in Germanic heroic song; the literary character of Middle High German texts—objections summarized in Hoffmann (1974); Heinzle's insistence that, even if a genuine oral tradition of the Dietrich epics existed, it remains intangible; the conscious use of formulae as elements of written style, perhaps in the service of oral performance; the generally low quality of American scholarship in this field; the high degree to which applications of the theory are burdened by a priori assumptions; the Theory's monofunctional



concept of oral poetry and its consequently mechanical application of analyses merely to determine oral composition; the monotonous application of basically the same principles of quantifying analysis and its demonstrated futility in connection with other facets of research; the methodological questionability of a reasoning process leading from isolated textual characteristics to conclusions regarding the mode of existence of a text (148-49)—all these criticisms have been made, if perhaps less belligerently, in one form or another and with varying degrees of justification, elsewhere (see also Stein 1981b:32-34, 38).

Specifically, Stein sees the point at issue in the problem posed by the assumption of oral composition for the interpretation of a text: how can one reconcile the polygenesis of an oral text with its unitary extant written manifestation? He rejects Fromm's hypothesis (for the *Nibelungenlied*) of a medial type of writing author between the oral transmission and the extant text as resting on the false premise of regarding characteristics of oral composition as necessarily evidence of such composition. In this regard Stein bases his argument on those advanced by Curschmann in 1967 and 1968: one must reckon with the possibility that lexical and thematic stereotypes were used consciously by writing authors, and thus, in Heinzle's terms, were transformed into stylistic devices. He also rejects the notion of "transitional texts" in this connection. It is surprising, however, that Stein subscribes to Heinzle's *a priori* assumption, in keeping with idealistic criticism, that these texts are "quite obviously Literature," and that *therefore* one must regard their stereotypical devices as stylistic phenomena in a "literary sense." However, since Stein, unlike Heinzle, is not primarily concerned with the methodological issue of the relevance of these phenomena as evidence for an oral tradition, this does not affect his argument. He is principally concerned with demonstrating, on the basis of an analysis of *Orendel*, that the mutual exclusiveness of the assumptions of literacy and of orality is merely apparent and that the resolution of this conflict cannot be achieved by way of a compromise. He succeeds in showing that formulicity and written, "literary" composition are not mutually exclusive, and that, in fact, written formulaic style and stereotypic thematic structure serve as the basis for the function of the text as "answer" to the (pseudo-) heroic epic.

The existence of an oral tradition in the sense of the Theory, that is, as transmission of epic material by composition and

recomposition in performance on the basis of lexical and thematic stereotypes rather than as stable texts, is no longer seriously questioned. It is the predominant sense in which the term "oral tradition" has come to be employed in the more general analyses aimed at clarifying the concepts "oral" and "written." Two important examples of such analyses addressing other, in part more general, problems of medieval literacy and orality than those arising from the Theory and its application are two of Curschmann's recent essays (1984a, b).

In the former, Curschmann demonstrates not only a number of types of interdependence among orality, literacy, and pictorial representation, but also the participation of social conventions in such interdependences: the narrator in the role of knight assumes the social chivalric attribute of illiteracy in Wolfram's *Parzival*, partly in answer to Hartmann's literate chivalric narrator and partly in support of Hartmann's program of an emancipated chivalric vernacular literature. Literacy, however, is not a unitary concept: Thomasin of Circlaria, Hartmann, and Wolfram all understand different things by it, and none of them understands it in our sense, namely as the ability of most or all members of a society to communicate about all sorts of things in writing. The tension between literacy and orality, moreover, can be a calculated means of structuring the reception of a text; and to the written vernacular text belongs more and more the picture, the reception of which is not necessarily dependent on a reading of the text. In the latter of these two essays, Curschmann is concerned, in part, with the implications of the prologue of the *Thidreks saga* for traditional North German narrative, and he succeeds in showing that the writer of the prologue, "when he describes-or purports to describe-the reality of a living tradition of traditional poetry and prose in North Germany . . . is in fact thinking in terms of Icelandic-Norwegian literary tradition and contemporary literary practice. . . . And . . . it is from this Northern literary practice that he derives the model of how prose and verse work together to make an authentic story" (1984b:146). This literary model "builds on its own concept of orality and its role in human affairs" (*idem*), a concept in which writing, memorization, and oral composition play a role.

A review of the structure of the Theory, its point of departure in Lutz (1974), an attempt to clarify certain concepts used in discussions of the Theory, and a suggestion for a

theoretical basis for future applications of the Theory in Middle High German studies are provided in Bäuml (1984). The author sees the Theory as composed of two separate theories: (1) a primary theory consisting “of the derivation of the concepts of the compositional stereotype, the formula and the theme, from the observation of their function as essential elements of oral composition,” and (2) a secondary theory which regards the appearance of these compositional stereotypes in written texts as symptoms of oral composition. Both theories form part of the Theory as propounded by Parry and Lord: the primary theory is based on their fieldwork on the South Slavic oral epic, the secondary theory is the basis of their application of the concepts derived from that fieldwork to the written Homeric texts.

As Lutz had already pointed out, the structure of these two theories differs: the primary theory is based on “the observable production of the oral text in performance,” the secondary theory on an already produced written text; the “observation of recurrent stereotypes in oral performances” (33) in the primary theory has its counterpart in the secondary theory in the recognition of these stereotypes in a written text; and the result of the primary theory, the description of the function of the recurrent stereotypes in the oral composition of a text, corresponds in the secondary theory to the inference of oral composition antecedent to the written text. The secondary theory transforms the known basis of the primary theory into an unknown: the known orality of the former is thus converted into an unprovable, though inferable, result of the latter. Moreover, the secondary theory is represented by the process of written reception, whereas the primary theory refers to oral composition.

These innate complications of the Theory as well as the polysemic use of concepts such as “oral,” “orality,” “literacy,” and above all the implication in the secondary theory of the processes of reception rather than composition, lead Bäuml to argue for a rigorous definition of concepts. And, finally, he attempts to give theoretical expression to the increasingly dominant role of the notion of the “pseudo-oral” formula in written Middle High German texts, that is, of formulicity as written style. In this formulation, as in that of the secondary theory, the basis is the written text, the formulism of which is regarded analogically to the mechanism of composition in oral texts, *not in the process of written composition, but in that of transmission and reception.* In

each of these processes the stereotypical devices of the text “can have a mechanical and a referential function . . . . In the process of oral-formulaic written composition they play no essential mechanical part; but they necessarily have a referential [and mechanical] role” in transmission and reception: “they refer to a specific (oral) type of text, and thus represent the convention which determines the composition of the written text” (43). This theoretical view, or one very much like it, is, of course, already implicit in the recent studies by Curschmann and Stein. These analyses of specific texts currently represent the most promising directions of research regarding the role of the oral tradition in Middle High German literature.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Working familiarity with the Theory is assumed; for the basic texts see Parry (1971) and Lord (1960).

<sup>2</sup>Including hypotheses of the manner of performance of epics. See, e.g., Jammers (1957, 1959), Bertau and Stephan (1957), and Bertau (1965).

<sup>3</sup>CF., e.g., Kuhn’s comment (1981:131-44, espec. 135) on Carl v. Kraus’ view of the initial stages in the transmission of the courtly lyric.

<sup>4</sup>See, e.g., Homan (1977: espec. 433); Hoffman (1974:53-59); Heinzle (1978:67-79); von See (1978:15-23); and, for an incisive Austrian voice, Stein (1981a). Not to be overlooked, of course, is the “great silence” referred to by Homan (433, n. 33). It is not without symptomatic significance that Homan, though quite correctly emphasizing the fact that the existence of an oral epic tradition was never in question whereas its characteristics remained unclear, charges Bäuml with the intention of proving the *Nibelungenlied* to be “a product of oral composition in the sense of the Theory” (433, n. 32)—which is precisely *not* Bäuml’s intention (see below). Fast, rather than close, reading characterizes much of the polemic surrounding the application of the Theory to Middle High German studies. On the reception—or lack of it—of the theory by germanists, see also the comments by Norbert Voorwinden and Max de Haan (1979:1-8) in the introduction to their anthology of essays on the Theory.

<sup>5</sup>I shall limit my account to studies published before closure of the present essay in December 1984. In addition, the following dissertations are relevant: Wishard (1970); Egbert (1972); Aebi (1974); Ahern (1976); Wahlbrink (1977); Spraycar (1977).

<sup>6</sup>In this connection, and particularly with reference to the relationship between formulae and metrical structure, see Schwarz (1966).

<sup>7</sup>(1965:61); see also Delbouille (1959:355 ff.). Like most scholars during the early phases of research on oral-formulaic composition, Schwarz uses the notion of “essential idea” as a reductive paraphrase rather than applying it in reference to the tradition. For its use in the latter sense, see Edwards (1983).

<sup>8</sup>(1987:49). For some comments on the *Hildebrandslied* in a South Germanic oral tradition, see Kellogg (1965:espec. 72-73).

<sup>9</sup>Of course the more comprehensive basis for comparison would also result in an underestimation, since there will always be formulae which cannot be recognized as such in the absence of transmitted evidence. If, however, the more comprehensive procedure is viewed as a desirable norm, once this norm is established the underestimation resulting from the more limited procedure can be exactly calculated. This cannot be the case if the basis for comparison is comprehensive, since untransmitted evidence must be assumed but cannot be calculated (see also 365, n. 43). The same, of course, is true of analysis of narrative themes; cf. 385.

<sup>10</sup>For reviews, see Gillespie (1977), Green (1977), Trioreau (1977), Wakefield (1977), Bäuml (1978b).

<sup>11</sup>Doubt concerning the applicability of the Theory to medieval texts on the ground that formulicity does not (necessarily) indicate oral composition of a text, since texts unquestionably composed in writing are often also formulaic (e.g. Latin riddles, the *Meters of Boethius*, the Old English *Phoenix*, and so on), emanated for the most part from Anglistic studies. A notable exception is Holzapfel (1974), who, however, misses the target with his demonstration of the formulicity of Novalis' *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*: Novalis' novel is not an epic in verse and (therefore) the “formulae” in that text can be regarded as recurrent phrases, but not as expressions recurrent under the same metrical conditions. See also the statement by Lord cited below in note 22.

<sup>12</sup>See the reviews by Hennig (1964), Lievens (1964), Bumke (1964), Batts (1965), Fleet (1965), Zink (1965), Schrader (1966), Northcott (1966-67), and Coleman (1967).

<sup>13</sup>See, e.g., the comparisons, using different definitions of “patterned expression,” of Beatie (1965:espec. 98-100); Haymes (1970:44-66); Borghart (1977:71-81); and Voorwinden (1983a:espec. 43).

<sup>14</sup>One might disagree with the application of the term “Ersatztheorie” (substitute theory) to the theory applicable to Middle High German texts, since it does not and cannot simply replace the Theory, but must build on it (see Bäuml 1984). In this connection, one might also argue that, while Lutz' description of the Theory itself is correct, his characterization of the deciding factor in its descriptive function as the fact that it was not “dafür konzipiert . . . , einen Text als ‘mündlich’ oder ‘schriftlich’ zu charakterisieren” (“was not conceived to characterize a text as ‘oral’ or ‘written’,” 1974:441-42), is not strictly correct: the Theory, though descriptive and based on empirical experiment, was “conceived” to characterize texts as “oral” or “written” -the Homeric texts.

<sup>15</sup>Rev. by Haymes (1979), Rosenfeld (1979), Pérennec (1980), Bäuml (1981).

<sup>18</sup>Certain aspects of these functions had been treated by Bäuml in separate papers some years before the emphasis on the implications of orality and literacy, characteristic of the second phase of research in this area,

became evident. On the possibilities of creation of irony in the transition from oral to written transmission, see Bäuml (1974). In Bäuml and Spielmann (1974) a distinction between preliteracy and illiteracy within a literate society is drawn, and the problems of the distance between narrative and audience, homeostasis, and the representational and illustrative types of reception are discussed. The operation of irony directed against the 'hero' is discussed with special reference to reception in the contexts of orality and literacy in Bäuml (1977b), and some perceptual differences in the reception of oral and written texts are the subject of Bäuml (1978a).

<sup>17</sup>Curschmann (1977:64). Firestone (1975; see revs. by Heinzle 1977, Haymes 1978 and discussion in Stein 1981b) sees Proppian analysis as "the only adequate technique for describing the relationship between content and structure in a given narrative, Lord's distinctions between traditional and non-traditional patterns are the only adequate means of *evaluating* the descriptive information. By applying Propp's technique, we can describe the relationship between structure and content in each individual narrative in enough detail to show *how* the narrative was composed. However, in order to provide a sound basis for classification of the narratives, the resulting descriptive information must be examined in the light of Lord's observations of genuinely traditional use of recurrent patterns and ideas in oral tradition and literary adaptation of traditional patterns and ideas in medieval narratives." (1975:126-27; see also 4-7).

<sup>18</sup>Curschmann refers specifically to Lönnroth (1971) and to Clover (1974). In this connection, and particularly in respect to taking "full account of the special living conditions of [the] sources," see Byock (1982, 1984) for studies of significance beyond the boundaries of saga research.

<sup>19</sup>Curschmann counters Haymes' negative response (in the new preface to Haymes 1970) to Lutz' contention that in Middle High German the formulaic system can determine metrical structure. In this connection he refers to "the conventional use of a small number of trivial rhymes which creates its own 'system' of formulaic response, producing equivalences that are indistinguishable from what the Theory would designate as correspondences resulting from the process of oral composition" (69). This very indistinguishability, however, makes it questionable whether one can always determine the priority of rhyme over formula; there is a strong possibility that one may be faced with the question of which came first: the chicken or the egg.

<sup>20</sup>Revs. by Lecouteux (1979), Murdoch (1979), Spiewok (1979), Schultz (1980), Haug (1980), Curschmann (1980), Shaw (1980), Wierschin (1980), Flood (1981), Gschwantler (1982).

<sup>21</sup>His use of the term *Kompositionsmittel* ("means of composition") is here inexact: if the "means of composition" in written texts are "analogous" to those of the oral epic, they cannot well be remnants of an oral tradition, and if they are such remnants they cannot be the "means of composition" of the written texts in which they are found.

<sup>22</sup>Haymes (1980) has shown that pseudo-oral epics exist in South Slavic: "Of course Njegoš' text is not simply a 'pastiche of formulas'; rather, it is a conscious imitation of the oral style by a poet intimately acquainted with it. It is not an oral text. It is, however, a 'product' of the oral tradition as much as the poems of the Parry Collection are" (398); "Imitations of the kind we find in Njegoš' poem do not come into being in a vacuum; they are totally

dependent on a living oral tradition for their form, their language, and their themes. Recognizing oral form in a medieval poem does not mean that the poem was the product of a dictating session in which the dictating poet was a real oral singer of tales. *It does, however, mean that there were such singers and that they sang essentially similar songs with practically the same language and the same narrative devices*" (401, emphasis added). Lord does not deny the existence of a written formulaic style resembling oral formulism, but approaches the problem from a functionalist direction:

. . . one cannot have *formulas* outside of oral traditional verse, because it is the function of formulas to make composition easier under the necessities of rapid composition in performance, and if that necessity no longer exists, one no longer has formulas. If one discovers repeated phrases in texts known not to be oral traditional texts, then they should be called repeated phrases rather than formulas. I do not believe that this is quibbling about terms because the distinction is functional . . . . The fact of the matter is that the oral traditional style is easy to imitate by those who have heard much of it . . . . After all, the style was devised for rapid composition. If one wishes to compose rapidly in writing and comes from or has had much contact with an oral traditional poetry one not only can write in formulas, or something very like them, but normally does so. The style is natural to him. When the ideas are traditional the formulas may be those of oral traditional poetry; when the ideas are not traditional, they will not. One should not overlook the possibility that such written poetry may set up formulas of its own for those ideas that do not come from the oral traditional poetry. The situation is extremely complicated, because one must keep in mind (a) that within the oral tradition itself . . . new ideas enter the songs, and (b) the poems written in the style of the tradition sometimes influence the tradition itself (1975:18).

<sup>23</sup>In this connection, see also Voorwinden (1983a:43; my translation): "The question of whether a text belongs to the oral tradition cannot be answered by ascertaining the formulaic content of that text, but only by showing that all verses of that text are products of a traditional epic grammar and a traditional epic lexicon." See also the quotation from Lord in note 22 above.

<sup>24</sup>For the priority of the *Klage*, see also Voorwinden (1981). A thoughtfully critical view of Curschmann's thesis of the priority of the *Klage* is Wachinger (1981). It is interesting, incidentally, in view of his opposition to Bäuml's "Schichtenmodell," that Curschmann formulates the reason for the writing of the *Klage* and its coupling with the *Nibelungenlied* in terms of stratification: "Der Nibelungenstoff drängte nach oben, . . ." (The Nibelungen material sought to rise . . .," 1979:116), and the *Klage* represented "status," a legitimate type of book, and thus could help support the "revolutionary newcomer," i.e. the *Nibelungenlied* (119).

<sup>25</sup>A survey of research on perceptual aspects of the relationship literacy/illiteracy is offered by Ong (1982).

<sup>26</sup>Some of the points treated here are raised in other essays, e.g., Bäuml (1981).

<sup>27</sup>Of importance in this respect are Scholz (1980) and Green (1984a,

1984b). Wider implications of medieval literacy and orality, specifically the “rebirth” of literacy in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, are investigated by Stock (1983). For reviews of Scholz (1980), see Spiewok (1981), Bäuml (1982), Kartschoke (1983), and Voorwinden (1983b).

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