Viewing Priam: Wedding Dictionin Priam’s Speech-Acts in the “Teichoscopia”

Commentators have long noted the peculiarity in the questions posed by Priam regarding the identity of the Achaean leaders in the tenth year of the Trojan War. The section known as “teichoskopia”in *Iliad* 3.161-244 has an idiosyncratic relationship with the narrative time of the *Iliad.* The entire book 3 of the *Iliad* has been read from many angles, emphasizing Helen’s position in epic poetry and poetics and self-referentiality of epic (e.g. Clader 1976, Bergren 1980, Pucci 1993, Worman 2001, Elmer 2005, Martin 2007). The exchange between Helen and Priam is problematic in multiple ways. Moreover, the affinities of this passage with passages from the *Odyssey* have presented further challenges in its interpretation. Much of the diction is typical in guest scenes (Higbie 1995, Mackie 1996, Tsagalis 2008). Other scholars have regarded the “teichoskopia”as an earlier part of Trojan war narratives (Parry 1966, Kakridis 1971, Edwards 1980, Postlethwaite 1985). Other readings put forth the cognate perspective of wooing and counter-wooing scenes in the indo-european tradition (Jamison 1994). While most studies on *Iliad* 3 have focused on Helen, this paper analyzes Priam’s speech act from the perspective of traditional poetics and reflections of other speech genres in the *Iliad*. As I argue, the *topoi* of traditional discourse around weddings permeate the epic fabric. Priam’s discourse exhibits elements of the tradition of praise, *eikasia* and *makarismos* that are aptly placed in the iliadic context. It is a *communis opinio* that performances at wedding are centered around praise for the couple. The core of the song is praise, possibly modeled on an *ainos* poetry that seeks to extol the beauty of the bride and the strength of the groom. The wedding theme appears not infrequently in Homeric narrative (e.g. *Il.* 18.490-496; *Od.* 4. 1-19; *Od.* 6 *passim*; *Od*. 15.125-127; *Od.* 23.129-140) but typology and forms of wedding poetry enrich the epic fabric in more subtle ways. While similar strategies have been explored in the *Odyssey* (Hague 1983) wedding diction in the *Iliad* remains largely unexplored. A detailed reading of Priam’s questions to Helen shows how he orchestrates the praise of all the Achaean leaders with regards to the size of their appearance, something that can be read against wedding song poetics (as in Sappho. fr. 111). Moreover, Priam’s address to Agamemnon’s name includes a *makarismos*, also typical in wedding related diction (cf. Hes. Fr. 211 M.-W). The references to Odysseus include an *eikasia* that likens Odysseus to a ram. While Helen initially responds to Priam using a language that exhibits the strategy of the expert lamenter in a discourse of blame and guilt, she later corresponds her answers to the speech acts of Priam and offers information on more Achaean leaders on the field of Troy (Ajax and Idomeneus). The same preoccupations with size and *eikasia* are present in Helen’s answers that complement Priam’s speech. This paper focuses on Priam’s speech and aims to shed more light to our understanding of interdiscursivity in epic poetry by highlighting the narrative associations that Priam’s language conveys. Priam’s language renegotiates Helen’s position in the stories around Trojan War and places it in the context of the poetic tradition around Helen’s suitors.

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