



Odyssey 8.564-571: Verisimilitude, Narrative Analysis, and Bricolage

Author(s): JOHN PERADOTTO

Source: *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 1974, Vol. 15, No. 5, A Special Classics Issue on Myth and Interpretation (1974), pp. 803-832

Published by: University of Texas Press

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40754298>

REFERENCES

Linked references are available on JSTOR for this article:

https://www.jstor.org/stable/40754298?seq=1&cid=pdf-reference#references_tab_contents

You may need to log in to JSTOR to access the linked references.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



University of Texas Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*

JSTOR

JOHN PERADOTTO

ODYSSEY 8.564–571:
Verisimilitude, Narrative Analysis, and Bricolage

μάντις δ' ἄριστος ὅστις εἰκάζει καλῶς.

(Euripides, fragment 973N)

NEAR THE END OF THE EIGHTH BOOK OF THE *Odyssey*, ALCINOUS ASKS Odysseus' name and destination, and promises him safe escort on a fairy ship without helm or helmsman, fearless and swift as thought, steered, like the hero it will whisk home, by its knowledge of the minds and cities of men. Such ships are the stuff of dream and folktale. But in the *Odyssey* we are not in that narrative realm of undiluted wish-fulfillment where no limit appears to be set on such incredible power, nor any price paid for so transcending space and time and the world's ordered regularities of which Poseidon is an ineluctable part. A limit, a price is fixed, and Alcinoous immediately adverts to it, recalling his father Nausithous' prophecy: their untroubled escort of men would anger the sea-god eventually; a returning vessel would be wrecked and the city overwhelmed by a mountain (8.564–571):

ἀλλὰ τὸδ' ὥς ποτε πατρὸς ἐγὼν εἰπόντος ἄκουσα
Ναυσιθόου, ὃς ἔφασκε Ποσειδάων' ἀγάσασθαι
ἡμῖν, οὐνεκα πομποὶ ἀπήμονές εἰμεν ἀπάντων·
φῆ ποτε Φαιήκων ἀνδρῶν περικαλλέα νῆα
ἐκ πομπῆς ἀνιοῦσαν ἐν ἠεροειδέι πόντῳ
ῥαισέμεναι, μέγα δ' ἡμῖν ὄρος πόλει ἀμφικαλύψειν.
ὥς ἀγόρευ' ὁ γέρων· τὰ δέ κεν θεὸς ἦ τελέσειεν,
ἦ κ' ἀτέλεστ' εἶη, ὥς οἱ φίλον ἔπλετο θυμῷ.

This prophecy is recalled again in book thirteen (ll. 172–178) after the petrification of the Phaeacian ship on its return from transporting Odysseus to Ithaca.

N.B.: The present essay was supported in part by a research grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, and completed with the help of a Fellowship at the Center for Hellenic Studies, to whose director, Professor Bernard M. W. Knox, the author owes a large debt of gratitude for his encouragement and concern.

Texas Studies in Literature and Language
XV.5 (Special Classics Issue 1974)

As it stands in book eight the prophecy has always been a major target of criticism, from the Alexandrians to the best modern texts. Aristarchus athetized it, arguing that it was more at home (*οἰκειότερον*) in thirteen, just after its fulfillment has been dramatized, and that for Alcinoüs to recall it in eight is to violate a pattern presumably established (or at least exemplified) in two other similar situations: (1) 9.507–516, where Polyphemus remembers only after the event a prophecy about his blinding at Odysseus' hands (and in fact opens his speech with the same formulaic line as the one used by Alcinoüs at 13.172: ὦ πόποι, ἦ μάλα δὴ με παλαίφατα θέσφαθ' ἰκάνει); and (2) 10.330–333, where Circe, also after the event, recalls Hermes' repeated forecasts of Odysseus' arrival on her island. Furthermore, the argument continues, if Odysseus had known about the prophecy as early as book eight, he would never have told the Phaeacians how he earned Poseidon's hostility, nor would Alcinoüs on his side have given Odysseus escort after hearing such a story unless he had been fully oblivious of the prophecy before its fulfillment in thirteen.

Some scholiasts make a feeble try at defending 8.564–571 with arguments drawn from the same rationalist store. One argues that Alcinoüs is trapped by his promise of escort which, once made, cannot be rescinded—a case, in effect, of *noblesse oblige*: οἱ ἀγαθοὶ τὰς ὑποσχέσεις οὐκ ἀναπαλαίουσιν. Another allows that he may be so spellbound by Odysseus' tale that he forgets the prophecy, but that Odysseus should tell the tale at all after hearing the prophecy still remains for this critic a cause of puzzlement (ἀλλὰ πῶς Ὀδυσσεὺς ταῦτα ἀκούσας τὴν Ποσειδῶνος μὲν μὲν ὄργην ἢ ἠθέλησε τὰ ληθῆ εἰπεῖν;).

Modern critics, with what looks like that occupational Aristarchomania against which Nauck once protested, generally agree in condemning the lines as an insertion. Von der Mühl does it quietly and economically: "*postea inserti sunt.*" Not so Victor Bérard, whose textual butchery is by now notorious. Describing the whole passage (ll. 550–586) of which the prophecy is a part, he explodes into prose that crackles with contempt: "puérité," "bavardage," "sottise," "infamie," "injustice," "impiété," "bâtardise"! And to all the Aristarchian arguments for athetesis he adds a final plea of common sense:

Si même le roi n'eût écouté que son bon coeur et sa pitié, ni le peuple ni les autres conseillers et doges phéaciens n'eussent consenti à courir vers un pareil désastre, en compagnie d'un tel ennemi de leur dieu.¹

All these arguments are rationally compelling. And yet it is unlikely that an unscholarly if still serious reading of the work will be troubled by the problem in the first place. This does not necessarily dismiss the prob-

¹ Bérard, *L'Odyssee II* (Paris, 1959), p. 24.

lem, but it might suggest its triviality, or if not that, serve as propædeutic to a reappraisal of the relative value we attach to certain kinds of “reading.” The following statement, for example, will clarify the issue by the nearly polemical tone it assumes:

The unsparing intellectualist criticism of Homer which has been rife amongst scholars for the last three centuries, though in many ways valuable, does not contain the whole (or even the most important part) of the truth about Homer. Dissect his poetry as you will, the alleged cadaver remains impressively and obstinately alive; and those who read Homer today (even in translation) in the *trois jours* recommended for the *Iliad* by Ronsard may be nearer the truth about him than the professors who peer at the text through their high-power microscopes.²

That is the estimate, not of an unscholarly ordinary reader, but of a papyrologist, who concludes his study of Homeric papyri with the suggestion that most readers of Imperial Egypt no more needed, or were no more inclined to use, the scholarly *Hilfsmittel* at their disposal than the modern educated English-speaker when he reads Shakespeare.³ The reason is largely that the scholar-scholiast tends to spend less time dealing with questions that bear on the meaning of the whole than on points of narrow, often infinitesimal detail. What is more, such detail, when scrutinized too long and too closely, not infrequently generates questions that are at best irrelevant, at worst ridiculous. And the troubling thing is that such questions, once generated, no matter how ridiculous, enjoy a robust afterlife, an inheritance from one generation of scholars to another, until they constitute what might be called a hallowed, establishment sanctioned approach to the text. An example of such inherited obsessions—a critical *topos* at least as old as Aristotle (*Poet.* 1460a35)—is the incredulity felt over *Odyssey* 13.119 ff., where Odysseus sleeps soundly through the grounding of the Phaeacian ship and his own removal to the beach. Another example: at *Odyssey* 11.245, where Poseidon makes love to Tyro (λύσε δὲ παρθενίην ζώνην, κατὰ δ' ὕπνον ἔχευεν), who but a scholar in a delirium of literalness will stop with Aristarchus to ask why, if the girl was already passionate for his love (ἠράσσει' 238), the god had to put her to sleep? For want of an answer, the line gets athetized, and most modern critics concur (πρὸς τί γὰρ τῇ ἐρώσει καὶ ἔκουσίως βουλομένη μνηστῆραι κατέχευεν ὕπνον;). That way of focussing on a text reminds one of the anecdote told about P. A. M. Dirac, Cambridge physicist and winner

² J. A. Davison, “The Study of Homer in Graeco-Roman Egypt,” *Akten des VIII internationalen Kongresses für Papyrologie in Wien, 1955, Mitteil. aus. d. Papyrussamml. der Oesterr. Nationalbibl.* V. Folge (Vienna, 1956), p. 55.

³ See also M. van der Valk, *Researches on the Text and Scholia of the Iliad: Part II* (Leiden, 1964), pp. 582–583.

of the Nobel prize; asked how he liked Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, his one and only comment was, "It is nice, but in one of the chapters the author made a mistake. He describes the sun rising twice on the same day."⁴

But narrowness of focus is not the only thing that separates the Homeric scholar from the reader, or better, Homeric scholarship from "reading" Homer, since we are not discussing personalities so much as activities. More serious is the set of assumptions with which much Homeric scholarship has approached the text. This is not for a moment to suggest that readers do not bring any assumptions to the text. But generally speaking there are two characteristics of Homeric scholarship which, if indulged, tend to disrupt "reading." They are what I shall call rationalism and the urge to *improve* the text.

The arguments of Aristarchus and Bérard for athetizing 8.564–571 are examples of rationalism. They are reminiscent of Herodotus' attack on the historicity of the Homeric account of the Trojan war: Homer violates common sense, he argues, for had Helen really been at Troy, neither Priam nor his advisers would have been so irrational (*φρενοβλαβής*) as to hazard their own lives, their children, and their city simply to support Paris' lust (2.120).⁵ Similarly, Aristarchus considers it a violation of common sense for Alcinous to provide Odysseus with an escort home, unless he has forgotten the prophecy which ties that action to the potential endangerment of his people. That human action, whether in life or in stories, always proceeds by a narrow prudential calculus of means and ends is a highly questionable assumption. But beyond that, it imperils one's grasp of the integrity of narrative, in which actions are motivated more often than not by quite irrational factors, and in which events may be structured without any consideration whatever of motivation. So far as narrative *qua* narrative is concerned, intelligible motivation is often adventitious,⁶ and rational motivation a luxury.

⁴ Quoted by Arthur Koestler in *The Roots of Coincidence* (New York, 1972), p. 66. Let me not seem to imply that Aristarchus was utterly without scruples in censuring or excising whole passages from the text. He is infinitely more sensitive than Zenodotus, and frequently forces his cautious respect for manuscript consensus to override his own logical or aesthetic demurral. See p. 808 of this article.

⁵ On the cultural implications of this as a historical methodology, see Eric Voegelin, *Order and History II: The World of the Polis* (Baton Rouge, 1957), pp. 37–40.

⁶ Aristotle understood this when he spoke of *μῦθος* as the *ψυχὴ τῆς τραγωδίας* (1450a38), and as the *πρῶτον καὶ μέγιστον τῆς τραγωδίας* (1450b23), and argued that it was possible to have a tragedy without character-motivation (*ἦθος*) but not one without *μῦθος* (1450a23). The analogy with *ψυχὴ* suggests that *μῦθος* is not simply formal cause, but, like the soul in relation to the body, efficient and final cause as well. *ἦθος* can be said to function in none of these ways.

Rationalism is inclined to alter the text in the interests of logic and “common sense,” but there are other factors that may motivate it. Altering the received text purports to have in large part a historical aim, the recovery of the *authentic* or *original* text. No one would think to question this as a necessary task for such narrative as depends critically for its meaning and aesthetic effect on the accuracy of its verbal component, and which lies at the end of a transmission flawed by the high likelihood of scribal or other kinds of corruption. But the relevance of the operation diminishes sharply the more closely we approach a kind of narrative that is oral, traditional, and authorless, and where the meaning and effect of a tale persist through a multiplicity of versions. At the extreme limit of this kind of narrative—the traditional myths, legends, and folktales of pre-literate, primitive cultures and, to a certain extent, the survival of these kinds of tales in literate cultures⁷—it is meaningless to associate it with an individual “maker,” or to speak of an original, *echt* version. One may speak of earlier and later versions, of more beautiful and less beautiful versions; one might even be able to determine the earliest known version, but that in itself would not endow it with privileged status.

Now on a graduated scale between this kind of narrative and the other extreme, where are we to locate the Homeric poems? It seems clear that, although they mark an advance in increased professionalism and “text”-consciousness, all that we can infer about the oral component in their structure and composition seems to require locating them closer to the traditional, oral tale than to literature depending on the maintenance of *ipsisima verba*.⁸ But it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the con-

⁷ For the character of such narrative, see William Bascom, “The Forms of Folklore: Prose Narratives,” *Journal of American Folklore*, 78 (Jan.-Mar., 1965), 3–20. On this matter, one should also consider the supreme importance which Aristotle attaches to *plot* (*μυθος*), even the plot of highly “literate” literature. In chapter 14 of the *Poetics*, for example, he argues that the plot of a tragedy ought to be structured in such a way that merely hearing the chain of events without seeing them performed will educe the tragic effect (1453b3).

⁸ The differences between these two kinds of narrative are of course relative, not absolute. Insofar as *any* narrative, even the simplest, depends upon words as a vehicle, there are verbal changes that could drastically alter the effect of a tale. Think of *Odyssey* 13.158, where Aristophanes’ alteration of mss. *μέγα δέ* to *μήδε* not only resolves our uncertainty about the ultimate fate of the Phaeacians, but assures us that they are saved by a Zeus as merciful as he is judicious. That changes the whole story.

Furthermore, we are not contending that verbatim precision may not be an ideal of the practicing oral poet; that certainly appears to be the case among the Novi Pazar singers (see Kirk, “Homer and Modern Oral Poetry: Some Confusions,” *Classical Quarterly*, n.s. 10 [1960], 271–281, esp. 275–277). What we are saying is rather that verbal accuracy, irrespective of what the poet intends, is not as critical to the overall meaning and aesthetic impact as it is in more literate forms of narrative like the *Aeneid* or *Paradise Lost*; in other words, that what Aristotle

cerns and criteria brought to bear on these texts by Alexandrian scholarship were largely those of contemporary Alexandrian poetry. Many of the foremost poets of the age were, like Callimachus and Apollonius, scholar-librarians, and their literary output, even in its calculated simulation of archaic epic, exhibits interests that are more at home in the annals of scholarship than in the Homeric poems: a prosaic mentality, a pedantic concern with geographical accuracy of detail, a preoccupation with *aitia*, the influence of textual and glossographical studies on Homer, a desire to avoid "unseemly" details. On the other hand, much of the scholarly textual criticism betrays an urge, more consistent in poet than scholar, not simply to correct but to *improve* the text. For example, Aristarchus' rationalistic sense of dramatic truth was offended (very much like Dirac by Dostoyevsky's superfluous sunrise) that the members of the embassy to Achilles should share a meal with him so soon after dining with Agamemnon (*Il.* 9.174–177, 220–221). Even though his reverence for the majority of manuscripts keeps him from altering the text, he comments that it would have been *better* (ἀμεινον οὐν εἶχεν ἄν) if the second passage had read ἀψ (or αἰψ) ἐπάσαντο rather than ἐπει πόσιος καὶ ἐδητύος ἐξ ἔρον ἔντο. One may object that this is closer to a logician's than a poet's concern, but it surely approximates artistic composition more closely than "objective" textual criticism or historical inquiry. It is noteworthy that not a little of modern textual criticism (Bérard is the extreme case) has proceeded, sometimes with less discretion than Aristarchus, on the same (largely unadmitted) assumption that whatever is not found to be logical, coherent, beautiful, compelling, or "natural,"⁹ does not belong to the original composition and must accordingly be excised. The Alexandrian critic and his modern counterpart in effect do not permit Homer to nod.

The ultimate criterion of the Alexandrians concerning what is logical, coherent, beautiful, compelling, "natural," etc., is the canon of *versimilitude* (τὸ εἶκος, τὸ ὅμοιον), inherited from Aristotle, but probably first articulated by the Sicilian rhetorician Corax,¹⁰ and destined to dominate

calls μῦθος looms larger in importance than λέξις. One should also note that among modern illiterate Yugoslav bards it is doubtful that the notion of verbatim accuracy as we conceive it exists (see Adam Parry, "Have We Homer's *Iliad*," *Yale Classical Studies*, 20 [1966], 187–189), and if it does, there is still a great discrepancy between the accuracy that they may profess and the variation, sometimes massive, of their versions.

⁹ Kirk, in *Songs of Homer* (Cambridge, 1962), p. 248, commenting on *Odyssey* 23.296, says: "From one point of view the poem ends *perfectly naturally* at the point indicated by the ancient critics, whose judgment is important if not decisive" (italics added).

¹⁰ For the testimonia on Corax, see Ludwig Radermacher, *Artium Scriptores: Reste der voraristotelischen Rhetorik* (Vienna, 1951). For his development of the

Western poetics and criticism until relatively recent times. In Aristotle, it represents a broad consensus of what is likely or probable. Grounded in tradition, learned judgment, the majority, current opinion (*δόξα*), it is still a flexible tool for salvaging Homeric poetic usage against the *problēmata* and *epitimēmata* generated by a narrowing focus on the text;¹¹ it bears no ironclad correspondence to “facts,” whether of history or of science, but conforms more closely to public opinion, even where such opinion may depart from historical actuality or scientific possibility.¹² But the Homeric scholia show us how quickly and easily such a loose, prudential criterion can harden into strict, prescriptive rules, and initiate a long and inglorious history of critical interdicts, from Aristotle himself condemning Aegeus’ unmotivated entrance in the *Medea* (*Poet.* 15. 1454b1 and 25.1461b21) to Thomas Rymer censuring Shakespeare, and the Academy denouncing Corneille’s *Cid* for violations of *vraisemblance*. It is this principle of verisimilitude that underlies the arguments of scholiasts and scholars not only for discarding but also for keeping the passage with which our discussion began, *Odyssey* 8.564–571.

Let us not seem to underestimate the hermeneutic power of this principle, or to disdain all its practitioners because some used it undelicately. If the concerns of ancient commentary frequently strike us now as trivial, one reason may be that poets knew better than their critics what the current limits of verisimilitude were, or simply ignored them to follow the higher mandates of their muse. But there is a more important reason, which derives from the very essence of verisimilitude as a critical principle. Verisimilitude is constantly undermined by an inner contradiction. Its lack of specific method drives it toward universal normative prescriptions at the same time that history and the experience of alien cultures erode the consensus that is supposed to give it being. A spurious sense of progress may lead the modern scholar to condemn the scholiast, but insofar as he himself employs the same principle, unreflective of the cultural presuppositions that guide him, he works under a delayed sentence that will in time surely be passed on him, as he has passed it on his predecessor: “This man’s most ardent concerns were trivial.”

Were it the concern of this essay to add to the store of “verisimilar” arguments brought to bear on the prophecy of Nausithous, compelling reasons could, I think, be found for opposing Aristarchus and keeping the passage where it stands in book eight. I shall suggest a few without

argument from probability, see Bromley Smith, “Corax and Probability,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech Education*, 7 (1921), 13–42.

¹¹ *Poetics* 25. 1460b6 ff. Cf. Roland Barthes, *Critique et vérité* (Paris, 1966), pp. 14–35.

¹² *Poetics*, beginning of Chapter 25. Cf. also chapters 9 and 15.

detailed substantiation simply as an exercise before advocating a methodology that I take to be securer.

First, it could be argued, when in book thirteen Alcinoüs cries (l. 172) ὦ πόποι, ἦ μάλα δὴ με παλαίφατα θέσφαθ' ἱκάνει, just as when Polyphemus uses the same expression at 9.507, they are not necessarily expressing sudden remembrance of a long-forgotten prophecy. The verb ἱκάνει here does not mean “come to mind,” as so many critics appear to imply, but “come to fulfillment.” The Cyclops must not be charged with foolish disregard of the prophecy, but rather with simple miscalculation about its contents: in fact, he was, as he says, living in constant expectation (αἰεὶ . . . ἐδέγμην), but of the wrong kind of man.¹³ So also the mere fact that Alcinoüs recalls the prophecy on the occasion of its fulfillment is not in itself an obstacle to his already having recalled it in book eight.

Secondly, it has already been suggested that pragmatic considerations of the kind raised by Aristarchus and Bérard are not always paramount in decisions of Homeric (or other fictional) characters. It is, in fact, just as improbable or unreasonable (ἄλογον), if not more so, to suppose a king, θεῶν ἄπο μηδέα εἰδώς (6.12), who sits through Odysseus' whole tale—especially the Cyclops story—and then ships him off home without ever once adverting to a prophecy that concerns the very survival of the Phaeacian people, as to suppose one who takes that risk despite the danger. The Phaeacians, and Alcinoüs especially, pride themselves on—perhaps define themselves by—their hospitality and safe conduct of strangers (8.31–33; cf. 8.566 = 13.174):

ἤμεῖς δ', ὡς τὸ πάρος περ, ἐποτρυνώμεθα πομπήν·
οὐδὲ γὰρ οὐδέ τις ἄλλος, ὅτις κ' ἐμὰ δώμαθ' ἵκηται,
ἐνθάδ' ὀδυρόμενος δηρὸν μένει εἴνεκα πομπῆς.

It is perfectly within the realm of verisimilitude for a king, and a whole people, to be prepared to run the prophecy's risk in order to maintain their identity as πομποὶ πάντων. In fact, the prediction of Nausithous is very close to a certain kind of forecast of the future that is not infrequent in real as well as fictional life: (1) Depending largely on circumstances beyond the human agents' control, it may or may not be brought to a *telos* (8.570–571: τὰ δέ κεν θεὸς ἢ τελέσειεν, / ἢ κ' ἀτέλεστ' εἶη, ὡς οἱ φίλον ἔπλετο θυμῷ). (2) If it is to happen, it is not clear *when*. (3) To avoid the vague, future, possible outcome completely means relinquishing an immediate, concrete, present good, valued as much as or more

¹³ It should also be noted that a new touch of irony is added to the story of the *outis*-stragem by the fact that, although this prophecy (unlike Nausithous') becomes so detailed as to specify the name of Polyphemus' assailant, it does him no good.

than escape from the terms of the prophecy. (4) Keeping the prophecy constantly in mind could lead to a gloomy and immobilizing sense of desperation. One could cite as contemporary examples the warnings faced by heavy smokers or by San Franciscans living along the San Andreas fault.

These arguments for saving 8.564–571, based on the criterion of verisimilitude, are not inconsiderate. But they are not ones I choose to dwell on, for my larger purpose is not to defend the “authenticity” of the passage or even to evaluate its effect on the aesthetic quality of the narrative, so much as simply to understand what semantic impact on the narrative its presence (or absence) may have. The present analysis is neither historical nor evaluative. Nor is it concerned with whether the passage is a “flaw” or not; rather it will be suggested that much of what is considered to be flawed by the criteria of verisimilitude is in fact common or at least not unprecedented in narrative technique. Its primary purpose is *to make sense of the passage as it stands*. One of the questions it asks is “Can the tale remain intact if the received text remains intact?”

To leave aside verisimilitude and to approach the problem in this fashion may seem an attempt to escape the kinds of cultural presuppositions and assumptions that go hand in hand with verisimilitude. That would be an illusion, for it is surely impossible to remove all such predispositions and assumptions from our reading of a text. But not all of them will entail the alteration of the text or aim at a final, prescriptive meaning.¹⁴ Some of them will not seriously affect the literary transaction I am calling “reading”; some will be harmlessly trivial, encumbering but not arresting the act of “reading”; some will be so seriously crippling to the narrative as an organic ensemble that it may no longer be possible to speak of “reading” at all, but rather of myopic sifting through a text, now reduced to a mere repository of discrete testimonia in the reconstruction of some larger entity. The best that scholarship can do is to become conscious and cautious of its predispositions, and to return to that reverence for the

¹⁴ Not all criticism based on verisimilitude is as destructive of the received text as, say, Bérard on the *Odyssey*, or as interdictive as the rules under which Corneille and Racine composed. Dryden, for example, employs verisimilitude to defend the character of Caliban (*Essays of John Dryden*, ed. W. P. Ker [Oxford, 1900], I, 219–220). But such instances are rare in an otherwise uniform history of regulation and censure. On verisimilitude in general, see R. M. Alden, “The Doctrine of Verisimilitude,” *Matzke Memorial Volume* (Stanford, 1911); Ralph C. Williams, “Two Studies in Epic Theory: I. Verisimilitude in the Epic,” *Modern Philology*, 22 (1924), 133–151; René Bray, *La Formation de la doctrine classique en France* (1926; rpt. Paris, 1963), pp. 191–214; Tzvetan Todorov, “Le Récit Primitif,” *Tel Quel*, 30 (Summer, 1967), 47–55; and *Communications*, 11 (1968), the whole issue of which is devoted to “le vraisemblable” from the structuralist point of view.

integrity of the phenomenon under study as it is expressed by Schelling:

Hier fragt es sich nicht, wie muss das Phänomen gewendt, gedreht, vereinseitigt, oder verkümmert werden, um aus Grundsätzen, die wir uns einmal vorgesetzt nicht zu überschreiten, noch allenfalls erklärbar zu sein, sondern: wohin müssen *unsere* Gedanken sich erweitern, um mit dem Phänomen in Verhältnis zu stehen.¹⁵

In this regard, classical scholarship will find a more rigorous methodology suggested by the procedure of Erwin Panofsky than in the canon of verisimilitude:

The individual observation assumes the character of a "fact" only when it can be related to other, analogous observations in such a way that the whole series "makes sense." This "sense" is, therefore, fully capable of being applied, as a control, to the interpretation of a new individual observation within the same range of phenomena. If, however, this new individual observation definitely refuses to be interpreted according to the "sense" of the series . . . the "sense" of the series will have to be reformulated to include the new individual observation.¹⁶

Such a methodology is more rigorous to be sure, but unfortunately it is also one as yet rudimentary in its development so far as literary analysis is concerned.¹⁷

It should be clear by now that we are not here concerned with the lexical or literal meaning of words. It is one of the tasks of traditional philology to fix the literal denotation of an utterance, and in fulfilling that task it generally relies on more incontestable evidence than the shifting criteria of verisimilitude, evidence less vulnerable to history or to changes in the canons of taste.¹⁸ But it is to questions of larger or "second" meaning, for which no lexicon is adequate, that, for want of anything better, verisimilitude has been applied—the meaning, in other words, uncovered by the thing we loosely call interpretation, particularly of linguistic units larger than the sentence. Interpretation, needless to say, is unnecessary where there is no obstacle to intelligibility, where meaning is unproblematical, where what confronts us assumes (or seems to assume) the lineaments of our own semantic system. Interpretation becomes necessary only in the

¹⁵ *Philosophie der Mythologie* in *Sämtliche Werke*, Part II, Vol. II (Stuttgart, 1857), p. 137.

¹⁶ *Meaning in the Visual Arts* (Garden City, 1955), p. 35.

¹⁷ Karl D. Uitti, "Philology: Factualness and History," in *Literary Style: A Symposium*, ed. Seymour Chatman (London and New York, 1971), p. 112: "The analytic finesse and sympathy one willingly associates with the best kinds of philological research has hardly been adequately replaced by today's theoretical rigor."

¹⁸ Barthes, p. 20.

face of the distant, the problematical, the “other.” This experience is immediate when we read, say, practically any of the Amerindian tales in Lévi-Strauss’s *Mythologiques*. If we wish to understand them, we must rely on some method other than the traditional one, for in the face of such tales, the criterion of verisimilitude is powerless, demanding their simple proscription as irrational and obscene, or censuring them as “meaningless.”¹⁹

Current developments in the analysis of narrative structure are anthropological in their orientation; in other words, they have to do largely with literature (in the broadest sense of the word) that is in any way “foreign,” whether in time or space, or simply outside the mainstream of an intuitive cultural or academic consensus where the canons of verisimilitude might legitimately apply. However, we may justly suspect that there are not a few officially consecrated classics of our own culture whose meaning (at least in part) remains opaque to us because we persist in imposing upon them a spurious proximity.²⁰ For “proximity” and “distance” here are not always a matter of object, but of the stance taken by the critic. What Merleau-Ponty wrote of ethnology as a discipline applies equally well to the critic vis-à-vis the literary object, and echoes the sentiments of Schelling already cited:

Ethnology is not a specialty defined by a particular object, “primitive societies.” It is a way of thinking, the way which imposes itself when the object is “different,” and requires us to transform ourselves. We also become the ethnologists of our own society if we set ourselves at a distance from it.²¹

When it comes to the interpretation of well-worked classics, our suspicion that the official, inherited aggregate of opinion may be grounded in a false or at least partial premise has led to the extension of a mode of analysis originally designed for alien mythologies and folklore to more sophisticated or “literary” literature.

Current work in this mode of analysis of narrative structure appears to have as its ultimate goal to determine the laws of narrative imagination—what might be called a linguistics of literary discourse. Accordingly, it

¹⁹ On the cultural chauvinism of nineteenth-century philology, see Uitti, p. 113. Symptomatic of this trend is the title of the first of Lévy-Bruhl’s major works on the so-called primitive mentality: *Les fonctions mentales dans les sociétés inférieures* (Paris, 1910), translated sixteen years later under the less presumptuous title *How Natives Think*. His theory of a “pre-logical” mentality has, of course, been rejected by Lévi-Strauss, in *The Savage Mind* (1962; rpt. Chicago, 1966), p. 268; and Paul Radin, in *Primitive Religion* (1937; rpt. New York, 1957), pp. 12, 60 f., 269–274.

²⁰ See Gérard Genette, *Figures I* (Paris, 1966), p. 160, in the chapter entitled “Structuralisme et critique littéraire.”

²¹ *Signs*, trans. Richard McCleary (1960; rpt. Evanston, Ill., 1965), p. 120.

has taken its inspiration, methodology, and much of its terminology from recent developments in linguistics. The poet Valéry has said, "Literature is, and can be nothing other than, a kind of extension and application of certain properties of language."²² Emile Benveniste puts this assumption more bluntly: "The configuration of language determines all semiotic systems."²³ What is being emphasized in such statements is not so much language *as medium* but *as model* of literature. If the object of linguistics is to produce a grammar, the object of narrative analysis is to produce a *narrative grammar*, understood not in any metaphorical sense of the word but, in A. J. Greimas' careful phraseology, as "a limited number of principles of structural organization of narrative units, complete with rules for the combination and functioning of these units, leading to the production of narrative objects."²⁴ Just as the utterances generated by a linguistic grammar, though infinite in number, are reducible to a finite system of combinatorial rules, so also the recurrent patterns observed in narrative encourage us to construct a finite narrative typology out of which an infinite number of narratives is generated.²⁵ The critical difference between such a narrative grammar and the criterion of verisimilitude is that the former will be *descriptive* (like the theoretical linguistics that serves as its paradigm)²⁶ not *normative* (like traditional grammar, preoccupied with the preservation of a "purer" and more "correct" form of the language from "corruption").

To avoid at the outset certain misunderstandings that are likely to arise both about the possibility of a narrative grammar and about the relationship between narrative structure and linguistic structure, several observations of A. J. Greimas concerning the distinctiveness of narrative structures are worth citing:²⁷

Narrative structures are translinguistic because they are common to cultures with different natural languages. (Alan Dundes has shown that the models

²² Cited by Tzvetan Todorov, "Language and Literature," in *The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man: The Structuralist Controversy*, ed. Richard Macksey and Eugenio Donato (Baltimore, 1970), p. 125.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ "Narrative Grammar: Units and Levels," *MLN*, 86 (1971), 794.

²⁵ How *regular* or "stable" a narrative grammar may be in comparison with linguistic grammar is, of course, a moot point. Cf. E. and P. Maranda, *Structural Models in Folklore and Transformational Essays* (The Hague, 1971), pp. 14–15: "We are presently inclined to see narratives and even more stylized genres, such as riddles, as less stable messages than usually thought. Myths and other narratives, and for that matter other genres, are perhaps never learned 'by heart,' but the stability which can be discovered is due to the strictness of the combinatorial rules used."

²⁶ John Lyons, *Introduction to Theoretical Linguistics* (Cambridge, 1968), pp. 42–43.

²⁷ Greimas, pp. 793–794.

which Vladimir Propp constructed for the analysis of Russian fairy tales are also relevant to the descriptive of American Indian tales.)

Narrative structures are distinct from linguistic structures because they can be revealed by languages other than the natural languages (in cinema, dreams, etc.).²⁸

Narrative structures are not to be confused with so-called "literary genres." (For example, the same narrative structure can be found in a novel or a play.)

...

While they are verifiable and/or apprehendable at the level of the natural languages, narrative structures enjoy a certain autonomy with regard to linguistic structures and are not to be confused with them.

It should be clear from this that what we call "style" has little to do with narrative analysis, since the constituent units whose interrelationships are the subject of scrutiny are not words or phrases but *events* or *functions*. In other words, the success of this kind of analysis depends upon the possibility of treating literary works *as myth*. Roland Barthes is perhaps the most optimistic advocate of this enterprise:

The structural analysis of narrative, in its present accomplishment and future promise, is based entirely on the conviction (and the practical proof) that one can transform a given text into a more schematic version, set in a metalanguage which is no longer the language of the original text, without essentially changing its narrative character. In order to enumerate the functions, to reconstruct the sequences or to distribute the agents (*actants*), in sum, in order to bring to light a narrative grammar which is no longer that of the vernacular of the text, it is essential to strip the stylistic (or, more generally, expressive or "elocutionary") film from an underlying structure of secondary (narrative) meanings, to which the stylistic features are irrelevant.²⁹

²⁸ "Natural" languages, in the terminology of linguists, are opposed to artificial and hypothetical languages.

²⁹ "Style and Its Image," in Chatman, pp. 4–5. This is very close to what Lévi-Strauss has to say about *myth*: "Myth is the part of language where the formula *traduttore, traditore* reaches its lowest truth value. From that point of view it should be placed in the gamut of linguistic expressions at the end opposite to that of poetry, in spite of all the claims which have been made to prove the contrary. Poetry is a kind of speech which cannot be translated except at the cost of serious distortions; whereas the mythical value of the myth is preserved even through the worst translation. . . . Its substance does not lie in its style, its original music, or its syntax, but in the *story* which it tells. Myth is language, functioning on an especially high level where meaning succeeds practically at 'taking off' from the linguistic ground on which it keeps rolling" ("The Structural Study of Myth," in *Structural Anthropology*, trans. Claire Jacobson and B. G. Schoepf [Garden City, N.Y., 1967], p. 206).

Not all practitioners of the method share the clarity of Barthes and Lévi-Strauss (here captured in one of his less enigmatic moments!). Compare the need-less obscurity with which the same idea is expressed in what follows: "Our basic assumption is that text content is a set of referential invariants which survive a substantial (suprasemantic) paraphrasing of the original text expression. Text

This position is not entirely novel. It has always been recognized that the literary work, no matter how highly "stylized," projects, in René Wellek's words, "a world of objects . . . which have a status of their own and can be described independently of the linguistic stratum through which we have access to them."³⁰ This should not be read as a condemnation or devaluation of the study of verbal texture. Rather, it suggests that the goals of narrative analysis as here described and those of stylistics rarely congrue. One must not expect from the one what it is the function of the other to discover. But when it comes to specific texts, arguments are sure to arise over the respective relevance of these two levels of analysis. Earlier in this essay, we referred to a spectrum of narrative classes ranged between that which is nearly independent of its verbal medium at one end, and that which relies heavily on it at the other. *All* narratives, regardless of their position in this spectrum, submit to the kind of narrative (or content) analysis we are proposing, since they all have structures. Argument is not likely to arise over whether, in a given work, there is or is not a structure or system of inner relationships, but over the relative importance that structure may have, once extrapolated, in comparison with other elements of comprehension, like its verbal texture. It will be clear that attention to style is more important in Homer than in an authorless traditional myth, and perhaps more important still in Greek tragedy than in Homer.³¹ But it is the contention of its practitioners, rightly I think, that structural analysis of any narrative, from the most primitive to the most "literary," is a necessary precondition of a consistent critical interpretation of it.

It is quite beyond the scope of this essay to present a full-scale theory of narrative analysis; indeed, it would be foolhardy, given the rudimentary, exploratory state of speculation that so far obtains in a developing

content can be defined as the aggregate of meaning associated with a text paraphrase which is referentially equivalent to the original text; in other words, the original text expression and its content paraphrase denote the same referent" (Lubomír Doležal, "Toward a Structural Theory of Content in Prose Fiction," in Chatman, p. 103).

³⁰ "Stylistics, Poetics, and Criticism" in Chatman, p. 68. Among elements that he cites as capable of fruitful discussion with little or no attention to their linguistic formulation are motifs, themes, images, symbols, plots, compositional schemes, genre patterns, character and hero types, qualities such as the tragic and the comic, the sublime or the grotesque.

³¹ The interplay between verbal texture and structure of events in tragedy makes it essential that they be studied together. Consider, for an obvious example, the manner in which themes, images, and gnomic statement in the *Oresteia* develop in significant patterns that parallel and coincide with the development of the dramatic action. See Anne Lebeck, *The Oresteia: A Study in Language and Structure* (Washington, 1971), and J. Peradotto, "Some Patterns of Nature Imagery in the *Oresteia*," *American Journal of Philology*, 85 (1964), 378–393.

approach. It is my purpose rather to suggest the potentialities of the methodology by demonstrating how some basic concepts of modern linguistic theory (or perhaps better, of a general theory of signs, of which linguistics is only one part)³² are of utmost help in understanding some of the problematical passages in Homer like the prophecy of Nausithous in *Odyssey* 8.

Noam Chomsky's distinction between *competence* and *performance*, though it is, I think, of little immediate use to our specific problem, is here worth adverting to briefly, if for no other reason than to clarify the level at which the present analysis is being conducted, and at which some of the traditional philological cruxes of the Homeric text are transcended. By "competence" in language Chomsky means the idealized description of the grammar of that language, or, in slightly different terms, the ability by virtue of which native speakers of that language would recognize certain utterances as ungrammatical. By "performance" he means the actual utterances of native speakers, many of which may be ungrammatical for a variety of linguistically irrelevant reasons such as (in John Lyons' words) "the limitations of human memory and attention, the time it takes for neural 'signals' to pass from the brain to the muscles that are involved in speech, the interference of one physiological or psychological process with another."³³ On the other hand, many sentences that linguists might consider grammatical do not occur "naturally"; these, and many that do occur, are difficult or even impossible to understand by native speakers because (again, as Lyons puts it) "they cannot be 'processed' without 'overloading' the various psychological mechanisms involved in the reception and comprehension of speech."³⁴

If we approach the Homeric texts with this distinction between competence and performance in mind, it becomes clear that certain problematical passages, like the notorious duals of *Iliad* 9, or the resurrection of Pylaimenes at 13.658 after his death at 5.576, or even interpolations like those of which Peisistratus was accused (*Il.* 2.246 ff., *Od.* 11.631), can be regarded after the analogy of grammatical lapses in linguistic performance, which are so minor that slight adjustments in processing keep them from interfering with understanding. They may be criticized as clumsy or inelegant, but they do not seriously affect the meaning that resides in the disposition of narrative events. At the same time it is clear

³² See Ferdinand de Saussure, *Cours de linguistique générale*, ed. Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye (1916; rpt. Paris, 1960); also Roland Barthes, *Elements of Semiology* (printed together with *Writing Degree Zero*), trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (Boston, 1970).

³³ John Lyons, *Noam Chomsky* (New York, 1970), p. 94. For the distinction between competence and performance, see also pp. 38, 45, 129–130.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

that, just as there may be grammatical lapses at the sentence-level so considerable that they finally inhibit understanding, so there may be performatory failures (or interpolations) that the narrative cannot absorb without jeopardizing its meaning. It is essentially a matter of a distinction between what Edmund Leach calls "structural contradiction (large scale incompatibility of implication) and content contradiction (inconsistencies in the small scale details of textual assertion)."³⁵ It is only about the first of these that the present analysis is concerned.

More crucial for our immediate purpose is another pair of concepts: *paradigm* and *syntagm*.³⁶ This opposition is basic to modern structural linguistics. Indeed, to insist that "linguistic units have no validity independently of their paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations with other units" has been called the defining characteristic of structural linguistics.³⁷ Both paradigm and syntagm are presupposed in any product, conscious or unconscious, of systematic thought, and de Saussure even went so far as to suggest that they correspond to two basic types of mental activity.³⁸ A linguistic unit sustains a *paradigmatic* relationship with all other units that could be conceivably substituted for it in the same context. It sustains a *syntagmatic* relationship with the other units occurring with it and constituting its context, that is, units that may precede, follow, include it, or be included within it. Paradigms constitute what Jakobson calls a "metaphorical pool," a substitutional set whose elements are "linked by various degrees of similarity, which fluctuate between the equivalence of synonyms and the common core of antonyms."³⁹ In linguistic activity, elements are selected from such "pools" and *combined*

³⁵ "The Legitimacy of Solomon: Some Structural Aspects of Old Testament History," in Michael Lane, ed., *Structuralism: A Reader* (London, 1970), p. 261; originally in *European Journal of Sociology*, 7 (1966).

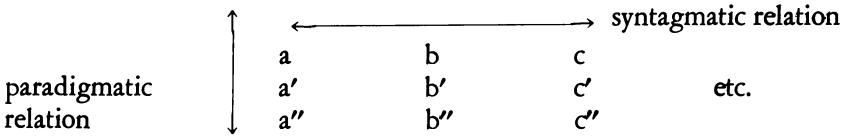
³⁶ These appear to be the most generally accepted terms for the concepts under discussion. See Lyons, *Theoretical Linguistics*, pp. 70–81, 428–429. But different terminology will be encountered in certain key authors. De Saussure: "association" and "syntagm" (pp. 170 ff.); Hjelmslev: "correlations" and "relations" (*Prolegomena to a Theory of Language*, trans. F. J. Whitefield [Madison, Wis., 1961], pp. 38–39, 65–66); Jakobson: "similarities" and "contiguities" (or as processes, "selection" and "combination"), but more often, especially in his extension of the opposition to nonlinguistic languages, "metaphor" and "metonym" ("Deux aspects du langage et deux types d'aphasie," *Temps modernes*, 188 [1962], 853 ff.; reprinted in *Essais de linguistique générale* [Paris, 1963]); A. Martinet: "oppositions" and "contrasts" (*Elements of General Linguistics*, trans. Elisabeth Palmer [Chicago, 1964], p. 36); Barthes: "system" and "syntagm" (*Elements*, pp. 58–88).

³⁷ Lyons, *Theoretical Linguistics*, pp. 74–75.

³⁸ This is not meant to suggest that paradigm and syntagm account for all linguistic facts or that there are not other relevant types of relationships.

³⁹ Roman Jakobson and Morris Halle, "Fundamentals of Language," *Janua Linguarum*, 1 (1956), 61.

in a restricted linear context in which their interrelationship is syntagmatic. Paradigms are united in a virtual set *in absentia*; by definition, they never actually occur together. Syntagms are united *in praesentia*; they occur together in an actual series or chain.⁴⁰ Schematically:



Each vertical column represents a paradigmatic set. A language event occurs when one unit is selected from each of these vertical columns to form a syntagmatic chain (e.g., abc, ab'c'', a''b'c', a''b''c'', etc.).

This abstract description will be clarified by some examples. At the phonological level in English,⁴¹ because it can occur in the context /-et/, the expression element /b/ stands in paradigmatic relationship with /g/, /j/, /l/, /m/, /n/, etc., and in syntagmatic relationship with /e/ and /t/. In the same way, /e/ is in paradigmatic relationship with /i/, /a/, etc., and in syntagmatic relationship with /b/ and /t/. And /t/ stands in paradigmatic relationship with /d/, /g/, /n/, etc., and in syntagmatic relationship with /b/ and /e/. At the word-level, consider the context *a . . . in the face*. The word *slap* belongs to a paradigmatic set containing such other words as *punch, kick, blow, smack, clout, jab*, etc.; it has syntagmatic relations with *a, in, the*, and *face*.

These examples are taken from speech, but paradigm and syntagm are no less operative in other signifying systems or types of communication. One such nonlinguistic signifying system is the selection, preparation, and consumption of food.⁴² The rules for the actual juxtaposition, both sequential and spatial, of food-units in the meal are syntagmatic; the sets of permissible servings at various stages in the meal are paradigmatic. One such paradigmatic set in this system would be, for example, that of appetizers, comprising such possible choices as soup, hors d'oeuvres, fruit, fruit juice, etc. The relation of any one of these to the entrée and

⁴⁰ De Saussure, p. 171: "Le rapport syntagmatique est *in praesentia*: il repose sur deux ou plusieurs termes également présents dans une série effective. Au contraire le rapport associatif unit des termes *in absentia* dans une série mnémorique virtuelle."

⁴¹ This example is taken from Lyons, *Theoretical Linguistics*, pp. 73-74.

⁴² See Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked* (New York, 1969), or, for a simpler introduction to the so-called "culinary code," his "The Culinary Triangle," *Partisan Review*, 33 (1966), 586-595; Michael A. K. Halliday, "Categories of the Theory of Grammar," *Word: Journal of the Linguistic Circle of New York*, 17 (1961), 241-291, but esp. 277-280; Mary Douglas, "Deciphering a Meal," *Daedalus* (Winter, 1972), pp. 61-81.

the dessert (themselves paradigmatic, substitutional sets) is syntagmatic. In what might be called the "garment system,"⁴³ a paradigm would be a "set of pieces, parts or details which cannot be worn at the same time on the same part of the body, and whose variation corresponds to a change in the meaning of the clothing: toque, bonnet, hood, etc."⁴⁴ A syntagmatic relationship results from "juxtaposition in the same type of dress of different elements: skirt, blouse, jacket."⁴⁵ The combinatory rules here are as restrictive as those of grammar: it would be "ungrammatical" to wear a silk top hat with gingham.

The essence of the syntagm is association by *juxtaposition*, whether temporal or spatial. The essence of the paradigm is association by any sensed *similarity* (as, for example, in language: grammatical likeness, semantic affiliation, or mere phonetic similarity). If I say "ball" and you respond "bat" or "game" or "chain" or "socket," you have made a syntagmatic association; but if you respond "sphere" or "testicle" or "cube" or "fall," you have made a paradigmatic association. And if you compulsively make only one of these kinds of association and cannot effect the other, you are afflicted with one of the two distinct types of aphasia.⁴⁶

Before we begin to discuss narrative as a communication system in terms of paradigm and syntagm, two further general observations are in order. The first has to do with *syntagmatic length*. Let us start with Lyons'⁴⁷ terse formulation of the principle, and then explain it: "If there is in a given set of units to be distinguished in terms of their composition out of 'lower-level' elements [for example, words out of phonemes, or sentences out of words], then . . . the 'length' of each 'higher-level' unit, measured in terms of the number of syntagmatically-related elements in the complex which identifies it, will be inversely proportionate to the number of elements in paradigmatic contrast within the complex." We can concretely exemplify this principle by examining two hypothetical signifying systems, one composed of only two expression-elements (referred to as 0 and 1), and another composed of eight expression-elements (referred to by the numbers 0 through 7), both of which permit all possible combinations. Now if there are eight higher-level units to be distinguished within the first system, each will have to contain at least three expression-elements (000, 001, 010, 011, 100, 101, 110, 111), while eight higher-level units within the second-system

⁴³ See Roland Barthes, *Système de la mode* (Paris, 1967).

⁴⁴ Barthes, *Elements*, p. 63.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Jakobson, "Deux aspects du langage." One might even characterize scholars as paradigmatic or syntagmatic, depending on whether they delight more in cataloguing and classifying or in syllogistic reasoning and narrative!

⁴⁷ Lyons, *Theoretical Linguistics*, pp. 80–81.

can be distinguished by a single expression-element (0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7). Let us say that sixty-four higher-level units are to be distinguished: the binary system will require complexes at least six elements long, while the octal system will require elements at least two elements long.

Now if one thinks of oral epic formulas, both verbal and thematic,⁴⁸ as lower-level units which are used by a poet in constructing the higher-level units of his tale, we begin to see, perhaps, a reason for the anomalous length of the Homeric poems. This disproportionate length can be viewed as the result in large part of new, subtler messages, requiring a larger "vocabulary" (i.e., more higher-level units), struggling with a traditional, economic set of paradigms (= formulas) originally designed to convey simpler messages. For the tendency in this system seems to have been not so much to increase the number of lower-level units by *creating* new formulas, more or less out of whole cloth, as to lengthen higher-level units by *combining* and *recombining* existing formulas. Jakobson has in fact suggested that one of the "discourses" in which the syntagmatic associations (which he calls *metonymy*) predominate is heroic epic.⁴⁹ We shall shortly see this observation concretely realized when we finally return to the prophecy sequence in *Odyssey* 8.

A final general observation to be made is that syntagmatic relationships are not necessarily sequential. That is to say, some elements of a structure may be identified or defined by their relative positions in sequence, but not all. "Sequence," M. A. K. Halliday says, "is at a lower degree of abstraction than order and is one possible formal exponent of it."⁵⁰ In language, for example, word-sequence in the sentence is in some cases more restrictive (as in English), in other cases less so (as in Greek and Latin). In the food-system, or so-called "culinary code," the syntagmatic relation between entrée and dessert is rigidly sequential; that between the elements within the entrée—"joint" (flesh), "staple" (cereal), and "adjunct" (vegetable)—is not sequential. And it is obvious how small a role sequence plays in the syntagms of the garment-system, and how large a role it plays in the syntagms at the word-level in most languages (e.g., "eat" as opposed to "tea," and "lie" as opposed to "isle"). We shall have to ask ourselves what role sequence plays in narrative syntagms.

When we bring the terms paradigm and syntagm to the analysis of

⁴⁸ By "theme" here I mean, of course, the so-called typical scene or "long formula," as J. I. Armstrong calls it; see his "The Arming Motif in the *Iliad*," *American Journal of Philology*, 79 (1958), 337–354.

⁴⁹ Jakobson, "Deux aspects du langage," p. 77.

⁵⁰ Halliday, pp. 254–255. See also Lyons, *Theoretical Linguistics*, pp. 76–78. On sequence in narrative, see Gérard Genette, *Figures III* (Paris, 1972), pp. 77–121.

narrative, we face certain problems⁵¹ not evident in language or in the other codes referred to above, but the gross outlines of the applicability of these terms are clear enough to encourage those who seek greater methodological rigor. If we take prophecy-tales of the kind confronting us in *Odyssey* 8.564–571, we can easily see that they can be viewed as syntagmatic chains of narrative units, and that each unit allows for possible paradigmatic substitutions. Different combinations will produce different messages. For example, one substitutional set will have to do with the *source* of the prophecy: Is it the direct revelation of a god (as presumably in the case of Aegisthus, warned by Hermes against murder and

⁵¹ The most difficult of these problems is to determine the *units* of analysis in a narrative. In the linguistic code this problem is minimal, for in the analysis of words, phonemic units are relatively easy to define, and at the level of the sentence, the units—words—are still easier to define. So also in the culinary and vestimentary codes, determining the units of analysis—meals, courses, helpings, mouthfuls in the one, and interchangeable units of apparel in the other—is not very difficult. But what are the *units* of a story? Analysis might profitably involve itself only with gross units as, for example, in the *Odyssey*, the encounter with the Ciconians, the episode of the Lotus-eaters, the defeat of Polyphemus. But it is clear that each of these larger incidents can be reduced to smaller units until we finally reach the level of the word. It is also clear that confusion of units from different levels of abstraction could lead to the same kind of flawed results as, say, a linguist's attempt to compare phonemes with words, or words with whole sentences. No rigorous method has yet been devised (especially for narratives as complex as the *Odyssey*) for defining equivalent units intermediate between the single word and the whole narrative. Equivalence is absolutely indispensable but difficult to assay by other than what a rigorist would call "subjective" means. Is it methodologically sound to consider, say, an image, a description of local setting, a simile, and a dramatic subject-function relation all as equivalent units? May one legitimately treat, say, the Lotus-eaters-episode and the Cyclops-episode as equivalent units despite the considerable disparity in length between them? The following remarks of Robert P. Armstrong, part of an article dealing with the difficulties of unit definition ("Content Analysis in Folkloristics" in *Trends in Content Analysis* ed. I. de Sola Pool [Urbana, Ill., 1959], pp. 151–170; reprinted in Pierre Maranda, ed., *Mythology: Selected Readings* [Baltimore, 1972], pp. 173–193), though it sets us on the road to some answers, still gives us the sense of groping that characterizes the search for solid criteria of equivalency (Maranda, p. 180): "Some kind of equivalency is . . . essential, in order that the units eventually isolated may have, with respect to some constant measuring concept, equivalent properties. The basis for equivalence may reside in the fact that two units perform the same function, regardless of variability in other respects; it may be found in structural considerations, as for example if two immediate constituents are to all intents and purposes equivalent when viewed from a certain vantage point. Finally, there is a kind of substantive equivalence, which is to be found when the mere presence of a certain kind of information is of interest. In this latter case all instances of the occurrence of the notion in question may be regarded as equivalent."

In what follows, I have tried to be sensitive to this need for equivalency in my own division of prophecy-tales into analytic units, but I must still insist that it is offered and should be received with the tentativeness suitable to an exploratory venture.

adultery [*Od.* 1.35ff.])? A god in human disguise? An unimpeachable medium—oracle or professional seer? A not always trustworthy medium of the god (as suggested by Jocasta's remark at *OT* 711f.: *χρησμός γὰρ ἦλθε Λαίῳ ποτ', οὐκ ἔρω / Φοίβου γ' ἀπ' αὐτοῦ, τῶν δ' ὑπηρετῶν ἀπο*)? A seemingly inspired nonprofessional? A dream, a *clēdōn*, or other merely possible omen (*ὄρνιθες δέ τε πολλοὶ ὑπ' ἡελίοιο / φοιτῶσ', οὐδέ τε πάντες ἐναίσιοι*) says Eurymachus to Halitherses at *Od.* 2.181f., and at 19.561 Penelope says of dreams, *οὐδέ τι πάντα τελεῖται ἀνθρώποισι.*)? One might further ask: Is it a serious matter—a matter of life or death—or does it involve a matter of relative indifference (e.g., the prophecy of Hermes to Circe, 10.330ff.)?

Another set of paradigms will concern the *terms* of the prophecy: It may be unmistakably clear, deceptively clear, explicitly ambiguous, clear as to outcome but vague about time, place, or circumstance, or so unclear or trivial as not to pass for a prophecy at all (as, for example, the cry of the Caunian fig-seller, "Cauneas" [= *cave ne eas*], which Marcus Crassus might have read as a warning not to sail on his fatal Parthian expedition [*Cicero, de Divin.* 2.84]). From another point of view, it might be unconditional or conditional. If conditional, the condition(s) may be manageable (actually or only seemingly) or unmanageable (again actually or only seemingly). A condition might be unmanageable or difficult either because it seems physically impossible or because it introduces a serious conflict of desires or claims. An example of the first is the prophecy that Alcmaeon would only be free of the Erinyes when he discovered a land that had not existed when he murdered his mother, a prophecy fulfilled, in the face of its apparent unlikelihood, when he comes upon the alluvial deposits of the Achelous river near Oeniadae (*Thuc.* 2.102.5–6).⁵² An example of the second is the situation of Agamemnon at Aulis, and, I would argue, that of Alcinoos in the *Odyssey*, faced with a conflict between the requirements of hospitality and compassion on the one side and the threat of ruin on the other.

Another paradigmatic set will involve the *response of the recipient*.⁵³

⁵² This is a case of fortunate outcome contrary to expectation. A famous case of adverse outcome contrary to expectation is *Macbeth* 4.1: "Macbeth shall never vanquished be until/Great Birnam wood to high Dunsinane hill/ Shall come against him." There is further interest in this case in that the prophecy that appears to contain an impossible condition is accompanied by an apparition that, to a prudent observer, could have presaged the fulfillment of the condition: "a child crowned, *with a tree in his hand*," as the stage directions tell us.

⁵³ One could add another closely associated category here to cover such stories as deal with persons who, though they are the ones most affected by the outcome, are not apprised of the prophecy until after the event. On the other hand, I would prefer to consider this a matter of sequential, and therefore syntagmatic, relationship.

Depending, of course, on the source, relative clarity, and terms of the prophecy, he may attempt to take precautions or escape. He may misinterpret. He may understand but miscalculate the particulars in application (as Polyphemus in *Od.* 9.507 ff.; see page 804 above). He may lightly disregard or forget it (as Aristarchus and Bérard presume Alcinoos to have done). He may disbelieve it. He may attempt to defy it. If it is conditionally dependent upon him, he may deliberately act to precipitate or prevent its fulfillment.

A final set of paradigms will concern *outcome* or *result*. Is it adverse or fortunate? Does it occur as expected or contrary to expectation? Is it unfulfilled, either in the sense that the tale ends leaving us uncertain as to the eventual accomplishment of a condition,⁵⁴ or in the sense that some prophecies may be thought of as statements of mere potentiality which a god is still free to bring to term or not, as he chooses. This last item is unusual, but seems to be implied by the strange remark with which Alcinoos ends his account of the prophecy in *Odyssey* 8 (570–571): “τὰ δέ κεν θεὸς ἢ τελέσειεν, / ἢ κ’ ἀτέλεσι εἴη, ὡς οἱ φίλον ἔπλετο θυμῷ.”

Such are the paradigmatic sets that a very preliminary glance at Greek prophecy-tales reveals. No doubt a full investigation will not only disclose other paradigms within each of the sets listed, but force us to add new sets or, in the interests of analytic economy, conflate some of those used here. It is only then that a secure typology of Greek prophecy-tales will emerge, consisting in effect of the rules that appear to govern possible combinations of paradigms. It is then that we can permit ourselves safer inferences concerning the “message” in each possible combination, a message that will be modified by some other combination and that I tentatively suggest is a statement largely about the relative congruence or discrepancy between the world and man’s knowledge of it, desires about it, and efforts to shape it to his advantage. Approached from this point of view, it is clear, for example, that the tales of Oedipus and Aegisthus are quite different statements about the same theme. In the first, the prophecy (as represented in *OT* 791–793)⁵⁵ is (1) of most serious consequence; (2) unambiguous; (3) from an intermediate source considered unimpeachable; (4) unconditional; (5) taken seriously by the re-

⁵⁴ For example, the discovery by Odysseus of an inland people who are ignorant of the sea—the condition of his second return and gentle death according to Tiresias (*Od.* 11.121–137; cf. 23.265–284).

⁵⁵ Oedipus’ tale is, of course, complicated by the presence of *two* prophecies (or, perhaps better, two instances of the same prophecy), one to Oedipus, which is unconditional and presumably inescapable, and one to Laius, which is conditional, though it could be considered as introducing a conflict of desires (i.e., for immediate sexual gratification as against ultimate security, as in Aesch. *Sept.* 746–749, Eurip. *Phoen.* 18ff., and Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.5.7).

ipient, who attempts to escape; and (6) still fulfilled adversely as expected. In the Aegisthus story (*Od.* 1.35ff.) the prophecy (more in the nature of a threat) is (1) of serious consequence; (2) unambiguous; (3) directly from a god without human intermediary; but (4) manageably conditional; (5) nonchalantly disregarded by the recipient; and (6) fulfilled adversely as expected. The difference observable at points (4) and (5), and to a lesser extent at point (3), alters the message to establish a moral connection between human desire/action and outcome, a connection altogether absent in the first type of tale. The story of Penelope's suitors follows roughly the same pattern as the Aegisthus-type, but reinforces it by repeating both the prophecy, which is made to emanate from a variety of sources, and the instances of callous disregard.⁵⁶

From the point of view of paradigmatic relations, the prophecy concerning the Phaeacians can be described as follows: (1) It is a matter of life and death. (2) It is clear in its terms as to outcome, but vague about the time. (3) It is revealed directly by the god. (4) It is conditional—unmanageably so, I would contend, by introducing a conflict of desires or claims. (5) The recipient responds by choosing the course that could precipitate fulfillment. (6) The outcome is *partially* fulfilled, adversely as expected—the petrification of the returning Phaeacian ship; *partially* unfulfilled—does Poseidon overwhelm their city with a mountain? We never find out. The effect of (2) and (4) here, in comparison with the Aegisthus-type tale, or that involving the suitors, is clearly to reduce culpability by increasing uncertainty and dilemma. The choice at (6)⁵⁷ re-

⁵⁶ This is perhaps a good point to note that the rules governing the combination of elements in prophecy-sequences will, among other things, involve a description of how, just as in sentence syntax, certain choices at one or several stages of the sequence may delimit the choices at other stages. One clear example: if, as in the case of Aegisthus, the source of the prophecy is a god or an unimpeachable medium, the terms unambiguous, the matter serious, and the recipient nonchalant, it is absolutely *required* that the outcome be adverse as expected. No other result is ever found. Any other would appear to have been meaningless, or if not meaningless, “unacceptable,” in the sense in which theoretical linguists use this term (see Lyons, *Theoretical Linguistics*, pp. 137–138). In other words, under these circumstances, a fortunate outcome, though *theoretically* possible as a permutation in the model, is for social and cultural reasons actually proscribed. It may be useful here to distinguish between *internal* (structural) limitations and *external* (historical, social, cultural) limitations, the former representing the totality of theoretically *possible* combinations inherent in the model, the latter representing the actual culturally motivated selection or proscription of those possibilities (see Fredric Jameson, *The Prison-House of Language* [Princeton, 1972], pp. 127–128).

⁵⁷ It might be better to consider what happens at (6) the *absence* of a choice by the storyteller, that is, the *suppression* of a paradigmatic set. The effect would then be attributable to a *syntagmatic* relationship: that is, the effect of the narrative chain *without* any unit at a specific point, as compared with the effect of the

flects the attempt to occupy an unstable position between a tragic view of the human condition as reflected by the outcome of the Oedipus-type tale, and a simple view of retributive justice as reflected in the outcome of the Aegisthus/suitors-type tale. The dilemma of the Phaeacians has its counterpart in the dilemma of the storyteller.

So far, our observations on prophecy-tales have had to do with their paradigmatic aspects, that is to say, with the shifts in the "message" precipitated by different choices from a finite repertory at each stage in the narrative chain. We are only able to understand how each unit functions in the meaning of the message by knowing what other possibilities are available at that stage.⁵⁸ It now remains to consider how our understanding of the Phaeacian prophecy may be improved by examining it from a syntagmatic point of view, that is, in the horizontal interrelationships between those units actually chosen to constitute the narrative chain. Again we must remind ourselves that whatever we say must be extremely tentative until the work of classifying Greek prophecy-plots from this new perspective is more advanced than it now is. This is also a good point at which to remind ourselves that our purpose is not to prove or disprove the authenticity of *Odyssey* 8.564–571, but simply to describe, without recourse to the external canons of verisimilitude, how the meaning of the tale is altered by its presence or absence at this point in the syntagmatic chain.

When first looking at syntagmatic relations in general, we noted that sequential order sometimes plays a role in establishing them. That is to say, different *sequences* of the same units convey different meanings. Some examples from the linguistic code at the phrase-level: in French, "deux-cent," where the sequential pattern means "multiplied by," compared to "cent-deux," where the pattern means "added to"; or in English, "a hunting dog," where the pattern conveys *attribution* ("a dog of a certain type"), compared to "a dog hunting," where the pattern conveys *predication* ("a dog performing a certain activity"). Does this kind of transposition or displacement have as critical an effect on the meaning of narrative syntax? It appears so, at least in the present case. Consider

chain *with* a unit at that point, rather than the effect of the narrative chain *with a particular unit* at a specific point, compared with the effect of the narrative chain *with other possible units* at that specific point.

⁵⁸ This important concept of *difference* or *opposition* is central to De Saussure's linguistic theory, and to the analysis of other semiological systems that rely on it. Of concepts (*signifiés*), for example, he says that they "sont purement différentiels, définis non pas positivement par leur contenu, mais négativement par leur rapports avec les autres termes du système. Leur plus exacte caractéristique est d'être ce que les autres ne sont pas." And a little later: "Tout ce qui précède revient à dire que *dans la langue il n'y a que des différences . . . sans termes positifs*" (*Cours de linguistique générale*, pp. 162 and 166, respectively).

four possible variations of the Phaeacian story: (1) As in the received text, Poseidon's threat is explicitly recalled *both* before the event (in book 8) and after the event (in book 13). (2) It is explicitly recalled only before the event. (3) It is explicitly recalled only after the event. (4) It is recalled in neither place, or, if you will, there is no threat or prophecy at all: what the Phaeacians suffer comes to them simply as a result of the god's anger, absolutely without warning. Variant (4) makes a statement about the world as a field of random events, relatively unpatterned, or at least unpredictable—the world Jocasta describes at *OT* 977 f.: τὰ τῆς τύχης / κρατεῖ, πρόνοια δ' ἔστιν οὐδενὸς σαφῆς. The effect of variants (1) and (2) is essentially the same: a view of the world approaching the tragic, in which a morally serious protagonist does not permit himself to take the prophecy lightly or to forget it, yet suffers the harmful outcome nonetheless. Restating the prophecy after the event in variant (1) adds emphasis but no essential difference of meaning to the message already conveyed in variant (2). Variant (3) turns the outcome into just retributive punishment meted out to those who lack the moral seriousness or practical wisdom to read the sufficient warnings offered by experience. It is a pattern common in the folk literature of many cultures. Events in *Märchen* are so arranged that they fully express the demands of naive morality, of wish-fulfillment, which views suffering ultimately as the result of irresponsibility or stupidity. Any sense of pity engendered by the tale is controlled by an earthy pragmatic calculus. To suffer because one has violated a forgotten or disregarded interdict—even if the interdict is unjust or the violation praiseworthy—is not tragic. "He should have known better," the tale suggests. But to know beforehand, to remember the interdict, and to risk punishment for a higher cause creates a tragic effect.

The important point here is that these different "statements" about the relation of man to his world are conveyed in the narrative code—that is, in different "syntax" or sequential ordering of events—not in the linguistic code, at least not necessarily so,⁵⁹ and certainly not in the Phaeacian story before us.

The situation in which Alcinous finds himself by remembering the

⁵⁹ One of the basic differences between anonymous traditional, predominantly oral narrative and self-conscious, "literary" narrative is the higher incidence in the latter of explicit statements in the linguistic code of messages already conveyed in the narrative code. This is especially evident in Greek tragedy when compared with Homer. One should also note that one kind of irony prominent in "literary" narrative, especially in tragedy, consists in generating a tense opposition between statements in the linguistic code and those in the narrative code. An example: the opposition between Jocasta's view of the world expressed *in the linguistic code* at *OT* 977 f. (τὰ τῆς τύχης / κρατεῖ κτλ.), and the statement expressed *in the nar-*

prophecy at 8.564 is closely analogous to that of Pelasgus in Aeschylus' *Suppliants*: an intended act of compassion and deliverance involves a serious threat to one's own welfare. The major difference is that Alcinous' dilemma is not made explicit in the linguistic code, as Pelasgus' is, with painful clarity in Aeschylus (407–417, 438–454 ending with a wish that the dilemma were *not* so clear: θέλω δ' αἰδρις μάλλον ἢ σοφὸς κακῶν / εἶναι). But the placement of the prophecy at 8.564 ff. is sufficient to convey the same message in the narrative code. If those who follow Aristarchus in athetizing the passage are less than convincing, they are right in seeing that these lines profoundly alter the tone of Odysseus' tale in books 9 through 12. Odysseus' tale-within-a-tale is of such a special kind that it does much more than simply fill us in on his adventures between Troy and Ogygia. It forces us to register that new information also in its effect on its fictional audience as a frightening alteration of the framework within which their decision to help Odysseus was made. The guest they purpose to escort home is revealed as the special enemy of the god who has threatened them with catastrophe for just such actions. As if that were not enough, the dilemma unexpressed in the linguistic code is further underscored in the narrative code by two of Odysseus' adventures, one following the other in his account, each suggesting contradictory moral imperatives: the Cyclops-episode and the Aeolus-episode. On the one side, the punishment of Polyphemus underscores the danger attendant on ill treatment of suppliant strangers—a danger best expressed in gnomic form in the linguistic code by the swineherd Eumaeus (14.56–68):

ξεῖν', οὗ μοι θέμις ἔστ', οὐδ' εἰ κακίων σέθεν ἔλθοι,
ξεῖνον ἀτιμῆσαι. πρὸς γὰρ Διὸς εἰσιν ἅπαντες
ξεῖνοί τε πτωχοί τε.⁶⁰

On the other side are the words with which Aeolus constates in the linguistic code what is already implicit in the narrative code, that it is improper to assist a man whom the gods hate (10.73–75):

οὐ γὰρ μοι θέμις ἐστὶ κομιζέμεν οὐδ' ἀποπέμπειν
ἄνδρα τόν, ὃς τε θεοῖσιν ἀπέχθεται μακάρεσσιν.
ἔρρ', ἐπεὶ ἀθανάτοισιν ἀπεχθόμενος τὸδ' ἰκάνεις.⁶¹

rative code by the sequential-syntagmatic arrangement of her prayer to Apollo for deliverance (911–923) and, in the very next line, the sudden arrival of the Corinthian Messenger.

⁶⁰ Compare Nausicaa's comment, 6.207 f.

⁶¹ Cf. Harry L. Levy, "The Odyssean Suitors and the Host-Guest Relationship," *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association*, 94

These contradictory principles have their counterpart in the ambivalence of the Phaeacian *ethos*, at once proud of its hospitality and more than ordinarily suspicious of outsiders (7.32 f.).⁶²

One need only consider hypothetical alternatives to this way of telling the story to see how crucially its “message” depends on syntagmatic arrangement. A story whose narrative chronology exactly paralleled the chronology of its fictive events would make us aware of the information in books 9–12 *before* the Phaeacian decision to help Odysseus and the prophecy of Nausithous. The Phaeacians-episode would serve merely as another stage, the last, in Odysseus’ long journey home. Their decision to escort him would be just another risk in the face of an indefinite prophecy. Accordingly, their catastrophe would fall short of the tragic dimension. It would have the same effect as a hypothetical tale in which Achilles kills Hector in ignorance of the prophecy that his own death must shortly follow Hector’s.

It might be objected that, had Homer *intended* to represent Alcinoüs’ situation as a dilemma with tragic implications, he would have expressed it *in the linguistic code*. First, we must insist that our analysis does not concern intentions so much as *effects*. It is not intention that gives an utterance meaning. Meaning inheres in an utterance irrespective of speakers’ intentions, and most utterances carry with them a range of possible meanings only one of which may coincide with the intentions of the speaker. Intentions—possible intentions—can only be inferred from an analysis of the meaning of an utterance. But even assuming that it is useful to speak of intentions here, a second, and more important, consideration concerns the oral poet’s choice of means in implementing his intention, especially if what he wishes to say is unprecedented in the traditional “language” in which he composes. All that we have come to know about the technique of oral poetry suggests a heavier reliance on inherited formulas, both verbal and thematic (situational), than on invention, even when it comes to saying something essentially new. The sense of economy, of making do with as few formulas as possible, is everywhere evident in oral poetry, and is such a commonplace in the

(1963), 145–153. Levy argues that the *Odyssey* generally shows traces of two different cultural traditions in the area of host-guest relationships: one a lavish aristocratic, courtly tradition, and the other a tradition of impoverished peasants who cannot afford not to distrust strangers.

⁶² On the second of these characteristics, one all too insufficiently appreciated in Homeric criticism, see M. I. Finley, *The World of Odysseus* (New York, 1954), p. 106; H. J. Kakridis, *La Notion de l'amitié et de l'hospitalité chez Homère* (Thessaloniki, 1963), p. 88; and Gilbert P. Rose, “The Unfriendly Phaeacians,” *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association*, 100 (1969), 387–406.

scholarship on the subject that it needs no retailing here.⁶³ But how, in fact, does the oral poet go about saying something new, if he limits himself to a traditional repertory of linguistic and narrative formulas not originally designed for his project? Our analysis of the Phaeacian prophecy and its outcome suggests that he does so largely by *rearrangement* of preexisting syntagmatic units, in this case narrative ones.

Operating like this within the constraints of a finite and particular formulaic system, the oral poet is better understood as a "bricoleur" than as a creator *ex nihilo*. In the now classic first chapter of *La Pensée sauvage*, Claude Lévi-Strauss used the term "intellectual bricolage" to characterize mythic thought. The bricoleur differs from the "engineer" in that he utilizes materials and tools that have not been specifically designed for the task in hand. The essence of bricolage is to work with available means, with a limited and heterogeneous repertory stocked with the salvaged residue of disaffected or inadequate systems. In Lévi-Strauss's own words,

The "bricoleur" is adept at performing a large number of diverse tasks; but unlike the engineer, he does not subordinate each of them to the availability of raw materials and tools conceived and procured for the purpose of the project. His universe of instruments is closed and the rules of his game are always to make do with "whatever is at hand," that is to say with a set of tools and materials which is always finite and is also heterogeneous because what it contains bears no relation to the current project, or indeed to any particular project, but is the contingent result of all the occasions there have been to renew and enrich the stock or to maintain it with the remains of previous constructions and destructions. The set of the "bricoleur's" means cannot therefore be defined in terms of a project. . . . It is defined only by its potential use or, putting this another way and in the language of the "bricoleur" himself, because the elements are collected or retained on the principle that "they may always come in handy." . . . They represent a set of actual and possible relations; they are "operators" but they can be used for any operation of the same type.⁶⁴

The operation of the bricoleur in meeting new contingencies with old materials always involves *a new arrangement of elements*.⁶⁵ Merleau-Ponty considers rearrangement a major mode of realizing new meaning, of bridging the gap, formed by the inadequacy of existent signifiers, between intention and communication:

L'intention significative se donne un corps et se connaît elle-même en se cher-

⁶³ See the collected papers of Milman Parry edited by Adam Parry in *The Making of Homeric Verse* (Oxford, 1971).

⁶⁴ *The Savage Mind*, pp. 17–18.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

chant un équivalent dans la système des significations disponibles que représentent la langue que je parle et l'ensemble des écrits et de la culture dont je suis l'héritier. Il s'agit, pour ce voeu muet qu'est l'intention significative, de réaliser un certain *arrangement* des instruments déjà signifiants ou de significations déjà parlantes . . . qui suscite chez l'auditeur *le pressentiment d'une signification autre et neuve* et inversement accomplisse chez celui qui parle ou qui écrit l'ancrage de la signification inédite dans les significations déjà disponibles.⁶⁶

Without ever using the term "bricolage," or concepts like narrative code and linguistic code, Adam Parry, in a brief but singularly provocative article written some years before the publication of *La Pensée sauvage*,⁶⁷ had suggested how Homer employs rearrangement to express that which his inherited fund of poetic diction had never been called upon to express. "Neither Homer," Parry argues, "in his own person as narrator, nor the characters he dramatizes, can speak any language other than the one which reflects the assumptions of heroic society." Yet he rightly insists that the long and confused first speech of Achilles in the Embassy-scene (9.308–429) expresses, by rearrangement and actual *misuse* of the language at his disposal, disillusionment with the very assumptions of heroic society which that language was designed to sustain. That rearrangement and "misuse" is bricolage at its best.

As for the prophecy of *Odyssey* 8.564–571, we have not proved or even tried to prove its "authenticity," so much as to demonstrate the precariousness of the canons of verisimilitude used to exclude it along with many other passages in Homer, and the difference of meaning its presence conveys. This endeavor itself has been in many ways an act of bricolage, for it has been assisted by the use of tools specifically designed for other materials and problems: linguistic tools for the analysis of sentences, and tools for narrative analysis of primitive myth. The particular arrangement of narrative units in the received text turns Alcinous and the Phaeacians into subtragic⁶⁸ characters caught in a dilemma between the threat of catastrophe and the dictates of mercy, a situation which, so we may surmise, had no set formulation in the traditional poetic repertory. "So we may surmise": *veri simile est*. With that phrase we expose

⁶⁶ *Sur la phénoménologie du langage in Éloge de la philosophie (Collection Idées)* (Paris, 1963), p. 97. (Italics added.)

⁶⁷ "The Language of Achilles," *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association*, 87 (1956), 1–7; reprinted in G. S. Kirk, ed., *The Language and Background of Homer* (Cambridge, 1964).

⁶⁸ "Subtragic," for want of a better term, because the full force of a tragic outcome is muted by the uncertainty with which we are left at 13.187, wondering whether Poseidon does or does not actuate the second and more dreadful half of his threat.

the perhaps finally inevitable element of verisimilitude in our own and in all such analysis, the argument from probability to which we must always appeal when the evidence falls short of absolute necessity. But to discover and admit the verisimilitude in the structure of our judgments has its virtues, not the least of which is to evade the trap of rigid prescriptiveness that results from unacknowledged presuppositions and that has always accompanied a theory of language and literature as mere *reflection* of a stable reality against which they can be assessed, and, if found wanting, corrected.⁶⁹

The University of Texas at Austin

⁶⁹ See Todorov's introduction to the issue of *Communications on le vraisemblable* (cited in note 14). The present essay was already in press when Claude Bremond's *Logique du récit* (Paris, 1973) became available in this country. This brilliant study represents a qualitative leap in the pursuit of methodological rigor in narrative analysis.