Hesiod’s Titanomachy as an Illustration of Zielinski’s Law

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At the turn of the present century Zielinski formulated the law that the early Greek epic describes simultaneous events consecutively and as if they happened consecutively.¹ There are numerous examples of this law in the Homeric poems. The poet concentrates on one event at a time and never steps back with regard to his main narrative. He does, however, as Zielinski noted, have references to events occurring before the action of his poems and recapitulations of earlier events within his poems, but these are presented parenthetically or put into the mouths of his characters and so do not affect the forward movement of the narrative.

Zielinski explained his law as due to the poet’s habit of describing events as an observer; observation always proceeds forward in time and it is only by means of analysis that we are able to synchronize events. Fränkel gave another explanation: the poet lacked the abstract idea of time into which different actions might be integrated.² It seems likely, however, that Zielinski’s law is best explained as a law of oral poetry, the study of which came into prominence after Zielinski and Fränkel wrote. Simultaneous events are told consecutively, or paratactically, and the paratactic method of composition is one of the most important techniques of oral poetry. This method has been well described by Notopoulos, though without any reference to Zielinski’s law: the oral poet strings events together, one after the other, connecting them by means of foreshadowing, retrospection, and ring-composition.³ It is surprising that the theoreticians of oral poetry have until re-

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cently paid so little attention to Zielinski’s law, but this omission has now been repaired by Krischer.4 Krischer explains Zielinski’s law in terms of the poet’s ability to handle a great mass of material by what he calls the cataloguing style: a narrative is divided into different simultaneous events which are separately told to their conclusions one at a time.

We have given the above brief account of Zielinski’s law in order to introduce our discussion of the Titanomachy in Hesiod’s Theogony. The narration of the battle in this passage seems rather muddled, for the fighting of the Hundred-Handers, which we naturally think of as beginning at the same time as that of Zeus, is told as if it occurred later. But all becomes clear once we realize that Hesiod has constructed his narrative in accordance with Zielinski’s law.

The Titanomachy deals with the last day in the war between the gods and the Titans, after they have been fighting for ten years. In an introductory section (617–87) we are told how Zeus and the gods brought up the Hundred-Handers from the underworld and won their aid against the Titans, and are given a general description of the beginning of the battle. Both sides displayed the power of their hands and hurled their missiles against each other, ἐπ’ ἀλλήλοις ἔσαν βέλεα (684). We naturally suppose that these missiles include the rocks of the Hundred-Handers as well as the thunderbolts of Zeus, and that Zeus and the Hundred-Handers have begun fighting at the same time at the beginning of the battle.

The next section (687–710) describes the fighting of Zeus. It begins as follows:

οὐδ’ ἄρ’ ἔτι Ζεὺς ἴσχεν ἐὸν μένος, ἀλλὰ νῦ τοῦ γε ἐλθαρ μὲν μένεος πλήντο φρένες, ἐκ δὲ τε πᾶσαν φαίνε βῆν . . .

“Zeus no longer restrained his might.” At first sight it seems as if he has delayed his entry into the battle, but, as West points out, the phrase οὐδ’ ἄρ’ ἔτι . . . ἴσχεν ἐὸν μένος is meant to draw our attention to a particular event within the framework of the previous general description.5 West compares Ζεὺς δ’ ἐπεί οὖν κόρθυνεν ἐὸν μένος in the account of the battle between Zeus and Typhoeus (Theog. 853) and ἐνθ’ οἱ γ’ οὐκετί δηρὸν ἀφέστασαν in the account

4 T. Krischer, Formale Konventionen der homerischen Epik (Zetemata 56: Munich 1971) esp. 91ff.
of the Theomachy (II. 21.391), both of which signal a transition from the general to the particular in narratives closely resembling the Titanomachy.

The final section of the Titanomachy (711–21) describes the fighting of the Hundred-Handers, beginning as follows:

\[ \text{ἐκλίνθη δὲ μάχη πρὶν δ’ ἄλληλος ἐπέχοντες ἐμμενέως ἐμάχοντο διὰ κρατερᾶς ύσμίνας.} \]
\[ \text{oι δ’ ἄρ’ ἐνὶ πρῶτοισι μάχην δριμεῖαν ἔγειραν Κόττος τε Βριάρεως τε Γύνης τ’ ἀτος πολέμως,} \]
\[ \text{oι ὑστηρίματα πέτρας στιβαρῶν ἀπὸ χειρῶν πέμπον ἐπασσυντέρας, κατὰ δ’ ἐσκίσαν βελέσσαι Τηθήνας . . . .} \]

The battle was inclined, that is, the turning-point of battle was reached. Before this time (\(\text{πρὶν}\)) the two sides were fighting with each other ceaselessly. The Hundred-Handers were hurling their rocks and covered the Titans with these missiles. Most scholars think that the fighting of the Hundred-Handers begins after the beginning of the battle and after the beginning, if not after the end, of the fighting of Zeus.\(^6\) I think that if the \(\text{πρὶν}\) is correctly understood we can easily interpret the fighting of the Hundred-Handers as beginning at the same time as that of Zeus at the beginning of the battle.

The \(\text{πρὶν}\) is usually taken to refer to some earlier period in this final day of battle. This is the opinion of West, who sees it as a breach of Zielinski’s law that the poet should not step back in time.\(^7\) It seems better, I suggest, to take \(\text{πρὶν}\) to refer to the ten-year period of warfare before the final day of battle. If this is done, what we have is a parenthetical reference to the period before the time of the main narrative, and so there is no breach of Zielinski’s law. We can compare three other apparent breaches in Hesiod and one in Homer, all of which can be explained in the same way. In \text{Theogony} 617–27, at the beginning of the introductory section of the Titanomachy, in a sentence introduced by \(\text{ὡς πρῶτα}\), we are told that the Hundred-Handers were bound in the underworld before Zeus and the gods freed them; West sees this as a real breach of Zielinski’s law,\(^8\) but again we are being referred to a time before

\(^6\) See West (\text{supra n.5}) 355 on \text{Theog.} 711–12; and C. J. Rowe, \text{Essential Hesiod} (Bristol 1978) 98 on \text{Theog.} 715.

\(^7\) West, \text{loc. cit.}

\(^8\) West (\text{supra n.5}) 338 on \text{Theog.} 617.
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the action of the main narrative, the subject of which is the freeing of the Hundred-Handers. In Theogony 505, in a parenthesis introduced by τὸ πρὶν, we are told that Gaea was keeping the thunderbolt hidden before (the subject of the main narrative) Zeus obtained it from the Cyclopes. In Opera 90–95, in a sentence introduced by πρὶν, we are given a description of the state of blessedness obtaining among men before (the subject of the main narrative) the coming of Pandora. And in Iliad 16.796–800, in a sentence introduced by πάρος, we are told that earlier (before the beginning of the action of the Iliad) Achilles’ helmet protected his head and was not permitted to be soiled in the dust, but that then (after the slaying of Patroclus) Zeus gave it to Hector to wear.

That the πρὶν in our passage refers to the ten-year period of warfare before the time of the main narrative is shown by comparing the following description (which also is not in breach of Zielinski’s law) in the introductory section of the Titanomachy (635–38):

οἴρα τότ’ ἀλλῆλοις χόλον θυμαλγέ’ ἔχοντες
συνεχέως ἐμάχοντο δέκα πλείους ἐνιαυτούς’
οὗδ’ τις ἢν ἔριδος χαλεπῆς λύσις οὗδέ τελευτή
οὐδέτέροις, Ἰσὸν δὲ τέλος τέτατο πτολέμοιο.

They were fighting with each other continuously for ten years and no successful conclusion to their struggle was in sight for either side. The description here of continuous warfare, τότ’ ἀλλῆλοις χόλον θυμαλγέ’ ἔχοντες / συνεχέως ἐμάχοντο, is unmistakably echoed by our πρὶν δ’ ἀλλῆλοις ἐπέχοντες / ἐμενένος ἐμάχοντο. Moreover, the statement at 638 that “the fulfillment of war was equally stretched” uses the image of the balance of battle, which also appears in our passage, before the πρὶν sentence, to describe the turning-point of battle, ἐκλίνθη δὲ μάχη.

In his account of the final day of battle Hesiod has nothing to say about the fighting being equal or continuous. We are told, in the introductory section (627f), that the gods were destined to be victorious if they gained the aid of the Hundred-Handers, and are left with the impression that, being so aided, they were able to defeat the Titans very speedily on this day and their victory was never in doubt. Thus our πρὶν sentence serves to contrast the earlier period of indecisive warfare with (the subject of the main narrative) the final day of battle as a whole, and it is difficult not to believe that the Hundred-Handers, who were the deciders of this battle, began fighting along with Zeus at its beginning. On this
day, and presumably from its beginning, the Hundred-Handers turned the balance of battle in favor of the gods. Before this day, during the earlier period of indecisive warfare, the gods and Titans had fought continuously in balanced combat; now the Hundred-Handers were hurling their rocks.

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