INTRODUCTION

1 BOOK 3 AND THE *ILIAD*

1.1 The Structure of Iliad 3

Whoever delimited 'Book 3', as we now know it,[1] has left us with a self-contained series of episodes with a clear structure. The book may be analysed as follows (line-lengths in brackets):

A1 1–120 Origin of the duel between Paris and Menelaus (120)
B1 121–244 Episodes with Helen (124)
C 245–313 Oath-swearing before the duel (69)
A2 314–82 The duel (69)
B2 383–461 Episodes with Helen (65) and coda on the battle-field (14)

There is a clear pattern of duel–Helen–oath–duel–Helen, centred round the oath-swearing, which is the last chance the two sides have of a peaceful settlement. This pattern may give us an insight into how poets went about composing and structuring their poems: repeating a small number of types of episode is much easier than having to use a range of different types.[2]

Alongside this basic pattern, there is a rhythm in the way the site of the narrative moves from the field of battle to the city to the field to the city and finally back to the field. It is notable too how the first two episodes are almost exactly the same length as each other, as are the next three. As will become clear, this is a regular technique, and we shall see that the length of episodes plays an important part in indicating which are the most important sections of the narrative.

Within the individual sections of this basic analysis of the book, we find similar patterning. **A1** can be divided into three equal sections:

a 1–37 The armies advance; Paris' challenge; Menelaus' response (37)
b 38–75 Hector and Paris discuss (38)
c 76–110 Hector offers a truce and duel; Menelaus accepts (35)

Just as the narrative moves from battle-field to city throughout the book, here two public scenes enfold a more private one between the two brothers; and the outer scenes put Menelaus together with each of the Trojan brothers. The three scenes sketch in aspects of these three central figures which will characterise them throughout the narrative: Paris is an

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[1] On the question of book-division, see Introduction to Commentary.
[2] For the importance of this technique in the *Odyssey*, see Bowie 2013: 2–15.

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intriguing mixture of cowardice and bravery; Menelaus is a brave warrior but also a man concerned with the sufferings of both sides; Hector is impatient but endowed with enough authority for Agamemnon to stop the fighting so he can speak to the armies.

In **B1**, the patterning is less strict:

a 121–45 Iris summons Helen to the walls (25)
b 146–60 Negative reaction of the old men (15)
c 161–70 Positive reaction of Priam and description of Agamemnon (10)
d 171–6 Helen's positive response (6) leading to
e 177–244 *Teichoscopia* (68)

    177–90 Agamemnon (14)
      177–80 Helen's identification (4)
      181–90 Priam's reaction (10)
    191–224 Odysseus (35)
      191–8 Priam's description (8)
      199–202 Helen's identification (4)
      202–24 Antenor's reaction (23)
    225–9 Ajax (5)
      225–7 Priam's description (3)
      228–39 Helen's identification (2)
    230–3 Helen's identification of Idomeneus (4)
    234–44 Absence of Castor and Polydeuces (11)

Again, a private scene is followed by a public one, which contains the contrasting reactions to Helen of the old Trojans and of Priam. In the *Teichoscopia*, there is a basic pattern of description–identification–reaction, which is varied in its four appearances, thus avoiding mechanical repetition: in the first, the description is separated from the identification and reaction; in the second, the pattern is there in full; in the third, there is no reaction; and in the fourth, there is only identification. Odysseus is treated with a full and seamless example of the pattern and, significantly, this contains, almost at the centre of the whole passage and in its longest section, Antenor's account of the embassy of Odysseus and Menelaus, the rejection of which was a lost opportunity for Helen to return to her family and to end the conflict.[3] The final part varies the notion of 'seeing' with an account of people that Helen could *not* see, her two brothers of whose death she is tragically ignorant.

This section introduces us to the key figure of Helen, and each part emphasises the sad world she lives in. With Iris, she begins as the demure

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[3] See 204–208n. Line-numbers refer to book 3, unless stated.

and dutiful wife at her loom who comes at Iris' call, her only reaction to the summons being a single mysterious tear. The cool reaction of the old men, and Priam's hasty reassurance to her, hint at the difficult life she leads as the perceived cause of the war. Even the identifications emphasise the sadness of Helen's position: when pointing out Agamemnon, she is reminded of her past life as his sister-in-law; when she identifies Odysseus, Antenor reminisces about the embassy that could have returned her to her husband; with Idomeneus, she is reminded of the hospitality she and her husband used to dispense together. In these cases, both Helen and the audience can feel the sadness equally, but it is we, the audience, who feel the greater sadness, when we learn of the deaths of her brothers and realise that this is another tragedy that awaits the unsuspecting Helen.

The scene of oath-swearing (**C**) has a simple structure of four sections, two long ones alternating with ones about half their length, followed by a concluding coda, the basic pattern being Priam–rite–prayer–rite–Priam:

    a 244–63 Work of the heralds; Idaeus summons Priam (20)
    b 264–74 Beginning of the rite (11)
    c 275–92 Prayer of Agamemnon (18)
    b 293–302 Completion of the rite; prayer of the soldiers (10)
    a 303–13 Priam's speech and departure (11)

The summoning of Priam evokes that of Helen, and again there is but a single reaction, 'he shuddered' (259), which sums up his feelings about the circumstances he is about to confront. Like Helen, he is given no direct words in his first section. In the description of the rite, the longest section is the prayer of Agamemnon. The prayer is obviously important in itself, but that Agamemnon goes beyond the general curse to address personal concerns reinforces the notion of him as a violent figure when crossed, as suggested in the first book by his violent reactions to the seer Calchas, and to his best warrior Achilles in the matter of the slave-girl Briseïs.

The duel (**A1**) follows, in two parts:

    a 314–39 Preparations for the duel; prayer of soldiers, arming scene
        (26)
    b 340–82 The duel (43)
        a 340–9a Paris' throw (9.5)
        b 349b Menelaus' attack (0.5)
        c 350–4 Menelaus' prayer (5)
        b 355–63 Menelaus' throw and sword-attack (9)
        c 364–8 Menelaus' complaint to Zeus (5)
        b 369–72 Menelaus' seizure of Paris' helmet (4)
        a 373–82 Aphrodite saves Paris (10)

Here, two roughly equal sections on Paris frame the actions of Menelaus: the differences in the length of the description of the two mirrors the disparity in military skill between them. In the section on Menelaus, there is also a triple repetition in attack–prayer to god–attack–complaint to god–attack–intervention by goddess.

The final section (**B2**) falls into two parts, followed by a coda:

a 383–417 Aphrodite and Helen (35)
    383–94 Aphrodite summons Helen (12)
    395–412 Helen's angry response (18)
    413–17 Aphrodite's angry response (5)
b 418–47 Helen and Paris (30)
    418–27 Helen's arrival (10)
    428–36 Helen's (initially) chiding speech (9)
    437–47 Paris' conciliatory speech and bed (11)
c 448–61 Search for Paris and speech of Agamemnon (14)

In **a** and **b** the pattern is the same: a summons to Helen and her arrival is in each case followed by an emotional speech by her and a response from her interlocutor. Twice Helen attempts to assert herself and express her opinions, but twice circumstances, in the form of divine anger (the longest section) and the charms of Paris, force her to acquiesce in what another wants. The coda takes us back to the battle-field, where the conflict will soon start again, with another Trojan attempt (admittedly divinely inspired) to kill Menelaus illegitimately.

1.2 Narrative and Style

A feature of Homeric style, well illustrated by book 3, is the remarkable economy with which descriptions of people, physical objects, geographical features, and so on are treated.[4]

In general, major characters are not elaborately introduced or described on first appearance, in part no doubt because the poet could rely on his audience's knowledge of them. Where they are so introduced, the introduction usually has a significance beyond merely giving a picture. For instance, in book 1, when Nestor first appears, there is stress on his age and experience, which fits him for his attempts to mediate between Achilles and Agamemnon (1.247–52), and Thersites is introduced at length (2.212–21), probably because he is less familiar and a strikingly unusual figure, but the description of him as ugly and boorish

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[4] On the way, though there are not many full descriptions, Homer yet manages to create 'vividness', see Haubold and Huitink 2017. For the stylistic differences in this area between Homer and the poems of the Epic Cycle, see Griffin 1977.

is also relevant to his function in the narrative. Book 3 contains the first appearances (or first significant appearances) of a number of key figures, Paris, Menelaus, Hector, Helen and Priam, and in a more 'realist' work one might have expected some indication of how they looked, what they were doing, or their background, but we are frequently denied this.

For instance, when Paris steps out of the ruck of fighters (15–20), all we learn about his appearance is the weapons he is carrying, and these, as we shall discuss further below, have a symbolic rather than a descriptive purpose. The only other detail is that he was 'striding forward' confidently (22); this leads to the immediate humorous collapse of that confidence when he spies Menelaus. When we next learn about Paris' appearance, this knowledge is again less important than the message it conveys: after all, everyone knows that traditionally Paris was handsome. When Hector upbraids Paris for his cowardice, he describes him as 'outstanding in appearance' and 'a seducer' (39; cf. also 55), saying that the Achaeans are laughing at his 'fine figure' which hides a cowardly spirit (44–5). Again, the description is ultimately more concerned with conveying character than appearance. Aphrodite describes him as 'splendid in his beauty and garments; you would not think he had just come from battle, but was going to the dance, or was sitting having just ceased from dancing' (392–4), but again the function of this description is less to tell us about Paris than to rouse Helen to passion for him.

Helen herself is treated in a similar manner. When she is first seen, there is no description of her bodily form or character, but of her activity, weaving a tapestry of the battles taking place outside the city (125–8). Again, this carries symbolic weight, and can be read in two ways. First, though many may hold her sexual misdemeanour responsible for the war, we first see her at the traditional wifely activity of weaving, which suggests that the question of her responsibility for the war may not be a simple one. Secondly, her weaving of scenes of the 'hardships that the Greeks and Trojans were suffering at the hands of Ares because of her' (126–8) could be read as her focalisation of affairs: she brings into existence the troubles on the loom just as she has in reality. These three lines thus economically set out the problem of Helen: cause of all the trouble or dutiful wife? It will be up to the audience to negotiate a path between these two view-points as the story progresses.[5]

Helen's emotional reaction to Iris' summons is notably spare: she says nothing, dresses and sheds but a single tear (142); even her desire for home is caused by Iris rather than herself (139–40). We are left uncertain as to her deeper feelings.

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[5] See further §1.4.1 below.

Of Helen's famed physical appearance we learn nothing here, and
not much more later. To go out in public, she will don a robe that is
'shining' (141) and 'fragrant' (385), and she will be accompanied by the
appropriate pair of attendants (143–4), as the chaste Penelope regularly
is in the *Odyssey*; but again this is not just incidental detail but underlines
the correctness of her behaviour. The old Trojan councillors describe
her as 'terribly like the immortal goddesses in appearance' (158), which
is a striking comparison but tells us nothing about how she looked like
them.

Iris (122–4), and indeed Aphrodite (386–8) when she comes to
summon Helen, are afforded accounts of their appearance, though the
physical aspect is a minor part and the descriptions are deceptive. Iris is
disguised as Laodice, who is 'the most beautiful of Priam's daughters', and
Aphrodite is like 'an aged woman'. More important than their appearance
is the identity of the people whose form the goddesses take. They are fig-
ures whom Helen would naturally trust, a relation of Antenor, who acted
as mediator between Greeks and Trojans in the early stages of the conflict,
and a beloved servant from Sparta. Helen espies Aphrodite's 'beautiful
neck, desirable breasts and flashing eyes' (396–7), but this is not especially
informative – how else would the goddess of love look? – and the piercing
of the disguise is essential to the development of the scene.

If these figures are given some initial description, others are not. At
the start of the battle, Menelaus appears without any indication of what
he was doing, how he was armed, or what sort of a man he is.[6] Once
again, we have to rely on speech, this time his own, to get a sense of the
man. When Hector announces Paris' offer of a duel, Menelaus expresses
his great 'sorrow' (97) at the suffering caused by his and Paris' quar-
rel (100), and makes clear his wish for the matter to be resolved swiftly.
There is a humanity here which is not found in many other of the leading
figures.

It is the same with Hector. When he comes to upbraid Paris (38), he
arrives and begins speaking.[7] As we saw, his speech supplies some infor-
mation about Paris, and Paris returns the compliment, characterising
Hector's heart as like an axe used in ship-building and his mind as entirely
fearless (60–3). The two brothers, so different in character, are thus
brought to life without any need to pause to describe them separately:

[6] Menelaus has been mentioned three times in books 1–2, but all we learn of
him is that he attended Agamemnon's sacrifice 'of his own accord, because he
knew in his heart how troubled his brother was' (2.408–9; see also 1.159 and
2.586).
[7] The steps in the narrative are marked by acts of perception: (ἐνόησεν, 21, 30,
ἰδών, 38); however, what the characters see is not expressed in any detail.

the speeches express the character of the speaker and describe that of the listener.[8]

Physical description is indeed found during the *Teichoscopia* (161–244), but its most important function is not just to let us know what Agamemnon and others looked like, but rather to delineate their qualities and relationships. The stories accompanying the descriptions and identifications of the warriors fill in the historical background in a poignant manner: we learn of Priam's distinguished service with the Phrygians when they fought the Amazons, something he will never repeat; of the embassy of Menelaus and Odysseus which, if successful, could have prevented the whole war; and of the deaths of Helen's brothers which, though only we know it, leaves her even more alone in the world. There is therefore a piquant contrast between the admiring descriptions of the great warriors and the past opportunities that have gone for ever.

Even in scenes which are of prime importance for the story, Homer tends to place the emphasis on certain 'non-physical' aspects. So, in the oath-swearing, the offerings are briefly listed when Idaeus issues his summons to Priam (245–8) and the preparations are briefly described (268–70), but the focus in the actual rite is more on Agamemnon. His imperiousness is familiar from book 1, and here his character is further revealed by the vicious way in which he cuts the lambs' throats (292–4), and by his prayer which, though supposed to represent all present, culminates in a very personal demand somewhat beyond what is required. The description of the rite is itself briefly done (292–6). The only elements described are the cutting of the lambs' throats and their lingering deaths, and the pouring out of the wine. The significance of the former is not commented on, but the brief prayer of those present concerning the wine (297–301), that the blood of any oath-breakers may be similarly spilled, is sufficient to make plain the meaning of the whole rite.

The similes are one area where description is central, but rather as with the descriptions of Iris and Aphrodite which were in fact disguises, one cannot work from the simile to a picture of the actuality they are being used to describe. To put it paradoxically, though we are told what things or people looked *like*, we are not told what they *looked* like: more technically, there is quite a gap between 'vehicle' (the material in the simile) and 'tenor' (the person or thing in the narrative which it illustrates).

Book 3 has two similes for the armies: cranes, noisily flying to attack the Pygmies, describe the Trojans (3–7), and mist on a mountain-top conveys the thickness of the dust sent up by the soldiers' feet (10–12). Though

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[8] The general prevalence of speech in book 3 is notable: 56.8 % of it is speech, which puts it behind only books 6 (61 %), 9 (82.5 %) and 19 (64.2 %); the average is 44.9 % (figures from Beck 2005: 282–3).

there are obvious very broad similarities between a noisy flock of pugna-
cious birds and a noisy army, or between mist and dust, they go only so far.
Other details take one away from the battlefield, such as the ornithological
information about the cranes' behaviour and the remark that mist suits
thieves better than shepherds. The military context is acknowledged by
the reference to the 'slaughter', 'death' and 'strife' brought by the cranes,
but the visual and to some extent auditory aspects of birds and armies are
not ultimately closely similar. The description thus proceeds by indirect
methods rather than simple depiction of the army or the dust. Again how-
ever, economy is served, since briefly evoking in an indirect manner the
appearance of the army avoids the need for a literal description, which
could require a good deal of detail to have a comparable effect.[9]

   The comparison of Menelaus to a lion coming upon a corpse (23–6)
contains even greater differences between vehicle and tenor: Paris is not
a corpse, and Menelaus is not menaced by dogs and strong men. Here
a single key idea unites man and lion, their 'delight' at what they have
come upon (23, 27), but the use of the simile leaves it to the audience
to imagine Menelaus' more detailed feelings. This scene then ends with
another simile, for Paris' ignominious retreat, of a man recoiling before a
snake (32–5): the parallels – recoiling, trembling and pallor – are much
closer, and where the earlier similes moved away from the scene being
described, here the closeness of vehicle and tenor underlines the terror
felt by Paris and its ignominious nature.

   Finally, one area where the principle of economy might seem to be
breached is in the repeated narration of Paris' offer of the duel. He makes
this offer to Hector (67–75), who conveys it to the armies (86–94); it is
then conveyed by Iris to Helen (136–8) and by Idaeus to Priam (253–8).
In a way, it is inevitable that the news has to be conveyed to the salient peo-
ple, but this could have been done in a more reduced manner: 'Idaeus
brought the news to Priam.'[10] But even here Homer contrives to make
something of each repetition. When the news is conveyed to the troops,
one might expect, as in the case of Hector (76), a delighted reaction,
but Homer surprises by having them stand in silence (95), leaving the
audience to decide what kind of silence this is: bemusement, disbelief,
relief? It is only after Menelaus has given orders for the oath-swearing
that the army express their emotions, but then only very simply: 'they
were delighted, hoping[11] to be freed from awful war' (111–12). The three

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[9] Nothing is conveyed about the geography of where the armies are marching,
except that it is a plain (14). Similarly, when the truce begins, there is a very spare
description of the settling of the armies, but no more (113–15).
[10] The repetitions do, however, vary in expression and length.
[11] If ἐλπόμενοι is taken to mean 'expecting', then there is irony here.

verbs convey their feelings succinctly.[12] We have seen that Homer allows Helen and Priam a single emotional reaction to the news, tearful home-sickness and a shudder, but these are not just pathetic touches, they are also hints about the future. Helen will soon be home, and Priam's shudder is entirely justified, given Paris' likely performance in the duel: that this defeat looks forward to Hector's fatal duel with Achilles also gives it extra significance for the audience.

The economy of Homeric narrative is striking. Symbolic appearances or actions, similes and remarks in speeches are used to convey information which might otherwise have needed lengthy descriptions or explanations by the author. Notable too is the fact that these segments are very short, often little more than two, three or four lines. Even the characteristic epic use of repetitions varies in its functions. The style does not seek to bring its subject matter vividly before the eyes of its audiences, but rather to supply hints as to character, situation or future events. The audience has work to do.

1.3 Double Narration: Narrative 'Oddities' in Book 3

'How was it that Priam did not summon Helen to learn about the leaders in the earlier encounters before the walls?'[13] Since antiquity it has been noted that a number of the events of book 3 are better suited to the first year of the war rather than the last.[14] Was Priam so unconcerned that he waited nine years to learn whom he was fighting, and did it take nine years to realise that a duel between Paris and Menelaus would have been a less bloody way of settling the dispute over Helen than a long siege? Other events in the early books would also appear more apt to the start than the finish of the war. One response to this would attribute it to the *Iliad*'s being an early attempt at narrating over a long stretch; but of course the poem comes at the *end* of a very long tradition of oral Greek story-telling, so that we are not dealing with the first stumbling attempts to tell a long story.

A more positive approach will reveal that a sophisticated narratological process is involved. These apparently anachronistically sited scenes are not simply used as flash-backs ('analepses') or to fill in the background to the story.[15] Instead, there is a simultaneous, 'double' narration, in which

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[12] The repetition by the soldiers in 320–3 of Agamemnon's curse on anyone breaking the oath (276–80) similarly stresses the desire amongst the soldiery that an end finally be made to their nine years of suffering, but it is also an integral part of the ritual.

[13] Schol. bT 166a. On the start of the poem, I have not seen Meier 2018.

[14] Cf. Ameis and Hentze 1877: 163–76; also Bergren 2008: 43–57.

[15] On retrospection and foreshadowing in Homer, see e.g. Duckworth 1933; Notopoulos 1951: esp. 90–6; Kullmann 2001.

the start of the war is mirrored in the narrative of the events which will bring it to its end. The first and last years are thus superimposed on each other, so that the *Iliad* gives the *impression* of starting at the beginning of the war, as one might expect in an epic about Troy, whilst actually narrating its end. This solves the problem of how to cover a ten-year war without producing a work that straggled and lacked shape. Homer thus anticipates the criteria for literary works set out by Aristotle:[16]

> Again, any beautiful animal or compound object … must not only have an orderly arrangement of its constituent parts, but also not be of a random size … An animal of vast size cannot be beautiful, because the eye cannot take it all in at once, and its unity and sense of being a whole is lost for the spectators, as for instance if it were a thousand stades long.

The events of the start of the conflict are evoked in a largely chronological order. For an account of the earlier events we have to rely on the *Cypria*, a poem from the 'Epic Cycle' of works which recount the events leading up to the *Iliad*. These were composed after the *Iliad*, but must preserve traditions which the *Iliad* poet chose not to treat, in order to avoid diffuseness.[17]

The way the double narration works can be observed at the very opening of the poem. The dispute between Agamemnon and Chryses over Chryseïs is a structural parallel to the dispute between Menelaus and Paris over Helen:[18] the Chryses-episode thus replicates in miniature the whole Trojan story.[19] The subsequent quarrel between Agamemnon and Achilles over Briseïs, whose name rhymes with Chryseïs, then reinforces the pattern. In each case, the taking of the girl leads to disaster, just as the taking of Helen did. The end of the war thus evokes here the seminal initial event.

The gathering of the expedition at Aulis is not just suggested by a structural parallel but is specifically referred to by a character. When in book 2 the Greeks flee to the ships to go home, Odysseus reminds them of the omen they received when gathered at Aulis, in which a snake, which devoured eight sparrow chicks and then their mother, was interpreted by Calchas as foretelling a nine-year conflict with victory in the tenth

[16] *Poet.* 1450b34–1451a3.

[17] On all matters concerning the *Cypria* here, see M.L. West 2013: 55–128, and generally Fantuzzi and Tsagalis 2015. On what Homer may have known of the traditions found in the later cyclic poems, see M.L. West 2011b: 32–5.

[18] For another possible analepsis concerning what happened in Sparta, see §1.4.1 below.

[19] In narratological terms, it is a 'mise en abyme', where one element or episode in a story encapsulates the whole tale; this is a heraldic term for shields containing a smaller image of itself, which itself contains a yet smaller image and so on.