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What on earth did Helen ever see in Ajax, her former suitor?

JUNE 21, 2021 | By Gregory Nagy

2021.06.21 | By Gregory Nagy

§0. In our Homeric *Iliad*, there is a scene, traditionally known as the *Teikhoskopiā* or 'View from the Walls', where Helen of Sparta, described here as daughter of Zeus, is looking down from where she is standing, high up on the walls of Troy, and, as we view her, she in turn is viewing from up there, from her lofty vantage point, the leaders of the Achaeans who are assembling down below at ground zero, beneath the towering walls that loom overhead. Helen's new father-in-law, Priam, king of Troy, is also standing up there on the walls of Troy, right next to her, and we hear him calling out to her, asking her to identify, in sequence, three Achaean leaders whose looks catch his kingly eye. Helen will know each one of these leaders spotted by Priam, who presumes that she must have seen each one of them with her own eyes back when—back when she was still at home in Sparta. Prompted by Priam, Helen the eyewitness identifies for the king each one of the three Achaean leaders, one by one. But why on earth did Priam presume that Helen knew each one of these Achaeans? Before now, how on earth could she ever have seen with her own eyes all three of them? The answer is straightforward: she had seen each one of them at least once before, back home in Sparta, and in fact she had also seen there practically every other Achaean leader whom she now sees here beneath the high walls of Troy. She had seen them all at one single grand event. It happened back when… when a mass of Achaean leaders, not just these three, converged on Sparta to compete for the prize of winning Helen as bride—as the most eligible of all brides, daughter of Zeus that she was. The competition had been arranged by her would-be mortal father Tyndareos and by her semi-immortal twin brothers, Kastor and Polydeukes. The event is narrated in the Hesiodic *Suitors of Helen*, the bare outlines of which I introduced in the previous essay I posted for *Classical Inquiries* (Nagy 2021.06.14, linked here). But now, in the present essay, I shift the perspective, from the Hesiodic *Suitors of Helen* to the Homeric *Iliad* as

we know it, where we can view the suitors of Helen through Helen's own eyes. The illustration I have chosen for the essay here takes a close-up of those most perceptive eyes. And I find it most relevant here to ask myself a general question: do the perceptions of Helen in "our" *Iliad* match the perceptions of "our" Homer? My motive for asking such a question derives from my previous essay, where I noticed that the eligibility of Ajax, one of the main suitors of Helen in the Hesiodic *Suitors of Helen*, has been downgraded in "our" Homeric *Iliad*. And, as it happens, Ajax is one of not three but now four former suitors of Helen whom she will describe, picturing them through her celestial eyes. And here I follow up on the general question I asked a moment ago by asking something much more specific, something that centers on the main topic of this essay: What on earth did Helen ever see in Ajax, her former suitor?

Gaston Bussière (1862–1928), *Hélène de Troie* (detail). Musée des Ursulines de Mâcon. **Image** via Wikimedia Commons.

Gaston Bussière (1862–1928), *Hélène de Troie*. Musée des Ursulines de Mâcon. **Image** via Wikimedia Commons.

§1. The answer to my question is quite complex: back when Ajax was courting Helen in Sparta, she would have viewed him as a somewhat more eligible suitor than what she sees now. Or, to put it more accurately, the Ajax seen by Helen as we hear the story being told in the Hesiodic *Catalogue of Suitors* was a somewhat more eligible suitor in comparison to the Ajax she views in the *Teikhoskopiā*, that is, in the 'View from the Walls' that is pictured in the corresponding story being told in "our" Homeric *Iliad* 3, verses 161–244. To set up my comparison of the Hesiodic and the Homeric versions, I will start by offering an inventory of details in the Homeric narrative that I will compare with what we read in the Hesiodic fragments. I will list these Homeric details as Items "A" through "G", and in each item I will give only the relevant verse-numbers of *Iliad* 3:

A. As he looks down from the high walls of Troy, Priam selects with his kingly eye only three Achaeans for Helen to identify for him. They are, in this order: Agamemnon, Odysseus, Ajax. Helen's identifications happen at these verses: Agamemnon at 178–180, Odysseus at 200–202, Ajax at 229. So, Ajax gets only one verse, while Agamemnon and Odysseus get three each.

B. Priam's kingly eye does not select Menelaos; consequently, that hero gets no verses here from Helen, even though he was her original bridegroom. Only the brother of Menelaos, Agamemnon, gets verses from Helen here.

C. We have already seen that Ajax gets only one verse from Helen whereas Agamemnon and Odysseus get three verses each. And now we will see that Agamemnon and Odysseus get many more verses in this scene, though no further verses from Helen herself, whereas Ajax gets only two more verses besides the one he gets from Helen. I now give the details in C1 C2 C3:

C1. First, Agamemnon. We find fifteen more verses, divided into a shorter unit of five verses, 166–170, and a longer unit of ten, 181–190. Priam, having sighted Agamemnon at 166 and starting to describe him already there as enormous in size, goes on to describe him at 167–170 as good-looking and kingly. Then, after Helen identifies Agamemnon at 178–180, where she includes at 179 her own description of him as a good king and as a powerful warrior, Priam resumes his description at 181–190, where he makes clear his understanding that Agamemnon's supreme worth is measured by the vast number of Achaeans he dominates.

C2. Second, Odysseus. We find twenty-eight more verses, divided into a shorter unit of six verses, 193–198, and a longer unit of twenty-two. Priam, having sighted Odysseus at 191–192, goes on to describe him at 193–198 as shorter than Agamemnon—shorter by a head, it is said at 193—but Odysseus is wider than Agamemnon, as we read further at 194, with broader shoulders and with heftier chest. Here I draw attention to an added detail at 195: Priam sees that Odysseus is not wearing armor, though he also sees a set of armor lying on the ground nearby. I will return to this detail in a subsequent essay. For now, however, I continue where I left off. The description of Odysseus is extended further at 196–198, where we see an elaborate simile about Odysseus as an overaggressive ram dominating a submissive flock of sheep. What follows after that is a prompt from Priam to Helen, asking her to identify this Achaean hero who is yet unknown to him but known to her. Helen starts her reportage at 199 by being identified in this verse as the daughter of Zeus. Then she identifies Odysseus at 200–202, and she includes at 202 her own description of him as a master if craftiness. Then there is further reportage about Odysseus, starting at 203 and ending only at 224. But the role of speaker here does not revert to Priam, as in the reportage about Agamemnon. Instead the speaker of this far more lengthy reportage about Odysseus is Antenor, a Trojan ally of Priam, who now intervenes in the dialogue between Priam and Helen, giving his own reportage about Odysseus in the context of another event, which Antenor narrates in detail.

C3. Third, Ajax. We find only two earlier verses about him, at 226–227. Priam, having first sighted Ajax at 225, goes on to describe him at 226–227 as noble-looking and enormous, both taller and broader-shouldered than all the other Achaeans to be seen. Then Helen identifies Ajax at 229, where she includes in that single verse her own description of him: Ajax is surely enormous in size, a veritable fortress of strength for his fellow Achaeans. This single-verse praise of Ajax by Helen picks up on the final words of the two-verse praise by Priam: at 226–227, as we have seen, Ajax is described as not just noble-looking but also enormous, both taller and broader-shouldered than all the other Achaeans to be seen beneath the high walls of Troy.

D. This concluding detail about the broadest shoulders in the description of Ajax by Priam at 226–227 is relevant to a detail in the description of Odysseus by Antenor in the embedded narrative that is performed by that Trojan at 203–224, which immediately precedes the initial sighting of Ajax by Priam at 225. But I cannot yet focus on the detail

about Odysseus until we hear what is said in the narrative of Antenor about another Achaean.

E. So, I must circle back to the embedded narrative of Antenor at 203–224. The story here is not only about Odysseus. It is also about Helen herself. Most relevant to the story is the word *angeliē*, as we see it used at 207. Generally, this Greek word *angeliē* can be understood to mean 'announcement', but here we see a more specific meaning that is strictly juridical in context. We see a "counter-suit" going on here. By *counter-suit* I mean a legal proceeding that reverses an earlier legal proceeding, a *suit*, which needs to be understood in the context of a courtship, that is, where a man in the role of a *suitor* makes a proposal to win a woman as his bride. As we will see in what follows, the word *angeliē* can refer, more simply, to such an idea of a *suit*. For now, however, I concentrate on the more complex idea of a *counter-suit*. In terms of such an idea, a man in the role of a *counter-suitor* would be making a proposal to win back a woman as his bride. What seems to be going on in the narrative of Antenor at 203–224 is something like that. Two Achaeans have been sent to the home of Antenor the Trojan to make a juridical announcement in the form of a proposal to the Trojans, by way of Antenor as the go-between, and this proposal is for the Trojans to give back Helen, abducted from Sparta by the Trojan prince Paris/Alexander, to her original bridegroom Menelaos. So, the two emissaries are *counter-suitors*. And one of these two counter-suitors is Odysseus. But the other counter-suitor is just as important, even more important: he is Menelaos himself, the original bridegroom of Helen. And the narration at 203–224 gives a detailed description of not only Odysseus but also of Menelaos, but here I focus on just one detail of comparison: at 210, we hear that Menelaos had broader shoulders than Odysseus. Now the circle is complete. Yes, Menelaos had broader shoulders than Odysseus, but we have already seen that Ajax had even broader shoulders than Menelaos.

F. Almost as an afterthought, a fourth Achaean gets honorable mention in the *Teikhoskopiā* of *Iliad* 3. He is Idomeneus, king of Crete, described at 230–233, right after the description of Ajax, which ended at 229. But there is no sighting by Priam for this Achaean, even though there is a direct identification performed by Helen. It is Helen herself who takes the initiative in sighting Idomeneus. And what makes him different from Agamemnon, Odysseus, and Ajax? The simple reason is that Helen could have seen Idomeneus in contexts that were different from the one context where she would have seen the other Achaeans, which is, when they were courting her in Sparta. Idomeneus is

different: as she says at 232–234, this king often visited Menelaos and Helen in Sparta even after the courting was over, after the couple was already married.

G. After the identification of Idomeneus, Helen resumes her reporting to Priam about all the Achaean leaders assembled beneath the high walls of Troy by making a general declaration at 234–235. She declares here that she in fact knows the names of every one of these Achaeans. She knows their names because she knows them all— because she had actually seen them all at least once before. There was that one time when all the Achaean leaders that she now sees were her suitors back in Sparta, when her semi-immortal brothers, the twins Kastor and Polydeukes, gave her away as bride to Menelaos. That is, Helen can see all the Achaeans she knows with one big exception, which is revealed at 236–244: she cannot see her beloved brothers, and she is now asking herself, virtually: why are they not here beneath the high walls of Troy, helping the Achaeans restore Helen to her original bridegroom, Menelaos?

§2. With these Items A through G in place, I am ready to compare the details I have inventoried from "our" Homeric *Iliad* with some relevant details we find in the Hesiodic *Suitors of Helen*, Fragments 196 through 204 in the *Fragmenta Hesiodea* (Merkelbach/West 1967), hereafter abbreviated as "F" plus number of the fragment. The comparison will help resolve important questions that emerge from the Homeric version. I launch the comparison with four questions.

§2.1. For my first question, I come back to what I asked in the title of this essay: What on earth did Helen ever see in Ajax, her former suitor? My answer is that Helen still thinks highly of Ajax. He is still one of the most eligible of those former suitors of hers, but the description of his eligibility has been compressed in comparison with the more expanded description we find in the Hesiodic *Suitors of Helen*, F 204.44–51, as I showed in the previous essay I posted for *Classical Inquiries* (Nagy 2021.06.14, linked **here**). In Homeric and Hesiodic poetics, however, compression in comparison with expansion does not necessarily diminish the value of content. In the Homeric Catalogue of Ships, for example, as I also showed in the previous essay, the compression we see in the description of territories dominated by Ajax does not diminish the value of Ajax as second-best of the Achaeans in the overall structure of "our" Homeric *Iliad*.

§2.2. That said, I come to my second question: if the status of Ajax as second-best of the Achaeans is studiously retained, however briefly, in Helen's estimation of her former suitors,

then what about Achilles, who is himself the very best of all the Achaeans in "our" Homeric *Iliad*? Here the answer is most simple: Achilles was not a suitor of Helen because he was as yet only a boy when the Achaean leaders converged on Sparta to court this most eligible of brides: instead, as we learn from the Hesiodic *Suitors of Helen*, F 204 verses 87–92, Achilles stayed on Mount Pelion, under the tutelage of Cheiron the wise Centaur. So, Achilles never courted Helen at Sparta, and that is why Helen never saw him there. Besides, Achilles will not even be there when the Achaeans are assembling beneath the high walls of Troy in *Iliad* 3, since he has already in *Iliad* 1 withdrawn from the Trojan War in his anger at Agamemnon. So, Achilles could not even be sighted by Priam when the king was standing with Helen on the high walls of Troy. But then the Hesiodic narrative here adds, at verses 89–91, that Achilles would in fact have defeated all other Achaeans, even Menelaos, if he had participated in the competition among the Achaean leaders who converged at Sparta in their pursuit for one of them to be chosen as the bridegroom of Helen. So, according to the narrative, Menelaos ultimately won the competition because Achilles did not participate. But the narrative also adds, at verses 85–87, that Menelaos ultimately was the winner because the bride-gifts that he was offering were worth more than anything offered by any competing Achaean.

§2.3. Here things get more complicated as I proceed to ask my third question: if the bride-gifts of Menelaos were worth more than the bride-gifts of any competing Achaean, then how can we account for the fact that Agamemnon was also one of the competing suitors of Helen? As I am about to show, there is a fragmentary passage in the Hesiodic *Suitors of Helen* where Agamemnon is explicitly said to be a suitor. And here I must note a major difficulty in advance of showing the passage: since Agamemnon really was a suitor of Helen, it is difficult to see why Menelaos and not Agamemnon is said to be the one who offers bride-gifts that are more valuable than any other bride-gifts offered by any other Achaean. After all, it is recognized in all epic traditions that Agamemnon's worth was far greater than the worth of any other Achaean—his brother included. And he was worth more than any other Achaean because he dominated more people— and thus more territory, more property. As we saw at Item C1 in §1 above, Priam says at verses 181–190 of *Iliad* 3 that Agamemnon's supreme worth is measured by the vast number of Achaeans he dominates. Having noted this difficulty, I now show the fragmentary passage in the Hesiodic *Suitors of Helen* where Agamemnon is explicitly said to be a suitor of Helen:

> καί νύ κε δὴ Κάστωρ τε καὶ ὁ κρατερὸς Πολυδεύκης
> γαμβρὸν ποιήσαντο κατὰ κράτος, ἀλλ' Ἀγαμέμνων

5 γαμβρὸς ἐὼν ἐμνᾶτο κασιγνήτωι Μενελάωι.

> And now, at this point, Kastor and the forceful Polydeukes | could have made him an in-law [*gambros*, here = the bridegroom-to-be] by force [*kratos*]. But it was Agamemnon, |5 being himself an in-law [*gambros*, here = the brother of the bridegroom-to-be], who did the courting [*mnâsthai*] on behalf of Menelaos.

Hesiod F 197.3–5

In interpreting this fragment, I disagree with most other interpretations I have ever read (such as the various possibilities explored in a learned essay by Cingano 2005:135–140). The one exception for me is the interpretation of Douglas Frame (2009:229–235 2§102–104), with whose analysis of Hesiod F 197.3–5 I am in general agreement. Especially valuable is his comparison of what we read in this Hesiodic fragment about the wooing of Helen by Agamemnon on behalf of his brother Menelaos with what we read in Homeric poetry about the wooing of the heroine Pero by the hero Melampos on behalf of his brother, the hero Bias, at verses 287–297 of *Odyssey* 11 and at verses 228–239 of *Odyssey* 15. Following the insights of Frame, I now interpret the context of Hesiod F 197.3–5. I start with the semi-immortal twins Kastor and Polydeukes, the loving brothers of the immortal Helen, daughter of Zeus. The brothers preferred Menelaos over all the other Achaeans who were competing to be chosen as the bridegroom of their sister, and so they were ready, if the bride-offer of Menelaos were outmatched, to give Helen to Menelaos 'by force', thus canceling the rhetoric of courtship, where suitors make competing proposals. This way, the brothers of Helen would simply be deciding by *force majeure* that their sister must be awarded as bride to Menelaos. In terms of my reconstruction, however, a non-violent proposal of Menelaos could still become the winning proposal, but only if he merged his rhetoric and his worth with the rhetoric and the worth of someone who had the greatest power, wealth, and prestige of all the Achaeans. And that someone would be the brother of Menelaos, Agamemnon. That is why, I think, the primary suitor of Helen must be Agamemnon, not her bridegroom Menelaos, and that is why the brother of Agamemnon can be at best merely a secondary suitor. Or, to express this idea in terms of what we have seen at Item E in §1 above, Menelaos could be at best merely a counter-suitor. Such a role for Menelaos is what we see in the narrative of the *Teikhoskopiā* in "our" Homeric *Iliad* 3. I review here the essentials of this role, involving the legalities of a counter-suit: a counter-suitor, as I have already said, would be a man who makes a legal proposal to win

back a woman as his bride—after that woman has been illegally abducted by another man. As we saw in the case of Item E in §1 above, such a legal procedure seems to be happening in the narrative of Antenor at verses 203–224 of *Iliad* 3. We saw Menelaos there as a counter-suitor, making a legal proposal to win back Helen as his bride—after she had been illegally abducted by the Trojan Prince Paris/Alexander. That is at least one reason why, I think, Menelaos as a secondary suitor of Helen is not even sighted by Priam and thus never described by Helen in the *Teikhoskopiā* of *Iliad* 3, as I noted at Item B in §1 above.

§2.4. And here things get even more complicated as I now proceed to ask my fourth question. It has to do with Odysseus. As we can see from my notes at Item C2 and at Item E in §1 above, Odysseus takes the role of a "second" for Menelaos in a counter-suit performed by these two heroes in the story told by Antenor at verses 203–224 in the *Teikhoskopiā* of "our" Iliad. And this pairing of Menelaos and Odysseus leads me to my fourth question: why is Odysseus sighted by Priam and described by Helen in the *Teikhoskopiā*, as we have noted at Item C2 in §1 above, while Menelaos is neither sighted nor described in that scene, as we have noted at Item E?

§3. To find an answer to this most complicated question, I need to consider further the complexities that present themselves in the surviving fragments of the Hesiodic *Suitors of Helen*. I start with a most relevant passage, about Odysseus himself as one of the many Achaean suitors of Helen:

ἐκ δ' Ἰθάκης ἐμνᾶτο Ὀδυσσῆος ἱερὴ ἴς,
υἱὸς Λαέρταο πολύκροτα μήδεα εἰδώς.
δῶρα μὲν οὔ ποτ' ἔπεμπε τανισφύρου εἵνεκα κούρης·
ἤιδεε γὰρ κατὰ θυμὸν ὅτι ξανθὸς Μενέλαος
νικήσει, κτήνωι γὰρ Ἀχαιῶν φέρτατος ἦεν·
ἀγγελίην δ' αἰεὶ Λακεδαίμονάδε προΐαλλεν
Κάστορί θ' ἱπποδάμωι καὶ ἀεθλοφόρωι Πολυδεύκει.

Coming from Ithaca, Odysseus too was-a-suitor [*mnâsthai*], he with a might that is sacred, | he who was son of Laertes and who knew stratagems worthy of much applause. | As for (bridal) presents, he never offered any, never bringing-any-in-his-retinue [*pempein*] for the sake of the girl with the delicate ankles, |5 since he knew in his heart that Menelaos, the one with

> the golden hair, | would win. You see, when it comes to the possession-of-herds-and-flocks [*ktênos*], he [= Menelaos] was the-most-worthy [*pheristos*] of all the Achaeans. | But there was a proposal [*angeliē*], with reference to Lacedaemon [= Sparta], that he kept on conveying | to Kastor, tamer of horses, and to the one who-wins-prizes-at-contests, Polydeukes.
>
> Hesiod F 198.2–8

§4. The proposal devised here by Odysseus, as we learn from a retelling of the myth in the *Library* of "Apollodorus" (3.10.9), was about marriage, yes, in the sense that a suitor will make a proposal to the father of the intended bride, seeking permission to marry her. Such is an ordinary suitor's pursuit, his suit. And, in the case of the Hesiodic passage that we have just read, which is part of the overall narrative about the suitors of Helen, we have to start with the simple fact that is stated at the beginning of the passage: yes, Odysseus too was one of the many Achaean suitors of Helen. So, a simple interpretation of the role chosen here by Odysseus, as one of many suitors of Helen, is that he would make a proposal to Tyndareos, the would-be mortal father of the immortal Helen. For illustration, I share here a plausible picturing of the expected situation, where we see Odysseus as a would-be bridegroom of Helen presenting his proposal to the would-be mortal father of the bride.

Illustration by Howard Pyle (1853–1911), *Odysseus Advises King Tyndareus Concerning Helen's Suitors*. From James Baldwin, *A Story of the Golden Age* (1905). **Image** via Wikimedia Commons.

§5. But the fact is, Odysseus was no ordinary suitor, and his proposal was no ordinary proposal of marriage. Here I focus on my interpretation of the word *angeliē* at verse 7 of the narrative I quoted and translated above, Hesiod F 198.2–8. Although I translated *angeliē* there as 'proposal', in the context of the hero's role as a suitor of Helen, the Hesiodic narrative makes it explicit that the proposal of Odysseus was not only a proposal of marriage: he was also proposing, indirectly to Tyndareos as the would-be mortal father of Helen but more directly to the semi-immortal brothers of this immortal bride, a plan that became an epic reality—after the brothers, prompted by Odysseus, talked the father into action. Acting according to plan, Tyndareos administered an oath, to be taken by all the suitors, that they would promise to fight on behalf of the bridegroom who won Helen, whoever he might be, if any other man should

ever dare to take her away from the chosen bridegroom. As I already noted in my previous essay, there is a familiar retelling of this myth about the Oath of the Suitors in the *Library* of "Apollodorus" (3.10.9), and, I can now add, we can find clear traces of the Oath in Hesiod F 204.78–85 (also in Stesichorus F 190 via the scholia A for *Iliad* 2.339), but there remain, as I also noted in that essay, many uncertainties about the myth as myth.

§6. One such uncertainty is about the *angeliē* or 'proposal' of Odysseus, signaled at verse 7 of Hesiod F 198.2–8. As we can see from the overall diction of the Hesiodic *Suitors of Helen*, the use of this word *angeliē* was a conventional way of referring to each one of the competing proposals made by each one of the suitors pursuing their suit to become the bridegroom of Helen. I cite as the clearest example the wording in Hesiod F 199.7. And, ordinarily, the suitor would come personally to present his suit to the father of the potential bride, though, in exceptional circumstances, the suitor could send a substitute suitor, called a *met-angelos*, as we see at Hesiod F 204.58. In the context I just cited, it is pointedly emphasized that even Idomeneus, king of Crete, who would have thought of himself as the most eligible suitor by virtue of his dominant status as ruler of a sea-empire, took the trouble of sailing to Sparta in person and forgoing the exceptionalist option of sending a substitute suitor: no, even Idomeneus needed to see Helen for himself and not just hear about her divine beauty, as we read at Hesiod F 204.59–63. (My interpretation here differs from that of Cingano 2005:132, who considers the possibility that Idomeneus was exceptional in attending, while most other suitors may not have attended.) That said, I must now return to the complication I introduced at §5, where I noted that the *angeliē* or 'proposal' of Odysseus, signaled at verse 7 of Hesiod F 198.2–8, was not only a proposal of marriage. No, it was more than that, in the sense that Odysseus was also proposing a plan that led to the Oath of the Suitors. But, in another sense, this 'proposal' was really also a proposal of marriage—though it was no ordinary proposal, just as Odysseus was no ordinary suitor. As we learn from the retelling of the myth in the *Library* of "Apollodorus" (3.10.9), the plan of Odysseus in proposing that the suitors of Helen take their Oath to support the winner of the suit was intended not only to create solidarity in the future for those who failed in their suit to win Helen as bride. No, the plan of Odysseus was intended also to win for himself his own bride. He had already given up on the possibility of his winning the divine Helen as bride, and that is why he does not even offer her any bride-gifts, as we see at verses 4–6 in the narrative of Hesiod F 198.2–8. The *angeliē* or 'proposal' that Odysseus makes at verse 7 of this same narrative, Hesiod F 198.2–8, is aimed at the semi-immortal brothers of Helen in Sparta, Kastor and Polydeukes, who are expected to reward Odysseus for his planning of the Oath, if his plan proves to be successful. And the

reward demanded by Odysseus is that Helen's brothers must arrange for him to win as his own bride the daughter of Ikarios of Sparta. This Ikarios was the brother of Tyndareos of Sparta. And the daughter of Ikarios was Penelope.

§7. All this is not to say, however, that Odysseus was absent from Sparta when all the other suitors of Helen converged there. Odysseus too was present, as I interpret the narrative, and he too could have offered bride-gifts as one of Helen's suitors, if he had so wished. In terms of this interpretation, I translate the Greek word *pempein* at verse 4 of Hesiod F 198.2–8 not by way of the English word 'send'—in the sense that a sender, in English, is assumed to stay behind and not to come along with whatever is being sent to a given destination. In Greek, by contrast, *pempein* can mean that the sender will come along to that given destination, as in cases where the sender of a retinue that processes solemnly to a sacred place will not only come along with the retinue that the sender arranges but will also actually lead such an arranged retinue, as in the case of processions or parades (my favorite example is Pausanias 1.2.4, where the verb *pempein* actually takes as its direct object the derivative noun *pompē* in the sense of 'procession'). In the present situation, narrated in Hesiod F 198.2–8, I think that *pempein* at line 4 needs to be understood in a context where Odysseus, just like most if perhaps not all of the other suitors, could have arranged for a retinue carrying bridal gifts to process ceremonially to Sparta—and that retinue could optionally be led by the suitor who arranged it. But Odysseus, in terms of my interpretation, chose not to offer Helen any of the bridal gifts that he had brought with him.

§8. I can take the argument further. The *angeliē* or 'proposal' of Odysseus at verse 7 of Hesiod F 198.2–8 results not only in his own marriage to Penelope and in the marriage of Menelaos to Helen. It results also in another kind of marriage. Since the proposal of Odysseus results also in the Oath of the Suitors, as we have already seen, I will now argue that even the collective swearing of this Oath can be seen is a kind of marriage. But it is a collective marriage. By swearing to fight for the man who wins the bride if that bride is ever abducted by another man, all the Achaeans who take the Oath are notionally marrying Helen.

§9. There is a parallel to this kind of collective marriage to be found in the epic narrative of the Indic *Mahābhārata* about the abduction of a female hero called Draupadī. Here I follow in general the analysis of Stephanie Jamison (1994), who has shown convincingly that this Indic narrative tradition is cognate with the Greek epic narrative traditions about the abduction of Helen. But now I need to focus specifically on one detail: Draupadī is married simultaneously

to five brothers, the Pāṇḍava-s, who are the main heroes of the *Mahābhārata*. So, when Draupadī is abducted by another hero, Jayadratha, all five of her husbands collectively pursue the abductor and fight him, defeating both him and his vast army. Thus they have successfully reabducted their bride Draupadī. Before the reabduction succeeds, however, there is a scene that in many ways closely resembles the View from the Walls of Troy in *Iliad* 3. It happens in *Mahābhārata* III.254.3, where Draupadī is standing on the platform of her abductor's chariot: the abductor, who is also standing on the platform, demands that Draupadī must name one by one the five pursuing heroes that he and she have both sighted. These chariot-riding pursuers are rapidly closing in on the target of their pursuit—of their counter-suit—eager as they are to perform the violent act of reabduction that is about to take place. And now Draupadī, viewing the pursuers from the platform of her abductor's chariot, responds to this illegitimate suitor's questioning about the counter-suitors by identifying and describing each one of her five collective husbands, and her descriptions are poetically cognate, as we see in the article of Jamison, with the kinds of descriptions we read about four of Helen's former suitors, viewed as they are from the high walls of Troy.

§10. Here I circle back to Ajax, focusing on this suitor of Helen as sighted beneath the high walls of Troy by that ultimate bride who never became his own bride. As I have argued in this essay, the compressed view of this suitor, though he is now perhaps somewhat less eligible than he used to be, need not be interpreted as a slighting of his attractiveness as a would-be bridegroom of Helen. And, as we will see in a subsequent essay, Ajax in our Homeric *Iliad* actually comes closest in attractiveness to the one hero who was considered to be the most attractive of all bridegrooms. That hero, as we will also see, was Achilles, an eternal bridegroom who forever missed, in his lifetime as a mortal, the chance of marrying his eternal bride.

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