

Language of Sex(ual Violence) in the *Theogony* and the *Catalogue of Women*

The language of the Hesiodic corpus has been well analyzed and discussed from various angles (Parry 1971, Vernant 1974, Calame 1999), yet the particular formulae used to denote sexual intercourse have been overlooked in recent scholarship. Following the methodologies of Ormand, Osborne, and Strauss Clay, I argue that the language of sexual intercourse in the Hesiodic corpus is formulaic but can also characterize mythological figures. I first analyze the language of sexual intercourse in the *Theogony* and the *Catalogue of Women* to determine the standard formulae. I then examine case studies from each text and discuss the differences between neutral sexual language and language of sexual violence. Finally, I look at particular instances of violent sexual language to determine how this violence plays out in the larger mythos concerning certain characters.

Hesiod uses three particular formulae to describe neutral or positive sexual unions in the *Theogony*, which the author of the *Catalogue of Women* follows. The most common neutral formula for sex is a feminine participle of the verb μείγνυμι, sometimes combined with the additional, usually positive phrase ἐν φιλότῃτι, “mutual commitment” (Calame 1999: 40), for example Zeus with Mnemosyne (*Theog.* 56) and Chrysaor with Kallirhoe (*Theog.* 288). The second common neutral formula is a female agent with the participle εἰσαναβᾶσα (Maia with Zeus, *Theog.* 939; cf. *Theog.* 508, 912; *Catalogue* MW fr. 23a.7, 25.25). The final formulaic pattern is the prepositional phrase διὰ χρῦσιν Ἀφροδίτην (Gaia with Tartarus, *Theog.* 822, cf. *Theog.* 1005, 1014; *Catalogue* MW fr. 23a.35), which uses Aphrodite as a stand-in for a verb of sexual intercourse.

The formula for violent sexual action, however, relies on a form of the verb δαμάζω, usually a grammatically feminine participle. The sexual metaphor of ‘subduing’ is inherently

violent as seen in its non-sexual contexts (e.g. *Theog.* 490, 857). I argue that this formula, especially in comparison with the neutral formula, indicates a distinction between grammatical agency and sexual agency, and the particular use of this verb indicates an overt expression of violent dominance.

Female agency in sexual relationships, as indicated by grammatically feminine participles or feminine subjects of (usually passive) verbs, are overwhelmingly found in the fragments of the *Catalogue*—of the 34 examples in the fragments, 25 have grammatically feminine agents. Further, of the instances of grammatically male agents, only one has overt connotations of male violence: Poseidon takes Mestra with the verb ἐδάμασσε (MW fr. 43a.55). Significant examples with grammatically feminine agents have verbs of violence, such as Clytaemnestra with Agamemnon (MW fr. 23a.28, ὑποδηθηθεῖσα) and Deianeira with Heracles (MW fr. 25.18, same participle). In the *Theogony*, this formula appears, for instance, in Rhea’s intercourse with Kronos (*Theog.* 453, δηθηθεῖσα) and Medea’s with Jason (*Theog.* 1000, same participle). I argue that these instances of sexual violence foreshadow the violence which these very women will use against their husbands in the mythological traditions as they reclaim the agency removed by the dominance of the sexual act. The grammatical agency which they retain in the formula stands in stark contrast with the lack of physical or sexual agency they have in the narrative. Accordingly, Medea, who is mentioned only once in the *Theogony*, is “subdued” (δηθηθεῖσα) by Jason, despite the fact that she will remain anything but submissive. Indeed, δηθηθεῖσα hints at the violence she will use at the conclusion of her marriage, and thus the beginning of the relationship foreshadows its end in the formulae used to characterize sexual violence.

Although the repetition of these particular phrases to denote sexual intercourse may qualify them as formulae in Parry’s sense of the word, the formulaic use often has bearing on

plot and characterization. This paper outlines how the authors of these two texts differentiate between positive, neutral, and violent sexual interaction, and develops a schema for recognizing sexual violence in archaic Greek texts. In addition, this study furthers our understanding of how formulae can work within a larger mythological tradition: how these formulaic phrases contribute to characterization both in terms of the immediate story, as well as the larger mythos about the character.

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