

Serial Repetition in Homer and the “Poetics of Talk”: A Case Study from the *Odyssey*

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The recent discussion, in Frederick Ahl and Hanna Roisman's *The Odyssey Re-formed* (1996), of the conversations between Eumaios and Odysseus in the swineherd's hut offers us what is in many respects a close and satisfying reading of the encounter.¹ The background to the scene is as follows. On Athena's advice Odysseus has gone to seek temporary shelter at Eumaios' hut. Here, disguised as a beggar, Odysseus is set upon by the swineherd's dogs. He preserves life and limb by promptly dropping to the ground and abandoning his staff. Eumaios at this point notices what is happening and calls off his dogs. He takes the stranger into his hut, and here they spend the rest of the day together in conversation.

There has been some difference of opinion among scholars as to what, precisely, is being communicated at this “first” encounter.² Ahl and Roisman, however, make a number of perceptive comments about the motives of the two men as they talk. For the purposes of this paper I draw

¹ Chapter 8, “First Encounters with Eumaeus.” The strength of this volume is the authors' recognition that ambiguous speech may be intentionally so, but that it may be successfully interpreted in the light of other information transmitted in the text. What is crucial to interpretation is their reading of the speaker's intent (see, for example, 166).

² The key to the problem of interpretation in the Eumaios-Odysseus scene is not so much Odysseus; if we bear in mind his disguise and follow his words with care we can read his intentions. The key to the problem is Eumaios. The points at issue are: does Eumaios perceive Odysseus in the stranger's disguise? Do his actions, if not his words, betray his thoughts? For a range of views, see three recent publications. The first of these is Ahl and Roisman (1996), who see Eumaios as a perceptive man, a match for Odysseus. But see also Doherty (1995: 148-59), whose interest in the Eumaios episode is limited to the stories that Eumaios and Odysseus tell each other. She, however, sees the swineherd as “dutiful and unimaginative,” a man of “stolid dependability” (150). For a less sympathetic view of the swineherd, see Olson (1995:chapter 6, “Eumaios the Swineherd”), and note espec. 139, where he describes the swineherd as being “completely and ironically unaware of the real identity of the Stranger.”

attention to three points that are central to their reading of the scene. First, they observe here a tension within Odysseus between his desire for recognition and his need not to be acknowledged; second, they propose, and this is more contentious, that Eumaios does indeed recognize his master, whether consciously or subconsciously; and, third, they argue that Odysseus does not yet feel sufficiently confident of his swineherd's support to reveal himself to him (Ahl and Roisman 1996: 175-76). I too am interested in what happens between Eumaios and Odysseus; hence my comments in this paper on the first of their conversations, the extended conversation that takes place on the first day that Odysseus spends with his swineherd (14.111-522).

To supplement Ahl and Roisman's "rhetorical reading" of the scene (1-3, 12-16), I propose to analyze it from a slightly different perspective—as talk, or, more precisely, as a conversation in progress. I shall pay close attention to the structure of the conversation, which, to anticipate one of my findings, is shaped by the repetition of a single speech-act (I use here the terminology of Austin 1962). Then I shall make a number of observations' on its composition and on the function of repetition, both within the narrative and as a communicative strategy in conversation. My comments will reflect on the question that Rose posed (although not in so many words) some years ago: why would so sustained a conversation hold the attention of an audience (1980:285)? My discussion will examine the conversation between Eumaios and Odysseus as a representation of talk, as a means of characterization, and, through the rapport that is established between singer and audience, as a source of entertainment).³

This prolonged conversation between the two men may be more correctly described as negotiation: Odysseus is, as I shall demonstrate, trying to do a deal with his swineherd, who responds to his efforts in interesting ways. The exercise as a whole has been measured out for us in a series of six structurally similar proposals. Each of these proposals sets out the terms of an exchange; in each case the speaker is trying to drive a bargain. This speech-act, the bid, with which we are all familiar, given that in the real world we engage in such negotiations on a daily basis, comprises

³ I acknowledge the contribution to the broader topic of heroic speech in Martin 1989. My concern, however, is not so much with traditional performance technique (although it is naturally fundamental to this study), nor with the tension between tradition and variation that we observe in the epics, but with Homer's representation of a particular kind of conversation.

two essential elements that may appear in either order, *request* and *offer*.⁴ From everyday experience we would expect that this proposal will be taken up by the second speaker, who will accept, reject, or modify in some way the original terms (a second type of speech-act often comes into play at this point). If the terms are accepted, a third stage ensues: exchange. This third unit, often, but not always, an action-sequence, completes the negotiation. Taken together, these three units represent the information that we all store in our memories about setting up and carrying through that negotiation which we call a bargain. I now analyze the conversation between Eumaios and Odysseus in these terms. Notice that six bids in all are proposed before the bargain is concluded.

1. *Odysseus proposes a bargain* (14.111-47)

He seeks confirmation of Eumaios' loyalty to Odysseus
in return for news which he will give of his whereabouts.

Once Eumaios has prepared a simple meal for his guest and they have eaten, the time has come for talk. It is Odysseus, the guest, who seizes the initiative in conversation. This is unusual; we would expect the host to initiate conversation (cp. *Od.* 3.68-74; 4.60-64; and even 1.157-77). The hero, with gentle irony, will ask Eumaios for the name of his rich and powerful master. His introductory words, at 115, ὦ φίλε, τίς γάρ σε πρίατο κτεάτεσσιν ἐοῖσιν . . . ; (“Friend, who is the man who bought you with his possessions?”⁵) suggest some sympathy on the part of the vagrant for the swineherd. At 118-20 he builds on that sympathy to offer his only resource: he offers news of Eumaios’ long-absent master. This is the first bid; in return for the information he professes to seek—he requests the name (115) and a description (118) of Eumaios’ master—Odysseus holds out the possibility of news about him. If we probe beneath the surface, bearing in mind Ahl and Roisman’s points above, we realize that the hero is offering to exchange a modified version of his own good news, that Odysseus has returned to Ithaka, for some indication of Eumaios’ attitude toward his master (115-20). The proposal is entirely in character:

⁴ If we follow Austin’s classification of speech-acts (1962), we are dealing with a “commissive.” For useful commentary on commissives, see Bach and Harnish 1979:49-51, espec. 51 (on the bargain-proposal).

⁵ Quotations of passages from the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are from the standard Oxford editions by Monro and Allen. All English translations are from Lattimore 1951 and 1965, with slight changes for emphasis.

Odysseus, as beggar, has nothing to offer but news and gossip; on the other hand, his proposal, in its indirectness, is true to the nature of the hero Odysseus, the master of subtlety.

Odysseus' offer is at first rejected by Eumaios (122-23), for he is skeptical of the beggar's promises. Beggars tell tales purporting to be true in the hope of kind treatment; they exploit his mistress Penelope's desire to believe, and her sorrow is renewed (124-32). So Eumaios dismisses Odysseus' offer, and yet he is prepared all the same to give the beggar the information he seeks. He names Odysseus and declares his devotion (133-47).

What is of considerable interest here is that Eumaios takes the upper hand in the negotiation. He has dismissed the possibility of an exchange along the lines that Odysseus proposes. He has provided information about Odysseus not because he has accepted the beggar's deal, but quite simply because he finds comfort in speaking of him to a ready listener. But he gives the beggar no chance to complete the terms of the bargain: he will not allow him to allude to Odysseus' whereabouts, even indirectly. It is Eumaios' resistance and healthy skepticism that, I suggest, rouse Odysseus' interest and commit him to the intense persuasive enterprise that ensues. This point is crucial to what follows.

2. *Odysseus' second attempt to bargain* (14.148-73)

Odysseus seeks a mantle and tunic in return
for news of his whereabouts—on oath.

The beggar revises his bid. In exchange for the news he foreshadows of Odysseus' return and the oath he is prepared to give (151-52)—

ἀλλ' ἐγὼ οὐκ αὐτως μυθήσομαι, ἀλλὰ σὺν ὄρκῳ,
ὡς νεῖται Ὀδυσσεύς·

but I will not speak in the same manner, but on my oath tell you
Odysseus is on his way home—

he asks for a mantle and a tunic (152-54):

εὐαγγέλιον δέ μοι ἔστω
αὐτίκ', ἐπεὶ κεν κείνος ἰὼν τὰ ἅ δώμαθ' ἴκηται·
ἔσσαι με χλαῖνάν τε χιτῶνά τε, εἵματα καλά·

Let me have my reward for good news then,
as soon as he is come back and enters his own house.
Give me fine clothing, a cloak and a tunic to wear.

Unlike those beggars whom Eumaios has previously encountered (122-30), he would not claim those items immediately. As a guarantee of his good faith he would accept them only on the day of Odysseus' return. On oath the beggar promises that Odysseus will return to Ithaka (161-64).

Odysseus' request for garments to replace his ragged clothes is not surprising, given his disguise. It is interesting to note, however, that the idea for the request may have been put into his head earlier, by Eumaios; at the very least, this request is a conscious echo of Eumaios' hypothetical bargain (131-32):

αἰψά κε καὶ σὺ γεραιέ, ἔπος παρατεκτῆναιο,
εἴ τις τοι χλαῖνάν τε χιτῶνά τε εἴματα δοίη.

So you too, old sir, might spin out a well-made story,
if someone would give you a cloak or a tunic to wear for it.

Just as he refused Odysseus' previous bid, Eumaios now refuses to accept it in revised form, although Odysseus has strengthened his offer with an oath, given at 158-59. Eumaios firmly refuses to credit the news that Odysseus shares and to pay its price (166-67, 171). The reason he gives is not now his mistress' distress (122-32), but his own (169-70).

Observe that the beggar does not await Eumaios' agreement to the terms of the bargain; and he does not, as before (118-20), speak of vague possibilities. On this occasion he speaks confidently and directly—but not, of course, frankly. Nevertheless, we can identify the hero's eagerness to share his relief in his homecoming in his repetition of his declaration: compare 152, ὡς νεῖται Ὀδυσσεύς (“Odysseus is on his way home”), with 161, ἐλεύσεται ἐνθάθ' Ὀδυσσεύς (“Odysseus will be here”). As for Eumaios, we should note that immediately after he refused to acknowledge the force of the oath taken by the beggar (171, ἀλλ' ἦ τοι ὄρκον μὲν ἐάσομεν [“but we will leave your oath alone”]), he makes a wish (171-73):

αὐτὰρ Ὀδυσσεὺς
ἔλθοι ὅπως μιν ἐγὼ γ' ἐθέλω καὶ Πηνελόπεια
Λαέρτης θ' ὁ γέρων καὶ Τηλέμαχος θεοειδής

but I hope that Odysseus
will come back, as I wish, and as Penelope wishes,

and Laertes the old man too, and godlike Telemachos.

Is his wish intended simply to strike a more courteous note, to soften the abruptness with which he dismisses Odysseus' promise? Or does it indicate that Eumaios' skepticism has been shaken—that he is moved by the beggar's conviction and by his apparent integrity? To resolve this impasse, we expect confirmation within the story.

3. *Eumaios proposes a bargain* (14.174-90)

Eumaios offers the story of Telemachos' present situation—in return for the beggar's own tale.

At 174-84 there is indeed confirmation of a kind. Eumaios' despair with regard to his absent master must have been in some way diminished (although, clearly, it has not been allayed), because he is able to turn his mind elsewhere. Just as the swineherd had earlier found comfort in speaking of Odysseus, now he finds relief in sharing with the stranger his anxiety about Telemachos. This kind of talk—confessional talk—whereby an individual is more willing to share innermost anxieties with a stranger (whom s/he believes s/he will not see again) than with an acquaintance is plausible in psychological terms (see Wardhaugh 1985:126-27). Eumaios outlines Telemachos' history for the benefit of the beggar and laments the fate the suitors have planned for him. And, to complete the exchange, he offers his guest the occasion to do the same. In return for his confidences he requests the beggar's own story (185-90). Eumaios, it seems, has been quick to recognize the beggar's style of negotiation and to seize for himself the opportunity of operating within its frame.

4. *Odysseus' third bargain* (14.191-389)

Odysseus offers his 'life story'—in return he wants his news (of Odysseus' return) to be accepted.

The beggar readily offers Eumaios a tale; but he recasts the terms on which he offers it. Thus a fourth bid emerges from the third. This is a tale of persuasive intent, carefully contrived. A cunning blend of fact, truth, half-truth, and invention, it is a formidable creation. Only when we learn Eumaios' life story at 15.390-484 do we enjoy, in retrospect, the game that Odysseus has played with his host (and that Homer plays with his audience). Because the hero needs to win Eumaios' sympathy, he echoes in his tale the

experiences and sufferings of the swineherd. He of course knows Eumaios' history; but we, the audience, are still in ignorance. The hero includes details such as royal birth, subsequent misfortune, a deceitful Phoenician, and "rescue" by an unknown king.⁶ The very overlap between Odysseus' invented life story and his listener's experience of life guarantees—for the swineherd at least—the trustworthiness of the beggar and the authenticity of his tale.

The tale reflects Odysseus' persistence and resourcefulness; in fact, Homer reminds us of this set of qualities at 191 (πολύμητις Ὀδυσσεύς, "Odysseus of many counsels"). For within his long narrative the beggar inserts a passage through which he can return the conversation to the topic of Odysseus and his imminent homecoming.⁷ Earlier in their encounter he had offered Eumaios news of Odysseus; he had met then with a discouraging response. When next he had sworn to Odysseus' homecoming, Eumaios' gloom had lifted a little. Now, within the seductive framework of the entertaining tale, he again endeavors—against Eumaios' instructions (168-69, ἄλλα παρέξ μεμνώμεθα, μηδέ με τούτων / μίμνησκ' ["we will think of other matters; don't keep reminding me of these things"])—to forecast a homecoming. He relies this time not only on the cogency of the context (for Eumaios, as we have noted, Odysseus' story could well be true since it runs so close to his own) but also on the solemnity of a royal pledge (the oath is not now on a beggar's lips but on those of a king, 331-33):

ῶμοσε δὲ πρὸς ἔμ' αὐτόν, ἀποσπένδων ἐνὶ οἴκῳ,
 νῆα κατειρῦσθαι καὶ ἐπαρτέας ἔμμεν ἑταίρους,
 οἳ δὴ μιν πέμψουσι φίλην ἔς πατρίδα γαίαν.

And he swore to me in my presence, as he poured out a libation
 in his house, that the ship was drawn to the sea and the crew were ready
 to carry Odysseus back again to his own dear country.

⁶ Doherty 1995: 149 points out that the tale is the tale of Odysseus' own adventures presented in realistic terms, without the fantastic episodes of books 9-12. This may be so; but what is more striking, I believe, is the series of parallels between Odysseus' contrived tale and the story of Eumaios' life.

⁷ A detailed study of the narrative is not relevant here. For studies of the tale as a whole, see Trahman 1952; Williams, 1972-73; Haft 1983-84; Thalmann 1992:102-7; and, most recently, Doherty 1995:148-59.

And the beggar adds a further persuasive, but false, detail: that Odysseus is returning by way of the oracle of Zeus at Dodona (327-30), where he is consulting on whether it is better, after so long an absence, to return ἀμφαδόν (“openly”) or κρυφηδόν (“in secret”) (330). Eumaios would know enough of his master and his ways to acknowledge that Odysseus would naturally give thought to this question. Eumaios is not to know that Athena, rather than Zeus, has already given Odysseus the advice he needed (13.397-415).

The poet also demonstrates Odysseus’ subtlety. I propose that the hero’s narrative is intended to function as a unit of exchange within the same interactive strategy, the bargain, as do the previous bids. The terms of exchange, however, are not spelled out. Odysseus offers an entertaining tale about a fictitious individual; he implies in return that Eumaios should accept the promise embedded within it, the promise of Odysseus’ return. Note that Odysseus has here changed his means of presentation (but not his purpose); he now works “in secret,” κρυφηδόν, hoping in this way to break down Eumaios’ resistance, rather than by the more—but not entirely—direct strategies that have already proven unsuccessful.

But Eumaios, after twenty years of separation, and having learned from his previous unhappy experiences, is not to be won over in a moment. His skepticism, which he has developed over the years to shield him from disappointment, holds him back. For this reason he accepts, as I noted above, that part of the tale that refers to the beggar—the elaborate fiction, fashioned to echo his own sufferings; and at 361-62 he pays tribute to the storyteller’s skills:

ἄ δειλὲ ξείνων, ἧ μοι μάλα θυμὸν ὄρινας
ταῦτα ἕκαστα λέγων, ὅσα δὴ πάθεις ἦδ’ ὅσ’ ἀλήθης.

o sorrowful stranger, truly you troubled the spirit within me
by telling me all these details, how you suffered and wandered.

But he is reluctant to accept what is at the heart of the tale, that part which touches on Odysseus and the announcement of his imminent return to Ithaka (363-64):

ἀλλὰ τὰ γ’ οὐ κατὰ κόσμον ὄτομαι, οὐδέ με πείσεις
εἰπὼν ἀμφ’ Ὀδυσῆϊ.

Yet I think some part is in no true order, and you will not persuade me
in your talk about Odysseus.

Eumaios explains why he cannot give credence to what he has heard (365-71) and he supports his reason with a tale (378-85) similar to that which he told at 122-30 and which echoes, in certain details, the content of the beggar's autobiography.⁸ Yet Eumaios no longer, as before at 89-92 and at 133-38, speaks of the possibility of Odysseus' death. Only his unwillingness to be deceived yet again with respect to the imminent return of his master prompts him to doubt the beggar's account. The irony of this situation is inescapable. Odysseus, home at last and eager to share as far as he may his delight in his return, has met with despair and apparent disbelief from his loyal steward. The master of persuasion is thwarted in his efforts not by one of his peers, but by his swineherd. The hero's own comment at 391-92 reflects his amused surprise at his predicament:

ἦ μάλα τίς τοι θυμὸς ἐνὶ στήθεσσιν ἄπιστος,
οἶόν σ' οὐδ' ὁμόσας περ ἐπήγαγον οὐδέ σε πείθω.

Truly, the mind in you is something very suspicious.
Not even with an oath can I bring you round, nor persuade you.

5. *Odysseus' final offer* (14.390-456)

Odysseus seeks a tunic and a mantle and a passage home (if Odysseus returns)—in return he offers his own life (if he does not).

The bargain that Odysseus now attempts to strike at 391-400 recalls his earlier oath (149-65) in its form and in its apparent directness. Yet it also differs, in that the terms are more emphatic. The beggar asks to be given a mantle and a safe homecoming on the day that Odysseus returns. But should Odysseus not reappear, he will consent to lose his life. Again Homer strikes an ironic note: a safe homecoming is what Odysseus desires most of all; his words, through his disguise, are absolutely sincere.

In his effort to win Eumaios' trust, the resourceful Odysseus returns to a direct approach. Through the energy and confidence of his vow he hopes now to unsettle Eumaios' skepticism. But again the swineherd refuses Odysseus' offer. And his reasons are proper. Eumaios could not accept a wager that might cause him to harm a guest, thereby offending Zeus the guest-god (402-6):

⁸ For comments on this tale, see Doherty 1995:151-52. Thalmann 1992:137 comments that it "suspiciously resembles fiction." If this were the case, Eumaios truly has the measure of his guest.

ξείν', οὕτω γάρ κέν μοι εὐκλείη τ' ἀρετή τε
 εἶη ἐπ' ἀνθρώπους ἅμα τ' αὐτίκα καὶ μετέπειτα,
 ὅς σ' ἐπεὶ ἐς κλισίην ἄγαγον καὶ ξείνια δῶκα,
 αὐτίς δὲ κτείναιμι φίλον τ' ἀπὸ θυμὸν ἐλοίμην·
 πρόφρων κεν δὴ ἔπειτα Δία Κρονίωνα λιτοίμην·

That would be virtuous of me, my friend, and good reputation
 would be mine among men, for present time alike and hereafter,
 if first I led you into my shelter, there entertained you
 as guest, then murdered you and ravished the dear life from you.
 Then cheerfully I could go and pray to Zeus, son of Kronos.

But even though he refuses the wager—through this humorously ironic dismissal—he is influenced by what the beggar has said and by the manner in which he has made his point. Eumaios expresses his renewed hope not in words but through his actions: his sacrifice of the best pig (414-17) and his sequence of offerings (to the immortal gods, 420-24; to the nymphs and Hermes, 434-36; and again, now with a libation, to the gods, 446-47). Odysseus has at last made some progress: Eumaios concedes that his report allows him to hope again. Note the narrator's comments at 423-24:

καὶ ἐπέυχετο πᾶσι θεοῖσι
 νοστῆσαι Ὀδυσῆα πολύφρονα ὄνδε δόμονδε.

and prayed to all the gods
 that Odysseus of the many designs should have his homecoming.

6. *A new approach: a bid for a cloak* (14.457-522)

Odysseus offers a story to illustrate Odysseus' wily character—in return he seeks a warm cloak for the night.

The after—dinner conversation between Eumaios and Odysseus, which brings this episode to a close might appear to be an interlude in the narrative. The urgency and intensity that we detected in the earlier stages of the conversation have evaporated. This unexpected shift in dynamics represents the observable recursive ebb and flow of everyday negotiation (Nichol 1996:ix). Speakers who have met with steady resistance to their proposals may well adjust their goals and begin anew. In this scene Odysseus appears to have put aside his efforts to share his joy in his homecoming and to persuade Eumaios that his master is near at hand; in a

reassessment of his position he directs his energies now to attending to his immediate need, a cloak for the night—for it is windy and wet (457-58). But the sequence as a whole is not without broader significance.

The beggar offers, spontaneously, a story about himself and Odysseus that dates back to the Trojan War. He recalls a night of wind and snow when he, Odysseus, and Menelaos were on duty beneath the walls of Troy. He had carelessly left behind his mantle. He tells Odysseus of his predicament and describes the ready ingenuity of the hero's response, which is so true to character that for a moment, in the course of the telling, it restores Odysseus to the swineherd. When the beggar, toward the close of his tale, boldly asks for a cloak for himself (504-06), a request that he has foreshadowed repeatedly through his Odysseus-tale, Eumaios does not hesitate. His gratitude for his guest's evocation of the hero is repaid with a generous covering against the rain and the wind (518-22). The beggar's proposal for a deal is accepted and fulfilled.

So here at last we see a bargain negotiated from its initiation to its successful conclusion. Each of the earlier proposals has been rejected or modified or, if accepted, accepted only in part. Now at last we see a deal carried through from a proposal agreeable to both parties to a mutually satisfactory outcome: Eumaios allows himself to feel the presence of his master; Odysseus sleeps warm, secure in the knowledge of the loyalty and affection of his swineherd.

Conclusion

Negotiation between individuals may take any number of courses. The path it takes depends on the personalities involved and on the issues under discussion. Homer certainly does not have a single script in mind for a negotiation sequence in the world of epic. If we pause to study the negotiation between Priam and Achilles in *Iliad* 24.468-620, we observe that Priam uses a variety of preparatory strategies (in accordance with Hermes' instructions) to prepare his way for his bid (his request that Achilles ransom his son).⁹ Here in *Odyssey* 14 we have a plausible version

⁹ The strategies are *supplication* (477-79); *request for compassion* (485-506); *lamentation* (507-14); *consolation* (515-51); *bid* (ransom request) (552-58); *threatening response* (559-70); *acceptance* (592-95); and *consolation* (596-620). Note that the action-sequence *exchange* (571-90) actually precedes *acceptance* in this case—an interesting insight into Achilles' temperament and his mood. Any ransom request is an attempt to bargain: see also *Il.* 1.17-21. For a discussion of the way in which this speech-act, the bid,

of another style of negotiation, more intense by virtue of its reliance on a single strategy. Each of these six bids represents an attempt to negotiate an exchange; each participant seeks to formulate, or reformulate, a proposal that will be acceptable to the other.

The repetition of the speech-act, the bid, in this narrative segment is an example of Homer's occasional practice of repeating scenes, or elements of scenes, *seriatim*.¹⁰ We see such repetition, for example, in the *Iliad*: in Agamemnon's tour of inspection (*Iliad* 4.223-421), in the sequence of night-time summonses that the king initiates (*Iliad* 10.17-179), or in the funeral games described at *Iliad* 23.257-897. The repeated dining scenes 'at Odysseus 1.125-48 are a modest example of the same phenomenon (Scott 1971). What is repeated in such scenes is the format of the whole, its underlying structure; what is repeated word for word are the physical action or actions that may be part of that event.¹¹ In the Eumaios-scene we have noted the repetition of the speech-act, the bid. This scene, however, is unlike the scenes that I have noted above, in that there is no physical action that overtly signals structural repetition for the benefit of the audience. But there are two interconnected elements that surface and resurface in the course of the conversation: *request* and *offer*. Although verbal repetition is not as marked here as it might be in action sequences, the poet's repeated recourse to these two elements causes us to consider his purpose.

I suggest that it is useful to give some thought to serial repetition, since it differs in significant respects from the kind of occasional repetition, across the text as a whole, of word, phrase, sentence, and type-scene, that has been studied extensively since the time of Milman Parry.¹² And we

marks out the course of the *Iliad*, see Murnaghan 1997.

¹⁰ I distinguish this kind of repetition from the repetition of messages, a phenomenon described and discussed in Kakridis 1971:ch. 4, "Double Repetitions in Homer."

¹¹ At *Iliad* 4.223-421, for example, the repeated elements are *approach* (4.251, 273, 292-93, 364-65) and Agamemnon's *emotion*, delight or anger, which colors his remarks to each man (255, 283, 311, 336, 368).

¹² Repetition at the level of formula has been a topic in Homeric studies since the work of Milman Parry was first published (see his collected papers, Parry 1971). For recent discussion of the force of repetition at the formulaic level and at the level of typical scene, see Foley 1991. Doherty (1995:Appendix) addresses the topic of formal redundancy, but none of the categories that she proposes at the level of narration (Appendix, B) include repetition of this kind. On *serial* repetition at this level of production I mention two works, one minor, the other major. Scott (1971) draws our attention to this phenomenon and seeks to observe its force. On the other hand, Fenik

might consider first how serial repetition functions in the poetics of narrative. Being relatively easy (and on occasions automatic), repetition offers a ready and almost effortless solution to the challenges of composition in performance. Repetition—with or without variation, of speech acts as well as of typical scenes—resolves for the poet the problem of accessing ideas and finding the words to express them: it facilitates fluency and, of course, it sustains speech in a situation in which silence is to be avoided. This is a practical function that serves the poet in his capacity as performer.

But serial repetition serves the poet as storyteller, too. In the example we find at *Odyssey* 1.125-48, repetition is used to convey a contrast between the behavior of a civilized young man who knows how to behave in company and who is putting his understanding of etiquette into practice for the first time and that of the suitors, who have ceased to care about good manners (Scott 1971 :548). The scene points up effectively the selfishness of the suitors and the inexperience, but good intentions, of Athena's young host. Likewise, in the three Iliadic cases noted above, sustained repetition, even as it carries the narrative forward, serves as a convenient and controlled means of characterization (again, by means of contrast). The repeated scenes of *Iliad* 4 allow us to see not only some relevant aspects of Agamemnon's character—most conspicuously, his lack of interpersonal skills (cf. 4.264, 339, 370-400)—but also the different character of each of the men whom he encounters (Kirk 1985:*ad loc.*). The sequence of *Iliad* 10.17-179 does the same. The various exchanges illuminate certain traits in each of the principal actors: Menelaos, Nestor, Diomedes, Odysseus, and, of course, Agamemnon (Hainsworth 1993:*ad loc.*). And in *Iliad* 23 the funeral games serve as a review of the cast of players, in that the poet allows us to see each of the Achaian heroes in action for one last time (Richardson 1993:*ad loc.*; Willcock 1973:1-11).

In *Odyssey* 14, however, we have an episode that, I claim, is unique. Note that in this scene there is no change of personnel: the same two people are the speakers throughout. And yet, through its balance of uniformity of

(1968) shows that in those very scenes where we might expect serial repetition, it does not occur. Fenik demonstrates that despite *apparent* repetition within scenes of combat, Homer does not repeat the same combat pattern *seriatim* (in the way that he repeats the speech-act of *bid* in the Eumaios-Odysseus scene). For example, in the *aristeia* of Agamemnon, the king kills two pairs of brothers in succession (*Il.*11.101-48), yet there is no structural repetition.

At the same time, however, some work has been done in the field of linguistics on this very topic: see, for example, the special issue of *Text* 7.3 (1987); Tannen 1987; and Tannen 1989:chapter 3, "Repetition in Conversation."

structure against notable differences in detail, the scene as a whole conveys important information about character and motivation—and about the way in which two “strangers” establish a bond of common interest. From Eumaios’ perspective, the task is to build a completely new relationship;¹³ for Odysseus, the task is to test, and to re-create, a relationship that existed in the past. Through the play of stability against variation, in repeated reference to a constant, our knowledge of how bargains are negotiated, and in the variation among the six expressions of the bid itself, the poet is able to refer us to the enduring qualities of his hero: his resourcefulness, his tenacity, and his interest in gain (after all, Odysseus will not give up information without obtaining something in return). These indeed are the qualities that the poet has identified as typically Odyssean in the vocabulary he uses throughout the epic (πολυμήχανος [“inventive”], πολύμητις [“of many counsels”], πολύτλας [“much-enduring”]), and κερδαλέος [“with an eye to gain”]). As for Eumaios, it is significant that the poet gives him on occasion a proactive role. This suggests that Eumaios is alive to what Odysseus is doing. The very fact that he can reject Odysseus’ proposals or seek a revision or, indeed, make a similar move in discourse suggests to us that he is no unthinking, acquiescent servant but a man with a lively mind. His response to each of the beggar’s proposals, in its use of repetition, marks the swineherd as an attentive and critical listener. Note Eumaios’ responses to the beggar’s terms (that Odysseus will return: 167, 171-72, 365-66, 384, 423-24 [in the narrator’s voice], and 515; the request for a tunic and cloak: 510, 516). He may not be as κερδαλέος (“shrewd”) as his master, but he is no fool (Ahl and Roisman 1996: 169). Hence the intensity of the persuasive exercise.

As I have noted, the poet uses thematic repetition (Odysseus’ imminent return; the “reward” of a cloak and a tunic) to draw our attention to structural repetitions of this kind. Otherwise, he leaves it to us, his audience, to detect these recurrent patterns unaided and to make something of them. I suggest that he expects us to find some amusement in observing his game—in noting the simplicity of a strategy that can nevertheless offer so much information. And this reticence on his part in turn heightens our pleasure in the tale, which derives not only from an appreciation of the strategy employed but also from the rhythm of the exchange, as each bid is offered and its terms negotiated. Rhythm of this kind, at this level of

¹³ Other after-dinner conversations in the Homeric epics are conversations between acknowledged peers. Each party knows the other, if not personally, then at least through family connection. What is important is that both parties share the same attitudes and have the same worldview.

production, is, I argue, a source of aesthetic delight akin to the delight we find in repetition of words and phrases (Tannen 1987:575-76).

At this point I wish to introduce Tannen's notion of the "poetics of talk" (1987:574-75). She uses this evocative phrase to make the point that all language is poetic in some degree. In her investigations of the relationship between literary discourse and everyday talk, she observes that there are linguistic patterns common to both genres. These are of two kinds: sound patterns (which we need not pursue here) and sense patterns—patterns of repetition, such as the repeated bids under discussion, imagery and detail, dialogue, and figures of thought or tropes that operate on meaning (574-75). She demonstrates that repetition, which is "artfully developed and intensified" in literary discourse, is "spontaneous, pervasive, and often relatively automatic" in everyday talk (580-81). She discusses the purposes of repetition under four headings (production, comprehension, connection, and interaction) and proposes that it is possible to link the "surface patterns of talk" with the goals of the participants and to measure their degree of contact—their mutual understanding of how the conversation is developing (581). Her conclusion is that repetition, in creating a sense of coherence, serves the high-level function of establishing rapport, of communicating involvement and a willingness to interact within the same "world of discourse" (585).

The particular instance of repetition under examination in this paper is in all these respects paradigmatic. We should remember, however, that although repetition in actual conversation creates rapport between participants, in representations of conversation it can only indicate rapport between the characters involved. The negotiation between Odysseus and Eumaios, wherein several bargain-proposals are put forward and reworked, indicates a shared understanding of the direction that this particular conversation is taking—and lays the foundation for the bond between the two men (cf. Tannen 1989:59-71). Doherty (1995:152) attributes their mutual understanding to the parallels between the stories each man tells the other; I claim, following Tannen, that the bond develops *throughout* the conversation (not simply with the life story that each man tells) and that Homer's choice of repeated structures for the presentation of their conversation and his use of repeated themes reveal this shared understanding. Eumaios' repetition of the beggar's speech-act and his echoing of the beggar's terms, as well as Odysseus' repeated bids and his adoption of Eumaios' theme, the gift of a tunic and cloak—all mark this readiness in both parties to cooperate in conversation. What we have here is a meeting of minds. For Homer's audience, too, repetition creates rapport, in the terms that Tannen has set out. It creates rapport between them and

the poet, who performs in their presence. It is this rapport that maintains listeners' sympathy for and interest in the tale. For the duration of the song they are prepared to commit themselves to the "world of discourse" that the singer has evoked.

I suggest that this brief study of the form and the presentation of this particular negotiation throws further light on the interaction between Odysseus and Eumaios. It supplements Ahl and Roisman's discussion of and insistence on Odysseus' eagerness for recognition and, more importantly, it reflects on the competence of his swineherd, who comes to realize that *this* beggar does indeed have something to tell him about his long-awaited master. This, however, has not been the sole purpose of the present case study. Our examination of the structure of the encounter has led us to reflect on yet another aspect of the role that repetition plays in the composition of the epic.

This controlled and elegantly simple construction, the repeated speech-act, endows the scene with a remarkable—indeed, an extraordinary—intensity. As the audience follows the serial reworkings of the proposal, their interest is caught and their attention is held. Given that the structural framework of the passage is identical from one conversational move to the next, the poet frees his listeners to ponder on the possible reasons for repetition and, furthermore, to concentrate on what is new in each segment—that is, the details of the revised transactions between his two speakers. It is the nature of this interaction that is the principal focus of our attention. This long and extraordinary conversation gives us the impression of a conversation rendered from life; and yet, as Tannen would argue, it offers us more. It is designed also, as I have shown, to engage, to delight, and indeed to tease. Such, in short, is the special role of serial repetition in the "poetics of talk."

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