# Discovery Procedures and Principles for Homeric Research

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I propose to describe a way to do research on Homer. The description includes more than just procedures. It also includes an account of the principles and assumptions behind them and examples of their use.

It's as well to state at the outset that the object of study for the discovery procedures that I am concerned with is the words of Homer. The familiar term for this study is philology, which has been described as follows by Nietzsche in the preface to *Daybreak*:

> ...philology is that venerable art which demands of its votaries one thing above all: to go aside, to take time, to become still, to become slow — it is a goldsmith's art and connoisseurship of the <u>word</u> which has nothing but delicate, cautious work to do and achieves nothing if it does not achieve it <u>lento</u>. But for precisely this reason it is more necessary than ever today, by precisely this means does it entice and enchant us the most, in the midst of an age of 'work,' that is to say, of hurry, of indecent and perspiring haste, which wants to 'get everything done' at once, including every old or new book: — this art does not so easily get anything done, it teaches to read <u>well</u>, that is to say, to read slowly, deeply, looking cautiously fore and aft, with reservations, with doors left open, with delicate eyes and fingers. [1]

Nietzsche describes philological reading as both visual and tactile ('eyes and fingers'), as delicate, cautious, slow, and deep; both 'with reservations' and 'with doors left open.' One might think the philologist was examining objects that had never been seen before, and in many ways, the study of Homeric words actually is a new subject of study. Here is how an articulate scholar of that language, Emile Benveniste, has put it:

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[1] F. Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale, Cambridge, 1997, p. 5. I owe my knowledge of this text to Gregory Nagy.

Il faut bien dire cependant que notre connaissance du vocabulaire homérique est encore dans l'enfance. Nous avons reçu de l'antiquité un système d'interprétation auquel on continue de se tenir et qui marque nos lexiques et nos traductions. Tandis qu'un effort considérable a été employé à restaurer un texte sûr, et à définir les caractéristiques dialectales du la langue épique, nos interprétations restent largement celles d'une époque où les conventions esthétiques primaient le souci de l'exactitude. Mieux on étudie les textes homériques, plus on aperçoit la distance entre la nature réelle des concepts et l'image qu'en donne la tradition scolaire. [2]

So the study of the Homeric vocabulary is "in its infancy," *dans l'enfance*. That's a surprising thing to say: how can the study of one of the oldest poetic artifacts we have from the past still be "in its infancy" when in fact its study is probably the oldest scholarly pursuit in the West? Yet the infancy that Benveniste speaks of is a key notion, because the meaning of Homeric words, along with a lot of other things dependent on it, has to be rebuilt from scratch: we are bound, I believe, to engage in the illusory but still worthwhile effort to empty Homeric words of the meanings that we have learned for them and to start over, by immersing ourselves in this poetry and examining it with both the delicacy and openness that Nietzsche describes. Perhaps every generation of Homer scholars needs to do this, but ours above all, according to Benveniste, because the interpretations that characterize the scholastic tradition and that are the basis of our lexica and translations are flawed from the start, both by an inappropriate aesthetic and by imprecision, but to put it more positively, because there are available to us two perspectives and the research methods that flow from them that renew the study of Homer globally: first, the notion that Homeric poetry is the product of a traditional system that functioned to meet the needs of composition in performance, and second, that the rigorous study of the history of the Greek language and of the Indo-European family of languages as a whole is important for Homer because the poetic tradition from which it descends already existed in form, diction, and even to some extent in function, already in Indo-European society.

To begin with the effect of Parry and Lord on Homeric philology, I offer an example from my own work: an analysis of the formulas of the verb εὔχομαι make it clear that its three different senses, 'pray,' 'say proudly and truly' (this is the meaning that is usually and incorrectly translated by the English word 'boast'), and 'assert/claim' (in a legal context) are as distinct in their formulas as they are in their contexts and syntax. So a word's metrical, verbal, and syntactical contexts can function to support polysemy. But it makes sense, given the compositional function of formulaic diction, that formulaic analysis coincides with and supports the kind of contextual analysis that philology requires. In fact, any formalization of a process like semantic analysis, which is often an intuitive, highly subjective process of the type

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[2] E. Benveniste, *Le vocabulaire des institutions indo-européennes*, t.2, Paris, 1969, p. 58.

"does this new meaning that comes to mind fit all the attestations?" cannot but enhance the effectiveness and the persuasiveness of new work on epic words.

On the benign fiction of emptying one's mind of previous notions and beginning again, or to put it another way, of defamiliarizing the epic world and its words: A key procedure here is to work inductively, to rebuild the categories of thought and expression from within the epic world, not to impose them from without. For example, if we take up the two-termination adjective ἴφθιμος, -ον, which is a modifier of ψυχάς (with a *varia lectio* κεφαλάς) in the third line of the *Iliad* and also of κεφαλάς in an almost identical line in *Iliad* 11.55, there is reason for concern, since 'souls' are definitely not considered to be 'strong' (which is the meaning given for ἴφθιμος in all the standard lexica and translations) elsewhere in epic. For instance, among the formulas that feature the word ἴφθιμος is the phrase:

> βοῶν ἴφθιμα κάρηνα#
> 'the *iphthīma* head of cattle'

which is attested six times in line-final position, where the word κάρηνα means 'head of cattle' in metonymic rather than concrete terms, to designate whole animals, as a rancher would speak of a herd of 'fifty head.' One can compare the parallel formula:

> νεκύων ἀμενηνὰ κάρηνα#
> 'the strengthless (i.e., lacking μένος) heads of corpses'

which occurs twice in the first nekuia of the *Odyssey* (11.29, 11.46), and in which the word κάρηνα is still metonymic, as it is also in the variant κεφαλάς for *Iliad* 1.3 attested in 11.55.

The meaning 'strong' (in antiquity ἰσχυρός) for ἴφθιμος is based on a false etymology from ἴφι 'by force.' I'm confident that it is false because there is no evidence of the digamma in this word's attestations (as opposed to, say, the epic adjective ἴφιος which is clearly derived from ἴφι 'with force' and <u>always</u> follows a word ending in a diphthong or a short vowel). The morphology of the suffix -ῑμος (with long iota) is unclear as well. No other etymology has carried conviction.[3] So 'strong' is a meaning that has likely been imposed from without rather

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[3] A. Athanassakis, "An inquiry into the etymology and meaning of ἴφθιμος in the early epic," <u>Glotta</u> 49:1-21, 1971, is the last full treatment of this word known to me. Its methodology is to begin with an etymology (in this case, from *ἰφι-τιμος, yielding a sense 'honored with power (sic)' that comes to mean 'powerful' and 'honored', with 'metrically motivated' syncope of the iota and assimilation to account for the aspiration of the tau) and then to proceed to test it against the usages of the word. The most recent etymological proposal I know of is by A. J. van Windekens, *Dictionnaire étymologique complémentaire de la langue grecque : nouvelles contributions à l'interprétation historique et comparée du vocabulaire*, Leeuven, 1986, s.v., who suggests a derivation from *ἄ-φθῑ-μος 'imperishable,' accounting for the initial iota by the influence of ἴφι (but consider ἄφθῐτος, with ἀ- intact!). Neither these nor any other previous suggestions have carried conviction, and my work here does not concern them.

than derived from within the epic system, rather than tested by inductive experience of the word's formulas and usage in context.

The formulas of ἴφθιμος fall into a diverse set of contexts: the word is used for body parts like the shoulders of Apollo or Achilles or the actual heads of heroes when they put on their helmets, and also head of cattle and of the dead, as just mentioned; ἴφθιμος is also applied to individual warriors like Sthenelos, Diomedes, and Menelaos, as well as their wives — Diomedes's wife, but also Penelope, and Penelope's sister, who is probably called *iphthīmē*, not named Iphthīmē as some would have it.[4] ἴφθιμος also applies to groups of men: the Lycians or the Danaans, Odysseus's companions or the Laestrygonians. Sometimes it is used for pairs, like Sthenelus and Eurymedon or Hades and Persephone, where the adjective is once plural, applying to both, and once applies to one member of the pair. None of the individuals who receive it have it more than twice in attested epic, and most only receive it once, which seems to indicate that it is what Parry called a particularized epithet, not a generic one. It always either fills the first or the second foot of the line in this usage with personal or ethnic names, but unlike a generic epithet, there is no consistency to the metrical shape of the names that it is applied to. There is but one exception to its consistency in metrical placement, and the context there is also exceptional: the word is used in line-final position at *Iliad* 11.373 of a dead man, one Agastrophos, a personage spoken of only there in Greek epic, never before, never again. Diomedes is stripping this hero of his armor at the moment when Paris shoots him. So the dead but still ἴφθιμος Agastrophos is a parallel — apparently the only parallel — in the Epic corpus to the word's use for souls/heads sent down to Hades, and it provides us with a contextual link between the two usages, one for living persons and couples and groups, the other for the souls of the dead. The point is that this adjective, whether it means 'strong' or not, may be memorializing a trait in living men if it is not capturing the essence of the dead.

But now my point of departure, which was the impropriety of the meaning 'strong' as an attribute of ψυχαί, may be valid or it may not be. The situation raises a basic problem in research procedure: identifying a real problem. How can you tell what is worth looking at and pursuing and what isn't? I vividly remember my colleague Douglas Frame saying thirty or so years ago that the way to do that was as follows: a problem is worth looking at if you get the same feeling that you get when you are going to lift up a bucket that you think is full and it turns out to be empty. Here's another, perhaps more concrete strategy for finding a fruitful subject that we used to tell ourselves as graduate students: all you really need to do is pull a thread from the fabric of the poetry and begin to follow it. It's guaranteed, we used to say, that it will lead somewhere interesting and take you someplace — perhaps not where you thought

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[4] If we should decide that it is not the epithet but the name, the assumption we would be making would be, "if we don't know her 'given' name — as we do, say, with Penelope or Aigialeia — then her name is Iphthīmē," and that is not a valid assumption, since many women in epic have only patronymics and no given name.

you would go but somewhere interesting nevertheless. Is the goal, then, to solve the problem you identify, once and for all? Is the goal to begin with a generalization and then try to prove it? No to both: the goal is patiently to rebuild the poetic and cultural fabric that was disclosed as a given to the Epic audience, to reconstitute the resonances and connections of a traditional performance system. It is not a to impose solutions, but to find solutions that impose themselves. The goal is to open the door, in Nietzsche's terms, in a way that leaves room for others to pass through as well.

But also, there is a longer view that I have at least <u>tried</u> to keep in mind and that I learned from my mentor and colleagues: Homeric scholarship is an age-old pursuit, and those of us working today are standing on the shoulders of generations of predecessors just as our shoulders will hopefully be stood upon by our successors and as others will stand upon theirs. There is reason to be both modest and hopeful. The point is to make a contribution and to respect the work of those who have gone before, without whose help we could not glimpse the receding horizon. Any jackass can kick down a barn, as the saying goes: the hard part, and the worthwhile part, is to appreciate what has gone before, to learn from it, and to move forward on the basis of it.

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I still have the empty-bucket feeling about ἴφθιμος. I'm going to pursue it, stubbornly perhaps, as an interesting example, but it is clear that I need a new justification for the pursuit — or to put it another way, I need to redefine the problem. How about this? Translating ἴφθιμος in all of its strangely varied and strangely constrained contexts as 'strong' seems uncharacteristically imprecise. It does not yield up a convincing explanation of the unity or harmony of the word's contexts. Why is it used of pairs and couples, of groups of gregarious animals or of souls or of social groups like the Danaans, the Laestrygonians, or Odysseus's companions? Another point: an association with the word ἴς 'force' seems inapposite when we consider the body parts to which ἴφθιμος applies: heads of humans on which helmets are placed, shoulders of gods or heroes on which weapons (like the aegis or the arrows of Apollo) are placed: but the *loci* of force and strength in Homeric warriors are hands and legs, not heads and shoulders. At least, if heads and shoulders can be said to be strong, it is not because they embody the aggressive strength that is our first association with the word 'strong.' Heads <u>bear up</u> under loads that people <u>shoulder</u>; heads and shoulders do not lift rocks, throw spears, or kill opponents. Shoulders in epic are said to be broad, εὐρύς, or στιβαρός 'stout, steady,' and a meaning of this sort seems to suit well the sense of ἴφθιμος at least when it applies to a head with a helmet being placed upon it in arming scenes:

> κρατὶ δ' ἐπ' ἰφθίμῳ κυνέην εὔτυκτον ἔθηκεν (4 times)
> on his steady (=*iphthīmos)* head he placed the well-made helmet

In fact, this meaning may be the key to the whole problem: perhaps just like the English word 'steady, steadfast', ἴφθιμος has a physical as well as a social shading that stretches from the

ability to bear up to loyalty to a group or another individual. That would explain, for example, why it applies to the Laestrygonians and to Odysseus' companions. As is typical of this peculiar word, ἴφθιμος applies both to an individual Laestrygonian, the nameless daughter of Antiphates whom Odysseus' companions meet, and to the people as a whole:

> κούρῃ δὲ ξύμβληντο πρὸ ἄστεος ὑδρευούσῃ,
>
> θυγατέρ' ἰφθίμῃ Λαιστρυγόνος Ἀντιφάταο.
>
> they met a girl fetching water in front of the citadel,
>
> the steadfast/loyal (=*iphthīme*) daughter of the Laestrygonian Antiphates.

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*Odyssey* 10. 106

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This girl points out her father's house to them, where they encounter her mother, an instant object of dread:

> ἡ δ' αἶψ' ἐξ ἀγορῆς ἐκάλει κλυτὸν Ἀντιφατῆα,
>
> ὃν πόσιν, ὃς δὴ τοῖσιν ἐμήσατο λυγρὸν ὄλεθρον.
>
> αὐτίχ' ἕνα μάρψας ἑτάρων ὁπλίσσατο δεῖπνον.
>
> τὼ δὲ δύ' ἀΐξαντε φυγῇ ἐπὶ νῆας ἱκέσθην.
>
> αὐτὰρ ὁ τεῦχε βοὴν διὰ ἄστεος· οἱ δ' ἀΐοντες
>
> φοίτων ἴφθιμοι Λαιστρυγόνες ἄλλοθεν ἄλλος,
>
> μυρίοι, οὐκ ἄνδρεσσιν ἐοικότες, ἀλλὰ Γίγασιν.
>
> and she immediately called famous Antiphates from the assembly,
>
> her husband, who devised grievous destruction for them.
>
> Immediately he snatched one of the companions and made a meal of him.
>
> Then those two rushed off in flight and went to the ships,
>
> but he [Antiphates] raised a shout throughout the city, and they, hearing it,
>
> kept coming, one from one place, another from another, the steadfast/loyal (=*iphthīmoi*)
>  Laestrygonians,
>
> countless ones, not resembling men but Giants.

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*Odyssey* 10.114-119

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A terrific disaster follows, the cannibalistic slaughter of all of Odysseus' men except for those on his own ship, which by a stroke of luck he had anchored outside of the harbor. Why should these hideous Laestrygonians be dignified with any other epithet than one meaning just 'strong'? What is 'steadfast' or 'loyal' about them? Precisely what is described here: unlike the other cannibal, the Cyclops Polyphemus, these people have an ἀγορή, they have a cooperative family structure, and the king among them summons the whole populace to cooperate in dining upon Odysseus's men. If there is one thing that Odysseus' cunning is supposedly useless to combat, it is massive, socially-coordinated violence — in fact, that seems to be the whole

point of this episode. Here is the way that Telemachus puts it to his father when contemplating the prospect of the two of them fighting all the suitors, another hateful group, *en masse*:

> ...οὐδέ κεν εἴη
> ἄνδρε δύω πολλοῖσι καὶ ἰφθίμοισι μάχεσθαι.
> ...there'd be no way
> for two men to fight with many, steadfast/loyal (=*iphthīmoi*) men.

<p align="right">*Odyssey* 16.244</p>

This is axiomatic for Epic, and a useful perspective to have on the successful massacre of the suitors at the end of the poem, which tends to look like shooting fish in a barrel. By contrast, when Odysseus in disguise as a beggar at his own palace sees the servant women going to sleep with the suitors, he addresses his own grief-stricken heart as follows:

> στῆθος δὲ πλήξας κραδίην ἠνίπαπε μύθῳ·
> ”τέτλαθι δή, κραδίη· καὶ κύντερον ἄλλο ποτ' ἔτλης,
> ἤματι τῷ, ὅτε μοι μένος ἄσχετος ἤσθιε Κύκλωψ
> ἰφθίμους ἑτάρους· σὺ δ' ἐτόλμας, ὄφρα σε μῆτις
> ἐξάγαγ' ἐξ ἄντροιο ὀϊόμενον θανέεσθαι.”
> striking his chest he rebuked his heart with a *muthos*:
> "Bear up, heart; once you endured something else even worse,
> on the day when the Cyclops, whose *menos* was unrestrained, was devouring, to my
>           grief,
> my steadfast/loyal (=*iphthīmous*) companions, but you kept your nerve until cunning
> lead you out of the cave, when you supposed that you were about to die."

<p align="right">*Odyssey* 20.18-22</p>

Odysseus uses this same expression in the genitive, *iphthīmōn hetarōn*, for his companions when he retells the Cyclops story to Penelope in *Odyssey* 23.13. Here he is telling his heart that his men did not lose their solidarity with each other despite the horrible turn of events, and so he, too, must bear up when faced with the betrayal of solidarity by his own servants. The passage features the nexus of associations between the strength and steadiness to endure suffering and the maintenance of group solidarity.

It's also possible to see the social aspect of ἴφθιμος when the word is used of individuals. Just as one or two cannot fight a group of men who are *iphthīmoi*, so also an individual who is himself *iphthīmos,* cannot fight without solidarity from his companions, as Sarpedon says to his men when attacking the Achaean wall:

> ὦ Λύκιοι τί τ' ἄρ' ὧδε μεθίετε θούριδος ἀλκῆς;

ἀργαλέον δέ μοί ἐστι καὶ <u>ἰφθίμῳ</u> περ ἐόντι

μούνῳ ῥηξαμένῳ θέσθαι παρὰ νηυσὶ κέλευθον·

ἀλλ' ἐφομαρτεῖτε· πλεόνων δέ τι ἔργον ἄμεινον.

Lycians, why do I see you letting up your furious defense like this?

It is hard for me, all steadfast/loyal (=*iphthīmōi*) as I am,

alone to break through and make a path beside the ships.

So accompany me; the work of more men is a better thing…

*Iliad* 12.410-413

Both before and after this passage (12.377, 12.418), the Lycians as a group are called ἴφθιμοι by the narrator, so their group identity is front and center in the narrative here. You may well remember the other point in the narrative of the *Iliad* when they are so called — at the death of their leader, Sarpedon, as they flee the battle scene *en masse*.

Here is another passage where a "brother" of Hector, Melanippus, gets both praised and blamed for the qualities that being labeled as ἴφθιμος appears to embody:

…Ἕκτωρ δὲ κασιγνήτοισι κέλευσε

πᾶσι μάλα, πρῶτον δ' Ἱκεταονίδην ἐνένιπεν

ἴφθιμον Μελάνιππον. ὃ δ' ὄφρα μὲν εἰλίποδας βοῦς

βόσκ' ἐν Περκώτῃ δηΐων ἀπὸ νόσφιν ἐόντων·

αὐτὰρ ἐπεὶ Δαναῶν νέες ἤλυθον ἀμφιέλισσαι,

ἂψ εἰς Ἴλιον ἦλθε, μετέπρεπε δὲ Τρώεσσι,

ναῖε δὲ πὰρ Πριάμῳ, ὃ δέ μιν τίεν ἶσα τέκεσσι·

τόν ῥ' Ἕκτωρ ἐνένιπεν ἔπος τ' ἔφατ' ἔκ τ' ὀνόμαζεν·

οὕτω δὴ Μελάνιππε μεθήσομεν; οὐδέ νυ σοί περ

ἐντρέπεται φίλον ἦτορ ἀνεψιοῦ κταμένοιο;

οὐχ ὁράᾳς οἷον Δόλοπος περὶ τεύχε' ἕπουσιν;

ἀλλ' ἕπευ· οὐ γὰρ ἔτ' ἔστιν ἀποσταδὸν Ἀργείοισι

μάρνασθαι, πρίν γ' ἠὲ κατακτάμεν ἠὲ κατ' ἄκρης

Ἴλιον αἰπεινὴν ἑλέειν κτάσθαι τε πολίτας.

…And Hector urged on his brothers,

really all of them, but first of all he rebuked the son of Hiketaon,

steadfast/loyal (=*iphthīmon*) Melanippus. For a time his spiral-footed cattle

he was tending in Perkote, when the enemy were far distant;

but when the curved ships of the Danaans came,

he came back to Ilium and was conspicuous among the Trojans,

and he lived at Priam's side, and he [Priam] honored him like his own children.

Hector rebuked this man, and he spoke a word and called him by name:
"Is this the way we will let up, Melanippus? Isn't especially your
dear heart respectful of your dead cousin?
Don't you see how they are busy with the arms of Dolops?
Get busy yourself! It's no longer possible at a distance from the Argives
to fight with them, before we either cut them down or from its height
they seize steep Ilium and destroy its citizens..."

*Iliad* 15.545-559

It doesn't seem to be a coincidence that a man said to be ἴφθιμος is singled out by Hector to take up arms in defense of a fallen kinsmen when his own sense of obligation to Troy had brought him there to join the war effort in the first place and when his success as a warrior had made him an adoptive member of the family of Priam.

We could go on examining the contexts of ἴφθιμος, not all of which will be as rich in social connotations as these, but in all of which, I am confident, the word works well with a meaning that shades from 'steadfast' to 'loyal.' It is a relational term invoking kin, spouse, friends, and ethnic groups, a word with social as well as physical connotations, not just a word that means 'strong.' My point here is less to complete a demonstration than to exemplify a productive set of discovery procedures and their assumptions, although one of the main rewards or goals of this process is to re-present and recover the sense of familiar passages by rebuilding the web of associations and meanings that are embedded in them.

Perhaps the most important and fruitful technique in the procedure just exemplified is the inductive analysis of a word's contexts. That may well be the essence of it. In fact there are times when everything that needs to be disclosed about a word, what has lain hidden about it since the tradition perished, is not its meaning at all but its contexts. I can think of one particularly clear example of this phenomenon: another epithet, but this time one whose meaning and etymology are utterly transparent, so why would anyone think of it is an object of research and discovery? It is the word θυμολέων 'lion-hearted,' which occurs just five times in Homeric Epic. It is attested as follows:

- once each in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* as an epithet of Herakles (*Iliad* 5.639; *Odyssey* 11.267),
- once, in the *Iliad*, as an epithet of Achilles (*Iliad* 7.228),
- twice, in the *Odyssey*, in a closely repeated sequence of lines, as an epithet of Odysseus (*Odyssey* 4.724, 4.814).

Exhausting the implications of this distribution of the word would take some time, but it surely has interesting implications for Monro's Law, and the mere fact of it is a remarkably clear disclosure about the relationship between the three heroes that invites further analysis. What if we follow our discovery procedure and look at the word's attestations in context? It is

Penelope who applies it to her long-lost husband as she grieves with her servants. She has just learned of the departure of Telemachus to Pylos and beyond:

> κλῦτε, φίλαι· περὶ γάρ μοι Ὀλύμπιος ἄλγε' ἔδωκεν
> ἐκ πασέων, ὅσσαι μοι ὁμοῦ τράφον ἠδ' ἐγένοντο,
> ἣ πρὶν μὲν πόσιν ἐσθλὸν ἀπώλεσα <u>θυμολέοντα</u>,
> παντοίησ' ἀρετῇσι κεκασμένον ἐν Δαναοῖσιν,
> ἐσθλόν, τοῦ κλέος εὐρὺ καθ' Ἑλλάδα καὶ μέσον Ἄργος.
> Listen, dear women: the Olympian has given me woes beyond measure,
> out of all the many women who were brought up and born in my time;
> first I lost my noble husband, <u>the lion-hearted one</u>,
> in all types of virtue exceptional among the Danaans,
> a noble man, whose glory is broad throughout Hellas and the middle of Argos.

*Odyssey* 4.720-725

(The last three lines of this passage are repeated *verbatim* by Penelope shortly thereafter, at lines 810-818, when she is speaking to her sister in a dream.) Her grief at the loss of Odysseus is proportional to his value, which is marked by the geographical extent of his κλέος, his superiority in an array of virtues, and the two epithets he receives, ἐσθλός and θυμολέων. Here is the attestation of θυμολέων for Achilles in the *Iliad*. Ajax is threatening Hector:

> Ἕκτορ νῦν μὲν δὴ σάφα εἴσεαι οἰόθεν οἶος
> οἷοι καὶ Δαναοῖσιν ἀριστῆες μετέασι
> καὶ μετ' Ἀχιλλῆα ῥηξήνορα <u>θυμολέοντα</u>.
> ἀλλ' ὃ μὲν ἐν νήεσσι κορωνίσι ποντοπόροισι
> κεῖτ' ἀπομηνίσας Ἀγαμέμνονι ποιμένι λαῶν·
> ἡμεῖς δ' εἰμὲν τοῖοι οἳ ἂν σέθεν ἀντιάσαιμεν
> καὶ πολέες· ἀλλ' ἄρχε μάχης ἠδὲ πτολέμοιο.
> Hector, now you yourself alone will know clearly
> what sort of chieftains are also among the Danaans
> even after Achilles, the man-breaker, the lion-hearted.
> But he for his part in curved ships that traverse the deep
> lies in anger at Agamemnon, shepherd of the hosts;
> we are the kind of men who could oppose you
> and there are many of us: but begin the battle and the war.

*Iliad* 7.226-232

I do not think it is a coincidence that this highly constrained epithet is applied to the two great Homeric heroes by those closest to them at moments in their stories when they are both painfully <u>absent</u>: Penelope when she has learned of the departure of Telemachus and now finds herself without her husband <u>or</u> her son, and Ajax, the greatest warrior of the Achaeans 'after' Achilles, at the moment when he is about to face the greatest warrior of the Trojans. Without having done the homework or having the time to make the case, I suggest that the use of this epithet of Herakles — I am assuming, perhaps needlessly, that the lion in their θυμοί is primarily his lion, not theirs — for the Homeric heroes comes at these moments in their respective stories first in internal reference of one epic to the other, but also as a receding reference to the greatest of all the Panhellenic heroes, Herakles, who stands behind them, and more especially in subtle allusion to the circumstances of hero cult, when figures of the past like these three are invoked as absent objects of grief, in connection with their death and loss but also as subjects of hope, for their benign, healing return. In any case, it seems to me that this all too brief investigation of the contextual distribution of a single word can disclose to us many things about the framework of Homeric epic in general.

Up to this point, my discussion has concerned only one of the two methodological perspectives that renew the study of Homer. The specific words that I have spoken of give no quarter to the second perspective, that granted by the comparative, historical study of Indo-European languages and their ancient poetic traditions. The etymology of one is (up to this point at least) obscure and of the other transparent, and so their study does not now call for recourse to the comparative method. Such a perspective is methodologically secondary to the contextual analysis of an epic word in its own system in any case, and the main point to be made about it is this: if there were cognates of these words in other Indo-European languages, what would need to be compared is not just phoneme to phoneme or dictionary definition to dictionary definition, but each word in each language in the system of usages in context in which it occurs. Without direct contact with the texts of comparanda, the enrichment that arises from comparison is greatly diminished if not lost. What we can gain from historical comparison is not only a way to gauge the likelihood of our own ideas about meaning and associations but also a way to understand the paths that the Homeric tradition has taken and those that it has not. Another point: one cannot separate out the diachronic from the synchronic when it comes to the study of Homer, because, as Lévi-Strauss said about myths, in epic the relationship between the two is reversed. Performance traditions renew the old and replace the new with them and vice versa. If (or rather since) we cannot construct a synchronic grammar of Homeric diction, what hope is there for a synchronic interpretation?

The Homer that is the focus of these research procedures is a poetic system evolving over a long period of time. It is a higher-level system than a language, since its compositional units and syntactical conventions are more complex and feature narratives and characters as well as words and formulas and lines of poetry, but it is not a text with a single synchrony or a single grammar. To a great extent, it is also a closed system defined by occasion, style, and content,

so that the primary source for the explication of Homer is Homer, not other Greek poetry going forward or outside of the epic. For instance, if prayers have a thematic structure in Homer that is not necessarily the same as prayers in Tragedy, the difference cannot legitimately be used to claim that the meaning of the verb 'to pray' in Epic needs to be modified to suit the structure of prayers in Tragedy.[5]

On the other hand, there are times when the poetry of tragedy or of post-Homeric epic, to say nothing of lyric, does preserve the web of meaning in the traditional system and can serve at least to support its exegesis. The Alexandrian geographer Dionysius the Periegete, who lived in the time of Hadrian and wrote a *Description of the World* in 1188 dactylic hexameters, has one instance of ἴφθιμος as an epithet of the word φιλότης, a combination that is not borrowed from Homer or any other attested source:

> ἤτοι μὲν λίμνης Μαιώτιδος ἄγχι νέμονται
> αὐτοὶ Μαιῶταί τε καὶ ἔθνεα Σαυρομάτάων,
> ἐσθλὸν ἐνυαλίου γένος Ἄρεος· ἐκ γὰρ ἐκείνης
> <u>ἰφθίμης</u> <u>φιλότητος</u> Ἀμαζονίδων ἐγένοντο,
> τήν ποτε Σαυρομάτησιν ἐπ' ἀνθρώποισι μίγησαν,
> πλαγχθεῖσαι πάτρηθεν ἀπόπροθι Θερμώδοντος.
> And they dwell near the Maiotic lake,
> the Maiotai themselves and the tribes of the Sauromatae,
> a noble offshoot of Ares Enualios; for from that
> <u>steadfast</u> (=*iphthīmos*) <u>love</u> (=*philotēs)* of the Amazonides they were born,
> the love which they once were mingled in among the Sauromatae people,
> when they (=the Amazonides) were driven away from their fatherland, far from the
>      Thermodon.

That ἴφθιμος is an epithet of φιλότης 'friendship, love, affection' makes sense in terms of the preceding analysis of its place in the system of Epic diction. Either Dionysius knew his Homer well — he uses ἴφθιμος twice elsewhere in expressions that do have Homeric parallels — and extended the application of the word in this way that suits the 'grammar' of Epic, or he borrowed the expression from some other Homeric source now lost to us. Either way, the attestation implies that the cautious use of post-Homerica is a valid resource to Homeric philology, because the Homeric poetic system lived on as a cultural phenomenon in Greece for a very long time. A fortiori, the ability to look back at avatars of the epic tradition before the ones that we have, even when they have been reshaped in the long history of other cultures, is an opportunity for understanding whose value cannot be underestimated.

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[5] D. Aubriot-Sévin, *Prière et conceptions religieuses: en Grèce ancienne jusqu'à la fin du Ve siècle avant J.-C.*, Lyon, 1992, makes just this criticism of my work on Homeric prayers.

This Homer, then, that needs to be rebuilt from scratch, that evolved as a system over centuries before we even begin to have it, and that can extend its reach into an indefinite future, is a banquet of vast proportions. Since I spoke earlier of Douglas Frame's advice on finding a research subject, it seems fitting to conclude with another of his pronouncements, one that has become known to his friends as Frame's Law. I believe that he expressed it first in connection with his learning that someone had stolen a particularly good idea of his and published it before he'd had a chance to write it up himself. The original formulation was not a thing of beauty, but like a good Roman law, it gets the idea across in the fewest possible words: "There's enough room in here for everybody," where the "here" is the study of Homer. As I recall — and time can play tricks on recollections of one's youth — the first application of Frame's law by its author was that the thief had taken Frame's idea and done something very different from what Frame had in mind with it; so there was room for both the thief and his victim at the table. Another application would be: there's no need for thievery in the first place.