Hesiod and the Heroes: Dying in Epic Time

This paper examines the use of the formula πόλεμός τε κακὸς καὶ φύλοπις αἰνή ("evil war and dread strife") in line 161 of Hesiod's *Works and Days*. I argue that this phrase calls out to its other epic uses, particularly the Homeric instances of the formula. The phrase, as well as its shorter relative, simply φύλοπις αἰνή, appear in close association with the forces at Troy and the divine influence that caused and propagated the war. I suggest that this resonance lends the formula, when used in Hesiod, a strong referential quality that evokes imagery around the Trojan War. Because Hesiod's use of the long-form phrase occurs in his myth of races, a passage with a clear focus on past events, the formula contributes to Hesiod's retrospective view. His use of the formula here thus reinforces Hesiod's desire to establish himself as thematically and temporally distant from Homeric epic.

This paper runs through relevant passages of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* to consider the phrase φύλοπις αἰνή and the longer version of the formula. I argue that the formula is often used with explicit reference either to the armies of the Trojans and the Achaeans (Τρώων καὶ Ἀχαιῶν; as at 5.495-7, 6.104-6, and 11.213), or to divine influence as it affects the events of the war (as at 4.65, 6.1, 16.256, 16.676-7). In the first place, the φύλοπις αἰνή formula is thus prominently associated with the two groups present at Troy. Furthermore, the association of "dread strife" in the *Iliad* with divine influence parallels Hesiod's use of the same formula in the myth of ages, where Zeus repeatedly imposes death and pain on the race of men. Because so many of the Iliadic examples of the phrase involve the calamitous, god-given destruction of men by means of war, I argue that Hesiod's use of the phrase strongly recalls the divine endorsement of the Trojan war. The appearance of the phrase in the *Odyssey* (24.475-6) refers to Odysseus' past, offering

an example of how the phrase functions as a reference to a heroic, Iliadic past. Hesiod, I argue, also uses the phrase to mark his own retrospective, distanced account.

My argument for explicit associations between the Iliadic war narrative as suggested by the φύλοπις αἰνή forumula and Hesiodic use of the formula is supported by a brief consideration of a second formula. The phrase ἀνδρῶν ἡρώων θεῖον γένος, οἳ καλέονται/ἡμίθεοι ("the divine race of heroes, who are called semi-divine;" *WD* 159-60) is paralleled in *Iliad* 12.23 (κάππεσον ἐν κονίῃσι καὶ ἡμιθέων γένος ἀνδρῶν; "and the race of semi-divine men fell in the dust"). The referentiality of this phrase, used so close to the mention of "dread strife," contributes to Hesiod's vision of the war and its heroes as chronologically and thematically distant. The use of the phrase in the *Iliad* evokes a complex chronology and suggests an unusual metapoetic comment on the situation at Troy, which contribute to the impact of Hesiod's own comment on past races. Furthermore, the overlapping vocabulary of these passages clearly associates the "semi-divine heroes" with the act of dying; they are heroes because they are dead. The importance of time and its passing help to define the ἡμίθεοι, and so Hesiod's reference to them contributes to his ability to situate himself and his poetry at a remove from the Homeric context.

The *Iliad* looks forward to a time when the heroes described therein will have achieved their κλέος, gained as they pass through the "dread strife" of war to a heroic death. By contrast, Hesiod's song looks back on these heroes with a mind to their existing legacy. While Homer looks forward to the end of the war and the departure from Troy, Hesiod's heroes have already died there. As Andrew Ford says, "the fundamental promise of [Homer's] poetry is the paradox of restoring through mere voice these vanished heroes… to visibility" (55). Hesiod, by contrast is concerned not with the restoration of the heroic race, but with its destruction. It is necessary for his poem that they have died and given way to the present age, in which their κλέος remains.

Their fame in turn inspires the songs of the *aoidoi* who celebrate them, allowing Hesiod his own share of κλέος.

Bibliography

Ford, Andrew. *Homer: The Poetry of the Past*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992.