

Hector, the Marginal Hero: Performance Theory and the Homeric Monologue

Following Richard Martin's (1989) insight that characters in Homeric epic are performers of their own identity, this paper will examine the status of performance in Hector's monologue at *Iliad* 22.99-130. Martin examines speech-performances in the *Iliad* in terms of a public/private dichotomy where the marked term *muthos* designates public speech while the more general term *epos* can signal non-public speech acts (Martin 1989: 10-42). Within the context of a public/non-public dichotomy of speech performances, each occurring within context-structures in which one either wins or loses, it is particularly difficult to parse monologues—namely, those speeches directed by a character to himself in the *Iliad* without an audience in the poem other than the self or the non-character audiences and readers of Homer's epic, and which express a character's thoughts and emotions in dialogue form and thereby explain motive for a hero's subsequent action (Fenik 1978).

The phenomenon of self-speech in the Homeric epic is marked by a character addressing his own *thumos*: “deeply troubled, he spoke to great-hearted spirit” (ὄχθήσας δ' ἄρα εἶπε πρὸς ὄν μεγαλήτορα θυμόν, *Il.* 11.403, 17.90, 18.5, 20.343, 21.53, 21.552, 22.98; *Od.* 5.298, 355, 407, 464; cf. Scully 1984). Monologues are the externalization of the interior, the “thought and other psychological processes” of a character (Gill 1996: 15). Hence, monologues, ostensibly directed to a character's *thumos*, function for the Homeric audience as what could be called “meta-performative” moments when the poet and character effectively stand outside of the dramatic situation to comment on larger thematic issues pertinent to the given situation: for instance, how a character should behave based on concepts of *aidōs* or his adherence to heroic ideology and community standards, or how a character perceives himself as living up to said standards.

Without an audience, the performer is free to explore options that would be censored within a public arena, such as flight from combat. Hence, although the specific thoughts of each hero are different, monologues tend to explore non-heroic possibilities of escape and express fear of dying (Fenik 1978: 68-70). As moments that dramatize narrative distance, the monologue is particularly suited for both challenging and reaffirming ideological formations, including heroism, masculinity, and public identity. As such, the monologue is a unique genre of heroic speech performance—something akin to an internalized flyting—while simultaneously recognizing personal doubt or ambivalence towards the heroic ideal, a fantasy that a hero outside of public scrutiny may entertain. These monologues represent a sort of “performance” of non-heroic alternatives.

I am interested here in Hector’s long monologue at *Iliad* 22.98-130 as a performance of both heroism and anti-heroic escapism. Hector’s monologue appears to shift between registers, employing at one moment elements of adversative discourse (flyting) and at others elements of intimate and even erotic commerce between equals. Hector explores alternate avenues before facing Achilles in combat (flight, surrender), but couches each of those non-heroic options within other performance genres: competitive public speech and the erotically charged intimate encounter termed ὀπίζειν “intimate exchange.” My analysis aims to show that Hector’s monologue falls short both as a *muthos* and an *epos*, and in the process Hector even finds himself straying from the very genre of epic itself. His speech marks him as a kind of poet of the peaceful and the pastoral who is very much out of place in war-torn Ilium. The flights of fancy he indulges in his monologue are indicative of his vulnerability as a mortal hero, as set against the implacable Achilles. Accordingly, I will suggest that Hector’s failure as a heroic performer reflects on the larger theme of vulnerability in the *Iliad*.

Bibliography

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