

1. What is Willcock's view of Homer's presentation of the Meleager myth in book 9 of the *Iliad*? How does it affect the way that we read the *Iliad* as a whole?

Willcock, M. M. "Mythological Paradeigmata in the *Iliad*" *Classical Quarterly* (1964) 141-154.

Willcock views the the variations in Homer's retelling of the Meleager myth not as evidence that the *Iliad* was patterned after some previous of Meleager in the form of a lost work. He views the retelling as yet another example of Homeric license. He sees Homer refashioning elements of the myth based on submerged motifs that tend to recur in non-linear patterns in epic. This makes sense, and I think we can see an analogy of this approach to myth in Sophocles' *Oedipus* trilogy. Willcock finds Homer sometimes careless with his details and always ready to reshape myths for extended analogical purposes. Willcock has gone some way toward addressing the questions I have had when reading such mythological references in the *Iliad*. I have tended to take Homer's word for it and yet had nagging suspicions that the stories were more than just overemphasized in some parts and underemphasized in others. I assumed, being lazy, that Homer must have had a better sources than I and likely had a stock of details that had somehow been lost in later retellings of myths (e.g., Ovid). Little did I suspect that he may have been a Texan at heart, borrowing standard motifs from other stories and incorporating them into previously unrelated myths. I wonder, though, if the implications of Willcock's observations go rather beyond the question of *aition*. It seems to me that Willcock has neglected the possibility that Homer may have been purposefully putting such "corrupted" versions of the myths in the mouths of his characters for purposes other than simple narrative coherency; perhaps Homer uses them for subtler literary purposes. I can't believe that an audience familiar with the myths homer is retooling would not perceive a certain amount of dissonance if they had not assumed that Homer's characters and not Homer were taking liberties with the myth. The poet might very well deliver the lines in character with all the wiliness of an Odysseus. Rather than making a point himself, Homer might cynically be offering the audience a look at the shallow sophism of a character. I agree that this does not make sense in the context of Achilles' use of the Niobe with Priam, but here we might take Achilles' myth-making as harmless and prudent. Everything depends on the tone. Take Nestor for an example. Whenever I read one of Nestor's discursive remarks I can't help thinking him a doddering old man who is meant to be taken humorously as something approaching comic relief in a passage already burdened with tragic implications.