

## HOMER AND IRISH HEROIC NARRATIVE

THE discoveries and work of Parry and Lord have turned the old battleground of the Homeric Question and its many side issues into a scene of fruitful tillage if not of complete harmony. The exploration in Yugoslav epic songs of the nature of oral narrative, with its identification of the moment of reciting and the moment of composing, has met with wide approval in its application to the Homeric poems. Some scholars, however, feel that the difference in literary merit between the Homeric poems and the Yugoslav epic songs, fine as many of these are, is still too great to allow us to apply to Homer without reserve the conclusions which may be valid for the Yugoslav tradition.

In the following preliminary essay an attempt is made to import some earth<sup>1</sup> from a neighbouring field into the Parry–Lord compound. This field, comparatively unworked in respect of the studies we are concerned with, is a prose field, and it is true that the Parry–Lord premiss of seeking a living and working model of the Homeric poet-bard seemed to fence out prose. However, if the various features of oral composition are found also in prose, the latter cannot rightly be excluded. It means that both metrical and prose epics together comprise the larger field of storytelling.

To give a brief example of the relevance of prose material, Irish narrative literature (the field in which we propose to turn over a few sods) in the well-defined heroic tales known as Finn tales exhibits a highly developed epithet structure closely analogous to that of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. Heroes, for instance, have personal epithets which are closely associated with their names. If epithets are a feature of heroic storytelling it seems clear that they exist in Homer as such a feature. It follows that they do not exist to ‘pad out’<sup>2</sup> the line. Metre does not account for the *existence* of epithets, but it affects their development into a system. The exact reverse is also likely to be true: epithets, if they have an existence *a priori* or *per se*, must affect the development of a heroic metre. Where there is no metre, as in prose epic, the epithet system will develop differently. In Irish tales alliteration is a formative principle and this leads to the use of two or more epithets together.

Epithets in fact are poorly represented in the Yugoslav tradition. In *The Singer of Tales*, p. 34, Lord says epithets are not so frequent in the tradition ‘because the shortness of the line does not present a need for them that cannot be fulfilled by title or patronymic. They come into usage either when there is

<sup>1</sup> ‘Import some earth’ as distinct from throwing some dirt! Nobody can properly withhold admiration from the far-sighted method and meticulous care of Parry and Lord in recording the material and its background, nor from its editing by Lord in *Serbo-Croatian Heroic Songs*, Harvard U.P. (in progress). The whole work will remain as a model for such studies and an invaluable source for all students of oral literature.

<sup>2</sup> It is no doubt true to say that epithets ‘pad out’ the line in Latin epic. The change from the shorter Saturnian to dactylic hexameter initiated by Ennius led to the rapid

growth of epithets. Many of these are translations of Homeric epithets and the further development of epithet in Latin epic is not relevant to oral epic. The distinction between ‘written’ and ‘oral’ epic lies in the pressure which instant composition produces. This pressure causes a resort to that economy which the tradition prescribes. In instant composition large-scale originality is neither possible nor, in its own milieu, acceptable. The role of the audience as conservers of fixity and controllers of innovation has not been sufficiently stressed. The term aural is as valid as oral for non-written literature.

no title or because the make-up of the line does not allow a long patronymic, or when the singer wishes to express the actor in a whole line, frequently in a vocative, as in *Sultan Selim, od svijeta sunce*, "O Sultan Selim, light (sun) of the world".<sup>1</sup>

The words 'does not present a need' seem to imply that in a longer line the epithet's function is to complete the metre. In a later passage, speaking of necessary enjambement he says: 'The length of the hexameter is one of the causes of the discrepancy between the two poetries. It is long enough to allow for the expression of a complete idea within its limits, and on occasion it is too long. Then a new idea is started before the end of the line. But since there is not enough space before the end to complete the idea it must be continued in the next line. This accounts for systems of formulas that have been evolved to fill the space from the bucolic diaeresis to the end of the line, with complementary systems to take care of the run-over words in the following line.' (*S.T.*, p. 145.)

It is difficult to see why Greek epic should have devised this long line if it includes awkward space that has to be filled. Apart from that, epithets in Homer are all-pervasive, describing 'shoes—and ships—and sealing-wax—cabbages—and kings', and where agents are concerned, whether men or women, gods or goddesses, the patronymic or title is merely one of the possible epithets which may be applied. We intend to argue<sup>1</sup> that the hexameter's development was affected by the existence of epithets as a feature of heroic storytelling and that epithets are consequently not a convenient device of metrical fulfilment. The rich epithet structure of Irish prose tales suggests this, and the formulaic character of the narratives has a bearing on Homeric studies.

For the purpose of comparison with Homer we confine our attention on the Irish side firstly to a few comparatively late Finn tales.<sup>2</sup> These tales as printed

<sup>1</sup> See below, pp. 16 ff.

<sup>2</sup> The tales used here are quoted from the collection *Silva Gadelica*, edited with translation by Standish O'Grady (Williams and Norgate, 1892). These tales are romantic rather than heroic in concept but as far as storytelling is concerned the distinction is of little importance (see Lord, *S.T.*, pp. 219–20). Of these tales one, *The narrow-striped Kern* (referred to as K) was composed, according to O'Grady's suggestion (p. xiii), soon after 1537 or earlier. *An Gilla Decair* (referred to as GD), *The Difficult Lad*, and *Bodach in Chóta Lachtina* (referred to as BCL), *The Churl with the Grey Coat*, may also be placed in the sixteenth century. Generally speaking, this might be regarded as the last century in which the composing of 'high class' or court tales (hereafter referred to as literary tales because they survive in written manuscripts) flourished. We include also two short tales from the same collection, *Bruiden Chéise Choraínn* (referred to as BCC), *The Magic Dwelling of Chéise Choraínn*, and *Bruiden bheg na hAlmaine* (referred to as BA), *The Little Fight at Allen*. We extend this

sixteenth-century core backwards by referring to *The Chase of Síd na mBan Finn* (referred to as SBF), in *Fianaigecht*, Royal Irish Academy, Todd Lecture Series, vol. xvi, ed. Kuno Meyer, 1910 (repr. 1937). This version of the tale, as Meyer points out (p. xxxi), is taken from a manuscript written in 1419; we extend forwards by referring to *Eachtra Lomnochtáin* (referred to as EL), *The Adventure of Lomnochtan*, a late Finn Tale, probably about 1700 (ed. Bergin and McNeill, Connradh na Gaedhíle, Dublin, no date; for English version see *Gaelic Journal*, nos. 94–105). Finally, to help in demonstrating the formulaic character of phrases quoted, we shall refer to *Agallamh na Senórach* (referred to as Ag.), *The Colloquy of the Ancients*, the longest of the pieces in *Silva Gadelica* (140 pp.). This is not itself a tale but a compendium of Irish place-lore in which Finn anecdotes are told to St. Patrick by two survivors of the Fiana. The piece dates from about 1200 and the many formulas in the language show that in dealing with heroic narrative matter a traditional language was already well developed. Our

must bear a fair resemblance to told versions. Various techniques of oral literature which they exhibit indicate their essential nature. It should be realized that the sources detailed below, which we shall use to demonstrate noun-epithet and other formulas, cover a range of about five hundred years, from c. 1200 to c. 1700.

We refer in the second place to a small selection of modern folktales<sup>1</sup> which belong to a living tradition and share some characteristic features both with the manuscript Finn tales and with Homer.

Oral technique differs from that of the writer. Similar situations call for the same descriptions and in the course of an oral tradition stories come to have repetitions and recurrences and a large formulaic element ranging from single words to quite long passages.<sup>2</sup> Formulas are not caused by metre. They are an essential part of the method of telling a heroic tale. The tale may be in prose or in verse but, if it is heroic, it will have formulas. In a prose tale, formulas, especially long or well-known formulas, are not fossils in the texture of the tale. The composer exercises considerable discretion over them, as we shall see. But he exercises even more discretion over the parts of his tale which are, so to speak, uncharted. He must traverse these parts as best he can, and never perhaps in the same way. But his thought proceeds in the mould and pattern of formulas. The less familiar uncharted parts make the greatest demands on his powers of composition, expression, and memory, and it is this very fact which causes him to interlard these parts with other set, traditional passages which please the audience by their repetitive and well-polished character, while enabling the teller to nurse his story along without undue effort. Formulas, fixed descriptions, commonly recurring themes are all in fact rest periods for both speaker and listener.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, the storyteller does not regard such traditional passages as unessential adornment (as a writer might see it). Such passages are like the stepping-stones across a river, which he can see before him and which mark the way ahead.

Let us now consider some formulaic elements in Irish tales with reference to Homeric counterparts. One need not delay over commencing and ending formulas. They are not of any great importance. Some sort of opening gambit is universal in storytelling, and even in everyday anecdotes people invariably use a simple opening formula. In the selection of Donegal folktales we have chosen, the formal beginnings are reduced to a minimum. In tales I, VII, and IX we have: 'Bhí sin ann agus is fada ó bhí . . .',—'There was once and it is a long time since . . .'<sup>4</sup> In the manuscript Finn tales we often find very long

eight pieces, therefore, abbreviated in the text of this article as Ag., SBF, K, BCC, BCL, BA, GD, EL, cover the period from 1200 to about 1700.

<sup>1</sup> *Sean-Sgéaltla Ó Thír Chonaill, Béaloideas*, vol. vii, No. 2, 1937, collected and written down in Donegal by Seán Ó hEochaidh. (*Béaloideas* is the Journal of the Folklore of Ireland Society, publ. by The Educational Company of Ireland, Dublin.)

<sup>2</sup> Parry's definition of formula specifies metrical conditions, and Lord (*S.T.*, p. 31) says 'any study of formula must . . . properly begin with a consideration of metrics and music'. These are no doubt proper defini-

tions since the writers are dealing with two poetic traditions; but metre has no essential connection with formulas, which I take to be identical sequences of words.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. J. H. Delargy, *The Gaelic Storyteller*; Sir John Rhys Memorial Lecture, British Academy, 1945, pp. 34-5.

<sup>4</sup> I deliberately omit consideration of more than one tale from the same speaker. For example, No. X also contains this opening formula, but it is told by the storyteller of No. I. It seems better to avoid such duplication so as to show clearly that these formulas are not personal to one speaker.

openings, sometimes including a list of the *dramatis personae*.<sup>1</sup> Homer and Hesiod commence with a formal address to the Muse. Homer's own description of bards at work—as, for example, when he shows us Demodocus preparing to tell the tale of the Wooden Horse<sup>2</sup>—makes it clear that such an appeal to Apollo or the Muse was the regular opening.

The endings of our Donegal tales are somewhat more formulaic than their beginnings. Tales I and IX say: 'They prepared a feast (var., wedding feast) which lasted for nine nights and nine days and the last night was better than the first night.'<sup>3</sup> This is a rigid formula. Another ending is more personal: 'Eileen and her husband had a long happy life; the last time I visited them in their castle they had a big family; but I suppose the green sod is growing on their graves before this.'<sup>4</sup> Another ending is: 'as long as a stream runs or grass grows'.<sup>5</sup> The manuscript Finn tales have very brief ending devices which vary little, saying in effect that 'that is the adventure of such and such up to that point'.<sup>6</sup> This expression may be a purely literary 'signing off'. It is somewhat remarkable that the Homeric poems have no formal endings.<sup>7</sup>

If we turn to more organic formulas in the body of a tale, it may seem to us at first sight that a storyteller has little control over elements which in fact are prefabricated, especially *long* formulas. But the situations which call for formulas, the aspects of life which, by convention, were described, are such that they do not in themselves affect the plot or structure of a tale. They form a sort of decorative embroidery and accordingly the artist has considerable control over them. He may introduce certain formulas or not, he may repeat them wholly or in part, or not at all.

An example from the first tale in the Donegal group will indicate the nature and control of a certain type of long formula. The formulas for sea journeys in

<sup>1</sup> See *Silva Gadelica*, *An Gilla Decair*, pp. 257–9. These are not formulas in the rigid Homeric sense. There are many passages in Irish tales which are better classified as *fixed descriptions*. These may contain short formulas and many identical 'concepts', but the wording, the number, and the ordering of such concepts, varies, and is deliberately varied.

<sup>2</sup> *Od.* 8. 499.

<sup>3</sup> '... gléasadh cuirm a mhair naoi n-oidhche agus naoi lá, agus b'fheárr an oidhche dheireannach nó an chéad oidhche.' *Béal*, vol. vii, 2, p. 205. We exclude two other uses of this formula in the collection because the same storyteller or his father is involved; but it may be found also in other collections, e.g. *Béal*, vol. vi, 2, p. 292.

<sup>4</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 224. Compare the tone of these endings with a typical ending quoted by Lord from a Yugoslav singer: 'The next day Meho and Anica were married. May they have many children. The following day there was a horse race. Finally the wedding guests dispersed' (Lord, *S.T.*, p. 234, App. I). Lord also gives an alternative ending from another singer of the same tale: 'I heard this song from the Turk Huso Čoravi. I have not heard from that day to this such a singer. There he is and there is his song. If

it is worthy then I too am pleased.' This sentiment is paralleled by a common Irish formula (not found in the collection we are dealing with) to the effect that 'that is *my* story and if there be a lie in it, let it be. It was not *I* who composed or invented it [the tale].' This well expresses the storyteller's peculiar position of both claiming and disclaiming authorship.

<sup>5</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 232.

<sup>6</sup> e.g., 'that that is the adventure of GD', or 'of BCL', or 'that that is the "Bruiden" of Chéis Chorainn', or 'of Allen up to that point'. See *Silva Gadelica*, pp. 275, 289, 310, 342.

<sup>7</sup> The last line of the *Iliad*—'Thus they held the funeral of Hector, tamer of horses'—does not seem like an end formula for the whole poem, effective though it is from a literary point of view. One scholastic tradition provides a continuation line. Continuation (in an oral milieu) may account for the lack of a formal end. For example, the Finn tale *Eachtra Lomnochtáin*, as printed by McNeill and Bergin, continues for 147 paragraphs, but the majority of manuscripts end the tale after paragraph 50 (and we do not follow the text beyond this point as a source of reference).

Irish tradition usually describe the sights or sounds experienced on the voyage: 'They raised their sails bulging and billowing to the top of the straight masts, with a following wind, so that there was nothing for them to hear but the wailing of seals, the sound of great monsters, the calling of eels, the screeching of seagulls; and they made neither sea stop nor long pause until they sailed up into a harbour on the east coast of Ireland.'<sup>1</sup>

Later in the tale the formula is repeated with the necessary contextual change of 'he' for 'they', a different destination, and one or two slight variations. A third time it is merely sketched in: 'He raised his sails as he had done before; and he made neither sea stop nor long pause until he reaches the court and castle of the King of Inis Tuile in the Western World.'<sup>2</sup>

One might expect, if one looks on formula as a fixed traditional unit, that such units would retain their shape throughout repetitions. Here, not only is the formula varied, it is half dismantled eventually, and the tools which operate to dismantle it are other formulas. 'Court and castle', 'the King of Inis Tuile', and 'the Western World', the new elements in the final version of the formula, are themselves conventional terms which occur constantly.<sup>3</sup>

It may be sufficient here to quote on the Homeric side, in Rieu's translation,<sup>4</sup> a similar voyage formula describing how Telemachus sets out:<sup>5</sup> 'Telemachus shouted to the crew to lay hands on the tackle and they leapt to his orders. They hauled up the fir mast, steepled it in its hollow box, made it fast with stays and hoisted the white sail with plaited oxhide ropes. Struck full by the wind, the sail swelled out, and a dark wave hissed loudly round her stem as the vessel gathered way and sped through the choppy sea, forging ahead on her course.'

As Parry's work showed, Homer's unit of composition is the line and part of line. It follows from this that long descriptions such as the passage just quoted can be more easily dismantled and the parts otherwise incorporated, than, say, in the Irish tales. For example, the last part of this formula, itself a formula of three lines, is used at *Il.* 1. 481-3: 'Struck full by the wind', etc. At *Il.* 1. 432-7

<sup>1</sup> Op. cit., p. 198. This formula also occurs in tale No. IX in the following form: 'They raised their sails bulging and billowing to the top of the straight masts; and to make a long story short,—a formula of curtailment which strikes at the very heart of the heroic storyteller!—'they made neither sea stop nor long pause until they reach the court and castle of the King of the Underlands.'

<sup>2</sup> Op. cit.: 'd'áirdigh sé a chuid seolta mar rinn sé aroimhe; agus ní theárn sé stad mara nó mór-chomhnuidhe gur shroichidh sé cúirt agus caisleán Rí Innse Tuile 'san Domhan Thiar.'

<sup>3</sup> It may be convenient here to summarize other short formulas occurring in the five Donegal folktales selected. The expression 'ní theárn sé (sí, etc.) stad mara nó mór-chomhraidhe'—'he (she, etc.) made neither sea stop nor great pause'—occurs 8 times in all; in one case the story says 'she walked on and made neither sea stop', etc. showing a type of contradiction alleged in respect of

certain Homeric formulas. 'Níor bhain siad méar dá sróin', a formula of similar meaning occurs 6 times. The phrase 'cúirt 7 caisleán', court and castle, occurs 6 times. The traditional formula 'bhí go maith 7 ní raibh go holc'—things were well and were not ill—occurs 5 times; the expression 'neoin bheag 7 deireadh and lae'—little evening and the end of day, 6 times; the doublet 'sughach sáthach'—merry replete—whether as adverb or epithet, 5 times. Other alliterating doublets are 'ithite ólta', in the expression his fill *eaten* (and) *drunk*, twice, and 'fá dheireadh agus fá dheidhneach', *in the end and at last*, twice.

<sup>4</sup> *Od.* 2. It has been pointed out that Rieu's translation is not the best for the purpose of illustrating epic technique. It does not do complete justice to the formulaic character of the poems but on the other hand its vividness and charm represent an aspect of Homer very lacking in more literal translations.

<sup>5</sup> *Od.* 2. 422-9, Cf. 4. 577-680.

the reverse process, a ship's arrival and the orderly steps taken by its crew and master, is described. The cataloguing of a fixed series of steps in the order of their doing has been remarked on by Lord and others as a feature of oral style.<sup>1</sup> For example, the arming of a warrior is described in natural order beginning with the putting on of greaves and ending with the taking of spears in hand.<sup>2</sup> Such passages once started tend to keep their cohesion. If a more summary description is called for, other, shorter formulas are employed, as, for voyaging:

οἱ δ' αἰψ' εἴσβαινον καὶ ἐπὶ κληῖσι καθίζον,  
ἐξῆς δ' ἐζόμενοι πολὺν ἄλα τύπτον ἐρετμοῖς.

Or with sails:

ἱστοὺς στησάμενοι ἀνά θ' ἰστία λεύκ' ἐρύσαντες  
ῥιμεθα· τὰς δ' ἄνεμός τε κυβερνῆται τ' ἴθνην.<sup>3</sup>

One may say concerning frequent situations of voyaging, as in the *Odyssey*, and of arming, as in the *Iliad*, that Homer does not dwell on the scene unless it is perhaps of special significance. To dwell on such frequent scenes would be to dispel interest, and Homer has a number of alternative devices to hold up the narrative and otherwise achieve the objectives credited to extended formulas. On the other hand Irish tales exhibit such formulas in more splendid isolation as special adornments of the tales, although in lengthy tales summary treatments are not lacking.

Festive occasions are likely to follow a set pattern and heroic narrative represents them by formulas. We saw how tail-end formulas may briefly describe feasts. The two following descriptions may be compared, the first taken from the *Odyssey*.<sup>4</sup>

'The Suitors came swaggering in and took their seats in rows on the settles and chairs. Their squires poured water on their hands and the maids put piles of bread in baskets beside them, while the pages filled the mixing bowls to the brim with drink. They helped themselves to the good things spread before them; and when all had satisfied their hunger and thirst, the Suitors turned their thoughts to other pleasures, to the music and dancing without which no banquet is complete. A herald brought a beautiful lyre and handed it to Phemius, the minstrel whom they had pressed into their service.'

The following is taken from *An Gilla Decair*<sup>5</sup> and I translate with some attempt at alliteration, which is a prominent feature of the Irish. The words in italics are verifiable as formulas in the sources to which I limit myself and the Irish phrases with other references are given in a footnote.

'The son of Duibhne was put in a house of healing which was in the city. And noble herbs were put on *his weals and his wounds* and he was made *healthy and whole*. And the boards and benches of the city were set in order. Neither the humble was put in the place of the high nor the high in the place of the humble but each one in his proper place at those tables according to his *birth and breeding* and his profession. *Fine appetizing food and palatable potent drink* were brought to them. They spent the first part of the night at drinking; the second part at song and pleasure and the cheering of *their hearts and spirits*. They spent

<sup>1</sup> See *Singer of Tales*, p. 92.

<sup>2</sup> As in *Il.* 16. 130-9. Such descriptions are more summarily dealt with elsewhere, for example in *Il.* 10. 147-8; 177-8; with 254 ff. and 333-5. A shorter description is

*Il.* 7. 206-7.

<sup>3</sup> *Od.* 9. 471-2; 77-8.

<sup>4</sup> *Od.* 1. 144-54. The preceding lines also describing the preparations are conventional.

<sup>5</sup> *Silva Gad.*, p. 268.

the third part at *slumber and steady sleep* until the sun arose *in a fiery orb* over the *heavy-sodded earth* on the morrow.<sup>1</sup>

To return to Homer, the description of a sacrificial feast is one which does not readily admit of curtailment. The sacrifice itself is a step-by-step procedure which calls for 'natural' order in the narrative. In *Iliad* 1 the sacrifice of a hecatomb to Apollo starts at 447 with the placing of the beasts about the altar and the washing of hands and the taking of the dedicatory barley grains. The special prayer of Chryses now interrupts the formulaic matter. We are told next, in a single line formula (457), that 'so he spoke and Phoebus Apollo heard him'. The formula of sacrifice resumes in step-by-step detail, covering 458–63. Here begins the human feast which is part of the same formula, covering 463–71. The whole episode then concludes with an extension of the feast by song in honour of Apollo, 472–4.

In *Odyssey* 3. 447 ff. there is a similar description of a sacrifice of a single beast, preceded by an interesting additional feature: the gilding of the horns by a goldsmith. 447 is the same as *Iliad* 1. 458, but the formal description does not continue to correspond until we reach the middle of 457, as far as 463 where the passage is exactly the same as *Iliad* 1. 460–6 where there is a variation. *Iliad* 1. 467–8 is missing in the *Odyssey* passage but the matter is otherwise covered. *Iliad* 469 corresponds with *Odyssey* 473 and while there are further parallels in sense the formal identity ceases.<sup>2</sup> Thus we can see that the Homeric long formula can be broken up owing to its hexameter-line structure, and that the context can break up the cohesion of the formula and cause its curtailment.

Another repetition of this same sacrifice formula well illustrates Homer's unnodding awareness of his context. In *Odyssey* 12 occurs the episode in which Odysseus' men, in their captain's absence, driven by hunger and the exhaustion of their supplies, kill the cattle belonging to the Sun and thus seal their own fate. The seizure of the cattle is narrated, and their being made 'to stand around', and the prayer to the gods. Here should come the formal start of the conventional description as in the other passages, namely, the line:

αὐτὰρ ἐπεὶ ῥ' εὔξαντο καὶ οὐλοχύτας προβάλοντο:

but instead, Homer says the men plucked leaves from a high and leafy oak because they had no white barley on board their ship. The term he uses is 'κρὶ λευκόν'—evidently plain white barley. When this is processed for sacrificial use, it is called 'οὐλαί', as in the preliminaries of the sacrifice in *Odyssey* 3 (441–2). When it is actually 'thrown down' in a dedicatory ritual it has undergone further processing—at any rate it is now called 'οὐλοχύται', the word needed to initiate the conventional description. Homer cannot use οὐλοχύται since he has no οὐλαί, since he has no κρὶ λευκόν because the men have eaten everything! With a punctilio and presence of mind worthy of a better fate they used a composition

<sup>1</sup> Ag., p. 201 (ina chnedhaib ocus ina chréchaib); Ag., pp. 136, 202 (slemain sláinchréchtach); BA, pp. 336, 341 (do réir a uaisle ocus a atharda); EL, p. 9 (biada saora sochaithme); Ag., pp. 97, 104 (urghair-diugad menman ocus aicenta); BCL, p. 293 (re suan ocus re sírchotlad); Ag., pp. 189, 206 (circhaill teintide); GD, p. 266 (na talman tromfódaige).

<sup>2</sup> This line, αὐτὰρ ἐπεὶ πόσιος καὶ ἐδητύος ἐξ ἔρον ἔντο, a formula of transition, is properly used in the *Odyssey* passage to pass on to other matters. In the *Iliad* passage it is rather illogically incorporated in the feast description. There is no immediate transition, as the narration goes on to say 'when the sun sank', etc., and later, 'when rosy-fingered dawn appeared', etc.

of leaves. The formula then proceeds in the normal way until we reach the line

καίε δ' ἐπὶ σχίλῃς ὁ γέρων, ἐπὶ δ' αἶθοπα οἶνον  
λεῖβε

'the old man proceeded to burn (the sacrifice) on logs and to pour on the sparkling wine', as in the other descriptions.<sup>1</sup> Apart from the irrelevance of the old man, this cannot be used. Homer says that as they had no wine they poured on water. The description then proceeds normally.

But we have not yet done with the marvellous ease with which Homer breaks up and knits into his story these long elements which are really strongly self-cohering. We still await the conclusion of the conventional passage—about four lines. We never hear them. Homer chooses this moment—the middle of a formula—to wake his narrator, who has been literally nodding, and bring him to the scene where the appetizing smell of cooking meat is his first intimation of the disastrous action of his men.

Perhaps we have said enough to show that the composer in Irish folktales and even more notably in Homer not only brings long formulas into accord with various contexts, but is quite free and willing to break the pattern of coherence which step-by-step description tends to establish.

Let us turn again to fixed descriptions in the Irish literary tales, say the following voyage description from the adventure of the *Gilla Decair*.<sup>2</sup> I here translate with some attempt at reproducing the alliterations:

'Goll and Oscar fitted out a capacious vast vessel, steep-sided and stoutly made. They turned their backs to the land and their faces to the sea and to the angry gloomy-sloping cold-wet ridges of the deep, and went on their way with strong-toiling speedy passage until they were listening to the calling of the sea pigs and the seals and the marvellous monsters of the ocean until they reached harbour and haven in the land of lovely Greece. They drew up their ship on land where wave might not buffet nor batter nor rock wreck it.'

It will be seen that we have here a rather special elaboration, a high-sounding description which cannot easily be whittled down or subordinated to a context. In a reasonably short narrative—and all the Irish narratives we are considering are much shorter than the *Iliad* or *Odyssey*—such a passage has a decorative function. In a long narrative where many journeys were encountered the description would not preserve its coherence unimpaired. The function would not always be decorative; some journeys would be relatively unimportant and subject to more summary treatment. Accordingly, in the Irish literary tales set descriptions tend towards considerable elaboration and there is strong cohesion. The only type of elaboration in Homer which has a similar cohesion is the epic simile. Since these similes are detached from and contrasted with their context, they cannot be digested by that context. The

<sup>1</sup> In a similar description of a sacrifice in *Il.* 2. 410 ff. Homer omits the detail of pouring on the wine, possibly because of the first part of the line—καίε δ' ἐπὶ σχίλῃς ὁ γέρων—as there was no old man there concerned. He simply says they burned (the sacrifice) on logs which had been stripped of their leaves.

<sup>2</sup> This passage contains noun-epithet

formulas, e.g. long luchtmar lánáibsech, and other formula types, e.g. cuan ocus caladphort, but taken as a whole it is not a formula in the Homeric sense. It could be described as 'a conceptual formula'. It will be noticed that the concept of sounds heard—seals, monsters, etc.—is the same as in the formula quoted from the Donegal tales (p. 5). *Silva Gad.*, pp. 273-4.



similes can be repeated like other formulas.<sup>1</sup> We have a sort of compensation operating here: voyage, feast, arming formulas tend to yield to their contexts and suffer curtailment and change; similes, on the other hand, must be repeated in full but gain variety by the great number of subjects available.<sup>2</sup>

Combat is another set occasion. The preliminaries themselves are conventional. We have already glanced at the full orderly assembly of step-by-step detail in the arming of Achilles and Patroclus, and the more summary description of other passages. It has been pointed out that a full description helps to emphasize an occasion and enhance its impact. The Irish term *cóiriú catha*, or 'preparation for battle', is a common phrase used to denote a narrative 'formula' and this fact in itself bears witness to the frequency in Irish of stock descriptions of arming and armour. Here is a typical description of the arrival and equipment of a warrior from *Bodach in chóta lachtna* in O'Grady's translation:<sup>3</sup> 'And they had not long to wait before they marked a tall, bellicose, impetuously valiant óglach rise by means of his javelins' staves, or of his spears' shafts, and so attain both his soles' width of the white-sanded beach. A polished and most comely lorica he had on; an armature that was solid and infrangible surrounded him; his handsome red shield surmounted his shoulder, and on his head was a hard helmet; at his left side a sword, wide-grooved, straight in the blade; in his two fists he held a pair of thick-shafted spears, unburnished but sharp; a becoming mantle of scarlet hung on his shoulders, with a brooch of the burnt gold on his chest.'

We may be struck by the individual epithets of Homeric type (white-sanded, polished, wide-grooved, thick-shafted, etc.) and we shall return to the subject of epithets later. We have remarked (above, p. 4, n. 1) that these extended passages in Irish literary tales are not formulas in the sense that long Homeric descriptions are. Homer does not normally vary a long formula except in respect of curtailment or interruption (and the same is true of the Irish heroic folktale). But the literary tale passages are set occasions which are deliberately varied. The tale *An Gilla Decair* (GD) contains two voyage descriptions and five combat scenes, which, respectively, differ from one another. Such passages might be described as 'conceptual formulas'.<sup>4</sup> They contain numerous actual formulas. For example, in the passage quoted, the vaulting method of arrival (or departure) whereby a person 'rises by means of his javelins' staves and attains the width of his soles of the ground he lands on', is a formula. It occurs also in *Eachtra Lomnochtáin* (except that 'the deck of the ship' replaces 'the white-sanded beach') and in *Gilla Decair* where a leap to a cliff-top is described and where 'the heavy-sodded ground' (itself a formula) replaces 'the white-sanded beach'.

<sup>1</sup> There are very few cases of repeated similes in Homer. The most notable in the *Iliad* is the stallion simile of bk. 6 (Paris) and bk. 15 (Hector). The *Odyssey* out of its approximately forty-six long similes repeats two.

<sup>2</sup> Even where the subject of comparison is the same, the simile may be quite different. The lion subject is the most obvious case in point. To compare a hero to a lion can suggest only a limited field of likeness in, say, the qualities of courage, strength, fierceness. But illogically the simile takes its own un-

predictable path by making the lion's characteristics depend not so much on its nature as on the circumstances related. For example, in *Il.* 17. 109-12, the lion feels fear, and in 133-6 the helpless presence of its cubs inspires it to courage; and in *Il.* 18. 317-22, the lion's fierce longing for revenge is due to the fact that a huntsman has stolen its cubs in its absence. In such similes the lion's native qualities are largely irrelevant.

<sup>3</sup> *Silva Gad.*, p. 289.

<sup>4</sup> See J. Ross, *Modern Philology*, lvii (1959-60), pp. 4 f.

In oral narrative there is a large assortment of formulas which are employed to cover transitions. These, of their nature, are brief and not subject to briefer or more expanded formulation. In Homer they often consist of a single line as *δύσετό τ' ἥελιός σκιάοντό τε πᾶσαι ἀγνυαί*, 'the sun sank and all ways grew dark'. The Irish literary formula, 'Nó co ruc nóin ocus deired lae ortha' (GD) 'until evening and the end of day came on them', is very similar. It has passed into modern oral tradition.<sup>1</sup> Homer has: *ἦμος δ' ἠριγένεια φάνη ῥοδοδάκτυλος Ἥως*, 'when early rosy-fingered Dawn appeared'. In Irish tales we get such expressions as 'nó gur éirig grian lánsoillsech arna mórach', 'until the all bright sun arose on the morrow'. We have conventional descriptions of food such as 'nua gach bíd hocus sen gach dighe', 'the newness of every food, the oldness of every drink', and such Homeric expressions as *κρεάων πίνακας παντοίων*, 'plates of all kinds of meat'.

Perhaps the most prominent of all stylistic features in Finn tales is the use of synonymous and alliterative doublets. It is closely akin to the use of epithet. The epithet reinforces the single image, just as the doublet amplifies the single image. (Indeed a prefixed epithet is often included in the doublet when the synonyms do not themselves alliterate: for example, *bás agus oidheadh*, death and doom, becomes *bás agus buan-oidheadh*, death and lasting demise.<sup>2</sup>) The constant recurrence of doublets serves, like the epithet nouns, to ease the concentration of both audience and storyteller.

A simple list of doublets from the literary sources we are using will illustrate the formulaic nature of this device. We give in brackets the sources in which each doublet occurs. In some cases individual doublets may recur many times (e.g. *tuillem agus tuarastal* occurs six times in the story of the Gilla Decair) in a single source, in other cases there may be only a single instance in the particular story. However, if we bear in mind that our sources cover a span of about five hundred years, the formulaic nature of these doublets will be amply demonstrated (I do not include doublets which are attested by one source only, however often they may be there repeated: for example *ar ais nó ar éigin*, 'by hook or by crook', occurs three times in Gilla Decair but not (I think) in our other sources; nevertheless it is as commonplace in Irish as the expression 'by hook or by crook' is in English). The sign 7 indicates 'agus', 'and', but these doublets are not to be thought of as petrified unvarying formulas. Not only may 'and' give way to 'without', 'nor', or 'neither-nor': but the doublet nouns may occur in the genitive or other cases, be qualified by adjectives, and generally enter fully into a context while retaining absolutely their formulaic character. This is an instance of the difference between prose and verse, for generally speaking the Homeric epithet formula must change when the case changes. In the following list the spelling is normalized.

Aonach 7 árdoireachtas (K, BCL, GD), assembly and great gathering.

aistear 7 imtheacht (Ag., BCL, BCC, GD), journey and going away.

bás 7 buanoidheadh (BCC, EL), death and lasting doom.

cath 7 comhrac (Ag., SBF, GD, EL), battle and combat.

cath 7 comhlann (Ag., SBF, BCC, BA, GD, EL), battle and conflict.

dún 7 deaghbhaile (Ag (dúnad), K, EL), stronghold and good home.

<sup>1</sup> *Seanscéalta*, Nos. I, VI, VII.

<sup>2</sup> EL, p. 8, par. 11. The full phrase occurring there—'They both fell'—*i dtáisibh 7 i dtáim-néalaibh báis 7 buan-oidhidh*—'into

swoons and deep comas of death and lasting doom', doubly illustrates the point, for *táise 7 táim-néal* is itself a formula [also in Ag., p. 136].

earradh 7 éideadh (Ag, GD), clothing and apparel.  
 freastal 7 fritheolamh (Ag., SBF, K (reversed), BA, GD), attending and serving.  
 fiadhach 7 fianchoscar (Ag, K, BA, GD), hunting and game-slaying.  
 gail 7 gaisceadh (Ag, BCC, GD, EL), valour and hero deeds.  
 a habhach 7 a hionahar (Ag, SBF, GD, EL), her (its) entrails and innards.  
 lúth 7 lámhach (Ag., SBF), agility and handling skill.  
 go lár 7 go lántalamh (BCC, BCL, EL), to floor and to full ground.  
 maithe 7 móruaisle (Ag., K, BCC, BA, GD, EL), nobles and great people.  
 nua gach bidh 7 sean gach dighe (Ag, K, EL), the newness of every food and the oldness of every drink (the best of food and drink).  
 ól 7 aoibhneas (Ag, SBF, EL), drinking and cheerfulness.  
 sluagh 7 sochaidhe (Ag., SBF, GD, EL), hosting and throng.  
 (i dtóirchim) suain 7 síorchodalta (K, BCL, GD, EL), (in a state) of slumber and lasting sleep.  
 triath 7 tighearna (Ag., BCC, EL), prince and lord.  
 teist 7 tuarascbháil (Ag., GD), testimony and description.  
 tuilleamh 7 tuarastal (GD, EL), earning and pay.  
 uamhan 7 (im) eagla (Ag., SBF, BA), dread and fear.

The general effect of many doublets and of the pattern of alliteration is to give the prose narrative the measured regular pace which the hexameter verse gives to Greek epic.

In the Irish tales also there is a vast and complex epithet system which merits separate study. However, some idea of the formulaic character of these epithets may be given here. Epithets are applied to named heroes and are usually personal to them (e.g. *Diarmaid déadgheal*, bright-toothed Dermot; *Conán maol mallachtach*, Conan bald, given to cursing); to named places, where they are descriptive like, say, *sandy Pylos* (e.g. in *Almain lethanmhór Laigen*, in Allen the great broad (plain) of Leinster); and to the broad spectrum of nouns which figure prominently in all heroic narrative, men and women, clothing, weapons, armour, ornaments, animals, food and drink, vessels, sounds, physical aspects of earth, sea, and sky. There is little mention of gods except in general and formal terms such as of a person greeting another 'by the gods he worshipped'; however, there is an 'other-world' magic element in tales, with supernatural happenings and the intervention of deities. Three of our sources, rather burlesque tales, GD, K, and BCL, concern the actions of a deity in disguise.

It will be seen from the few incidental examples of noun-epithets given above that, as in the doublets, the 'binding force' analogous to metre is alliteration. This will be clearer if we take four separate words for 'spear':

*craoiseach* crannreamhar (GD, EL), shaft-thick spear.  
*slegha* sithrighne (SBF, GD), long stout spears.  
 dá *manáis* móirlebra (Ag. (móirremra), GD), two great stout spears.  
 do *laighnib* lethanghlasa (Ag., SBF), with broad blue lances.

In five of these eight instances the epithet is used alone and forms with its noun an alliterating couplet. One could not say '*craoiseach lethanghlas*', or '*sleagh crannreamhar*'. However, there is a strong tendency to double (or even treble) epithets and this has the obvious advantage that it provides alliteration

within the epithets, which are thus freed from necessary attachment to a noun with like initial.

Thus our oldest source, Ag., has, for example, *sleige seimnige sodiubraicthe* (p. 127) and *sleg seimnech sithfoda* (p. 103), but also *sleg chrannremar churata* (p. 212). SBF, our next oldest source, has indeed *cráisechaib crannremra curata cóigrindi* (p. 88), but also *slega crandremra curata cóigrinne* (p. 84) and in *tsleg crannremar chóigrinne* (p. 96). It has, besides the single epithet *lethanglas* attached to *laigen* (noted above), the same epithet alliteratively reinforced and attached to the word *manaois* in a *manáis lethanglas límtha Lochlannach*—his broad-blue well-ground Norse lance. Once doubling of epithets occurs the initial of the noun ceases to matter and the epithet couples room at large and may attach to any suitable noun.

The epithet combinations for *claidheamh*, sword, which has few synonyms, are more rigid. Here *claislethan*, broad-grooved, seems to be the primary epithet. We have this epithet in Ag., BCL, BCC, GD, EL. Our earliest source, Ag., is content with this single epithet (p. 191), but BCL and BCC add a second, *cuilgdhireach*, straight in the blade. BA also uses *cuilgdhireach*, combining it with *cruaidh*, hard; and BCC also uses *cruaidh*, combining it with *claisleathan*.

For *long*, a ship, we have two epithets, *luchtmhar lánaibhseach*, capacious, conspicuous, in GD, BCL; but also the single epithet *lánmhór* (mostly in gen. case), fully great, in Ag, BCL, EL.

*Dúil*, 'a creature', has *diabhlaidhe*, 'devilish', alone in EL, *diablaide dodelba*, 'devilish, ill-featured', in GD, *duaibsech doidelbach*, 'gloomy, ill-featured' in BCC. In BCL we have *dúil diablaide droichdeilbe*, the last epithet being a slight variation of *dodelba* which describes hags in BCC (*mnáib duba duaibsecha droichdelbacha*) and also a mouth (*sreingbeoil duib duaibsig droichdelbaig*). The epithet *dub*, 'black', which appears in the last two examples, we also find in SBF along with *dodelba*, 'ill-featured' (*aithech dub dodhealba dímór*, 'a black ill-featured huge churl').

The word *laoch*, 'hero', appears with *lánchalma*, 'valorous', in GD, BA, EL. The combination appears also with the additional epithet *léidmech*, 'daring', in BA. However, the commonest additional epithet is *láidir*, 'strong', in the central position. We get:

(hero)	laoch (BA)	} láidir lánchalma. <sup>1</sup>
(thrust)	suinned (GD)	
('other-world' creature)	gruagach (GD)	

*Sciath*, 'a shield', naturally has many descriptive epithets as to size, colour, and decoration. The epithets *mór míleta*, 'large, military', are applied to it in BA, EL. These epithets, however, are at large elsewhere and applied in BCC to *mná*, 'women', in one case, and to *óclaeach*, 'a warrior', in another. The latter example illustrates a further tendency of epithets, that is, not merely the doubling and trebling but the further addition of a differently alliterating couple of epithets. The full phrase in this case is: *in taenóclaeach mór míleta merchalma déthghel deggherdach* (BCC, p. 307), 'the one warrior, great, military swift-brave tooth-bright good-skilled'. Even in such a complex variety the cohesion of epithets could be demonstrated if one casts one's net widely enough.

<sup>1</sup> The development of cohering pairs of epithets enables them to be used as *adverbial* formulas (the adverb in Irish is formed by prefixing 'go' to the adjective). Accordingly

we get *go láidir lánchalma*, with strength and valour (BA), or *go calma curata*, bravely and in warrior fashion (GD, whereas in SBF, BCC, *calma curata* appear as epithets).

In EL (p. 62), for example, we get *laoch mór míleata mearchalma dēidgheal dathálainn*, an identical sequence except for the last epithet *dathálainn*, 'colour-handsome'.<sup>1</sup> The first part, the noun with its trio of alliterating epithets, will also be found in BCL (p. 289).

In Ag., p. 103, we get *baile*, 'town', with attached epithets *rigda rómór*, 'royal and great'. In SBF, p. 66, the same epithets are attached to *a dhá dhóid*, 'his two fists'. The epithets *dlainn ilchrothach*, 'handsome, many-featured', are applied to *ainder*, 'a maiden' in BA (p. 341), and to *óglach*, 'a warrior' in SBF (p. 63). A common pair of epithets, *strrechtach síde* (Ag., SBF), 'bewitching, fairy', is applied almost exclusively to music (*ceol*). However, in Ag., p. 167 we find it applied to *marcslog*, 'a cavalcade'.

The epithets *beca bélscaeilte*, 'small, widely scattered', occur as follows:

SBF, p. 55, <i>ina mbuidnib</i> , in their groups	} <i>beca bélscaeilte</i> .
GD, p. 264, <i>ina gconlánaib</i> , in their bands	
GD, p. 267, <i>aigeda</i> , pieces	
BA, p. 340, <i>blogha</i> , fragments	

Finally, let us consider the epithets *acarb iarnaide* rough, iron (made of iron). They occur in our sources as follows:

Ag., p. 136, <i>slabrad</i> , <sup>2</sup> chain	} <i>agarb iarnaide</i> .
GD, pp. 259, 259, 261, 261, <i>agastar</i> , halter	
BA, p. 337, <i>slabrad</i> , chain	
EL, p. 14, <i>slabhgradh</i> , chain	

*athgarbh iarainn*.

The last example has a slight modernization in the last epithet *iarainn*, a form which also occurs in a verse interlude<sup>3</sup> in GD above (p. 260, *agastar agarb iarainn*).

When we consider this pair of epithets, occurring four or five times in GD, and only three times in our other sources of which one instance is in our earliest text, Ag., dating from before 1200, and another instance in EL, our latest text, dating from about 1700, we may conclude that these epithets must have been widely current in oral tradition over a very long period; and that a small selection of texts can give only a dim picture of a vast and complex epithet system which combines a degree of rigidity with considerable variety. The other epithet combinations we have considered lead to the same conclusions. On the other hand the doublets have a very high degree of rigidity.

One must expect that an epithet system of prose hero tales should be less rigid than a poetic tradition like that of Homer.<sup>4</sup> The binding force of metre is

<sup>1</sup> Though EL is one of our sources, the above example is taken from an extension to the tale found in a few manuscripts. Elsewhere in this article we use only the shorter tale found in most manuscripts which ends at paragraph 50 of the Bergin-McNeill text. See Cat. of Ir. MSS. in Brit. Mus., vol. ii, p. 345-6.

<sup>2</sup> If we consider epithets which alliterate with *slabrad*, we find, Ag., p. 128, *slabrada sníomacha senaircit*, twisted chains of old silver; SBF, p. 86, *co slabraduib sníthi sesmachacha senairgit*, with twisted steadfast

chains of old silver; and, BA, p. 337, *slabrad sínte senaircit*, a stretched chain of old silver.

<sup>3</sup> Passages of verse often occur in the course of Irish prose tales but consideration of them lies outside the scope of this article. One may remark, however, that Bowra's suggestion (*Heroic Poetry*, p. 15), that these verse interludes are survivals of an earlier tradition of which the prose has filled the gaps, is one which few Irish scholars would entertain.

<sup>4</sup> It is not possible on the basis of our examination of Irish formulas to give an

naturally much stronger than that of alliteration (for the epithet can easily change while the alliteration is preserved). Nevertheless, making all due allowances, one must have some reserve about regarding the basis on which Parry firmly established the traditional nature of Homer as showing also its oral character. The epithet system in Homer is characterized, Parry said, by great extension and great simplicity, and he amply demonstrated the truth of this thesis. By great simplicity he meant the rigidity whereby epithets under the same metrical conditions established themselves against all rivals. Thus, for example, in *Od.* 2. 414, we find the phrase *ἐϋσέλμω ἐπὶ νηί*, 'on the well-decked ship', and close by *θοῆν ἀνὰ νῆα μέλαιναν*, 'through the swift black ship'. These expressions are not rivals. The epithets differ because the metrical position differs.<sup>1</sup> In its own place *εὐσελμος* will hold the fort against other epithets.

This 'simplicity' or, to use the current terms, thrift or economy, is a very remarkable feature of Homer. Some writers speak of thrift or economy as if it applied only to epithets and as if the *extreme* thrift practised by Homer in this aspect were a proof of oral quality. Thrift, which is vast and complex in its applications, is certainly a proof of oral quality but extreme thrift is not necessarily extreme proof. It may be that in regard to epithets, the verse medium of Homer accounts for this extreme degree of thrift. However, almost utter rigidity in any aspect seems to run against the composer-bard theory. There is in oral composition a slow changing of the tradition and, even in the midst of thrift, variety and innovation or a certain state of flux is implied. Extreme rigidity may be a matter of suspicion and may possibly imply editing of some kind.<sup>2</sup>

The epithet at all events seems to be at the heart of narrative heroic style and it is unfortunate that it is poorly represented in the Yugoslav tradition (as well as in the Donegal folktales we have considered). Much of the examination of formulas in Homer seems to assume a fixed dactylic hexameter into which the poet-composer must fit his various formulas like so many building bricks. The fact seems to be that epithet formulas are a feature of heroic storytelling, not simply of epic hexameter. It must be obvious that these formulas of their nature have a slow organic growth and to assume that this slow growth took place in the context of an established hexameter verse is unreasonable. Page, in his *History and the Homeric Iliad*, vi, p. 218, has examined a considerable number of epithets from many points of view and has demonstrated the great antiquity (often to the point of obsolescence) of many such formulas. They belong, many of them, to the Mycenaean era long before the hexameter is likely to have developed into the rigid strait jacket of the Homeric poems.

How then, it may be asked, can very archaic epithets fit metrically into the poems? The answer, perhaps, is that they belong properly to the end of the line, the only metrically fixed place in the primitive verse. Most of the epithets

accurate idea of the degree of thrift in Irish tales as compared with Homer. As Lord points out, the work of a single singer—and the material would need to be very extensive—is the proper basis for a comparison with Homer. In our case, considering we are dealing with what amounts to a random selection of manuscript tales ranging over many centuries, the abundance of persisting formulas must postulate a high degree of

'thrift' in the tradition.

<sup>1</sup> Metrically, they cover the same ground but the *θοῆν* expression is ruled out in l. 414 as the initial would lengthen the preceding syllable.

<sup>2</sup> Possibly the Homeridae, whose part in the transmission of the material is not now knowable, may have—if editing was done—eliminated rival variants.

which Page characterizes as Mycenaean belong to endline combinations: *φαίδιμος Ἑκτωρ, πόδας ὠκὺς Ἀχιλλεύς, νυκτὸς ἀμολγῶι, εὐρέι πόντῳ, κάρη κομόωντες Ἀχαιοί, εὐκνήμιδες Ἀχαιοί, ἐλίκωπες Ἀχαιοί*, and so on.<sup>1</sup>

To demonstrate how epithets dominate the endline position we may take the first hundred lines of *Iliad* 1. If we count the number of epithet combinations, absolutely in final position like *δῖος Ἀχιλλεύς*, or metrically final with the inclusion of *τε*, like *ἀμφηρεφέα τε φαρέτρην*, we get 25 from a total of 50. This excludes final items like *ἀλλὰ δέχθαι ἄποινα*, or *ἡῦκομος τέκε Λητώ*, although these might well be included.

The table given by Parry (*L'Épithète trad. dans Hom.*, p. 50), although he uses it somewhat differently, can be used to demonstrate the same thing. Here Parry takes a list of eleven gods and heroes and examines the frequency of their noun-epithet formulas in certain metrical positions. The final position, namely  $- \cup \cup / -$ , or from the bucolic diaeresis to the end of the line (the element whose importance we are particularly stressing here) yields the greatest number of noun-epithet formulas, namely 274. Parry's second column lists the formulas which are included between the hephthemimeral caesura and the end of the line (i.e. the metrical element  $\cup \cup / - \cup \cup / - \cup$ ). This yields a total of 255 formulas. His third column lists the formulas included between the feminine caesura and the end of the line ( $\cup / - \cup \cup / - \cup \cup / - \cup$ ). This yields 271 formulas.

As may be seen, the first-column formulas (or those covering  $- \cup \cup / - \cup$ ) are marginally the most numerous. But in fact the real numerical superiority involved here is concealed owing to the fact that columns two and three contain noun epithets which are mere extensions of the formulas of column one. For example, *δῖος Ὀδυσσεύς* (1), becomes *πολύτλας δῖος Ὀδυσσεύς* (3); *εὐρύσπα Ζεύς* (1), becomes *Ὀλύμπιος εὐρύσπα Ζεύς* (3); or *ὠκὺς Ἀχιλλεύς* (1), becomes *πόδας ὠκὺς Ἀχιλλεύς* (2). In other words the final unit  $- \cup \cup / -$  lays the whole foundation for noun-epithet formulas. Parry's fourth column, which gives the noun-epithet formulas of the chosen eleven for the commencement of the line (i.e.  $- \cup \cup / - \cup \cup / -$ ) up to the caesura, contains only 27 items.

Again, on pp. 124-5 of *L'Épithète*, Parry compares the treatment of the three names *Ἀχαιοί*, *Δαναοί*, and *Ἀργεῖοι* with regard to epithet use. He notes that (taking all their cases) *Ἀχαιοί* has an epithet 197 times against 415 times without; *Δαναοί* has an epithet 22 times against 114 without; and *Ἀργεῖοι* has an epithet 7 times against 148 without. 'Il est évident', he concludes, 'que le poète se sert ou se passe de l'épithète selon son utilité pour la versification, celle-ci dépendant de la mesure du substantif.'

<sup>1</sup> Page comments at some length on the epithet *ἐλίκωπες* (of Achaeans) and takes it to mean 'black-eyed' rather than deriving from any association with *ἐλικο-*. This epithet is not very common and occurs for the first time at *Il.* 1. 389. The fact that this obscure and indeed obsolete epithet should occur at all is puzzling, especially since already at *Il.* 1. 123 (or 135), the Achaeans have been characterized as *μεγάθυμοι*, a metrical equivalent which thus makes *ἐλίκωπες* an offence against the 'law of economy'. The poet has already referred to Chryseis at *Il.* 1. 98 as *ἐλικώπιδα*, a unique

feminine counterpart of *ἐλίκωπες*. The context of this line is the return of the girl to her father, the priest of Apollo, and the context of line 389 where the epithet is transferred to the Achaeans, is the same. The same scene in the bard's mind, when he has introduced an obsolete epithet on the first occasion, may explain his using the same epithet for the Achaeans in the second context. However, we are now encroaching on the fascinating dimension of theme composition, of motif links, motivation, and association techniques, which Lord has developed over and above the formulaic groundwork.

Justified as this conclusion may be in the fully fledged hexameter, it does not account for the great preponderance of epithet with Ἀχαιοί (namely, 47 per cent as against 19 per cent and 5 per cent for the other two) unless we note that the metrical form of Ἀχαιοῖ and its cases admits the epithet-noun<sup>1</sup> to the *final* position in the line, just as their metrical form rules out Δῶναοῖ and Ἀργεῖοῖ. There is no difficulty in providing these with epithets elsewhere than in final position (as in ὦ φίλοι ἦρωες Δαναοί). The marked difference in treatment depends on end-position usage, and this confirms our conclusion that the end of the hexameter, perhaps originally the element - ∪ ∪ - ∪, was the only part fixed metrically. We might add tentatively that this fixity was achieved mainly by relegating epithet-nouns to this end part of the line. Perhaps also the growth and development of such epithets helped to extend metrical fixity backwards to the point marked by the 3rd and 4th caesurae.

The great French linguist Meillet long ago examined the Indo-European origins of Greek metres,<sup>2</sup> and with regard to the epic hexameter he found that its development depended on the innovation ∪ ∪ = -, apparently a Greek innovation, and suggested that the hexameter may have been borrowed from Aegean civilization. He noted that the dactyl was already a familiar element of other Greek metres and suggested that this fact would make the adoption of the hexameter easier. The relative fixity of the dactyl with third, fourth, and fifth foot, as against frequent spondees in the beginning of the line, and even verses beginning with ∪ - or - ∪, or ∪ ∪ -,<sup>3</sup> accords with the fact that this fixed part of the line is monopolized by noun-epithet formulas.

The work of Meillet has been recently carried much further by Professor Calvert Watkins in an article<sup>4</sup> which has wide implications for the origins of Greek as well as other Indo-European metrics. In that article Watkins examines first the paroemiac, the proverb verse unit, 'viewed as an anapaestic dimeter catalectic'. He emphasizes the 'fixed cadence', ∪ ∪ - ∪ (anapaest followed by syllaba anceps). Besides the 10-syllable paroemiac with its regular anapaestic rhythm, he goes on to discuss a more primitive variant of nine syllables, the 'enoplon', which, while having the same fixed cadence, has a more variable pattern in the initial part of the verse. He gives three examples (p. 196) of these 9-syllable paroemiacs of which I quote here the metrical pattern, namely, ∪ - ∪ ∪ - ∪ ∪ - ∪, ∪ ∪ - - - ∪ ∪ - ∪, and - - ∪ ∪ - ∪ ∪ - ∪. It will be seen that these systems, however they may be anapaestic and associated with lyrical verse, are also in fact dactylic and comprise the part of the Homeric line from the third-foot caesura to the end. This is the metrical unit which Parry examines for noun-epithet formulas in column three of his table (p. 50). Among examples of shorter paroemiacs (p. 200) Watkins gives items which have the metrical patterns, - ∪ ∪ - ∪ (5 syllable), and - - ∪ ∪ - ∪ (6 syllable); these again are the metrical formula units examined in columns one and two of Parry's table.

<sup>1</sup> Epithet-noun, in that order. Otherwise than in this paragraph I have used the more usual term noun-epithet, but the normal order is epithet-noun.

<sup>2</sup> *Les Origines indo-européennes des mètres grecs*, Paris, 1923.

<sup>3</sup> *Od.* 4. 13; *Il.* 23. 493; *Il.* 9. 5, etc. Meillet writes (p. 70): 'Il est donc probable que à la date où se sont fixées les formules, la liberté était plus grande qu'à la date où

*l'Iliade et l'Odyssée* ont été composées.

'Derrière les usages stricts de l'époque historique, on entrevit une époque pré-historique où il était tenu un compte exact de la quantité, mais où le versificateur avait des libertés qui ont été restreintes par la suite.'

<sup>4</sup> 'Indo-European Metrics and Archaic Irish Verse', *Celtica*, vi. 194-249, Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1963.



Watkins, in a footnote (p. 202), cautiously approves Meillet's suggestion that the hexameter was borrowed. He then points out that it is 'hardly accidental that the normal quantitative cadence of the hexameter — ◡ ◡ — ◡ is precisely that of the paroemiac line in Greek, as well as that of the South Slavic epic decasyllable. In the constitution of the hexameter we have perhaps to deal with a syncretism of the inherited Indo-European epic line with a line of external origin, rather than a straightforward borrowing.'

Other than in this footnote Watkins has not examined the implications of his work on the paroemiac for the hexameter of epic. It will be seen that not merely is the quantitative cadence of the hexameter, — ◡ ◡ — ◡, also that of the paroemiac, but that the metrical pattern of whole paroemiac lines is exactly the metrical pattern of the chief formula-bearing parts of the hexameter. The paroemiac system may indeed be anapaestic but this sets no great barrier between the two classes. The formulaic metrical systems in Homer take their start chiefly from the third- and fourth-foot caesurae and from the bucolic diaeresis. As far as the caesurae are starting-points this means that the formulas are mainly anapaestic in a dactylic system. The problem of transfer of one rhythm to another is a question of the initial, and in the case of the hexameter it is a question of the origin and cause of the caesura. That is an inquiry which is outside the scope of the present article, but one may think that a syncretism with something external, as suggested by Watkins, is less likely than a development within the Greek system. The Indo-European epic style of alternating lines, a long with a shorter, has been replaced by a single long line. This itself involves no great change.<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps I may here briefly summarize what I have been attempting to postulate. (a) Prose storytelling is earlier than poetic.<sup>2</sup> (b) Heroic prose storytelling (in the Irish tradition) can be seen to employ epithet-nouns as part of its technique and so these do not arise as a result of versification. (c) The hexameter cannot have sprung fully fledged into existence but is likely to have developed (as Watkins shows for the paroemiaks) from a prototype which had a fixed tail-end and a free fore-part. One may imagine a sort of creeping paralysis of versification starting at the line end. The preponderance of epithet nouns at that point suggests that that feature of heroic storytelling helped to develop and mould the hexameter.

To return for a moment to the question of thematic composition, alluded to a footnote above (p. 15, n. 1), a subject which has been convincingly presented by Lord, there is allied to this another dimension which I cannot follow, at least as applied to Greek epic, namely, Lord's theory of sound patterns. This is summarized, for example, in Lord's article in the *Companion to Homer*.<sup>3</sup>

He writes: 'Alliteration and assonance are very common in the Homeric poems and, as in other oral epics, these features are clustered about the key words of a passage. The first sixteen lines of *Iliad* 21 illustrate this phenomenon:—'

<sup>1</sup> Two of the examples of paroemiaks (op. cit., p. 200) quoted by Watkins, an alternation of long and short line, form together a perfect dactylic hexameter:

ὦ Δίε πάσι θεοῖσι  
τετιμένε· σοὶ γὰρ ἔδωκαν.

Watkins, following Bergk, takes this couplet as paroemiac but others regard it as a normal dactylic hexameter. It is mentioned here

without prejudice to emphasize how much—even to the extent of identity—the paroemiaks have in common with the epic hexameter.

<sup>2</sup> See p. 18, and G. S. Kirk, loc. cit. One may perhaps assume the priority in time of prose tales to metrical tales.

<sup>3</sup> Homer and other Epic Poetry: Wace and Stubbings, *A Companion to Homer*, p. 200.

Having quoted these lines he then proceeds to analyse the word echoes and alliterations which he claims cluster about a given theme or idea. For example, he finds in the word *τέκετο* in line 2 a k, t alliteration which is picked up in the word *δίωκε* at the end of line 3 and culminates in the word *Ἐκτωρ* in line 5. I can find little reality in this idea. I fear that Lord has abandoned the aural world and made his analysis on the basis of a written text. The Greek language, because of its complex sound structure, the uniformity of article, noun, and adjective endings, systems of reduplication, and so forth, may seem on paper to yield patterns of alliteration and sound echoes, but they are the accident of the language and any acoustic pattern such as the above k, t examples may be paralleled by other (but, apparently, non-significant) features. For instance, the same few lines contain *πρὸς πόλιν*, say, and *μαίνεται φαίδιμος*. These things are all accidental and their very frequency and inevitability make them go unnoticed.<sup>1</sup> Alliteration must be deliberate. On the other hand one is conscious of alliteration in early Latin texts and in—a more subtle practitioner—Virgil. The impact of alliteration in Irish heroic storytelling is also unmistakable. Homer seems largely to have outgrown this device, if indeed it was ever a marked feature of Greek epic. If it was, we should expect many alliterative examples in the fixed epithets, like, say, *ποδώκεα Πηλεΐωνα*, or *περίφρων Πηνελόπεια*; but these are rare and incidental.<sup>2</sup>

To conclude, it may be that this brief comparison with a few Irish tales sheds a little light on the Homeric scene. If so, it seems that a thorough study of oral techniques in the vast number of tales in manuscript (not to speak of the great recorded wealth of heroic Irish folktales in the archives of the Irish Folklore Commission) will have a contribution to make to Homeric study.<sup>3</sup> The impact of writing seems to have had little effect on the oral character of Irish literature. The same difficulty which Lord or anyone else finds in answering the questions why anybody should have written down the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* and how he could have done so before the advent of modern recording apparatus applies also to medieval Irish tales.

Kirk<sup>4</sup> has called attention to the references in Homer to storytelling, that is, to prose tales. Such a prose tradition, however humble, is of great significance and must be at the back of all poetic traditions. Where heroic narrative develops a verse form it must undergo profound changes under the influence of

<sup>1</sup> In, say, the line of Archilochus beginning *ἐν δορί μὲν μοι μάλα μεμαγμένη*, the accidental features of *μεμαγμένη* are given significance by the deliberate choice of the context which underlines these accidents.

<sup>2</sup> Apart from special effects like the unruly stone of Sisyphus, the only clear example of deliberate word pattern that comes to mind is *Il.* 3. 298–301:

“Ζεῦ κύδιστε μέγιστε, καὶ ἀθάνατοι θεοὶ  
ἄλλοι,  
ὅππότεροι πρότεροι ὑπὲρ ὄρκια πημήνεια,”  
etc.

This, with its various repetitions, is a prayer formula, no doubt traditional and reinforced by magical jingles.

<sup>3</sup> James Ross in an interesting article in

*Modern Philology*, lvii (1959–60), pp. 1–12, examines song-poetry of the Western Isles of Scotland in respect of formulaic diction. He shows that this material exhibits ‘conceptual thrift’ (that is, the idea or mental picture remains rather fixed) ‘with considerable variety of diction rather than “thrift of diction”’. This leaves such formulas free to develop beyond one fixed and established form. In a short excursus on tales he stresses the part which memory and preparation play (as against the Parry–Lord image of the creative composer). This emphasis on recollection finds support elsewhere. See J. H. Delargy, *The Gaelic Storyteller*, pp. 11, 12, 14, 25, 27, 34.

<sup>4</sup> G. S. Kirk, *The Songs of Homer*, 1962, pp. 108 f.

metre, but it still remains heroic narrative. It must still conform to the instinctive rules which the immemorial experience of a tradition imposes on a storyteller. Heroic storytelling is largely a sequence of delaying tactics, great and small. We have discussed some of these larger delays. If we were to make a conjecture about the epithet we might say that, while it may be in origin of a magical significance, in developed storytelling it seems to serve the function of a small but recurring delay, which slows the narrative to a majestic and dignified pace. To that extent it is functional and the traditional epithet 'ornans', applied to it, is somewhat misleading.

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