

Iliad: Major Battle Episodes and Structure

Scenes of battle represent over a third of our text of the Iliad. Bernard Fenik's monumental analysis of typical battle scenes published nearly 60 years ago (Fenik 1968) did not attempt to draw significant conclusions beyond the typicality of scenes, articulating his primary task as to "discover and describe the repeated, formulaic details in the battle scenes". Tilman Krischer (1971) shortly afterwards analysed the *aristeia* as a typical battle episode, identifying five major *aristeiai* in the Iliad (those of Diomedes, Agamemnon, Hector, Patroclus and Achilles). Since then, little of substance has emerged regarding the literary dimensions of Iliadic battle. Keith Stanley (1992) did for ring-composition in the Iliad what Fenik had done for battle scenes – published what appeared to be the last word.

Fenik, Krischer and Stanley were operating respectively at the level of the scene, of the episode and of the book. My interest is in the interaction of episodes within the text and thus in the text's overall architecture or shape. The paper addresses formal structure at the macro level of the poem, specifically identifying a large-scale pattern of ring-composition that structures the narrative of Achilles' withdrawal and constructs important thematic connections and contrasts between episodes in the first and second halves of the poem, in particular associated with themes of normative and transgressive warfare.

Less ambitious than Cedric Whitman's (1958) articulation of an all-encompassing pattern of ring-composition my pattern of ten balancing pairs demonstrates through close readings of balancing episodes how without Achilles warfare is conducted normatively in books 3 to 7, before the implementation of the *Διὸς βουλή* from book 8 onwards leads to a prolonged period of abnormality, deviation and irregularity. Through a monumental pattern of ring-composition the

Iliad is structured to focus attention on the differences that Achilles makes, absent or present, working out the consequences of his withdrawal by setting up patterns that will be repeated, with difference, when he returns to battle.

The paper shares with earlier contributions an interest in how major themes/motifs structure the monumental poem, substituting major battle episodes for episodes of supplication in the case of Thornton (1984) and for collective decision making in the case of Elmer (2012).

References

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