dramatis personae.[64] This hypothetical parade also suggests how dramatic performance shares the stage with the "performance" of Greek masculinity.[65]

64. The point can be made even if we can only imagine that they were not wearing their costumes and masks. I am thankful to an anonymous referee for pointing this out to me.

65. I wish to thank Mark Edwards, Mary-Kay Gamel, Sharon James, Nancy Rabinowitz, Lauren Taaffe, and two anonymous referees for their valuable comments on an earlier draft of this paper. This project was supported by faculty research funds granted by the University of California, Santa Cruz.

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RING-PATTERNS AND RING-COMPOSITION: SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE FRAMING OF STORIES IN HOMER

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It is only in the course of this century that scholars have become familiar with the concept of ring-composition.[1] The term itself, *ring-composition*, describes a certain arrangement of elements within a unit of discourse such as a story or a digression within a story.[2] When the same element—the same idea, the same notion—appears at the beginning and at the end of a story, we identify this repetition as a ring; when a number of elements within the unit are handled individually in a certain sequence (A, B, C,...) and then rehandled in the reverse order (...C, B, A), the outcome is a number of 'rings.' In either case, we refer to the pattern which we detect in the text as *ring-composition*.

Most scholars today hold that ring-composition is a premeditated pattern appearing on the surface of the text, and that this symmetrical ordering of material serves a mnemonic or an aesthetic function.[3] They also believe that ring-composition is confined to the ancient world, that it is no longer practised.[4] Edwards' note on the device (in the context of Homeric epic) epitomizes these views: "Of the small scale structural devices which are used to order the presentation of material

1. For an account of early observations of ring-composition see D. Lohmann, *Die Komposition der Reden in der Ilias* (Berlin 1970) 5-7.

2. For commentary on the device and examples, one might consult W. van Otterlo, *De Ringcompositie als Opbouwprincipe in de Epische Gedichten van Homerus* (Amsterdam 1948); J. Notopoulos, "Continuity and Interconnexion in Homeric Oral Composition," *TAPA* 82 (1951) 81-101; B. A. van Groningen, *La composition littéraire archaïque grecque* (Amsterdam 1958) 52-56. For more recent discussions see B. Peabody, *The Winged Word* (Albany 1975) 222 (where Peabody makes a point which I develop in this paper) and 231-33; F. Cairns, *Tibullus: a Hellenistic Poet at Rome* (Cambridge 1979) 193-202 (note Cairns' brief but useful bibliography of ring-composition at p. 194); W. Thalmann, *Conventions of Form and Thought in Early Greek Epic Poetry* (Baltimore and London 1984), chap. 1, "The Organization of Thought." Although this paper concerns itself with the ring-patterns which occur in the context of Homeric storytelling, the points raised here should provide the basis for discussions of ring-patterns occurring in other contexts.

3. According to Notopoulos (above, note 2) 97-98, it is a "stylistic device," a "consciously applied principle of composition." Cairns (above, note 2, 195-96) claims that these formal thematic structures "are, in origin, mnemonic features of oral poetry," which helped the poet arrange his material (in non-narrative sections and over longer sections of narrative) and helped the audience to follow him. See also B. Fenik, *Homer and the Nibelungenlied* (Cambridge, MA 1986) 98, on ring-composition as "an arbitrary configuration"; and Lohmann (above, note 1) 7-8 on ring-composition as "ein poetisches Kompositions-prinzip," and as "'rhetorische' Kunstmittel." J. Gaisser, "A Structural Analysis of Digressions in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*," *HSCP* 73 (1969) 1-43, at p. 42, sees ring-composition as both practical (in that it allows short passages to be inserted into the narrative and indicates the beginning and the end of a digression) and decorative.

4. Van Groningen (above, note 2) 24: "les procédés d'un autre peuple et d'un autre âge ne sont pas forcément les nôtres." For a summary of the later history of ring-composition, see Cairns (above, note 2)

In Homer, ring-composition is probably the least familiar to us and the hardest to appreciate without giving it our special attention."[5]

But is the structure unfamiliar—or difficult to appreciate? Fowler makes the unsettling proposal that ring-composition is "perhaps one of the most obvious and psychologically natural ways of organizing material" in both oral and written composition.[6] Although he offers little discussion to corroborate his intuitions, his comment deserves further consideration for two reasons: first, because the view which he proposes is quite different from the common view of the device; and second, because there is in fact a body of evidence which will support the claim.

I suggest that ring-composition—or what we classicists call ring-composition—should be reexamined in the light of a substantial study conducted in the United States in the late 1960s of the activity of storytelling. The results of this study should persuade us that the generation of rings is not a phenomenon confined to ancient literature; it is part of all oral storytelling—or at least of oral storytelling in our own culture, even today; and that the ring-pattern which we associate with stories and episodes of stories is not the product of a ring-shaped template (which imposes formal constraints on the storyteller) nor is it a mnemonic device. Rather, the ring-pattern which we observe in oral storytelling is the outcome of a storyteller's efforts to present his or her story in an acceptable and an effective form.

The research in question is an investigation into the structure of stories which was conducted by William Labov and Joshua Waletzky, who gathered and analysed a large number of oral anecdotes—stories occurring naturally in everyday conversation.[7] Their research reveals that most oral anecdotes in our own tradition share a number of formal properties and reveal a common framework, namely, a structure which we recreate automatically when we tell stories; we recognize its elements as soon as they are brought to our attention. I shall describe this framework, using Labov and Waletzky's terminology for the most part. Then I shall analyse a number of stories from the ancient world to see whether they too may have been constructed in this way. Since the Homeric epics are now widely believed to have been composed orally, and since Homeric ring-patterns have been extensively studied, it is appropriate that a review of ring-composition in the context of storytelling should begin with some stories from Homer.[8] Finally I shall propose a tentative explanation for the development of the rhetorical figure which we call ring-composition.

First, let us look at the formal properties of storytelling, as Labov and Waletzky describe them. When a storyteller sets out to tell a story, he or she is most likely

5. M. Edwards, *The Iliad: a Commentary*, vol. V (Cambridge 1991) 44.

6. See R. Fowler, *The Nature of Early Greek Lyric: Three Preliminary Studies* (Toronto 1987) 62. He adds, without further comment: "One will hear examples [of ring-composition] in any normal conversation." To provide the evidence for Fowler's claim will be one of the aims of this paper.

7. For a discussion of 600 oral anecdotes, see W. Labov and J. Waletzky, "Narrative analysis: oral versions of personal experience," in *Essays on the Verbal and Visual arts*, ed. J. Helm (Seattle 1967) 12-44. Labov has taken this exploratory work further in *Language in the Inner City: Studies in the Black English Vernacular* (Philadelphia 1972), chap. 9, "The Transformation of Experience in Narrative Syntax."

8. My neglect of Hesiod, Pindar, Herodotus, and Thucydides is, at this point, deliberate. My intention is to examine the practices of an early, oral storyteller and to compare them with the practices of oral storytellers today.

to begin with a segment which Labov and Waletzky call an *abstract*. A storyteller may use his abstract in two ways. When he says at the outset, "Listen to this!" or "Have you got a moment...?," he is giving notice that he wants to tell a story, and that it may be some time before his listeners have a chance to speak again; that is, he is negotiating for the attention of his prospective audience. On the other hand, the storyteller may use his abstract as a guide to his listeners—as a summary or an evaluation of the story which he is going to tell.[9] The following are examples of abstracts of this second kind: "Jim and Maria had to get a silent number"; "I failed the test for my driver's license"; "I've had a terrible day." The term *abstract*, in other words, covers two functions, each of which has a different focus. I propose that these functions should be distinguished formally. I use Polanyi's rather awkward term *entrance talk* to the describe the preliminary negotiation which goes on between the would-be storyteller and his potential audience.[10] The term *abstract*, therefore, can be reserved for that other, story-related function of the introductory segment: it will mark the clause, or the clauses, which indicate the scope or the point of the tale.

Entrance talk and abstract are regularly followed by one or more clauses which convey essential background information to the story. Without information of this kind the listener is not able to make sense of the narrative. Labov and Waletzky describe this segment as *orientation*. In the anecdotes which I am constructing, the following units might serve as orientation: "Maria had been at home by herself"; "I had been trying to park the car"; "It was raining and I didn't have an umbrella." It is not necessary, however, that all such material be presented *en bloc*: some information can be interwoven with the narrative: "Maria went to answer the phone—she was at home by herself."

The narrative proper comprises the clauses which report the events of the story. The clauses which precede the resolution of the tale (I discuss this element below) are described by Labov and Waletzky as the *complication* or *complicating action*. In the Western tradition a storyteller aims to communicate a particular temporal-causal sequence, but he or she may not always report events and actions in the order in which they occurred.[11] (When he chooses to leap ahead to later events, he will at some point in his narrative backtrack to fill in the omitted details which are

9. For commentary on introductory clauses of this kind, but as a phenomenon peculiar to archaic poetry, and a reflection of an archaic way of thinking, see van Groningen (above, note 2) 62-69.

10. I argue, that is, that we should recognize the frame of discourse as a separate and significant element. For a detailed account of openings and closings as the means by which storytellers take their listeners from the real world of casual talk into a story-realm (in which a story is to be communicated) and, ultimately, return them to the real world, see K. G. Young, *Taleworlds and Storyrealms: the Phenomenology of Narrative* (Dordrecht 1987) 31-36. For discussion of how such transitions may occur, see G. Jefferson, "Sequential Aspects of Storytelling," in *Studies in the Organization of Conversational Interaction*, ed. J. Schenkein (New York 1978) 219-48. The terms *entrance talk* (or opening) and *exit talk* (on this closing element, see below) are suggested by L. Polanyi, "Literary Complexity in Everyday Storytelling," in *Spoken and Written Language*, ed. D. Tannen (Norwood, NJ 1982) 155-70.

11. For temporal sequence as the basis of storytelling in a Western tradition, see Labov and Waletzky (above, note 7) 20-32. Temporal sequence is not, however, a universal characteristic of narrative structure: see L. Polanyi, "So What's the Point?," *Semiotica* 25 (1979) 207-41, at 208-09; A. Becker, "Text-Building, Epistemology, and Aesthetics in Javanese Shadow Theatre," in *The Imagination of Reality: Essays in Southeast Asian Coherence Systems*, ed. A. Becker and A. Yengoyan (Norwood, NJ 1979) 211-43, esp. 216-20.

necessary to the tale.) The final event in this sequence is its *resolution*, that is, the end-point of the chain of action which the storyteller is reporting: "And so they asked for a silent number"; "He told me that I'd failed the test"; "And everything is wet; my clothes, my shoes, and my papers."

The story itself may end at this point, with the concluding event of the narrative. There is, after all, nothing more to tell.[12] But the storyteller may wish to confirm the point of the tale or in some way to tie things off. In order to fulfil the first goal, he may reiterate the resolution of the narrative; or he may comment on the action. And to fulfil his second, he will formally seal off the storytelling, perhaps opening a pathway back into the conversation which the story had suspended. Labov and Waletzky call these final clauses the *coda*. Again, as in the case of the abstract, the coda may be divided into two categories. I use *coda* to describe that segment of the tale which pulls the story together—the segment in which the resolution is reiterated or the action is evaluated. And it might take this form: "So they have a silent number"; "It was a frustrating experience." I use Polanyi's term *exit talk* to describe that segment which bridges the gap between the events of the story and the present time or which notifies the audience that the performance is over: "I just thought that I'd let you know"; "So I'm still catching the bus"; "Now I'm going to find some dry clothes."

A complete story, therefore, may proceed in the following fashion: entrance talk, abstract, orientation, narrative, resolution, coda, exit talk.[13] Each of these elements may appear in any anecdote, but they are not all obligatory. When we tell stories to a few friends, we may not feel it necessary to use entrance talk: we may be sufficiently confident of their supportive interest to launch directly into our abstract. Or, if we tell a story in response to a leading question or a leading remark, even an abstract may be unnecessary.[14] And, as has been noted above, a story may well end with its resolution: it may lack both coda and exit talk. We may omit any of these elements, if we judge that our story in this form will be acceptable to our audience. We would have included them if we had felt that our audience needed them—and we may include them at another telling.[15] Indeed, if we were to tell a story in more formal circumstances to a wider audience, we would include most, if not all, of the elements which have been described above. Our aim in including the elements which surround the narrative proper is clearly pragmatic: we use the outer framing elements (entrance talk and exit talk) and the introductory and closing segments (abstract and coda) to ensure that our story gets a hearing and that our listeners will appreciate its point. These peripheral elements address the needs both of the storyteller, who wishes his or her story to be a success, and of the audience, which

12. Cf. van Groningen (above, note 2) 70: "On cesse quand on a traité le dernier morceau de la série, quand on n'a plus rien de nouveau à dire."

13. I have not discussed one further element which Labov and Waletzky identify: *evaluation*. This element, unlike those which I have described above, has no fixed place within the story. If evaluative information appears in the abstract, however, it may well appear also in the coda. On the evaluative element in any story, see Labov and Waletzky (above, note 7) 33-39.

14. On this point, see Jefferson (above, note 10), and see below.

15. A second telling of the same story may well be different in some respects—in some of the details communicated—if the storyteller perceives that the new audience has different needs and expectations from those of his original audience. For discussinn see, for example, L. Polanyi, "On Telling the Same Story Twice," *Text* 1 (1981) 315-36, esp. 319-26.

must be given a certain amount of assistance if its members are to understand the narrative as the speaker intends. We decide which elements we should include on the basis of our own experience as storytellers and on the basis of what we have learned over the years about the structure of stories. From a very early age we have been tutored in the crafting of stories both by our parents (who share the roles of coach and audience) and by our schoolteachers. Thus the storytelling strategy which is common to the Western tradition is transmitted from generation to generation. It is learned in the first instance, but like so much else of what we do every day, it becomes almost automatic.

Observe that this framework, when it is fully exploited, opens the way to repetition or near repetition of words or of themes. It is possible that we might find a correspondence between entrance talk and exit talk (the elements which focus on the storyteller/audience relationship), or between the elements which introduce the narrative and bring it to an end: abstract and resolution, or abstract and coda.[16] It is equally possible that we may not. When correspondences of this kind occur in oral anecdotes, however, they are more likely to be the byproducts of audience-directed strategy than a conscious embellishment of the narrative.

This analysis of everyday storytelling as we know it indicates that certain patterns, which remind us of the patterns of ring-composition, may be produced in the normal course of storytelling. The storytelling framework can produce the equivalent of two rings within a single story—and more, if self-contained episodes or digressions are embedded within the original tale.

Can we then relate this everyday framework to Homeric storytelling? Do these patterns of correspondence which we have observed in everyday discourse illuminate the origins of Homeric ring-composition? With this possibility in mind, I turn to some of Homer's stories: to some episodes from the narrative of the *Iliad* and to some stories which Homer's characters tell one another in the course of the narrative. I shall analyse these in terms of the storytelling schema which has been described above (a complete account is provided in the Appendix); then I shall consider the implications of what we find.

At 11.91-100, Homer tells the story of the death of Oïleus. The poet begins this episode with an abstract. This is appropriate; he is moving from a general statement about the movement of battle to a specific sequence of events, the death of Bienor (which is noted but not described) and that of his companions. The key to the abstract is Ἀγαμέμνων...ἕλε...Ὀϊλῆα (91-93). Within this abstract there is a certain amount of background material (93), which we identify as orientation. Homer begins the narrative proper at 94. It is resolved at 98: δάμασσε δέ μιν μεμαῶτα. The coda (99-100) evaluates the event in the terms of the battlefield:

16. Such repetition may be useful when the storyteller is returning to the main narrative from a detour or a lengthy expansion (cf. Gaisser [above, note 3] 42). But even if the resolution or coda does not appear to repeat the theme of the abstract (which initiated the digression or the episode), the very presence of such an element acts as a sign that the detour or the episode is being terminated, and informs the listener that he is being returned to the narrative proper. For example, when an abstract evaluates the events of the story and the resolution reports the outcome, there is no correspondence. But the story has an identifiable beginning and end.

these bodies are coolly stripped by the victor and left to lie exposed. In this brief tale abstract and resolution correspond: they form, as it were, a single ring.[17]

Likewise, at 5.541-60, Homer tells how Aineias brings down the sons of Diokles. At the outset (541-42) he gives an abstract of the episode: Αἰνείας... ἕλεν...Κρήθωνά τε Ὀρσίλοχόν τε. The information which he provides at 543-49 is background material.[18] Note that the death of the heroes is anticipated (at 558) in the simile (itself a small story) which parallels their experience. The narrative of 550-58 is resolved at 559-60, when the young heroes are overpowered and fall (δαμέντε καππεσέτην). As in the previous example, the abstract corresponds to the resolution. Again we might identify a single ring.

Some Homeric stories may yield more than one ring. When one of Homer's characters tells a story, he may use entrance talk and exit talk to frame it. The former will prepare his audience for what is to come; the latter will indicate that his tale is over. In Nestor's anecdote at 11.670-762, Nestor's entrance talk (670-71), εἴθ᾽ ὣς ἡβώοιμι βίη δέ μοι ἔμπεδος εἴη ὡς ὁπότ᾽..., is recapitulated in exit talk (762): ὣς ἔον,...μετ᾽ ἀνδράσιν. Within this outer frame we notice that Nestor tells a lengthy and rather rambling tale out of which emerge three larger episodes, each of which exhibits the properties which Labov and Waletzky have identified. Each of these begins with an abstract. The first episode begins at 672 (ὅτ᾽ ἐγὼ κτάνον Ἰτυμονῆα) and continues into a new phase at 677 (συνελάσσαμεν). The second begins at 685-88 (οἱ...ἡγήτορες ἄνδρες δαίτρευον) and is, as it were, begun afresh at 696-97 (ἐκ δ᾽ ὁ γέρων...εἵλετο). This episode contains within it two rather bare stories: one (689-95) concerning earlier hostility between the Pylians and the Epeians; the second (698-702) the story of the theft of Neleus' horses. The third larger episode (which develops in three stages) begins at 720-21 (ἀλλὰ καὶ ὣς ἱππεῦσι μετέπρεπον ἡμετέροισι). This third episode includes within it a further tale, 738-46 (πρῶτος ἐγὼν ἕλον ἄνδρα, κόμισσα δὲ μώνυχας ἵππους, 738). In each of these larger episodes the story returns at its conclusion to the point promised in the abstract: the resolution of 675 echoes 672: ἔβλητ᾽...ἐμῆς ἀπὸ χειρὸς ἄκοντι, κὰδ δ᾽ ἔπεσεν; the second phase of this first episode (initiated at 677) is completed with ἠλασάμεσθα at 682.[19] The next resolution, which occurs at 703-05 (ὁ γέρων ...ἐξέλετ᾽...), echoes 696-97. The coda of 706 refers to the abstract of 687-88 (ἡμεῖς...διείπομεν); the resolution of 743-44 echoes 738: ἤριπε δ᾽...ἐγὼ δ᾽ ἐς

17. It is not that the abstract is repeated in the resolution; rather the abstract *looks ahead* to the resolution. Cf. van Otterlo's observation in a work not available to me: *Untersuchungen über Begriff, Anwendung, und Entstehung der griechischen Ringkomposition* (Amsterdam 1944) 43, cited in Thalmann (above, note 2) 16.

18. For a fuller discussion of these tales in which the material that we classify as orientation is expanded (and often, as at 4.474-77, 13.665-70, or 16.572-76, becomes a narrative, an "obituary," in its own right) and the narrative proper is perfunctory, see J. Griffin, *Homer on Life and Death* (Oxford 1980), chap. 4, "Death, Pathos, and Objectivity." It is the foregrounding of what would otherwise be classified as background material, to the extent that it is cast as a small story in itself, which unbalances the story—and engages the reader. This background material, as Griffin notes (104), gives "status and significance" to an otherwise undistinguished subject. As a consequence we are surprised and affected by what the storyteller tells us. Not all scholars have understood this characteristic of Homer's obituaries: see, for example, C. R. Beye, "Homeric Battle Narratives and Catalogues," *HSCP* 68 (1964) 345-73.

19. Notice the coda at 683-84, which draws together the two phases of this first episode and evaluates the young Nestor's performance: γεγήθει δὲ φρένα Νηλεύς....

δίφρον ὀρούσας στῆν ῥα μετὰ προμάχοισιν; and the last, at 761 (πάντες δ᾽ εὐχετόωντο θεῶν Διὶ Νέστορί τ᾽ ἀνδρῶν), echoes 720-21. A fourth, and transitional, episode (707-19) has no abstract. It is, I suggest, implied (let me tell you what the Epeians did in their desire for revenge). The resolution of the tale (717-19: οὐδέ με Νηλεὺς εἴα θωρήσσεσθαι, ἀπέκρυψεν δέ μοι ἵππους) makes no reference to this; rather, it serves as the prompt for the final episode (720-61).

We might observe eight rings in this long tale: a ring which is completed by entrance talk and exit talk, four consecutive rings, and three embedded rings within them.[20] When we examine Nestor's leisurely tale closely, we find that it is more firmly structured than we might at first have believed. His reminiscences resemble the tales which we tell in everyday contexts, in which, despite considerable expansion and a number of digressions, the point of the narrative is never forgotten. Nestor's ability to return in exit talk to the theme which introduced his tale accurately reflects our own ability to retain in memory for sustained periods the point of a story-in-progress.

In the Niobe-paradigm of 24.602-13 we find a story within a story within a larger segment. In the larger segment (599-620), which represents the speech act *persuasion*, Achilleus attempts to comfort Priam and to encourage him to resume the routines of life. On occasions like this, a relevant story will lend weight to an argument. Hence the story of Niobe and her grief (602-13): Niobe was ready to eat, despite her grief. So, at 602, Achilleus begins the story of Niobe with an abstract which signals the point of the tale: ...ἠΰκομος Νιόβη ἐμνήσατο σίτου. At 613 he repeats the phrase, now as a coda: ἡ δ᾽ ἄρα σίτου μνήσατ᾽. That is, Achilleus' coda echoes his abstract. But within this tale is a self-contained story—the tale of how Niobe's children met their deaths—in which the abstract (τῇ περ δώδεκα παῖδες ἐνὶ μεγάροισιν ὄλοντο, 603) foreshadows the resolution (τὼ δ᾽ ἄρα καὶ δοιώ περ ἐόντ᾽ ἀπὸ πάντας ὄλεσσαν, 609). Achilleus' story yields two rings—abstract and coda and, within it, abstract and resolution.[21]

In the examples above, Labov and Waletzky's modified story framework accommodates itself readily to Homer's stories, some of which, as I have noted above, have been analyzed elsewhere in terms of ring-composition. What

20. There is no single authoritative analysis of this long tale. See van Otterlo (above, note 2) 18-22; Lohmann (above, note 1) 73. My analysis accords in most respects with that of Gaisser (above, note 3) 9-13. Although I find different points of correspondence for 738 and 761, I identify these as narrative boundaries, as does Gaisser. Thalmann (above, note 2, 11) comments on a comparable pattern when he discusses the double frame of Eurykleia's story at *Od.* 19.392-468. The functions of each of the rings, as Thalmann describes them, correspond to the functions of (a) entrance and exit talk and (b) abstract and resolution.

21. Cf. van Otterlo (above, note 2) 12; Lohmann (above, note 1) 13 and n. 3; Gaisser (above, note 3) 9 (where the inner ring of 603 and 609 [the embedded story] is overlooked). The correspondence (noted in Lohmann and Gaisser) between 601 (μνησώμεθα) and 618-19 (μεδώμεθα) has nothing to do with the framework of Achilleus' story. The repetition is, I suggest, an integral part of the speech act *persuasion*. This is marked off by a repeated element, as are many speech acts in Homer and in our own everyday speech—such as *exhortation* (cf. *Il.* 23.403 and 414) and *defiance* (cf. *Il.* 24.560 and 568). (For Thalmann's observations on this point, in connection with *Il.* 24.524-50, see above, note 2, 16; where also see his comments on a similar passage [at *Od.* 20.61-82 a narrative is enclosed within a prayer].) Little research has yet been conducted into the regular use of repetition in speech acts, whether in English or in other languages. For some introductory remarks on the topic, see R. P. Martin, *The Language of Heroes* (New York 1989) 46-47.

conclusions might we draw from the general correspondences which these two patterns of analysis reveal? I would suggest that many of the structures in the Homeric texts which in recent years have been identified as examples of ring-composition—that is, as repetitions consciously plotted by the poet—are simply evidence that the poet is telling his story in accordance with a traditional story-framework.

If we analyze Homer's story-rings not as the products of a ring-composition template but as the products of a strategy for oral storytelling, we see that Homer understands storytelling in much the same way as we do. With regard to any of the tales he tells, either in his own voice or in the voice of one of his actors, he prepares his listeners for the content and the direction of the narrative (through his abstract); and once the end—the resolution—has been reached, he will sometimes reiterate it or evaluate it (through his coda). And when any of his actors tell stories, he has them monitor their relationships with their listeners (through entrance talk and exit talk) just as we would.

Sometimes Homer's presentation of his story will result in one or more rings; sometimes it will not. It is worth noting, however, that even those Homeric stories which do not exhibit ringlike patterns remain true to the story structure which Labov and Waletzky have identified. The absence of a ring-pattern does not indicate that the story is in any way deficient. Nor does it indicate that the poet has developed, or selected, a different story-format. Antenor's story, at *Il.* 3.204-24, is a case in point. There is no *formal* repetition in the framework of Antenor's story. But note that Antenor's opening words (204) express his agreement with the previous speaker. Helen has just described Odysseus (201-02) as εἰδὼς παντοίους τε δόλους καὶ μήδεα πυκνά, despite his being the product of rugged Ithaka. Antenor's statement (ἦ μάλα τοῦτο ἔπος νημερτὲς ἔειπες) looks back to what has just been said: it allows *Helen*'s words to serve as an evaluative abstract to *his* story, which will conclude (224) as it began, with a confirmation (in an evaluative coda) of Helen's assessment: οὐ τότε γ' ὧδ' Ὀδυσῆος ἀγασσάμεθ' εἶδος ἰδόντες. Gaisser, who regards Antenor's tale as exceptional in the *Iliad*, fails to recognize the displacement of the abstract; because she cannot find the repetition characteristic of ring-composition, she classifies Antenor's tale as an example of a different—linear—technique, *Ritournellkomposition*.[22]

This distinction, in my view, is meaningless. Rather, Antenor is simply doing what anyone does in conversation: he is picking up and developing a topic which has been already introduced into the conversation. It is this practice which accounts for the differences in structure between so many of the stories told in the *Odyssey* and those in the *Iliad*. Stories in the *Odyssey* are regularly invited by another speaker. Because the storyteller is responding to a request for information he sees no need to provide an abstract to which his resolution or his coda might correspond. Stories in the *Iliad* are not prompted in this way. Because they are generally

22. On *Ritournellkomposition*, see Gaisser (above, note 3) 5; on the Antenor-tale, see ibid. 39-40. For other examples of stories without ring-patterns, see *Il.* 10.266-70 (the history of Meriones' helmet); *Od.* 3.254-312; *Od.* 4.238-64 (Helen's evaluative abstract is picked up by Menelaos in an evaluative coda to her tale, 265-70); *Od.* 7.241-97 (Odysseus' resolution corresponds to the questions asked by Arete at 237-39); *Od.* 8.500-20 (what might have been Demodokos' abstract is anticipated in Odysseus' request, 494-95).

intended to persuade, they arise in response to the circumstances; and because the storyteller introduces the story himself, there is every chance that it will include an abstract and that there will be some kind of correspondence between this and the closing elements. That is, the variations in the structures of the stories within the two epics represent everyday responses to differing circumstances in the storyworld; they are not evidence of different narrative styles, nor do they represent, as Gaisser suggests, "an evolutionary process in the development of epic style."[23]

I would argue that Homer's ring-patterns (those patterns, that is, which occur in the context of storytelling) are like our own. We are considering a phenomenon which relates primarily to the pragmatics of storytelling (getting the story told and ensuring that it makes its point). Aesthetic and mnemonic considerations (to the extent that they can be successfully separated from the pragmatic) are secondary. Contrary to what Edwards suggests, Homer's ring-patterns do not mark the poet as different from ourselves. Rather, in the light of Labov and Waletzky's study, we have evidence that Homer used a storytelling strategy closely akin to our own.

It is particularly satisfying to be able to relate our own everyday storytelling practice to the structure of ring-composition in its early oral manifestations. This is not to say, however, that ring-patterns in Homer are limited to the context of storytelling. A careful study of other speech acts, such as *persuasion*, *exhortation*, and *defiance*, reveals ring-patterns of a similar kind. In each case the speech act is marked off by repeated elements, the first of which highlights the point of the speech act (as does a storyteller's abstract) and the second reiterates it as it occurs in its logical position in the sequence of the argument (as does the resolution of a narrative).[24]

So far I have discussed ring-patterns which, I argue, are context-based, being produced as a frame for this particular kind of speech act, the story. But there is another kind of ring—one which, perhaps, is not to be found in Homer. This kind of ring occurs as an ordering device; it governs the presentation of themes within a poem, for example, or even in expository prose.[25] These rings occur in the very position where the rings which we associate with a story framework do not occur (that is, within the body of discourse, not at its periphery); their function, as far as

23. Gaisser (above, note 3) 43.

24. See above, note 21. Ring-patterns also emerge from Homer's use of hysteron-proteron (cf. Thalmann [above, note 2] 6-8). Although discussion of this structure is beyond the scope of this paper, I note in passing S. E. Bassett's comment on hysteron-proteron (*The Poetry of Homer* [Berkeley and Los Angeles 1938] 124): that in Homer it is not a rhetorical figure, but the "unstudied, intuitive expression" of a poet who thinks of function rather than form.

25. For commentary on the importance of ring-composition as a structural principle of certain kinds of verse, see Cairns (above, note 2), chap. 8, "Ordering"; and see above, note 3. (For the contrary view, see R. Peden, "Endings in Catullus," in *Homo Viator: Classical Essays for John Bramble*, ed. M. Whitby, P. Hardie, and M. Whitby [Bristol and Oak Park, IL 1987] 99 and n. 22.) On the other hand, Cairns' reading (above, note 2) 197-201 of a passage from Homer (*Il.* 6.343-68) as an example of complex ring-composition does not persuade me that the success of the passage is in any way due to its "conceptual symmetry." (The somewhat simpler reading of Lohmann [above, note 1] 101-02 still leaves the question unanswered: could these subtle correspondences have been intended by an *oral* poet, for a *listening* audience?) As for ring-composition in written prose, it has been argued recently in impressive detail that ring-composition was indeed used in a highly sophisticated fashion as an ordering device within extended passages of written discourse: see J. Ellis, "The Structure and Argument of Thucydides' Archaeology," *CA* 10 (1991) 344-80.

we may judge it, is not to promote the telling of an acceptable story but is a stylistic, text-based choice. I would argue, therefore, that narrative rings of this second kind are in fact a phenomenon different from, but not unconnected with, those ring-patterns which we observe in the framework of the oral anecdote.

What might be the connection between the ring of written discourse and the ring-pattern of oral storytelling? If a connection does exit, is it possible to explain it? I suggest, as a first hypothesis, that we might view the former (the rings of written discourse) as a development of the latter (the everyday rings). For support I turn to Deborah Tannen's argument that literary language makes intensified and artful use of a number of features—such as repetition or alliteration—which in conversation are "spontaneous, pervasive, and often relatively automatic."[26] Tannen claims that many of the devices which are considered to be stylistic devices of literary texts (and which are thought of as being "literary") are developments of patterns which we have always used in oral contexts—in storytelling in conversation, for example.

Let us consider the possibility that the elaborate, content-centred rings of Greek and, subsequently, Latin literature (I refer now to written discourse) developed from the simple rings of oral discourse, of which story-rings, perhaps, are the most notable. I have argued that in the Homeric epics—as in everyday storytelling—correspondences of abstract and resolution or abstract and coda (and of entrance talk and exit talk) were often unpremeditated *as correspondences*. But once the Homeric epics were recorded and became the subjects for study, these pleasing patterns in the texts may have assumed a new significance for, at least, some of their readers. It is possible that writers in the ancient world noted these patterns within Homer's stories and, not comprehending the rationale which gave rise to them, sought to emulate them now for their own sake. In the new, literate, context it came about that these repetitions lost their immediate, practical focus and took on a different aspect;[27] they came to be used self-consciously and artfully.[28] That is, the ringlike patterns which had framed—and would continue to frame—the oral anecdote became a literary device as well: an artificial, text-based, intellectual means for holding the attention of a reader.[29] They came to be used in circumstances where

26. D. Tannen, "Repetition in Conversation: Towards a Poetics of Talk," *Language* 63 (1987) 574-605, esp. 581. Tannen has made this point elsewhere: see her "Oral and Literate Strategies in Spoken and Written Narratives," *Language* 58 (1982) 1-21; *Conversational Style: Analyzing Talk amongst Friends* (Norwood, NJ 1984) 168; "Relative Focus on Involvement in Oral and Written Discourse," in *Literacy, Language, and Learning: The Nature and Consequences of Reading and Writing*, ed. D. Olson, N. Torrance, A. Hildyard (Cambridge 1985) 124-47; with W. Chafe, "The Relation between Written and Spoken Language," *Ann. Rev. Anthropol.* 16 (1987) 383-407, esp. 396.

27. The exception to this is, of course, the representation in written narrative of oral storytelling. In such circumstances the story framework continued to be faithfully (and naturally) reproduced in the literary form: for examples from the classical world, observe the structure of storytellings in Apuleius, *Met.* For discussion of the formal properties of stories in connection with English literary genres, see M. L. Pratt, *Towards a Speech-Act Theory of Literary Discourse* (Bloomington 1977), chap. 2.

28. Cairns (above, note 2, 213) asks whether poets used these structures consciously and whether readers perceived them. I would suggest that when the poet *framed* his narratives as he might do in everyday discourse, he was often (but perhaps not always) unconscious of the pattern. When the poet, in the body of his poem, produced what we could confidently identify as a series of rings, it is not possible that he acted unconsciously. Whether readers of the time perceived these artificial rings or not, we cannot say.

29. Note that the scholars cited above in note 3 all identify and discuss ring-composition as a literate strategy—even when the patterns of repetition reflect the activity of oral storytelling, such as we have observed in the Homeric examples discussed above.

they would not appear in oral discourse. Not only did they frame a unit of discourse but they shaped that unit; and not only did they prepare the listener for a message (and reiterate its point), but they presented the message and established its thematic unity.[30] The literate poets who observed this symmetry (whether they noted it in Homer or, perhaps, in casual discourse) may not have identified the pragmatic purpose which underpinned it. Nevertheless, they adopted what appeared to them to be a stylistic device and adapted it for their own ends.

So our term ring-composition has been used to describe not one but two phenomena: first, the term identifies the occasional patterns which occur in natural discourse—such as those which we find framing Homer's stories; and second, it identifies what appear to be premeditated patterns of reference and repetition across long stretches of discourse (such as we might find in Thucydides, or in Tibullus). Clearly we need to distinguish the two. We should separate the rings of the storytelling framework (which we all use and understand, and which I believe we should *not* identify as ring-composition[31]) from the artificial rings of literary discourse. Once we can make this distinction we shall be able to talk with greater understanding and greater sympathy about storytelling—and about stylistics—in the ancient world.[32]

30. On thematic, but not necessarily logical, unity, see B. Gentili, *Poetry and its Public in Ancient Greece* (Baltimore and London 1988) 49. Some scholars, indeed, claim that ring-composition may structure the presentation of narrative. It is not clear to me, however, why a system which doubles back on itself might promote the understanding or the enjoyment of material which is normally presented in linear form. For comment on this point, see Gaisser (above, note 3) 42.

31. We might refer to such patterns as 'ring-patterns,' as 'structural correspondence,' or as the 'frame' of a narrative.

32. I thank the anonymous referee for *Helios* for helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

APPENDIX

The Framework of Four Homeric Tales (11.91-100; 5.541-60; 11.670-762; 24.602-13)

11.91-100

91-93	abstract	Agamemnon killed Oïleus
93	orientation	the companion of Bienor, the charioteer
94-98	complication	he faced Agamemnon, but Agamemnon stabbed him with his spear, which pierced his helmet
98	resolution	and killed him
99-100	coda	Agamemnon stripped him (and Bienor) and left their bodies exposed

5.541-60

541-42	abstract	Aineias killed Krethon and Orsilochos
543-49	orientation	family background: four generations of the family line
550-58	complication	they reached Troy; they fought like lions
559	resolution	they were overcome by Achilleus
560	coda	and they fell

11.670-762

670-71	entrance talk	I wish I were young and strong as when
671-72	abstract	I killed Itymoneus in a quarrel
673-74	orientation	I was driving cattle which I had seized
674	complication	(a) he defended them
675	resolution	(a) and was struck down by me; he fell
676	coda	and his people fled in fear
677-81	complication	(b) we drove off many head of cattle and
682	resolution	(b) took them to Pylos
683-84	coda	I was young and did well; my father rejoiced
685-88	abstract	the spoil was divided
689-93	orientation	the Pylians had been worsted by the Epeians
689	abstract	the Pylians had been worsted
690	orientation	Herakles had come
690-93	complication	and killed the bravest of the Pylians
694-95	resolution	the Epeians despised us and committed outrageous acts against us
696-97	abstract	Neleus took many head of cattle as compensation
698-702	orientation	the reason for his anger
698-99	abstract	a wrong was done Neleus in connection with his horses
700-01	orientation	they were on the way to a race
701-02	resolution	Augeias kept them
702	coda	and sent away the driver
703-05	resolution	Neleus, in anger, took a great deal of plunder and he gave the rest to the people
706-07	coda	so we administered the spoils and made sacrifice
707-17	complication	the Epeians came against us, with the Moliones; they laid siege to Thryoessa; Athene came to us and gathered an army
717-19	resolution	but Neleus would not let me go
720-21	abstract	but I distinguished myself in battle
722-23	orientation	by the river Alpheios
723-37	complication	the actions which preceded battle; the beginning of battle
738	resolution (1)	Nestor was the first to kill a man
738	abstract	I was first to kill a man (Moulios) and win his horses
738-41	orientation	Moulios' background
742	complication	he came on and I struck him
743-44	resolution	he fell in the dust and I took his horses
744-46	coda	the Epeians ran in terror
747-49	complication	I charged and took 50 chariots
750	resolution (2)	I would have killed the Moliones, but for the Earthshaker
753-58	complication	we pursued the Epeians; Athene turned us back
758	resolution (3)	I killed my last man
759-60	coda	and we returned to Pylos
761	resolution	all glorified Zeus amongst gods and Nestor amongst men
762	exit talk	this is the man I was

24.602-13

602	abstract	Niobe remembered to eat
603-09	orientation	Niobe was grieving because her children were killed
603-06	abstract	her twelve children were killed in anger by Apollo and Artemis
604	orientation	six daughters and six fine sons
605-08	complication	Niobe compared herself to Leto and boasted of her offspring
609	resolution	Apollo and Artemis slew all her children
609-11	complication	her children were slain; and lay unburied until
612	resolution	the Uranian gods buried them;
613	coda	but she remembered to eat

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