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ORAL SERMONS AND ORAL NARRATIVE

I

When the *gusle* tradition of spontaneous, oral performance declined in the Balkans, one of the last living laboratories of this genre became unavailable to us. As a result, the field work and analysis done by Milman Parry and Albert B. Lord became the complete corpus of oral narrative in the West, and their theories of oral composition became doctrine. Whatever modification or refinement of the Parry-Lord postulates were made on the basis of their statements or were gleaned from the texts they had collected. Criticism of their assumptions was usually quite speculative since there were no other singers from whom one could learn first-hand. And it was mainly when the extenders of Parry and Lord tried to apply their theories to literature which we only know through manuscripts that serious doubts set in.

However, we have recently become aware of a vital oral tradition in the United States whose transmitters employ techniques similar to those of the *guslars* of Serbo-Croatia.¹ I refer to many 'spiritual' preachers located mainly in the American South and Southwest – most of whom happen to be Black – who compose their sermons spontaneously, recite them orally, and usually chant a portion of them, thus breaking up their utterances into metrically consistent units, which units are essential to Parry's definition of "formula".² These preachers also use traditional themes extensively, and many sermons are composed by the rhapsodic agglutination of several such units, much as purely narrative episodes are strung together in composing heroic songs.

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¹ See Bruce A. Rosenberg, *The Art of the American Folk Preacher* (New York, 1970), and "The Oral Quality of Rev. Shegog's Sermon in William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*", *Literatur in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* 2 (1969), 73-88.

² "Studies in the Epic Technique of Oral Verse-Making I: Homer and Homeric Style", *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 41 (1930), 80.

But to use the fortunate phrase of Eugene Vinaver, it is a long way from Camelot to Carbonek, and a long way from Bosnia to Bakersfield, though perhaps not such a long way from the chanted sermon to the chanted epic. In the present essay I shall discuss the similarities between these two genres to determine whether any generalization about oral literature is valid if based upon a close analysis of the sermon. If the techniques of the preacher and the *guslar* are in significant ways analogous, then we shall further want to decide how our understanding of oral composition and transmission will be enlarged. Prudence demands that before we can generalize about oral performances we must extract our principles from traditions which are certifiably oral; hence the impetus for a detailed study of American spiritual preachers.

The specific focus of this essay will be upon a phenomenon slighted by Parry and Lord, the stall; that is, language used repetitively (on either a lexical or syntactical level), whose formulation is somewhat automatic, so as to give the performer time to think of what to say next. Since it is now well-recognized that the oral performer's most pressing need is to come up with the following line even while he is reciting the line of the moment, stalls are developed as an aid in composition. The results produce the 'oral style'. The various forms of stalling are perhaps the most significant stylistic feature of oral narrative. But first we would do well to compare the sermon and the heroic song in a general way.

The dissimilarities between the sermon and the epic are the most striking and obvious aspects of any comparison; but the dissimilarities are relatively superficial as we shall see in detail below. Most importantly – and in many ways one need not proceed beyond this – both kinds of performance are governed by a metrical concern, and it is this concern which produces the formulaic language which Lord found in the Bosnian hills. The *guslars* frequently punctuate each line by gliding the last syllable or measure and then pausing.³ Often each line has its own melody which is completed before the next one is sung – it does not seem to carry over to the following formula – and so the *guslar's* music helps to define his syntax. The folk preacher characteristically punctuates the sermon line with a pause and a loud gasp or grunt, and his inflection usually falls at the end of the line.

The services of many folk preachers are antiphonal; this is especially true of Negro congregations. When the audience participates actively in the preacher's performance, they affect his style. When a congregation

³ Albert B. Lord, *The Singer of Tales* (New York, 1965), 37-38, 54.

is listless the preacher may try special effects to arouse them (or the Spirit of God within them), and failing that may terminate the sermon sooner than planned. Diction may be affected: the preacher may exclaim, "Gettin' quiet in here, ain't it?" or, "I wonder do you know what I'm talkin' about." And the audience also helps punctuate the language of the sermon by its rhythmic responses, so that the quality of the congregation during any given performance – if that 'quality' can be measured as something akin to emotional responsiveness – is an important aspect of the folk sermon. So too with the Yugoslav peasants and the performance of the *guslar's pesma*, where the effect of the audience upon the performer appears to be similarly influential.

To return to the essential point; for whatever reason – the preacher's or the congregation's predilection for rhythmical delivery – the language of such performances is formulaic. Most preachers were reluctant to discuss their language because of their belief that when they are behind the pulpit their words come to them directly from the Holy Ghost. Therefore, I was told that it would do no good to question *them* about their speech or their ideas. Even preachers whose confidence had been firmly gained were loath to admit that they ever repeated themselves. Only after several months did two or three men discuss certain phrases which appeared often within each of their sermons, and then only when confronted with the evidence of the tape recorder. Rev. Rubin Lacy of Bakersfield, California, had a special term for his verbatim repetitions: "bywords" or "habitual words". They gave him time to sort out the thoughts to come. His friend, Rev. Elihue Brown, said all such repetitions were "rests on the highway, where you could pull off and regain your strength to drive on". He said that all the while that he was preaching he would be "reading" the pages of God's (imaginary) book before him; even at those moments when he seemed to establish "eye contact", Brown was "reading God's message" before him.

Again, like the *guslar's* songs, the sermons are often composed by rhapsodic stringing or stitching together (to remain faithful to the Greek etymon) of several traditional themes,⁴ those single modules of narrative, which comprise heroic songs. In working with the preachers, however, we found it more useful to consider such modules as fairly consistently patterned sequences of formulas which are regularly used to describe a narrative event or some idea, often from the Bible. Sermon themes appear to be as flexible in their construction as their narrative counterparts,

⁴ See Albert B. Lord, "Composition by Theme in Homer and South Slavic Epos", *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 83 (1952), 71-80.

and they are as flexible in their use within a sermon. Our field work indicates quite decidedly that sermon themes are used by many preachers to facilitate composition, in that they are largely automatic in formulation and thus allow the preacher time to prepare the composition ahead. In this way they function much as do stall formulas. And they have other purposes as well; several preachers used well-known themes to enliven a bored congregation.⁵ Because the language was largely automatic, the preacher could devote his energies to expression, gesture, and dramatic intonation that would otherwise be spent composing forthcoming lines, so as to enliven the performance.

To speak of seeming differences for a moment, one of the most obvious is the hortatory quality of the sermons and the narrative nature of the epics, or heroic songs. The difference is more apparent than real. To begin with, the sermons use many narrative stories within their frameworks, usually as *exemplar*; the percentage of 'pure' narrative varies within sermons and from preacher to preacher, but I think it is accurate to say that at least half of the lines are devoted to telling a story. As both Bartlett and Olrik have seen,⁶ the preacher seems to prefer the striking metaphor, action, and pithy dialogue; it livens their presentation and reinforces the understanding of their congregations that God and His Saints are real, live people and not distant, unapproachable abstractions. It has been observed of the popular preachers of the early 1800's that much of the effectiveness depended on the vividness of their images, and that successful rhetoric was in large measure tantamount to "image manipulation".⁷ In analyses of sermons recited a year apart, we found that the narrative portions were retained, largely intact and almost always in the same order, but that the moral or message for the day – less patterned and more truly spontaneous – varied with great flexibility and from year to year did not have continuity. The following outlines are of two sermons,

⁵ In this sense the recitation may function as did catalogues in Middle English romances. A list of foods is no more interesting than a grocery list, but as the minstrel adds gesture and vivacity to his performance it will be successful.

⁶ F. C. Bartlett, "Some Experiments on the Reproduction of Folk Stories", *Folklore* 31 (1920), 30-47, and Axel Olrik, "Epic Laws of Folk Narrative": both available in Alan Dundes, ed., *The Study of Folklore* (Englewood Cliffs, 1965), 243-58 and 129-41. Olrik formulated the *Gezetz des Gegensatzes*, stating that antagonists and contrasting characters are always polarized. Bartlett noted that visual imagery tends to be more active, and that relations of opposition, similarity, etc., are likely, through time, to be intensified.

⁷ See the unpublished Ph. D. dissertation of George Andrew Von Glahn, "Natural Eloquence and the Democratic Gospel: The Idea of an American Rhetoric from the Second Great Awakening to Cooper's Natty Bumppo" (University of North Carolina, 1969), 108.

the first preached in 1967 (on the left) and the second on the same topic a year later. Both are reprinted in *The Art of the American Folk Preacher*, (138-49):

LINES/SUBJECT	LINES/SUBJECT
1-3 Scripture	1-4 Scripture
4-22 Digression on preaching	5-10 Digression on experience
23-35 Digr. on self and fishing	11-17 David as shepherd
36-44 Digr. on liars	18-19 Digr. on self
45-48 David's experience	20-68 <i>David's anointing</i>
49-60 Digr. on St. Paul	68-100 <i>Fight with Goliath</i>
61-67 Description of David	101-105 Transition
68-81 <i>David's anointing</i>	106-143 <i>David's flight to cave</i>
82-107 <i>Fight with Goliath</i>	144-167 Digr: dangers of shepherd's life
108-140 <i>David's flight to cave</i>	168-205 <i>David saves lamb</i>
141-161 David as shepherd	206-213 Digr: Lord as Shepherd
162-218 <i>David saves lamb</i> (and recitation of Psalm)	214-222 Digr. on self; moral for the day
219-260 Digr. on selfishness	223-235 Digr: warning to preachers
278-330 Four Horsemen	

Narratives make certain demands upon the order and interrelationship of their internal components – ‘motifs’, if you like – which we do not find in sermons. Propp has best expressed it in the sentence, “theft cannot take place before the lock is broken”.⁸ Beowulf must first travel to Hrothgar’s land before he fights Grendel; Ganelon must betray Roland for the pagans to ambush Charlemagne’s rear guard. Actually, Lord has indicated that the *guslar* has a certain measure of freedom with his story and is not obligated to continue or end it in a certain way. Theoretically, the preacher has a greater freedom. While it is true that David must always win his fight with Goliath, the saving of strayed sheep can be related before or after the Giant-Combat. The story of Moses receiving the ten commandments can be told before or after he leads the Jews out of Egypt, depending on which moral the preacher wished to raise at which moment.⁹ But it should be noted that the preacher’s freedom is more theoretical than actual, because (again) in studies made of the same sermons re-

⁸ Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, Louis A. Wagner, ed. (Austin, 1968), 22.

⁹ Von Glahn (“Natural Eloquence”, 75) cites Ralph Waldo Emerson’s distinction between a lecture and a sermon as that between a tree and a building. For a lecture one has a framework, and the structure is evident from the first glance at the plans; but the tree – the sermon – branches out in unforeseen directions, its beauty challenging the imagination. The sermon convinces because it is natural and has little to do with logic. See also A. M. Baumgartner, “The Lyceum is My Pulpit: Homiletics in Emerson’s Early Lectures”, *American Literature* 34 (1963), 477-86.

cited in different years we found that usually the same stories appear in the same order, as we saw in the illustration taken from Lacy's performances. For the preacher this internal 'necessity' comes about not through the inner logic of narrative, but as yet another aid to enable him to retain, to 'get by heart', in the same way that *guslars* get their stories 'by heart'.

One difference between the sermon and heroic song that is as real as it is apparent is the performance's opening. The *guslar* usually begins his song with much the same rhythm and pace that he will use at the end.¹⁰ The length of the line, its stress, and the intensity of delivery often do not vary appreciably throughout the song. The preacher almost invariably begins in normal 'prose', his delivery akin to conventional pulpit style, and then he gradually increases his rhythm and the intensity of his delivery until his language is metrical and he is chanting rhythmically.¹¹ The admonition here is that one must be careful in discussing the formulaic content to select the proper portion of the sermon to compare with other known oral performances. An excerpt from the beginning will produce language that is – as just suggested – aside from diction, little different from conversation or secular public oratory. As the preacher increases the pace of his delivery his language becomes more repetitive, a ratio which always holds.

Neither sermon nor *pesma* is as metrically consistent as one would wish, and both the preacher and the *guslar* often have one or two syllables left over at the end of their lines (or were as many short): the Yugoslavs solved their rhythmic problems in the same way as do the preachers: by gliding the short lines and compressing the long.¹² Also, the *guslars* did not sing their songs in the Western sense, but rather chanted them with a decided Asiatic flavor. This facilitated comparison with the preachers, and the Americans turned out to be even more melodic – to my ears at least – than the Bosnians I heard.

II

During 1967 and 1968, after the field work for this project was well under way but the analysis was still in its early stages, as each new significant

¹⁰ Lord (*The Singer of Tales*, 22) notes that a few *guslars* also begin slowly and end rapidly.

¹¹ Von Glahn ("Natural Eloquence", 82) says of the sermons of James McGready, a preacher of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, that the last sections were seldom printed as they were usually extemporaneous, being determined by the situation and the mood of the audience.

¹² Lord, *The Singer of Tales*, 38.

piece of evidence was uncovered, Prof. Donald K. Fry and I began making comparisons with Old English text literature. Fry is also a medievalist and interested in formulaic approaches to literature as they apply to Anglo-Saxon narrative, especially *Beowulf* and *Judith*. One of our first surprises was over the great frequency of stall formulas in the sermons. The preachers themselves admitted after close questioning that the purpose of the stall was to allow them time to think of what to say next: the stall is repeated verbatim so frequently one thinks of it as memorized and it consequently needed no concentration for its performance. If a case could be made for the memorization of any portion of the sermons, it was in the stall formulas and in quotations from the Bible. The preachers said that such devices gave them time to work out the next few lines; the stalls also gave them something to say, something to fill in what would otherwise be 'dead air', while they were thinking of the lines to come. The need for stalls was obvious in this oral performance, but if *Beowulf* was the record of an oral performance, where were they in the Anglo-Saxon epic? And in prematurely reaching conclusions, we decided that this was yet further proof¹³ that our oldest English epic was the product of a literate talent. (As it happens we still think so, though now perhaps for better reasons.)

But this error was obvious upon first turning to the songs of the *guslars*. Lord mentions¹⁴ the occasional use of stalls by his performers, but they do not occur often because the audience is likely to become bored with them and so the singer controls their use. However, the *guslar* also needs time to formulate the lines ahead, which he gains in a characteristic additive manner typical of his mode:

When Mujo was a shepherd, he used to tend cattle with the shepherds; he used to go out with the shepherds. He was weak and the shepherds beat him; they beat him and tormented him. The unhappy Mujo was walking along the mountainside and he found the young of a Vila, the little children of a white Vila, in a thicket on the mountain.¹⁵

In terms of the repetition of final words, this phenomenon is *conversio*; from the point of view of repetition of the language or ideas of the preceding clause or sentence, we may speak of *gradatio*, though in classical rhetoric that was accomplished by repeating a single word. When we

¹³ The most persuasive article is that of Larry D. Benson, "The Literary Character of Anglo-Saxon Formulaic Poetry", *PMLA* 81 (1966), 334-41.

¹⁴ *The Singer of Tales*, 22.

¹⁵ Milman Parry and Albert B. Lord, *Serbo-croatian Heroic Songs I* (Cambridge, Mass., 1954), 116.

turn to the performances of the oral singers of central Asia, the *akyn*, we find a similar pattern; the following lines are from Nora Chadwick's *Oral Epics of Central Asia*:¹⁶

When he grew to be a prince, he overthrew princely dwellings;
Sixty stallions, a hundred horses,
He drove thither from Kokand;
Eighty mares, a thousand kymkar
He brought from Bokhara;
The Chinese settled in Kashgar
He drove away to Turfan;
The Chinese settled in Turfan
He drove yet farther to Aksu.

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The repetition which characterizes the Yugoslav oral narrative tradition and affords the *guslar* time to formulate the lines ahead also occurs occasionally in the preaching style and for the same reason: in the sermons it is yet another form of repetition (*adjunctio* if we consider repetition of initial verbs), another kind of pause. In the following example, Rev. Brown (of Bakersfield, Calif.) is the preacher, and "God is Mindful of Man", his message; June 11, 1967 is the date:

- 232 I want to say to the deacon board
I want you to be mindful
I want you to be mindful how you serve as a deacon
Because the Lord doesn't have to use you
- 235 I want to say to you brother preachers be careful how you preach
Because the Lord didn't have to have you to preach

The important principle is that one should not necessarily look for the same form of stalls or of whatever device or process in every poetic tradition, because each poetry has its own traditions and its own artistic expedients; consequently, its poets work out their problems in individual as well as traditional ways. If those ways, or modes, overlap or are analogous the folklorist will have solid evidence to work with; if not, he will have to examine the varying forms closely to extract similarities of function. The preachers not only could repeat certain phrases with impunity, but the congregation encouraged such repetition which verged on the litanous; the audience of the *guslars* (and apparently of the *akyn*) discourage such repetition. The effect produced by the stall upon the narrative is one of unevenness: several lines advance the action or idea rapidly and then progression halts: the preacher subjectively formulates

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¹⁶ Nora K. Chadwick and Victor Zhirmunsky, *Oral Epics of Central Asia* (Cambridge, 1969), 31.

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subsequent utterances while the congregation has a moment to reflect upon the message. In contrast, the *guslar's pesma* moves more slowly but more evenly without the preacher's pulsating, peristaltic tempo. The stalls *are* in Jugoslavian song; they are simply in another form.

So important are the twin necessities to formulate subsequent lines and to fill in the line of the moment that stalls are likely to take manifold forms for the preacher. Quite often they are not simply techniques designed to gain some time, but are also mnemonic in that they help the performer retain the traditional aspects of his material. I wish to consider them together here as they are both techniques which function to simplify the performer's task. For this immediate purpose only, then, stalls may be seen to operate in several *aspects* of language: in 'memorized' formulas, in repetitive themes, in the use of appositives, in ideas or actions repeated in substantially different diction, and in certain enjambed lines which follow predictably ("Predictable Complements").¹⁷ We shall examine them separately.

The stall formula appears so frequently in oral sermons and is so stable that we think of it as memorized. Almost always it is exclamatory in nature, which is appropriate to many parts of a sermon. Among the most popular recorded in this study were such as "Hark Hallelujah", "God from Glory", "God from Zion", "Oh, Lord". The *guslars* also tend to solidify certain narrative functions. Second, the preacher often introduces dialogue with such lines as, "Jesus said the other day", or "I heard Moses say the other day": Salih Ugljanin occasionally introduces dialogue with repeated phrasing: "*Majko moja, teneta ti tvoga*".¹⁸ Each experienced preacher seems to have several formulas which he uses interchangeably. While they are remarkably stable, they are not 'memorized' in the sense that the preacher does not strive to repeat his stall formula exactly. The important thing for him is to fill a space with a certain utterance, and he is indifferent to whether he says "I'm gonna tell ya, friend", or "I want ya to know, brother". As it happens, most stalls of the kind here considered are repeated verbatim, but it has been my experience that such repetition is incidental and not necessary.

Medievalists prefer the term "Type-scene" to Stith Thompson's "motif", which Fry has recently defined as "a recurring stereotyped presentation of conventional details used to describe a certain narrative

¹⁷ So far as I know this term was first coined and used by Albert C. Baugh "Improvisation in the Middle English Romance", *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 103 (1959), 418-54.

¹⁸ Parry and Lord, *Heroic Songs II*, lines 268 and 292.

event, requiring neither verbatim repetition nor a specific formula content". However, in Old English verse certain details and ideas may be used in the formation of several type-scenes necessitating the conceptualization of "theme", which Fry further defines as "a recurring concatenation of details and ideas, not restricted to a specific event, verbatim repetition, or certain formulas, which forms an underlying structure for an action or description".¹⁹ For our purposes, an understanding of the type-scene – distinct from the Thompson "motif" because of its concern for language as well as event – will suffice.

When these entities are examined comparatively, it is clear that the preacher thinks of the event or idea in terms of specific language components, and often these components' syntax and diction are retained from one performance to another. While recording, it was clear that Lacy had a fairly good idea of the syntax, diction, and narrative structure of his description of the "Four Horsemen". He could relate, in the calm and privacy of his kitchen, nearly the same description he had recited from the pulpit five weeks earlier. In the example below, Rev. Elihue Brown twice preached on related topics using similar phrasing; on the left is his performance of June 11, 1967; on the right that of May 19, 1968:

- | | |
|---|--|
| <p>114 Jesus was so concerned about man
 Until He left His richness and glad
 glory
 Came down here in this old sin-cussed
 world
 Stepped on the train of nature with
 a virgin woman
 And brought Himself out an infant
 baby
 On the train of nature nine months</p> | <p>Same Jesus this evenin'
 Was concerned about us so
 much so
 Until He left glad glory
 Came out of glory to his old
 sinful world 5
 Got on the train on nature
 Stayed there nine months
 Stepped off at the station one
 mornin'
 Early one mornin'
 Stepped off at the station of
 Bethlehem 10
 Wrapped up in swaddlin' clothes
 Way down in an oxen manger
 Stayed right there
 Until God wanted Him to come
 on out
 Stayed right there 15
 Until God wanted Him what to
 do
 Stayed right there</p> |
| <p>120 Stepped off the train at a little old
 station called Bethlehem
 Wrapped over there in swaddlin'
 clothes
 Stayed right there
 'Til God told His father Joseph
 I want you to carry the baby over to
 Galilee</p> | <p>Stepped off at the station of
 Bethlehem 10
 Wrapped up in swaddlin' clothes
 Way down in an oxen manger
 Stayed right there
 Until God wanted Him to come
 on out
 Stayed right there 15
 Until God wanted Him what to
 do
 Stayed right there</p> |

¹⁹ Donald K. Fry, "Old English Formulaic Themes and Type-Scenes", *Neophilologus* 52 (1968), 53.

Since the subject of the 1967 passage was “God’s concern for man” and of the 1968 passage, “no other gods before me”, we can properly call both concatenations of ideas, “themes”. The passage is obviously not memorized but over the course of time and many repeated performances the thrust will be toward memorization, that is, the passage should become progressively more solidified.²⁰ Again, variation during performance will always occur, something that Brown is not likely to worry about. The important factor, for him, is that this associational cluster enables him to recite his *enfance* theme more easily than if each time he had to reconstruct each detail from nothing.

The preacher also simplifies his task in other ways in which memory is hardly an issue at all. Many men use nouns, noun-compounds, and clauses in apposition (a form of *expositio*, specifically *interpretatio*) whose psychological and thematic associations enable him to chant such series with great facility. The following passage is from a sermon of Rev. J. J. Freeman, July 23, 1967:

But when it comes to our profession
The preacher
40 The highest office that’s in the world
The lowest-paid office in the world
The most talked-about man
Amen, everybody knows his profession better than he does

Rev. Lacy used a similar technique on May 19, 1968:

225 That same God
Same God
I say that same God
Is a way-provider
When ya don’t have a way
230 When ya can’t make your own way
He’s a way-provider
He’s a rock
In a weary land
And a shelter
235 In the time of a storm

The latter passage is cited because of the technical similarity to the Old English narrative style of presenting appositives, cited below without the intent to suggest orality or similarity of function:

²⁰ See Albert B. Lord, “Homer and Huso II: Narrative Inconsistencies in Homer and Oral Poetry”, *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 69 (1938), 440. The more often a singer describes a scene or an event, “the more fixed does the description become”.

There in they laid him, their well-loved lord,
Their ring-bestower,...
 ...with weapons heaped,
With battle-armor, with bills and byrnies.²¹

We have seen that the preacher's stall formulas are usually, though not necessarily, verbatim repetitions. However, they are not the only lines which get repeated exactly; various kinds of ideological elements get repeated in various ways. The stalls are found so often throughout all the sermons that it would be superfluous to cite them here. It should be said that when Rev. T. J. Hurley (of Oklahoma City), for instance, repeats "It's gonna rain/It's gonna rain"²² (Perilous Times, Version II, 11) that he is not using a stall formula but that he has for various other reasons decided to repeat the line; however it has the same effect in detaining the progress of the sermon. One of the clues that Hurley is in fact in need of time occurs immediately following the repetitions: the next two lines are semantically similar, "God's gonna send a flood down/God's gonna destroy ya."

Repetitions occur less frequently in the *pesma*, but occasionally one finds them as in the "Song of Bagdad", 11, 415, and 416: "*Prekorila, pa me zasramila,/Prekorila, pa me zasramila!*"²³

Unlike Homer's alleged thrift, some preachers will get stuck on one idea and seem unable to progress. Rev. Rubin Lacy was once immobilized on tape, and floundered around for something further to say, but until a new thought came to him he kept repeating, in various ways, the same basic idea:

45 Was born and God's only man in the world ever was born by a woman an'
- was near and was after God's own heart
And goin' up the road, after he become king hmmm?
He got selfish
He wanted everything he saw
50 That that belonged to him and that that didn't belong to him

For the preacher the effect is the same as for a stall: Lacy has here said something, actually six lines worth, while thinking of what new idea to present. In pointing out the natural eloquence of the American frontiersman as a nineteenth century ideal, George Von Glahn²⁴ cites Natty Bumppo's "additive" style: "old and helpless", "eaten and drunk",

²¹ Lines cited from *Beowulf: The Oldest English Epic*, Charles W. Kennedy, trans. (New York, 1940), 4.

²² In *The Art of the American Folk Preacher*, 288-89.

²³ Parry and Lord, *Heroic Songs II*, 12.

²⁴ "Natural Eloquence", 55 and 92.

and “weep and mourn”. This device adds emphasis to Natty’s speech, and also gives him the appearance of fluency and of thoroughness. The same effect is true of the preacher’s duplicating style, and perhaps also of poor Mujo who suffered at the hands of the other shepherds: “They beat him and tormented him.”

Nearly all preachers use another method of repeating basically the same idea, or closely related ideas, which differs from Lacy’s example above in that each line or clause is related syntactically, semantically, and lexically in such a way as to suggest that the series approaches memorization: if a word is repeated at the beginning of successive sentences or clauses, we speak of *repetitio*; when Hurley, below, repeats the same idea in different words, we have *interpretatio*; in that he uses different verbs to express similar ideas we have *disjunctio*. These are, in many of the same ways, stalls. Rev. Hurley once used the following passage:

- 215 Regardless of what anybody says or does
 Regardless of who turns against me
 Regardless of who’s for me
 Let ’em mock let ’em scoff
 Let ’em make fun and make shame of me
 220 I’m gonna live for God

One suspects that passages of this sort, so rhetorically structured, are also used on occasion for their emotional impact. Lacy once used a similar series (June 20, 1967) which is not anaphoric but which shows, semantically, that each line ‘belonged’ to its grouping, a form of *compar* and *disjunctio*:

- eebec1c24c44caa7ed43e1205f4d28cc
 ebrary
- 105 Search all day and all night
 Know all about you
 Seed everything you do
 Hear everything you say
 I heard him say the other day

Anaphora does develop with surprising frequency, and as has been explained elsewhere, largely because when the preacher retains the syntax and first word (or words) of the preceding line he has that much less to worry about. One should not rule out, however, the likelihood that some preachers use anaphoric sequences primarily for their accumulative emotional effect (*conduplicatio*). To demonstrate this technique two passages are cited. The first, by Rev. Brown (June, 1967) developed more as a stall, though much of the idea comes from an old spiritual; the second by Rev. Hurley (May, 1968) is both used to simplify his composition and for effect:

- 191 This same Jesus
This same one that had concourse with the lawyers and doctors
The same man
- 195 That had – gave – told 'em to fill up a pitcher with water
Same man gave sight to the blind
Same man
- 93 He said Oh Lord
It's not my will
- 95 It's not my way
It's not my thoughts
It's not my ideas
It's not my opinion
It's not my theories
- 100 It's not what I think
It's not what I do
It's not what I say
No, God, it's Your will be done

The recitation of such a passage requires little subjective formulation. The syntax from lines 94 to 102 hardly varies while the series is introduced by line 93 and concluded without adding a new idea at 103; “will” and “way” are logical pairs because of alliteration as well as idea: the following four objects – “thoughts”, “ideas”, “opinion”, and “theories” – are closely related as is the sequence (for other reasons) of “think-do-say”. We find the same development throughout the songs of Yugoslavia; Đemail Zogić thus describes part of a scene in Parry's collection 24, “Bojičić Alija Rescues Alibey's Children”:

- 1275 *Na desnu je sisu naslo ijo*
Na pušku je nišan saklopijo
Na taban joj ćarku judarijo
(II, 243)

Repetition of the various kinds we have been mentioning is by no means the only way the preacher has to lighten his composition burden. It should be so apparent as not to need demonstration that if the performer can break up a single sentence into two, three, or four metrical units he has eased his mental labors considerably. Of the men whose work is exhibited in *The Art of the American Folk Preacher*, Rev. Freeman provides the best example, witness his lines, “Jesus said go ye to all the world/
And preach the gospel/
To every creature.” That the passage is from an oft-recited portion of the New Testament is not entirely coincidental, as it is intimacy with just such passages that enables the preacher to enjamb the lines readily. (It can be done with little-known passages, but not with as much facility.)

Another aspect of enjambment-as-stall is what, in quite another context, has been called "Predictable Complements". As it applies to folk preaching, it is a line which associationally or logically follows another and so does not present any compositional challenge to the speaker. The best example here comes from a sermon that has not been published, one preached by the Rev. Jerry Lockett in Charlottesville, Virginia, on March 17, 1968. About halfway into his performance, Rev. Lockett is talking about Jesus at Gethsemane, specifically the Son's plea:

Got down on his bended knee
Begin to call on the Father
Which art in heaven

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ebruary

Even though The Lord's Prayer is not being quoted here, Lockett is talking about one of Jesus' prayers, and the sequence "Begin to call on the Father/Which art in heaven" is understandable. But a short while later the subject is Golgotha, and still the following sequence appears:

On the third day in the mornin'
We seen this same Jesus
Oh Lord have mercy
I tell you my Father
Which art in heaven

Earlier, when Lockett was talking about Jesus in the temple of Jerusalem, he said:

I know you got your education
Got it from a man
But I got mine from my Father
Which art in heaven

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And later, when describing the Ascension, Lockett preached:

I'm leavin' now
For my Father
Which art in heaven

So we can see that regardless of the context, when Lockett ends a line in "Father", he is very likely to follow it with "Which art in heaven", and thus he will not have to worry about one more line.

One can see in Parry's collected "Song of Bagdad" a certain development in which an extended passage is repeated shortly after; in Salih Uglijanin's song the sultan gives detailed instructions to his pashas and viziers, all of which are then carried out in much the same phrasing. (I, 79-80; Lord describes this in *Singer of Tales*, 82-83.) This sort of

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horizontal development also occurs in *Beowulf*, for instance, when, after Grendel is slain, Beowulf returns to Hygelac to retell the slaying of Grendel, though in the Anglo-Saxon manuscript the horizontal development is not verbatim. This phenomenon also occurs in the sermons though it is seldom developed as extensively as in the narratives just mentioned. In the following passage we can observe Rev. Lacy simplifying his task with horizontal development:

- 133 So God
 Made a earth
135 A world
 With three hundred and sixty-five days
 In the year
 Mister Hoyle
 Made a deck of cards
140 With three hundred and sixty-five spots
 In the cards

Brown has used a similar mode:

- 200 Walked out along the seashore
 Noticed – saw Andrew
 Simon Peter
 Told Andrew
 Simon Peter

In the Serbo-Croatian songs something of the sort also takes place. In the following examples very similar language is used to depict a conversation between the preacher and Alija (on the left), while a little later Alija gives the same message to his mother. Although not a theme or type-scene – there is nothing here which is likely to be transposed to another song – the scenes are analogous and the *guslar* takes advantage of it to avoid retelling it in entirely new syntax. The fact that the message is repeated at all has given the singer material for elaboration:

- | | | | |
|-----|--|---------------------------------------|-----|
| | <i>Pa je sultan ferman naćinijo</i> | <i>Na mene je ferman opravijo</i> | 272 |
| | <i>Na gaziju Derdeljez Aljiju</i> | <i>Na gaziju Derdeljez Aljiju</i> | |
| 220 | <i>Da pokupiš Bosnu cip dejelu</i> | <i>Nadene me komendar Aljijom</i> | |
| | <i>Z Bosne vojaske stotinu hiljada</i> | <i>Da pokupim Bosnu cip cijelu</i> | 275 |
| | <i>Da devljetu sljegneš u hindatu</i> | <i>Butum Bosnu pa Hercegovinu</i> | |
| | <i>Da mu primuš bijela Bagdata</i> | <i>Od Bosne mi stotinu hiljada</i> | |
| | <i>Da se Bosna pominje do vijeka</i> | <i>Da devljetu sljegnem od indata</i> | |
| | | <i>Da mu bijem bijela Bagdata</i> | |
| | | (II, 10-11) | |

Finally, it is clear that some digressions also serve to make up time and aid the preacher in avoiding the relentless inevitability of composing

the next line – or lines. One can see the thematic and dramatic relevance of digressions in *Beowulf* or the *Odyssey*, for instance, but one is hard put to explain the rationale for Lacy's reminiscence about fishing as a young boy, when his topic was the apostles as fishers of men. Why he digressed is understandable associationally; providing intellectual justification is another matter. So, while many digressions are little more than the products of faulty concentration, on occasion the preacher may intentionally employ a well-known and often-recited anecdote or *exemplum* in a situation where his creative powers momentarily fail. Lacy used such a device when he added a well-known theme of the Four Horsemen to a sermon on the Twenty-Third Psalm, though he certainly had other motives in that instance; Brown inserted ten lines about how mothers worry over their children while discussing Mary's concern for the young Jesus; McDowell digressed for two lines (197-198) as he paused between Second Thessalonians and First Timothy.

At the conclusion of this preliminary rhetoric, some statement concerning the sermon's effectiveness needs to be made. When oral performances are transcribed, the observed (no longer a listener, but a reader) is in a different world. The language is either clear, though rather simple, as with the sermons of Reverends McDowell or Franklin, or they are hopeless, a-grammatical jumbles, such as one finds in parts of Lacy. We murder to transcribe: on paper there is little rhythm, no music, no shouting from the congregation. But in this art the medium is the message, and that message will be in many ways non-verbal. James Weldon Johnson recalled seeing "congregations moved to ecstasy by the rhythmic intoning of sheer incoherencies".²⁵

The preacher will insist that his message is theological, that it is, or contains, or conveys an idea, but from my own observation of hundreds of services, the matter seems to be more complex. The ideal mode for the presentation of data, in this case theological data, is prose. Chanting presents language too rapidly for the assimilation of logic while prose allows the preacher time to develop ideas and to clarify his rationale. Since informational content is seldom interesting when repeated, the 'manuscript preacher' must search weekly for new sermon topics or at least novel ways of presenting familiar ones. The preacher who chants is much less concerned with new data: his message is ever on the gospel, and though he will, obviously, vary his text for the day, not only are the number of texts relatively small but the morals derived from them are also limited.

²⁵ *God's Trombones* (New York, 1948), 5.

An audience raised with traditional literature is less concerned with data than one accustomed to originality in art. The congregations of folk preachers come to church prepared: they usually know their Bible and know it well. Many of the congregation are deacons and Sunday School teachers; a few may preach themselves. In the Baptist and Methodist Churches (at least) most of the congregation will have had experience in rendering testimonies, and so will have experience not only in public performance but with various popular *exempla*. With such an audience one can postulate an *a priori* preparation in subject matter, an interest – often intense – in their religion and in the proceedings of the church, and one knows that they will have certain stylistic preconceptions about the performance of a sermon before they ever settle in their seats. And so before the first prayer has been uttered, the preacher knows that he can stimulate certain conventional anticipations in his congregation: opening remarks, quotations from Scripture, the form and the melody of the entire piece, even some of the language itself.

As with any traditional art – where the content is familiar – the performer relies heavily on the aesthetics of form. Johnson had listened to sheer incoherencies, but the congregation was moved to ecstasy: the incoherencies were uttered successfully, that is, aesthetically. Kenneth Burke has shown long ago the various methods the artist employs to affect the traditional audience.²⁶ When the listener is won over by rhythm, a part of him assents to the artist's will. If the preacher, through his chanting, can induce the congregation to tap their feet, to clap their hands, to nod their heads and sway to his rhythm, he has gained an important measure of persuasion over them. When the audience sways in unison, they have given their leader a measure of their belief; in church, where the doctrines are already a matter of faith, the preacher's informational content will not be nearly so important as his rhythm.

The congregation also assents to – and becomes a part of the service by that much more – the preacher's melody. We have seen in *The Art of the American Folk Preacher* how each preacher has his own music: at the most intense moments of his performance his chanting becomes markedly melodic, and can be notated. Certain lines of which the preacher is fond will be sung consistently to the same melody, suggesting that the preacher closely identifies language with music. In trying to notate several passages, we also heard members of the congregation anticipate their minister by a second or two as they sang a brief melody which he had

²⁶ *Counter Statement* (Berkeley, 1968), especially the essays on "Psychology and Form" and "Lexicon Rhetoricae".

not yet begun. In this anticipation as well was the congregation committing a further portion of its belief to the preacher.

In traditional art there is no suspense and no surprise; one is satisfied aesthetically because of a sense of the logic and justness of procedure, the inherent dignity of it, and because of the fulfillment of traditional expectations. Those expectations can be satisfied in narrative, as when the master returns and casts out the lazy servant who merely buried his talents. But it can also be resolved on the level of rhetoric; for instance when Lacy says that God "Knows all about you" the audience will have an inkling that "Seed everything you do" (or some line closely approximating it) will follow. The latter having been spoken, the congregation will, however unconsciously, expect the next line – in an aesthetic sense they will demand it: "Hear everything you say." The same expectation will be found in such series as Hurley's (already cited), "It's not my will/It's not my way", etc., which builds up expectations for a denouement. "It's not my will" may even develop a slight anticipation for the following line which, properly, retains the same syntax, changing only the most important word (which is suitably placed last) by substituting an alliterative. The length of the series can vary somewhat without substantially altering the demand that the series end with the assertion that, "No God It's Your will be done".

What we have just said is similar to an observation made many years ago by William Butler Yeats on the nature of rhythm:

The purpose of rhythm, it has always seemed to me, is to prolong the moment of contemplation, the moment when we are both asleep and awake, which is the one moment of creation, by hushing us with an alluring monotony, while it holds us waking by variety, to keep us in that state of perhaps real trance, in which the mind liberated from the pressure of the will is unfolded in symbols.²⁷

Yeats sought the individuation of symbolic communication in his audience; the preacher seeks to gain assent.

The well-preached sermon intensifies steadily, sometimes with appropriate moments of relaxation, both in tone and rhythm. More than with the telling of a folktale or the chanting of an heroic song (the Yugoslav 'epics' are folktales chanted metrically with a *gusle* or *tamboura* accompaniment), the aesthetic end of the sermon is not merely an arbitrary break in its linear development, but its culmination, its fruition. The European folktale (as a genre) is circo-symmetrical: the hero begins at

²⁷ *Ideas of Good and Evil* (London, 1903), 247-48.

home, departs, and returns. In Propp's terms, always follows (however tardily). Tales begin with function A and proceed inexorably to function K or W. Donors do not appear by chance nor helpers without purpose; combat with the villain is always followed by his defeat, pursuit is invariably frustrated by rescue.

Decidedly, the denouement of the folk sermon is fruition. As Rev. Lacy once said to me, "when you've said enough, you ought to know when to sit down.... You want to make people glad twice: glad when you get up and glad when you sit down." As we have shown, the *guslar's pesma* shares many of the same exploitative devices, the aesthetic sense of the singer leading him to solve his problems in the same ways as the preacher. On this level – the performer interacting with his audience – we can ignore the tremendous differences of narrative Surface Structure: the deeds of Marko Kraljević differ greatly from those of King David, but in both the performer will be appealing to similar psychic patterns within his audience.

III

The evidence is more than ample that the art of these American folk preachers is comparable to the oral narrative traditions of the *guslars* and the *akyn*. Most important, the language of these folk sermons is formulaic in the sense in which Parry and Lord used that concept. If anything, the language of most of the preachers is more heavily formulaic, more repetitive, than the published songs from Yugoslavia: the stall formulas of the preachers appear more stable and occur more frequently than any single line in Parry's texts. Composition is by traditional theme in both, though neither all the songs nor all the sermons are composed this way. Both performances are chanted, the *guslar* and the preacher both filling out hypometric lines by gliding and expanding terminal syllables, and compressing hypermetric lines. The major difference in the two styles is one of mode: the preacher begins in prose and progresses toward a metrical delivery while the *guslar* is metrical from the beginning. This difference can be overcome by the critic interested in comparisons if he selects those portions of the sermons recorded when the preacher is chanting. Major factors considered, the style of the preachers is sufficiently close to that of the Bosnian singers to make a linguistic comparison valid.

One of the most important lessons learned while working with the preachers is that one should be suspicious of generalizing about the oral

tradition from only one known body of performers to various other traditions which have come to us only through manuscripts. One of the tendencies of the "Parrists" – Alain Renoir has given me the term – has been to assume that the striking features of the Yugoslav oral style were the exclusive manifestation of orality, which they then applied to the texts of Homer, to the *Chanson de geste*, and to *Beowulf*. Sound procedure demands, however, that the first comparison of a certifiable oral tradition be made with another before the analysis of manuscripts is ever begun.

For instance, one of the cardinal doctrines of the Parrists is the assertion of the polarity between literate and illiterate insofar as an 'oral' and a 'written' style results; but this dichotomy, suspected from the first by those whose conclusions were deduced from the texts, does not hold in the case of the preachers, nearly all of whom are literate and some of whom have been college-trained.

Then, Lord's assertion that the "disease of literacy" – to use his infectious phrase – was debilitating the oral tradition is not entirely true. From personal observations during the summer of 1969, it is alive and well, though perhaps not as vigorous or as 'pure' as one would wish, but decidedly warm and active in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The *guslars* do not seem to be as popular as in Parry's day owing to growing urbanization and a wide-spread Yugoslav stigma against their own peasant origins. Perhaps their increasing popularity has been fostered by the floods of tourists to Yugoslavia, many of whom are fascinated by the *guslars* and would never have heard of them without Lord's book. But whatever the reason, they are still performing – though now not exclusively in an authentic folk tradition, often largely for tourists in those 'Folklore' entertainments which every Dalmatian town seems to produce for its summer people. Prof. Thomas Magner, of Penn State's Slavic Languages Department, knows of practicing *guslars* in Pittsburgh, Detroit, and Chicago, and though their tradition is no longer 'pure', their study might prove rewarding.

The Singer of Tales is a curious book in some ways; to cite one instance of criticism, Lord does not mention that for four centuries during the Turkish occupation it was quite dangerous to be caught with a manuscript exalting local heroes who had fought against the conquering Turks. The tradition of heroic song went underground during these centuries, and consequently it became necessary for the *guslars* to recite orally. Literacy, *per se*, had nothing to do with it. And while most of today's *guslars* are illiterate and many are blind, it is possible that for four hundred years many of them were actually able to read and write.

Another matter to which insufficient attention has been paid is that of the religion of the *guslars*; nearly all of them appear to be Moslem. The photos which Parry took show this and my personal experience bore this out. We should want to know more about what influence this religion has on the performance of songs, and even their selection: certainly the rhythm was influenced, and perhaps the content. And we should especially want to know what influence the Moslem oral tradition played on the secular; to cite one possibility, the Moslems recognize an extensive body of commentary on Scripture which has for centuries remained in oral tradition: the Hadith. Lord only briefly mentions a substantial difference in the songs produced by Christian and Moslem *guslars*,²⁸ but does not elaborate on it.

Finally, the most important thrust of this research has been to question the usefulness of the very concepts of "formula" and "system". These terms, given us by Parry, connote something precise, mechanical, and above all autonomous. No doubt such an attitude is a concomitant of that philosophy which was the legacy of the New Criticism, whose adherents hold that finished literary works are not the personal attempts at communication by human authors who are intimately related to those works, but rather autonomous artifacts of eternity which the critic understands at least as well as the author. And it may be true that the literary maker, like James Joyce, through constant revision, refines his own personality out of the being of his work, and becomes, in the end, a god off-stage, indifferently paring his nails. Given the treasure of autobiography and personality present in Joyce's works, one wonders if such a statement is true even of the literary artist: it is certainly not true of the oral. An analogue is to be found in the prevailing attitude toward the formula and the system; we have not tried to see utterances in relation to other utterances within the same composition (except in terms of memorization or lexical substitution), nor as something closely related to the life of the singer.²⁹

Donald Fry has summarized as well as anyone the chaotic situation regarding definitions of the formula: every man his own definition. "In terms of form, different scholars define repetition as allowing the words of two phrases to vary in position, inflection, and even number under certain conditions."³⁰ Fry tries to escape this solipicist booby-trap

²⁸ *The Singer of Tales*, 16.

²⁹ A pleasant exception is David E. Bynum, "Themes of the Young Hero in Serbo-croatian Epic Tradition", *PMLA* 83 (1968), 1296-1303.

³⁰ Donald K. Fry, "Old English Formulas and Systems", *English Studies* 48 (1967), 196.

by shifting emphasis from the formula to the system as the basic unit of composition: “when the poet creates one formula by analogy from another, the new phrase is based on the pattern of the older one, which is to say, it is created from its system. All formulas, therefore, originate from systems” (11). What is said here is true, all too tautologically true: if the system is the basic ‘mold’ or ‘pattern’ from which all formulas come, then it follows that all formulas originate in systems.

We shall try to exploit the promising direction pointed out to us by Fry, arguing that the system in oral composition is really the basic grammatical pattern of language, simplified by metrical, lexical, and syntactical considerations, and it is upon this system that the oral performer relies. It is misleading to say that “an experienced composer will have ready in his mind thousands of formulas which need no more modifications than the addition of a particle or two, of an inflection, if even that much”;³¹ all of us, every native speaker – whether of Croatian or of English – has the basic grammatical patterns of his language ready in his mind, but no *guslar* who ever lived (in my opinion) instinctively had his Croatian broken up into semantically prefabricated decasyllabic segments. That puts us back with the analogy to a digital computer. What the *guslar* does have, what the *akyn* and the folk preacher have, is the skill to produce metrically consistent (or nearly consistent) utterances: that skill is actual, and the spoken language itself is merely potential. The oral performer’s sense of rhythm masters only the deep structure; in actual performance this assumes various particularized surface structures.³² What the *guslar* possesses that his Bosnian farmer friends do not is the ability to take the language and the narrative tradition which is common to both of them, and give it a certain metrical shape. The oral performer has ability, not thousands of formulas.

As a demonstration in support of this hypothesis – I do not pretend to have irrefutable proof – I have elsewhere cited excerpts from two performances.³³ One, by Rev. Rufus Hays of Charlottesville, Va., was on Psalm 116: as Rev. Hays was preaching he slipped and stated that the psalm was by David, but immediately catching himself he apologized with the same rhythm and meter as the preceding lines. Obviously, the language

³¹ “Old English Formulas”, 203.

³² I borrow these terms from Transformational Grammar for illustrative purposes only. The deep structure is the formula describing the grammatical components of the language, and has an infinite number of forms; the surface structure is the actual manifestation of the deep structure in the sentence itself.

³³ “The Formulaic Quality of Spontaneous Sermons”, *Journal of American Folklore* 83 (1970), 15-16.

of the apology could not have been memorized nor is it likely that it was composed 'by analogy' with existing formulas, unless 'by analogy' we mean out of Deep Structure. A second passage was from a recorded sermon of Rev. C.L. Franklin, who seemed to be composing 'formulas' as his narrative progressed, even repeating certain lines verbatim ("stretch out the rod that's in your hand") within a limited context which he never used again.

With a fixed text in front of us we can define formulas as precisely or as liberally as we choose, but the singers are not thinking in terms of formulas and systems. One of the problems in defining these terms comes about because they are the scholar's attempts to impose a logical precision, a rationale, and a method where no such logical, rational method exists in the field – the singer's mind. When the performer is reciting the line of the moment he not only has recall of the lines just uttered, but he is already subjectively formulating the lines to come. In order to work out the next line the singer will use any of several devices: he will repeat a key word or phrase as in the additive style, or he will retain the same syntax (changing only a word or two), or he will insert some appositive.

When a certain word or phrase which he has previously uttered for some reason remains in his mind, it may appear several lines later in quite another semantic and syntactic context. This context is likely to be so different that by all but the most general definitions we should be forced to say that the utterances are different formulas from different systems. And so they would be, but such a decision would only obscure the basic fact that the later line – though semantically and perhaps syntactically different – was actually a direct result of the earlier line. Rev. Lacy was preaching on "God's Plowboy" (July 2, 1967), and he took from his printed text a metaphor of the soldier who expects to be paid in the Army of God:

304 An' the reward
Shall be in the mornin'
In the mornin'
I said in the mornin'
When it's all over

He then went on to devote nine lines to a discussion of preparing ground for sowing, and although his language was characteristically concrete, he was talking by analogy of the preparation man will have to make to meet his Creator. After line 319, the following utterances were spoken:

319 God from Zion
He's gonna reap

A red horse
 And when a preacher preach the gospel
 He's lookin' in the mornin'

Now it must be pointed out that line 319, "God from Zion", is one of Lacy's favorite stall formulas and is included here simply to give a sense of the passage's context. "In the Mornin' " is a phrase which Lacy and others associate with *Revelation*, since the apocalypse is supposed to fall then. In a sermon on the Twenty-third Psalm (also collected in the Oxford volume) Lacy uses an often-recited theme on the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, which theme begins with the line, "In the Mornin' ". One of the horses in this theme is the "Red Horse". It is likely that the earlier phrase, "In the mornin' ", used in connection with preparation for the last days, was still in Lacy's mind ten lines later when he uttered "A red horse", which is completely out of logical context. As it happens, Lacy then goes on to say, "He's lookin' in the mornin' " on line 323, just two grunts after the "Red Horse" utterance.

Ultimately, if we are to discover how the chanted sermon is composed, we shall have to go beyond the formulaic theory. Parry's theory, originally devised to explain the recurrence of epithets in Homeric texts and then applied to the Yugoslav oral tradition, supplies us with many of the terms necessary to describe oral performances; but it is difficult to generalize from his theories, and especially from those who applied his observations to Old English. To return to just one point, that of memory, it is surely significant that the *guslars* seldom use a stylized introduction while the preachers do have a sacred text which they consciously try to repeat verbatim. And even then, they will often break away from Scripture to recite in their own rhythm.

I want to consider those lines memorized which the performer not only repeats but tries to repeat; as we have seen with chanted sermons, it does not matter much to the preacher whether he says, "let me tell ya brother", or "I want to talk to you tonight, my friend". He needs something to say for the moment – in this case an introduction to further material – and he needs to gain an instant's time, and it is not a syntactical definition of 'formula', but the psychological context that induced him to employ this 'idea', and its lexicon.

Now it is undoubtedly true that certain utterances are 'formulaic' in Parry's sense and that their syntactical structure lends itself to variation by analogous composition: collocable sequences. To cite just a few obvious examples, if..., then...; neither... nor; as (adjective) as (noun). If these patterns are firmly ingrained in the performer's mind, as would

likely be the case in English, then we would probably be correct in saying that new 'formulas' are created by adjusting one or two words according to this pattern.

But nearly every other phrase would not be formed by this kind of analogy, unless the pattern underlying this utterance is in the deep structure of the language. If that is granted, as I think it must be, then our investigations into oral composition and the formula simply reveal some basic facts about all linguistics. The syntactical possibilities of such languages as Old, Middle, and Modern English are simply too great to believe that the oral performer can instantly "modify" them, even by so much as "the addition of a particle or two, of an inflection". (And I wish to make it clear that Professor Fry is not the object of this doubt, but those whose theories he describes.) If we must speak of oral formulas, we would do well to restrict our discussion and definition to lexical features, as H.L. Rogers has already suggested.³⁴ Once we do that, however, I think that we will eventually decide that many words will appear in different formulas that will be associationally explicable, and that it is the performer's associations – and not the scholar's concept of the 'formula' – that will best enable us to comprehend oral composition, at least in the sermons.

It is well understood that all grammatical utterances are 'formulaic' and that formulicity does not imply orality. When an author consciously attempts to imitate the oral style it is very difficult to differentiate between modes. Recently, all that has been learned about the sermon performance was applied to the 'oral' sermon near the end of William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*, with the result that it was impossible to decide with certitude that Rev. Shegog's performance was really the creation of Faulkner's imagination.³⁵ It is easy to understand then, why the texts of *Roland*, of *Beowulf*, and of the *Odyssey*, whose poets or scribes were intimate with the oral style, would appear to resemble oral performances so closely.

One scholar has already anticipated the conclusion of the present field study: that while repetition appears to be the chief criteria in determining orality, it is actually inadequate.³⁶ Nor, as we have argued, does repetition imply memorization. Concerning the former matter, Cassidy has shown that the syntactical possibilities of Old English verse are limited, as they

³⁴ "The Crypto-Psychological Character of the Oral Formula", *English Studies* 47 (1966), 99 ff.

³⁵ Rosenberg, "The Oral Quality of Rev. Shegog's Sermon", 82-83.

³⁶ Frederic G. Cassidy, "How Free Was the Anglo-Saxon Scop?", in Jess Bessinger and Robert P. Creed, eds., *Franciplegius* (New York, 1965), 75-85.

are in all certifiable oral traditions. When the demands of recitation within a particular tradition further limit that choice, through the imposition of meter, through the necessity of telling the story without inverting sentence structure or resorting to periodic sentences, and through the simplicity of diction which characterizes all certifiable oral traditions, the syntactic possibilities are greatly reduced. Concerning the latter, any chance utterance of today may be syntactically and lexically identical to one I may have spoken thirty years ago. Such utterances would be, by Parry's definition, formulas, true enough, but once having admitted that how much do we know about the composition of speech?

If we wish to know more about oral, spontaneous composition of traditional narrative, we shall have to return to the field. It is essential that the primary work be done with those who transmit the traditional narratives we are concerned with, and we must find out from them how it is done. If we wish to generalize our findings, it must be done only after an analysis and comparison of two or more oral traditions; then we can decide what phenomena are exclusive to orality, and we can intelligently anticipate what forms each phenomenon will take in other traditions.