

Lowell EDMUNDS, *Toward the Characterization of Helen in Homer. Appellatives, Periphrastic Denominations, and Noun-Epithet Formulas. Trends in Classics. Supplementary Volumes Bd. 87. Berlin / Boston: De Gruyter 2019, XII + 183 p.*

One year after the English translation of H el ene Monsacr e’s seminal book came out¹, the figure of Helen reopens the discussion on Homeric characterization, especially that which emerges through the study of poetic onomastics. This work, published as the 87th supplementary volume of De Gruyter’s series *Trends in Classics*, testifies to this revival of interest, as recognised by the author himself (E.): “The study of the Homeric epithets for Helen is a first stage in a larger study of her characterization in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*” (v). Just like the Homeric characterization, Helen herself has been subject to renewed interest in recent scholarship, especially that which concerns the application of comparative and theoretical models². The work under review illustrates how Homer represented Helen through nineteen noun-epithets, appellatives, and periphrastic denominations, and each of these is considered in context. The analysis is thus based on morphology, which sets it apart from other ‘speeches and voices’ that have been considered up until now³. The aim is to bring to light “not only the Helen who has begun her speech to Hector in the mode of lament and with self-reproach, but also the Helen of the narrator’s epithets” (p. 149). This is an ambitious goal that E. successfully achieves after his previous monograph on the myth of Helen as an abducted wife⁴.

¹ Monsacr e, H. 2018. *The Tears of Achilles* (trans. by Nicholas J. Snead, Hellenic Studies Series, 75). Washington, DC: Center for Hellenic Studies (English translation of the original French version Monsacr e, H. 1984. *Les larmes d’Achille: le h eros, la femme et la souffrance dans la po sie d’Hom ere*. Paris: Albin Michel).

² Cf. Suzuki, M. 1989. *Metamorphoses of Helen: Authority, Difference, and the Epic*, Ithaca/London: Cornell University Press; Austin, N. 1994. *Helen of Troy and her Shameless Phantom*. Ithaca/London: Cornell University Press; Gumpert, M. 2002. *Grafting Helen: The Abduction of the Classical Past*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press. This renewal of interest is also testified, in the philological and literary field, by studies and critical editions published after a hiatus of four decades: Allan, W. 2008. *Euripides: Helen* (Cambridge Greek and Latin Classics). Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press; Cadau, C. 2015. *Studies in Colluthus’ “Abduction of Helen”* (Mnemosyne supplements. Late Antique literature, 380). Leiden: Brill; Donadi, F. 2016. *Gorgias. Helenae encomium* (Bibliotheca scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana). Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter.

³ Finkelberg, M. 2011. *Speeches*. In *The Homer Encyclopedia* (3 vols.), ed. M. Finkelberg. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell; De Sanctis, D. 2018. *Il canto e la tela. Le voci di Elena in Omero* (Biblioteca di studi antichi, 98). Pisa/Roma: Fabrizio Serra Editore. This last reference is not mentioned in the final Bibliography of the volume.

⁴ Edmunds, L. 2015. *Stealing Helen: The Myth of the Abducted Wife in Comparative Perspective*. Princeton/Oxford: Princeton University Press.

The inquiry follows a canonical structure. Leaving aside the Table of Contents (vii-ix), the list of Abbreviations (xi-xii) and Tables (xiii), the book is organized into a sequence of twelve chapters preceded by a Preface (v-vi) and an Introduction (1-14). After a general Conclusion (146-149), the work is completed by four Appendices dedicated to Helen's epithets in Homer, Helen's name without epithets, the "on account of" motif, and Helen's epithets in the lyric poems (p. 151-158). The book concludes with Works cited (p. 159-170), an *Index nominorum et rerum* (p. 171-172) and an *Index locorum* (p. 173-182).

In the Introduction, E. proposes to analyse all Homeric occurrences with the assumption that "none [of Helen's epithets] can be described simply as a generic epithet of women" (v). In this way, he strongly opposes Milman Parry's theory of the semantic emptiness and merely ornamental function of the epithet. Nevertheless, E. does not address the more controversial question of how to generally define a traditional formula – the work limits itself to investigating Helen's character beyond the descriptive purposes of Parry's first quantitative survey (p. 1, 3-4). Without considering *τριτάτη* (*Il.* XXIV 761) and two other epithets used in oblique form by Hector (*γυνὴ εὐειδής* at *Il.* III 48 and *θαλερὴ παράκοιτις* at *Il.* III 53), E. analyses the epithets of Helen with a synchronic and contextual perspective. Two important issues then emerge: a) the three levels of Helen's epithets based on a scale from disapprobation to high approbation and b) the special authority of the narrator. In the final paragraphs of the Introduction, his attention turns to the metrical concerns of Helen's name. Considering the mobile nature of the noun-epithet combination between the initial and the mid-verse positions, E. assesses that some specific epithets such as the ethnic Ἀργεΐη allow for Ἑλένη to be placed in the first half of the line (for example at *Il.* VI 323-324). This premise leads E., on the one hand, to qualify Helen's formulas as "a fairly complete syntactical repertory" and, on the other hand, to reconsider the Parryan list of Helen's distinctive epithets. E. then appeals to the concept of "tradition" or "traditional referentiality" to explain the attribution to Helen of non-distinctive epithets. More precisely, the composer would have access to an inherited stock of epithets during the oral composition, in a process tending to "homeostasis, or equilibrium of past and present" (p. 13).

Chapter One (p. 15-25) provides an overview of the appellatives and periphrastic denominations of Helen. By expounding upon López Gregoris' survey⁵, E. shows that some appellatives are used to stress Helen's fundamental identity of wife (in the eyes of her in-laws) at Troy. E. particularly highlights the differences between three forms: *νόμφα φίλη*, "dear bride"; *φίλον τέκος*,

⁵ López Gregoris, R. 1986. El matrimonio de Helena: solución lexemática. *Epos* 12: 15–30.

“dear child” and γύναι, “lady”. With regard to γύναι, E. relies on two other synonymic epithets, ἄκοιτις and ἄλοχος, which refer to Helen as wife and as a prize won by Menelaus. This semantic nuance seems to be confirmed by Helen’s conscious use of verbs such as ἄγω, its compound ἀνάγω and the *vox propria* ἀρπάζειν in reference to her abduction, as well as the correspondent passive form ἔπομαι (p. 22). At that point, E. considers Helen’s terms for her Trojan in-laws and her family in Sparta. Among the periphrastic denominations, E. ascribes Hector’s εὐειδής, παράκοιτις and νυὸν ἀνδρῶν αἰχμητῶν at *Il.* III 48-49 and 53. All three of these forms refer to Helen as Menelaus’ wife and stress her status of ‘young bedmate’ at the time of the abduction.

In Chapter Two (p. 26-39), E. reassesses the relationship between Helen’s epithets of opprobrium and their sources. Besides Trojan-in-laws, the main sources of pejorative epithets for Helen are Helen herself, Achilles and Aphrodite. Helen is the first to call herself κακομήχανος, “contriver of mischief” (*Il.* VI 344) with a clear reference to the deadly conflict. The same nuance connotes another epithet that Helen uses for herself (κρυοέσση), derived from the “coldness that makes one shiver” (κρύος). Nevertheless, one should not think that Helen blames herself. Conversely, her death-wishes are apologetic and must be thought of as quotations of what others say about her. The same rhetoric strategy underlies the use of κύων (*Il.* VI 344, 356) and κυνῶπις (*Il.* III, 180), through which Helen refers to herself as a passive prize. Conversely, she calls herself ἄμμορος in her lament for Hector (*Il.* XXIV 773), which heightens her sorrow for the dead hero, as Achilles did with Patroclus (*Il.* XIX 315). Achilles’ qualification of Helen through the *hapax* ῥιγεδανή (*Il.* XIX 324-325) is more pejorative, since his choice of words is aimed to highlight Helen’s status of ‘object of reproach’ for both Achaeans and Trojans. After analysing Achilles’ reproach, E. dedicates an entire section to σχετλίη, “obstinate” (*Il.* III 414), with which Aphrodite addresses Helen on the wall of Troy before she enters Paris’ bed. This epithet is to be interpreted within its enunciative context (380-447), characterised by an exceptional concentration of epithets aimed at emphasizing a contrast between Aphrodite and Helen with respect to divine status.

Chapter Three (p. 40-51) is entirely devoted to the ethnic Ἀργεΐη. This is the most frequently used epithet for Helen (9x in the *Iliad* and 4x in the *Odyssey*) and the most fungible. Far from indicating Helen’s geographical origin, the epithet is used not only to qualify her as non-Trojan, but also to identify her as an object of contention between Achaeans and Trojans. The perspective adopted by E. follows Strabo’s version (8.6.5) and underlines a difference in the use of Ἀργεΐη in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*: “Because the Achaeans are no longer assembled [in the *Odyssey*], there is no longer need for a single word to de-

scribe the many peoples of Greece and distinguish them from a foreign enemy” (p. 42). Consequently, “Argive Helen” represents the object of a legitimate claim for the Achaeans, the object to be fought over and “on account of whom” the war is fought. The analysis then turns towards the use of Ἀργεΐη in the *Odyssey*, where the epithet appears with a different nuance: it is aimed at evoking what E. calls the “Iliad identity” of Helen, “the long-lost and now recovered life” in Sparta (p. 47-49). The chapter closes with the first appendix of the book concerning the use of “Argive” in the rest of the *Odyssey*.

Chapter Four (p. 52-64) explores the twenty-three occurrences of the name Helen unmodified without an epithet. When characters do not use Ἑλένη with an epithet, it is usually to refer to her as a passive object of war, notably in the recurrent formulas where the name is coupled with Menelaus’ possessions stolen by Paris (κτήματα, e.g. *Il.* II 356 and 590, III 161 and 458, VII 362). In these passages, Helen’s identity is reduced simply to “the woman”. Finally, E. examines the name Helen in the *Odyssey*, where she is thrice referred to without an epithet as the wife of Menelaus. In particular, the author dwells on *Od.* XV 100, where Helen and Megapenthes (both without attributes) accompany Menelaus to the storeroom to choose departure gifts for Telemachus. Nevertheless, E. considers the storeroom scene in the *Odyssey* as exceptional, since the unmodified names of Helen and Megapenthes may be deliberately private: “They are not in view of others and neither of them does or says anything that would prompt an epithet” (p. 63).

Chapter Five (p. 73-80) analyses the first formula depicting Helen as a public figure, δῖα γυναικῶν. Although it is composed of the very common adjective δῖος, this expression is considered by E. as distinctive of both Helen (5x) and Penelope (8x) when appearing in public. E. suggests that the non-functional similarity between Helen and Penelope stems from a Homeric distribution of inherited epithets for women. The first occurrence of the formula comes from the narrator in the Teichoscopy, characterised by the contrasting perspectives of the narrator (who introduces Helen’s first reply to Priam with δῖα γυναικῶν, *Il.* III 17) and Priam (who calls Helen φίλον τέκος, his daughter-in-law, III 162). The author explains this contrast by rightly assuming that “Priam’s appellative seems to be over-written by the laudatory epithet and the poet’s perspective seems to replace that of the kindly old king” (p. 67). By contrast, E. considers the recurrence of δῖα γυναικῶν to be anomalous at *Od.* IV 304-305, since here Helen is not in motion, but laying down in bed with Menelaus.

In Chapter Six (p. 73-80), E. analyses the second epithet depicting Helen as a public figure, τανύπεπλος (“long-robed”). Sharing this epithet with Thetis, Cti-

mene and Lampetie, Helen is thus defined three times by the narrator so as to emphasise her impressive public appearance. Hainsworth's reading of the reply-formulas used by Helen in the Teichoscopia (*Il.* III 171) opens a possible contextual interpretation of *τανύπεπλος*⁶. It occurs in an unusual verse in which Helen has two epithets. Moreover, it seems to continue the contrasting perspectives of the narrator and Priam with the aim of redeeming Helen's bad reputation. The analysis of this epithet leads E. to observe the consistency between the Iliadic and Odyssean identities of Helen. By considering the exceptional recurrence of *τανύπεπλος* in a private context at *Od.* XV 305, the author observes that Helen brings her "Iliadic identity [...] into bed in Sparta" (p. 77).

Chapter Seven (p. 81-92) focuses on *ἠύκομος*, "having beautiful hair", which E. analyses based on Mureddu's comparative study of noun epithets in Hesiod and Homer⁷. First, the epithet emphasizes it as an important aspect of Helen's identity as 'the beautiful woman over whom the war is fought'. In the meantime, E. states that *ἠυκόμοιο* refers to a woman's beauty as part of her public identity without representing a focal quality that determines the war (p. 88). Secondly, no other character besides Achilles uses this epithet for Helen (*Il.* IX 339). Moreover, *ἠύκομος* occurs six times in an appositional phrase to describe Paris as "the husband of the fair-haired Helen" (*Ἑλένης ἕνεκ' ἠυκόμοιο*). Following the bT scholium in *Il.* III 329, E. underscores that Paris shares this expression with Zeus, *πόσις Ἑρῆς ἠυκόμοιο* at *Il.* X 5. Nevertheless, it should not be thought that the sharing of these epithets is for the purpose of establishing associations between Helen and other figures. As in the case of *δῖα γυναικῶν* used for Helen and Penelope, the non-functional importance of *ἠύκομος* in the narrative is explained through the argument of the Homeric redistribution of inherited epithets for women. The chapter closes with an appendix dedicated to the semantics of the formula *Ἑλένης ἕνεκ' ἠυκόμοιο*, expressing no causality in relation to Helen's agency in the narrative.

Chapter Eight (p. 93-102) centres around *λευκώλενος*, "white-armed". The survey carried out by E. shows that the principal meaning of *λευκώλενος* is linked to the social rank of the recipient (women who have this epithet are usually in the *megaron*). Contrarily, the significance of beauty is secondary. The first occurrence studied by E. is at *Od.* XXII 226-229 where *λευκώλενος* is paired with *εὐπατέρεια* in a so-called "half asyndeton": adopting a then-now logic, Athena says to Odysseus that he may have been a better man when he was fighting for a less valuable prize (Helen) than the one he is fighting for now (Penelope). Helen is also *λευκώλενος* at *Il.* III 121 when Iris, disguised as Laodice (Helen's

⁶ Hainsworth, B. 1968. *The Flexibility of the Homeric Formula*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

⁷ Mureddu, P. 1983. *Formula e tradizione nella poesia di Esiodo*. Roma: Ateneo.

sister-in-law), summons her to the wall. This epithet is explained by the T scholiast as a sort of instrument through which the poet “ornaments her [*sc.* Helen] with the epithet of Hera [...]”. But if the war seems to be reaching a climax when the narrator calls Helen λευκώλενος at *Il.* III 121, in the *Odyssey* the war is finally over: Athena’s use is thus isolated and considered an “ad hoc reduction of the over-all Iliadic characterization [of Helen]” (p. 101).

Chapter Nine (p. 103-113) is dedicated to καλλιπάρηος, “fair-cheeked”, and καλλίκομος, “fair-haired”. Both are used of Helen once in the *Odyssey* during the episode of Telemachus’ departure from Sparta. If ἠύκομος refers to Helen’s beauty as the marker of a public identity, καλλίκομος suggests sexual desirability and its consequences in private contexts: “bed seems to be exactly the right place for this epithet” (p. 105). With this nuance, καλλίκομος is used for Helen when she is lying in bed with Menelaus on the morning of Telemachus’ departure (*Od.* XV 57-58). A similar connotation can be found in the word καλλιπάρηος which is defined by the T scholiast as “opportune, indicating the disposition of the lover [...]”. It is generally attributed not only to concubines in the *Iliad* and to marriageable young women in Hesiod, but also to some chaste goddesses such as Themis, Leto and Hera, the latter being by definition “the sexual partner of Zeus” (p. 107). This epithet is also applied to Helen in the farewell scene, in which Helen and Menelaus offer Telemachus some parting gifts (*Od.* XV 123-130). Adopting a contextual approach, E. interprets this “anachronistic epithet” by stating that Helen, the young “fair-cheeked” woman in her pre-Iliadic past, symbolically transfers her previous status to the gift for Telemachus’ hypothetical bride, who is expected to be “fair-cheeked” herself.

Chapter Ten (p. 114-124) offers a first in-depth analysis of the kinship epithets (Διὸς θυγάτηρ, κούρη Διὸς, Διὸς ἐκγεγαυῖα except for εὐπατέρεια) used by the narrator both in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* to describe Helen as the daughter of Zeus. The chapter highlights two points of view about Helen’s familial identity: one is the narrator’s (the only entity besides Penelope who knows that Helen is Zeus’ daughter) and the other is the “down-to-earth” one of the characters. The first part of the chapter centres on Ἑλένη Διὸς ἐκγεγαυῖα, which occurs with a contrasting function at the beginning of the Teichoscopia (*Il.* III 199) to establish an implicit antithesis between Tyndareus’ paternity and Priam’s “dear child” address to Helen. The same formula occurs a few lines later at *Il.* III 418 in the brief passage in which Aphrodite brings Helen face to face with Paris: “[...] although Helen is the daughter of Zeus, she is intimated by another, more powerful daughter of Zeus” (p. 117). In the same context, at line 426, Helen is also qualified by another formula (κούρη Διὸς αἰγιόχοιο), which connotes her status in the eyes of Paris. The second part of the chapter

is devoted to the Odyssean occurrences. At *Od.* IV 184, when Menelaus, Helen and Telemachus weep over Odysseus, the narrator qualifies Helen as Διὸς ἐκγεγαυῖα (a formula shared with Athena) with the aim of restoring Helen's reputation after her self-denigration. E. suggests that this formula confers on Helen an Athena-like identity now that she becomes the "director of the recollection of Odysseus", a sort of bard in performance (p. 120-121). Finally, E. analyses the last occurrence of Διὸς ἐκγεγαυῖα at *Od.* XXIII 218, where the speaker is not the narrator, but Penelope, and Helen, rather than being present, is the subject of discussion and a term of comparison.

Chapter Eleven (p. 125-133) discusses the occurrences of εὐπατέρεια in *Iliad* Book 6 and *Odyssey* Book 22. In the first case, Athena uses this epithet to qualify Helen as the "daughter of a noble (Spartan) father" (*Il.* VI 288-292) with reference to Tyndareus as Helen's father. If Athena's use of εὐπατέρεια differs from the narrator's, in the *Odyssey* the goddess adopts the same epithet to equate Helen's status with her own. In the second section of the chapter, E. analyses εὐπατέρεια as the epithet of Tyro and then as a catalogue epithet. As shown in the Conclusion, εὐπατέρεια occurs in later sources (Euripides, Apollonius of Rhodes, Rhianus and the *Orphic hymns*) to describe humans and goddesses in a way that seems contrary to how it was applied in the Homeric poems, where the epithet represents a "way in catalogues to present women in general in different lights" (p. 133).

In Chapter Twelve (p. 134-155), the emphasis shifts from a synchronic to a diachronic approach. In particular, E. tries to explain some non-functional similarities that emerged from the synchronic study of Helen's epithets. This approach is first applied to Helen's epithet for beauty. According to the author, their analysis allows for the deconstruction of the myth (or the "old truism") of Helen's beauty as the main cause of the Trojan war: "The war is going on [...] because Helen has been abducted and is in Troy, not because she is beautiful" (p. 135). At the same time, the diachronic comparison with the Hesiodic *Catalogue* allows for the argument to be made that Homeric poems have differentiated their Helen from the Hesiodic one. Later, E. comes back to the kinship epithets, through which it is possible to follow the narrator's point of view regarding the contemporary events of the war. These diachronic remarks are finally brought together and put into perspective in the general conclusion of the volume, which does not add distinctive elements to the solid argumentation carried out in previous chapters.

Throughout this book, E. presents a more historical Helen than the one depicted, albeit with scientific ambitions, in recent novelizations of the Trojan war⁸. The author demonstrates a philological eye alert to linguistic issues. Homeric sources are well-selected to build up a cogent argumentation and to expand our knowledge of Greek linguistics. A significant number of passages are interpreted not just by isolating a few lines, but by considering the context of the entire plot (this is particularly true for passages of Book 3 related to the Teichoscopia). Destined for advanced or informed readers interested in Homeric characterization and formularity, in Greek onomastics, and in the Homeric reception of Helen, this book is meticulously edited and only minor typos were found (p. 22 ἔπομαι > ἔπομαι; p. 30 ῥιγέω > ῥιγέω and ῥιγώω > ῥιγώω; p. 98 “LgfrE” > “LfgrE”).

In addition to its quality, it is worth underscoring the novelties of this volume. First, E. relativises the importance of Helen’s beauty in the outbreak of the Trojan War, so as to consider the comparison made between Helen and immortal goddesses by the old man on the wall of Troy a *façon de parler* (p. 63). In this regard, the work repositions Paris as being the first one responsible for the Trojan War, considering the conflict as something that happened not because of Helen, but *Paridis propter amorem*. But if it is true that “the one who caused the war that the Achaeans are fighting is Paris” (p. 135), we cannot but wait impatiently for a similar work devoted to a three-dimensional analysis of the ethical responsibility of the hero. The second innovative issue of E.’s book is itself linked to beauty: although *Iliad* maintains two different perspectives of the narrator and the characters, beauty is the point at which these two perspectives sometimes overlap. Nonetheless, E. acknowledges the rhetorical independence of Helen, most notably in the *Odyssey*, whereby she becomes an authoritative speaker and a visibly persuasive character equipped of an impressive oral style. If the volume suggests that the importance of beauty is relative, it also invites us to consider with greater attention another fundamental issue of Helen’s identity, namely its relationship with temporalities. In fact, Helen is a figure of temporal instability and represents the shuttling back and forth between past and present. This is particularly true in the *Odyssey*, a poem largely dominated by the dynamic of memory in its almost obsessive referring to the Trojan past. It is precisely owing to this temporal balance that E. rationalizes some inconsistencies of Helen oscillating between *eros* and *eris*, between her antithetical roles of “guest” in the *Iliad* and “host” in the *Odyssey*⁹.

⁸ Elyot, A. 2006. *The Memoirs of Helen of Troy: A Novel*. New York: Three Rivers Press; Maguire, L. 2009. *Helen of Troy: From Homer to Hollywood*. Chichester/Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.

⁹ This point is emphasized by Meagher, R.E. 2002. *The Meaning of Helen: In Search of an Ancient Icon*, Wauconda, IL: Bolchazy-Carducci.

Last but not least, the material implications of Helen's abduction are emphasised on several occasions (p. 19, 24, 52-54, 63, 100, 135). This may represent a meeting point with Gumpert's previous monograph¹⁰, whereby Helen stimulates a "chrematistic economy" through her beauty, which sets into motion different contests for possession, deprivation, and repossession: after all, for both Achaeans and Trojans at different times, the essence of Helen is in her absence.

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¹⁰ See note 2 above.