Beginning to Think about Narrative in Poetry

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My title is frankly presumptuous. To imply that reflection on narrative in poetry begins here and now, with this essay, is to dismiss out of hand a huge body of precedent. Narrative theorists have been thinking deeply about poetic narratives since ancient times. Arguably, there would be no tradition of systematic reflection on narrative at all, at least not in the West, without the Homeric poems, which, from Plato on down to Genette and Sternberg and beyond, have continuously served as touchstones of narrative theory. Many important theoretical developments have hinged on analyses of poetic narratives; for instance, it would be hard to imagine Bakhtin finding his way to a theory of discourse in the novel without the example of Pushkin's *Onegin.* Nevertheless, presumptuous though it may be, my title does draw attention to a blind spot in contemporary narrative theory. We need to begin thinking about narrative in poetry—or perhaps to *resume* thinking about it—because we have not been doing so very much lately, and because, whenever we *have* done so, we have rarely thought about what differentiates narrative in poetry from narrative in other genres or media, namely its *poetry* component.

Contemporary narrative theory is almost silent about poetry. In many classic contemporary monographs on narrative theory, in specialist journals such as the one you are now reading, at scholarly meetings such as the annual conference of the International Society for the Study of Narrative, poetry is conspicuous by its near-absence. Even the indispensable poems, the ones that narrative theory seems unable to do without, tend to be treated as de facto prose fictions; the poetry drops out of the

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equation. As far as narrative theory is concerned, Homer has been made an "honorary novelist" (Kinney 3).[1] Pushkin must have been one too, as far as Bakhtin was concerned, since otherwise he would have had to justify treating *Onegin* as an exemplary novel. Its poetry, we have to assume, must have been effectively invisible to him; he certainly has nothing to say about it.

Contemporary narrative theory's blind spot with respect to poetry is partly to be explained in institutional terms, as an artifact of specialization. Some scholars specialize in narrative; others specialize in poetry; few specialize in both. However, far from being distinct, the two categories actually cut across each other: many poems are narratives, after all, and many narratives are poems. Moreover, to say that "many poems are narratives" drastically understates the case; in fact, *most* poems before the nineteenth century, and many since then, have been narrative poems. The range of narrative poetry is enormous; it includes the entire epic tradition, primary and secondary, oral and written, as well as medieval and early-modern verse romances, folk ballads and their literary adaptations, narrative verse autobiographies such as Wordsworth's *The Prelude*, and novels-in-verse from *Eugene Onegin* through Les Murray's *Fredy Neptune* and Anne Carson's *Autobiography of Red*. The category also includes many lyric sequences or cycles, including many sonnet sequences, as well as the many free-standing, non-sequence lyric poems that evoke or imply narrative situations, incorporate narrative elements, or display some degree of "residual narrativity" (Fludernik).[2] One might go even further, and argue that, if oral literature is taken into account, then the majority of the world's *literary* narratives are poetic narratives.[3] In this perspective, contemporary narrative theory's relative neglect of poetry appears not so much an oversight as a scandal.

LYRICALITY, POETICITY

There are a number of honorable exceptions to the general rule of narrative theory's blindness to poetry. Peter Hühn, for instance, has mounted an entire research program, in collaboration with his colleagues at Hamburg, on the narrative dimension of lyric poetry (Hühn, "Plotting" and "Transgeneric"; Hühn and Kiefer). Moreover, there have been many valuable individual analyses of particular poems from the perspective of some version or other of narrative theory, for example, James Phelan's recent analysis of Robert Frost's "Home Burial" in the light of rhetorical narratology (199–215).[4] Nevertheless, even in these cases it requires only a little scrutiny to ascertain that the object of analysis is not after all the relationship between narrative and *poetry* but the one between narrative and *lyric*—which is *not* the same thing.

Phelan is characteristically explicit on this score. He is interested, he tells us, in various hybrids of narrative and lyric, and in various intersections of narrativity and lyricality. Lyricality he defines as "somebody telling somebody . . . on some occasion for some purpose that something *is*" (as opposed to "that something *happened,*" which would qualify as narrativity); or alternatively as "somebody telling somebody . . . on some occasion for some purpose what he or she *thought* about something" (22;

my emphases). Obviously, lyric in this sense is not restricted to poetry. Lyric *can* occur in poetry, of course, but, as Phelan argues, it can just as readily occur in prose fictions such as Hemingway's "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place" or Sandra Cisneros "Woman Hollering Creek," sometimes in combination with narrative, sometimes not.

Hühn, too, focuses on narrative's interaction with lyric, rather than with poetry as such, though he does not share Phelan's interest in prose lyric or in hybrid forms. He approaches lyric not from the rhetorical perspective of narrative progression, as Phelan does, but rather from the perspective of *plot* and *eventfulness*; nevertheless, his sense of lyricality seems generally compatible with Phelan's. Lyric plots typically involve mental or psychological phenomena or incidents ("Plotting" 149; "Transgeneric" 146), and lyric events are psychological, or in some cases discursive, in the sense of occurring at the level not of the story but of the lyric speaker's discourse ("Plotting" 162–68; "Transgeneric" 151–52). This approach seems to capture in its own way both Phelan's lyrical teller ("somebody telling something") and his lyrical told ("that something *is*"; "what he or she *thought*"); no more than Phelan's approach, however, does it restrict lyric to poetry.

In neither case, then, is poetry as such on the analyst's agenda. Indeed, in the case of Phelan's analysis of "Home Burial," the poem might as well have been written in prose, since Phelan nowhere acknowledges the regular meter, the lineation, or the other, less conventional features of spacing that differentiate Frost's poem from prose fiction. Purged of poetry, "Home Burial" has in effect been made over into an honorary short-story. In Hühn's analysis, the poetry of poetic narrative is taken more fully into account, but it has been demoted to auxiliary status. Hühn reflects the attitude of most narrative theorists of poetry when he writes that "the materiality and the formal structure of the poetic text (sounds, rhythm, prosody, syntax, typography, etc.) may be exploited for the additional modeling of narrative sequences, reinforcing, modifying, or counteracting the semantic plot-development" ("Transgeneric" 153). This is a valuable formulation, and later on in this paper I hope to corroborate what Hühn says here about formal poetic structure "reinforcing, modifying, or counteracting" plot. But for now I want to call attention to Hühn's priorities: poetic structure *may be* exploited, he writes; it yields *additional* modeling. Poetic form, it appears, is *optional* and *supplementary*; it *enhances* narrative structure in poetry, but evidently is not *intrinsic* to it.

Explicit in Phelan's approach and implicit in Hühn's, the distinction between poetry and lyric is not one that contemporary poetry scholarship generally recognizes. On the contrary, nearly everyone else who has written recently on topics in poetry seems to take it for granted that lyric and poetry are identical, and a few have even said so explicitly (e.g., Wolf 23). But this seems to me to be manifestly incorrect: lyric is *not* identical with poetry. Lyric can be cast in prose form, as Phelan posits and as writers in the modernist tradition have richly demonstrated; conversely, not all poetry is *lyric* poetry. Indeed, before the nineteenth century, the majority of poetry was arguably not lyric, but narrative or discursive (essayistic, argumentative, didactic, ars-poetic, what-have-you). The conflation of poetry with lyric is a relatively recent development, dating from no earlier than the nineteenth century, when all poetic genres (and prose genres as well) underwent what the literary historian

Alastair Fowler terms a "lyric transformation" (250–661).[5] Before then, lyric was a special case—only one option among many, and not even the likeliest option. Since then, lyric has become the *default mode* for poetry; but that does not mean that *all* poems are lyrics, even now, and it certainly doesn't mean that poetry of earlier periods was predominantly lyric; manifestly, it was not.

To resist slipping into the default mode, we need to be able to distinguish poetry from lyric, and to disentangle lyricality—whether Phelan's or Hühn's versions, or anyone else's—from (for want of a better term) *poeticity*. But this, in turn, seems to call for a theory, or at least a working hypothesis, about what makes poetry *poetry*. If it is manifestly not lyricality that makes poetry poetry, neither is it *figurativity* or *metaphoricity,* another of poetry's supposed *differentia specifica*. The evidence of several generations of linguistic and cognitive research has confirmed metaphoricity to be constitutive of language and thought in general, and not at all the preserve of poetry in particular. So, if not lyricality or metaphoricity, then what *is* it that makes poetry poetry? What defines poeticity, and more to the point, how does poeticity interact with narrativity in poetic narratives?

SEGMENTIVITY AND COUNTERMEASUREMENT

Let me introduce here a working definition of poetry that seems to me not only compelling in its own right, but also highly applicable to issues of narrative in poetry. It was proposed over a decade ago by the poet and critic Rachel Blau DuPlessis, but as far I know remains undiscovered by academic poetry scholarship—a situation that I would like to rectify right now.[6]

If *narrativity* is the term for the defining feature of narrative, and *performativity* for the defining feature of performance—and there are, of course, volumes of scholarship devoted to clarifying both these concepts—then what is the equivalent term in the case of poetry? DuPlessis proposes *segmentivity* ("Manifests," 51). Poetry is that form of discourse that depends crucially on segmentation, on *spacing*, in its production of meaning. Poetry, she writes, involves "the creation of meaningful sequence by the negotiation of gap (line break, stanza break, page space)"; conversely, then, segmentivity, "the ability to articulate and make meaning by selecting, deploying, and combining segments," is "the underlying characteristic of poetry as a genre." Needless to say, both narrative and performance also involve "the negotiation of gap"; indeed, narrative's intrinsic "gappiness" must figure prominently in any account of narrative in poetry, as I shall try to indicate in the next section. But in narrative and performance segmentivity is subordinated to other features—narrativity and performativity, respectively—while in poetry segmentivity seems "both more systematic and more constitutive." In other words, segmentivity is the *dominant* of poetry, in something like Jakobson's sense, just as narrativity is the dominant of narrative, and performativity of performance.[7]

Poetry, according to DuPlessis, "is the kind of writing that is articulated in sequenced, gapped lines and whose meanings are created by occurring in bounded units . . . operating in relation to . . . pause or silence." "These bounded units," she

goes on, "can be made in varying sizes and with a varying semantic goal." She specifies the *word* as one such "bounded unit," as in modernist and avant-garde poetry where "words (or even just letters) sometimes hang alone in an open space." More typical, of course, is the unit of the *line* which, as the long history of poetry analysis amply documents, can be variously counterpointed with the sentence, that is, *enjambed*: "Sentence or statement may be draped, or shaped, across a number of lines." At every level, however, the crucial factor in poetry's construction of meaning is *spacing:*

> Line terminations may be rounded off by rhyme, or by specific punctuation marks, but they are basically defined by *white space*. . . . These segmented units can be organized into the larger page-shapes of fixed stanza, or into other page-space thought units with their termini of various kinds. . . . All the meanings poetry makes are constructed by segmented units of a variety of sizes. The specific force of any individual poem occurs in the intricate interplay among the "scales" (of size or kind of unit) or comes in "chords" of these multiple possibilities for creating segments. ("Manifests" 51)

Obvious counter-examples to DuPlessis's bold generalizations spring to mind, but they can be readily accommodated, I think. Prose poetry is one such potential counter-example. Prose, we might say, constitutes the "zero degree" of segmentivity—spacing that is by design neutral and *in*significant (or rather, that signifies nothing beyond "prosaicness"). Prose poetry, however, does not reflect "zero degree" segmentivity; rather, its prose formatting is *conspicuous*, foregrounded against the background expectation of verse lineation: prose where there *ought to be* verse. Prose poetry *semanticizes* prose spacing, making it *signify*, if only as difference and deviation from a norm. A more challenging counter-example is oral poetry. Surely it is at least somewhat paradoxical, if not downright incoherent, to make spacing a criterion for the definition of forms of poetry that have no spatial dimension and exist only as performances, or in memory. "There are really no lines" in oral poetry, as Peter Seitel pointedly reminds us (*vii*), which does not, however, prevent him from discovering recurrent "stanzas" in unrhymed East African epic ballads. In other words, oral poetry too has its periodicities and gaps, its segmentivity, even if here "spacing" is only metaphorical, and the equivalent of "white space" is pause, silence, or the beginning or end of a recurrent pattern.

DuPlessis's definition of poetry, while richly suggestive, is also highly abstract and, at less than 700 words, so brief and elliptical that it reads like a series of gnomic aphorisms. It clearly requires some unpacking and glossing. By a happy coincidence, the same year in which DuPlessis first presented her definition, 1995, also saw the publication of an essay similar in spirit but much more fully developed, by John Shoptaw. Though conceived entirely independently of each other, so far as I know, the two essays dovetail so snugly that I propose to clarify and supplement DuPlessis's by reading it alongside Shoptaw's.

Shoptaw's immediate purpose is to redefine the traditional notion of poetic measure in such a way as to accommodate the formally various unmetered poetry of

such contemporaries as John Ashbery and Charles Bernstein. Provocatively, Shoptaw defines a poem's measure as "its smallest unit of resistance to meaning" (212). This sounds, on first hearing, merely perverse; shouldn't measure be defined the other way around, as the smallest unit of *construction* of meaning—a poem's basic building-blocks? On further reflection, however, it seems that Shoptaw has got this right, after all. It is where meaning-making is interrupted or *stalls out*, where the text breaks off and a gap (even if only an infinitesimal one) opens up, that the reader's meaning-making apparatus must *gear up* to bridge the gap and heal the breech. A gap is a provocation to meaning-making; we intervene to make meaning where ready-made meaning fails. Actually, there is nothing very novel in this account; we are already familiar with this principle from the poetics of graphic novels (McCloud), where it is the *gutter* between the panels that mobilizes meaning-making, and from the poetics of cinema, where the same thing happens at the *cut*. For that matter, we know it from narratology, which acknowledges narrative gaps and gap-filling to be one of the engines driving narrative progression.

  If Shoptaw is proposing, in effect, to treat the gaps that open up between a poem's units of measure as the equivalent of gutters in comics or edits in movies, then he is clearly talking about something akin to DuPlessis's notion of segmentivity. It is poetry's segmentivity, its *spacing*, that serves, according to this account, as the main engine of poetic meaning-making. Shoptaw goes on, still very much in the spirit of DuPlessis's working definition, to specify the scales or levels of measure that are possible in poetry. Poetry can be *word-measured*, as it is, for instance, in certain one-word-per-line poems by modernists such as e.e. cummings or William Carlos William (225–27); for that matter, it can even be measured *below* the word-level, at the scale of letters and punctuation-marks, though this is a rarity, largely restricted to avant-garde experiments (221–24). Poetry can be measured at the scale of the *phrase*, as it is, for instance, in Emily Dickinson's poetry, where the idiosyncratic use of dashes emphasizes phrase-units (227–32). Naturally it can be measured at the scale of the *line*, the normal scale of measure for most lyric poetry (232–39). By contrast, it is the *sentence* that is the normal scale of measure for *prose*, though it can also be used in poetry, for instance in the Language poets' practice of what they called the "New Sentence" (239–51). Finally, Shoptaw identifies the *section* as a level of measure, for instance in sonnet sequences, but also in variegated modern poems such as *The Waste Land* (251–55).

  Since he is preoccupied mainly with the problem of measure in contemporary nontraditional poetry, Shoptaw omits a couple of intervening levels of measure that belong to the repertoire of traditional metrical poetry, but that we might want to interpolate into his system in the interests of completeness. Parallel to the level of the section, for instance, it might be desirable to interpolate that of the *stanza*, such as the Spenserian stanza of *The Faerie Queene*, the highly adaptable *ottava rima* of Ariosto, Byron, and Kenneth Koch, among others (see Addison), and the fourteen-line *Onegin* stanza of Pushkin. Similarly, between the level of the word and that of the phrase, or cutting across them, we might introduce a level of measure corresponding to the traditional *metrical foot*.

DuPlessis, as we have seen, posits "intricate interplay" among segmented units of different kinds and scales. In a similar vein, Shoptaw observes that poetry is not only measured, but is typically *countermeasured*: in many, perhaps most instances, measure at one level or scale is played off against measure at another level or scale. Dickinson's poetry, for instance, may be predominantly phrase-measured, but her phrases are also counterpointed or countermeasured at the level of line and stanza. In Milton's heavily enjambed blank verse, sentence is countermeasured against line. All up and down the scale of levels, what Shoptaw (following Bernstein) calls the "music of construction" arises from the countermeasuring of one kind of segment against another.

Shoptaw's approach usefully supplements and amplifies DuPlessis's, but more than that, it gives us tools for beginning to think about narrative in poetry. If poetry is measured and countermeasured, so, too, is narrative. Though segmentivity is not *dominant* in narrative, by definition, nevertheless narrative is certainly segmented in various ways, at various levels and scales. On the level of story, the "flow" of events is segmented into sequences of various scales—"moves," sub-plots, episodes—and ultimately into discrete events. On the level of discourse, narration is segmented into multiple, shifting voices—quoted, paraphrased, and ventriloquised, juxtaposed on the same plane or inset one within the other—while "point of view" is segmented by constant micro-shifts of focalization. Time in narrative is segmented; so is space; so is consciousness. Gaps abound, of all kind, on all levels. In poetic narratives, narrative's own segmentation interacts with the segmentation "indigenous" to poetry to produce complex interplays among segments of different scales and kinds— "chords," as DuPlessis calls them. So, for instance, the various narrative gaps in Frost's "Home Burial" which drive the engine of its narrative progression, as Phelan has so persuasively shown, are played off against the poem's intricately countermeasured form of meter, sentence, line, and section, sounding a rich "chord" that would be inaudible if the narrative were recast as plain prose.

I do not want to give the impression that the counterpoint of narrative units and poetic segmentation has gone unnoticed up until now in the scholarship on poetic narrative; nothing could be further from the truth. Kinney, for instance, notes effects of counterpoint between poetic form and unfolding narrative throughout her corpus of English poetic narratives (Chaucer, Spenser, Milton, Eliot), as does Levy in her corpus of Chinese narrative poetry. Hühn's close narratological analyses of lyric poems from the English tradition very often take such effects of counterpoint into account, for instance in the case of Browning's "The Bishop Orders His Tomb at Saint Praxed's Church," Hardy's "The Voice," and Larkin's "I Remember, I Remember" (Hühn and Kiefer 125–37, 147–55, 201–212). Very often, but not always; there are other cases that seem just as strongly counterpointed (for instance, Shakespeare's Sonnet 107 or Keats's "Ode on Melancholy") where Hühn seems to overlook the countermeasurement of poetic and narrative units (Hühn and Kiefer 23–33, 111–123).[8] In other words, Hühn faithfully implements in practice his theoretical principle that poetic segmentation may *optionally* supplement––corroborate or counterpoint—the narrative structure of lyric poems; whereas I want to argue, in the

light of DuPlessis' hypothesis of poetry as segmentivity and Shoptaw's analysis of countermeasurement, that segmentation *must always* contribute meaningfully (for better or worse) to the structure of poetic narrative.

WAR MUSIC

To illustrate the application of segmentivity and countermeasurement to narrative in poetry, it would be helpful to consider several alternative treatments of the "same" narrative material. Nothing is handier, for this purpose, than multiple translations of the same original text, and no tradition of verse translation in English is richer or more various than the series of translations of the Homeric poems that extends from the seventeenth century down to the present. In fact, so rich and various is this tradition that it is hard to know how to make a selection from it, so I'll take the shortcut of reusing a selection already made by John Frow over twenty years ago, for purposes different from mine. Conveniently, Frow (172–78) juxtaposed four different translations of the same passage from *The Iliad*; I have reproduced them in my appendix.[9] The translators are George Chapman, from the early seventeenth century; Alexander Pope, from the early eighteenth; and two mid-twentieth-century translators, the academic classicist Richard Lattimore and the maverick Christopher Logue (who calls his version an "account" of *The Iliad* rather than a translation). I am not concerned here with evaluating the faithfulness or adequacy of the translations relative to the original (nor would I be capable of doing so), but only to distinguish the variations in handling a narrative content presumably given in advance.

The passage in question, from Book XVI, is in certain respects a microcosm of *The Iliad* as a whole (see Logue, *War Music viii*). A moment of typical mayhem, it involves two parallel narrative sequences, transpiring on different ontological planes. On the human plane, the passage unfolds in the thick of battle, with the Trojan hero Sarpedon lying dead underfoot while the fighting swirls around his corpse and the Greek Patroclus, outfitted in his friend Achilles's armor, continues his murderous rampage. Meanwhile, on the plane of the divine, Zeus is debating with himself whether to allow Patroclus to carry on a while longer and amass yet more glory, or to let Hector cut him down right now. In this distribution of the action between parallel planes, opportunities abound for shifts in focalization. The battlefield action could be focalized through one or more of the warriors, while the events on the divine plane, since they are exclusively *mental*, interior to Zeus, are likely to be internally focalized with the god as focalizer (see DeJong 73). Alternatively, the battle could be seen not from inside but from outside and above, from the gods'-eye-view rather than the soldiers', so, while a shift of focalization between one plane and the other is possible, it is be no means inevitable. Other possibilities are also available; for instance, DeJong (57–58) reads the opening lines (in Chapman's version: "a man must have an excellent wit/That could but know him"; in Lattimore's: "No longer/could a man, even a knowing one, have made [him] out") as focalized through an "anonymous focalizer," manifesting what Herman would call "hypothetical focalization." In any

case, shifts in focalization can cut across event sequences and even ontological planes, depending upon the translators' choices. This is what I mean by counter measuring at the level of narrative.

Such narrative countermeasuring in turn cuts across, and is cross-cut by, the poetic segmentation of the text, its organization into words, metrical feet, phrases, lines, sentences, rhyming units, and/or sections. Since there is no single inevitable or universally accepted equivalent of epic hexameter in English versification, each of these translators must decide for himself, in the light of his own period's poetics, what formal equivalent seems most appropriate. Consequently, with respect to poetic segmentation, each of these passages is measured and countermeasured quite differently. Chapman, for instance, uses a long, seven-stress line with end rhymes. His poetry appears to be line-measured, and countermeasured at the sentence-level, in this respect anticipating Milton's form of countermeasuring (except that Milton suppresses the end-rhyme, of course). However, this description doesn't do full justice to the complexity of Chapman's form, since his seven-stress line ("fourteeners") actually tends to break after the fourth stress, creating in many lines a pair of sub-lines of four and three stresses respectively. This happens, in fact, in no fewer than half of the lines of this sixteen-line passage, including the second and fourth lines below:

> a man must have an excellent wit
> That could but know him; and might fail—so from his utmost head
> Even to the low plants of his feet his forme was altered.
> All thrusting near it every way, as thick as flies in spring

By contrast, Pope's version, written in heroic couplets, is strongly end-stopped as well as end-rhymed, and measured at both the level of line and the level of the closed couplet:

> Now great *Sarpedon*, on the sandy Shore,
> His heav'nly Form defac'd with Dust and Gore,
> And stuck with Darts by warring Heroes shed;
> Lies undistinguish'd from the vulgar dead.

Lattimore, the mid-twentieth-century academic translator, uses an unrhymed, irregular six-stress line, a sort of pseudo-hexameter, in distant imitation of the Greek original. Like Chapman's, Lattimore's long-lined version is counter-measured at the line and sentence levels, with the added complication that Lattimore tries to preserve some of the Homeric formulae or epithets, as in *godlike Sarpedon; glorious Hector; Achilleus, the son of Peleus; bronze-helmed Hector* and so on. This introduces an element of phrase-measure that counterpoints the predominant line- and sentence-measure of Lattimore's verse. Finally, Logue, an outlier in this respect as in many others, uses an irregular free-verse line countermeasured against conspicuous section divisions signaled by ad hoc spacing and even changes of font from roman to italic and back again.

Narrative segmentation and poetic segmentation interact differently in each of these versions. One detail is particularly revealing in this regard: the "epic simile" that is folded into this micro-episode, and that, like many of the *Iliad*'s similes (see, e.g.*,* Bassett 166–69), opens a window onto a fragment of a pastoral or natural world apparently far removed from the battlefield. In the passage from Book XVI, the soldiers swarm around the unfortunate Sarpedon's corpse as flies do around a pail of sheep's milk at milking time. The point of view inherent in this simile is potentially ambiguous. Generally, Homeric similes belong to the extra-diegetic level on which the poem's narrator communicates with the narratee, above the heads of the characters, but sometimes, as DeJong observes (126), similes can be "assimilated" to characters' experience of events; in other words, they can be *metonymically* motivated at the diegetic level, as so many metaphors are throughout world literature (see Genette). Though DeJong does not include this "flies around the pail" simile in her inventory of "assimilated similes" (127–28), it nevertheless seems a plausible candidate. It could be read as the sort of comparison that might occur to someone on a battlefield, surrounded by carrion (including the corpse of Sarpedon), and no doubt by flies, too; in other words, it could be metonymically motivated relative to the battlefield frame. On the other hand, this simile might just as appropriately reflect a remote or even sadistic god's-eye-view of the battle. "As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods, / They kill us for their sport," says Gloucester in *King Lear* (IV.i. 37–38), and the Homeric poem's English translators (at least the ones who come later than Chapman, Shakespeare's contemporary) might be assumed to have that Shakespearean line, and the perspective it reflects, in mind, however subliminally.

Pope, in this passage, seems the most anxious of all these translators to segregate the divine plane from the human one. He decisively dissociates the "flies around the pail" simile from Jove, isolating the flies on the battlefield side of the ontological divide, while placing Jove and his focalization—literally his *Eyes*—in a separate couplet, distanced from the flies not only by a full stop but also by an indent signaling a fresh verse-paragraph:

> Thick, as beneath some Shepherd's thatch'd Abode,
> The Pails high-foaming with a milky Flood,
> The buzzing Flies, a persevering Train,
> Incessant swarm, and chas'd, return again.
>   *Jove* view'd the Combate with stern Survey,
> And Eyes that flash'd intolerable Day.

By contrast Chapman leaves the "flies" simile ambiguously poised between the battlefield-internal perspective and the god's-eye-view. The flies' *buzze* and Jove's *eye* literally appear on the same line, albeit in different sentences and separated by one of those caesuras that typically break up Chapman's seven-stress line after the fourth stress:

>   as thick as flies in spring
> That in a sheep-cote (when new milke assembles them) make wing

> And buzze about the top-full pailes. Nor ever was the eye
> Of Jove averted from the fight

Lattimore goes even further, like Chapman bringing the "flies" simile and Zeus together on the same plane and in the same line, separating them by a rather attenuated caesura, even weaker than Chapman's:

> So they swarmed over the dead man, nor did Zeus ever
> turn the glaring of his eyes from the strong encounter.

So if the focalization inherent in the simile seems ambiguous between the battlefield and the god in Chapman, the ambiguity tends to be resolved in Zeus's favor in Lattimore, as reflected by the latter's syntactical and formal assimilation of the simile to the god's-eye-view.

Finally, Logue takes this passage in a completely different direction, imposing a different segmentation, signaled by the visual apparatus of spacing—the "gutter" that he introduces between the third and fourth lines of his version of this passage—and a change of font to italic. Logue explicitly separates out a third plane, neither that of the battling humans nor that of the divine observer and judge, but precisely that of the metapoetic communication between narrator and narratee, here involving second-person direct address:

> *But if you can imagine how*
> *Each evening when the dairy pails come in*
> *Innumerable flies throng around*
> *The white ruff of the milk,*
> *You will have some idea of how the Greeks and Trojans*
> *Clouded about Sarpedon's body.*

In other words, where the other translators tend to "assimilate" the simile to one or another ontological plane of the poem's world, Logue extricates it from the diegesis altogether.[10]

Thus poetic segmentation in each case interacts with narrative segmentation to produce a somewhat different focalization of this epic simile, in one case (Pope) relegating it unambiguously to the battlefield world, in other cases assimilating it weakly (Chapman) or strongly (Lattimore) to the god's-eye-view, in yet another (Logue) dissociating it from either of these diegetic planes and instead assigning it explicitly to the extra-diegetic plane of communication between narrator and narratee.

A similar diversity of handling is discernible at the end of the passage, after Zeus has determined to give Patroclus free rein for a while longer. How does the text return from the scene of Olympian cogitation to the plane of human struggle where Hector, overcome by divinely-inspired panic, flees the battlefield? Here it is Pope and Lattimore whose methods have the most in common. Each shifts abruptly from the god's focalization *of* Hector to Hector's internal focalization, or, to put it another

way, from divine cause (the god's intervention) to human effect (Hector's panic). Each deploys the poetic equivalent of a cinematic jump-cut, signaled by a decisively end-stopped line and a reorientation of pronoun reference:

> *Pope:*
> Then *Hector's* Mind he [Jove] fills with dire dismay;
> He [Hector] mounts his Car, and calls his Hosts away.

> *Lattimore:*   In Hektor
> first of all he [Zeus] put a temper that was without strength.
> He [Hektor] climbed to his chariot and turned to flight, and called to the other
> Trojans to run.

Chapman does not signal the descent from the divine to the human as decisively as Pope and Lattimore do here, encouraged, no doubt, by the countermeasurement of sentence and line (enjambment) that characterizes his form throughout. Divine and human tend to mingle promiscuously, and the "leakage" between planes here is reinforced by Chapman's interpolation of an ad hoc allegorical personification—Flight, a sort of pseudo-god improvised for the occasion, who joins Hector not only in his world but even in his chariot!

>   [Zeus] so disanimates
> The mind of Hector that he mounts his chariot and takes Flight
> Up with him.[11]

So, where Pope and Lattimore segregate actors on different ontological planes (Zeus the inspirer of panic vs. Hector the panic-stricken), Chapman permits the mingling of figures of different ontological provenance.

Logue also mingles planes, but (again) differently. He figures God's decision-making (conventionally enough) as weighing the human actors' fates in the pans of a balance:

>   And all this time God watched his favourite enemies:
> Considering. Minute Patroclus, a fleck
> Of spinning radium on his right hand—
> Should he die now? Or push the Trojans back still more?
> And on his left, Prince Hector, like a golden mote—
> Should he become a coward for an hour
> And run for Troy while Patroclus steals Sarpedon's gear
> That glistens like the sea at early morning?

The divine decision itself, however, though still coded in the same figurative terms, is disaffiliated from the rest of the judgment scene. Separated off by another "gutter" of white space, it is grouped instead with Hector's (internally focalized) experience of panic. Narrative and discursive continuities are countermeasured against formal and visual discontinuity:

  The left goes down.
In the half-light Hector's blood turned milky
  And he ran for Troy.

But if discontinuity and disaffiliation prevail in one respect, in another respect continuity reasserts itself: the milk into which Hector's blood is (figuratively) transformed associates his panic with the milk-pails of the earlier simile, imparting a tidy circularity to this self-contained micro-episode.[12]

CONTINUING TO THINK

Segmentivity and countermeasurement might provide just the tools we need to launch a robust program of research into narrative in poetry. There is much we do not yet know about the interaction of poetry and narrative, and most of what we do know is local and particular, limited to specific poets, genres or traditions. The general concepts of segmentivity and countermeasurement imply a research agenda for consolidating and integrating all that local knowledge into a capacious, big-tent theory of poetic narrative. It would be valuable to know, for instance, how different meters, rhyme-schemes, and stanza forms interact with narrative (see, e.g., Addison; Kinney); how narrative is handled differently in poetry of different genres and sub-genres, from different periods, in different cultural traditions (see, e.g., Levy), and in different languages; whether there are period, generational, or group styles of segmentation and countermeasurement, and how individual poets' styles relate to those of their period, school, movement, or coterie; and so on. Preliminary to some of these larger projects, it would be useful to know more about what happens when the "same" poetic narrative is translated from language to language, or from one verse-form to another (see, e.g., Kinney 34–50, on the translation of Boccaccio's *rime royal* into the *ottava rima* of Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*), or when a prose narrative is recast as verse, or the other way around (see, e.g., Kittay and Godzich 27–45, on medieval French *dérimage*, the "unrhyming" of verse). Filling in these and other lacunae in contemporary narrative theory seems to me a worthy project and a desirable end in itself, if only because it would bring more fully within the scope of narrative theory a huge volume of the world's most valued narratives, namely those written in poetry.

There might be fringe benefits as well. A theory of narrative in poetry might shed light on segmentivity in other narrative forms—in comics, in film, in television, especially in serial television (an area of renewed interest both in practice and in current narrative research). It might even shed some light on segmentivity in the novel itself.

The illusion that prose is a continuous medium, *un*segmented, is a powerful one, with an almost ideological force; nevertheless, it is demonstrably untrue. Prose fiction, too, is segmented, even if its segmentivity is subordinated to its narrativity. If poetry has its metrical feet, lines, stanzas, and so on, prose fiction has it own formal segmentation into volumes, installments, books, chapters, sections, even paragraphs and sentences, cutting across its narrative segmentation. One might not guess this, however, from the literature of narrative theory. Apart from some valuable work on

serialized novels, prose segmentation remains to this day somewhat undervalued and under-theorized. Almost eighty years ago, Vološinov (111–112) sketched in the course of a couple of pages an approach to the paragraph of prose fiction as a unit of dialogical discourse ("something like *a vitiated dialogue worked into the body of a monologic utterance*"), but I am not aware that anyone ever followed up on his rich suggestion, or that any other theory of paragraphing in narrative prose has ever been advanced.[13] Similarly, almost forty years ago Stevick devoted an entire brief book to a stimulating but somewhat under-theorized discussion of chapters in fiction, and again I don't know whether anyone has revisited this topic seriously since.[14] Perhaps attention to segmentation in narrative poetry might revive these long-lapsed inquiries into prose segmentivity. It might even put back onto the agenda of narrative theory the question of a general theory of segmentation and motivation in prose fiction that Benjamin Harshav raised back in the seventies.

Who knows but that, on the lower frequencies, poetic narrative might not speak for *all* narrative?

APPENDIX: FIVE *ILIADS*

Original and four versions of *The Iliad,* Book XVI, ll. 638–58 (from Frow 172–74) *Original (* Illiad, Books XIII–XXIV. D.B. Monro. Clarendon Press Series. Oxford: Claendon Press, 1888.)

οὐδ' ἂν ἔτι φράδμων περ ἀνὴρ Σαρπηδόνα δῖον
ἔγνω, ἐπεὶ βελέεσσι καὶ αἵματι καὶ κονίῃσιν
ἐκ κεφαλῆς εἴλυτο διαμπερὲς ἐς πόδας ἄκρους.   640
οἱ δ' αἰεὶ περὶ νεκρὸν ὁμίλεον, ὡς ὅτε μυῖαι
σταθμῷ ἔνι βρομέωσι περιγλαγέας κατὰ πέλλας
ὥρῃ ἐν εἰαρινῇ, ὅτε τε γλάγος ἄγγεα δεύει·
ὡς ἄρα τοὶ περὶ νεκρὸν ὁμίλεον, οὐδέ ποτε Ζεὺς
τρέψεν ἀπὸ κρατερῆς ὑσμίνης ὄσσε φαεινώ   645
ἀλλὰ κατ' αὐτοὺς αἰὲν ὅρα καὶ φράζετο θυμῷ,
πολλὰ μάλ' ἀμφὶ φονῳ Πατρόκλου μερμηρίζων,
ἢ ἤδη καὶ κεῖνον ἐνὶ κρατερῇ ὑσμίνῃ
αὐτοῦ ἐπ' ἀντιθέῳ Σαρπηδόνι φαίδιμος Ἕκτωρ
χαλκῷ δῃώσῃ, ἀπό τ' ὤμων τεύχε' ἕληται,   650
ἢ ἔτι καὶ πλεόνεσσιν ὀφέλλειεν πόνον αἰπύν.
ὧδε δέ οἱ φρονέοντι δοάσσατο κέρδιον εἶναι,
ὄφρ' ἠὺς θεράπων Πηληϊάδεω 'Αχιλῆος
ἐξαῦτις Τρῶάς τε καὶ Ἕκτορα χαλκοκορυστὴν
ὤσαιτο προτὶ ἄστυ, πολέων δ' ἀπὸ θυμὸν ἕλοιτο.   655
Ἕκτορι δὲ πρωτίστῳ ἀνάλκιδα θυμὸν ἐνῆκεν·
ἐς δίφρον δ' ἀναβὰς φύγαδ' ἔτραπε, κέκλετο δ' ἄλλους
Τρῶας φευγέμεναι· γνῶ γὰρ Διὸς ἱρὰ τάλαντα.

George Chapman (c. 1616)

. . . so full of bloud, of dust, of darts, lay smit
Divine Sarpedon that a man must have an excellent wit
That could but know him; and might fail—so from his utmost head
Even to the low plants of his feet his forme was altered.
All thrusting near it every way, as thick as flies in spring
That in a sheep-cote (when new milke assembles them) make wing
And buzze about the top-full pailes. Nor ever was the eye
Of Jove averted from the flight; he viewd, thought ceaselessly
And diversly upon the death of great Achilles' friend—
If Hector there (to wreake his sonne) should with his javelin end
His life and force away his armes, or still augment the field.
He then concluded that the flight of much more soule should yeeld
Achilles' good friend more renowne, and that even to their gates
He should drive Hector and his host; and so disanimates
The mind of Hector that he mounts his chariot and takes Flight
Up with him.

<div align="right">(Chapman 218)</div>

Alexander Pope (1718)

Now great *Sarpedon*, on the sandy Shore,
His heav'nly Form defac'd with Dust and Gore,
And stuck with Darts by warring Heroes shed;
Lies undistinguish'd from the vulgar dead.
His long-disputed Corpse the Chiefs inclose.
On ev'ry side the busy Combate grows;
Thick, as beneath some Shepherd's thatch'd Abode,
The Pails high-foaming with a milky Flood,
The buzzing Flies, a persevering Train,
Incessant swarm, and chas'd, return again.
    Jove view'd the Combate with a stern Survey,
And Eyes that flash'd intolerable Day;
Fix'd on the Field his Sight, his Breast debates
The Vengeance due, and meditates the Fates;
Whether to urge their prompt Effect, and call
The Force of *Hector* to *Patroclus'* Fall,
This Instant see his short-liv'd Trophies won,
And stretch him breathless on his slaughter'd Son;
Or yet, with many a Soul's untimely flight,
Augment the Fame and Horror of the Fight?
To crown *Achilles'* valiant Friend with Praise
At length he dooms; and that his last of Days
Shall set in Glory; bid him drive the Foe;

Nor unattended, see the Shades below.
Then *Hector's* Mind he fills with dire dismay;
He mounts his Car, and calls his Hosts away.

(Pope 273–74)

Richard Lattimore (1951)

   No longer
could a man, even a knowing one, have made out the godlike
Sarpedon, since he was piled from head to ends of feet under
a mass of weapons, the blood and the dust, while others about him
kept forever swarming over his dead body, as flies
through a sheepfold thunder about the pails overspilling
milk, in the season of spring when the milk splashes in the buckets.
So they swarmed over the dead man, nor did Zeus ever
turn the glaring of his eyes from the strong encounter,
but kept gazing forever upon them, in spirit reflective,
and pondered hard over many ways for the death of Patroklos;
whether this was now the time, in this strong encounter
when there over godlike Sarpedon glorious Hektor
should kill him with the bronze, and strip the armour away from his shoulders,
or whether to increase the steep work of fighting for more men.
In the division of his heart this way seemed best to him,
for the strong henchman of Achilles, the son of Peleus,
once again to push the Trojans and bronze-helmed Hektor
back on their city, and tear the life from many. In Hektor
first of all he put a temper that was without strength.
He climbed to his chariot and turned to flight, and called to the other
Trojans to run.

(Lattimore 347–48)

Christopher Logue (1963)

And nobody, including those who saw him lie,
A waxen god asleep on his outstretched hand,
Could know him now.

> *But if you can imagine how*
> *Each evening when the dairy pails come in*
> *Innumerable flies throng around*
> *The white ruff of the milk,*
> *You will have some idea of how the Greeks and Trojans*
> *Clouded about Sarpedon's body.*

  And all this time God watched his favourite enemies:
Considering. Minute Patroclus, a fleck

Of spinning radium on his right hand—
Should he die now? Or push the Trojans back still more?
And on his left, Prince Hector, like a golden mote—
Should he become a coward for an hour
And run for Troy while Patroclus steals Sarpedon's gear
That glistens like the sea at early morning?

  The left goes down.
In the half-light Hector's blood turned milky
  And he ran for Troy.

(Logue, *Patrocleia* 41–42)

ENDNOTES

One version of this paper was given as a talk at the Forty-Ninth Annual Convention of the M/MLA in Cleveland OH, November 9, 2007; another version was given at the International Society for the Study of Narrative annual convention, Austin TX, May 3, 2008. I wish to thank Bruce Heiden and Peter Seitel for some timely coaching, but at the same time to absolve them of any responsibility for my misapprehensions about (respectively) the Homeric poems and oral literature.

1. For instance, the fact that *The Odyssey* is a poem is of little consequence to Sternberg, who uses E.V. Rieu's highly novelistic prose translation of it in his book on *Expositional Modes and Temporal Ordering in Fiction.* Even the classicist Irene de Jong, in her book on *Narrators and Focalizers* in *The Iliad*, ignores the poetry of the poem almost completely, as a matter of policy; one of her objectives is to find narratological motivations for features such as fixed epithets and speech-formulas that had hitherto been motivated formally or genetically (in terms of oral-poetic practice).
2. See Hogan (169): "Individual [lyric] poems typically imply encompassing narratives."
3. The logic here is a little sneaky. The vast majority of the world's narratives are everyday conversational narratives, few of which, however, qualify as literary; but *all* of the world's oral poetic narratives are literary *by definition*.
4. Not only is it possible to read poems in the light of narrative theory but, as Jonathan Culler complains in a 2008 *PMLA* special feature on "The New Lyric Studies," currently it is almost inevitable to do so. "When poetry is studied," he observes, "it is frequently assimilated . . . to the model of narrative fiction" (201). Taking a Frost lyric (coincidentally) as his test-case, Culler shows how this sort of assimilation works in practice, and especially what it leaves out of account: "The poem's metrical form and its rhyme scheme are irrelevant to such an approach. We do not even seem to allow the poet's metrical construction to enter into relation with the [poem's] speaker" (203).
5. Compare Virginia Jackson's recent account of the nineteenth-century "lyricization of poetry."
6. DuPlessis's definition appears in a "Codicil" attached to her essay, "Manifests" (51). I first heard it delivered in a talk at the "Past, Present, Future Tense" conference at Cornell University in 1995. The version of "Manifests" that appears in DuPlessis's 2006 book, *Blue Studios* (73–95), omits the "Codicil on the Definition of Poetry," without explanation.
7. "The dominant may be defined as the focusing component of a work of art: it rules, determines, and transforms the remaining components. It is the dominant which guarantees the integrity of the structure. . . . We may seek a dominant not only in the poetic work of an individual artist and not only in the poetic canon, the set of norms of a given poetic school, but also in the art of a given epoch, viewed as a particular whole " (Jakobson 82–83). I would add that we might also seek it in particular genres or, as here, in "umbrella" categories such as poetry, narrative and performance.
8. I don't want to exaggerate: Hühn is actually quite attentive to the counterpoint of narrative and poetic segmentation, by comparison with those who demote poetic segmentation to the paratextual status of mere "layout" (e.g., Wolf; Rubik).

9. Frow actually juxtaposes *five* different translations, including a nineteenth-century prose translation by Andrew Lang, Walter Leaf and Ernest Myers; but since prose is conventionally understood to reflect the "zero degree" of segmentivity, I will forego discussion of the prose version here.

10. Logue handles this passage radically differently in the version of his *Patrocleia* that appears in his later, fuller treatment of *The Iliad* in *War Music.* Here the swarming of the soldiers around Sarpedon's body is evoked without the epic simile (though smaller-scale similes multiply):

    > Dust like red mist.
    > Pain like chalk on slate. Heat like Arctic.
    > The light withdrawn from Sarpedon's body.
    > The enemies swirling over it.
    > Bronze flak (161).

    The "flies" simile's appearance is delayed for some twenty lines, and when it finally does appear, it is explicitly assimilated to the battlefield frame:

    > And over it all,
    > As flies shift up and down a haemorrhage alive with ants,
    > The captains in their iron masks drift past each other,
    > Calling, calling, gathering light on their breastplates (162).

    No window opens onto any distant scene; this simile is entirely metonymic and battlefield-internal. Battlefield connotations that were more or less potential in other versions of the "flies around the pail" simile are here fully actualized.

11. The enjambment here is particularly witty: the idiom "takes flight" suddenly realizes itself as a tiny, three-dimensional allegorical drama, like a page in a children's pop-up book: "takes Flight/Up with him."

12. Here again, Logue handles this material quite differently in the *War Music* version. He foreshortens the entire episode, editing out the remainder of Patroclus's rampage, and cutting directly to his death at Hector's hands. The scene of divine judgment remains, but its outcome is the *reverse* of what it was in the earlier *Patrocleia* version:

    > And all this time God watched his favourite enemies:
    > Minute Patroclus, like a fleck
    > Of radium on His right hand,
    > Should he die now—or push the Trojans back still more?
    > And on His left, Prince Hector, like a silver mote.
    >   The *right* goes down. (163; my emphasis)

13. It is indicative of the general indifference to prose segmentation that in the course of a survey of "physical aspects of texts and their relation to literary meaning," E.A. Levenston mentions paragraphing exactly once (76), in connection with Molly Bloom's monologue in *Ulysses.*

14. Peter Rabinowitz (58–59) includes the beginnings and endings of volumes, chapters and episodes in his inventory of "privileged positions" that invite special attention from interpreters—but then finds nothing further to say about any of these sub-divisions.

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