

HOW TO KILL A DRAGON  
ASPECTS OF INDO-EUROPEAN POETICS

Calvert Watkins

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# Sketch for a history of Indo-European poetics

The study of what we now term Indo-European poetics has hitherto proceeded in three distinct streams, each with its own historical sequence and sometimes greater, sometimes lesser independence from the other two. These may be termed (1) *formulaics*, (2) *metrics*, and (3) *stylistics*. Formulaics—the oldest—examines and compares lexically and semantically cognate or closely similar phrases in cognate languages, like Homeric Greek ἄκεις ἵπποι ‘swift horses’, Young Avestan *aspāhō* . . . *āsauuō* ‘id.’, and Vedic *ásvas* . . . *ásávaḥ* ‘id.’, securely reconstructible in root, suffix, and ending as *\*h<sub>2</sub>ók-éu-es h<sub>2</sub>ékū-ōs*, in either order. Metrics examines and compares similar versification systems, like the mostly isosyllabic, quantitative, bi- or tricollic verse line grouped into strophes in both Vedic and Greek lyric poetry. Stylistics examines and compares all the other linguistic devices, figures, and other recurrent phonological, morphological, and syntactic variables which may be in play in verbal art in cognate languages.

I treat these three topics separately and in the order given, since their histories are largely independent. A very detailed study of the history of Indo-European poetics, with the emphasis on formulaic comparisons, may be found in Schmitt 1967, the author’s dissertation under Paul Thieme. Schmitt’s impulse for producing this magnum opus was evidently his discovery six years before of the formula *mṛtyúm tar-* ‘overcome death’ in the Atharvaveda (quoted in chap. 40), which provided a Vedic phrasal counterpart to the Greek compound *vék-tap*, the ‘nectar’ which ‘overcomes death’, in Thieme’s etymology to the root of Latin *nex* ‘death’ and Vedic *tar-* ‘overcome’. See Thieme 1952 and Schmitt 1961 (reprinted in 1968:324) and 1967:190. Many of the classic studies are reprinted in Schmitt 1968; these will be so signaled where mentioned. Other general discussions of the issue may be found in Meid 1978 and Campanile 1987.

### 1. Formulaics

Rigvedic *ákṣiti śrávaḥ* (1.40.4b, 8.103.5b, 9.66.7c), *śrávaḥ* . . . *ákṣitam* (1.9.7bc) and

Homeric κλέος ἀφθιτον (Il. 9.413) all mean ‘imperishable fame’. The two phrases, Vedic and Greek, were equated by Adalbert Kuhn as early as 1853, almost *en passant*, in an article dealing with the nasal presents in the same two languages.<sup>1</sup> Kuhn’s innovation was a simple one, but one destined to have far-reaching consequences. Instead of making an etymological equation of two words from cognate languages, he equated two bipartite noun phrases of noun plus adjective, both meaning ‘imperishable fame’. The comparability extended beyond the simple words to their suffixal constituents *śrav-as- a-kṣi-ta-m*, κλεφ-εσ- ἀφθι-το-ν.<sup>2</sup> What Kuhn had done was to equate two set or fixed phrases between two languages, which later theory would term *formulas*. Thus in M. L. West’s somewhat lyrical words (1988a:152), ‘With that famous equation of a Rig-Vedic with a Homeric formula . . . Kuhn in 1853 opened the door to a new path in the comparative philologist’s garden of delights.’ The equation has itself given rise to a considerable literature, notably Schmitt 1967:1-102 and Nagy 1974; it is discussed at length with further references and the equation vindicated in chap. 15.

Kuhn made further investigations directly concerned with proving a common inherited Indo-European poetics and poetry, basing himself on comparison of the charms and incantations of Atharvavedic white and black magic with those of Medieval and contemporary Germanic folklore. While he was only moderately successful at demonstrating these to posterity, and some of his comparisons rest only on elementary parallels and are therefore to be rejected, a more sophisticated methodology can and has justified the essential correctness of his instincts and many of his insights. They are examined in detail in part VII below. In particular, Kuhn’s attention and sensitivity to the comparability of genre was a notable step forward, even if later work has shown that comparable structural sets may also sometimes occur in radically different genres.

In another article in the same year 1853 Kuhn had, again in passing, noted the similarity of the Vedic phrase *isireṇa mānasa*, more or less ‘with eager mind’ (RV 8.48.7), and its exact Homeric cognate *ἱερὸν μένος* in the set tag phrase *ἱερὸν μένος* (Ἄλκινόσιο etc.) ‘holy spirit/strength (of Alkinoos)’, narratologically equivalent to the proper name alone. The Belgian Iranist Jacques Duchesne-Guillemin renewed the discussion of this still-enigmatic pair in 1937, as did Antonino Pagliaro in an essay first published in 1947/48 and subsequently reprinted (see Schmitt 1967:28, n. 176). The relevance of the formula to the semantic notion of the ‘sacred’ was touched on by Benveniste 1969:196, perhaps over-hastily. We must recognize that the semantics and pragmatics of the original inherited phrase antedate its attested use in both the Rigveda and Homer. Cf. also Schmitt 1973.

With the contributions of Kuhn, ‘the concept of an Indo-European poetic lan-

1. KZ 2.467. The journal, *Zeitschrift für Vergleichende Sprachforschung*, was founded by Kuhn only the previous year, and for the first hundred volumes of its existence was so abbreviated, for “Kuhns Zeitschrift”. With volume 101 (1988) it became *Historische Sprachforschung* (HS).

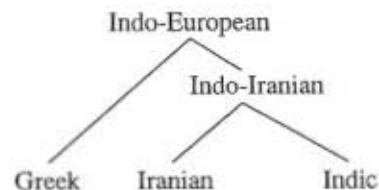
2. The identity of the equation could be captured by a reconstruction reducing each of the two to the same common prototype. Historically the first reconstruction in Indo-European studies, with precisely the declared aim of capturing the common prototype underlying the feminine participles Greek *-ουσα* and Indic *-antī*, had been made by August Schleicher only the year before Kuhn’s article, in the preface to Schleicher 1852.



guage was beginning to emerge' (West 1988a:152). Other scholars added to the corpus of phraseological equations among cognate Indo-European languages, which might with some confidence be attributed to the repertoire of the proto-language itself. A metaphorical expression for the Indo-European poet and his craft was early identified by the French Iranist James Darmesteter (1878) in an article significantly entitled 'A grammatical metaphor in Indo-European'. He compared the Avestan compound *vacas-tašti*- 'hymn, strophe', literally 'utterance-crafting', with Vedic *vácānsi āśā . . . takṣam* 'with my mouth I have crafted these words' and the Pindaric phrase *ἐπέων . . . τέκτονας* (*Pyth.* 3.113) 'crafters of words'. Methodologically, note that while the collocation has been claimed to be the 'central Indo-European poetic figure' (Schmitt 1967, 1968), and in all probability is of Indo-European date, it is not confined to Indo-European, for the same metaphor and a similar expression are found in contemporary Egyptian Arabic folk poetry, 'craftsman/fabricator of words' (Dwight Reynolds, p.c.). Virtually any technology can be exploited for such metaphorical purpose, such as weaving: archaic Old Irish *fáig ferb* 'he wove words' (*Amrae Choluimb Chille*), embellished by the borrowing of Latin *uerbum*.

A large number of these common formulaic figures, like *κλέος ἀφῶτον* and *śrávas . . . ākṣitam*, rest on equations between Vedic and Early Greek. Such is for example the expression of an apparent Indo-European tabu reported by the early Greek epic and gnomic poet Hesiod in his *Works and Days* 727, *ὀρθὸς ὀμείχειν* 'to urinate standing up', which C. R. Lanman in his additions to W. D. Whitney's translations of the Atharvaveda compared to Vedic *ūrdhvó mekṣyāmi* 'I will urinate standing up' (AV 7.10.2). Both pairs are identical in root, morphology, and syntax.<sup>3</sup>

Vedic represents only the Indic fork of the Indo-Iranian branch of the Indo-European family tree, with Greek another branch; schematically,



The closeness of the relation is marked by the shared node, the intermediary common language. There are far more lexical correspondences, words shared between Indic and Iranian than between either or both of these and Greek. It should therefore come as no surprise that Indic and Iranian as well share more formulaic phrases than either or both with Greek. Scholars were in fact slow to recognize and exploit this simple fact and principle, viz., the closer to the common proto-language, the greater the frequency of common phrasal retentions. The reason is probably the recentness (relative to Vedic and Greek) of the establishment of a soundly-based Older Iranian philology by Christian Bartholomae and the relative scarceness of the cultivation of Iranian studies relative to that of Sanskrit or the Classics.

3. One of the benefits of the comparison and reconstruction of formulas involving the phrasal combination of two or more words is their contribution to the study of Indo-European syntax, despite the pessimism of Schlerath 1992.

A small but well-chosen and ably commented selection of common Indo-Iranian phrases, the fruit of a lifetime's sporadic gleanings, was published by Emile Benveniste (1968) in the volume honoring his friend and collaborator Louis Renou. A much fuller and systematic collection, without comment or discussion, was presented in the same year by Bernfried Schlerath, in Konkordanz C of his *Vorarbeiten II* to an unfinished Avesta dictionary (1968:148-64; with valuable index of keywords 189-99). His findings are now systematically incorporated into Manfred Mayrhofer's etymological dictionaries of Old Indic (1956-1980, 1986-).

Schlerath's useful introduction (1968:viii-xv) specifically states as a methodological principle that only expressions or formulas with at least two etymologically related words in each language qualified for inclusion. This restriction is not valid, as we saw in the preceding section. Renewal of one, two, or more members of a formulaic syntagma, of one or more *signifiants*, under semantic identity—preservation of the *signifié*—is a perfectly normal and commonplace way for formulaic sequences to change over time, as I and Enrico Campanile and others have long insisted.<sup>4</sup> (See chap. 17 for examples and discussion.)

The most detailed collection of Indo-Iranian phrasal collocations is due to L. G. Gercenberg [Hertzenberg] 1972. He assembled nearly 350 two- or three-member phrasal collocations of cognates in Vedic (almost all Rigveda) and Avestan; his collections include comparisons outside Indo-Iranian where relevant. Each is provided with a syntactic and lexical reconstruction; only collocations involving pairs (or more) of etymologically related words are admitted. His sets are presented laconically, without comment or context, and could well be re-examined with profit. For a single example see chap. 12.

Other languages and traditions have made important contributions to the collection. A famous example first compared by Jacob Wackernagel in 1910 (reprinted in Schmitt 1968:30-33) is that of Avestan *pasu.vtra*, a dual dvandva compound 'cattle [and] men' and Umbrian *ueiro pequo* 'men [and] cattle', possibly showing the same archaic syntax. Comparable expressions from the other traditions like the Roman poet Ovid's *pecudesque virosque* (*Met.* 1.286) were subsequently added by others (see Schmitt 1967:16, 213 and chap. 17, this vol.). Note that this formula like *goods and chattels* is another *merism*, a two-part figure which makes reference to the totality of a single higher concept. *Cattle and men* together designate the totality of moveable wealth, wealth 'on the hoof', chattels. The same semantics underlies another paral phrase first noted by Albrecht Weber in 1873 (see Schmitt 1967:12) in Vedic *divipāde (ca) cātuṣpāde (ca)* '(both) two-footed (and) four-footed', Umbrian *dupursus peturpursus* 'two-footed, four-footed'. See on these Watkins 1979a.

A good example of the unfortunate consequences of Schlerath's restriction is his treatment of the Avestan pair *pasu-* 'cattle' and *nar-* 'man' as against *pasu-* and *vtra-* in the same meaning. His restriction leads him to ignore the Old Avestan *kamnānar-* 'having few men' and *kamnaḥsuua-* 'few cattle' (Y.46.2), astutely discussed by Benveniste 1968, 1969:1.49.

The collection of formulaic phrases common to two or more Indo-European poetic traditions has proceeded at a slow but steady pace for nearly a century and a

4. See most recently Campanile 1993 for a reaffirmation of our principle, with many examples.



half. See for example Kurke 1989, on the pouring (IE \**ǵheu-*) of a poem or prayer like a libation in Vedic (*imḍ glro . . . juhomi* 'I pour these songs' RV), Greek (ἐὐκταῖα . . . χέουσα 'pouring votive prayers' Aeschylus), and Latin (*fundere preces* Horace, Vergil). If the Latin examples of the Augustan age might reflect Greek influence, as she acknowledges (124, n. 24), one could also point to the Old Irish idiom *feraid fáilte* 'pours welcome' where Greek influence is not possible.

The collection is still ongoing. Recent acquisitions include the equation in 1992 by a graduate student in Classics at Harvard, Fred Porta, of Vedic *mahó ájmasya* '(Savitṛ the sun rules) the great path, way (of the horses of the sun's chariot)' (RV 4.53.4) with Greek μέγας ὄμιος 'the great path, way (of the horses of the moon's chariot)' (*Homeric Hymn to Selene* 32.11).<sup>5</sup> In the following year, 1993, Michael Weiss in his Cornell dissertation<sup>6</sup> argued convincingly that Latin *itágis* 'everflowing', Greek ὑγιής 'healthy', Cypriote *uwais(e) zan* 'forever and ever', Gothic *ajuk-duþs* 'eternity', and Old Avestan *yauuaējt-* 'living forever' are all direct or indirect reflexes of an Indo-European collocation of \**h<sub>2</sub>oju-* 'lifetime, eternity' and \**ǵih<sub>2</sub>-* 'to live', manifested in a compound \**h<sub>2</sub>ju-ǵih<sub>2</sub>-*. Continued study of all the Indo-European traditions can safely be expected to yield still more such equations. Thus the new Simonides fragments (IEG II<sup>2</sup> 11.12) bring in the phrase ἄμα δίκης 'chariot of Justice' the first cognate of Rigvedic *ṛtásya rátha* 'chariot of Truth' with its Old Irish thematic congeners (Watkins 1979b). Yet the concern of Indo-European poetics extends much further than just the accumulation of cognate phrases, whether formulaic or not in the technical sense (see immediately below) in the given tradition.

### Formula and theme

The study of these inherited phrases in the various Indo-European traditions was fundamentally affected by the epoch-making work of Milman Parry in his Paris dissertations (1928a and 1928b).<sup>7</sup> Parry's work on Homeric phraseology and the technique of oral composition, largely influenced by his field work on the living epic tradition of Yugoslavia, showed that *formulas* functioned as the 'building blocks' of Homeric verse. His subsequent famous and influential, if now outdated, definition of the formula was 'a group of words which is regularly employed, under the same metrical conditions, to express a given essential idea' (Parry 1930 = A. Parry 1971:266-324). Parry's great contribution was the founding of a new genre in literary theory, termed by him 'oral poetry', even if neither 'orality' in the sense of non-literacy, nor 'poetry' in the sense of 'metrical', is a necessary condition. Later writers, notably Parry's

5. The equation is linguistically noteworthy in further anchoring the residual o-grade of a root in (post laryngeal) *a-*: \**h<sub>2</sub>ǵ-* > \**h<sub>2</sub>ǵ-* of *áǵa*, *áǵati* beside \**h<sub>2</sub>ǵ-mo-* of *óǵmos*, *áǵma-*. Contrast Vedic *áǵman-*: Latin *agmen*, which show either original e-grade, or more likely generalization of the root-form *ag-*. The equation of *óǵmos* and *áǵma-* is at least as old as Saussure's *Mémoire* of 1878. The Celtic divine name *Ogmios*, Old Irish *Ogma*, and the name of the writing system *ogam* are probably to be related. See McManus 1991.

6. Refined and developed as 'Life Everlasting', presented to the Twelfth East Coast Indo-European Conference, Cornell University, June 1993.

7. English translations in Parry 1971.

student and successor Albert Bates Lord with his influential 1960 work *The Singer of Tales*, and in selected papers reprinted in *Epic Song and Oral Tradition* (1991), have tended to replace 'oral' by 'oral-traditional', while others, like Gregory Nagy, prefer just 'traditional'.

Parry's theory as developed by Lord has been further significantly modified by the work of others on different traditions around the world, such as Finnegan 1970, 1977, Ivanov and Toporov 1974, Nagy 1974, Kiparsky 1976, and Opland 1983, to name only a few. See the several collections, introduction and bibliography of Foley 1981, 1985, 1986, 1987, 1988. One should mention also the work of J. Latacz (e.g., 1979) and his school, for example E. Visser 1988, with references.

The primary modifications of the notion of the formula were to de-emphasize the purely metrical as a condition *sine qua non*, and to place greater emphasis on the notion of theme (Parry's 'essential idea'). At the Ann Arbor Conference of 1974,<sup>8</sup> bringing to the question the insights of contemporary syntactic theory in a pioneering fashion, Paul Kiparsky felicitously termed the formula a 'ready-made surface structure'. At the same conference I termed the formula in traditional oral literature 'the verbal and grammatical device for encoding and transmitting a given theme or interaction of themes,' and five years later added 'That is to say that *theme* is the deep structure of formula'.<sup>9</sup> The point can stand today even if for some time I have been inclined to think that "deep" theme is not so very far from "surface" formula.

Another modification to Parry's definition has been to remove its restriction to 'a group of words', by recognizing that a single word may have true formulaic status. I argued this at length for Greek μῆνις 'wrath'—the very first word in the *Iliad*—for not just metrical but more important for thematic reasons (Watkins 1977). A similar view is expressed by G.S. Kirk in the preface to his Homer commentary (1985:xxiii): 'single words, even, may evince 'formular status', 'because they can sometimes have an inherited tendency, not solely dictated by their length and metrical value, to a particular position in the verse.' Here the operative phrase, I would suggest, is 'inherited tendency'. The 'particular position in the verse' is subject to the caution expressed already by Nagy 1974:8 n. 24, that Parry's definition of the formula 'is suitable for a working definition, provided that the phrase "under the same metrical conditions" is not understood to mean "in the same position within the line".' The whole of Part Two of this work shows that the formulaic (or 'formular') status of derivatives of the root \**ǵhen-* 'smite, slay' is precisely an 'inherited tendency' in all the ancient Indo-European language contextual nexuses—mythic, epic, or apotropaic charms—which continue it, regardless of language or verse-line.

Nowhere is the notion of the formula so important today as in its original locus, the Homeric poems. G.S. Kirk in the preface to his Homer commentary (1985:xxiii) writes further,

the whole question of the formular, conventional or traditional component in the Homeric language is extremely important for the exact appreciation of any particular passage, and of course of the whole poem. Something of a reaction is detectable

8. Stolz and Shannon.

9. Collitz Lecture published in Watkins 1982; see further below.



at present from the extreme claims and inconclusive statistics that proliferated after the Milman Parry revolution [emphasis mine - C.W.], but it remains true, nevertheless, that the deployment of a partly fixed phraseology is a fundamental aspect of Homer's style and technique—one that shaped his view of life, almost. One can as well ignore Homer's 'use of phrases' as an ordinary poet's 'use of words'.

The same recognition—if somewhat tardy, as he himself acknowledged—of the 'Milman Parry revolution' was well expressed by Ernst Risch in the preface to the second edition of his *Wortbildung der homerischen Sprache* (1974:v): 'Since the studies of Milman Parry (1928), which did not become known until far too late, even the phenomenon of epic poetry looks different.' Risch's first edition had appeared in 1937, 9 years after the publication of Parry 1928, but made no mention of it despite the review articles of such distinguished Homerists and linguists as Chantraine (1929) and Meillet (1929). Parry's work was duly signalled in the bibliography of Meillet's great *Aperçu d'une histoire de la langue grecque* from the 3rd edition of 1930 on.

If scholars have been slow to appreciate the 'Milman Parry revolution' in Homeric studies, they have been even slower to acknowledge its significance and implications for the study of most of the other ancient languages of the family. A notable exception is Kiparsky 1976, who was able to bring the hymns of the Rigveda into the Parry-Lord universe of discourse by showing the artificiality of the latter's insistence on composition in performance as a condition *sine qua non* for 'oral poetry'. The poetry and prose alike of the entire thousand-year Vedic period in India, roughly 1500-500 B.C., was composed orally, memorized, and transmitted orally; only afterwards did the art of writing spread from the West to the Indian subcontinent.

The 'formular, conventional or traditional component' (Kirk, *supra*) of the language of the Vedic hymns is just as marked and just as important as for the Homeric language, and the same observation is equally valid for early Iranian verse, for the prose—n.b.—narrative of Hittite and Anatolian myth, and to a lesser degree for the early poetic monuments of many, perhaps most later Indo-European traditions.

When in favorable circumstances we can assert that a given phrase or even word, is or was once formulaic (or 'formular') in its own tradition in the technical Parry sense, and when we can also assert that a phrase, or even word, cognate to the first in another tradition is also or was once formulaic in that tradition, then the inference from the comparative method is clear. Both formulas are descended from a common original formula in the technical Parry sense, a building block in the construction of 'literary', 'artistic', or otherwise non-ordinary verbal messages or texts in the—necessarily oral, pre-literate—society of the speakers of the proto-language common to the two traditions. If the two traditions are, for example, Homer and the Vedas, then an Indo-European comparative literature becomes no longer just an antiquarian frill but an interpretative necessity for literary theory. It is the obligation of the student of these literatures, singly or together, to give an account of what Kirk termed, perhaps unwittingly, the real 'inherited tendency'. It is that inherited tendency toward the deployment of parallel partly fixed phraseology which is a fundamental aspect of the style and technique of not only a Homer but a Vasiṣṭha<sup>10</sup>—and one that shaped both

10. I take here only as emblematic the name of one legendary Vedic rishi and his family—with a bow to Heine, *Die Heimkehr* 45 (*Der König Wiswamitra, / Den treibt's ohne Rast und Ruh', / Er will durch*

poets' views of life, almost. The responsibility is clear; the present work is my own attempt to answer it.

## 2. Metrics

The middle of the 19th century, not long after Kuhn's 1853 equation of Greek κλέος ἄφθιτον with Vedic *ákṣiti śrávas*, also saw the halting beginnings of a comparative Indo-European metrics, with Westphal 1860. Westphal's attempt lacked—understandably for the time—the requisite sophistication both in the comparative method and in the phonological and prosodic foundation of metrical systems. The defect would be remedied in altogether masterly fashion by Antoine Meillet, with a systematic equation of the meters of the Vedic hymns with those of Greek lyric, based on the quantitative rhythm and prosodic system which is common to both. First announced in an article on Vedic metrics of 1897, then more amply argued in the chapter entitled 'Les origines de la métrique grecque' of his *Aperçu d'une histoire de la langue grecque* (1913),<sup>11</sup> his analysis was finally presented in monograph form in *Les origines indo-européennes des mètres grecs* (1923).

Meillet had proved his case, and it is now generally accepted by competent authorities, e.g. West 1982, even if still largely ignored by most Hellenists. Meillet's own judgment is worth quoting, as expressed in the 3rd edition (1930:xvi) of the *Aperçu*, where the 1923 monograph is the final item in the bibliography: 'Doubtless Hellenists have for the most part remained sceptical as regards the conclusions of this work; but I believe I have there correctly applied the methods of comparative grammar and the principles of rhythmic.'

In the system of the (dialectal) proto-language ancestral to Greek and Indo-Iranian the rhythm was quantitative, based on the alternation of long or heavy ('strong time') and short or light ('weak time') syllables. Long syllables contain a long vocalic nucleus (long vowel or diphthong) followed or not by one or more consonants, or a short vowel followed by at least two consonants; short syllables contain a short vowel followed by no more than one consonant. The basic rhythmic alternation consisted of strong times (—) separated by weak times of one (v) or two (vv) shorts. The verse line tended to be isosyllabic, i.e. with a fixed syllable count, sometimes varied by suppression of the final (catalexis) or initial (acephaly) syllable. The arrangement of lines was stichic (line-by-line), typically grouped into three- or four-line strophes which could themselves be grouped in units of three (the Vedic *trcas* and the strophe, antistrophe, and epode of Greek choral lyric). The longer line of 10-12 syllables contained an obligatory word boundary (caesura) adjoining the 5th syllable, i.e. 1234 || 5 or 12345 ||. It contained three cola: the initial, up to the caesura, with free alternation of long and short syllable, a partially regulated internal colon, and a rhythmically fixed final colon or cadence. The shorter line of 7-8 syllables usually lacked a fixed caesura and contained only two cola, the free initial and the fixed cadence. The quantitative opposition of long and short was neutralized in the verse-final syllable (anceps).

*Kampf und Büssung / Erwerben Wasischtas Kuh.*), which I owe to J. Schindler.

11. On this remarkably innovative work see the penetrating appreciation of A. Morpurgo Davies 1988a.



In Indo-Iranian and Early Greek poetry the convention is that a verse line equals a sentence, whether a longer or a shorter line. In practice verse boundaries are often the boundaries of syntactic constituents of (longer) sentences, and syntactic phenomena sensitive to sentence boundary are frequently found adjoining metrical boundary, both external (e.g. line boundary) and internal (e.g. caesura). Metrical boundaries frequently coincide with formula boundaries. The resultant interplay or counterpoint between syntax and meter is a very distinctive characteristic of the earliest Indo-European poetry, and presumably of the poetic grammar of the proto-language as well.

Paul Thieme 1953:8 could justly claim that 'We may state with certainty that they [the Indo-European community] possessed a poetic art whose metrical form can be reconstructed from the comparison of Indic, Iranian, and Ancient Greek data with an exactitude whose precision excludes any possibility of doubt.'<sup>12</sup>

Other scholars since Meillet have adduced the evidence of many other metrical traditions around the Indo-European world. Roman Jakobson (1952) argued for the Indo-European origin of the South Slavic epic 10-syllable line (*epski deseterac*) with obligatory caesura and a statistical tendency to a rhythmic cadence of an anapest followed by an anceps,  $\cup \cup - \cup$ . He compared the identical Greek cadence known as the paroemiac or 'proverb' verse, from its frequency as proverbial utterance occupying the second half line or hemistich of a dactylic hexameter, and proposed as Indo-European metrical prototype a 'gnomic-epic decasyllable'.

In the beginning of the 60's (1961 [presented 1960], 1963; more cautiously 1982) I argued for the Indo-European origin of a Celtic meter, the archaic Old Irish heptasyllabic [4 || 3] line with fixed caesura and trisyllabic stress cadence 'o o o or 'o o 'o. It shows as well the variants [5 || 2], [4 || 1], [5 || 3], and others, but the word boundary as caesura is mandatory. While I still believe this archaic Irish verse form is inherited, I would now rather associate it with the other manifestations of the Irish *rosc*, discussed in chap. 24. That is to say it should be compared with other examples of what I term 'strophic structures' or the 'strophic style', an Indo-European poetic form distinct from, and perhaps of earlier date than, the quantitative meter ancestral to that of Greek and Vedic.<sup>13</sup> This poetic form is examined in part III. The 1963 paper (reprinted in Watkins 1994) retains its utility both for the analysis of the different Early Irish *rosc* meters, and for the presentation and derivation of the different Greek and Indic verse forms.

Other traditions as well have been invoked in support of an Indo-European

12. Some doubt in fact inheres in the inclusion of Old and Young Avestan here, since the old quantitative opposition of long and short syllable has evidently been given up in Iranian. But it is well-nigh impossible not to compare the [4 || 7] 11-syllable line of the Gathas with fixed caesura after the 4th syllable with the Vedic 11-syllable *triṣṭubh* (or 12-syllable *jaḡati*) with caesura after 4, and similarly the typical 8-syllable Younger Avestan stichic line with the Vedic 8-syllable *gāyatrī*. Both the Old and the Younger Avestan lines are likewise arranged in strophes.

13. And doubtless prehistoric Iranian. Old Iranian preserves most clearly the two verse forms, one isosyllabic, with two hemistichs separated by a fixed caesura (the Gathas or Songs), and the other strophic, with lines of variable length corresponding to syntactic groups (the Yasna Haptaḡhāiti liturgy). (See chap. 21.)

metrics. See West 1973, with references to his own work on Lydian, and the introduction to West 1982. The most recent contributions have been by Heiner Eichner, writing on Italic (1988-90) and Anatolian (1993). While characteristically rich in learning, literature, and individual observations, these studies involve many seemingly arbitrary assumptions, and the case for each family remains *sub judice*. I discuss some of the same evidence in chapters 9, 11, and 23.

The origins of the Greek epic meter, the dactylic hexameter, are particularly challenging. The earlier view set forth by Meillet 1923 and K. Meister 1921 that this meter is an 'Aegean' borrowing is quite unlikely. The general consensus now is that the line must somehow reflect the combination of two hemistichs. I argued in passing in 1969 for a historical relation of the metrical contexts of the formula 'imperishable fame' in Greek and Vedic, and this topic was pursued in considerable detail in Nagy 1974, attacking the metrical problem via formulaics and formula boundary (typically corresponding to metrical boundary). A crucial discovery was the Lille Stesichorus (ca. 620-550 B.C.) papyrus (Parsons 1977), containing some 125 lines of a lengthy choral lyric strophic composition estimated to have contained 2000 lines. The hitherto unique metrical system was first analyzed by Haslam 1978, assuming it was a development of the hexameter; but later West 1982:29-56 showed that the hexameter could be derived from the Stesichorean line, and that this poet provided the critical link between choral lyric and epic.

The precise details of the origin of the hexameter still remain a matter of debate. Other scholars who have treated the question from a different standpoint include N. Berg 1978 and E. Tichy 1981. The quantitative metrics of Greek and Vedic, quite possibly reflecting a late dialectal protolanguage, will receive no further discussion in the present work. My concern in part III is for the more widespread and probably more ancient strophic style, and elsewhere for the synchronic analysis of various metrical or otherwise poetic texts.

### 3. Stylistics

By this term I refer globally to all the other formal features of language, all the linguistic devices which in Jakobson's phrase are 'what makes a verbal message a work of art' (1981:18, 1987:63). Thus stylistics is in a sense a virtual equivalent of poetics, and in the discussion to come I will tend to use the two indiscriminately.

The notion of Indo-European stylistics in all likelihood arose first as the natural response of literarily sensitive scholars philologically trained in the Classical languages to the reading of poetic texts in a third member of the comparison, typically Vedic Sanskrit. It is thus just as "natural" as the notion of Indo-European comparative linguistics itself, and for the same reasons. Anyone who knows by heart the couplet of the Greek soldier-poet Archilochus (2 IEG):

ἐν δορὶ μὲν μοι μᾶζα μεμαγμένη· ἐν δορὶ δ' οἶνος  
Ἴσμαρικὸς· πίνω δ' ἐν δορὶ κεκλιμένος



**In my spear** is my kneaded bread; **in my spear**  
Ismarian wine; I drink leaning **on my spear**,

with its triple figure of anaphora of the weapon, will surely recognize and respond to the same figure of anaphora, this time five-fold, of another weapon in Rigveda 6.75.2:

dhánvanā gá dhánvanājīp jayema  
dhánvanā īvrāḥ samádo jayema  
dhánuḥ śáror apakāmāp kṛṇoti  
dhánvanā sárvaḥ pradíśo jayema

**With the bow** may we win cattle, **with the bow** the fight;  
**with the bow** may we win fierce battles.  
**The bow** takes away the enemy's zeal;  
**with the bow** may we win all the regions.

The observer will also note that the Vedic anaphora is more complex, encompassing the repeated verb *jayema*, and that the Vedic anaphora includes a figure of polyptoton or variation in case, instrumental ~ nominative.<sup>14</sup>

So James Darmesteter in 1878 entitled his paper on the formulaic nexus 'crafting of words' (above, 1) 'a grammatical metaphor of Indo-European', with full consciousness of its stylistic and poetic nature. Text-linguistic giants like Wilhelm Schulze and Jacob Wackernagel made countless stylistic observations over their lifetimes, but the most influential was a lecture delivered by Wackernagel at Munich on 29 November 1932, called 'Indogermanische Dichtersprache', with the German word, literally 'poet-language', that I have paraphrased (1992b:4.86) as 'style and poetic language'. Wackernagel's lecture was published posthumously during the Second World War, and reprinted in his *Kleine Schriften* (1953) and in Schmitt 1968.

The paper is historically significant enough and of such extraordinary richness in its implications—often inadequately recognized—that it requires the detailed examination given below. Here for the first time Wackernagel presented a sketch for a whole Indo-European stylistic and poetic language, centered around four characteristic features: (omission of) the augment, the metrical form, word order, and word selection.

The first is morphological, the absence of the augment (verbal prefix *é-*, *a-*) in past indicative tense forms (those with 'secondary' endings) in early Greek and Indo-Iranian poetic texts. Wackernagel suggested that the omission of the augment was an archaism of poetic practice, the remnant of a time when there was still no augment.<sup>15</sup> The question is complicated now by the data of Mycenaean Greek, which show almost no augmented forms. These are non-poetic texts some 500 years before Homer, so Wackernagel's view is probably to be rejected. For discussion see Morpurgo Davies 1988b:78.

14. Saussure noticed the same thing when he referred to Rigveda 1.1 as a 'versified paradigm' of the name of the god Agni.

15. The augment is found only in the dialect area including Greek, Armenian, Indo-Iranian, and the fragmentarily attested Phrygian.

Wackernagel's very brief treatment of metrical form simply spoke favorably of Meillet's work, and disallowed alliteration as a property of Indo-European poetic language in the way that it functioned in later Celtic, Italic, or Germanic, all of which show or showed a fixed 'demarcative', word-initial stress accent (word-final in British).

In my view alliteration was one of a number of phonetic figures available to the Indo-European poet, used widely as an embellishment and not 'bloss ganz vereinzelt und spielerisch' (with Wackernagel of the Indians and Greeks). As such, alliteration was an 'equivalence' token, capable of being promoted to the 'constitutive device of the sequence' (Jakobson 1981:27) any time the appropriate phonological and prosodic conditions were met. This appears to have occurred in different branches at very divergent times.

In Insular Celtic the development of the initial mutations, which presuppose identical treatment of consonants between vowels in syntactic groups both word-internally and across word boundary, is incompatible with a demarcative stress (which would serve to differentiate the two positions). Once the morphophonemic system of mutations was in place, however, it would be natural for the languages to develop demarcative stress, to signal the grammatical information now carried by the initial consonant of the initial syllable. The development of the mutations is generally dated to shortly before 400 A.D.

The system of alliterative verse in Germanic must be considerably older, on the evidence of a crucial feature. Finite verb forms do not regularly participate in the alliterative scheme, unless they are verse- or sentence-initial. This convention must be related to the accentuation of the finite verb in Indic and indirectly in Greek: the finite verb in main clauses was unaccented<sup>16</sup> except in verse- or sentence-initial position. This scheme is found already in our earliest documentation of Germanic (Gallehus runic inscription) *ek hlewagastir holtijar horna tawido* 'I, Hlewagastiz of Holt, made the horn' and must reflect very ancient Germanic prosodic practice.

Wackernagel's most acute observations are found in his final two topics, word order and word selection ('diction'). The parallelism between the two is clearer in the German *Wortstellung* and *Wortwahl*, as is their striking similarity to Jakobson's model of the intersecting axes of *combination* and *selection* (1981:27), on which more below.

Wackernagel begins by pointing out the well-known contrast in early Indo-European between the highly regulated word order of Vedic prose or the Old Persian inscriptions and the highly variable, apparently 'free' or non-configurational word order observable in the Vedic hymns or the Songs of Zarathustra. He notes in Ancient Greek poetry three stages of non-prosaic order of increasing 'irrationality': Homer, the least complex; then the choral lyric of Pindar, Bacchylides, and Stesichorus;<sup>17</sup> and finally the quite artificial perturbations of word order found in the

16. Whence the recessive accent in Greek.

17. He points out that Stesichorus 65 (= PMG 242) αὐτὸν σε κολαιμάχε πρώτων ἑαυτοῦ πρώτου, ο fighter at the gate' shows a word order impossible in Homer, who has only αὐτὸν (Il. 10.389, 22.351). One would like to know the full verbal and metrical context of this hemistich, and the position of the verb governing the accusative. See note 20 below.



recherché versification of the Hellenistic period (and its Roman imitators). Wackernagel regards the latter as 'manifestations of overripeness', and compares the artifices of Old Norse skaldic poetry. As we will see in chap. 9, the same degree of perturbation of normal word order is found in Ireland, in the late sixth and seventh centuries, long before the language of the skalds.

Wackernagel then turns to Homer, to examine clearly inherited features of poetic word order. Some of these are in fact rules of ordinary grammar. Wackernagel first signals three: sentence-second position of enclitics and other weakly stressed particles ('Wackernagel's law'),<sup>18</sup> Behaghel's 'law of increasing members', and the disjunction (German *Sperrung*) of constituents of syntactic groups.

Recent work of considerable syntactic sophistication has shown that there are in fact at least three 'Wackernagel's laws' governing the positioning of enclitics, particularly in strings, which account for superficially variable or contradictory orders. See in detail Hale 1987 and to appear.

Behaghel's 'law of increasing members' rests on a plethora of examples from Germanic, Greek, and the other Indo-European languages which show the stylistic figure of enumerations of entities whereby only the last receives an epithet: "X and Y and snaggle-toothed Z". The Catalogue of Ships in *Iliad* 2 offers in its lists of names of persons, peoples, and places examples practically without exception. The fact gains interest with the recognition today that the Catalogue is in some—though hardly all—respects a 'Bronze Age' text, accurately reflecting the geography and settlements of middle to late second-millennium Greece.<sup>19</sup>

The poetic disjunction of the constituents or syntactic groups has received considerable light from the study of formula and its relation to meter. In particular there is a marked tendency for separated constituents to themselves adjoin metrical boundaries. Thus in Wackernagel's example from Tibullus (1.9.4):

*sera tamen tacitis poena uenit pedibus*

yet **tardy justice** comes on *silent feet*,

where *sera* and *poena* follow line-initial and hemistich boundary, and *tacitis* and *pedibus* precede hemistich and line-final boundary.

Wackernagel goes on to point to two cases at the beginning of each epic where contrary to received opinion Homer violates his own word-order practice. One is *Od.* 1.7 *αὐτῶν γὰρ σφετέρησιν ἀτασθαλίησιν ὄλοντο* 'they perished because of their own folly', where the genitive *αὐτῶν* quite abnormally precedes the pronominal possessive adjective.<sup>20</sup> 'Presumably this reflects the modification of a formulaic prototype like *Il.* 4.409' writes S. West in the *Odyssey* commentary, citing the same model

18. Wackernagel illustrates his famous law with *Il.* 1.8 *τίς τὰρ σφῶε θεῶν . . .* 'who of the gods (brought) these two . . .' The correctness of his reading of the particle *τὰρ*, rather than the τ' ἄρ of the vulgate, will be discussed in chap. 11.2, on the language and poetry of the Trojans.

19. Cf. Page 1959, Huxley 1960, and Hope Simpson and Lazenby 1970. For a more cautious treatment see Kirk 1985:158-250.

20. It is striking that the Stesichorean innovation *αὐτῶν* σε noticed by Wackernagel (note 17 above) involves the same elements, *αὐτός* and a pronominal form.

as Wackernagel had. The other is the more common licence, beginning with *Il.* 1.1, to reverse the natural "iconic" order of name and patronymic ('from the oldest Indians to the Russians of today'): Πηληϊάδεω Ἀχιλῆος. A comparable poetic licence is to depart from the historical order in the enumeration of public offices held, the *cursus honorum*, for metrical reasons: the Roman saturnian in a Scipionic inscription *consol censor aidilis hic fuet apud uos*. Such licences probably belong to the domain of poetic universals.

Under 'word selection' ('diction') Wackernagel includes formulaic noun phrases like 'imperishable fame', noting that their locus is precisely the language of poetic eulogy—the business of the Indo-European poet. He likewise links Germanic and Indo-European two-part personal names to poetic phraseology, as later defended by R. Schmitt 1973, and links the poetic and the hieratic in the language of cult, as exemplified by Greek Ζεῦ πάτερ, Latin *Iuppiter*, Vedic *dīaus pitar*. As we saw in chap. 1.2, the last can now be extended by Anatolian and Celtic facts.

Wackernagel then turned his attention from phrasal and lexical phenomena to the non-meaningful level of phonology and morphology: deformations like metrical lengthening and shortenings, and the special doubly marked poetic *o*-stem nominative plural ending *-āsas* (for *-ās*) of Vedic and Avestan, which after going "underground" in Classical Sanskrit resurfaced in Middle Indic early Buddhist poetry and whose hieratic value was transparent in the unique Old Persian example, the formula *Auramazdā . . . utā aniyāha bagāha tayaiy ha<sup>tiy</sup>* 'Ahuramazda and the other gods there are.'

His final example was a widespread stylistic feature of (typically prose) folktales, a text-initial, existential form of the verb 'to be' introducing the typical person or place: in Homer ἔστι πόλις Ἐφύρη (*Il.* 6.152) 'There is a city Ephyre . . .', ἦν δέ τις ἐν Τρώεσσι Δάρης (*Il.* 5.9) 'There was among the Trojans a certain Dares . . .' One need only compare the numerous Indo-European texts beginning 'There was a king . . .', Sanskrit *āsīd rāja*, Old Irish *bof rí*, Lithuanian *būvo karālius*, Russian *žil-byl korol'* (*car*). Greek preserves a remarkable morphological and semantic archaism in Alcman (PMG 74) ἦσκε τις Καφεύς φανάσσων 'There was a certain Cepheus ruling . . .', where the existential value of the suffixed form in *-σκε* corresponds exactly to the same value of Old Latin *escit* 'there is', demonstrated by Fränkel 1925:442. The verb can undergo ellipsis, as in the description of Calypso's island (*Od.* 1.51), beginning νῆσος δειδρήεσσα, θεὰ δ' ἐν δώματα ναίει 'An island full of trees, a goddess dwells within'. This syntactic and stylistic feature must be itself inherited; it recurs at the very beginning of the narrative part of the Hittite Appu-folktale StBoT 14, I 7ff (following the moralistic proem) URU-*aš* ŠUM-*an=šet* URUŠudul URULulluwa=*ya=ššan* KUR-*e aruni* ZAG-*ši ēšzi* 'A city—Šudul its name—and the Lulluwa-land is on the edge of the sea.'

With this programmatic lecture, delivered in 1932 at the crowning point of Wackernagel's long career, the study of Indo-European stylistics and poetic language had found itself.

For the work of the last two generations we can be brief. In the postwar period the German Indologist Paul Thieme made a number of contributions, reprinted in



Schmitt 1968. One in particular is discussed in chap. 42 below. The same decade saw the publication of seminal works on the general theory of stylistics, linguistics, and poetics by Roman Jakobson, reprinted in 1981. The Italian classicist and Indo-Europeanist Marcello Durante in 1958, 1960, and 1962 published three very imaginative and learned treatises, part of an ongoing project of research into the prehistory of Greek poetic language. They deal with metaphor, the terminology of poetic creation, and the epithet, resting primarily on original observations of verbal and thematic parallels to Greek texts in Vedic and other languages. They too are reprinted in German translation in Schmitt 1968, and revised and somewhat streamlined versions were later published in Durante 1970 and 1976. The latter is particularly rich in Indo-European comparanda.

Schmitt 1967, already cited at the outset, is important also for stylistics, approaches to genre in Indo-European, and a host of individual correspondences, not to mention the virtually exhaustive bibliography up to that date.

The Italian Indo-Europeanist and Celticist Enrico Campanile published in 1977 an important monograph with the intriguing title *Studies in Indo-European poetic culture*. The great innovation of this work was to emphasize the cultural and societal position and function of poet and poetry, based largely on the study of the traditional poet in Celtic and Indic society. Campanile makes valuable observations on stylistics, on the poet as professional, and on the "total"—all-embracing—character of Indo-European poetic culture, and makes very precise our notion of the functional meaning of some Indo-European stylistic figures. Later works of this author, most recently 1990, develop some of the same themes, with the notions of societal and culture history predominating.

Indo-European 'poetic culture' is also the domain of a number of lengthy recent contributions of Françoise Bader, with the accent on myth. These include Bader 1989, 1991, and 1993.

In 1981 there appeared in German translation an article of fundamental importance by the Russian Indo-Europeanist Vladimir Nikolaevič Toporov. This lengthy, learned, and literarily sophisticated essay in fact offers no less than a theoretical foundation for the study of Indo-European poetics. It is marked by the thought of Roman Jakobson, as well as Saussure and Starobinsky, but most firmly and clearly by the two traditions with which it is concerned, the language and literatures of Vedic and Classical India on the one hand, and the European critical aesthetic and intellectual tradition of the last century or so on the other. Striking is his juxtaposition (p. 194 with n. 8) of the definition of Bhāmaha (7/8th century A.D.) in his *Poetics* (*Kāvyaśāstram*) I 16: *śabdārthau sahitaū kāvyam* 'poetry is sound and meaning put together' with the statement of Paul Valéry, writing in 1938: "L'opération du poète s'exerce au moyen de la valeur complexe des mots, c'est-à-dire en composant à la fois son et sens . . . comme l'algèbre opérant sur des nombres complexes" (*Oeuvres* 1.1414). Toporov's work appears to be widely unknown to Sanskritists, Indo-Europeanists, and students of literary theory alike, but it amply repays serious study.

In 1988, there appeared an important article by M.L. West, 'The Rise of the Greek Epic', with extensive reference to the Indo-European poetic literary and cultural background. We may look forward to the promised—or at least envisaged—

book developing the ideas there presented, and detailing the genesis of the Homeric poems.

For completeness's sake, let me merely record that in 1979 I gave the Collitz lecture to the Linguistic Institute in Salzburg, with the title 'Aspects of Indo-European Poetics' (published 1982), in which I tried to sketch in a few lines a total picture of the essentials of Indo-European poetic language, its function, and its techniques. At the University of Texas at Austin in 1981, at the Session de linguistique et de littérature at Aussois (Savoie) in 1983, at St. Johns College, Annapolis, and Yale University in 1984, I presented variations on a lecture entitled 'How to Kill a Dragon in Indo-European', subsequently published in Watkins 1987c. As the titles would indicate, these two articles (reprinted in Watkins 1994) together furnish the nucleus from which the present work has grown.

I conclude this brief history with a paragraph from Meillet 1930:144 (compare 1913:159), to reiterate what we have known now for 80 years:

Greeks and Indo-Aryans received from the Indo-European period a literary tradition . . . This literary tradition made no use of writing . . . But there was an oral tradition of Indo-European poetry, as shown by the original identity of the two metrics, which one must take account of in order to explain the beginnings both of Greek poetry and of Greek thought.

That is to say that the comparative method in linguistics and poetics can illuminate not only ancient ways of speech but ancient modes of thought.