

Enjambement as a Criterion for Orality in Homeric and South Slavic Epic Poetry

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One of the most conspicuous consequences of the adding style of oral poetry is a strong tendency for the end of the sentence to coincide with the end of the verse. In other words, a relatively negligible number of overrun verses is to be expected. As in other aspects of the true nature of oral style, Milman Parry here too was a pioneer, comparing the frequency of various kinds of enjambement in Homer, Virgil, and Apollonius of Rhodes (1929).

Obviously, Parry considered enjambement a self-explanatory term and did not offer a formal definition. Subsequently, G. S. Kirk, in his elaboration of certain aspects of the problem of enjambement in Homer, defined it as “the carrying over of the sentence from one verse into the next, involving an overrunning of the verse-end” (1976:147). Admittedly, Svetozar Petrović objected recently that this definition does not agree with what is usually called enjambement in general versification because it ignores the existence of a strong sentence stop in the middle of the latter verse (1982:10n), a feature which is essential according to the majority of versification experts. There is, however, no doubt—and Petrović did not deny this—that Parry’s and Kirk’s concept of enjambement is wholly appropriate for their purposes.¹

Parry divided enjambement into two main groups that he called “unperiodic” and “necessary.” We have unperiodic enjambement when the sentence, in Kirk’s formulation, could have ended with the verse, but in fact is carried over into the succeeding verse by the adding of further descriptive matter (adverbial or epithetical) or, as Parry wrote, of “a word or phrase or clause of the same grammatical structure as one in the foregoing verse” (1929:207). This type of enjambement was considered by Parry as characteristic of oral style; he derived the term “unperiodic” from the ancient Greek critic Dionysius of Halicarnassus, but Kirk proposed instead the term “progressive” as more convenient. Necessary enjambement comprises cases in which, as Kirk explained, the sentence

¹ Cf., for example, the definition of enjambement in Preminger (1974:s.v.): “The completion, in the following poetic line, of a clause or other grammatical unit begun in the preceding line.”

cannot be considered complete at the end of the verse and must be carried over into the following verse. Parry further introduced a distinction between two subtypes of necessary enjambement without, however, giving special names to either of them. The main distinction is that in the first, weaker subtype a weak punctuation mark is possible at the end of the former verse, which is not the case with the second subtype. For example, the first subtype would consist of a subordinate clause in the former verse, such as “when he had gone,” and of a main clause in the latter one, while in the second subtype the verse-end divides the sentence without allowing even the weakest sentence stop at the point of enjambement (Kirk’s example is: “when he” in one line and “had gone” in the following one). Kirk supplied suitable denominations for both of these subtypes: “periodic” and “integral,” respectively. It is evident that this last group of enjambéd verses is by its very nature contrary to the oral adding style, since it is inconceivable that a singer should be able to plan in advance sentence periods extending beyond the verse-end of several verses, at least not in the sense that every single verse should not contain a semantic and syntactic whole. If the thought of the first line is continued in the succeeding one, then it would be accomplished by adding a supplementary participle (the *oulomenēn* type in *Iliad* I.2) or an adverbial phrase, but not (or at least extremely rarely) so that the verse-end separates the subject from the predicate (or vice versa: the type *hos mala polla / plangthē* in *Odyssey* I.1-2), a transitive verb from its object (when the object is indispensable), a verb of incomplete sense (e.g., the Greek *tugkhanein*) from its verbal complement, and so on. Kirk added a third subtype of necessary enjambement, which he called “violent.” It covers instances in which the verse-end comes between a preposition and its noun, for example, or an epithet and the noun described or determined by it; in short, it separates words belonging closely together by semantic and/or syntactic criteria. However, this is a very rare phenomenon and he himself found only three instances in his entire corpus of 867 verses of Homer. Besides, he admitted that there is always a certain degree of subjectivity in distinguishing violent from integral enjambement. Therefore, he counted them together in his tables, as I have also in my analysis.

The table below shows the relationship between Parry’s terminology and Kirk’s as represented in the latter’s article (1976:148), the only difference being that the columns with Parry’s and Kirk’s terms have been given in reverse order. The numbers in the first column are Kirk’s symbols for various degrees of enjambement:

Number	Parry's Terms	Kirk's Terms	Possible Punctuation
0	(no enjambement)	(no enjambement)	(actual) strong stop
1	unperiodic	progressive	(conceivable) strong stop, (actual) comma
2	necessary (type 1)	periodic	comma
3	necessary (type 2)	integral	none
4		violent	none

For his statistical sample, Parry chose the first hundred lines from six books of the *Iliad* and from six of the *Odyssey* (selecting them by the formula $1 + [4 \times n]$ where n stands for 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5), the first hundred lines from each of the odd-numbered books of the *Aeneid*, and the first hundred lines from all four books of the *Argonautica* plus lines 681-780 from the first book and lines 889-988 from the last book. Given in percentages and counting both types of necessary enjambement together, his results are as follows (1929:204):

	No Enjambement	Unperiodic Enjambement	Necessary Enjambement
<i>Iliad</i>	48.5%	24.8%	26.6%
<i>Odyssey</i>	44.8%	26.6%	28.5%
<i>Argonautica</i>	34.8%	16.0%	49.1%
<i>Aeneid</i>	38.3%	12.5%	49.2%

What is striking in these results and what Parry himself particularly emphasized is the proportionately higher percentage of verses without enjambement in Homer (approximately every second verse), the considerably lower percentage of unperiodic enjambement in Virgil and Apollonius, and the appearance of necessary enjambement in almost every second verse of epic poems known to be written as compared to only every fourth in Homer. Parry attributed this frequency of unperiodic enjambement in the presumably oral style of Homer to an interplay of formulas and took it as a most significant mark of the adding style of oral poetry.

Soon after the war, Parry's procedure was applied to South Slavic oral poems from Parry's collection by Albert B. Lord (1948). On the basis of a sample of 2,400 epic decasyllables—600 from each of two songs by Salih Ugljanin and 600 from each of two by Avdo Međedović—he established the absence of enjambement in 44.5%, unperiodic enjambement in 40.6%, and necessary enjambement in only 14.9%. Lord analyzed this last type into six sub-categories. The first contains an apostrophe at the beginning of a speech, consisting of a noun in the vocative case plus some

word or phrase, frequently in apposition, to fill out the line; for example:²

Sultan Selim, od svijeta sunce Sultan Selim, light of the world.

As Lord noted, this is the most unnecessary type of necessary enjambement. The second sub-category involves a subordinate clause in the preceding line:

Da nijesu ovaki junaci, If they were not such heroes,
Ne bi za nji znale kraljevine. The kingdoms would not have known
of them.

“These two types cover the largest number of cases,” Lord notes (117). The third is similar to the second of the first two, involving an adverbial phrase in the initial line:

No u jutru prije zore rane.... But in the morning, just before dawn....

In the fourth category an explanatory clause in the latter line completes the meaning of the main clause in the former line:

Bog će videt', a videt' Krajina, God will see, and so will the men of
the Border,
Šta će Luka Pavičević radit'. What Luka Pavičević will do.

There are, in addition, cases of parallel grammatical constructions in the upper and lower lines (“either . . . or . . .,” “not only . . . but also . . .,” and so on); for example:

Al nam valja Bagdat prifatiti, Either we must take Bagdad,
Al Stambola zemlju jostaviti. . . Or leave the country of Stambol. . . .

But, as Lord remarked, in all the preceding instances there is not to be found “a single case of an adjective in one line modifying a noun in the next, or the subject in one line separated from its verb in the following line, or of any integral part of the sentence structure separated by the pause at the end of the line from another integral part” (117-18). In fact, as Lord noted, there do exist some rare cases of this type of enjambement in his sample: only one instance was found in the 1200 verses of Salih Ugljanin, and twenty-two in the same number of Avdo’s verses; for example:

² I draw on Lord (1948) for the descriptions and examples.

the rest of the 332 verses are unenjambéd (182, Table B); in percentages this distribution amounts to 38.2% without enjambement, and 28.6%, 12.2%, and 21.0%, respectively, for the various kinds of overrunning verses.

If we add the percentages for periodic and integral (plus violent) enjambement, the result is 33.2%, which is substantially higher than Parry's figures for necessary enjambement (for the *Iliad* alone, the increase is nearly 7%), but it is still much lower than Parry's 49% for the *Aeneid* and the *Argonautica*. Furthermore, Kirk's progressive enjambements are more frequent than Parry's unperiodic enjambements. But most striking is the deviation in the number of lines without enjambement: in Parry's *Iliad* sample we find 48.5% against Kirk's 38.2%, a notable difference exceeding 10%. In fact, the number of such verses in Homer, according to Kirk's count, agrees with the percentage Parry had established for Virgil and exceeds that for Apollonius by a small margin. Thus there remain the considerably higher number of progressive enjambements and the considerably smaller number of "necessary" ones as distinctive features that would differentiate Homer from writing poets.

I made a similar count along Kirk's lines in the Patrokleia, but independently of his tables. Since I probably used somewhat broader and looser criteria, I arrived at a somewhat higher percentage of integral enjambement: 222 instances, or 25.6%, against his 21.0%. I have, for example, counted as integral the enjambement in the following lines: 7 (*kourē / nēpiē*, noun/epithet), 119 (*gnō d' Aias . . . / erga theōn*, verb of perception/direct object), 194 (*meteprepe . . . / egkhei*, "he excelled / with his spear"), as well as all cases where the verse-end separates the subject from the predicate (or vice versa) regardless of a possible interpolation of a part of speech that allows for a comma at the end of the former verse (Kirk assessed such cases differently, and Petrović would probably agree with him). There appear, of course, several lines on which I disagree with Kirk the other way round, which is further proof that he was right in stating that a certain measure of subjectivity is unavoidable in such analyses (Kirk 1976:150). For example, I consider it inconsistent to classify the enjambement in lines 617 and 620 as integral but that in lines 770 and 831 as periodic: all four verses end with a participle after which a comma is possible.³ But these are trifles, and what is important is that both Kirk's stricter criteria as well as my looser ones yield a relatively high proportion of integral enjambement in a supposedly oral text. But, as we shall see later, the same point is valid also for Parry's percentages.

The most severe critics of Parry's methodology until now have been

³ In my text of the *Iliad* (H. Färber, ed., Munich, 1954), there is, in fact, a comma at the end of ll. 617 and 620, but not after ll. 770 and 831.

Dee Lesser Clayman and Thomas van Nortwick (1977). They disagreed with him on his sampling technique, lack of proper statistical tests to determine the significance of his results, and assumption that the conclusions, reached on the basis of a study of only three poems, were valid for all Greek hexameter poetry. Therefore, in their opinion, his final conclusion was unreliable (Barnes 1979:1). However, Harry R. Barnes, in a re-examination of their work, showed that the deviation in their statistical findings is the result of the application of a different definition of enjambement, that their figure for Aratus is erroneous, and that their own sampling in the case of Theocritus is incorrect. His conclusion (9) was that Clayman and Van Nortwick “are correct in objecting that Parry overemphasized this one type of enjambement,” that is, unperiodic, “as a distinguishing characteristic of oral poetry,” but that they are wrong in denying a correlation between the degree of enjambement and the oral or written form of composition of the respective songs, as asserted by Parry.

My intention here is not to question the basic soundness of Barnes’s criticism of Clayman and Van Nortwick, but rather to call attention to the first part of his conclusion referred to above. It seems to me that there is a tendency among oralists to overemphasize the role of unperiodic (Kirk’s progressive) enjambement in oral poetry. In my opinion, necessary (type 2) or integral enjambement is more indicative of the way in which a certain piece of poetry came into existence. If we accept as valid the maxim that in oral poetry the verse-end and the sentence-end naturally tend to coincide, then integral enjambement should not be expected to occur to any significant extent, since it is by its very nature contradictory in oral traditional improvisation. Lord’s analysis strongly supports this point: in his sample of 2,400 incontrovertibly oral verses, a mere twenty-three instances of his sixth subtype of enjambement were found, that is, less than 1% of the total sample, a figure in clear disagreement with the percentages established for Homer by various scholars.⁴

To test Lord’s results, I have analyzed a certain number of oral traditional poems from the collection of Vuk Karadžić. Admittedly, some adherents of the Harvard oral school often object that Vuk did some editing before he published the collected songs and thereby spoiled (or falsified) their documentary value. However, Petrović (ms.) showed recently how negligible his interventions had been: apart from some minor and unimportant points, only occasionally did he attempt to bring the songs into accord with what he established as the norm of the singer. After all, Parry’s Yugoslav assistant, Nikola Vujnović, also intervened during the

⁴ I have made random tests on various oral or “oral-derived” poems (see n. 6, below) either in the original (*Song of Roland*) or in translation (*Manas, Alpamysh*); the findings seem to confirm the thesis of this article, but before such results can be quoted as evidence more extensive analyses are needed.

composition of the songs recorded by Parry: Lord informs us that Vujnović drew the attention of the singers to patent mistakes, metrical irregularities, blunders in the subject matter or plot of the songs, and so on. Therefore, I believe that the use of Vuk's collection as a corpus of authentic oral poetry is fully legitimate.

It is well known that Vuk published his heroic (*muške*) songs in volumes 2-4 of his collection. They comprise, respectively, 100 songs (with 18,696 verses, not counting a small number of variants here and elsewhere printed in notes), 87 songs (with 16,606 verses), and 62 songs (plus four in an appendix, all together 15,347 verses), which total 253 songs with 50,649 lines. I have used for my analysis all the songs in the second volume and songs 24-43 from the fourth volume (1932). My sample was chosen in order to include the songs of Vuk's best singers (Tešan Podrugović, Filip Višnjić, Starac Milija, Starac Raško, Stojan Hajduk, Živana, Stepanija, and Jeca). I have, therefore, analyzed enjambement in 120 songs with 24,575 lines, which is approximately half of Vuk's entire corpus of epic poetry. I restricted myself, however, to counting only those instances of enjambement that could be classified as Parry's type 2 of necessary enjambement, or Kirk's integral overrunning, that is, those that are in most patent disharmony with the oral adding style: separation of the subject from the predicate by verse-end and all similar cases. As mentioned earlier, strictly formal criteria are difficult to establish and some other count might yield different data. However, the general impression would hardly change substantially.

To clarify my method of classification, I cite below some examples illustrating what I consider integral enjambement:

Vuk 2, No. 68, ll. 98-99, p. 386:

<i>Kako j' proklet Arap isekao</i>	How the accursed Arab cut down
<i>Sedamdeset i sedam junaka,</i>	Seventy-seven heroes,

(The direct object in the second line is indispensable to the meaning of the subordinate clause in the first line.)

Vuk 2, No. 94, ll. 312-14, p. 561:

<i>Ne bih ti se mlada pokrstila</i>	I, young one, wouldn't become a Christian
<i>Ni za kakvo blago od svijeta</i>	For any wealth in the world
<i>Do za tvoju na ramenu glavu.</i>	Except for your head on [your] shoulders.

Vuk 4, No. 33, ll. 64-65, p. 208:

<i>Šestu posla [knjigu], brate,</i>	The fourth [letter] he sent, my brother,
<i>na četiri</i>	to the four
<i>Na četiri sandžak-alajbega.</i>	To the four sandžak-alajbeys.

(This is an instance of violent enjambement attenuated by the repetition of the final words of the first verse at the beginning of the second one.)

Vuk 4, No. 33, ll. 600-01, p. 222:

<i>Turci daše pleća, pobjegoše</i>	The Turks took to their heels,
<i>Drini vodi ladnoj na obalu.</i>	they fled To the bank of the Drina, the cool stream.

(The complement in the second verse is necessary in the sense that the verb *pobjegoše* [“they fled”] otherwise remains to some extent dangling; perhaps this example is the least convincing.)

Vuk 2, No. 35, ll. 145-46, p. 189:

<i>Tvoga starca, stara Jug-Bogdana</i>	Your elder, old Jug-Bogdan,
<i>Na muke sam udario teške.</i>	I have submitted to painful torture.

Vuk 2, No. 36, ll. 2-4, p. 192:

<i>Kada slavni srpski knez Lazare</i>	When the glorious Serbian Prince Lazar
<i>Posla zeta Miloš Obilića</i>	Sent his son-in-law Miloš Obilić
<i>U Latine da kupi harače,</i>	To the country of the Latins to collect poll taxes,

(This is again one of the most violent cases of enjambement.)

Vuk 2, No. 81, ll. 111-12, p. 455:

<i>Slušaj čudo: Todor Pomoravac</i>	Hear about a wonder: Todor of Pomoravlje
<i>Odveo mi snahu isprošenu.</i>	Abducted my daughter-in-law already promised in marriage.

Vuk 2, No. 49, fragment 3, ll. 46-47, p. 284:

<i>Nego sjutra mislim u Kosovo</i>	But tomorrow I intend at Kosovo
<i>Za rišćansku vjeru poginuti.</i>	To die for the Christian faith.

(The second verse contains a necessary complement to the verb of the first verse.)

Vuk 2, No. 88, ll. 841-42, p. 507:

<i>Pa stadoše sluge i sluškinje</i>	So the servants and the maids started
<i>Na kapiji svate darivati.</i>	To give presents to the wedding guests at the door.

In my sample of 24,575 lines I have found a total of only 271 instances of integral enjambement (some of them open to doubt, as I have illustrated), which amounts to no more than 1.1% of the sample. This result shows great similarity to Lord's percentage for the songs of Salih Ugljanin and Avdo Međedović, and a remarkable deviation from all figures obtained in analyses of Homer (either by Parry, Kirk, or Clayman and Van Nortwick).

Perhaps one might object that such a low percentage of integrally enjambed verses in South Slavic oral poems has something to do with the nature of its decasyllabic meter. Anticipating this objection, I undertook an analysis, along the same lines, of the written poem *Gorski vijenac* [*The Mountain Wreath*] of Petar II Petrović Njegoš, who was himself the author of folk songs preserved in Vuk's collection (1967). There are many examples of most violent enjambements in this written poem; for example:

ll. 583-84:

<i>Junaku se češće putah hoće</i>	Several times, on account of the hero, would
<i>vedro nebo nasmijat grohotom.</i>	the serene sky roar with laughter.

ll. 1522-23:

<i>da su jednom žbiri i špijuni</i>	that once the policemen and spies
<i>oblagali jednoga principa.</i>	slandered a doge.

ll. 1680-81:

<i>Koje čudo mogu na godinu</i>	What a lot can in a year
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kokošakah oni pozobati! of chickens they eat up
 (= What a lot of chickens they
 can eat up in a year!).

Enjambements so violent in nature are rare in truly oral songs. The frequency of enjambed verses is also considerably higher in Njegoš: in the first 800 verses, I have counted 53 instances of integral enjambement, or 6.6%, that is, six times as many as in the songs from Vuk's or Parry's collections. Of course, this is still far below Parry's 49% for Virgil and Apollonius, and even substantially less than in Homer.⁵

If we now consider together the results obtained by Lord and by me in analyzing South Slavic oral poetry, those of Parry and Kirk in their studies of Homer, and Parry's percentages established for Virgil and Apollonius, and if we compare them with one another, the surprising fact is that the figure for necessary/integral enjambement in Homer is considerably higher—moving in the direction of written poetry—than those found as valid for poems composed by oral traditional improvisation (see note 5). How should this unexpected result be explained? In my opinion, there are two possible answers: either the principle of verse = sentence is to be abandoned, or Homer is not a poet of the same kind as Tešan, Milija, or Avdo. In my view, the second alternative is more persuasive. This would not mean, of course, that Homer was another Virgil or Njegoš, but only that writing had played some role in the production of what we now read as the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. While not to be classified either as an oral singer or as a literate poet, he should be taken as someone in between those types. The most apt and convenient designation for that category that occurs to me is John Miles Foley's "oral-derived":⁶ this does not negate his deep indebtedness to the oral tradition, but does offer an explanation for certain features in his poems that are difficult to reconcile with oral character. If this article is not completely mistaken, enjambement is one such distinctive feature strongly pointing in the same direction.

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⁵ Why the percentage of integral enjambement in a written poem is, after all, relatively low is another problem requiring a separate discussion. With regard to Parry's figures, we must recall, of course, my earlier remarks, namely, that his figures for necessary enjambement include both of Kirk's periodic and integral types, but this difference has already been taken into account for my conclusions, which are based on the strikingly low figure for integral (plus violent) enjambement in South Slavic oral poetry (about 1%) as compared to Kirk's 21% and my 25.6% in the *Iliad*.

⁶ Foley 1988 and 1990:chap. 1.

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