

Chasing a Hero, Changing Into a Goddess: Nuptial Discourse and Context in the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite*

The *Hymn to Aphrodite* sung in praise of the divinity of love tricked by Zeus into mating with a mortal hero raises within its narrative the fundamental questions concerning the relation of mortals with the divine world with all its complexity. Recent scholarly trends on this hymn have focused on themes of power and authority in the narrative, possible cultic elements from a local, panhellenic and comparative perspective, and the hymn's relation with other aspects of epic poetry, most notably the other Homeric hymns and the *Iliad*. Aphrodite's speeches, before and after her epiphany to Anchises, present a divinity with affinities to both the Iliadic but also Sappho's representation of the goddess. Reading this hymn from the oral poetics angle with an audience-minded focus, the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite*, not unlike other epic poems, is a rich depository of speech genres and performances that audiences were well familiar with. This paper seeks to uncover the nuptial discourse and the wedding performance tradition present in the hymn by focusing on Anchises' address to Aphrodite and comparing it to Odysseus in *Odyssey* 6.

Both addresses, Odysseus' to Nausicaa and Anchises' to Aphrodite have the combination of praise with *eikasia*, the likening of the addressee to a goddess initially. Beyond the formulaic praise the address ends in a way that can make us think of a certain typology that is being followed by male performers. Although fit to function within the greater narratives in the *Odyssey* and *Homeric hymn to Aphrodite* respectively, this shared typology gives strong indication of ritual nuptial discourse patterns. Odysseus ends his address with a direct prayer for pity *eleaire* (*Od.* 6.175), addressing Nausicaa as

anassa a word also addressed to divinities, and following with more imperatives asking the princess to show him the city and give him clothes to wear (*Od.* 6.178). The praise for Nausicaa in the first part of his speech is not just simply formulaic; it shows a strategy and makes us go deeper in the ancient performer's mind. In blunt terms, praise can be regarded as flattery with a practical goal to ensure survival in this scene. But the mechanism that this address to the young female figure unfolds is variegated. With the likening of Nausicaa with Artemis that Odysseus has created, there is another layer that he creates: he puts the mortal princess in divine shoes and makes her act like a goddess in his supplication case. Different speech genres are merging: lament and wedding motifs, prayer and supplication making a case that the wedding repertoire had a multiform complexity.

When Anchises addresses Aphrodite and expresses the *eikasia*, he likens her to Artemis, Leto, Aphrodite, Themis, Athena, a Grace or a Nymph. The 'bride' Aphrodite is put in a chorus of illustrious divine women, including her real self. Anchises as a performer alleviates his own tension in front of the woman's unnerving beauty but also in formulaic terms treats her like a bride and a goddess at the same time while promising to make a temple and offer rites to her. Through praise he appropriates her to the divine, but also further concludes with a prayer requesting personal excellence, glorious offspring and a long and happy life (lines 101-106). The figure of Aphrodite in disguise is treated like a statue, becomes an iconic figure one prays to with a *quid pro quo* context, the prayer's wishes to come true as the result of a perfect ritual performance. A fusion between prayer to a divinity and nuptial wishes come together as Anchises asks for prosperous offspring and a long life until old age. Both Odysseus and Anchises connect

in intricate ways nuptial traditional language with prayer. As I argue, a comparative view of these scenes in conjunction with moments from lyric poetry can help us reconstruct an ancient genre of performance, that of male performers' addressing a bride.

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