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How (Not) to Define the Epic Formula

FIFTY YEARS AGO the Homeric scholar Milman Parry made what has turned out to be the most significant contribution made this century toward the elucidation of the formulaic technique of epic poetry.¹ It had previously been observed that epic poems such as Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* and the Old French *Chanson de Roland* were characterized by the presence of repeated phrases, called formulas, such as πόδας ὠκύς 'Ἀχιλλεύς "swift-footed Achilles" 31x,² or κορυθαίολος "Ἑκτώρ" "Hector of the shining helmet" 25x in Homer, or, from the *Roland*, *li quens Rollant* "the count Roland" 33x, or *sun cheval brochet* "he spurs his horse" 8x. The formulaic epic style was generally condemned during the nineteenth century because formulas were regarded as padding in the verse-line.³ No attempt, however, was made to define what a formula is nor to investigate the structure or function of formulas.

The classic definition of the formula originated with Milman Parry in his 1928 dissertation: "une expression qui est régulièrement employée, dans les mêmes conditions métriques, pour exprimer une certaine idée

¹We wish to express our gratitude to Paul Kiparsky and J. Bryan Hainsworth, who graciously took time to discuss aspects of their work on formulas with us. Our thanks also goes to John S. Miletich for additional references to literature on formulaic studies. The responsibility for errors, of course, rests solely with the authors of this article. More discussion of the Old French data can be found in Marjorie L. Windelberg, "Formulaic Flexibility and Metrical Irregularity in the *Chanson de Roland*," Ph.D. Dissertation, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1978. The Greek tradition, including Hesiod, is elaborated on by D. Gary Miller, *Homer and the Ionian Epic Tradition* (Innsbrücker Beiträge zur Sprachwissenschaft, to appear, 1980).

²The frequency of repeated phrases is indicated by using an "x" after the number of occurrences.

³This attitude about Old French epics may be found, for example, in Gaston Paris's *Histoire poétique de Charlemagne* (Paris: Bouillon, 1865) or in Léon Gautier, *Les Épopées françaises*, 2nd ed., 4 vols. (Paris: Palmé, 1878-1884). Homer was even considered "childish" and "simple"; see the references in Milman Parry, *L'Épithète traditionnelle dans Homère: Essai sur un problème de style homérique*, Diss. Paris, 1928 (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1928), p.155.

essentielle."⁴ A slight alteration was made in Parry's later English definition: "a group of words which is regularly employed under the same metrical conditions to express a given essential idea."⁵ The definition, however, has proved to be inadequate and, in spite of further study during the last fifty years, the formula has resisted definition. Even Parry recognized that his definition excluded many phrases which he felt to be formulaic in nature. Thus he accepted as formulas those sets of phrases which differed only in a minor aspect (e.g., differences in the person and number of a verb), provided that the phrases still occupied a specific metrical slot.⁶ In an article published in 1930, Parry developed the notion of a formula-system, which is a set of unique expressions that have one term in common with a regular (i.e., repeated) formula. Thus the following phrases constitute the formula-systems related to the Homeric formula ἄλγε' ἐθηκε "he laid woes (on someone)" by substitution of the verb or the direct object.⁷

ἀλγε'	ἐθηκε
(Direct object)	(Verb)
ἄλγε' ἔδωκε	τεύχε' ἐθηκε
"he gave woes"	"he put weapons"
ἀλγε' ἐπάσχει	εννιν ἐθηκε
"they suffered woes"	"he made (someone) bereft"
ἀλγε' ἐχουσιν	κύδος ἐθηκε
"they have woes"	"he brought glory"

⁴Parry, *L'Épithète traditionnelle*, p. 16.

⁵Milman Parry, "Studies in the Epic Technique of Oral Verse-Making. I. Homer and Homeric Style," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, 41 (1930), p. 80.

⁶Parry, *L'Épithète traditionnelle*, pp. 85-94, and *Les Formules et la métrique d'Homère* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1928), pp. 10-16.

⁷All the examples are from Parry, "Studies in the Epic Technique," pp. 128-219. Note that each of the phrases has the metrical shape ~~~~ , because Parry insisted that formulas can only be "employed under the same metrical conditions" (p. 80). Similarly, Parry's disciple Albert B. Lord, in his book *The Singer of Tales*, Harvard Studies in Comparative Literature, 24 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1960), p. 4, defines the formulaic expression, a member of a formula-system, as a "line or half-line constructed on the pattern of the formulas," thereby also limiting the length of formulas by metrical criteria.

Since the 1950's, Parry's twin concepts of the formula and formula-system have been applied to epics in a variety of languages, including Serbo-Croatian, Old English, Old French, and Old Spanish.⁸ Nevertheless, Parry's definition has been attacked on a variety of grounds. Particularly subject to criticism have been his criteria that the formula have a definite metrical shape, contain an essential idea, and be regularly employed. The concept of a formula-system has also encountered difficulties. Some of the attempts to amend or reformulate the definitions of the formula and the formula system have been surveyed by Donald K. Fry, who also proposed his own definitions based on his experience with Old English poetry.⁹ Fry, contending that it is the formula-system, not the formula, which is the primary concept, defines a formula-system for Old English poems as "a group of half-lines, usually loosely related metrically and semantically, which are related in form by the identical relative replacement of two elements, one a variable word or element of a compound usually supplying the alliteration, and the other a constant word or element of a compound, with approximately the same distribution of non-stressed elements."¹⁰ As a hypothetical example of a possible system in Old English, Fry cites the half-lines 78a *heall-aerna maest* and 1195b *heals-beaga maest* from *Beowulf*, and shows how they might be related to five other phrases from *Beowulf*, Cynewulf's *Christ*, and the *Metres of Boethius* by the association of one element or another:

<i>Beo.</i> 78a	<i>heall-aerna maest</i>	"best dwelling-hall"
<i>Boe.</i> VII 6a	<i>healle hroffaeste</i>	"firm-roofed hall"
<i>Christ</i> 730a	<i>fold-aerna faest</i>	"firm (i.e., secure) dwelling-land"
<i>Beo.</i> 193b	<i>niht-bealwa maest</i>	"most dangerous night"
<i>Beo.</i> 1195b	<i>heals-beaga maest</i>	"best neck-ring (i.e., necklace)"
<i>Beo.</i> 2763b	<i>earm-beaga fela</i>	"many arm-rings (i.e., bracelets)"
<i>Beo.</i> 2691b	<i>heals ealne ymbefeng</i>	"covers the whole neck"

⁸For bibliographic references, see such works as Edward R. Haymes, *A Bibliography of Studies Relating to Parry's and Lord's Oral Theory* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1973) or John S. Miletich, "The Quest for the 'Formula': A Comparative Reappraisal," *Modern Philology*, 74 (November 1976), 111-123.

⁹Donald K. Fry, "Old English Formulas and Systems," *English Studies*, 48 (1967), 193-204.

¹⁰Fry, p. 203.

Fry allows different parts of speech to participate in the substitution, thereby introducing fluctuation into the syntactic-semantic relationships. According to Fry, "since only the form and the sound of the substituted words determine their suitability for the spaces in the half-line which they fill, the formulas may vary widely in meaning while being close enough in form to belong to the same system."¹¹ However, that only form and sound are relevant factors remains an unproved assertion on Fry's part. In addition to permitting variation in both lexical classes and syntactic-semantic structure, Fry also admits variation in the metrical pattern; the line from *Boethius* exhibits the metrical structure $\underline{\text{X}} | \underline{\text{X}} \underline{\text{X}}$, TypeD1 in Siever's system, while the other lines are of type E $\underline{\text{X}} | \underline{\text{X}} \underline{\text{X}}$

Like Fry, Michael Nagler also differs fundamentally from the Parryan viewpoints on formulas.¹² In Nagler's opinion, all variants of a formula, like the variants of oral songs, motifs, and themes, are to be considered as surface allomorphs of an abstract song, motif, theme, or formula. For example, the council motif could have as one allomorph assembly by demand of the members of the group while in another allomorph the assembly might be called upon the arrival of a messenger not belonging to the group. One surface allomorph cannot be taken as more basic than another; rather, the various manifestations of formulas, songs, etc. are related to one another by correspondences, which, for formulas, may be phonological, metrical, syntactic, or semantic. With regard to the last type of correspondence, Nagler proposes that an idea does not have to be realized as a "traditional" formula: it may appear as another word or phrase with the same meaning or signification, or it does not even have to be verbally actualized.¹³ By permitting signification to be "realized implicitly,"¹⁴ Nagler can define the formula as an "undifferentiated (preverbal) Gestalt."¹⁵ Nagler is making an important claim about the poet's mental structure when he states that "the Gestalt itself is undifferentiated into any

¹¹Fry, p. 203.

¹²Michael N. Nagler, "Formula and Motif in the Homeric Epics: Prolegomena to an Aesthetics of Oral Poetry," Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1966. Also, Michael N. Nagler, "Towards a Generative View of the Oral Formula," *Transactions of the American Philological Association*, 98 (1967), 269-311, and *Spontaneity and Tradition: A Study in the Oral Art of Homer* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974).

¹³Nagler, "Formula and Motif," p. 32.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 49.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 49; "Generative View," p. 281; *Spontaneity*, p. 15.

of its possible parameters. There is no need for him [the poet] to make changes in, say, the phonetic configuration of a certain phrase, since that configuration is not determined until the moment of utterance."¹⁶ This amounts to an "archeformula" theory which Nagler does not really defend as counter-distinct from a more typically generative view that would attribute to the bard a basic ("unmarked") form of a given formula from which the bard can derive surface alternants or variants by various rules.¹⁷

Nagler's formulation is mentalistic, for it incorporates psychological sets¹⁸ involving perception as well as structurally identifiable formal and semantic properties, e.g.:¹⁹

ἀμῶήλυθε θηλυς ἀὔτη(*Odyssey* 6.122)

"a womanly cry rang about"

ἀμῶήλυθεν ἥδυς ἀὔτμή(*Odyssey* 12.369)

"the sweet fragrance was wafted about"

Of special significance here is the phrasal rhyme a-é-u-e/e-u/a-u-e, but this is a part of language and mind, not of formulaic composition per se, as Parry had already noted.²⁰ It is an important lesson on the creative rôle of language and mind in the generation of new formulas, but that does not, in itself, make the above phrases members of the same formula. It was long ago noted that words fall into natural classes, whether phonologically, morphologically, or semantically related, giving rise to analogical creations.²¹ There is nothing surprising about the fact that poets exploit

¹⁶Nagler, "Generative View," pp. 285-286.

¹⁷"Basic" and "derived" are being used here solely in terms of a generative grammar; in no way is this related to the traditional idea of "norm" vs. "variant" in statistical discussions. There are (at least) two types of derived phrases. The various manifestations of a formula are derived from given lexical items by grammatical processes. On the other hand, formulaic phrases are generated from a pre-existing formula by means of lexical substitution.

¹⁸Nagler, *Spontaneity*, pp. 8-9.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 1-3.

²⁰Parry, *L'Épithète traditionnelle*, pp. 90-91.

²¹See, for example, Hermann Paul, *Prinzipien der Sprachgeschichte*, 2nd ed. (Halle: Niemeyer, 1886), sections 75-84.

these structural properties of the natural language.²²

It is well known that words are stored in the mind not only by phonological shape but also by metrical and syllabic structure, and by semantic class. But Nagler evidently wants to go farther with relationships like the following:²³

<i>πίονι δῆμω</i>	
(9x)	τίετο δῆμω(6x)
"in the rich	
land"	"he was esteemed among the folk"
<i>πίονι δῆμῳ</i> (<i>Odyssey</i> 17.241)	
"in rich fat"	

(ἀλλοδα)πῶ ἐνὶ δῆμῳ(*Iliad* 19.324)
 "in an alien land"

The implications of this next step are not to be taken casually. First, it is clear that *-πῶ ἐνὶ δῆμῳ* is an echo of *πίονι δῆμῳ*, not of *πίονι δῆμῳ*, a fact which Nagler has no way of capturing.²⁴ Second, this step demands the assumption that not only words but "formula families" are in the poet's grammar. But where? Evidently not in the lexicon, since Nagler specifically asserts that these formula families are pre-verbal Gestalts, i.e., formless representations. But how can they be formless if the formula family requires (in one variant) a word *δημο-* and the structure /pV(y)VnV/ (where V stands for vowel) before it?

The notion of a preverbal Gestalt raises further questions. What is a formless representation of a formula family? Is that not a contradiction? If all formula families are formless at an abstract level, how is one family distinguished from another? A semantic representation is ruled out since in Nagler's system the members of a family may or may not have anything in common semantically. Similarly, an abstract phonological structure is

²²Cf. Parry, *L'Épithète traditionnelle*, pp. 85-87.

²³Nagler, "Generative View," pp. 276-278; *Spontaneity*, p. 8.

²⁴Cf. Wayne B. Ingalls, "Another Dimension of the Homeric Formula," *Phoenix*, 26 (1972), 111-122.

excluded because (1) the phonological structure is not always the same, and (2) a formless representation cannot have a phonological structure.

It makes eminently better sense to speak about different kinds of formula families. One kind is "preverba" (semantic), e.g., Homeric *θάνατον/θόνον καὶ κῆρα μέλαιναν* "death and black fate," *Roland trenchet la teste*²⁵ "he cuts off the head (*teste*)," *i ad le chef trenchet* 1551b "he has cut off the head (*chef*)," etc.; another kind of formula family is phonological, e.g., *πίον- δημο-*. Then *(ἄλλοδα)ΠΩ ΕΝΙ ΔΗΜΩ* is more obviously a phonic echo of a given formula which is phonologically defined. Nagler discusses such "associations,"²⁵ but it is unclear why he muddles formula-theory with these mentalistic processes.

Nagler criticizes Hainsworth for suggesting that the poet thinks of a formula "in its most familiar form, and this form we may call the primary shape of the formula."²⁶ This is easier to translate into a generative model (which Nagler's merely pretends to be) than Nagler's Gestalt, for there is no "fallacy of 'norm' vs. 'variant,'"²⁷ but merely a natural account of the linguistic facts by reference to the notions of "basic" / "derived" and "unmarked" / "marked."

Part of the problem in discussing Nagler's theory is its linguistic vagueness. He inconsistently wavers between a "generative" approach (which is really taxonomic because all information is stored and nothing is in fact generated), a Gestalt theory, and Indie *sphota* doctrine, desiring (but failing) to combine these three theories into one all-encompassing model of textual analysis. Reams of recent linguistic work on phonology, discourse, metaphor, and semantics are unfortunately ignored by Nagler, as are the many structural models of textual criticism.²⁸ These omissions and confusions make it difficult to criticize the theory which is already

²⁵E.g., Nagler, *Spontaneity*, p. 21.

²⁶The quotation is from J. B. Hainsworth, *The Flexibility of the Homeric Formula* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), p. 61. Nagler voices his criticism in *Spontaneity*, p. 18.

²⁷Nagler, *Spontaneity*, pp. 24-26.

²⁸See Robert E. Scholes, *Structuralism in Literature: An Introduction* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974); Philip Pettit, *The Concept of Structuralism: A Critical Analysis* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1975); Robert-Alain de Beaugrande and Wolfgang Ulrich Dressler, *Introduction to Text Linguistics* (London: Longman, 1980).

vacuous on the grounds that it is impossible to test it: since everything or nothing can be a formula or "formulaic," there is in fact no way to identify a formula.²⁹

That the distinction between "formula" and "formulaic" cannot be captured by Nagler's theory raises a problem, for this distinction has been claimed to be crucial in several respects. According to Lord, imitators differ from actual bards in the South Slavic tradition in that the former use fewer straight formulas.³⁰ In a similar vein, Alison Goddard Elliott suggests that writing poets may prefer formulaic phrases to straight formulas because the formulaic phrases (or "syntactic formulas") allow a greater variety in the diction.³¹ Furthermore, Dorothea Wender's argument that formulaic oral poetry is sometimes less formulaic than written literature, based on the "evidence" of Kipling's *The Elephant's Child*, is hardly compelling since literature aimed at children constitutes a formulaic genre by itself for reasons that are obviously quite different from those that motivate formulas in a tradition of oral improvisation-composition.³²

A revision of the definition of the formula less extreme than Nagler's has been proposed by J. B. Hainsworth, who takes exception to Parry's definition because it relies on or implies criteria of use such as position in the line and metrical shape, grammatical relations, and meaning.³³ To circumvent these objectionable features, Hainsworth defines a formula as a

²⁹Cf. Joseph A. Russo, "Is 'Oral' or 'Aural' Composition the Cause of Homer's Formulaic Style?" in *Oral Literature and the Formula*, ed. Benjamin A. Stolz and Richard S. Shannon (Ann Arbor: The Center for the Coordination of Ancient and Modern Studies, The University of Michigan, 1976), p. 34; and "How, and What Does Homer Communicate? The Medium and Message of Homeric Verse," *The Classical Journal*, 71 (1976), p. 291, n. 7.

³⁰Albert B. Lord, "Homer as Oral Poet," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, 72 (1967), pp. 18-24.

³¹Alison Goddard Elliott, "The *Vie de Saint Alexis*: Oral versus Written Style," paper presented at the Eighth International Congress of the Société Rencesvals, Pamplona, August 1978, and to appear in the *Actes* of that congress.

³²Dorothea Wender, "Homer, Avdo Mededovic, and *Elephant's Child*," *American Journal of Philology*, 98 (1977), 327-347. For further criticism of Wender, see D. Gary Miller, "Improvisation, Typology, Culture, and 'The New Orthodoxy'" (forthcoming), and D. Gary Miller and Marjorie Windelberg, "A Linguistic Analysis of Formulaic Composition" (forthcoming).

³³Hainsworth, *Flexibility*, pp. 34-36.

"repeated word-group."³⁴ One advantage of Hainsworth's definition is that a greater degree of flexibility, both metrical and grammatical, is allowed in the formula. According to Hainsworth, "in the act of improvisation, what the poet needs, it seems evident, is not many formulae of the same shapes for different things but many formulae of different shapes for the same thing, the thing which at the moment he wishes to mention."³⁵ By Hainsworth's definition the phrases *παρα νηυσί θοησιν* "beside the swift ships" and *μάχην ἐμάχοντο/ἐμάχοντο μάχην* fought a battle" in the lines given below are counted as formulas, but would be excluded by Parry's definition:

- II. 15.673 ἦ δ' ὅσσοι παρα νηυσί μάχην ἐμάχοντο θοησιν "and likewise all those who fought a battle beside the swift ships"
 Od. 9.54 στησάμενοι δ' ἐμάχοντο μάχην παρα νηυσί θοησι "setting their battle in array, they fought beside the swift ships"

Yet there are problems with Hainsworth's definition. For example, it does not adequately account for suppletive paradigms (whose allomorphs may or may not recur) that fit the same metrical slot, e.g., "fatherland":³⁶

Nom. <i>πατρίς ἄρουρα</i>	}	all scan	— υυ — υ
Acc. <i>πατρίδα γαίαν</i>			
Gen. <i>πατρίδος αἴης</i>			
Dat. <i>πατρίδι γαίῃ</i>			

Also excluded are semantically equivalent (but metrically different) phrases such *-as θάνατον/θόνον καί κῆρα μέλαιναν* "death and black fate" or from Old French, 48/58: *Asez est melz/mielz qu'il i perdent les chefs/ testes* "it is much better that they lose their heads there. "

Because Hainsworth defines a formula as a "repeated word-group," he can admit as formulas random sequences of words not joined in syntactical relation, e.g., from Homer, 122x *αυταρ ἐγώ* "but I," 139x *αυταρ ὁ*. "but

³⁴Hainsworth, *Flexibility*, p. 35.

³⁵J. B. Hainsworth, "Structure and Content in Epic Formulae: The Questions of the Unique Expression," *Classical Quarterly*, N.S. 14 (1964), p. 161.

³⁶Cf. Kurt Witte, "Zur homerischen Sprache VII: Zur Flexion homerischer Formeln," *Glotta*, 3(1912), pp. 110-117.

he," etc.³⁷ It is in this respect that Hainsworth's definition differs most from the one proposed by Paul Kiparsky.³⁸ Kiparsky likens formulas of oral poetry to the "bound phrases" (or idioms) of everyday language. Kiparsky classifies bound phrases into two major types:

1. Syntactically fixed phrases can be either lexically constant (e.g., *knight errant*) or undergo lexical substitution (e.g., *day in and day out*, *week in and week out*, etc.). Because their internal structure is syntactically deviant, these phrases are listed in the lexicon as "ready-made units" that have phonological and semantic representations and a syntactic classification.³⁹ Thus fixed phrases exhibit non-compositional semantics and cannot undergo transformations (e.g. *knight errant* cannot be transformed into **this knight is as errant as that one*).

2. Syntactically flexible phrases such as *make headway* are subject to transformations (e.g., *he made considerable headway* or *although headway was made*) and the individual elements of such phrases are found in the lexicon "listed separately and provided with contextual restrictions that specify their possible phrase-mates."⁴⁰

Kiparsky concludes that "the proposed analysis sets limits on the syntactic form of both fixed and flexible phrases. It requires that both should be constituents, that is, expressions which are members of one of the following syntactic categories: Sentence, Noun Phrase, Verb Phrase, Adjective Phrase, Prepositional Phrase, in addition to the lexical categories Noun, Verb, etc."⁴¹ Therefore, the elements of a flexible phrase or formula are grammatically related as sister constituents of a single node (in transformational -generative terms).

Furthermore, Kiparsky's model "allows for the inflection, separation, and modification of formulas without singling out one form as the proto-

³⁷Parry, *L'Épithète traditionnelle*, pp. 23-24. Hainsworth, *Flexibility*, p. 36.

³⁸Paul Kiparsky, "Oral Poetry: Some Linguistic and Typological Considerations," in *Oral Literature and the Formula*, ed. Benjamin A. Stolz and Richard S. Shannon (see n. 29, above), pp. 73-106, with a response by Calvert Watkins, pp. 107-111.

³⁹Kiparsky, p. 77.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, p. 77.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, p. 80.

type and postulating analogical processes to generate the others'.⁴² Finally, "no metrical criteria are made part of its definition. This allows for phonologically induced metrical variation in fixed formulas and for both phonologically and syntactically induced metrical variation in flexible formulas."⁴³

One weakness of Kiparsky's approach is that there is an intuitive difference between bound phrases like "addled eggs" and formulas. Formulas are not merely bound phrases inserted into a poetic context; indeed, they usually are not idiomatic. Moreover, as Calver Watkins observed in a commentary on Kiparsky's article, fixed formulas, unlike fixed idioms, are not syntactically deviant.⁴⁴

Some of the assumptions underlying Kiparsky's model relate to several controversial theoretical issues. For example, because Kiparsky's definition is formal, his theory does not consider the function of formulas. The problem of the formal vs. functional aspects of formulas goes back to Parry, who saw that formulas were used as an aid in composition, yet defined the formula by means of its formal characteristics.

Repetition, for instance, is a striking feature of formulas which has figured in many of the definitions proposed. Hainsworth's definition of a formula as a "repeated word-group" is intended as a heuristic.⁴⁵ For Parry, the criterion of repetition was valuable while he was investigating the traditional epithets, but he also recognized that unique phrases can be patterned on a formula, constituting a formula-system. Attempts to bring unique phrases into consideration have been strongly criticized by H. L. Rogers as "subjective and intuitive."⁴⁶ However, if one relies solely on the

⁴²Kiparsky, p. 85.

⁴³Ibid., p. 87.

⁴⁴Watkins's response to Kiparsky, p. 108.

⁴⁵Hainsworth: personal communication. Although we will be criticizing this kind of definition, we recognize its value in statistical studies of the type done by Joseph J. Duggan. *The Song of Roland: Formulaic Style and Poetic Craft* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973); for a clear defense of the usefulness of a definition based on repetition, see Elliott (n. 31 above). Obviously, there is no other way of recognizing a formula in a dead language save by its repeated character.

⁴⁶H. L. Rogers, "The Crypto-psychological Character of the Oral Formula," *English Studies*, 47 (1966), p. 93.

regularities of the text to determine what is a formula, one will exclude unique phrases which could have been formulas for the poet and his audience. For instance, the phrase *puint le ceval* "he spurs the horse" occurs only once in the *Chanson de Roland*, in line 3547, yet it is obviously related to the regular formula *le cheval brochet* "he spurs the horse" 8x by lexical substitution. The suspicion that *puint le ceval* is an Old French formula is confirmed by its regular use in other epics.⁴⁷

The process of lexical substitution to create formulaic phrases has generally been an embarrassment to formulaic theory: Parry grafted it onto his model as a secondary feature; Hainsworth recognizes the process but cannot incorporate it into his model.⁴⁸ Kiparsky discusses lexical substitution in fixed phrases and restricts the substitution to members of a semantic class.⁴⁹ He does not, however, deal with lexical substitution in flexible phrases, although it does occur, for example, at the end of the phrases cited below, which are expansions of *Roland*, v. 3363, *Tute l'enseigne li ad enz el cors mise* "the whole banner he has stuck into his body":

1621/3427 El cors li met tute l'enseigne bloie/jalne "into his body he sticks the whole blue/yellow banner"

In the above example, the words substituted are color terms. However, to restrict the substitution to members of a semantic class would be too strong a claim. Rather, it seems that the poet could also draw upon the semantic features of a constant element in a formula, as in the following example, also from the *Roland*:

Carles /li reis (4x)/li magnes (8x)/li veil (2x)/
"Charles /the king/the great/the old/ "

⁴⁷See Jean Rychner, *La Chanson de geste: Essai sur l'art épique des jongleurs* (Genève: Droz, 1955).

⁴⁸Hainsworth, *Flexibility*, pp. 10-11.

⁴⁹Kiparsky, p. 76.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, p. 78.

Kiparsky suggested in his article that verbs cannot be substituted.⁵⁰ This position reflects Kiparsky's reliance on a transformational-generative theory of grammar in which the verb is the fixed starting-point for co-occurrence restrictions within the sentence.⁵¹ However, the claim that verbs or verb phrases cannot be variable cannot be maintained in light of data from the *Roland*, e.g., *e l'osberc li derumpt* (3x) "and the hauberk tears," *e l'osberc li desmailet* (v. 1270b), "and the hauberk breaks its mail on him" *e l'osberc li descloit* (v. 1199b), "and the hauberk breaks open on him"; *l'osberc li descumfist* "the hauberk came undone."

These verses show substitution of the verb at the end of the line to accompany changes in the assonance of the *laisses*, while in the verses cited below, the verb used changes according to the demands of assonance (e.g., *portereiz* / *ad livrées*) and syllable count (e.g., *aport* is disyllabic while *présentent* is trisyllabic; *livrent* or *portent* would not have worked in 2768 and *presentereiz* would have been too long for 2752);

De Sarrauce ci vos *aport* les clefs (v. 677) De Sarrauce les clefs li
portereiz (v. 2752) De Sarrauce les clefs li *ad livrées* (v. 2762) De
Sarrauce li *présentent* les clefs (v. 2768)

Note that the substituted elements are not necessarily the same part of speech, but they perform the same function, e.g., *Roland*, v. 1225 *des oriez esperuns* "with golden spurs" beside v. 1944, *des esperuns a or* "with spurs of gold"; or v. 1055, *sempres ferrai de Durendal granz colps* "quickly will I strike great blows with Durendal" beside v. 1065, *Einz i ferrai de Durendal asez* "ere will I strike much with Durendal," where the substitution is conditioned by the different assonances of two *laisses similaires*. Compare the comments on semantically-based formula families above.

The issue of lexical substitution in Formulas also has a dynamic aspect. Lexical variation in formulas can arise by extension of the co-occurrence restrictions and, therefore, some flexible phrases may have ari-

⁵¹See Noam Chomsky, *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The M. I. T. Press, 1965), Section 2.3.4 and Ray S. Jackendoff, *Semantic Interpretation in Generative Grammar* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The M. I. T. Press, 1972), p. 37.

sen from fixed formulas, as both Kiparsky and Hoekstra have postulated.⁵² For instance, in the *Roland*, the formula expressing the idea "on the green grass" occurs 14x in the shape *sur l'erbe verte* and twice in other configurations (v. 2573a *sur la verte herbe* and v. 1612b *desur le herbe verte*). The phrase 1334b *sur l'erbe drue* "on the thick grass" occurs once, but under highly marked conditions: it is at the end of a line (an atypical locus for a formula of its length), where it is subject to assonance. It is likely that the poet had a preferred manifestation of a formula to express "on the grass," i.e., using *erbe* with the adjective *verte* and that *sur l'erbe drue* was created as a nonce form. Similar is the well-known example of Old English *beo-den maere* "fabulous lord" (3x for alliterative purposes) beside the normal *maere eoden* (12x).

Phrases such as *sur l'erbe drue* have often been considered secondarily derived from the pattern of a regular formula by a process of analogy or pattern substitution.⁵³ We maintain that analogical processes are valid, in spite of the objections to analogical creation raised by Rogers and Nagler, whose formless Gestalt specifically precludes the establishment of base forms and derived alternants. Admittedly, there are many sets of phrases in which it is no longer possible to designate one phrase as basic, e.g., *Carles li reis / li magnes / li velz* (cf. above) or, as Kiparsky points out in the case of the phrases *πάθεν ἄλγεα* and *πάθ' ἄλγεα* "he suffered woes," *ἄλγεα πάσχει* "he suffers woes," *ἄλγεα πάσχων* "suffering woes," and *ἀλγ' ἐπάσχον* "they suffered woes," "What is essential . . . is only the abstract bond between *algos* and *path-*. It is this bond which constitutes the formula."⁵⁴ Rogers and Nagler miss the point of the analogical processes that enable the poet to derive new formulas from a (pre-)existing one. The way in which a given form or formula is derived in a synchronic grammar provides the information as to whether a formula alternant is "marked" or "unmarked."⁵⁵

⁵²Kiparsky, p. 85. Arie Hoekstra, *Homeric Modifications of Formulaic Proto-types: Studies in the Development of Greek Epic Diction*, Verb. Nederl. Akad. van Wet., Afd. Letterkunde 71, 1 (Amsterdam, 1965).

⁵³Parry, "Studies in the Epic Technique."

⁵⁴Kiparsky, p. 86.

⁵⁵Cf. our comments elsewhere in this paper; for additional examples and discussion, see D. Gary Miller, "Language Change and Poetic Options," *Language*, 53 (1977), 21-38, as well as Miller, *Homer*.

The process of derivation can occur on various linguistic levels of representation. Under the label of lexical substitution, we have examined semantically related phrases. Phrases can also be derived or associated at the phonological level of representation. We have already discussed the phonological relationship between *πίονι δῆμω* "in the rich land" and *ἀλλοδαπῶ ἐνὶ δῆμω* "in a foreign land." Kiparsky does not distinguish this kind of echo from the example of phonological echo which he cites (C below), in which both the surface structure and the phonological structure play a rôle. In such cases, the lexical repetition sets up psychological expectations and the substitution is based on a perceptual-strategy interpretation of the surface sentence. Kiparsky also misunderstands the nature of the substitution systems, as demonstrated by the fact that he limits the words to be substituted to the same semantic class. That this is wrong is clear from the following examples of "echo" of a surface structure, where various kinds of information (phonology, morphology, syntax, perception, and psychological expectations) play a rôle:

- A. Il. 9.402 *Ἴλιον ἔκτισθαι*, *εὐ ναιόμενον πολίεθρον*,
 "that (they say) the well-inhabited citadel Ilios possessed"
- Il. 2.133 *Ἴλιον ἐκπέρσαι* *εὐ ναιόμενον πολίεθρον*
 "to sack the well-inhabited citadel of Ilios"
- B. *ἐπὶ νηυσὶν Ἀχαιῶν*
 (9x verse-final) "by the ships of the Achaeans"
- Il. 10.306 *θοῆς ἐπὶ νηυσὶν Ἀχαιῶν*
 "by the swift ships of the Achaeans"
- Il. 18.259 *θοῆς ἐπὶ νηυσὶν ἰάνων*
 "spending the night by the swift ships"
- C. Il. 1.48 *ἔ'ζετ' ἐ'πειτ' ἀπάνευθε νειῶν*
 "he sat down then apart from the ships"
- Od. 6.236 *ἔ'ζετ' ἐ'πειτ' ἀπάνευθε κίων*
 "he sat down then apart (after) going away"

Kiparsky has confused this kind of complex substitution with true phonological echoes, which, by contrast, appeal to the phonological representation alone without reference to syntactic or morphological information. Consider again the set consisting of (1) *πίονι δῆμω*, (2) *πίονι δῆμῳ*, and (3) *(ἀλλοδα)πῶν ἐνὶ δῆμω*, where (2) is a pun or calembour on (1) and (3) is a phonological echo.

Kiparsky is, nevertheless, evidently right in discarding metrical localization as a part of the definition of the formula. Localization is a separate dimension. Packard and Gates have shown that formulas (as repeated word-groups) are independent of localization, for Homer has less localization than Quintus Smyrnaeus or Callimachus but a higher proportion of formulas.⁵⁶ Ingalls argues that the tendency for words to localize is contingent upon (1) the "colometric" structure of the verse-line, and (2) pre-existing formular models.⁵⁷ Historically, of course, the opposite was to some extent true. Formulas created the metrical units or "cola"⁵⁸ which in turn became the "frames" within which composers had to operate⁵⁹—hence the relationship between formulas and cola observed already by Parry.⁶⁰

Russo extends the work of O'Neill on word position and of Porter on cola fillers to demonstrate localization of grammatical types, e.g., middle participles in verse-initial position (οὐλομένην "destructive," μαρνάμενοι "battling," etc.) or, in the last two feet of the line, the sequences Adjective-Noun (e.g., ἀγλαόν υἱόν "famous son," ἀγριον ἄνδρα "savage man") or Noun-Adjective (e.g., ὄρκια πιστά "trustworthy oaths," τεύχεα καλά "fine armour").⁶¹ Grammatical patterning as formulas was already

⁵⁶David Packard, "Metrical and Grammatical Patterns in the Greek Hexameter," in *The Computer in Literary and Linguistic Studies*, Proceedings of the Third International Symposium on the Use of the Computer in Linguistic and Literary Research, ed. Alan Jones and R. F. Churchhouse (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1976), pp. 85-91, and H. Phelps Gates, "Methods for Measuring Word-localization in Greek Hexameter," Colloquium on Homeric Language and Metrics, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 3 March 1976.

⁵⁷Wayne B. Ingalls, "The Analogical Formula in Homer," *Transactions of the American Philological Association*, 106 (1976), 211-226.

⁵⁸Gregory Nagy, *Comparative Studies in Greek and Indic Meter*, Harvard Studies in Comparative Literature, 33 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1974), pp. 140-149, and "Formula and Meter," in *Oral Literature and the Formula* (see above, n. 29), pp. 259-260.

⁵⁹Cf. Russo, "How, and What," pp. 294-295.

⁶⁰Parry, *Les Formules*.

⁶¹Joseph A. Russo, "A Closer Look at Homeric Formulas," *Transactions of the American Philological Association*, 94 (1963), 235-247; Eugene G. O'Neill, "The Localization of Metrical Word-types in the Greek Hexameter," *Yale Classical Studies*, 8 (1942), 102-176; and H. N. Porter, "The Early Greek Hexameter," *Yale Classical Studies*, 12 (1951), 3-63. For the examples, cf. Joseph A. Russo, "The Structural Formula in Homeric Verse," *Yale Classical*

criticized by Minton, who recognizes the valuable contribution but questions the relevance to formula theory.⁶² Like Nagler's formless Gestalts, any repeated and localized grammatical units (e.g., all possessive adjectives) could be a formula, which renders the notion vacuous.

Since localization is independent of the formula, it obviously cannot be part of the definition of the formula. Nothing should be identified as a formula whose sole "formulaic" characteristic is its localization. Therefore, "one-word formulas" are impossible since the only thing that could make a single word "formulaic" is repetition in a given metrical slot.

Logical as this is, it nevertheless misses the point that single words tend to localize just as bound phrases tend to localize and functionally both are aids in improvisation-composition. It is a priori to be expected that the bulk of elements utilized for improvisation-composition will be selected from ordinary syntactic combinations of the natural language. From this it follows that one can expect large numbers of Noun Phrases and Verb Phrases (sister constituents), but also single lexical nodes such as Noun or Verb, when these are directly dominated by an NP or VP, respectively. This excludes articles or possessive adjectives, for instance, which must be a sister to a Noun. Recognition of single nodes accounts for the "one-word formulas" that function just like the NP or VP sister constituents that dominate them. Their metrical localization follows from the fact that bards learn the traditional diction in the context of song and make new lines on the model of their position in pre-existing cola or lines. It is, in short, a function of performance.

Just as Kiparsky's definition of the formula as a "bound phrase" excludes single words from formulaic status, so does it preclude the possibility that other combinations of words could be formulas. For example, the sequences *αὐτὰρ ὁ* . . . "but he (verb)," *αὐτὰρ ἐγώ* . . . "but I," etc. do not form a whole syntactic unit dominated by a node, yet, as Parry and Hainsworth have pointed out, these phrases behave like the more normal formulas characterized by a syntactic relation.⁶³ As Hainsworth has

Studies, 20(1966), pp. 236-238, and Russo, "'Oral' or 'Aural,'" p. 36.

⁶²William W. Minton, "The Fallacy of the Structural Formula," *Transactions of the American Philological Association*, 96 (1965), pp. 243-244.

⁶³Parry, *L'Épithète traditionnelle*, pp. 23-24 and "Studies in the Epic Technique," pp. 85-87; Hainsworth, *Flexibility*, p. 36.

astutely noticed, it is the "degree of mutual expectancy" between the words, and not the syntactic status of the sequence, that is most important.⁶⁴ Thus, *αὐτὰρ ὁ* is a formula because *αὐτὰρ*, which belongs not to the Ionic-Attic dialect but to Mycenaean and Arcado-Cyprian,⁶⁵ is poetic and the combination is therefore (flexibly) bound (in Kiparsky's sense of co-occurrence restrictions). Similarly, the Old French phrase *e si* "and thus," repeated 7x in the position after the caesura in the *Roland*, as a collocation fulfills the same function as that of a formula: it aids the poet in the process of improvisation-composition. Thus a prefabricated collocation or individual word is not a formula but may be used formulaically by virtue of localization.

Another phrase not admitted as a formula under Kiparsky's definition of the formula as a (lexically) bound phrase would be the Old French phrase *li emperere(s)* "the emperor" (53x in the first hemistich of the *Roland*). Although there are no co-occurrence restrictions between *li* and *emperere* as lexical items, the phrase is traditional and bound because of its phonological properties, specifically, the hiatus between the two words: the natural language contained an obligatory rule of elision which, in the poetic language, was blocked under certain metrical conditions.⁶⁶

In conclusion, a theory of improvisation-composition, required by the poetic genre, must recognize the tendency of bards to generate slot and colon fillers as aids in improvisation-composition, selected both from the natural language and the language of poetry. The co-occurrence bonds are very complex since various poetic words and collocations interact with each other and with those of the natural language, having been drawn from mental associations. Not only can ordinary phrases be bound (if Kiparsky's analysis is correct), but also words and phrases in the language of poetry may be bound in varying degrees to one another. There is a "degree of mutual expectancy" (to use Hainsworth's terms) not only within phrases, but across phrases, on the level of the sentence or verse line, as suggested by Parry and Hainsworth for Homer.⁶⁷ The technique is

⁶⁴Hainsworth, *Flexibility*, p. 36.

⁶⁵See C. J. Ruijgh, *L'Élément archéen dans la langue épique* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1957), pp. 29-55.

⁶⁶Other examples of poetic rule blocking can be found in Miller, "Language Change" and in his *Homer*.

⁶⁷Parry, "Studies in the Epic Technique," p. 126, and Hainsworth, *Flexibility*, pp. 15-17

also found in the *Roland*: the verb phrase *mult ben i ferir* "to strike very well" is bound to subjects of several types, e.g., *Mult ben i fiert Oliver e Rollant* (v. 1413); *Mult ben i fiert Carlemagnes li reis* (v. 3543); *Mult ben i fierent Franceis e Arrabit* (v. 3481).

Thus the formula is a collocation of words which primarily occurs as sister constituents of a sentence. The elements of the collocation are bound together by co-occurrence expectancies that exhibit varying probabilities. The degree and type of repetition of formulas follow not from poetry per se, as Kiparsky assumes,⁶⁸ but from the function of the genre.⁶⁹ The "aura!" function of formulas suggested by Russo is a phonic property which is not essential to the primary function, aid in improvisation-composition.⁷⁰ This primary function is effected not only by formulas, but also by various other formal devices such as formulaic expressions and localized single words- The aids in composition are utilized by the poet both to express and to connect such higher level phenomena as motifs and themes.

Formulas, we feel, should be evaluated in terms of both their formal and functional features, as well as in terms of selection and content:

	Functional	Formal
A. Selection	Suitability to the poet's goal Appropriateness to Context	Syntax and Meter
B. Content	Informativeness Poetic Effects	Degree of Bonding Phonic Utility

Text Linguistics provides a good model by means of which the relationship between formulas and motifs can be elucidated. Text Linguistics is a theory of discourse analysis which draws upon behavioral studies, and

and p. 36.

⁶⁸Kiparsky, p. 83.

⁶⁹For the evidence from prose, see Bruce A. Rosenberg, "Oral Sermons and Oral Narrative," in *Folklore: Performance and Communication*, ed. Dan Ben-Amos and Kenneth S. Goldstein, *Approaches to Semiotics* 40 (The Hague: Mouton, 1975), pp. 75-101.

⁷⁰Russo, " 'Oral' or 'Aural.' " Also see Miller, *Homer*.

specifically upon Cognitive Science,⁷¹ Motifs correspond to what Text Linguistics calls the "Schema," i.e., a person's knowledge of how events are structured, sequenced, and combined. The elements of an event are Subschemas. Still more minute are Scripts, the instructions to the participants in an event for carrying out their rôles. Formulas may express the Script or even the Subschema directly.⁷² We use Zumthor's analysis of the *planctus* motif as an example.⁷³ The Subschemas are:

- I. Encounter with the body of the deceased. Scripts:
 - A. Vision of the prostrate body. Formula: *veit X (mort) geisir*
 - B. Discovery of the body. Formula: *truvat X*
 - C. Announcement of death. Formula: *morz est X*
- II. Announcement of the lament. Formula: *a regreter le prist*
- III. Address to the deceased. Formulas: *Ami(s)X, Bels cumpainz X, sire cumpaign, etc.*
- IV. Prayer to the deceased. Scripts:
 - A. Prayer for God's mercy. Formula: *de vos / tei ait Deus mercit*
 - B. Prayer for God to take the soul in paradise. Formula: *(Deus) - metet - anmes - en flurs - en pareis*
- V. Praise of the deceased. Scripts:
 - A. The hero is incomparable (expressed in various ways)
 - B. The survivor is diminished in stature or will suffer (varying expressions)
- VI. Signs of exterior grief. Scripts:
 - A. Crying (*N'en i ad cel ki durement ne plurt, plureit des oilz, cumencet a plurer, etc.*)
 - B. Pulling the beard or hair (*sa blanche barbe tiret, sa barbe blanche cumencet a detruire, tiret sa barbe*)
 - C. Fainting (*Carles se pasmet, se pasme(n)t X*)
- VII. Expression of interior grief. Scripts:

⁷¹Robert Alain de Beaugrande and Wolfgang Ulrich Dressler, *Introduction to Text Linguistics* (London: Longman, 1980).

⁷²Roger C. Schank and Robert P. Abelson, "Scripts, Plans, and Knowledge," in *Proceedings of the Fourth International Conference on Artificial Intelligence*, Tblisi, Georgia, U.S.S.R., 1975, and *Scripts, Plans, Goals, and Understanding* (Hillsdale, N. J.: Erlbaum, 1977).

⁷³See Paul Zumthor, "Étude typologique des *planctus* contenus dans la *Chanson de Roland*," in *La Technique Littéraire des chansons de geste* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1959), pp. 219-235.

- A. Crying out of pity (*de pitet durement plurt*)
- B. Having pity or grief (*aveir or prendre with pitét or doel*)

This is not merely a translation of new terminology from old, for Text Linguistics offers a more complete set of predictions about the structure of a text, much of which is supported by experimental findings.

In an oral tradition, a bard must be able to perform smoothly and efficiently. In the interest of efficiency, some formulas can be considered default or preferred formulas.⁷⁴ The defaults and preference hierarchies minimize the processing load, so that the poet can attend to planning ahead. However, a performance which is too efficient, that is, too dependent on a restricted set of formulas will be boring for the audience. In order to make the performance of interest through poetic effects, the poet may select a less-used variant or develop unique phrasing. The poet might also achieve variation through adding, deleting, collapsing, or embellishing the subschemas, scripts, or formulas. Variation may also result if the poet changes his goal in the story plan.

Finally, the phenomena of text transmission correlate well with experimental findings of research in Text Linguistics.⁷⁵ For example, information from a text is more comprehensible and more easily recalled if it matches the patterns of the knowledge about the world which we have stored. This supports several of the phenomena reported by Parry and Lord: Lord has discussed the poet's ability to perform a song he has just heard, through reproduction of story and motif rather than by memorization. The individual performances differ little in overall composition but have variation in lines, formulas, and wording.⁷⁶ The rationalizations, reorderings, and deletions found in epics result from the attempt of the singer to alter received text information so it will better make the patterns of stored schemas, while accidental or variable information (e.g., numbers) will suffer decay and become unrecoverable. Furthermore, different versions of a story may be the result of distinct elements of information becoming conflated or confused if they are closely associated in stored knowledge. Such changes are not perceived by the performer, and that

⁷⁴Beaugrande and Dressler, section 7.12.

⁷⁵Ibid., section 9.37.

⁷⁶Albert B. Lord, *The Singer of Tales* (see note 7 above) passim.

provides a solution to Lord's dilemma that oral poets make all kinds of changes and adaptations in acquiring a song from another poet and yet seem to be unaware of making anything but "minor improvements."⁷⁷

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⁷⁷Ibid., pp. 26-29.