HEPHAISTOS AND SPIDERS' WEBS

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"Fiction is like a spider's web."
Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*

Thought-Woman, the spider,
Names things and
As she named them
They appeared,

She is sitting in her room
Thinking of a story now
I'm telling you the story
She is thinking.

Leslie Silko, *Ceremony*[1]

These two introductory epigraphs, Victorian and native American, indicate the cross-cultural and trans-historical consistency of the connection between spiders' webs and narrative.[2] While the first author is broadly concerned with the problematics of gender and creative productivity, especially literary productivity, the second specifically asserts a feminine author or creator for the web of narrative. The basis for the presence of spiders and their webs in both of these considerations of narrative can be found in the long-standing association between notions of weaving and the creation of narrative, an association occasionally expressed through arachnid imagery.[3] Furthermore, because of the traditional cultural role which women occupy as weavers, any weaving metaphor, simile, or analogy which is employed for narrative is already implicated in issues of gender. This relationship between women and weaving is made explicit in Silko's version of the beginning of things, where a female spider is responsible for the naming, and thus the creation, of both reality and fiction. In this native American myth, not only is a female (spider) credited with the tangible activity of weaving, but also with the intangible, abstract production of narrative. Woolf's words leave latent the connection between the feminine and the weaving of narratives, yet

[1] Woolf 1929: 72; Silko 1977: 1.

[2] I would like to express my deep gratitude to the referees of this article; I very much appreciate the care and generosity with which they read a challenging, if not idiosyncratic, piece of work. Their suggestions significantly improved the clarity and force of my argument.

[3] From the ancient world, see the myths of Arachne (Ov. *Met.* 6.5–145) and Procne and Philomela (Ov. *Met.* 6.424–674; Apollod. 3.14.8); see Scheid and Svenbro 1996: 128–136 for references to spiders and narrative in antiquity and Hillis Miller 1978 and 1992 for analyses of narrative and weaving based on Ariadne's thread.

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one might infer that Woolf has in mind some of these associations in a manifesto directed towards liberating women's creative powers.

The *Odyssey*, and indeed Homeric epic, are full of references and situations which suggest an analogical relationship between weaving and narrative, all of which evoke anxieties about narrative and gender.[4] Little noticed, however, are the two mentions of spiders' webs in the *Odyssey*. The first reference occurs in the Song of Ares and Aphrodite in *Odyssey* 8, where Hephaistos captures the illicit lovers in bonds like delicate spiders' webs (ἠΰτ' ἀράχνια λεπτά, *Od.* 8.280). The major premises of this narrative seem to be neither well known nor frequently repeated in early Greek: the marriage of Hephaistos and Aphrodite is virtually unattested elsewhere; the subsequent adultery of Ares and Aphrodite finds its most explicit and lengthy version in this very episode; and Hephaistos' apprehension of the lovers in their amorous adventures is also unfamiliar.[5] Given the uniqueness or rarity of this scene in contemporary art and literature, it seems likely that the Homeric poet or tradition either selected a little known tale for specific narrative purposes or constructed an innovative scenario for these same purposes which may then have entered the mythological vernacular. The second reference to ἀράχνια is in the "strange echo" of Telemachos' words to Eumaios at *Od.* 16.34–35, when the young man asks the family retainer to relate to him the status of his mother's fidelity to Odysseus; this would be exemplified by the absence of spiders' webs on Odysseus' bed, an indication that Penelope has not abandoned the οἶκος.[6] In both instances, the spiders' webs play a significant role in determining the sexual fidelity of a wife.

These two references to spiders' webs, I hope to demonstrate, are not simply "strange," but are both intimately related to the narrative strategies of the *Odyssey*. Embedded within the *Odyssey* as an already known narrative (whether it actually *is* already known or not) is a narrative representation of the worst possible scenario for Odysseus within his own epic. This internal narrative allows the *Odyssey* to rehearse a story of marital infidelity whose outline is highly suggestive of a potential narrative direction for the *Odyssey* itself; Penelope's fidelity is already under intense scrutiny both in the context of the dominant narrative and through repeated contact with the narratives of Clytemnestra and Helen.[7] The narrative

[4] For weaving and narrative in Homer, see, for example, Snyder 1981: 193–194; for weaving, narrative, and the feminine in ancient Greece, see Bergren 1983.

[5] "[I]t is striking to find that in developing this passage the poet both creates the marriage and apparently annuls it" (Brown 1989: 283, n. 2); see also Garvie 1994: 293. The relationship between Aphrodite and Ares is better attested: see Hainsworth in Heubeck 1988: 364, referring to the François Vase, cult, Hes. *Theog.* 933–937, and a Lemnian vase of 550; see also Delcourt 1957: 76. The passage contains not only mythic novelty but also linguistic variation: see Brown 1989: 284; Hainsworth in Heubeck 1988: 364. Delcourt (1957: 9) argues for the Song being a recent part of the *Odyssey*, even if the theme itself is ancient.

[6] See Garvie (1994: 297 *ad loc.*), who offers no explanation for spiders' webs in either passage, for the "strange echo"; Newton (1987: 18, n. 22) merely observes both instances.

[7] See Bliss 1968: 63 on the *Odyssey* and marital fidelity; Newton (1987: 13, 15–16) also acknowledges the implicit equation between Penelope and Aphrodite; Zeitlin (1995: 122) reads

self-reflexivity of the Song, however, suggests that there may be readings which transcend the simple equation between its plot and the marital plot of the *Odyssey*. Not only do I concur with earlier critics that the Song of Ares and Aphrodite must be considered seriously within the narrative of the *Odyssey*, but I further suggest that the spiders' webs embedded within the Song and repeated in *Odyssey* 16 are crucial to understanding the Song and the *Odyssey* itself. Together these two rare uses of the word are further indications of the *Odyssey*'s meditation on narrative.

Before moving to the text of the *Odyssey*, let me outline a recent theoretical debate which also turns on spiders and their webs. The use of arachnid images in this discussion may seem as strange as the references in the *Odyssey*, but at stake is how to understand the production of narrative, which I have indicated will figure significantly in my analysis of Hephaistos' webs. The metaphorical connection between the spider's web, a fictional narrative, and a woven cloth provides the impetus for a fragment in one of Roland Barthes's influential commentaries about the production of a text. In *The Pleasure of the Text*, Barthes writes (1975: 64):

> we are now emphasizing, in the tissue, the generative idea that the text is made, is worked out in a perpetual interweaving; lost in this tissue—this texture—the subject unmakes himself, like a spider dissolving in the constructive secretions of its web. Were we fond of neologisms, we might define the theory of the text as an *hyphology* (*hyphos* is the tissue and the spider's web).[8]

In this passage, we see Barthes's trademark effort to minimize the authorial influence on a text and to imagine a text as a "discursive process" (Logan 1982: 74).[9] In addition, Geoffrey Hartman in "The Voice of the Shuttle: Language from the Point of View of Literature" appeals to the myths of Procne, Philomela, and Arachne to bolster his contentions about weaving, Language (sic), and narrative (Hartman 1970). These analyses of weaving and narrative, despite their basis in activities and in myths significantly related to the feminine, do not problematize the interrelation of gender and narrative, even though the analogy between narrative and weaving seems to suggest such a direction.

Feminist critics, as a result of what they perceived to be the androcentric direction of Barthes's "hyphology" in *The Pleasure of the Text* and Hartman's appropriation of the myths of Philomela and Arachne, examined the significance of the neglect of gender in analyses of these mythical narratives and the denial of authorship in a theory based upon a spider's web. Patricia Joplin's "The Voice of the Shuttle is Ours" (Joplin 1984) and Nancy Miller's "Arachnologies: The Woman, the Text, and the Critic" (Miller 1986) re-insert the female as

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Penelope's sexual fidelity as the "principal anxiety which hovers over the whole poem"; for the "indeterminacy" of Penelope's fidelity throughout the narrative of the *Odyssey*, see Katz 1991.

[8] For text as the "interweaving of a tissue," a "fabric," see also Barthes 1981: 39 and 32.

[9] See also Logan 1982: 70–74 for a chronological account of Barthes's movement from *text*, based on the cognate Latin, to the Greek *hyphos* which effectively disconnects the notion of text from the English (and French) signifier.

author into the narrative of narrative. As her title indicates, Miller opposes her own "arachnology," which returns our gaze to the producer of the text, to Barthes's "hyphology," which finds its meaning in the product, the text itself (Miller 1986: 270–272). Following Hartman, Joplin and Miller particularly situate their arguments in the ancient model of the myth of Arachne in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (6.5–145), a narrative which efficiently combines the images of female weaver, weaving as a potential form of narrative, and spiders and their webs. The discussions then progress to the narrative of Procne and Philomela, which strongly associates the female voice and weaving.[10] The disturbing leap made by Arachne and Philomela from real weaving to metaphorical weaving, i.e., narrative, from feminine silence to masculine language, from passivity to resistance, has significant narrative results, as Joplin argues.[11] The subversive weaver Arachne is punished violently, while in the story of Procne and Philomela the violence of Tereus is presented as being exceeded by the infanticide of the sisters, well illustrating the dangers which might result from feminine access to masculine power in language.[12] These two narratives serve both to acknowledge the connections between the feminine and narrative/language/writing while simultaneously implicitly justifying cultural control over feminine access to them. Joplin's and Miller's strongest contribution to the debate is their recognition of the presence of the female in Barthes's and Hartman's narrative of language, in which an "elision of gender" elevates Literature and narrative to unmarked, and therefore masculine, abstractions (Joplin 1984: 26).[13]

The terms "hyphology" and "arachnology," as their coiners would surely agree, represent radically different theoretical approaches to a text. Nevertheless, all of the critics invoke literary evidence in which either the figure of the spider has been a woman or the production of webs is within the feminine frame of weaving, whether or not this is explicitly acknowledged in their analyses. Considered from this perspective, Hephaistos' webs appear even stranger as the product of a masculine technician, and a question thus arises concerning what kind of "arachnoid writing" the *Odyssey* might propose.[14] A close study of the ἀράχνια in the *Odyssey* will contribute to the debate about "hyphology" and "arachnology," just as the frame provided by these terms will illuminate the spiders' webs of the *Odyssey*.

[10] Ov. *Met.* 6.424–674; Apollod. 3.14.8, where Philomela reveals the rape ὑφήνασα ... γράμματα.

[11] For Arachne's narrative web revealing or signifying shameful sexual encounters of the gods, see Vincent 1994: 378; Miller 1986: 272–273. For weaving as "resistance," see Joplin 1984: 26.

[12] See Segal 1994: 275 for the presentation of the women's revenge as more monstrous than Tereus' original rape and excision of Philomela's tongue.

[13] See also Miller 1986: 282. Among classicists, Segal (1994) reacts to the work of Barthes as his title indicates, while also responding to the work of Joplin and Miller on narrative.

[14] For the phrase "arachnoid writing," see Scheid and Svenbro 1996: 128–129; for them, the term refers to "the web of the poem ... which holds the voice [cicada] prisoner." Each reader liberates the voice by reading the poem, i.e., by reconstructing the (meaning of the) poem.

Not just the spiders' webs, but much else about the Song of Ares and Aphrodite is strange. The most immediate marker of difference from the main body of the narrative is a comic eroticism which belies the seriousness of the topic.[15] The content of the Song also distinguishes it from the other two sung by Demodokos: Goldhill rightly points out that the first and third songs introduce an Odysseus who arrives in Phaeacia "already a subject for epic song"; these *epyllia* appear to resemble the genre of epic poetry typified by the *Iliad* (Goldhill 1991: 50).[16] The first relates a quarrel between Achilles and Odysseus which has been variously interpreted, which is otherwise unattested, and which remains unresolved in this context.[17] The third narrative relates Odysseus' trick of the Trojan horse, which successfully ends the ten years of the Trojan war. The Song of Ares and Aphrodite is quite different from the other two in its narrative mode: the story is unconnected to Iliadic events, which in the context of the *Odyssey* are treated as historical, and relates events solely concerned with the exploits of the Olympian gods. In this sense, the Song is as "mythological" for the internal audience of the *Odyssey* as it is for the external audience, ancient or modern. The Song also exhibits no direct relationship to Odysseus or his narrative. While the truth value of the two stories dealing with Odysseus seems to be validated by Odysseus' silent, tearful acceptance of the narratives, the truth value of this central song is less clearly discernible, and its value to us, the external audience, is correspondingly less dependent upon Odysseus' reaction, because he cannot vouch for its veracity.[18] Despite the unique erotic and mythological quality of the song, its integration and efficacy within the *Odyssey* have been successfully maintained. Braswell has demonstrated that the Song is relevant to the recent encounter between Odysseus and Euryalos (Braswell 1982: 131–135, 136).[19] The Song can also be read as projecting a possible future event within the narrative of the *Odyssey* itself, or as an intratextual narrative suggesting one of the many possible directions for the main narrative of the *Odyssey*, as Braswell,

[15] For the comic aspect of the song, see Burkert 1960: 130–144; Hainsworth in Heubeck 1988: 363. All the songs in *Odyssey* 8 are also marked by the intervention of Demodokos; for the Song of Ares and Aphrodite in particular, *scholia* note that it is created by Demodokos, not Homer, as an explanation of its difference from the rest of the narrative: see Bliss 1968: 57; Newton 1987: 12, n. 1.

[16] See also Pucci 1987: 218.

[17] On the relationship between this quarrel and the quarrel between Achilles and Agamemnon in *Iliad* 1, see Braswell 1982: 130, n. 5; Nagy 1979: 22–23. For this song representing the deep, traditional enmity between Achilles and Odysseus, see Nagy 1979: 42–58. "In fact the poet tells us all we need to know at this moment, and a sensitive reader or hearer will always see in the opposition of Achilles and Odysseus an antithesis between violence and guile. A good case could be made for the contention that this is all the myth there ever was" (Bliss 1968: 64, n. 19).

[18] For Demodokos as both a "truthful" and an "Iliadic" poet in the first and third songs, see Pucci 1987: 215. Odysseus does indeed react with pleasure to Demodokos' second recitation (*Od.* 8.367–368); a striking parallel is Odysseus' pleased reaction to Penelope's unwitting seduction of the suitors in *Od.* 18.

[19] See also Burkert 1960: 136; Marg 1971: 14–15.

Edinger, and Newton argue.[20] Odysseus/Hephaistos could arrive home to find his wife Penelope/Aphrodite in the embrace of one of the suitors, whom he would then punish.[21] In Demodokos' middle song, the *Odyssey*, rather than referring back to Iliadic themes as the other two songs do, creates its own internal web of narrative whose threads are delicate, virtually invisible, but unbreakable.

The tenuous but strong ties of the Song of Ares and Aphrodite to the narrative of the *Odyssey* are mirrored by a similar bond between the god Hephaistos and the hero Odysseus. Again, a parallel which at first glance appears strange is revealed upon examination to be fundamentally motivated by the narrative strategy of the *Odyssey*, which encourages an identification between Hephaistos and Odysseus himself. The god Hephaistos appears as both the hapless cuckold of the glamorous Aphrodite and the powerful Ares, and the clever, even heroic, captor and exposer of the adulterous pair. With Hephaistos Odysseus shares weaknesses and strengths which are essential elements of his characterization throughout the *Odyssey*. Physically, lameness or bad legs are associated with both Hephaistos and Odysseus. Hephaistos' characteristic lameness is either congenital, causing Hera to hurl him from Olympus (*Il.* 18.395–405); or the result of Zeus throwing him from Olympus for his role in an aborted rebellion by Hera (*Il.* 1.586–594), which is connected to the divine rebellion described at *Il.* 1.396–406.[22] The *Odyssey*'s own reference to Hephaistos' birth and lameness occurs in Book 8, where he is described as the son of Hera and Zeus who is lame from birth (*Od.* 8.312–313).

Odysseus' legs and unprepossessing physical appearance are also the focus of attention in both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Odysseus is described by Priam at *Il.* 3.193–194 as shorter than Agamemnon and wider in the shoulders and chest; a few lines later Antenor reveals that Menelaos' shoulders are bigger than Odysseus' even though Odysseus is "more majestic" (γεραρώτερος) when sitting (3.210–211). Antenor's remembrance of Odysseus also emphasizes the contrast between Odysseus' outward appearance and his verbal ability: having fixed his eyes on the ground and looked up at his audience, he seems to be an ignorant

[20] See Edinger 1980: 46 for the specific and broader relationship of the Song of Ares and Aphrodite to the narrative of the *Odyssey*, although Edinger's article as a whole concentrates, like Braswell's, on the song within *Odyssey* 8. For more recent interpretations, see Newton 1987: 12, citing Athenaeus (5.192d–e) as an ancient commentator who recognized the implications of the song for Odysseus.

[21] For the ultimate morality of the outcome, see Hainsworth in Heubeck 1988: 363; Bliss 1968: 64, n. 18; Brown 1989: 284–285. Pucci (2000: 291–292), while questioning the notion that the *Odyssey* as a whole has any fixed morality, notes that certain episodes, among them the Song of Ares and Aphrodite, pertain to morality. Cf., however, Peradotto (1993: 181), who reads the Song as "exceeding" the morality of epic, and Olson (1989: 136, 139–143), who sees the song as the subversive intrusion of a "real" scenario of adultery which highlights the comfortable, unreal conclusion of the epic.

[22] A *scholium* to *Il.* 1.586–594 indicates that Hephaistos was thrown to Lemnos for his participation in this rebellion.

man, surly and foolish. Odysseus' speech, however, reveals him to be worthy of his epithet πολύμητις (3.216) as he sends forth his huge voice and words like winter snow (3.221–222).[23] As Braswell and then Newton have outlined, Odysseus' appearance in the *Odyssey* is frequently degraded and also bears similarities to Hephaistos' physique. In Book 8, Odysseus refers to the weakness of his sea legs (230–233) and Hephaistos comments on his own lameness (306–312). Odysseus, as part of his beggarly disguise when he arrives on Ithaca, supports himself on his walking stick, feigning disability (17.203 and 338), and finally, the scar, the physical mark which identifies Odysseus most firmly to certain members of his household, is the result of a wound to his thigh.[24]

In addition to certain physical characteristics, Odysseus and Hephaistos also share an internal quality which is both innate and necessitated by their physical weakness, whether actual as in the case of Hephaistos, or feigned, as is frequently the case for Odysseus. This is μῆτις, by means of which in *Odyssey* 8 Hephaistos captures the illicit lovers with his device of a net. Hephaistos' epithets include κλυτοτέχνης (*Od.* 8.286; *Il.* 1.571, 18.143 and 391), κλυτόμητις (*Homeric Hymn* 20.1), πολύμητις (*Il.* 21.355), and πολύφρων (*Il.* 21.367; *Od.* 8.297, 327), all of which indicate his connection with μῆτις and two of which also describe Odysseus (πολύμητις, πολύφρων).[25] Hephaistos exhibits his μῆτις primarily through his activities as a craftsman: his τέχνη and μῆτις create objects which appear to be animate, like the creatures on Pandora's headdress similar to speaking beings (*Theog.* 584); the shield of Achilles in *Iliad* 18, decorated with images that appear to move; and magical dogs which guard the palace of Alcinous in *Odyssey* 7 (91–94). Hephaistos also creates objects which come alive themselves, such as Pandora (*Theog.* 571–572; *Erga* 60–71), and the handmaidens which he fashions as his own helpers (*Il.* 18.417–420).[26] In these depictions of Hephaistos as a craftsman relying on his μῆτις and τέχνη, the production of animate and semi-animate beings imitates or even replicates female reproduction.[27] We see a similar pattern in the representation of Zeus in the *Theogony*, where Zeus himself possesses μῆτις, an innate quality which is confirmed or solidified through his literal incorporation of the pregnant goddess Μῆτις. Zeus' μῆτις seems to enable him to participate in a displaced process of reproduction: Zeus is the ultimate creator of Pandora, and he gives birth to Athena from his head after swallowing her pregnant mother Μῆτις. Like Zeus, Hephaistos through μῆτις assumes at least metaphorically the female capability for reproduction. Thus Hephaistos

[23] Newton (1987: 13, n. 8) maintains that the comparison of Odysseus to a ram in the following lines implies that his legs are short and thin, an implication which to me remains fanciful.

[24] Newton 1987: 13–15, adducing other similarities.

[25] πολύφρων: *Od.* 1.83, 14.424, 20.239, 21.204; πολύμητις: *Il.* 1.311, 3.200; *Od.* 2.173, 4.763, 5.214.

[26] As Delcourt (1957: 11) notes, the Hephaistos who is capable of immobilizing by chains or binding is also able "animer l'immobile."

[27] See the chapter "Naissances miraculeuses": Delcourt 1957: 137–153.

already has significant associations with the feminine which underlie the spiders' web simile in the Song of Ares and Aphrodite in *Odyssey* 8.

An even closer relationship between Odysseus and Hephaistos as both craftsmen and "feminine" in some way appears to be presented by the text of the *Odyssey* more than once. First, the simile comparing Odysseus to a blacksmith in the famous episode when he blinds Polyphemos using μῆτις (*Od.* 9.391–394) directly suggests an association between the hero and the god. Odysseus also reveals woodworking skills in the construction of the raft he builds to escape Kalypso's island. Furthermore, the most famous instance in the *Odyssey* of Odysseus' craft is his construction of a marital bed, the narrative of which, like Hephaistos' spiders' webs around another marital bed in *Odyssey* 8, will reveal proof of female/marital fidelity.[28] Odysseus thus shares Hephaistos' reliance on μῆτις and his technical abilities. He also, like Hephaistos, is a masculine figure whose representation has feminine overtones; I have argued that Odysseus' μῆτις is a feminine aspect of his characterization, while Foley has demontrated that Odysseus partakes of the feminine in "reverse similes" in the *Odyssey*.[29]

In the Song of Ares and Aphrodite, however, Hephaistos applies his μῆτις not towards the production of life-like creations, but towards the creation of a web of chains.[30] When Hephaistos hears about the adulterous behavior of his wife, he relies upon his μῆτις to make a δόλος or trap (*Od.* 8.276, 278, 282, 317) comprising unbreakable and unloosenable metal chains (274–275) which are repeatedly referred to as crafty or tricky: δολόεντα (281), τεχνήεντες (297), τέχνας (327), and τέχνῃσι (332). These bonds are doubly insidious because no one can see them, not even the blessed gods. Like so much else in this Song, Hephaistos' connection with chains and binding is not strongly attested elsewhere. In the *Iliad*, there are elusive references to various gods whose bindings have been associated with Hephaistos by *scholia*, by suggestive vases and statues, and by later authors. At *Il.* 1.396–406, Thetis describes an episode in which Hera, Poseidon, and Athena want to bind Zeus (συνδῆσαι, 399). A *scholium* to *Il.* 1.591 saying that Zeus threw Hephaistos to Lemnos because of the chains of Hera (τοὺς τῆς Ἥρας δεσμούς) seems to relate to the binding at 1.396–406 (Delcourt 1957: 43).[31] Hephaistos also apparently enchains Hera herself on a throne, perhaps as revenge for her unsatisfactory maternal attention.[32] In *Odyssey* 8, the bonds hanging invisibly from the rafters, another expression of Hephaistos' μῆτις, strangely suggest ἀράχνια λεπτά, spiders' webs, and bring us back to the implicit binding power of weaving and narrative in Homeric epic, particularly the *Odyssey*.

[28] For Hephaistos' carpentry, see *Il.* 1.606–608, 2.101; for woodworking, Newton 1987: 13–14.

[29] Holmberg 1995 and 1997; Foley 1994: esp. 72–73.

[30] One of the most successful operations of μῆτις is through binding (Detienne and Vernant 1991: 81); and binding is indeed a particular focus of Hephaistos' μῆτις (279–326).

[31] Plato (*Rep.* 2.378d) presents the binding of Zeus by Hera as Iliadic; see above, n. 22.

[32] Pindar fr. 283 (Snell). For Wilamowitz's inventive weaving together of all these stories into a cohesive, if unlikely, narrative, see Delcourt 1957: 31, 87, 78–79.

The acts of weaving depicted in both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* present an image of weaving which combines the manual, technical skill (τέχνη) familiar from Hephaistos' creations and the mental or intellectual skill (μῆτις) required for the weaving of a δόλος and narrative. The ancient Greek word used for weaving in many, although not all, of the instances of weaving is ὑφαίνω, cognate with Barthes's "hyphology" from the Greek ὕφος. The craft of weaving fabric is confined in the Homeric poems to females, but it is also, even in this context, strongly associated with song and narrative. In the introductions of Kalypso and Kirke, who sing while they weave, we see a very simple connection between weaving and singing.[33] In *Il.* 3.125–128, Helen weaves (ὕφαινε, 125) a tapestry which depicts the battle which is being fought because of herself and Paris. A *scholium* notes that the poet has provided a worthy archetype of his own poem in Helen's weaving (ἀξιόχρεων ἀρχέτυπον ἀνέπλασεν ὁ ποιητὴς τῆς ἰδίας ποιήσεως);[34] Helen's tapestry, however, is embedded within the monument of the *Iliad*, and memory of her tapestry only survives through the skill and immortality of that epic.[35] In this example, we see the explicit association of narratives woven in fabric with the female. The weaving of fabric and the weaving of a narrative are so closely associated here as to suggest that the oral tradition understood or considered the poetic creation of a narrative to be analogically related to weaving.[36]

The Homeric poems also present a semantic range for ὑφαίνω which widens beyond the weaving of fabric into a broader metaphorical context. Penelope's production of the shroud for Laertes is both a literal and metaphorical act of weaving, combining in her deceptive ravelling and unravelling of the shroud both the technical aspects of weaving and abstract μῆτις, thereby warding off the suitors. The suitors' descriptions of Penelope's deception mention both trickery and weaving, but not in a direct relationship: in *Odyssey* 2 and 24, a suitor says that Penelope plans a δόλον (*Od.* 2.93 = 24.128; see also 2.106 for the δόλῳ) and weaves the shroud (ὕφαινε, *Od.* 2.94 = 24.129). Penelope's own description, however, gestures significantly towards a relationship between the

[33] *Od.* 5.58–62; 10.221–223, 226–228, 254–255. For this connection between singing and weaving, see Snyder 1981: 194; also Pantelia 1993: 498. The singing of these immortal females marks a recognition of the informal songs in which ancient women surely engaged while plying their tasks; see Lord 1948: 40 for the significant number of texts (11,000 out of 12,500) attributed to women in the Parry Collection of South Slavic Texts. Nevertheless, such a representation does not support a gender-based distinction between oral (feminine) narrative and written (masculine) texts. Any gender-based distinction derives from the cultural authority of types of narratives: Bassi (1997) persuades that in Homeric epic, face-to-face orality associated with masculine communication supersedes any type of written communication. In ancient Greece, in fact, the deceptiveness believed to be inherent to writing aligns it with the feminine. While written texts may be privileged in the critical analyses I have introduced, what is important is less a question of oral vs. written than of the use of language as a tool of cultural modelling and reflection, and of who controls this determination.

[34] Erbse 1969: 381.

[35] Helen's knowledge of the workings of narrative is further revealed later by her famous statement to Hektor in *Iliad* 6 (357–358) that they will be the subjects of song for men in the future.

[36] *Contra* Scheid and Svenbro 1996: 112.

literal weaving of Laertes' shroud and a metaphorical, mental weaving of δόλοι and μῆτις. In her own words, Penelope's decision to trick the suitors was a spinning of tricks (ἐγὼ δὲ δόλους τολυπεύω, *Od.* 19.137). By using the word for spinning, she refers to the preliminary work necessary to weaving, and neatly stays within the metaphorical context of weaving by manipulating the extended field of activities related to it. After Penelope has finished her narrative, she despondently tells the beggar that she can find no other μῆτιν (19.158). As Pietro Pucci notes (2000: 284), Penelope is the only mortal female in the Homeric text whose weaving becomes metaphorical, although her metaphorical weaving is still intimately connected to literal weaving. Penelope's μῆτις of Laertes' shroud, temporarily successful, is eventually uncovered and ultimately fails to deceive the suitors. In fact, Penelope's weaving and unweaving symbolize stasis in the narrative, rather than the forward movement which is the prerogative of Odysseus once the narrative urges him from Kalypso's bed. Penelope's weaving preserves and prepares the way for the heroic Odysseus, just as Penelope's plotting at the end of the epic functions as a supplement, however important, to Odysseus' own plot and narratives.[37] In the figure of Athena, the Homeric text even more explicitly uses weaving metaphorically when the goddess weaves μῆτις for Odysseus' νόστος (ὑφαίνω, 13.303 and 386) only to be forced to invoke her father Zeus in the last lines of the *Odyssey*.[38] Zeus ultimately resolves the potentially endless generational conflict which that νόστος has initiated, and effectively provides closure for the epic itself, just as his decision to allow Odysseus to be roused from Kalypso's island begins the narrative. The weaving of both Penelope and Athena, while playing a significant role in the narrative, is ultimately marginalized and subordinated to the demands of the narrative focus on Odysseus.

In the Homeric texts, men do not weave fabric, but they are described as weaving μῆτις, like Athena, and, once, words. This entirely abstract weaving by masculine characters is appropriate within each context but also highly problematic for a variety of reasons. The weaving of a μῆτις can be dangerously deceptive and threatening to the hero's mission, as when the Lydian king weaves a πυκινὸν δόλον for the hero Bellerophon (*Il.* 6.187) and the suitors in the *Odyssey* weave a μῆτις (4.678). On the other hand, the μῆτις created in defense of the hero's goal (i.e., the narrative goal) can also be presented as essentially positive: the wise and cunning old Nestor weaves a μῆτις for the Greeks (*Il.* 7.324, 9.93); Odysseus describes his victory over Polyphemos as the weaving of δόλοι and μῆτις (*Od.* 9.422); and Penelope imagines Laertes as weaving a plan to protect her household (4.739). In the only direct connection between weaving and words in epic, the Greek ambassadors to the Trojans weave words and plans (μύθους καὶ μήδεα …

[37] For more positive readings of Penelope's subjectivity, see Felson-Rubin 1994; Katz 1991; Winkler 1990: 129–161.

[38] Athena does not literally weave, but she does teach the art of weaving to Pandora and to women: see Hes. *Erga* 63–64; *Od.* 7.109–110.

ὕφαινον, *Il.* 3.212).[39] The ambiguity of metaphorical weaving is clear from these divergent examples. Hephaistos, known for his μῆτις, his δόλοι, his τέχνη, fits comfortably into a situation, if you will, in which he might "weave" (ὑφαίνω) any of these, including perhaps μῦθοι. The Song of Ares and Aphrodite thus incorporates the masculine but unmanned Hephaistos within an ambiguous nexus of weaving, femininity, and marginality.

These same spiders' webs, however, also redeem the figure of Hephaistos. The imagery of the spiders' webs in the Song of Ares and Aphrodite, in fact, serves to obscure the connections established by the Homeric texts themselves between the female and weaving. The emphasis in the Song on the webs rather than the spider/weaver resembles the emphasis in Barthes's "hyphology" on the *hyphos* rather than the spider, on the text rather than the producer. Yet while Barthes's formulation implies the death of the author, Homeric poetry firmly establishes the masculine Hephaistos as the creator of these webs. We remember that the arc of both the Arachne and Philomela narratives contains the representational weaving of sexual crimes against women, but that the representation of, or revenge for, these events is not condoned by the narrative. Feminine weaving and language, by revealing abuses endemic to the Olympian and patriarchal power structure, become subversive and dangerous, to be controlled by males.[40] The web in the hands of this masculine weaver, however, does not represent the sexual crimes of the patriarchy, but rather captures a sexual crime *against* the patriarchal institution of marriage which is revealed and punished accordingly. In *Odyssey* 8, by comparison with the Ovidian passages, Hephaistos the husband is the victim and is in a sense violated, rather than a female, and the picture he presents of sexual infidelity exposes a crime against the patriarchal institution of marriage rather than against a single female whose legitimacy as a victim is ultimately compromised by the narrative itself. Hephaistos' web protects rather than destroys the social fabric, capturing for all the gods and goddesses (and the audience of the *Odyssey*) the picture of Aphrodite, the epitome of sexualized femininity, acting out a husband's worst fears. The Hephaistos from the *Iliad* who is associated with feminine challenges to the authority of Zeus is reconfigured within the context of the *Odyssey*.[41] He now becomes the avenger of adultery and the upholder of patriarchal authority. This revision of Hephaistos has everything to do with the *Odyssey*'s eponymous hero and the narrative ideology of the *Odyssey*. Hephaistos' webs, by capturing and representing a narrative of sexual infidelity, contain a narrative whose own ideological truth (the sexual inconstancy or vulnerability of the female *and* the male ability to overcome this danger) bolsters

[39] As Scheid and Svenbro (1996: 114) point out, Homer here is clearly "familiar with the metaphor of verbal weaving" although he does not use it for his own art.

[40] Doherty (1995: 127–160) emphasizes the "disruptive" (127) qualities of a number of narratives by females within the *Odyssey* (Helen, Sirens, Penelope) which are framed and ultimately contained by a narrative hierarchy which privileges the stories of Odysseus and the epic narrator.

[41] In *Odyssey* 8 we see a "nouvelle incarnation" of Hephaistos according to Delcourt (1957: 30).

the narrative fidelity of the *Odyssey* by refracting its concern with Penelope's own sexual vulnerability and predicting Odysseus' ultimate triumph.

The *Odyssey*'s intertwining of sexual and textual fidelity is later exemplified by the second reference to spiders' webs, in Penelope's bed: at *Od.* 16.34–35, a bed having evil spiders' webs (εὐνὴ ... κάκ' ἀράχνια ... ἔχουσα) potentially signifies Penelope's infidelity.[42] Telemachos has come to Eumaios' hut to see the old servant, and to hear the story (μῦθον) of whether Penelope waits at home or whether someone else has married her so that the bed of Odysseus lies bereft (of bedclothes or occupants, captured in κάκ' ἀράχνια). These spiders' webs speak to the *Odyssey*'s central concern with the fidelity of Penelope. Their presence would mean that Penelope has vacated the bed she shared with Odysseus; they would capture her infidelity just as the web of Hephaistos captures the infidelity of Aphrodite. Telemachos wants to hear the μῦθος which their presence or absence tells about Penelope's fidelity, a narrative strand which is woven into the μῦθος of the *Odyssey* and is now resonantly connected by a verbal thread to the story of Aphrodite's infidelity in the Song of Ares and Aphrodite in *Odyssey* 8. Thus, in both *Odyssey* 8 and 16, the spiders' webs cover a nuptial bed, a bed whose construction is closely aligned with the technical skill and identity of the rightful husband, and the presence of these webs reveals the infidelity of the wife. The web and its present or absent contents become a sign of infidelity: in Book 8, the trapped lovers themselves are caught in the visible act of infidelity; in Book 16, the absence of Penelope would have allowed the spiders' webs to enshroud the bed.[43] These webs are thus pictured as ordering and making visible, through their presence, a tale of infidelity.

The narrative of the *Odyssey*, however, weaves a story in which no spider's web is necessary as an epistemological device. Or rather, narrative itself becomes the web which captures the truth about fidelity or infidelity. Demodokos relates the μῦθος of Aphrodite and Ares; Telemachos desires the μῦθος of his mother, learning from Eumaios that she remains in the palace with an enduring heart; and Odysseus' μῦθος about the construction of that very same bed enables the revelation of Penelope's continuing fidelity while at the same time revealing his own identity in the most forceful manner possible. All of these embedded narratives posit the power of μῦθος to ensnare sexual fidelity or infidelity and the role of narrative in maintaining (the) patriarchal order through textual fidelity.

The maintenance of order in domestic arrangements and in narrative compositions is essential for the proper management of both. In the οἶκος, weaving and webs can symbolize a state of "domestic harmony and order" in which weaving is an antidote to "a state of domestic disorder."[44] Indeed, the absence of Odysseus causes disorder in his house which may itself be figured by Penelope's inconclusive

[42] For the importance of this bed as determinative of Penelope's fidelity, see Zeitlin 1995: 133.

[43] *Pace* Zeitlin 1995: 133, reading reverse signs of absence and presence in these passages.

[44] See Pantelia 1993: 498, 499; also Joplin 1984: 48 for weaving as "a return to order."

weaving of the shroud of Laertes. Epic, as does most narrative, presents us with a picture of a world whose order is ultimately revealed; the narrative of the *Odyssey* establishes the correct, harmonious, and above all satisfying ordering of the world of Odysseus. Not only does narrative order the world, but it also puts a framework around a series of events, "binds" them if you will, as the chains of Hephaistos bind the activities of Ares and Aphrodite, providing a captive display of their adultery. The *Odyssey* itself acknowledges the order in which a narrative must be represented. Odysseus compliments Demodokos for singing κατὰ κόσμον (*Od.* 8.489) and encourages him to sing the next song κατὰ μοῖραν (*Od.* 8.496). George Walsh, whose *The Varieties of Enchantment* attempts to elucidate the nature of song in archaic texts, identifies two kinds of order (1984: 7–9): the internal, aesthetic order or μορφή which is expressed at *Od.* 11.363–368 in the words of Alcinous, and the external, morally appropriate order which extends the internal rightness to socio-cultural "rightness." In addition, this pleasing order can validate a narrative, as Walsh argues (1984: 7): "the aesthetically pleasing thing about song cannot be separated from the truth contained in it."[45]

The internal, aesthetic narrative order thus forms and informs the external order on the moral level and is often crucial to the meaning of the narrative as a whole (Walsh 1984: 9); in other words, the harmonious weaving of the various and often differing strands of a narrative can thus form a meaningful story which resembles the complex structure of a spider's web. I have already remarked upon the difference between the Song of Ares and Aphrodite and the rest of the narrative of the *Odyssey*: the alternative poetic voice of Demodokos narrates the Song and it lacks the ostensible historical status of Demodokos' other tales. As I stressed earlier, the Song seems to be a mythological narrative for the internal characters featuring divine players, unlike the other narrated stories embedded in the *Odyssey* which are presented as either fact or fiction concerned with the realistic events of mortal life. This difference, I suggest, is marked precisely to establish the Song's paradigmatic narrative function, which the Song's content also reflects.

The relationship between myth and fiction within the same cohesive narrative plays a significant role in the construction of *Ceremony*, the Silko narrative from which I derived the second epigraph. The book is a blending of traditional native American myth in the form of poetry with a prose narrative about modern native Americans. Cousineau, in her analysis of myth and fiction in this text, makes some observations relevant for my study of spiders' webs. She notes that in Silko's novel the parts of the narrative in poetic verse are clearly marked off

[45] While these may be general guiding principles about song, the *Odyssey* itself undercuts the notion of aesthetically pleasing order guaranteeing truth both in *Odyssey* 11 and also at *Od.* 19.203 where lies resemble the truth. While it is possible for some speakers and poets to manipulate the truth, I would contend that the text of the *Odyssey*, despite its acknowledgment of the potential multiplicity of language and narrative, presents itself as a truthful text, primarily through its ability to order itself in just the way Walsh describes.

as belonging to mythic time. These fragmentary poetic verses are interspersed throughout the narrative; taken together, they assume a status as "conveyor of meaning" which tells a cohesive story (Cousineau 1990: 21). The narrative modes of myth and fiction, however, become confused and interwoven: mythic/poetic and fictional/prosaic narratives and meaning intermingle (Cousineau 1990: 23), just as the questions of fidelity addressed by the Song of Ares and Aphrodite are sewn into the narrative of the *Odyssey* both in *Odyssey* 8 and also in the larger narrative arc of Odysseus' reunion with Penelope and her fidelity. As "[o]ne story gives rise to other stories, and each story must be told if one is to understand the timeless pattern .... The reader must hold a multitude of unfinished stories in his mind, some told in prose, some in poetic form, stories of ancient myth and of the contemporary world" (Cousineau 1990: 22). The mythic presentation of the Song of Ares and Aphrodite additionally supplies a containment strategy which reflects Hephaistos' own containment of Ares and Aphrodite: the unexpected but possible ending to the *Odyssey* is inscribed mythically and safely. Similarly, Joplin argues that the middle of the Procne and Philomela myth, where the two sisters kill the infant Itys and feed him to his father, inscribes the subversive violence of the women and allows them to escape socio-cultural demands. This becomes the locus where the narrative simultaneously presents and then prevents an "unexpected ending" (Joplin 1984: 46). Ultimately in the Song of Ares and Aphrodite, socio-cultural and narrative order is restored, but its complete meaning is clarified only by the ending of the *Odyssey*.[46] This Song, whose existence is so shallowly attested, has its narrative validity verified by the Homeric narrative, which weaves the μῦθος into its own tale as both myth and truth.

The terms "hyphology" and "arachnology" have provided me with a hermeneutic frame to examine two unusual references in the Homeric epics to spiders' webs and their relationship to Homeric narrative. The question of how to classify the narrative strategy of the *Odyssey*, however, still persists. Are the epic poems "arachnoid writing" which hold their strands of narrative in place? Or is the oral poet the "spider that has created and so commands it all" (Hillis Miller 1992: 21)? In the native American context I've been discussing above, Cousineau inquires whether spiders' webs represent a "central structure which becomes accessible to the reader in the course of reading, or [whether] the multiple strands and crisscrossings deny the very notion of a unified discourse" (Cousineau 1990: 20).[47] Her answer is that in this narrative tradition, the "spiderweb is an emphatically nonhierarchical form" (Cousineau 1990: 21).[48] Cousineau's queries are expressions of very broad

[46] "The end of the story is the retrospective revelation of the law of the whole. That law is an underlying 'truth' that ties all together in an inevitable sequence revealing a hitherto hidden figure in the carpet. The image of the line tends always to imply the norm of a single continuous unified structure determined by one external organizing principle" (Miller 1992: 18).

[47] Hillis Miller (1992: 4, 8–9, 14) also notes the significance of repetition and lack of closure in narrative.

[48] For a text as a "polysemic space," see Barthes 1981: 37

theoretical and philosophical methods for approaching narratives, but the approaches she describes are not irreconcilable; in other words, a narrative can both have a central structure and also challenge the notion of a unified discourse. The *Odyssey* is in many ways such a narrative, an epic whose strong structure struggles to contain its centrifugal impulses, to borrow John Peradotto's term. The form of the *Odyssey*, then, in many ways corresponds to Barthesian "hyphology." Not only that, but the notion of the *hyphos* also works as a metaphorical representation of the oral tradition, in which the actual performance is ephemeral, visible and invisible, present and absent, but strong. The spiders' web in the Homeric text captures a narrative moment; the Homeric tradition does the same, weaving these moments together to form the epic. A single author, undiscernible in an oral tradition like the one which created the Homeric epics, or declared dead in the post-structuralist tradition of Barthes, is elusive behind spiders' webs.

A single author may be elusive if not non-existent in the oral tradition which created the *Odyssey*, but the *Odyssey* itself specifies a spider for its webs. In the *Odyssey*, the unmarked, implicit masculine appropriation of feminine weaving, a theoretical move which Miller and Joplin argue is implicit in Barthes's "hyphology" but contradicted by the very ancient literature which provides its premise, is made explicit. In the Homeric text or *hyphos*, the feminine weaving spider is already displaced by a powerful masculine creator of metaphorical spiders' webs. Unlike the later stories of Philomela and Arachne, this displacement is accomplished invisibly without violence to the female, and indeed Hephaistos himself becomes the object of sympathy. In its self-presentation, the *Odyssey* establishes a powerful hierarchical authority which is epitomized by Hephaistos and his web in *Odyssey* 8.[49] The Homeric narrative cunningly manipulates and then obviates the feminine associations of a weaving spider by instantiating the masculine master craftsman as the protector of the narrative and social order within and beyond the *Odyssey*. In this text, an "arachnology" does not unearth an originary feminine but rather a masculine spider who creates it all. The spiders' webs in *Odyssey* 8 reflect the fabric or *hyphos* of the oral tradition while also positing the figure of the bard as spider who weaves the fabric of the oral tradition, a move which acknowledges the *hyphos* but also lays claims to the bard's status as the originary spider. Finally, we can read the Homeric text as a strange but powerful interweaving of "hyphology" and "arachnology," incorporated into the poetic tradition by threads that are λεπτά, delicate but tight.

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[49] For the "hierarchical order" of narrative, see Doherty 1995: 161–177.

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