De novis libris iudicia

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Irene de Jong (at vii) speaks of the pleasure with which she accepted Pat Easterling and Richard Hunter’s invitation to write the Cambridge ‘Green and Yellow’ on _Iliad_ XXII. It was with equal pleasure that I prescribed this new commentary in 2012 for our students at the ANU. This volume represents an ideal marriage of text and editor.

De Jong’s volume follows a familiar ‘Green and Yellow’ template: a substantial introduction in which the editor explores topics of relevance to the author and the text; the text itself; a generous commentary (c. 140 pp.); a bibliography; an index of subjects and of Greek words.

The first section of the Introduction offers concise notes for the reader on what little we know of the poet; on the Homeric epics and their composition (Analysts and Unitarians; Milman Parry and oral composition in performance; the extent of the tradition; the circumstances of performance; transmission) and on the literary interpretation of the epics (the tensions between oral theory and literary appreciation; the contribution of narratology; the neo-Analytic approach). The second section addresses _Iliad_ XXII within the structure of the _Iliad_. A careful summary of the poem as a whole (Zeus’ will and the anger of Achilles) precedes a study of the close ties between Books VI, XXII, and XXIV: here de Jong considers the women who mourn for Hector, the nature of mortal existence, the relation of mortals with the divine, and the focus of the epic. _Iliad_ XXII is also firmly tied to the rest of the poem, especially through a tightly knit sequence of deaths—of Sarpedon, Patroclus, and Hector—which, central to Zeus’ plan, are central also to the narrative. This sub-section (2d) and the following sub-section (2e) on Achilles are very rich.

The third section of the Introduction discusses narrative art and oral style. This is where one expects de Jong to shine, even within this small compass. And
she does. In 3a de Jong introduces the narrator, largely invisible (like his narratees) yet constantly active—sometimes revealing himself in invocations and apostrophes but more often operating in a less conspicuous fashion as he subtly guides his audiences’ responses to the tale. Her narrator is omnipresent and omniscient. His distinctive similes (3b), on the other hand, are generally omni-temporal. De Jong offers a quick contrast here with the similes of the *Odyssey*, which are more closely linked to the narrative moment in terms of imagery. With reference to the longer similes she surveys the functions of what she calls similes ‘with a tail’: for de Jong these functions may be to create pathos, to develop anticipation, to offer a symbol, to assist in characterization, or to structure a narrative segment. There follows a discussion of epithets and their literary value (3c). Noting both the strengths and the disadvantages of Parry’s work, de Jong identifies a series of criteria which would allow a commentator to argue for the literary value of certain epithets: her discussion here, in which she proposes a number of relevant parameters, is particularly good. From epithets de Jong moves to language in a broader context (4). Section 4a offers a good conspectus of the Homeric dialect; section 4b takes the reader through metre, prosody, caesurae, and enjambment. The section ends with a long sample from *Iliad* XXII marked up metrically. Finally we have a note on the text (4c). This modest section is carefully assembled and neatly tailored, offering a brief history of transmission and enough information to allow the reader to understand the critical apparatus. The text used is, according to de Jong, her own—and this is a ‘collation’ of Monro-Allen (for the most part), along with van Thiel, and West.

This brings me to the commentary. This commentary, on *Iliad* XXII, is unlike de Jong’s narratological commentary on the *Odyssey* (*A Narratological Commentary on the Odyssey*, Cambridge, 2001), in which she approaches the poem as narrative and deals exclusively with its narrative aspects. Her commentary on *Iliad* XXII is—to some extent—in the mould of the traditional heterogeneous commentary: de Jong spreads her net more widely, with her designated readership in mind.

In her preface de Jong states (vii) that her commentary will pay particular attention to Homer’s language (as befits a commentary designed for the use of undergraduates and graduates) and to his narrative style. And yet, although her own narratological interests enrich the commentary throughout, they do not dominate its pages. Thus de Jong draws readers’ attention throughout to the poet’s use of particles—a valuable source of assistance to the reader; she likewise offers assistance with Homeric grammar, syntax, ‘Homeric’ phrases (such as ‘winged words’ at 215), oral syntax (as at 274-275), and prosody (174, 379). At the level of the *Iliad*-story, she compares passages across the epic, such as 44-45 (the bereaved parent), 133-134 (Achilles’ spear), 166-187 (‘Olympian scenes’), 208-213 (Zeus’ scales), 246-247 (‘god meets mortal’ scene), 248-305