Hesiod's Titanomachy as an Illustration of Zieliński's Law

R. M. Frazer

A T THE TURN of the present century Zieliński 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 Zieliński 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.

Zieliński 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 Zieliński's law is best explained as a law of oral poetry, the study of which came into prominence after Zieliński 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 Zieliński'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-

[1] T. Zieliński, "Die Behandlung gleichzeitiger Ereignisse im antiken Epos," *Philologus* Suppl. 8 (1899–1901) 407–49.

[2] H. Fränkel, "Die Zeitauffassung in der archaischen griechischen Literatur," *Beilagenheft zur Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft* 25 (1931) 97–118 (= *Wege und Formen frühgriechischen Denkens*³, ed. F. Tietze [Munich 1968] 1–22).

[3] J. A. Notopoulos, "Parataxis in Homer: A New Approach to Homeric Literary Criticism," *TAPA* 80 (1949) 1–23, and "Continuity and Interconnection in Homeric Oral Composition," *TAPA* 82 (1951) 81–101.

cently paid so little attention to Zieliński's law, but this omission
has now been repaired by Krischer.[4] Krischer explains Zieliński'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 Zieliński'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
Zieliński'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 descrip-
tion of the beginning of the battle. Both sides displayed the power
of their hands and hurled their missiles against each other, ἐπ'
ἀλλήλοις ἵεσαν βέλεα (684). We naturally suppose that these mis-
siles 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 ἑὸν μένος, ἀλλά νυ τοῦ γε
εἶθαρ μὲν μένεος πλῆντο φρένες, ἐκ δέ τε πᾶσαν
φαῖνε βίην . . .

"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 ἑὸν μένος is meant to draw our at-
tention to a particular event within the framework of the previous
general description.[5] West compares Ζεὺς δ' ἐπεὶ οὖν κόρθυνεν ἑὸν
μένος in the account of the battle between Zeus and Typhoeus
(*Theog.* 853) and ἔνθ' οἵ γ' οὐκέτι δηρὸν ἀφέστασαν in the account

[4] T. Krischer, *Formale Konventionen der homerischen Epik* (Zetemata 56: Munich 1971)
esp. 91ff.

[5] M. L. West, *Hesiod, Theogony* (Oxford 1966) 349 on *Theog.* 687.

of the Theomachy (*Il.* 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:

> ἐκλίνθη δὲ μάχη· πρὶν δ' ἀλλήλοις ἐπέχοντες
> ἐμμενέως ἐμάχοντο διὰ κρατερὰς ὑσμίνας.
> οἳ δ' ἄρ' ἐνὶ πρώτοισι μάχην δριμεῖαν ἔγειραν
> Κόττος τε Βριάρεώς τε Γύης τ' ἄατος πολέμοιο,
> οἵ ῥα τριηκοσίας πέτρας στιβαρῶν ἀπὸ χειρῶν
> πέμπον ἐπασσυτέρας, κατὰ δ' ἐσκίασαν βελέεσσι
> Τιτῆνας . . . .

The battle was inclined, that is, the turning-point of battle was
reached. Before this time (πρίν) 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 πρίν is correctly under-
stood 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 πρίν 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 Zieliński's law that the poet should not step back in
time.[7] It seems better, I suggest, to take πρίν 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 Zieliński'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
Theogony 617–27, at the beginning of the introductory section of
the Titanomachy, in a sentence introduced by 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 Zieliński's law,[8] but again we are being referred to a time before

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[6] See West (*supra* n.5) 355 on *Theog.* 711–12; and C. J. Rowe, *Essential Hesiod* (Bristol
1978) 98 on *Theog.* 715.

[7] West, *loc.cit.*

[8] West (*supra* n.5) 338 on *Theog.* 617.

the action of the main narrative, the subject of which is the free-
ing of the Hundred-Handers. In *Theogony* 505, in a parenthesis
introduced by τὸ πρίν, 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 πρίν, we are given a description of the state of bless-
edness obtaining among men before (the subject of the main nar-
rative) 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 πρίν in our passage refers to the ten-year period of
warfare before the time of the main narrative is shown by com-
paring the following description (which also is not in breach of
Zieliński's law) in the introductory section of the Titanomachy
(635–38):

> οἵ ῥα τότ' ἀλλήλοισι χόλον θυμαλγέ' ἔχοντες
> συνεχέως ἐμάχοντο δέκα πλείους ἐνιαυτούς·
> οὐδέ τις ἦν ἔριδος χαλεπῆς λύσις οὐδὲ τελευτὴ
> οὐδετέροις, ἴσον 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' ἀλλήλοισι
χόλον θυμαλγέ' ἔχοντες / συνεχέως ἐμάχοντο, is unmistakably
echoed by our πρίν δ' ἀλλήλοις ἐπέχοντες / ἐμμενέως 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 πρίν sentence, to describe
the turning-point of battle, ἐκλίνθη δέ 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 πρίν sentence serves to contrast the earlier
period of indecisive warfare with (the subject of the main narra-
tive) 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.

TULANE UNIVERSITY
January, 1981