The Monstrousness of Homeric Epic: Images from *Iliad* 2

Critics both ancient and modern have distanced the Homeric epics from monsters and monstrousness. Griffin (1977) argues that, while the Epic Cycle showcases monstrous forms and monstrous deeds, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* focus on realistic human actions and emotions. Aristotle (*Poet.*) likens the structures of the Homeric poems, with their unified plots, to the bodies of animals that can be viewed at a single glance and whose parts relate to one another in a natural fashion. By contrast, a monstrously large animal "of ten thousand stades" offers no pleasure to the viewer, since its structure cannot be appreciated at a glance. Recently, however, scholars such as Hardie (2009) and Lowe (2015) have identified ways in which ancient epics can take on monstrous qualities. Building on such studies, the proposed paper argues that images from book 2 associate the *Iliad* with a monstrous multiplicity (cf. Martin 1989 on the expansiveness of Homeric poetry and Ford 1992 on its potential boundlessness).

Monstrous images are prominent throughout *Iliad* 2. At 212-19 the narrator describes the disorderly rhetoric and disorderly body of Thersites, which ancient listeners might have construed as monstrous. The Homeric poets use the noun *pélōr*, often translated "monster," to describe not only the Cyclops and Scylla but also the disabled Hephaestus, and Thersites' disabilities are more extensive than Hephaestus': while Hephaestus is lame, Thersites is lame, bandy-legged and hunched. At 476-9 the narrator imagines another disorderly body: Agamemnon is said to have a head like that of Zeus, a midriff like Ares' and a chest like Poseidon's. While the bodies of monsters such as the Chimera mix parts from different animals, this image, without parallel in the *Iliad*, mixes the body-parts of different gods. At 2.301-32 Odysseus recalls a portent, consisting of "terrible monstrosities [*pélōra*]": a snake devours a

sparrow's eight chicks and then the sparrow herself. The snake thus carries out the sorts of gruesome deeds associated with Greek monsters. In the invocation that precedes the Catalogue of Ships (484-93), the narrator describes a monstrous figure whose ten mouths and ten tongues enable it to name all those who came to Troy. The multiplication of the singer's body parts matches the multiplication of names in his song. Finally (780-5), the narrator compares the noise of the troops with the din generated by Zeus when he lashes the monstrous Typhoeus.

These images offer some support to critics who dissociate Homeric poetry from the monstrous. The prophet Calchas connects the "terrible monstrosities" described by Odysseus with events from the Epic Cycle: the deaths of the nine birds symbolize the first nine years of fighting at Troy, the timeframe of the *Cypria*. The image thus supports Griffin's association of monstrosities with the Epic Cycle but not the *Iliad*, which takes place in the tenth year. Themes introduced by other monstrous images are relevant to the immediate context but not to the wider epic. Thersites' disorderly body echoes the disorder that he foments in the Achaean camp by challenging the authority of Agamemnon. The association of Agamemnon's form with the bodies of multiple gods suggests both his authority (these are gods) and its disruption (the image presents a confused mixture of body-parts). The description of Zeus lashing Typhoeus echoes Odysseus' earlier suppression of the disorderly Thersites, whom he beats with the scepter.

In other respects, however, the images from *Iliad* 2 anticipate aspects of the *Iliad* as a whole. At first sight, the image of the many-mouthed singer might not seem relevant to the Iliadic narrative: in the catalogue the narrator mentions the leaders by name but does *not* list all those present at Troy, the feat with which he associates the monstrous singer. Nevertheless, the narrator's battle narratives embrace a multitude of obscure warriors (for the importance of whom, see Strasburger 1954). On the terms set out in book 2, this is an achievement worthy of a

monstrous, many-mouthed poet. In this way, the *Iliad* also approaches the plural rhetoric associated with Thersites ("who knew many… words," 213), though not its disorderly tendencies. The plot of the *Iliad* may be unified, but its expansive narratives suggest a monstrous multiplicity.

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