

BOOK REVIEW

Speech Presentation in Homeric Epic. By DEBORAH BECK. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2012. Pp. x + 256. Hardcover, \$55.00. ISBN 978-0-292-73880-5.

In the book under review, Beck makes an important contribution to the ongoing criticism on Homeric discourse by studying “the full range of techniques for presenting speech in the Homeric epics” (1). Her detailed examination of direct quotation, free indirect speech, indirect speech, and speech mention alongside overall treatments of the subject in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* make the case that there is “a unified speech presentation spectrum” with “a stable set of functions and effects” in both Homeric epics (1).

The monograph, parts of which have been published in earlier versions in the form of articles, consists of an Introduction, six chapters covering the main aspects of the topic, and a Conclusion, plus Bibliography, (general) Index, and Index Locorum. In support of her argument, Beck provides a plethora of data, endorsed by meticulous statistics, which at times however seem to formulate a rather dense prose style: parts of the volume may seem too technical and possibly hard to follow for some readers. Yet this effect is mitigated by the inclusion of suitable examples and the summarising of conclusions at the end of (sub)chapters. Scholars and advanced students of Homeric poetry as well as those interested in speech presentation in (classical) literature will surely find here much interesting material to consider and work with.

The Introduction lays out a theoretical framework that rests in two complementary approaches, namely narratology and theoretical linguistics (speech act theory, pragmatics). The focus is clearly on the second body of theory, and the author explains in detail particular branches of the field that constitute her methodology. By drawing on Austin’s seminal theory, she distinguishes the speech act types and subtypes that can be found in Homeric poetry, mainly according to content and function within a conversation. Furthermore, the consistency of speech presentation in Homer is explained by the notion of the ‘implied author’. Although this concept is not pivotal in Beck’s analysis, one cannot help but wonder if its introduction into Homeric criticism should be supported by an accompanying discussion about tradition.

Chapter One deals with direct quotation (DQ), which is classified into two major groups: mimetic (“speech that ‘really’ took place”, 25) and non-mimetic quotation (*tis* speeches). Beck may start with the broad term ‘vividness’ to describe the principal function of DQ, but along the way the discussion brings to the fore interesting points that relate both to narrators and characters. I single out a few: in the *Odyssey* DQ is used by the primary narrator to give the whole spectrum of the story, whereas characters employ directly quoted conversations when the narrative refers to themselves, *plus* it is a *nostos*-story; in the wanderings, in general, Odysseus’ DQs highlight both his cunning and eagerness to act, while in the Cyclops episode the same technique underlines the hero’s intelligence.

Chapter Two, which tackles free indirect discourse (FID) (the narrative event according to which the voices of the narrator and the characters merge), should receive the future attention of scholars, as it sets the ground for the discussion of this subject in Homer. Although FID does not seem to be a common feature of Homeric epic and is by all means an issue hard to decide upon, Beck traces 80 instances of this phenomenon in both the narrator- and the character-text, and argues persuasively in favour of its existence in the speech of Phoenix (*Iliad* 9) and in the second song of Demodocus (*Odyssey* 8).

Chapters Three and Four explore respectively indirect speech (IS) and speech mention (SM), two admittedly neglected areas of Homeric research. Beck here provides a thorough examination in terms of length, expressivity, speech act type, and narrative level, and attacks the widely held view that IS and SM are mainly used for peripheral or unimportant discourse; instead they do contribute to “shaping the stories of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*” (191). This conclusion, however, could have been further developed so as to provide a more well-rounded proposal (if there is one) for the use of IS and SM in Homer.

Chapters Five and Six are devoted to general overviews of speech presentation in the two Homeric epics, which demonstrate above all that the *Odyssey* is much more concerned with conversation in comparison to the *Iliad*. The nature of these chapters is mainly descriptive, so the argument should perhaps be strengthened by placing more emphasis on the effects of speech presentation (e.g. in the promising, though regrettably brief, discussion of female speech in the *Odyssey*). Particularly illuminating is the section on Patroclus, which shows vividly how speech presentation techniques contribute to the construction of character in Homeric poetry and are also highly consistent with the progression of the narrative.

Last but not least, special mention should be made to the impressive database (freely available online at: <http://www.laits.utexas.edu/DeborahBeck/home>), which accompanies the book, though may well be used independently to search all instances of speech presentation in Homer according to multiple criteria (e.g. work, book, line, speaker/addressee, speech act type etc.). The author should definitely be praised for this achievement; I trust that both the book and the database will be more than useful to anyone interested in Homeric speeches.¹

CHRISTODOULOS ZEKAS

Open University of Cyprus, christodoulos.zekas@ouc.ac.cy

¹ The volume in general has been carefully edited and printed; I have found only a few typos (24: the phrase "Characters who use ... direct quotation." needs revision; 198, n.14: "direct" read "indirect"; 243: "Taplin ... *Character*" read "Taplin ... *Characterization*").