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A Referential Commentary and Lexicon to Homer, Iliad VIII [Review]

Erwin F. Cook
Trinity University, ecook@trinity.edu

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A. KELLY: *A Referential Commentary and Lexicon to Homer,* Iliad *VIII.* Pp. xix + 515. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007. Cased, £80. ISBN 978-0-19-920355-0.

A 14,305 page *Iliad* commentary? That is what we get if we multiply the pages Adrian Kelly lavishes on Book 8 with the poem's dimensions. And, Book 8? This is never really explained, though I suspect the long scholarly tradition that the book strays from Homer's typical compositional practices and standards is one reason. For Adrian Kelly's stated objective is to recreate at least part of the rich network of associations available to the early auditors of epic, with the result that Book 8 is shown to be as traditional as any other.

After an "Introduction" adumbrating the author's methodology and objectives, there follows a "Text and Referential Apparatus" of Book 8, with repeated narrative "units" marked out by angle brackets. These units consist of repeated language, motifs, and narrative patterns. A "Commentary" follows, in which K. investigates the significance of these units for audience reception. The "Lexicon," which K. identifies as "the core of the book" (16), describes the connotative levels of meaning created by repetition of the units. The final chapter, "Textual Discussion," demonstrates the usefulness of the approach for text-criticism.

The Introduction begins somewhat unpromisingly by mooting the issue of Homer's orality, and of an oral poetics, although it soon emerges that K. believes his work reveals important differences in reception between ancient auditors and modern readers of epic. Specifically, he takes the familiar approach that repeated narrative patterns help guide the audience's understanding and are used to create and manipulate their expectations. The author thus distinguishes between the "connotative" meaning created by repetition of these units in different contexts, and the "denotative" meaning of the language, actions and story patterns. "With this duality, the modern audience comes as close as it ever will to the fluency or experience of an Archaic audience hearing the poetry unravelled before it" (6). From a narrowly new-critical perspective,

perhaps, but for those of us who believe that the intertext to, e.g., the scales of Zeus or the association of Diomedes or Nestor with chariots must include the entire field of cultural production, such a claim seems fairly blinkered.

For K., "context" thus refers almost exclusively to the text of the *Iliad*, with recourse to other archaic poetry only if insufficient parallels can be found to establish connotative meaning. To illustrate the method, he chooses the description of Meleager as εἴξας ᾧ θυμῷ in the context of defending the Aitolians (*Iliad* 9.598). Based on other examples of the phrase, he concludes that it is used of actions "actually or potentially harmful to the agent" (7), who is moreover aware of the fact. From this he concludes that the phrase "refers not to the fact of Meleagros' return <to battle>, but to the actual harm he has knowingly incurred, through the lack of gifts and honour" (8). This, he asserts, was already the conclusion reached by the ancient commentators and J. Griffin—the scholion reads, "πάλαι, ὅτε ὠργίζετο, οὐ νῦν, ὅτε ἤμυνεν," while Griffin glosses with, "'after yielding to his anger', sc. and refusing to fight"—and K. uses this alleged concord to stress that referential interpretation is compatible with more traditional approaches.

The passage also illustrates the dangers of the method, for with only 2 Iliadic and 1 Odyssean comparanda it is hard to know if the connotative meanings he finds are valid. What is clear is that Meleager's earlier wrath and refusal to fight is in fact what *produces* the offer of gifts. More plausibly, Leaf and Hainsworth argue that the phrase refers to the *thumos* roused by Kleopatra three lines earlier (it bears reminding that Meleager here serves as a negative paradigm for Achilles, who will soon be roused to reenter battle by Patroklos).

Two important acknowledgments underlie this restriction of the evidence to the *Iliad*, and they bear directly on the author's claim to be recovering "traditional referentiality," a common stock of epic conventions shared by singers throughout Archaic Greece: first, we cannot assume "the referential homogeneity of the *Dichtersprache*" (9); second, the monumental scale of the *Iliad*'s narrative may be "relatively untypical" (10). In other words, not only the connotative meaning but the

actual functioning of the referential system may be idiosyncratic to the *Iliad* and both stand in an unknown—and I would suggest largely unknowable—relationship to traditional referentiality. If that is so, then what K. is disclosing is not a traditional, but an intratextual referential system.

The issue becomes acute in cases involving, e.g., short, rare and fairly colorless phrases such as εἴξας θυμῷ. In this instance, the claim to be disclosing traditional referentiality and not simply the poet's idiolect seems predicated on a high degree of homogeneity in the *Dichtersprache*, and specifically in terms of connotative meaning, so that its sense would be clearer to the audience than it is from its few appearances in Homer (and clearer than it is to me with the benefit of learned commentary and juxtaposed examples).

A related issue is that even if it could be shown that a unit belongs to traditional referentiality, this in no way precludes its being highly idiosyncratic in the *Iliad*. For example, a specific motif such as 'hero wields rock' probably did belong to the later— and thus often desperate and climactic—stages of fighting in countless epic performances, and such parallels doubtless significantly enriched the audience's reception of its Homeric instantiations. But, are we to imagine a "referential homogeneity" extending throughout archaic epic in which all heroes who wield stones are victorious, as they routinely are in the *Iliad*? Would it not be more plausible to assume, and the tradition more interesting for the fact, examples of fighters missing when they cast stones? or striking the charioteer instead? or their casts falling short? or stones falling like snowflakes from the battlements of Troy? In short, such motifs can be, and plausibly should be, seen as belonging to two separate if related referential systems, and the intratextual grid as sometimes providing more specific guidance on their reception in the *Iliad* than the traditional referential system.

With these caveats and reservations in place, what does the book achieve? Quite a bit. When Aineias picks up a stone in his duel with Achilles (20.281), this raises false expectations in the audience that he will actually succeed in his attack (4, 293-5). That Zeus yokes his own chariot team in Book 8 highlights his isolation from the other

gods, and that Poseidon later unyokes it on his return echoes Poseidon's refusal to join

Here in rebelling (46, 62, 95-6). The lion simile devoted to Menelaos (17.61ff.) is

pointedly inappropriate as it underscores the inferiority of the Trojan forces in Hektor's

absence (117). The phrase ἰθὺς μεμαῶτος is only used of a character about to suffer

defeat; when someone ἀκόντισεν, the spear never harms its intended victim though it

often strikes someone else (154-5). It is properly Zeus' business to make Olympos

tremble, but when Here does so at 8.199 the singularity does not support athetesis and

instead reflects her attempts to usurp Zeus' prerogatives (393-4). More generally,

Achilleus' extraordinary nature is repeatedly underscored "by his referential

atypicality" (159; examples gathered at 67 n.3); Hektor's misuse of traditional language

portray him as consistently overconfident and even delusional (examples at 76 n.2); and

Agamemnon commits several referential *faux pas* in his encouragement of Teuker in

Book 8, including his reference to Teuker's bastardy (57, 278-9). These examples

suggest the variety of narrative elements that K. is able to elucidate, and though not all

of his analyses command assent, the connotative patterns they disclose are sometimes

fairly impressionistic, and the evidence coerced into conformity with them, there is

much here that will be of interest to professional Homerists.

This does not mean that we should desiderate the 14,000 page version, not least

because what is nominally a commentary on *Iliad* 8 in fact covers a great deal of the

poem. In sum, the principle strength of this work is its patient amassing of a large body

of material that allows us to appreciate *Iliad* 8's rich and complex intratextual

referents. The book has established its author as a *promakhos* in the field of Homeric

studies, and I look forward to reading and profiting from his future research.

Trinity University, San Antonio   ERWIN COOK