There is a continuous interest in the structure of the Iliad, and from time to time there appear studies that attempt to illuminate some hidden aspect of a much discussed subject. The book under review aims at explaining «the relationship between the main narrative of the Iliad and its secondary narratives and episodes in a minor key» (p. VII) because (p. 11) «all the narratives set beside the main narrative reflect upon its events and act as a guide to its interpretation: in this respect they are all paradigmatic and never ornamental».

The author thinks that a new term is needed «to cover stories told by the poet inside the time of the poem, repeating in a minor key the elements of major events within the main narrative» (15), a term «broad enough to include all the narratives used alongside of the main narrative» (15 n. 15), and she calls it «para-narratives», which is interchangeable with «secondary narratives» (also termed «subsidiary»). This approach also utilizes the material considered by others «extraneous», but some serious problems arise.

Digressions, mythological exempla, which also mirror something in the main narrative, are considered forms of «para-narratives» (p. 15), but what about the «episodes»?

There are, we are told, «minor episodes», contrary to Aristotle’s concept of the nature and function of an episode, «whole episodes» (19) or «other episodes» (147), «a pair or group of episodes» (153 etc.). So, for example, the «funeral games» is an «episode subsidiary to the main plot» and «does nothing for the progress of the primary narrative» (18), but «Agamemnon’s embassy to Apollo in Book 1, and Priam’s embassy to Achilles in Book 24» are «two episodes» (19 n. 18) that do advance the main narrative.

The term is used freely and indiscriminately. What is termed «main narrative», which is obviously the μύθος-theme developed according to the requirements of a unified μύθος, should first be identified in terms of verses and books, and the remaining material should also be so identified, studied in relation to the main narrative and its specific function defined. As it is, what looks like a «para-narrative» may turn out to be part of the «main narrative». On the other hand, poetic material need not be categorized in order to be understood.

1 This further agrees with the statement that the «para-narratives are the key to the interpretation of the main narrative» (16), but not with what is said on page 13: «They (i.e. para-narratives) could be omitted without disturbing the course of the primary narrative: their function is artistic».


5 As J. H. Gaisser, A Structural Analysis of the Digressions in the Iliad and the Odyssey, HarvStud 73, 1969, 1ff, esp. p. 6f, has done with the «digressions».
A function of the para-narratives is to provide «a commentary on the events of the main plot of the Iliad» (49), best exemplified by the scenes on the Shield of Achilles. This is stated at the outset of chapter 3 entitled ‘The Shield of Achilles’, and there follows a lengthy discussion which shows that the author is well acquainted with the bibliography. It is true that the ‘scenes’ are described for the audience, but does the audience need a ‘commentary’, that comes late anyway, to understand the main narrative? In what way do the scenes of the first city help us understand the situation of Achilles in Book 9? Are we to assume that Homer’s audience did not know, long before Book 18, that disputes best go to arbitration?

After Nestor’s speech in I 259ff and what follows, the reader does not have to see the arbitration scene on the Shield to realize how Agamemnon and Achilles should best settle their dispute. Arbitration just was not possible, as not all disputes in real life were resolved through arbitration. The real world was as ‘ideal’ as the world depicted in the Shield of Achilles, with peace and war next to one another.

There are correspondences between the scenes on the Shield and the main narrative, some of them noted by other scholars as well, but not as many as A. has tried to decode, and few readers would agree that «the panic-stricken flocks of the besiegers» in the second city help us understand the situation of the «panic-stricken Greeks of the main narrative» (67).

In chapter 4 A. deals with ‘Nestor: Paradigms from Personal Experience’, which as para-narrative supposedly helps the reader understand the main narrative. Here again a lot of information is given on matters not directly relevant to the argument, e.g. the «other versions of Antinous’ story» (79 n. 18), and the author’s eagerness to find more ‘correspondences’ than others have found clouds the issue:

«The Lapiths of Nestor’s story correspond to the Greeks who, in the main narrative of the Iliad, are fighting the Trojans to recover a stolen bride» (80). But that is not what the Iliad is all about. Does the average reader of the Iliad really think that «the Trojans are bride-stealers, like the Centaurs, and Nestor’s advice will help the Greeks defeat them» (80)? «Through the story of his advice to the Lapiths when they fought the Centaurs, Nestor implies that Agamemnon is like the Centaurs who get drunk and attempt to steal women» (81).

Why must every detail in a mythical exemplum necessarily relate to the situation in the main narrative of the Iliad? First, however, we must be clear about what the ‘main narrative’ contains, a task not fulfilled in this study.

Debates occur in para-narratives, and A. devotes chapter 5 ‘Diomede: Debate in Para-Narrative’ to the subject. There is «an argument or debate on the merits of divine patronage» (112) and stages of it (113). Here it is not quite clear just what exactly the author considers ‘para-narrative’. She says (112): «An exploit of Tydeus’ while fighting against the Thebans introduces a whole series of para-narratives clustered round the figure of Diomede». Now, in an address to Dio-

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1 The correct reference to the verses (in Iliad 18) is 444–456, not 44–56 (p. 53).
medes (4. 370ff), Agamemnon briefly refers to Diomedes’ father and to his successes for a specific reason that has to do with the poetic situation. But where is the ‘debate’?

Agamemnon holds up to Diomedes an example to follow. Worse than this: seven verses (404–410) spoken by Sthenelus are considered ‘Stage 2’ (119) of the para-narrative debate, and there is here no narration whatsoever about Tydeus’ exploit, just the reaction of a warrior to Agamemnon’s ‘lies’ in his address to Diomedes. Athene’s reproach to Diomedes at 5. 80ff characterized by the author as ‘Stage 3’ (121) of the ‘debate’, does not contain any narrative at all but the goddess’ own involvement in Tydeus’ exploit.

Here, as elsewhere, the Greek text is copiously quoted and with the translations provided, as well as with the summaries that follow, it hardly serves a useful purpose. The footnotes are just as copious, often overloaded with irrelevant information.

In chapter 6 entitled ‘Genealogy and Paradigm’, we are told that «Genealogical material can also send signals to the reader, sometimes as one of a series of correspondences which invite comparison of a pair or group of episodes, sometimes in paradigmatic fashion, where the career of a famous ancestor invites comparison with the career of a character in the poem» (153). But from this it does not follow that «the career of Bellerophon functions as a paradigmatic warning to Diomedes» (166). How do divine favoritism and its withdrawal from Diomedes in Book 6 and 11 «prepare the way for the more intensely serious developments in the final books of the Iliad» (176)? And is there any need for such a preparation? The well-informed reader knows that there are thematic motifs which the poet uses and adjusts to the individual poetic situation as the plot requires.¹

Simple matters are oversimplified. E.g. «A man may be referred to as the son of his father by means of the patronymic rather than by his own name» (156). In general, the arrangement of the material bears a lot of repetition. We read, for example, several times that «Tydeus fought and died in the expedition against Thebes»;² Tydeus’ grave indicates that he «received a hero’s burial».³ Here too the author tends to include useful material which, however, is not directly relevant to the point at issue (e.g. Heracles’ adventures on the island of Cos, p. 159).

Chapter 7, ‘The Paradigm of Meleager: Application and Implication’, is a continuation of chapter 6, very detailed, heavily (and needlessly) footnoted. Just about everything concerning Book 9 is discussed, including Page’s view that the embassy is an interpolation (180). The question is debated at length (185–224) whether the ambassadors’ appeal to Achilles amounts to a supplication. This may be important, but more important is to consider how Achilles feels⁴, and the paradigm of Meleager does not help much to understand Achilles’ feelings.

The story of Meleager, as told by Phoenix in the Iliad, cannot possibly be made to be «fairly closely analogous to Achilles’ circumstances in book 9» (233). Meleager and

¹ Cf. O. Tsagarakis, Form and Content in Homer, Wiesbaden 1982 (Hermes Einzelschriften. 46), and: Studies in Odyssey XI, Wiesbaden 2000 (Hermes Einzelschriften. 82), passim.
² Cf. p. 157, copied from p. 112. Cf. also p. 115.
³ Cf. p. 167 copied from p. 115.

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Achilles may be both angry and withdraw from fighting but for different reasons, and this fact should not be overlooked. All tension and conflict stem from the way Agamemnon treated Achilles in Book 1. The lengthy discussion should rather concentrate on whether the story of Meleager, classed under the 'secondary' narratives (236), is indeed a para-narrative as, for example, Nestor's narration of his youthful exploits (Book 1). If «Achilles' rejection of Agamemnon's first attempt at reconciliation» (13) belongs to the main narrative, as A. rightly thinks, and Phoenix's story of Meleager is part of that «attempt at reconciliation», there is a problem. As an ambassador, Phoenix will, of course, talk to Achilles and the paradigm of Meleager (vv. 329–99) is part of his argument, which begins at v. 434 and comes to an end at v. 605.

Yet if the paradigm of Meleager is a «secondary» narrative, what kind of narrative is the reference to Phoenix's own past (vv. 447–49)? A. does not say. She only characterizes the story captatio benevolentiae (215) and finds striking parallels between this story and Achilles' situation (220), as other scholars do.

In this chapter too there are irritating repetitions of insignificant details (e.g. «her real name is Alcyone», pp. 240, 249). Is Cleopatra's real name so important for the discussion that it is given nearly a full-page footnote (240 n. 152)? The phrase «the motif of the ascending scale of affection» is repeatedly used, even twice within the space of 7 lines (289).

There follow some useful appendices: A. Approaches to Homer's narratives. B. The Nature of Homer's Text. C. The Meaning of the Exchange of Armour. D. The Hero's Death by Destruction of a Life-Token. E. The Motivation Ascribed to Wives Entertaining Husbands. But the bibliography is not always complete or up-to-date.¹

The References, pp. 319–337, are preceded by a list of abbreviations of well-known journals, also given in full, e.g. CJ Classical Journal (319). Helpful is the Index of Passages Cited, pp. 339–344, but the abbreviated forms, e.g. ll. are needlessly repeated when passages are quoted from different Books (so ll. 1, ll. 2, etc.) and the concluding General Index, pp. 353–384, which contains a great deal of detailed listings, e.g., s.v. Achilles: «might restrain Patroclus 26, 94 n. 46, 95–99», «Patroclus’ entreaties to 99–100, 196, 251–3, 255, 294», «instructions to Patroclus 111, 236–7, 280», «and death of Patroclus 217, 259». The Index also contains Greek terms which, however, do not go well with the English. E.g. «φησις» follows «Thucydidès» (382) and «αἴδω» precedes «Aigialeia» (357). A separate Greek Index would be more practical and helpful and should be there (when so much space has been given to the inclusion of superfluous information). Finally, not all names of modern authors quoted in the footnotes are listed in this Index.

The general reader of Homer will profit from this book, which is well written, in a lucid style. As stated above, the book contains a wealth of helpful information, undoubtedly the result of hard work, and it succeeds, I think, in elucidating much of the material used in the composition of the Iliad.

Rethymno

¹ Cf. R. J. Rabel, Plot and Point of View in the Iliad, Ann Arbor 1997. For criticism on modern theories of narratology (Appendix A) see now W. Kullmann, this journal 73, 2001, 640 n. 2.