Oral-Formulaic Research
in Old English Studies: I

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The extant corpus of Old English poetry is small, yet during the late twentieth century scholarly studies thereof have been numerous. In particular, the corpus has been the focus of scholarly controversy centering on the means whereby the poems were composed and made known to their audience. Were the poems composed orally or in writing? Were they improvised during performance or composed beforehand and memorized? Were they heard by their audience or read in manuscript form? Was the most important influence on their style and content a native tradition deriving from the Common Germanic past or a learned Latin rhetorical tradition? What is the relationship between their possible orality and their obvious aesthetic excellence?

As the questions themselves show, the controversy concerning the composition and presentation of Old English poetry is part of a larger critical question, that of the oral and formulaic composition of classical, medieval, and contemporary works. As Adrien Bonjour pointed out in 1957, "if the well-known dictum that history repeats itself is sometimes open to controversy, its veracity can hardly be doubted when we turn to the history of *Beowulf* criticism. For it almost seems a law that in its broad outlines *Beowulf* criticism should follow the fortunes of Homeric criticism" (563). Even in its most recent manifestations, oral-formulaic research in Old English has followed classical research, and it is inextricably intertwined with research on other literatures as well. Because, as John Miles Foley has recently pointed out, "oral literature research and scholarship is by its nature a comparative and interdisciplinary area" (1985a:5), scholars have frequently built on and responded to ideas published in fields of research other than Old English. As a result, the history of oral-formulaic

research in Old English is in many ways the history of oral-formulaic research at large as well as the history of resistance to the ideas of the oral-formulaists.

The present study consists of nine sections, of which the first four appear in this issue. Section I, "Oral and Written," considers the questions of whether Old English poetry was composed orally or in writing and whether it was presented to a listening audience or to an audience of readers. It also examines questions of lay literacy during the Old English period and of the nature of the reaction of a listening audience to traditional poetry. Section II, "The Oral-Formulaic Theory," reviews the origin and development of the study of oral composition in Old English, including nineteenth-century Higher Criticism, the study of formulaic structure in Homeric and Serbo-Croatian epic, and the application of the oral-formulaic theory to Old English literature beginning with the work of Albert B. Lord and Francis P. Magoun, Jr. Section III, "The Formula," reviews definitions that have been proposed for the basic units of oral composition, the formula and the formulaic system, and treats metrics and the study of particular formulas and formulaic systems. Section IV, "Themes and Type-Scenes," studies the level of oral composition above the formula, discussing the definitions that have been proposed for the terms "theme" and "type-scene" and reviewing the literature that has identified and described various Old English themes and type-scenes.

The last five sections of the essay will appear in a subsequent issue of *Oral Tradition*. Section V, "Levels Above the Theme," discusses the higher structures of oral poetry, including Ring Structure, the Envelope Pattern, and mythic structures. Section VI, "The Case Against the Oral-Formulaic Theory," weighs scholarly objections either to the idea of formularity or to the idea that Old English poetry might have been composed orally. It considers the controversies as to whether formulaic poetry can be artistic and whether literate formulaic composition can exist. Section VII, "The Comparative Method," discusses the studies of other literatures which have been used to illuminate Old English poetry, emphasizing that scholars must be aware of differences as well as similarities. It also examines the way that the comparative method illuminates two questions: whether all oral-formulaic poetry must be improvisational or whether it can be memorial, and how the Germanic and the Graeco-Roman Christian traditions

came together in Old English poetry. Section VIII, "Present Trends in Oral-Formulaic Research," reviews current trends which re-open questions about such points as the nature of the formula and the influence of linguistic theory on the oral-formulaic theory. Section IX, "Future Directions," discusses work on linguistics, myth, and the diachronic as well as synchronic nature of oral-formulaic verse which should introduce a new and productive era in oral studies in Old English.

I. Oral and Written

One basic question about which scholars disagree is whether Old English poetry was composed—or at least presented—orally or was composed in writing for reading in a manuscript. As Theodore M. Andersson (1962) has pointed out, by 1830 scholars argued that there were differences between oral and literate poetry, basing their ideas on the study of Homer and of existing oral literatures. In a study of unwritten traditions published in 1939, S. Gandz discusses oral literature and its transmission and the interaction between oral and written literatures, and Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg have argued that "oral and written narrative are formally distinct, and profoundly so" and that modern written narrative in the western world derives from "the orally composed narrative of ancient Greece and Northern Europe" (1966:18). Not all scholars, however, agree that oral and written literatures differ substantially. In a study of the Old Testament and the oral tradition that presumably lies behind it, William Whallon points out that Scandinavian Biblical scholars find the two forms "complementary, rather than incompatible and mutually exclusive" (1963:1). Ruth M. Finnegan concurs, suggesting that although oral literature differs from written literature in various ways, there is no definite break between them; she points out that in Africa, "oral and written literature often in practice comprise relative and overlapping rather than mutually exclusive categories" (1976:137).

Finnegan argues that oral literature differs from written primarily because it is performed before an audience rather than being read, an important matter when one considers medieval literature. Cecil M. Bowra (1952) has contended that heroic poetry was composed for a listening audience in an illiterate society, and Ruth M. Crosby has pointed out that "in the Middle Ages the

masses of the people read by means of the ear rather than the eye, by hearing others read or recite rather than by reading to themselves" (1936:88) with the result that "oral delivery of popular literature was the rule rather than the exception in the Middle Ages" (110). Furthermore, an oral tradition can be shown to lie behind the work of literate Anglo-Latin authors like Bede (see Cosmos 1977), and oral tradition even affected the instruction offered in monastic communities, because oral reading was "employed [not only] as a means of instruction during the services, but also as a source of edification at other times during the monks' day" (Hampton 1972:230).

Foley has argued that "the traditional oral society educates its members. . . through the repeated and collective experience of performed epic poetry" (1977a:134), and the Anglo-Saxons seem to have used oral literature as an educational tool both within the monastery and outside it. Thomas A. Shippey has demonstrated that the gnomic utterances used in poems were educational in nature and has suggested that the *Maxims* in particular had an educative function and demonstrate that the society "knows literacy and indeed venerates it, but still does most of its business orally and retains oral patterns of thought and rhetoric" (1977:36).

By examining all available evidence for oral poetry in Anglo-Saxon England, Jeff Opland (1977) has concluded that the Anglo-Saxons who conquered England brought with them a tradition of oral poetic composition and performance and has validated the work of earlier scholars, such as Frederick Norman's 1938 study of the Common Germanic poetic tradition. Opland suggests that the oral tradition "informed the vernacular poetry that came to be written after the introduction of writing for literary purposes by the Christian missionaries" (52) and theorizes that there must have been a range of poets in Anglo-Saxon England, including traditional illiterate singers, singers who memorized works composed by others, and literate poets who used oral-traditional forms. A major question in Old English studies is whether our extant poetry, all of which is found in monastic manuscripts, derives from the early oral tradition or was composed under the influence of Latin learning.

In 1951 J. R. Hulbert pointed out that scholars like the Chadwicks believed that *Beowulf* was composed orally, whereas others, who viewed the poem as composed during the eighth century under the influence of Virgil, believed that it was

composed in writing, reflecting a debate still lively today. Karl Brunner has discussed the contents of all four major poetic manuscripts and pointed out that the various poems must have been of importance for monastic communities or they would not have been preserved, suggesting that they must therefore have been composed by monastic poets. He argues that *Beowulf* "has a decided Christian bent" (1954:3), even though it deals with the monster-fights of a pagan hero, and that this "bent" was the probable reason for its preservation. N. F. Blake has suggested that *Cædmon's Hymn* is based on the Psalms rather than on Germanic heroic poetry and that the diction of the *Hymn* resembles that of the other extant poetry not because Cædmon borrowed from heroic poetry but because "later poets borrowed from Cædmon's Hymn" (1962:245). J. E. Cross (1972) argues that phrases like "books tell us" used in both poetry and prose indicate that the poetry was composed by literate poets for literate audiences. In a similar vein, David R. Howlett contends that the *Beowulf* poet arranged his materials to imitate Latin poems and that "the literary nature of *Beowulf*, particularly in its imitation of Vergilian symmetry, is certain. The poet must have addressed his work to those who read it slowly, turning folios back and forth" (1974:325).

The idea that all Old English poetry that has survived is of monastic origin and that the form and style in which it is written were influenced by classical models has been put forth in a persuasive manner by many distinguished Anglo-Saxonists. Alistair Campbell has argued that both ancient Greek and Old English poetry depict the recitation of short lays in a heroic setting but give no indication that long epics were known during the heroic age, suggesting that "the short lay was replaced by the full-style epic" when "new conditions were created by the growth of Anglo-Saxon monasticism" (1962:13). Opland has endorsed this opinion by analogy to the Nyanga tradition, suggesting that after the introduction of literate culture an Anglo-Saxon poet would have been able to write down a poem the length of *Beowulf* and comparing *Beowulf* to "Biebuyck's compilation of the *Mwindo Epic*" (1980:85).

The influence of such studies has been to suggest that Old English poetic diction and form are of Latin origin, an idea raised in 1910 by James Walter Rankin. Rankin asserts that between 597 (the arrival of St. Augustine) and 1066 (the Norman Conquest),

Latin exerted great influence on vernacular literature, attempting to indicate the nature and extent of this influence by finding Christian Latin sources for Old English kennings. Rankin's conclusion is that "the great majority of Anglo-Saxon kennings are of Latin origin" (51), even those expressing "non-religious conceptions" (83). E. G. Stanley (1956), studying the poetic diction, argues that Old English poets understood the meaning and function of similes in Latin poetry and adopted them and merged them with kennings, but he discusses primarily the Latin-based devices rather than the kennings. Jackson J. Campbell has contended that the Christian Latin tradition provided the Anglo-Saxons with "a poetic, complete with advice on stylistic features [and] factors of style the Old English poet could adapt and assimilate to his traditional Germanic verse form" (1967:2). Campbell believes that numerous Old English poets knew the Christian Latin tradition, and he further suggests (1978) that knowledge of classical rhetoric was undoubtedly extensive among poets. The extreme of this approach may be suggested by Ann S. Johnson's 1968 study, in which she argues that The *Battle of Brunanburh* uses classical rhetoric in a way not characteristic of secular poetry of its age and ignores devices typical of Old English poetry, and by Ann Harleman Stewart's "Kenning and Riddle in Old English" (1979), which deals with kennings without reference to oral tradition.

One of the main sources for evidence of an oral tradition in Anglo-Saxon England in addition to the literate monastic tradition is Bede's story of Cædmon, summarized by Opland as follows (1980:113): "Bede seems to indicate that Cædmon remained illiterate all his life. He never reads for himself, but always gathers his knowledge of biblical narrative by listening to others read to him. . .; he always sings or makes songs or dictates his songs. . . . Cædmon is a purely oral poet or singer." Even the fact that Cædmon seems to have been an oral poet, however, is ambiguous, and Donald W. Fritz has argued that the story of Cædmon is based on "the most commonplace and traditional concepts of mediaeval poetry" for which "Bede could have easily found authority in Isidore's *Etymologiae*" (1969:334). He compares Cædmon to Paulinus of Nola rather than to an oral scop, although he argues elsewhere (1974) that Cædmon was a contemplative poet who composed spontaneously and that such composition is not incompatible with the idea that Cædmon was an oral singer.

Richard J. Schrader has attempted to harmonize the ideas of oral and written origins of Old English poetry by suggesting that the monasteries both provided literate culture and also "perpetuated an ancient system of oral learning and composition that had always been in harmony with the written word" (1980:56). He points out that "a monk composed—often aloud, even as he would read aloud—by impressing the first draft on wax tablets, then by correcting it; finally he copied the work himself or gave it over to a scribe, who copied from the finished draft or from dictation. . . . Transcribing was slow and painful; it had the effect of impressing a text (and gloss) upon memories which seem to us prodigious" (57). He argues that "whatever training the literate *scop* who wrote *Beowulf* received in native poeticizing, it was not really incongruent with what was going on in English schools around 750, and nothing in it would have prevented the influence of Roman literature" (56).

The central problem with even so fine an argument as that of Schrader is that those who insist that extant Old English poetry is literate and monastic tend to overstate the case for Anglo-Saxon literacy. In *From Memory to Written Record* (1979), M. T. Clanchy contends that literate ways of thinking and conducting business did not develop until the period between 1066 and 1307 and that literacy was not widespread even in the monasteries of Anglo-Saxon England. He speaks of the importance of oral techniques throughout the entire Middle Ages, noting that "a narrator, whether of common law pleadings or of epic and romance, had originally reconstructed his tale in due form on the basis of a few remembered formulas" (222). Patrick Wormald states that although the existence of a written tradition of Old English poetry and prose is documented before the time of Alfred, "the status of the pre-Alfredian vernacular should not be exaggerated" (1977:103) and concludes "that the traditional view of restricted literacy is substantially valid for the whole early English period" (113).

The existence of literacy during the Old English period is important because *Beowulf* may not be a monastic poem. Wormald argues that there was little literacy except among clerics, with the result that if *Beowulf* were a literate work, it would have had to have been composed by a cleric. M. B. Parkes states that "in order to assess the extent and development of literacy among the laity, and its significance for the student of literature, it is necessary to include the ability to read and write in the

vernacular," and he distinguishes between three kinds of literacy: "that of the professional reader. . .; that of the cultivated reader, which is the literacy of recreation; and that of the pragmatic reader" (1973:555). He demonstrates persuasively that lay literacy became important only in the twelfth century, pointing out that from that time, the number of extant manuscripts of vernacular works increases. Godfrid Storms (1974) has suggested that *Beowulf* was composed by a lay poet for a lay audience, maintaining that none of the resemblances noted between *Beowulf* and the *Aeneid* proves that the *Beowulf* poet knew the *Aeneid* any more than resemblances between *Beowulf* and the *Odyssey* prove that he knew the *Odyssey*. Furthermore, John D. Niles has pointed out that even though some scholars have read Old English literature as if it were the product of a literate monastic culture with no other background, "there existed a set of native Germanic poetic strategies that deserve the name *rhetoric* just as much as do the strategies of Latin authors, even though the Germanic tropes were never codified in written treatises" (1983:79). In a study of understatement in Old English poetry, Frederick Bracher has noted that the device occurs more frequently in early poems than in late ones and has suggested that understatement may have been a characteristic of the heroic poetry from which the extant corpus descended. He reasons that understatement could not have been borrowed from Latin poetry because it "is found in the early poetry of all the Germanic peoples" and it would be "a remarkable coincidence if four related peoples developed such a usage independently" (1937:934).

Ritchie Girvan (1951) has suggested a pragmatic solution to the controversy over oral and written origins by arguing that some Old English poetry was composed orally and some was composed in writing, a point also made by Barbara C. Raw (1978). Girvan points out that the audience of orally performed poetry was "the immediate circle of hearers" (89), an opinion endorsed by John A. Nist (1959), who contends that the audience responds to the text from familiarity with the poetic tradition. Michael D. Cherniss (1970) states that a poet composing with a listening audience in mind must always be concerned with the immediate effect that the poem has upon the audience. He suggests that we must be aware of this effect in order to understand such poetry, and Foley (1977b) argues that the proem of *Beowulf* shows that poet and audience shared a collective traditional poetic experience. Alain Renoir

believes that an awareness of the reaction of the original Old English audience listening to an oral presentation helps us to appreciate *Genesis B*, because the author must have "had to treat his subject matter according to the expectations of his audience" (1967:51). Because the audience would have expected the defeated Satan to seek revenge, we must interpret Satan in part in terms of the heroic tradition.

In his 1973 introduction to the various kinds of poetry written during the medieval period, J. A. Burrow divides them into three chronological categories, distinguishing "the poetry of 'bards,' the poetry of 'minstrels,' and the poetry of 'men of letters'" (348) and using the term "bard" to describe the most ancient kind of narrative poet, the oral poet, including those of Anglo-Saxon England. Although the question of the oral nature of extant Old English poetry may never be answered to the satisfaction of all scholars, the fact that Old English poetry is at least oral-derived raises another question: if these poems were originally recited orally by illiterate scops, how did our extant manuscript copies come into being? Storms suggests that the story of Cædmon shows that "writing down oral verse was not an insuperable problem for an experienced scribe, nor was the dictating of oral verse impossible for a *scop*" (1974:13). Albert B. Lord views Homer as an oral poet who lived in an age when others were literate and his poems as "oral dictated texts" (1953:131-32), a view which has influenced Old English scholars like Storms. Some Anglo-Saxonists believe that our extant manuscripts testify to the existence of an oral tradition in Anglo-Saxon England. Kenneth Sisam (1946), for example, observes that variants in manuscripts of Old English poetry compared with those in classical texts seem to be more in keeping with the oral transmission of verse than with literate transmission. Alison G. Jones compares *Daniel* and *Azarias* (1966) and the two versions of *Soul and Body* (1969) and in each case finds that the differences between the two versions provide evidence of the oral transmission of the poems. Jess B. Bessinger, Jr., has even suggested that some of the passages that seem obscure, foreshortened, or inorganic in *Beowulf* "can be attributed to an uneasy collaboration of singer and scribe" (1957b:13) that produced our extant text.

Lord has pointed out that "once texts have been written down and are available to those who sing or tell stories, they can in fixed form have an influence on the tradition" (1967:1199), and

some scholars have been concerned with the way oral structures and written tradition come together in texts. Robert D. Stevick argues that part of the history of the Beowulf materials antedates the text we know and must have consisted of short oral works about various aspects of the story composed during the period before the Christianization of England. He suggests that the "Christian elements in *Beowulf* derive. . . from the normal mutations and accretions. . . in the oral literature of a cultural tradition whose religion had changed more radically than its. . . poetic techniques" (1963:88), but that our extant text derives from a written exemplar. One scholar who has been most deeply involved in discussing the intersection of oral and written has been Renoir. He argues, for example, that similarities between two poetic texts can be considered "illustrative of the fact that both poets may have drawn their materials from a common fund of formulas and themes" (1974:148) and that comparison of *Beowulf* and the *Aeneid* "helps us understand an important aspect of the Anglo-Saxon poet's superb mastery of his craft" (160). In "Oral-Formulaic Rhetoric and the Interpretation of Written Texts," he suggests that the "influence of written rhetoric. . . is probably what differentiates the oral-formulaic poem composed in writing for an audience attuned to oral-formulaic tradition from a similar poem composed orally before a live audience" and that those interested in approaching works which can be classified as oral-formulaic but written "might do well to take as a temporary starting point the assumption that, for pragmatic purposes, these works ought to be treated like oral compositions, and yet not quite so" (1986:125).

II. The Oral-Formulaic Theory

Work like that of Renoir shows that the interface between oral and written composition is extremely complex. As he has recently said, "Even though I personally believe that methodical research will eventually tell all of us which ancient texts were actually composed orally and which were composed in writing, the truth remains that we have yet no such means of reaching a consensus; and, until we reach such a consensus, I suspect that interpretations based on the assumption of oral composition will continue to be rejected by the opposition as energetically as

interpretations based on the assumption of written composition will continue to be rejected by the proponents of oral composition" (TBP). In order to understand the origin and development of the study of oral composition in Old English, as well as to understand many of the reasons why scholars have refused to accept the theories of the oral-formulaists, one must be aware of the two stages that preceded it—nineteenth-century German Higher Criticism and the study of formulaic structure in Homeric and Serbo-Croatian epic carried on by Milman Parry, Albert B. Lord, and students and followers of Lord.

The German Higher Critics noted the presence of what we now call formulas in Old English poetry, treating them variously in a "synonymischer Teil" (Sievers 1878:391) or "Formelverzeichnis" (*ibid*.:391) and terming them "epischen Formeln" (Banning 1886:1), "Formel[n]" (Meyer 1889:232), "Parallelverse" (*ibid*.:327), "Parallelstellen" (Kail 1889:37), and "wortlichen Wiederholungen" (Kistenmacher 1898:1). Eduard Sievers' work, for example, indicates that there was a Common Germanic poetic language that presumably preceded the colonization of England; Robert L. Kellogg (1965) notes that Sievers shows that phrases in the *Heliand* that occur only once in Old English help us understand the formulaic language of Old English poetry. In 1879, Franz Charitius argued that scholars needed to pay attention to formulaic phrases, and in 1901, Ernst Otto discussed recurring elements at the level of narrative, finding four typical characters (God, the king, the retainer, and the monster) in Old English poetry.

In 1898 Ellen C. Buttenwieser studied the aesthetic significance of the formulas used in *Andreas*, warning that scholars should not accept them as evidence of authorship because they represent a common lexical store used by all poets. Buttenwieser's study was timely and important, because, following the lead of Moritz Trautmann (1876), many scholars had used the existence of formulas to argue for the common authorship of particular poems. Heinrich Ziegler (1883) discussed the works which he attributed to Cædmon, and scholars like R. Simons (1889 and 1898) and Alois Brandl (1901-9) discussed works which they attributed to Cynewulf. Gregor Sarrazin published a series of studies on the correspondences between *Beowulf* and the Cynewulf canon, arguing in 1886 that either (1) the *Beowulf* poet must have imitated Cynewulf or Cynewulf the *Beowulf* poet or (2) Cynewulf was the author of *Beowulf*. He favored the second alternative and insisted

that the "Parallelstellen" (1892:192) must be the products of a single author, an argument he reprised in *Beowulf-Studien. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte altgermanischer Sage und Dichtung* (1888); in 1897, he attributed *Andreas* as well as *Beowulf* to Cynewulf. After the appearance of "*Beowulf* and Kynewulf" (1886), Johannes Kail published a study disagreeing with Sarrazin's assertions and arguing that the "Parallelstellen" do not indicate the common authorship of poems because they must have come into being over a long period of time, with the religious formulas later than the heroic ones. In 1889, Kail showed that the formulas were traditional, a concept adopted by Buttenwieser which has become a major part of the oral-formulaic theory.[1]

A number of early twentieth-century scholars studied the formulaic nature of heroic poetry and attributed it to oral composition. In a 1903 study of the evidence from Old English poetry and other sources, Lewis F. Anderson concluded that the formulas must have been useful in a preliterate society when "extemporization would naturally constitute a considerable element in much of the recitation" (24). In 1912, H. Munro Chadwick studied the common characteristics of Greek and Germanic heroic poetry, and he noted that the two kinds "contain many common features in regard to style. In both we find the constant repetition of the same formulae. . . . The explanation of such formulae is probably to be found in the fact that both sets of poems were designed for preservation by oral tradition" (320). In two studies of the Middle English poet Layamon, John S. P. Tatlock described formula usage in Old English poems, arguing that the Old English poets avoided the use of epic formulas in favor of "variety and ingenuity of phrasing" (1923a:515-16). He suggests that the fact that the poets avoided "a natural epic usage is a sign of the artificial sophistication of Anglo-Saxon poetry" (1923b:3). Tatlock acknowledges that the use of formulas was related to oral delivery, but he contends that "Anglo-Saxon poetry in general is sophisticated and not popular, produced in large part by professionals and scholars, and the complexity of the verse . . . and its uniformity through several centuries, and other uniformities of style, point to a conscious Ars Poetica" (1923a:515). His sense of the artistry of Old English poetry and concern that the formulaic poet may be a prisoner of his tradition are echoed by many of those who either reject the oral-formulaic theory as a whole or who, while acknowledging the formularity of the poetry, reject its

orality.

Some scholars at the beginning of the twentieth century, however, were willing to discuss Anglo-Saxon poetic diction without Tatlock's concerns about literary sophistication. H. C. Wyld points out that "although a word or phrase may occur in several passages, and must therefore be considered as conventional or traditional, this fact does not necessarily destroy its poetical value, nor detract from our estimate of the poet who uses it. Such *clichés,* although traditional, may be, and often are, expressive of a genuine emotion." (1925:54). Likewise, Francis P. Magoun, Jr., who later introduced the oral-formulaic theory into Old English studies, made a comparative study of the formulaic structure of Old English and Old Norse verse in 1929 with a view to describing the techniques used by the poets. In 1945 he argued that the West Germanic corpus of heroic poetry is a unified body and that "beyond a large common stock-in-trade of traditional story, the accumulations of parallel phrases and locutions that are sprinkled through the commentaries of this poetry . . . afford striking testimony to a basic, persistent community of diction" (1945:78). Other work suggests methods of investigation useful for scholars interested in the oral-formulaic theory; for example, John O. Beaty studies the use of the "echo-word" in *Beowulf*, the repetition of words or phrases intended to present an idea from several points of view, a poetic principle which Beaty says "binds by the identity of entire words or . . . of entire root-syllables" (1934:366) and which is analogous to composition by formulas. Another important study is Leonard J. Peters' "The Relationship of the Old English *Andreas* to *Beowulf*," which argues against those scholars who believe that *Andreas* is modelled on *Beowulf* merely because the vocabularies of the poems are similar. Peters writes that "three limitations enormously complicate the problem of determining literary influences in Old English literature by means of parallels. First, only a small number of the Anglo-Saxon MSS have survived. . . . Second, the chronology of most Old English works probably will never be settled to the satisfaction of everyone. ... Third, the investigator who is evaluating parallels consisting of words and phrases must take into account the highly conventional nature of Anglo-Saxon poetry . . . [and the] conventional formulas and poetic tags belonging to the common stock of poetic tradition" (1951:850-51).

Oral-formulaic research *per se* may be dated from 1923, the

year in which Parry wrote his Master of Arts thesis on Homer, providing "the formulation of a new answer to the ages-old quandary commonly known as the Homeric Question" (Foley 1985a:11). A full study of Parry's work is properly the province of the study of oral-formulaic research in ancient Greek, but those interested in Old English studies need to know his work. Parry's great contributions were to describe a continuing traditional process in which an oral epic poet worked and to conceive of the oral poet as a literary artist working within a tradition. In 1928, he defined the formula as "an expression regularly used, under the same metrical conditions, to express an essential idea" (13),[2] a definition he modified in 1930 to "a group of words which is regularly employed under the same metrical conditions to express a given essential idea" (272; italics deleted). The exact definition of a formula and the metrical conditions under which formulas operate in Old English poetry have been matters of great interest to Anglo-Saxonists.

In 1932 Parry argued that "the nature of Homeric poetry can be grasped only when one has seen that it is composed in a diction which is oral, and so formulaic, and so traditional" (328), and he laid the groundwork for testing his hypothesis in the illiterate society of rural twentieth-century Yugoslavia. Various scholars made further applications of Parry's work; Rhys Carpenter (1946) argued that Parry's work shows that the Homeric poems were composed orally and that similarities between them and Old English works prove that an oral tradition also informed Old English, and Martin P. Nilsson (1933) compared the Homeric epics to works from other oral poetic traditions. Parry's theories about the Homeric poems have become the "new orthodoxy" (Miller 1982:1) of Homeric studies, largely because of the major contributions of Lord, whose work initiated the field of oral-formulaic scholarship. Lord's work is important at every step of the way for understanding oral-formulaic research in Old English because his studies of Greek and Serbo-Croatian matters influenced Anglo-Saxonists, but his most important contribution is *The Singer of Tales*; although not published until 1960, it influenced scholars from the time that he presented its original version as his doctoral dissertation in 1949. From his personal acquaintance with the living oral tradition in Yugoslavia, Lord has been able to draw conclusions about the nature of the traditions at the times that classical and medieval literary works were composed. Because

Anglo-Saxonists build on or differ from Lord's ideas, I will discuss various aspects of his work at the appropriate places in this study.

Although Lord presented a brief formulaic analysis of *Beowulf* 1473-87 in his dissertation (see 1960:198-200), with the result that the history of oral-formulaic research in Old English poetry begins in 1949, Magoun's seminal article of 1953, "Oral-Formulaic Character of Anglo-Saxon Narrative Poetry," is the formal "extension into the realm of Anglo-Saxon narrative poetry of the work of Parry and Lord" (1953b:447). Magoun's most important assertion is that "the recurrence in a given poem of an appreciable number of formulas or formulaic phrases brands the latter as oral, just as the lack of such repetitions marks a poem as composed in a lettered tradition. Oral poetry, it may be safely said, is composed entirely of formulas, large and small, while lettered poetry is never formulaic" (446-47). Using Parry's definition of the formula and the formulaic system, Magoun argues that over 70% of a sample from *Beowulf* occurs elsewhere in the extant corpus, a fact that he feels demonstrates that Old English poetry—even the Christian poetry which shows "the adaptation of the traditional language of the ancient poetry to this new and different thematic material" (458) —was orally composed. In another article (1955a), Magoun suggests that Bede's account of Cædmon's poetic practice demonstrates the stages of the career of an oral singer. Magoun argues that Cædmon's "command of formulas and general technique *after* the dream can only mean a command of the same *before* the dream" and that Cædmon "had been learning them over a long time" (59). Magoun uses the oral-formulaic theory to suggest that Cædmon's use of formulaic Christian poetry was neither miraculous nor simply based by Bede on episodes in Latin works.

Numerous scholars have influenced the development of the application of the oral-formulaic theory to Old English poetry. Davis D. McElroy reinterprets the description of oral performance in lines 867ff. of *Beowulf* in the light of the oral-formulaic theory, interpreting it as a discussion of the use of the oral-formulaic techniques by the singer and translating the passage as follows: "One of the king's thanes was inspired by Beowulf's exploit to compose a short poem before the court. This man knew many verse-formulas and many stories rich in oral themes. He described Beowulf's adventure in skilful style, freely and eloquently adapting his formulas to a well-constructed plot. His audience was pleased

and he began another tale, this time telling the exploits of Sigemund" (1959:306). McElroy argues that the *Beowulf* poet "was making the first known judgment in English poetic criticism" (306).

In 1962, Stevick commented that "the amount and ingenuity of the scholarly activity" dealing with the oral-formulaic theory "are impressive" because "the new methodology applied to several segments of the extant Old English verse is rapidly producing results whose security and significance are noteworthy" (384). Nonetheless, he found the overall investigation disappointing and called for greater rigor in the application of the theory to Old English studies. The 1960's did indeed show more detailed analyses of oral-formulaic elements. Randolph Quirk, for example, while calling the oral-formulaic approach "valuable for sharpening our perspective as we try to evaluate our early poetry" (1963:150), reminded scholars that metrical demands may have determined the words used in particular cases. Neil D. Isaacs (1963), arguing that Old English personification differs from the common rhetorical device, used the oral-formulaic theory to interpret six cruces in *Beowulf*. A. C. Spearing used oral-formulaic research to help interpret medieval English literature for a modern audience, pointing out that "if an audience of listeners is to be able to respond to a poem on a single reading of it, not only must its expressive devices be largely simple, they must also contain a high proportion of the familiar. . . . A poet cannot afford to be too novel, too original, too individual in style: he must keep largely within a stylistic convention which his audience will understand and accept without consideration." (1964:20).

In addition, during the 1960's, oral-formulaic research had become so major a part of Old English studies that scholars began to survey the history of the theory. In *A Study of Old English Literature*, Charles L. Wrenn discussed the form and style of the poetry, noting that meter, rhythm, and diction did not change during the Old English period but that "some of the verbal machinery of heroic oral formulaic tradition, designed for the description of noble warfare, was replaced by conventional formulae appropriate to religious or hagiographical matters" (1967:36). He believes that "the revolution by which the ancient technique of verse was adapted to Christian subject matter . . . carried with it echoes of Old Germanic spirit, which are to be met with even in specifically Biblical and hagiographical verse such as *Judith* and Cynewulf's *Elene*" (91).

In 1969 Ann Chalmers Watts studied objections to the application of the oral-formulaic theory to Old English poetry, maintaining that "the original theory has not been rigorously or consistently applied to Old English poetry although one is given to understand that it has" and that "the practice of analogy has not been adequately tested or measured by those who believe Old English poetry to be oral in its composition" (64). Like Stevick, she called for a rigorous definition of the terminology of oral-formulaic criticism, and she surveyed work on both Homer and the Old English corpus. In 1973 Francis L. Utley surveyed the history of oral-formulaic studies in Old English and concluded that medievalists needed to carry on field research in order to understand oral literature more fully. Six years later Raymond Eichmann observed that the application of the oral-formulaic theory to medieval literature seemed to be "sporadic" and "its impact too widespread" (1979:97), and he surveyed the history of the theory without providing new directions except the observation that "our aim must therefore be directed toward the elucidation of oral presence beyond the mere affirmation of its existence" (109). In contrast to such scholars, Andreas Haarder in 1975 sought to discuss the implications of the theory, and instead of merely surveying its history, he discussed only the most significant contributions.

In the 1980's, as Foley observes, "oral literature research has become a field of its own" (1981:27), and two major studies of the field were published in 1980: Douglas D. Short's "*Beowulf* and Modern Critical Tradition," which concludes that since the 1950's oral-formulaic studies have been the most productive area of Old English studies, and Foley's "Oral Literature: Premises and Problems," whose purpose is to survey the field and the most significant contributions thereto. In a lengthier review (1981), Foley places "the oral theory in context and, in adumbrating its central importance to humanistic studies in general, . . . reveal[s] its manifold possibilities for future investigations of all kinds" (28). Carol L. Edwards, surveying the writings of both proponents of the theory and those who are unconvinced of its validity, argues that the oral-formulaic theory should be reinterpreted "under the tenets of operational structuralism . . ., [which] allows us to consider formulas through their operations" (1983:161). Her conclusion is that the oral-formulaic theory is "a poetics of process based in an implicit generative system" (161). In the most recent survey, the

"Introduction" to his *Oral-Formulaic Theory and Research: An Introduction and Annotated Bibliography* (1985b), Foley points out that in its rapid spread to more than 100 language areas "oral literature research and scholarship is . . . still very much in the process of discovering itself" (1985a:5).[3]

The series of state-of-the-art essays in *Oral Tradition* owe a great debt to the work of scholars like Watts and Foley, who have provided key studies of the entire field at important times, as well as to Foley's *Oral-Formulaic Theory and Research*. They focus, however, more specifically upon various aspects of the question of oral-formulaic research than has been possible in work that provides a larger overview. As a result, they are able to highlight particular problems in the application of the oral-formulaic theory to the literatures of different countries. In his discussion of translations of Old English poetry, for example, Renoir points out that the accuracy of even good translations of *Beowulf* may be affected by the inability of a translator to evoke all the oral-formulaic elements, viewing as a major difference between *Beowulf* and its modern English translations the lack of provision of a "context for the proper reaction to oral-formulaic themes" (1978:168), a problem of particular concern in Old English studies.

III. The Formula

In 1932 Parry noted that "the language of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* is a poetic language made to suit the needs of the verse" (325), and Anglo-Saxonists accept that there was an artificial Old English poetic dialect that included archaic linguistic features (see Lehmann-Tabusa 1958). Robert P. Creed, for example, points to the use of three nouns in line 4 of *Beowulf* that have etymological meanings associated with cutting or injuring or with bunches, and he argues that the poet performs in a "verse-dialect that held fast to important information even as the shape of that information subtly shifted over millennia" (1980:124). Whallon suggests that the poetic diction of *Beowulf* "must have been a conservative . . . influence on popular thought" (1965b:19) because "the old poetic formulas gave the oral tradition a . . . continuity not easily broken" (23). Following Parry, Lord describes a dynamic oral language which is "the offspring of the marriage of thought and sung verse" (1960:31), noting that as the poet composed his lines,

the formulaic language did not restrict his artistry because "the formulaic technique was developed to serve him as a craftsman, not to enslave him" (54). In his study of Homer's originality, Lord argues that an oral poet "has at his command ready-made phrases which have been built up by generations of poets to express all the ideas needed in the poetry. . . . Singers made changes from time to time, but these changes would have been slight as new formulas would have been modelled on the old ones" (1953:126).

The exact definition of the formula as it occurs in Old English poetry has been much discussed in Old English studies. Magoun adopted Parry's definition, but in 1959 Creed redefined the formula in Old English as "a word or group of words regularly employed under certain strictly determined metrical conditions to express a given essential idea" (447). Creed also stipulates that "the essential quality of a formula is not its memorable sound . . . but its *usefulness* to the singer" (446). In a later essay dealing with formulas, Creed discusses the three Old English versions of the story of Abraham, one in prose and two in poetry, which provide "an opportunity to observe and compare the ways of two traditional poets or singers at work on the same story" (1967:70), and studies the use of formulas and formulaic systems in the poetic versions. In 1959 Robert E. Diamond, beginning with Magoun's definition, made two important observations. In the first place, he pointed out that a formula does not necessarily involve the exact repetition of words because "variations of gender, number, case, tense, mood, etc. do not break the pattern unless they alter the metrical type" (230). Even more importantly, he observed that the formula is "entirely different in every tradition because of the varying demands of meter and syntax" (229). Diamond was the first Anglo-Saxonist to acknowledge the importance of the dimension which has recently been called "tradition-dependence" by Foley (1985a:68), who observes that "critics have too often simply 'translated' definitions and axioms derived for another poetry directly to Old English without allowance for its distinctive poetics" and ignored "the tradition-dependent characteristics of Anglo-Saxon traditional verse" (1978b:237).[4]

With reference to ancient Greek epic, J. B. Hainsworth observes that "the formula is a repetition of content, of words that have between them a bond of mutual expectancy," emphasizing that "the essence of a formula is its repetition" (1964:155). Hainsworth also points out that Homeric diction "is organized in a

special way characteristic of Homer and only of Homer and certain other pieces of early Greek literature" (157), and Whallon argues that formula usage is different in Homer and in Old English poetry: "While the formulaic epithets for heroes of the *Iliad* are true to individual character but indifferently appropriate to context, the formulaic kennings for the heroes of *Beowulf* are true to generic character but significantly appropriate to context" (1965a:96; emphasis deleted).

Whallon felt that all the terms that Parry had identified in respect to the Homeric formula should also pertain to the Old English formula, especially the concept of thrift (see, for example, 1969). In 1967, however, Donald K. Fry contended that because the concepts and definitions formulated by Parry and Lord were "based on entirely different poetics from those of Germanic, and especially Old English, poetry" (1967c:353), Anglo-Saxonists needed to adjust the theory to make it fit Old English poetry. In particular, Fry argued that thrift was not applicable to Old English poetry because "as long as poets used the device of variation, thrift was impossible" (356). In the same year, Fry turned his attention to another aspect of formularity, emphasizing the importance of the *formulaic system*, "that process of association by which the formulaic diction is organized in such a manner that the poet can select formulas from it in order to express concepts in verse" (1967b:199). He thus redefines the formula as "a group of words, one half-line in length, which shows evidence of being the direct product of a formulaic system" (204; italics deleted). Fry's emphasis on the tradition-dependent nature of the Old English formulas and formulaic systems has made these two articles necessary reading for all who wish to understand the nature of the formula in Old English.

In addition to Fry, Michael N. Nagler published a study of the formula in 1967 which, although it was written in the field of Homeric studies, has influenced Old English studies. Nagler argues that a formula is actually "a mental template in the mind of the oral poet" and is not to be found in "statistical aspects of 'repetition' found among phrases in the text" (269). He suggests that scholars must broaden their understanding of the formula rather than restrict themselves to the definition given by Parry, and he points out that we need "a theory of the formula which accounts for the irrefutable statistical facts that distinguish the texts of Homer from those of poems known to have been composed

by writing, yet does not close the door on the free play of creativity and genius that is so obvious throughout the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*" (274). His solution to the problem is that "a preverbal Gestalt generating a family of allomorphs must be the best conceptual framework for the Homeric formula" (284). In 1969 Nagler suggested that "if we define the formula concretely we are almost compelled to say that the oral poet memorized this or that concrete phrase or phrase-structure, but once we say that the formula he learned is a pre-verbal Gestalt, we can see how that process of learning is like language acquisition, not like memorization" (459). He has also argued that scholars must broaden their conception that a formulaic system is "an inert skeleton made into a poetic performance by the mere filling in of appropriate details" (1974:132).

One of the major movements in the study of the formula in the 1960's was an attempt to classify formulas by their syntax rather than by their semantic content. In Old English studies, two dissertations—that of Wayne A. O'Neil (1960) and that of Godfrey L. Gattiker (1962)—suggested that the syntactic frame was the basis of Old English poetic composition and that a poet could substitute words freely in the prescribed syntactic and metrical frames; Gattiker argued that his approach is compatible with the study of semantic formulas. Joseph A. Russo has suggested an analogous methodology in Homeric studies, arguing that "if the concept of the formula and the system really is to be refined beyond the original discovery of Milman Parry, it must be through the combination of Parry's insights with these more recent contributions which focus on the highly formal structural and metrical organization of the hexameter" (1963:235) because "formulaic verse not only repeats identical phrases; it also demands certain established rhythmical patterns" (247).

In another study, Russo (1966) points out that it is difficult to devise an appropriate method to study the syntactical formulas, but for Old English studies, Frederic G. Cassidy proposed such a methodology. Building on the analyses of O'Neil and Gattiker, Cassidy argued that "the verbal formula rests upon one or another of a limited number of archetypal syntactic patterns, each furnishing a 'frame' by means of which a very large and theoretically unlimited number of differently worded verbal formulas may be produced. . . . Old English verse is built upon only twenty-five syntactic patterns" (1965:78). Cassidy suggests that his

new concept shows that the formulaic system in Old English is not a rigid one because "the verbal details could change, not only unstressed elements but even stressed ones as in formulaic systems, within the steadying patterns of syntax" (83). Donald C. Green (1971) used a computer to study the syntax of the poems and to attempt to show how they were actually composed, finding confirmation for Cassidy's theory that archetypal syntactic patterns existed and suggesting that future studies of the same nature should be conducted.

In a further development of the ideas about the syntactical formula, Patrick W. Conner defined the formula as "the product—one half-line in length—of a grammar of poetic diction superimposed upon a grammar of the spoken language" (1972:206), basing his idea on the system of transformational-generative grammar that holds that "the grammar of a natural language is dependent for operation [on] the semantic component, the syntactic component, and the phonological component" (207). Because Conner's structural model describes natural language as well as poetic diction, its usefulness is limited in its application to Old English poetry, a limitation that William W. Minton noted in response to Russo's first article on the structural formula in Homer. Minton points out that "the phenomena included in the new definition are not confined to oral poetry and should be used in discussions of it only with the greatest caution" (1965:242). He argues that Russo's proposal makes the formula a unit without meaning, "a purely structural, metrical-grammatical unit" (243), and warns that we should not call the structural patterns formulas because scholars may be led to assume "that such patterns can be used as a test for oral composition" (244), a false assumption. As a result, he suggests that although the syntactical approach provides some insights, it cannot establish whether a poem is oral and does not help us to understand the nature of the formula.

The studies of syntax were, however, one of the influences that helped free the "formulaic theory of Old English poetic composition . . . of its earlier rigidity" (Fry 1968c:516), although most later scholars have not adopted the suggestions. In a study which does not allude to the oral-formulaic theory but nevertheless parallels its findings, F. H. Whitman (1973) argues that an Old English poetic translator followed the procedure of adding words to his literal translation in order to convert his text to poetry, remaining as literal as possible and even utilizing the same syntax

as his source with great frequency. Like Whitman, Fry (1968c) has studied the aesthetics of formulaic composition, emphasizing that poets chose their formulaic systems to express their meaning with aesthetic felicity. In another study dealing with formulas (1974), Fry re-examines the story of Cædmon, suggesting that Cædmon must have absorbed formulaic diction unconsciously as he listened to orally composed poetry. In this study, he defines the formula in terms of an "idea of systems as a pool of organized diction" (236) and argues that "the systems would remain only patterns in the poet's mind, probably never reaching the level of self-consciousness required for our critical purposes"; he speculates that "Germanic formulas preceded and ultimately produced Germanic meter" (246) rather than the other way around. Diamond has also studied the aesthetics of formulaic language, pointing out that the formula has both a semantic and a metrical component and "seems to be the equivalent in Old English poetry of the phoneme in linguistics, the basic unit associated with meaning" (1975:304). He contends that "mere tabulation of the frequency of verse types or of lexical units does not give us an adequate basis for analyzing poetic style, for each poet had his own stock of formulaic diction . . . [and] may well have developed his own slightly personalized diction" (1975:304-5). He uses his study of formulas to re-examine the vexed question of the authorship of the three *Christ* poems of the *Exeter Book*, concluding that *Christ I* and *III* are not by Cynewulf.

In 1977 Michael Curschmann warned that the subject of oral-formulaic narrative might be "becoming academic, frozen in its own original premises" (63), and scholars began to say that the formula needed to be defined more rigorously than it had been before. Paul Kiparsky suggested that scholars should systematically compare "the phrase patterns of oral poetry with those of ordinary language" (1976:73), and he defined the formula grammatically, pointing out that oral formulas are special kinds of bound phrases and categorizing formulas as either fixed or flexible, the former being ready-made phrases in the surface structures of the poetic language and the latter being "co-occurrence restrictions (obligatory or variable) between lexical items" (82). John Miletich argued that in orally performed works, "the metalinguistic role is a dominant factor in producing variation" (1976a:67).

In another study, Miletich stipulates that "whether the meter is syllabic, tonic-alliterative, or quantitative, the syntactic pattern

must be the same if the statistical results are to be comparable" (1976b:116), and he suggests that if we applied the oral-formulaic theory consistently to all literatures, we would be forced to conclude that *Beowulf* was not composed orally. Miletich emphasizes that we must distinguish clearly between the formula and the "formulaic expression" (117), and Edward R. Haymes points out that there is a difference between an oral formula and a "repeated phrase" — although scholars have "consistently confused the two concepts without sufficient regard for the consequences" (1980:392). Attempting to apply the oral-formulaic theory rigorously to Old English poetry, Geoffrey R. Russom points out that, in contrast to Homer, the poets of Old English works repeat concepts without repeating formulas. He states that the oral-formulaic theory tells us that "oral poets are supposed to repeat useful phrases whenever the need arises, providing fresh language only when they encounter unfamiliar material, or when memory proves faulty" (1978:373). Because Old English poetry does not demonstrate Homeric thrift, Russom makes the generalization that "formulaic theory is refuted, not only as it applies to Old English works, but in general" (387).

In response to such concerns about the definition of the formula and scholarly refusal to acknowledge the need to take into account tradition-dependent features, Fry published a pair of articles that have laid the groundwork for future study of Old English formulaic poetry. In a paper delivered in 1977 but not published until 1981, he pointed out that "early theorists, influenced by Magoun and Parry, regarded repetition as the sign and essence of formulaic composition. They postulated that poets memorized huge blocks of formulas and moved them around in different combinations to produce a poem. . . . Besides being unprovable, this theory reduced poetry to mere moveable blocks, cliches filling slots. The poet becomes the prisoner of his tradition. . . . A second group of theorists related formulas to grammatical patterns, which they called 'syntactic frames'. . . . This critically reductive theory failed." (171-72). Fry goes on to say that the most commonly accepted theory in the late 1970's "works on a generative model from memorized patterns rather than memorized phrases. . . . Multiply these patterns a couple of thousand times and you have not only a poetic tradition, but also a poetic which allows the poet enormous artistic freedom" (172). In a 1979 article which replies to Miletich's argument that more rigorous definitions

of terms are needed, Fry points out that "one person's rigor may become another person's rigidity. Literatures do differ and require exactly tailored analyses within the formulaic framework" (3). He also points out that Old English poetry is too complex to be analyzed in terms of the current statistical techniques, suggesting that "so long as comparative studies remain based on Parry's definition, which does not fit the Old English evidence, we must excuse Anglo-Saxon poetry from such comparisons" (5).

One response to the need for a definition of the formula that pertains precisely to Old English was made by Foley, who in 1978 used a computer to analyze the metrical text of *Beowulf* (see also 1976). The study addressed two important questions: "Could there exist suprasegmental structures which operated on principles similar to those by which formulas and systems were generated? Might there be a level of traditional poetic composition deeper and more fundamental than visually identified verbal patterns?" (1978a:72). In the course of the study, Foley demonstrated the existence of the "metrical formula," one of the most promising new ideas about formulaic structure in Old English and one which needs exploration in respect to other poems in the corpus.

In the 1980's, various scholars have re-examined aspects of formulaic analysis in Old English studies. Muriel Cornell (1981) studies formulas in the context of a wider investigation of the rhetorical device of repetition, which she views as a typical Old English poetic device as important as rhythm and meter. Niles re-evaluates Fry's concept of the formulaic system, suggesting that the system "must provide a poet with the means of expressing his meaning with a minimum of reflection" (1981b:399) and redefining the formula as follows: "A formula in Anglo-Saxon poetry may be considered a rhythmic/syntactic/semantic complex one half-line in length. It is one of a set of verses (or formulaic system) of a similar metrical type in which one main verbal element is constant" (399; italics deleted). In another study, Niles discusses the varied compound diction of *Beowulf* and suggests that "the high incidence of compounding in the poem—even more, the consistent organization of these compound words into highly useful formulaic *systems*—might indicate not only that the author of the work was familiar with the old oral tradition, but that he was a living part of this tradition" (1981a:499). Most recently, Renoir has emphasized that "by definition, oral-formulaic elements are repetitions. Like Homeric epithets, they may be exact repetitions,

. . . or, like Old English metrical formulas, they may consist of paradigms which can be fleshed out in an infinite number of ways" (TBP). He also reminds us that "whereas oral-formulaic composition is unquestionably a form of repetition, mere repetition must not be confused with oral-formulaic composition, and it matters little in this respect whether the repetitions be of written or oral origin or be the product of a non-oral formulaic system" (TBP). Such work clears the ground for a new and productive era of oral-formulaic research in Old English studies.

In 1974 Lord pointed out that "in Anglo-Saxon research needs to be done not merely in numbers of formulas . . . but also, and more particularly in specific formulas. . . . It would be useful to know . . . what formulas are common to *Beowulf* and to the religious poems. . . . It would be helpful to know what formulas occur only in the religious poems—and so forth. The purpose is to determine not only whether a tradition exists but what its content is." (204). What little work has been done on specific formulas in Old English poetry has tended to involve questions of manuscript readings or metrical patterns. In the former case, oral-formulaic research overlaps with the research conducted by scholars who are interested in the meaning of particular lexical items (see, for example, Kuhn 1979).

In addition, the study of particular formulas runs parallel to the study of aural effects in Old English poetry. In "The Role of Sound-Patterns in Serbo-Croatian Epic," published in 1956, Lord pointed out that a singer is guided in his choice of formulas by the concept of the "key word," which is "the bridge between idea and sound pattern" (302) and that "the sounds themselves aid in the choice of words even as the syntactic patterns assist in determining their structure. The singer weaves an intricate web of idea, sound and form. . . . The syntactic, metric, word-boundary, and sound patterns of lines and parts of lines are elements of the formulas" (304). In "The Poetics of Oral Creation" (1959), Lord again called attention to the importance of the aural effects and sound patterns of oral poetry, although most Anglo-Saxonists have been concerned only with aural effects rather than oral composition. Constance B. Hieatt has identified the role played by repeated words in *The Dream of the Rood* (1971) and in *Genesis A* (1980a) and by significant verbal repetitions in *Judith* (1980b). Correspondingly, Eugene R. Kintgen argues that Old English poetry uses verbal echo to link together "the phonetic and semantic levels" (1974:223), and

he identifies the uses of word echo and punning in *The Wanderer* which help reveal the implications of the theme of exile (1975) and the wordplay of *lif, lof, leof, lufu,* and *geleafa* which contributes to the effect of numerous Old English poems (1977). In a similar vein, Roberta Frank studies "the importance and meaning of etymological or pseudo-etymological wordplay (paronomasia) in Old English scriptural verse" (1972:208), and Roberta B. Bosse (1973) discusses the auditory aesthetics of *The Seafarer*. In the most interesting of such studies, James C. Addison, Jr., points out that even though *The Battle of Brunanburh* was undoubtedly not composed orally, critics need to consider its oral-formulaic elements, particularly the "extended aural interlace—interlace that deals with patterns of structure spanning many lines of text" (1982:268), and Cassidy, examining Christian changes to the Germanic oral-formulaic style, shows that there are recurrent formulaic words and phrases in Old English which form "a network with others" (1970:34), pointing to the image complex formed by the words *sunne, leoht, beacen,* and *tacen*, any of which "may suggest or trigger any of the others" so that "when two or more appear together it is a clear hint to look beyond the literal meaning" (34).

The study of formulas is also related to the study of metrics, the seminal studies of metrics being those of Winfred P. Lehmann. Lehmann argues that all poems written in the Germanic languages until the twelfth century belong to a single tradition—although there are differences within that tradition—and that we need to understand the facts that the poetry was presented orally and that "an appreciation of Germanic rhythms requires only that the rhythms of the single line be understood" (1956:35). Lehmann also uses the metrical conventions in Indo-European verse older than extant Germanic poetry to argue that "the structure of half-lines . . . shows great variety" (1982:23) in Indo-European verse and that scholars should not try to use "an accompanying musical instrument or appropriate pauses . . . to bring about equal, isochronous segments" (23). One scholar who has been concerned with the music that must originally have accompanied Old English poetry is Bessinger, who argues that "metrical formulas—recurring and interchangeable phrases strung together in similar metrical situations—make an oral singer's improvisation possible" (1957a:162) and that Old English poetry must have been recited to the accompaniment of the harp. Nist (1967) has argued that a

theory about the rhythm of *Beowulf* must account for the scop's use of a harp, and Thomas Cable has studied the metrical and melodic formulas underlying *Beowulf* and argued that there is an important relationship "between the lexical formula studied in Old English scholarship and the melodic formula studied in musicology" (1974:106) and that "a melodic formula, or a small set of melodic formulas, . . . preceded and shaped the composition of the text" (1975:11). Creed has performed a computer-assisted study of *Beowulf* and has proposed a new lineation of the poem, arguing that from the point of view of the oral-formulaic theory and of metrics, "every measure in *Beowulf* is equal to every other measure" (1982:27; italics deleted), a theory that contrasts with that of Lehmann. Foley re-examines the differences between Old English metrics and those of the Homeric poems and Serbo-Croatian poetry, focusing "on the role of meter in formulaic structure—not as a gauge of orality or literacy but simply as a prosodic determinant" and reminding us that "*nothing* in ancient Greek translates *at all* to Old English without careful and thoughtful attention to differences in prosody" (1982:7). He emphasizes that we need to study the metrics and formulaic structure of *Beowulf* "from both synchronic and diachronic perspectives and to carry out our analyses with all of the old-fashioned philological rigor we can muster" (14; italics deleted).

The study of metrics and that of formulas overlap, and Lewis E. Nicholson (1963) has suggested that hypermetric verses can be examined not from the point of view of their metrics, but from that of their formulaic structure. The study of particular formulas has often been carried on in the interest of emending lines or preserving manuscript readings. Magoun has pointed out that the normal emendation of *Beowulf* 2226b "brings the verse into line with a formula and/or formulaic system" (1953a:541) well-known in Old English poetry, and Creed (1956) has shown that 1. 2231a can be emended to match a verse found elsewhere in the poem. Creed (1958) uses the oral-formulaic theory to discuss manuscript readings from another angle when he contends that the *Genesis* poet must have been an oral singer on the basis that he fails to provide alliteration to link the half-lines in 1. 1316. A few articles have dealt with formulas of the Germanic and Indo-European traditions. Magoun, for example, argues that the "common occurrence of *wine Burgenda* and *vin Borgunda* merely tells us that the Anglo-Saxon and Old-Icelandic singers . . . knew the fact that Gúþhere-

Gunthere-Gunnar had ruled the Burgundians and had at their command this obvious means of saying so in a just measure of verse" (1958:218). Von Egon Werlich (1967) studies the Indo-European and Germanic contexts of two of the Old English terms for the singer, *wōðbora* and *scop*, and Tauno F. Mustanoja (1967), examining Indo-European funeral practices, argues that there must have been an oral tradition of ritual mourning among the Anglo-Saxons and that "Geatisc meowle" is the correct formula for *Beowulf* 3150b. Anne L. Klinck (1983), analyzing the Old English epithet *folces hyrde* in comparison to its Homeric counterpart, maintains that Old English poets used their flexible systems to merge the literal and the metaphorical levels of their formulaic language.

In 1957 Creed examined two formulaic systems, the "*andswarode*-system," which he argued serves as "a kind of easily discernible oral 'quotation mark' " (525), and "the maðelode-system," which he views as "essentially a verse-pair system designed to make a whole line of the song" (527). Thomas C. Rumble, contending that we can perform the best literary analysis of Old English poetry when we understand its formularity, discusses "the remarkably systematic and imaginative use that the *Beowulf* poet made of just one of his many 'set phrases'—the well-known *ic hyrde, mine gefræge* formula" (1964:15). Rumble argues that we must examine specific formulas closely in order to determine "whether one poet makes a more purposeful and artistic use of them than another" (20). Scholars who have done so within the last ten years are Paula Mertens-Fonck (1978), who studies formulas that introduce direct discourse; Harvey De Roo, who argues that *ealuscerwen* and *meoduscerwen* are "grimly ironic" (1979:259) in *Beowulf* and *Andreas* respectively; and Barbara Nolan and Morton W. Bloomfield (1980), who have studied the formal boasts in *Beowulf*.

In 1961 Whallon argued against those scholars who felt that the usefulness of formulas meant that they were virtually meaningless by stating that "a formulaic element need not be held meaningless merely because it was selected with little conscious reflection. Time-savers though the periphrastic expressions are, they may nevertheless be handsome or ironic or humorous" (310). Along a similar line, Fry has suggested that the potential in formulaic composition "for manipulated expectation, for parody, for repetition as a juxtaposing device, and even for irony is enormous"

(1981:172), and Richard A. Lewis has argued that formulaic conventions "have a generally fixed semantic orientation which could be exploited and was exploited for a more sophisticated literary effect" (1975:663). Likewise, Lars Malmberg (1970), citing ironic conflict between fact and expression in *The Wanderer*, discusses the use of the phrase *waþema gebind*. Both Creed and Bessinger have put the study of specific formulas to good use by suggesting how Old English poems were made by the addition of formula to formula. Creed remade a passage from *Beowulf* (1959), and, when criticized for having done so, responded that "some simplification of the complexity of the interaction of tradition and the traditional singer-poet may well be necessary if we are to try to understand something of the nature of the singer as artist, that is as *shaper* of the tradition, and not simply as performer, that is as *transmitter* of the tradition" (1968:152). Bessinger, attempting to provide a traditional context for consideration of *Beowulf*, remade *Cædmon's Hymn* as a "new oral-traditional praise song for the heroic builder of Heorot. This is of course very easy if the Hymn is used as a frame, for it is already basically that kind of poem, . . . indeed in one sense the best example surviving from the OE period of an heroic praise song" (1974:91).

IV. Themes and Type-Scenes

In "Ćor Huso: A Study of Southslavic Song," an unfinished work composed between 1933 and 1935, Parry noted the existence of traditional formulaic elements above the level of the formula, and he commented that "the oral song is made up on the one hand of the essential theme, which may in itself be a bare enough thing, and on the other hand of the traditional oral material which furnishes its elaboration. . . . The good or bad song is due to no mere accident of length, but to the singer's narrative ability, which is in turn limited by the quality of the tradition, . . . by the quality of the themes which make the texture of his song" (461). Lord defines the theme as "a subject unit, a group of ideas, regularly employed by a singer, not merely in any given poem, but in the poetry as a whole" (1938:440); he suggests that the "kinds of themes according to function or nature, essential, major, minor, narrative, descriptive, and so on, can be defined better at a later time when we understand more clearly the workings of the theme"

(440), and that thematic study can be classified by the study of "the workings of the theme" and by the study of specific themes.

In 1951 Lord pointed out that the theme "is not restricted, as is the formula, by metrical considerations; hence, it should not be limited to exact word-for-word repetition," and he emphasized that "the theme and the formula are distinct units, even if at times they coincide" (73). In 1953 he defined themes as "repeated narrative or descriptive elements" which "function in building songs in much the same way in which the formulas function in building lines. . . . Some themes . . . are purely ornamental. . . . Moreover, the themes vary in stability, both as to formula content and as to place in any given song, in accordance with the frequency of their use" (127). Lord's study of themes in South Slavic oral poetry permits him to answer those who suggested that the oral-formulaic theory called into question Homer's genius, because he argues that an oral poet "will show his originality both in new phrases and in new combinations of themes, perhaps even in new themes" (128).

Lord's 1949 dissertation, which became *The Singer of Tales*, introduced the study of oral themes into Old English studies, and he argues there that the theme "is not any fixed set of words, but a grouping of ideas" (1960:69) and that "the themes lead naturally from one to another to form a song which exists as a whole in the singer's mind. . . . The theme in oral poetry exists at one and the same time in and for itself and for the whole song" (94). Critics who followed Lord were concerned with the aesthetics of the thematic patterns in Old English poetry. Creed, for example, poses the frequently asked question, "How can a tissue of formulas, of repeated verses and significant parts of verses, be a great poem?" (1961:98), and answers it by arguing that "it is on the level of the theme that we can legitimately expect to find differences in the work of mature singers which has survived to us" (99). He calls attention to the "sameness (the recurrence of the theme) with difference (the use of formulas not employed in other occurrences, the different arrangements of the formulas" (99) to show that there is both a formulaic tradition and an artistic use of it.

The desire to discuss the aesthetic applications of the oral-formulaic theory and to clear up "vague and contradictory critical terminology" led Fry to provide new definitions of the terms theme, type-scene, and motif (1968b:49). He suggests that a *type-scene* is "a recurring stereotyped presentation of conventional details used to describe a certain narrative event, requiring neither

verbatim repetition nor a specific formula content" and defines a *theme* as "a recurring concatenation of details and ideas, not restricted to a specific event, verbatim repetition, or certain formulas, which forms an underlying structure for an action or description" (53; italics deleted). Fry's distinction between the type-scene, which is narrative-based, and the theme, which is a cluster of details, has influenced later discussions of the terms. Mark W. Edwards has discussed this distinction in respect to Homeric studies, holding that Fry's definition of the theme is not satisfactory for Homeric studies and suggesting that Homeric type-scenes "have a rigidity of structure (especially of sequence, though omissions of elements occur and the scenes are sometimes interwoven)" (1975:71). In 1974, Lord commented that "it is noticeable in Anglo-Saxon and evident from Fry's treatment of type-scenes that there seems to be no, or at best very little, verbal correspondence between instances of type-scenes, and, therefore, it appears appropriate to differentiate them from the compositional themes with a reasonably high degree of verbal correspondence" (207).

Although many scholars have adopted Fry's definitions, not all agree with them, and some confusion has resulted in Old English studies from the lack of generally accepted definitions of the terms theme and type-scene. One of the greatest difficulties is caused by disagreements between those who use the term "theme" in its technical oral-formulaic sense and those who use it more generally. Stanley J. Kahrl, aware of the two meanings of the term, states that he does not use "the term in the restricted technical sense of Magoun or Lord . . . [but in] the more usual sense of a concept or general idea embodied in a narrative action in which recurrent elements . . . serve to remind the reader of earlier occurrences of that concept" (1972:190). Since he specifies that he defines the feud as a theme in the general sense of the term, his discussion is easy to follow. Other scholars who use the term theme in the general sense are not as precise as Kahrl, and one wonders whether their work would profit from a discussion of the oral-formulaic context of the themes they identify.[5]

Some scholars who use the more general definition acknowledge that the use of a particular theme might have had relevance to an oral tradition. David M. Gaunt, for example, comments that when poets depict singers relating the story of the Creation, the theme "is associated in their minds with certain

effects to be described in the narrative" (1977:220). Although he acknowledges that the theme appealed to oral singers as well as to literate authors, he does not discuss the debt of the theme to the oral-formulaic tradition. Kathryn Hume discusses the theme of the hall, in which "what is looked to for safety and what is feared as a threat to that security make apt points of departure for a study of a culture's major assumptions" (1974:63). She refers to the theme of Exile identified by Stanley B. Greenfield (1955) but does not discuss the hall as an oral-formulaic theme. Kenneth Florey acknowledges that the source of the theme of stability and chaos may be either pagan or Christian and notes that the conflict between the two "is depicted in terms of heroic imagery" (1976:83) but does not discuss the oral-formulaic context of that imagery. The greatest problem, however, lies with those critics who discuss common oral-formulaic thematic elements and either deny that they are from the Common Germanic tradition or ignore discussions of formularity. Cross, for example, argues that the theme of war comes not "from a reality among our Germanic pagan ancestors" but from "a rhetorical question of St. Ambrose" (1971:269) and represents "part of the Christian conscience" (277) that lies behind *Beowulf*; he also contends that the poet of *The Wanderer* mentions the wolf and the bird to recall Christian themes rather than to evoke "the beasts and birds which appear in O. E. poetic battle-scenes" (1958-59:93). Likewise, both Stanley and John Gardner discuss the theme of the Beasts of Battle without referring to Magoun's identification thereof (1955b). Stanley simply says that the presence of the wolf, the eagle, and the raven in a battle-scene "is obviously a part of traditional descriptions of battle" (1956:442) and an example of the Old English use of "figurative diction" (443). In his discussion of *Elene*, Gardner also alludes to "the preparation for battle, which opens the poem" (1975:88) without speaking of the identification of the Approach to Battle type-scene (Fry 1969). Such omissions make the arguments cited above less compelling than they might otherwise have been.

In *The Singer of Tales*, Lord notes several Old English themes, "repeated assemblies with speeches, repetition of journeying from one place to another, and . . . scenes of the slaying of monsters" (1960:198-99). Many themes and type-scenes have been discussed in a single article each, whereas others have been discussed in various works. Magoun notes the existence of two

themes, "the grateful recipient," which "lets the singer highlight the value and splendor of a gift" (1961:274), and "the gesture of the raised shield and/or brandished spear," which gives "solemnity to words that follow" (276). George Clark discusses the themes of "the impact of a weapon upon some part of a warrior's armor or upon the man himself" (1965a:411), the advancing army (1965a), and the traveller who recognizes his destination (1965b). Paul B. Taylor treats the theme used by poets to suggest death, including the subthemes of "the sorrowful journey" and the "song of death" (1967:251). Earl R. Anderson identifies the theme of the "*sæmearh*," which is used to allude to the dangers of sea travel or "to suggest the speed of the journey" (1972:8). Opland (1976) identifies the theme of joy in the hall, and Renoir the narrative pattern in which "an elongated, man-made wooden object of any size . . . with a pragmatic effect upon the speaker of the poem or a protagonist thereof . . . speaks up to tell how it once had a previous existence under the form of one or more live trees" (1976:340-41; italics deleted)[6] and the theme of separation in *Maldon* and the *Hildebrandslied* (1979). In a paper read at the annual meeting of the Modern Language Association in 1980, Fry identified the theme of the Cliff of Death, which has "four essential elements: a cliff or wall, serpent shapes, darkness, and deprivation . . . [and] signals death." Dwight Conquergood (1981) has identified the pattern of the formal boast, and Nabaneeta D. Sen (1979) has compared themes in works like *Beowulf* to those in the Indic *Ramayana*, arguing that narrative themes may be divided into those about the hero's life and those belonging to the narrative itself. In an article of great promise because it shows an awareness of the complexity of Old English poetry, Howell D. Chickering argues that the *Death-Song* is one of six examples of "the theme of man's ignorance when facing God's judgment on his soul" (1976:96) and must be interpreted in its vernacular context; even though he defines a theme as "a particular concept and attitude" (96) rather than using the term in its technical oral-formulaic sense, his acknowledgment that formulaic expressions occur in all six texts helps us to identify the pattern as an example of an oral-formulaic theme.

Although the concept of the theme was introduced into Old English studies by Lord, the most important early discussions of themes—and two of the most productive for Old English scholarship—were made by Magoun and Greenfield. In 1955

Magoun published a study of one of the most common Old English themes, "the mention of the wolf, eagle, and/or raven as beasts attendant on a scene of carnage" (1955b:83) and called thereafter the Beasts of Battle. Magoun suggests that it is an "ornamental" rather than an "essential" theme (82), a judgment which later scholars, concerned with the aesthetics of the theme, have questioned. Bonjour points out that "Magoun's main object was the identification of the theme, and he therefore abstained from drawing any inferences as to the use of that theme by the different singers" (1957:564-65), maintaining that the affective use of themes makes the audience anticipate events that will take place while acknowledging that a theme "may have been used . . . rather mechanically and, if not exactly out of context, at least without the full force of . . . its virtual valences or associational powers" (566). He feels that the use of the theme in *Beowulf* demonstrates conclusively that the *Beowulf* poet uses his inherited formulaic materials artistically. Taylor compares the use of the Beasts of Battle in *The Battle of Brunanburh* to the picture of the wolf presented in the *Maxims*, arguing that the *Brunanburh* poet "intentionally or by formulaic convention or both, has placed in contrast the position a wolf *should* occupy according to the rituals of nature, and the place he *does* occupy because of the carnage" (1969:403). Allan A. Metcalf surveys the *Beowulf* poet's use of ten natural animals, especially the three Beasts of Battle, who "can sense when a forthcoming battle will provide them with carrion" and are connected with " 'doomed' men" (1963:379-80), and Hrafnhildur Bodvarsdottir argues that the Beasts are "associated with sinister landscapes and death . . ., with the territory of the uncivilized, monsters and the forces of evil (wolf), with the boundaries of such territories (wolf and raven), and with ignominious death . . ., or with the boundaries of such territories where a dramatic transition scene would be enacted" (1976:145-46).

Also in 1955 Greenfield published a study as influential in Old English studies as Magoun's study of the Beasts of Battle, "The Formulaic Expression of the Theme of 'Exile' in Anglo-Saxon Poetry," which deepened insights he had expressed on exile in three earlier articles (1951, 1953a, and 1953b). Greenfield points out that "despite the fact that the exile figures are so different in kind and character . . ., the expressions of their plights are clearly cast in similar molds" (1955:201). In order to "establish the dimensions of the poetic convention for the theme of 'exile,' as a

further contribution to the study of convention and originality in Anglo-Saxon poetry" (200), Greenfield shows that there are "four aspects or concomitants of the exile state: 1. status . . ., 2. deprivation . . ., 3. state of mind . . ., [and] 4. movement in or into exile" (201). Leonard H. Frey extends Greenfield's insights to consider the way that exile was understood during the Old English period and "its development in Christian narrative poetry" (1963:293), arguing that the theme provided an excellent background for Christian elegy. Joseph L. Baird (1966) contends that Grendel is a traditional exile as defined by Greenfield, stating that his exiled state would have had an impact on the original audience, and Matti Rissanen (1969) points out that the poet of *The Wife's Lament* uses the theme effectively to depict the plight of an exiled woman rather than that of an exiled man.

Five years after Greenfield's landmark article on Exile, David K. Crowne published a thematic study which proved to be of seminal importance for later Old English studies, "The Hero on the Beach: An Example of Composition by Theme in Anglo-Saxon Poetry" (1960). Using Lord's definition of the theme, he compared *Andreas* to its sources, concluding that it is not merely "a versified translation of some one of the prose versions" but a "vigorous re-creation of the foreign story within the traditional native idiom" (366), an observation as valuable as his identification of the theme. Crowne defines the theme as "a stereotyped way of describing (1) a hero on the beach (2) with his retainers (3) in the presence of a flashing light (4) as a journey is completed (or begun)" (368) and calls for Anglo-Saxonists to investigate the way that Old English poets used their traditional themes. Although many scholars have analyzed the theme as it appears in various works, Joseph A. Dane has denied its existence, arguing that "the two stories in the Phoenix digression of *Iliad* IX contain all the principal motifs associated with the 'Hero on the Beach'" (1982:444). Because scholars have attributed "Germanic provenance" (443) to the theme and he has found it in a classical text, Dane concludes that the theme does not really exist. But should we not seek—and find—"the continuity of tradition" Dane demands (443) in the common Indo-European heritage of both Greek and Germanic narrative, after the model that Renoir (1976) suggests when he identifies an oral-formulaic theme in the written poems of Catullus? Although Dane's argument is clearly untenable, it does suggest a direction for future research on a common Indo-European

tradition behind the Hero on the Beach.

Other work on this theme has been more productive. In a study of its survival in the *Nibelungenlied*, Renoir states that it appears in a different form with the threshold of a door substituted for that of the beach. He argues that "the disparity . . . may well be more apparent than real. A beach is by definition the separation between two worlds—that of the land and that of the waters—and the 'hero on the beach' necessarily stands at the juncture between the two. The same remark applies to a man standing by the door of a building: in a less obvious but equally real way he stands at the juncture between two worlds—that of the finite inside and that of the infinite outside" (1964:73). Fry published several articles on the same narrative pattern, arguing in the first (1966) that 11. 2-12 of the *Finnsburh Fragment* provide an example of a stage of the theme intermediate between instances in *Beowulf* and the *Nibelungenlied*, and in the second that we should not view the theme as identified by Crowne as a "pure form" (1967a:178) from which other versions diverge because we have no evidence to tell us which details represent the norm from which the others depart. As a result, he continues, "we must regard all the passages as equally legitimate and conventional variant treatments of the same narrative materials" (1967a:179). Janet Thormann identifies the presence of the theme in *The Phoenix* in a form different from any in heroic poetry because the four elements "are separated over the course of the narration in the first part of the poem, and three of the four elements are substantially modified" (1970:188). Carol Jean Wolf argues that the author of *The Dream of the Rood* uses the theme to describe Christ's burial, using it and the Approach to Battle sequence to reinforce "his presentation of Christ as a hero and the crucifixion as a heroic encounter" (1970:206). In an application to Old High German verse, Renoir (1977) uses the Old English research to argue that the theme lies behind the *Hildebrandslied* and to provide evidence supporting the manuscript reading of a disputed passage. Alexandra Hennessey Olsen (1980) studies the double use of the Hero on the Beach in *Guthlac B* and its literary affect, and James D. Johnson supports Renoir's argument that a door, like a beach, can represent a "separation between two worlds" by reference to "Ibn Fadlan's early-tenth-century description of a door-frame used as a symbolic boundary between the lands of the living and the dead" (1983:597).

In 1962 Creed discussed the theme of the Singer in the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, and *Beowulf*, noting that both "Homer and the Anglo-Saxon poet have presented us with pictures of *oral* poets, or singers" (46). He observes that "these singers within the song are presented to us as oral and traditional singers. . . . We are thus left as we listen to these passages with an impression of Homer and the Anglo-Saxon singer glancing back at these moments to what they apparently would have us believe are the primary sources of their great sings—Demodocus and the Danish singer." (52). In 1978 Foley used previously unedited Serbo-Croatian texts to cast light on the theme of the Singer in both Greek and Old English, showing that the *guslari* also depict ideal singers. He maintains that "the understanding of . . . idealized *guslari* as personifications of the oral epic tradition helps us to interpret their Anglo-Saxon counterparts Widsith and Deor" (1978b:246). In the same article, he notes that both Serbo-Croatian and Old English poems include the theme of the heroic oath that is taken before battle, and he suggests that the study of "both comparative resemblances and tradition-dependent dimensions" provides "a double focus which . . . is essential to the felicitous appraisal of oral epic art" (246).

In his doctoral dissertation of 1965, Lee C. Ramsey identified what he called the theme of Battle and argued that the two important features of the theme are "the use of similar details and the use of similar order" (9). He lists the important features of the theme as follows:

> The central action is the *advance* to the field, and the supplementary actions are the *command* to advance, the *preparations* for advancing, and the *assembly*, which is either a preparation for or the same as the advance. The established order is command, preparation, advance (the assembly being treated in different ways and coming in different places) when all the details are used. Other details include the statement of *intention*, which follows a reference to the advance . . .; the *beasts of battle*, which also follows a reference to the advance; *hastening*, which usually follows the beasts of battle; the *bearing of equipment*, which is synonymous with advancing; and various details about the *attitude* of the warriors, which can come almost anywhere. (72).

Ramsey's work was brought to the attention of Old English

scholars by Fry (1969), who notes that Ramsey labels the elements a theme whereas he considers them a type-scene that he names the Approach to Battle, the designation by which it is now known. Fry points out the artistic possibilities of using type-scenes, observing that "the traditional formulaic poet using type-scene construction gains certain advantages from his medium. By manipulating recognized patterns already rich in association, he affords himself possibilities for unity, symmetry, suspense, foreshadowing, and larger connotations from imagery" (41). Artistic uses of the type-scene have also been noted by Wolf (1970); by Fredrik J. Heinemann, who argues that the *Judith* poet portrays unheroic warriors comically and that the ironic effects he achieves constitute "a mock heroic version" (1970:83) of the type-scene; and again by Fry, who feels that *Judith* 199-216a provides an artistic use of the type-scene and that the poet's "mastery of convention makes the formulaic tradition not a limit to his creativity, but an opportunity for his genius" (1972:119).

In addition to the Approach to Battle, Ramsey identified the type-scene of the Sea Voyage, stating that the two passages in *Beowulf* share "similarities in events and in the sequence of events" (1971:54), even though they do not repeat specific words and details. He argues that "as rhetorical set pieces, the sea voyages of *Beowulf* have both a symbolic and a broader structural significance: symbolically, they help link together the major themes of voyaging, battle, challenge, and death; structurally, they, along with related descriptive patterns such as funerals, mark off the beginning and ending of the narrative as well as the transitions between its major segments" (59). In an essay that preceded Ramsey's, Diamond (1961) had discussed several themes (war, sea voyages, the *comitatus,* and cold weather), concluding that the poets of *Andreas* and *The Seafarer* did not use the type-scene of the Sea Voyage because their individual poetic purposes were more important than the use of the traditional type-scene.

Diamond observes that "the paradox is that the more we understand about the way these poems were put together, the less certainty we can pronounce on the relationships of the poems to each other" (468), and he is one of a number of scholars interested in the literary artistry of the Old English poetic use of themes and type-scenes. Fry has argued that the *Beowulf* poet, like the *Judith* poet, uses themes and type-scenes artistically, and he adduces as evidence the poet's use of "one very common pattern in Old

English poetry," the theme " 'Banquet followed by Bed,' which often symbolizes the bed of death after the banquet of life" (1968a:6). Robert B. Burlin discusses the same theme, noting that the *Beowulf* poet often uses such traditional formulaic material ironically: "The hero's conquests can be followed only by a general rejoicing, sumptuous rewards, and the mandatory banquets. Such occasions are the prevailing symbol in Old English poetry for human happiness. . . . [But] it is never far from the *Beowulf* poet's mind at least that the great celebrations of human communality share in the precariousness of the 'feast of life.' . . . The gnomic inconsequence reintroduces the alternation of human security and fear, comfort and agony, the inexorable rhythm on which the poet has chosen to organize his narrative." (1975:46-47). Harry E. Kavros also suggests that the *Beowulf* poet uses "the motifs of feast and sleep . . . ironically or in apparently inappropriate contexts, and the tension created by motif and context also heightens the tone of impending doom" (1981:121) and contributes to the poetic texture. In a similar vein, Joanne De Lavan, studying "feasts and anti-feasts in *Beowulf*" (1981:235) compares the theme of sleeping and feasting in *Beowulf* and in the *Odyssey*.

   In "Beowulf and Odysseus," Lord points out that the passages preceding the story of Euryalus and the Unferth episode include the theme of the "calumny of a stranger at a feast" (1965:86) as part of a complex of story patterns. In Germanic tradition, the theme of calumny is known as the *senna*, "a stylized battle of words" consisting of "threats, insults, challenges, and the appropriate replies" (Harris 1979:66), or the *flyting*, "a stylized exchange between hostile speakers of traditional provocations (insults, boasts, threats, and curses), typically organized in the basic pattern Claim, Denial, and Counterclaim" (Clover 1979:125). Although Carol J. Clover argues that the *flyting* "is not, strictly speaking, a type-scene of Oral Theory, but a set piece drawing on a common stock of clichés which are genre-specific" (1979:125), and although this pattern occurs in prose as well as poetry, it seems reasonable to discuss it along with demonstrable themes and type-scenes. In her analysis of the Unferth episode in terms of the *flyting* and its traditional setting, contenders, structure, content, and outcome, Clover (1980) emphasizes that understanding that the episode is a *flyting* makes it easier to interpret. Earl Anderson (1970) discusses the *flyting* in *Maldon* in order to illustrate the poet's skill, and in a later article he identifies a specific Old

English poetic variant of the *flyting*, the " 'tragic court flyting', which involves the following sequence of events: (1) a tense situation is created by the presence or arrival of strangers in the hall . . ., (2) hostility comes to the surface with an exchange of threats or insults, (3) accompanied by the appearance of a particularly provocative weapon, . . . [and] (4) the provocation results in a battle which takes place in the hall, and ends with the destruction of court and hall" (1980:293-94).

Notes

[1]For a detailed discussion of the relationship of German Higher Criticism to formulaic studies in Old English, see Foley 1981:52-56.

[2]All quotations from the works of Milman Parry are taken from Adam Parry 1971; all references appear in the text.

[3]The nearly 2000 entries (through 1982) analyzed in Foley 1985b will be supplemented and updated on a continuing basis in the Year's Work annotated bibliography to be published in the third issue of *Oral Tradition* each year.

[4]Diamond's statistical analysis has also been influential in recent years, as witnessed by the work of Sandra J. Hamartiuk (1980), who argues that formulaic analysis shows that *Juliana* differs stylistically from the other Cynewulfian poems.

[5]Some examples of works which use the term "theme" in its general sense are the following. Graham D. Caie (1976) studies the Judgment Day theme, discussed by L. Whitbread under the name "the doomsday theme" (1967:452); Whitbread argues that Old English poetry presents the theme in a non-heroic manner. Hildegard L. C. Tristram, studying the way that Old English poetry and prose describe Heaven and Hell, contends that "the origin and use of these syntagms . . . may be sought in Latin tradition" (1978:102).

[6]Although scholars have not extended Renoir's observations to other classical and medieval texts, Niles (1977) has argued that Hans Christian Andersen uses the theme of the Wooden Object Which Speaks in *Grantræet* and that his use shows his knowledge of Germanic oral tradition.

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