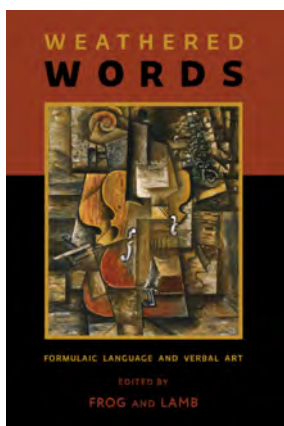


Приказ

Weathered Words

Frog and Lamb, William (eds.). 2022. *Weathered Words: Formulaic Language and Verbal Art*. Harvard University Press. 450 pages, paperback.



Trying to pin down the concept of *formula* has proven frustrating to many (if not most) scholars working on traditional verbal art. This is true for those scholars (like myself) who work primarily in the realm of Ancient Greek epic, where oral-formulaic theory (hereafter OFT) took its first steps, but perhaps even more so for those who have sought to adapt the methodology and findings of OFT to other traditions. More than sixty years after the publication of Lord's *The Singer of Tales*, this volume brings together a true cornucopia of perspectives and approaches to formulaic phraseology in verbal art, ranging from medieval Europe to contemporary South-East Asia, across a multitude of languages, cultures, and times. Fittingly, the contributors range from literary scholars working on texts that have been transmitted in writing, to linguists and folklorists conducting original fieldwork on living (and often endangered) oral traditions. Though Indo-European languages (and especially Germanic) are most strongly represented in the volume, readers will also find discussion of data from Turkic (Kyrgyz), Austronesian (Rotenese and Ifugao), and Finnic (Karelian), as well as classical Hebrew. If anyone had thought that the debate on formularity had become old and worn, this book will disabuse them of the notion. The volume consists of eighteen chapters. It opens with a prelude by the editors, Frog and Lamb, and it is organized into five sections: *Oral-formulaic Theory and Beyond*, *Methodological Approaches*, *Language and Form*, *Explorations at the Boundaries*, and *Constructing Worlds of Discourse*.

A Picasso of Perspectives on Formulaic Language by Frog and William Lamb

This clear and thought-provoking prelude opens with a concise history of OFT, tracking the study of formularity in oral poetry and other forms

of oral discourse, before presenting the structure of the volume and its contents, and picking out some important themes running through it. If this book is a mosaic, this chapter reveals how carefully the tiles have been made to fit. The historical overview discusses the long-standing divide between the study of formulaic units in verbal art and linguistics, which has come to be bridged only recently (and partially thanks to the seminar-workshop titled “Formula: Units of Speech, ‘Words’ of Verbal Art” held in Helsinki in May 2017 that provided the first spark for this volume). As an indicator of this new era, the work of linguists Alison Wray and Koenraad Kuiper is often cited in the volume (and Kuiper himself is among the contributors). Among the themes discussed are the role of metrical conditions, the relationship between formulaic language and poetic form, the fixity and variation of formulas, formulaic density, and how formulaicity appears in oral vs. written discourse.

Formulas in Oral Epics by Karl Reichl

Reichl offers a fascinating overview of formula-like and connected stylistic devices employed in Kyrgyz epic (while providing a short and useful introduction to *Manas* specifically). While *Manas* appears to be much less formula-dense than Homer (34), Reichl shows how other devices (such as rhyme-strings, often tied to specific themes) step up in the absence of formulas, so that “the formula in the narrow sense is ... part of a wider patterning of the epic idiom” (40). He mentions intriguing patterns of rhythm and melody, and how “for the singer metrical correctness comprises both the number of syllables and their rhythmic-melodic patterning” (32). Unlike traditions (like those studied by Parry and Lord) that rely on composition in performance, Reichl argues that *memorization* plays a much larger role in the oral epics of Turkic-speaking peoples, even for texts that are long, resulting in great verbal stability of an epic over several generations (something that OFT in its original form would not have predicted).

Of Scopas and Scribes: Reshaping Oral-formulaic Theory in Old English Literary Studies by Stephen C. E. Hopkins

Hopkins delivers an eye-opening account of the development of OFT in the realm of English studies, as well as the cultural biases that have shaped the field (such as focusing on early texts while hunting for “purity” of tradition, and favoring a “classical” text like *Beowulf* over later and less prestigious materials). He discusses the challenges of adapting concepts developed for Homeric and South-Slavic epic to a type of poetry built around variation and radically different metrical requirements, and summarizes the debate on the origin of the *kenning*. The latter part of the chapter covers the coexistence of

oral culture not just with literate Latin culture, but also with the writing of the vernacular, and discusses how this milieu shaped the transmission of Old English texts, introducing the concept of *scribal performance*.

Vlach Paupers: Formula and Layers on Meaning
by Sonja Petrović

In this exemplary study, focusing on a single collocation (the formula *Vlasi siromasi* “Vlauch paupers”), Petrović charts the rich historical and cultural context underpinning a single traditional formula as it is used by multiple poets and across multiple genres. In the process, Petrović clues us in on a number of useful insights, such as seeing formulas as “concentrators” of meaning (88), and observing how the same formula can react to different conditions of usage – *Vlasi siromasi*, for instance “may resonate as serious, humorous, ironic, or derisive” (89) based on genre, context, and the singer’s preferences. Particularly fascinating are the creative usages of our formula, which demonstrate what happens when phonological concerns (like punning and rhyming) take over semantic ones, as it happens in magical charms.

Multiform Theory by Frog

Frog offers a thought-provoking discussion of *multiform theory* (first originating with Lauri and Anneli Honko), whose goal is to describe *verbal systems* that produce stretches of text in verse or prose. The chapter contains copious examples from different genres of oral poetry (mainly from Old Norse skaldic and eddic poetry and *Kalevalaic* epic), but the theory is also applied to more modern, aesthetically unmarked examples, such as the English formulas used in checkout lines in New Zealand and the American Midwest. Like other contributions in this volume, Frog brings our attention to formulaic phenomena that are of larger scale and complexity than just a single phrase or line, thereby bridging the gap between what classic OFT would have called formula and theme.

Formulas and Scribal Memory: A Case Study of Text-Critical Variants as Examples of Category Triggering by Raymond F. Person Jr.

Person delivers an interesting exploration of so-called *category triggering* (a concept originally developed by Gail Jefferson to discuss phenomena in everyday conversation), as it applies to the textual transmission (or textual performance) of literary texts that are rooted in oral traditions. Illustrated through abundant examples from the Hebrew Bible (as well as some examples from the Homeric papyri), this paper provides a new explanation

for the phenomenon of *synonymous readings* (i.e., cases in which a scribe unwittingly introduces a variant in a text, drawing from their own memory of equivalent words or phrases).

We Don't Support, We Observe: *Epithets and Modifiers in a Vernacular Formulaic Genre* by Koenraad Kuiper and David Leaper

After convincingly arguing that radio-broadcast rugby commentary is an oral traditional genre, Kuiper and Leaper set out to quantitatively investigate *epithet usage* (a Parrian concern if ever was one) in respective corpora of New Zealand and UK English. Their results show a marked absence of fixed Homeric epithets (as they define them) in this genre (other perhaps than the adjective *big* used to modify a number of different referents). Other interesting observations abound: modifiers used for praise, such as *good* or *great*, were shared by the UK and NZ commentators, while the more diverse modifiers used for blame were specific to each commentary tradition. And quite amusingly, the UK commentators praised their home team more and blamed it less, while the NZ ones did the opposite: they praised the other team more and blamed it less than their own team. Like other studies in this volume, this chapter provides an example of what a quantitative approach to phraseology in oral traditions can look like today.

From Motif to Multiword Expression: The Development of Formulaic Language in Gaelic Traditional Narrative by William Lamb

Continuing with quantitative approaches, Lamb addresses the fundamental question of why and how formulas develop, by investigating Scottish Gaelic traditional narrative, “a domain known for its rich formulaicity” (195), and specifically the *More West Highland Tales*, a corpus of oral narratives from the nineteenth century, comprising different genres. In particular, Lamb asks whether discourse tropes (or motifs) that are often repeated and semantically distinctive are more likely to be expressed through formulas. The answer seems to be yes: in the corpus under consideration, frequency *and* semantic distinctiveness play the most important roles in determining whether traditional phraseology is employed to express a given motif. Genre effects are also clear: hero tales were found to be more formulaic than international tales and miscellaneous tales, and they also displayed formulas that were longer and more thematically distinct (i.e., more formulas around the motif of “power transactions”, fewer “incidental” formulas).

Form and Formula in Rotenese Oral Poetry by James J. Fox

Fox offers a fascinating exploration of Rotenese poetry (Rotenese is a group of dialects belonging to the Malayo-Polynesian sub-group of Austronesian languages, spoken in Eastern Indonesia), and how formulaic behaviors can show up in a type of verbal art whose formal concerns are quite different from those explored by Parry and Lord. Rotenese poetry is structured through canonical parallelism, whereby “virtually every word in every poetic utterance [should] be paired according to well-established and well-recognized cultural rules” (221): a well-formed pair of words is called a *dyadic set*. Fox argues that traditional patterns of sequential arrangement for these dyadic sets can be described as a type of “syntactic formulae”; these can be of different length and complexity, and can sometimes be combined with one another to extend over a succession of lines. Several examples are discussed, such as “the genealogical introduction” and formulas of birth and growth.

*Formula and Structure: Ways of Expressing Names
in the Nothern Runosong Tradition* by Jukka Saarinen

Saarinen tackles naming expressions in Kalevalaic poetry, and specifically in the poetry of Arhippa Perttunen from Viena Karelia. The chapter starts by providing a useful discussion of how OFT has been used in the study of *runosong*, for which the theory had be adapted to a tradition where lines are very often unique to each given poem, and where variation between separate renditions of a song is ever present. The study then describes formula types used for naming persons and beings in Perttunen’s corpus, sorted by syntactic structure and semantic features (e.g., type 1c: names expressed by referring to a place + and adjective; type 2f: a proper name + an apposition referring to an activity): beyond the surface variation, Saarinen shows that the poet is drawing on a wealth of traditional molds to create his expressions.

*Poetic Formulae in Post-Medieval Þulur:
Transatlantic Migration* by Yelena Sesselija Helgadóttir

This fascinating study looks at how formulas (or more in general, traditional poetic expressions) can migrate across space and genres, and what happens to their semantic or metrical features when they do so. The focus of the study is Icelandic post-medieval *þulur*, a genre that easily absorbs text fragments and compositional devices from various sources, incorporating formulas from both Icelandic folk poetry and post-medieval continental Scandinavian poetry. It is the latter borrowings (the so-called “transatlantic loan formulae”) that are explored in this chapter.

I am a fan of Hilarity by Ian Brodie

In one of the most delightful chapters of the volume, Brodie invites us to look at stand-up comedy through the lens of OFT (a topic explored in his 2014 monograph, *A Vulgar Art*). Brody presents one case study on how expressions crystallize over several iterations of the same comedy routine (in this case, the “Peanut Brittle” routine by American comedian Paul F. Tompkins). It’s a fascinating look into how a performer develops and refines a segment over the years, and how significant verbal consistency can be maintained over separate performances even in the absence of “stabilizing” features like meter and rhyme.

Formulas in Neo-Latin Poetry as a Means to Language Enrichment and Self-Representation: Language Tips and Sociolinguistics in Justus Lipsius’ Poems by Hans Nollet

Nollet looks at how some rare Latin expressions (such as the collocation *tesca loca* ‘waste places’, found in Varro and Festus) are borrowed in the Neo-Latin poetry of Justus Lipsius as a form of “linguistic apprenticeship”. He distinguishes these borrowings from cases of *imitatio*, *aemulatio*, and plagiarism, since Lipsius’ goals appear to be educational: he aims to teach authentic Latin expressions to his readers.

Rhythmic Fillers in Ifugao hudhud by Sergei B. Klimenko

This chapter presents a first exploration and classification of different types of rhythmical fillers found in *hudhud*, an epic chant from the province of Ifugao in the Philippines. The data for the study comes from recordings of Yattuka funeral chants. These fillers (which can be lexical or non-lexical) have been overlooked in the literature, and (at least some cases) are omitted from published texts, “as transcribers do not deem them as a necessary part of the performance” (357). They provide intriguing data both for the scholar of verbal art and for the phonologist.

Formulaic Expressions in Olonets Karelian Laments: Textual and Musical Structures in the Composition of Non-Metrical Poetry by Viliina Silvonen

In this rich exploration of formulaic units in Olonets Karelian Laments, a genre of sung poetry that lacks regular periodic meter, Silvonen captures formulaic phenomena at different levels of complexity (from minimal formulas, to cluster formulas, to macro-formulas), and observes how each type tends to crystallize in different domains (e.g., cluster formulas constituting an

entire poetic line seem to crystallize mostly idiolectally, while narrower cluster formulas recur also regionally; most macro-formulas, on the other hand, seem to crystallize within ritual themes that are context bound). Silvonen pays specific attention to the interaction of music and textual units, and presents a persuasive and lucid analysis.

*Morozko, Russian Folklore Formulas
in British Translation by Tatiana Bogrdanova*

This chapter looks at how different turn-of-the-last-century English renditions (Ralston, Lang, and Ransome) of the tale of *Morozko* (Frost or King Frost) approached the task of interpreting “the beauty and poetics of the Russian folk tale” (407) for a British audience. The focus here is not on the formula as a mnemotechnic device, but rather as a building block of oral aesthetics: how does a translator approach the task of conveying what Foley would have called the traditional referentiality of a formula, as well as the repetitions and sound patterns that characterize the original text?

*Opening and Closing Formulas in Tales Told
in England, by Jonathan Roper*

Roper tackles the very familiar but under-investigated formulas for the beginning and ending of English folktales, making the most of the our “bad data” – since, sadly, “less than one hundred reliable records of tales [were] recorded before World War I” (411), due to the very weak textualization of folktales in Victorian England. These formulas include the famous (but odd) “once upon a time”, “happily ever after”, as well as the somewhat lesser known “when pigs were swine”, and “bend-end” formulas.

The book is handsomely produced: I found almost no typographical errors (one of the few is “miliaux” for “milieux” on p. 71); the English is clean and readable, examples are numbered and translated throughout, and tables and figures are neatly typeset (p. 319 is particularly virtuosic); references are usefully divided by chapter, and an index of persons and a general index round out the volume.

Because of the volume’s eclectic approach, not everything treated as formularity here will be recognized as such by all readers. Personally, I found the phenomena described in Chapters 14 and 15 (in the appropriately named section ‘Explorations at the Boundaries’) to fall outside of my conception of formularity, but the data remains interesting and worth investigating.

Readers looking for unity won’t find an overarching theory of formularity in this volume, but rather a fascinating and stimulating “Picasso of perspectives” (as suggested in the prelude), derived from deep empirical en-

gement with multiple oral traditions, as well as the general sense, to echo the famous parable, that we are all touching the same elephant. Scholars of Ancient Greek might be surprised by the absence of Homer in this collection (though Homeric poetry makes a brief appearance in Chapter 7), but I personally found it refreshing: there is so much about oral poetry and prose that we, as classicists, could and should learn from the scholars who have written for this volume (and my own forthcoming book about Homeric formulaicity would have been much improved if I had first spent time with these essays). Overall, this is a fundamental read for anybody interested in verbal art.

Moving forward, I do think that developing a more generalized lexicon for discussing formulaic phenomena in oral traditions (and beyond) is a desirable goal, but one that can only be reached if we pay due attention to both the linguistic literature on formulaicity in natural language *and* to the type of detailed empirical investigations of formulaicity in verbal art that are collected in this volume. Interest in formulas is certainly not waning: a volume titled *New Light on Formulas in Oral Poetry and Prose*, edited by Daniel Sävborg and Bernt Ø. Thorvaldsen has just been published by Brepols (featuring some of the same authors). I certainly hope that many more will follow.

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