

1. What two "systems" does Heiden argue structure the narrative of the *Iliad* as a whole? Give one specific example of each. Assuming that Heiden's theory is correct, what does it tell us about how the poet composed the poem (and under what performance conditions he "performed" it) and about how we are meant to interpret it?

Heiden, Bruce. "Major Systems of Thematic Resonance in the *Iliad*" *Symbolae Osloenses* 75 (2000) 34-55.

The two systems that structure the narrative of the *Iliad* as a whole are ring-composition and movements. Thematic resonance seems to be a rubric comprising both systems or at least a feature common to both systems. If Heiden's theory is correct and if we take the Doloneian adaptation seriously, then we must reconsider the complete integrity of Homeric authorship. He does say that the poet seems to have chosen to announce distant thematic relationships not through narratorial comment but rather through "the arrangement of his material." This begs the question of the intellectual subtlety of the audience, not to mention their mnemonic prowess unless we are to assume that he means subconscious recognition. What percentage of the audience could remember the kind of detail that Heiden suggests is necessary to connect the sections thematically if the "performance" were oral—not to mention the inherent subtlety of the thematic resonances he proposes? If we assume that audience recognition of thematic resonance on both the archsystemic and the subsystemic levels is crucial to appreciation of the poem—a rather expansive assumption—and that audience appreciation is at least a desired if not comprehensively achievable poetic goal, then Heiden's conclusions seem to point to a literary epic—a work thematically conceived or recompiled in manuscript form.<sup>1</sup> The same question might be asked of the poet's ability or desire to compose a work so interconnected by chiasmic structure. I am not satisfied with Heiden's characterization of his categories as "not intrinsically difficult or obscure" (p. 37). It is telling that he finds it necessary to create diagrams for the "non-specialist." It is precisely the function of a diagram to present in a collapsed or accordion form that which is presumably too distended in its full expression for ready analysis. A listening audience would most likely be completely at a loss to connect subsystemic resonance over the narrative distances he suggests (e.g., in the A to Z extremity of the chiasm). Along with this, Heiden himself suggests that the resonance of themes in the C column, though not centered around events as much as recurrence of narrative subject matter, is not random aggregation—a feature of oral epic—but a purposeful and therefore literary feature (p. 47). These would more likely be discovered as he has discovered them—by longterm scholarly perusal and by a critical conversation between scholars over years of study. It seems a far stretch to expect oral recitation and what one might call the development of bardic groupies to produce such a sophisticated hermeneutic of the epic. Again, assuming Heiden is correct, the poet of the *Iliad* should strike the reader as celebrating life attained by means of retreat and recapitulation as more judicious than the open and manly pursuit glory (p. 50). Heiden concludes that the themes of the work develop along a trajectory. This trajectory appears to parallel the trajectory of Achilles' development as a character.

---

<sup>1</sup> Steven Nimis *Signs of Orality: The Oral Tradition and Its Influence in the Greek and Roman World*, ed. E. Anne Mackay (Brill 1998), 65-78. Nimis offers an alternative argument to Heiden's.