Iliadic fame and the splitting of time

When the heroes of the *Iliad* think about the meaning of their actions, they expect it to come in the form of *kleos*, "fame," in a future song. What are the consequences of this form of thinking that interposes a gap of time between event and meaning? This paper argues that, as a consequence of this fundamental gap imposed by the form of *kleos*, every present moment is no longer whole or contained in itself, but is instead opened onto the prospect of a meaning that will only arrive in the future. Each present is therefore split or divided between the "now"—what the hero understands and intends in the present moment of action—and another time that is yet to come. In this paper, we will follow a couple of figures through which this splitting is expressed and in which an image of time emerges that is distinct from our usual, chronological conception of time.

We will begin with Bakker's analysis of the semantics of *mellein*. Bakker considers the words of Patroclus when he sees the wounded Eurypylos and takes pity upon the Greeks (XI. 816-8, quoted from Bakker 2005: 99-100): "Ah, you poor leaders and rulers of the Danaans. So in this way, <I see now [*ar'*]>, you were going [*emellete*], far from your friends and your fatherland, to glut the swift dogs of Troy with your shining fat." Bakker argues against an interpretation that would reduce the phrase "you were going/about to do" to an objective statement of fact; it is not merely a statement set in the chronological past about its chronological future. Instead *emellete* emphasises the difference between what the Danaan heroes *thought* they were doing in embarking on the Trojan expedition on the one hand, and what they *actually turned out* to be doing on the other hand, given what Patroclus now knows about the misfortunes of the expedition. What we can take from Bakker's analysis is Patroclus' awareness of the gap

between the meaning that was intended or available at the time of the embarking, and the meaning that has subsequently been revealed.

While the meaning of *emellete* in Patroclus' speech expresses a *local* division or gap that appears between two definite moments in chronological time—time of embarking and time of Patroclus' speech—we see, in Achilles' response to Lykaon's supplication, a *generalised* division that splits *every* moment. Achilles's understanding of the meaning of his own life and deeds is consistently framed in terms of his death; it is his early death that he exchanges for "unwithering *kleos*," thereby making his honour, *timē*, of paramount importance (see Vernant 1991: 51-9). By asking Zeus for the death of the other Achaeans, Achilles hopes to produce a particular meaning—"Achilles was the best of the Achaians"—in the site of *kleos*, in the future of the song to come. Achilles is shaken out of this initial belief that he could consciously shape his *kleos* by the death of Patroclus, the unintended consequence of his own manipulations. The result is a change in Achilles' understanding of *kleos*, death, and meaning, which is expressed in Achilles' response to Lykaon. When Achilles imagines his death there, "a dawn or an afternoon or a noontime when some man in the fighting will take the life from me also either with a spearcast or an arrow flown from the bowstring" (XXI. 111-3), death has become radically uncertain. Along with the uncertainty of death comes the unknowability of *kleos*, since the latter is dependent on the former. With this unknowability, every moment— and not just particular moments—comes to be divided: Because we do not know *which* moments will turn out to have been significant, every moment becomes divided between its present and an unknowable future retroaction that may upend its meaning. The division of the present is thus generalised.

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