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CHAPTER 9

On Constructive Conflict and Disruptive Peace

The Certamen Homeri et Hesiodi

Paola Bassino

From a very early period, ancient Greek audiences reflected on their major epic poems by thinking about their authors. Inspired by a Hesiodic passage (*Op.* 648–62), they dramatised the perceived differences between the poems of Homer and those of Hesiod, and placed the two poets in open competition against each other at King Amphidamas' funeral games at Chalcis in Euboea. This biographical method of speculation on different epic traditions was popular: the story of the contest between Homer and Hesiod made its way into several works of literature, and was creatively retold to express different perceptions of Homeric and Hesiodic poetry from antiquity to the Byzantine age.¹

Today, the *Certamen Homeri et Hesiodi* is the most famous version of the contest between the two poets. It is the only extant work devoted exclusively to that story, and the very peculiar history and stratified composition of the text has attracted a great deal of scholarly attention.² The *Certamen* survives in a single manuscript now held in Florence (Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Plut. 56.1).³ The text transmitted in the Florentine manuscript can be dated, thanks to its mention of the emperor Hadrian

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¹ The passages on the contest between Homer and Hesiod have been most recently listed in Koning 2010: 266.

² For recent scholarship on the *Certamen* (with discussion of previous studies) see: Graziosi 2001 and 2002: 168–80, Beecroft 2010: 61–105, Kivilo 2000 and 2010: 7–61, Koning 2010: 239–68, Debiasi 2012.

³ This manuscript was bought in Crete and brought to Florence in 1492 by Janus Lascaris on behalf of Lorenzo de' Medici, and thus became part of the Medicean Library. It is a miscellaneous codex written by several hands and dated between the twelfth and the fourteenth century AD. It mainly contains rhetorical works and was probably used in school environments. The *Certamen* is copied at 15v–19r. Fryde 1996 provides an exhaustive summary of the known information about the manuscript; see esp. p. 784, with cross-references therein.

(33),⁴ to the second century AD. However, Nietzsche, its first modern editor, showed that the author of our text must have made extensive use of sources dating from a much earlier period, especially of the now lost *Museum* by Alcidas (fourth century BC).⁵ A few papyrus fragments discovered after Nietzsche's death confirmed his hypothesis.⁶ Alcidas must, in turn, have included materials that circulated in earlier centuries: the story of Homer being unable to solve a riddle (321–38) was, for example, already known to Heraclitus in the sixth century BC.⁷

Because it draws on texts and oral traditions that developed over hundreds of years, the *Certamen* yields unique insights into the processes of the reception and canonisation of early Greek epic. In particular, this text offers an analysis of the theme of conflict and its role in shaping both the epic tradition and the reception of it. In this chapter I examine how sections of the *Certamen* describe a series of approaches to what we may call constructive conflict, where poetic competitions appear as powerful driving forces behind the creation and performance of epic poetry. I will then argue that the *Certamen* offers an extensive reflection on the poetics of conflict and the divine, one that distinguishes between experience of conflict and representation of it, as well as an exploration of the disruptive potential of peace in an epic poem.

Conflict and the Performance of Epic Poetry

In the *Certamen*, Homer and Hesiod are engaged in a diverse range of poetic games. In the first two rounds of the competition, Hesiod asks Homer what is the best and the finest thing for mortals (75–89); he then

⁴ Line numbers are from Allen 1912.

⁵ Alcidas' *Museum* is mentioned at 240 as one of the sources for the story of Hesiod's death. Nietzsche suggested that the same work was used as a source for the agonistic section of the *Certamen* as well, based on the fact that the verses uttered by Homer at 78–9 are quoted by Stobaeus (4.52.22) as coming ἐκ Ἀλκιδάμαντος Μουσείου (see Nietzsche 1870). Nietzsche was in many ways the initiator of modern scholarship on the *Certamen*: he also published (Nietzsche 1871) the first critical edition of the text based on an inspection of the manuscript after Stephanus' *editio princeps* (*Homeri et Hesiodi Certamen. Matronis et aliorum parodiae. Homericorum heroum epitaphia. Excebat Henr. Stephanus*, Geneva 1573). On the impact of Nietzsche's work on the *Certamen* see most recently Latacz 2014: 12–19.

⁶ P.Petr. I 25 (1), first published in Mahaffy 1891, reports a text similar to 69–102, thus showing that some verses exchanged in the *Certamen*, including the couplet attributed to Alcidas by Stobaeus (see note 5), were circulating in connection with the competition between Homer and Hesiod at least in the third century BC; P.Mich. inv. 2754 (second century AD), first published in Winter 1925, contains in lines 1–14 an account of the death of Homer in a version that is similar to 327–38 and, following an otherwise unknown text in praise of Homer in lines 15–23, a *subscriptio* attributing the text to Alcidas. On these and the other papyri related to the *Certamen* see Bassino 2012.

⁷ Heraclit. 22 B 56 DK.

proposes an ἄπορον, that is, a question to which there seems to be no possible answer (97–101), followed by a series of nonsensical verses to which Homer has to respond (107–37). After an arithmetical problem (140–5), the competition develops into a series of philosophical questions (151–75), and ends with a performance of what the two poets reckon to be the finest passages from their own respective works (180–204). These verses show how the concept of ‘constructive competition’ was crucial to many of the people involved in the creation and performance of the epic poems: the poets, the traditional rhapsodes, and new ‘Homeric experts’ of a sophistic bent.

Several passages from Hesiod’s extant corpus present autobiographical and metapoetic statements, through which the poet shapes his artistic voice and identity.⁸ The story of the contest between Homer and Hesiod originates from *Works and Days* 648–62, in which Hesiod boasts of his victory in a poetic contest:

δείξω δὴ τοι μέτρα πολυφλοίσβοιο θαλάσσης,
οὔτε τι ναυτιλίας σεσοφισμένος οὔτε τι νηῶν
650 οὐ γάρ πώ ποτε νηὶ γ’ ἐπέπλων εὐρέα πόντον,
εἰ μὴ ἐς Εὐβοίαν ἐξ Αὐλίδος, ἥ ποτ’ Ἀχαιοὶ
μείναντες χειμῶνα πολὺν σὺν λαὸν ἄγειραν
Ἑλλάδος ἐξ ἱερῆς Τροίην ἐς καλλιγύναικα.
ἔνθα δ’ ἐγὼν ἐπ’ ἄεθλα δαΐφρονος Ἀμφιδάμαντος
655 Χαλκίδα τ’ εἰς ἐπέρησα· τὰ δὲ προπεφραδμένα πολλὰ
ἄθλ’ ἔθεσαν παῖδες μεγάλητορος· ἔνθα μέ φημι
ὑμῶν νικήσαντα φέρειν τρίποδ’ ὠτώεντα.
τὸν μὲν ἐγὼ Μούσης Ἑλικωνιάδεσσι ἀνέθηκα,
ἔνθα με τὸ πρῶτον λιγυρῆς ἐπέβησαν ἀοιδῆς.
660 τόσσόν τοι νηῶν γε πεπεῖρημαι πολυγόμφων
ἀλλὰ καὶ ὥς ἐρέω Ζηνὸς νόον αἰγιόχοιο·
Μοῦσαι γάρ μ’ ἐδίδαξαν ἀθέσφατον ὕμνον αἰεῖδεν.

I shall show you the measures of the much-roaring sea, I who have no expertise at all in either seafaring or boats. For never yet did I sail the broad sea in a boat, except to Euboea from Aulis, where once the Achaeans, waiting through the winter, gathered together a great host to sail from holy Greece to Troy with its beautiful women. There I myself crossed over into Chalcis for the games of valorous Amphidamas – that great-hearted man’s sons had announced and established many prizes – and there, I declare, I gained victory with a hymn, and carried off a tripod with handles. This I dedicated

⁸ Some are explored in Canevaro’s chapter in this volume.

to the Heliconian Muses, where they first set me upon the path of clear-sounding song. This is as much experience of many-bolted ships as I have acquired; yet even so I shall speak forth the mind of aegis-holding Zeus, for the Muses taught me to sing an inconceivable hymn.

Hesiod, *Works and Days* 648–62⁹

These lines contain a programmatic statement: Hesiod is asserting his authority as a didactic poet by claiming that, thanks to the Muses, he is able to give instructions on sailing even though he has little experience of it. But what substantiates Hesiod’s assertion of poetic authority is the mention of his triumph in the contest at Chalcis, and this suggests the centrality of competition as a means of establishing one’s poetic credentials. In order to affirm his poetic authority, Hesiod contrasts it with that of other poets and other poetic traditions; and although Hesiod does not explicitly mention his rival(s) in the contest, Homer’s name was supplied by virtue of these lines’ competitive stance towards heroic epic.¹⁰

The story told in the *Certamen* was, therefore, inspired by a Hesiodic passage in which competition between epic traditions is envisaged as a crucial element, one that is able to shape an archaic poet’s artistic identity. But the processes at work behind the composition of major poems in the archaic period, as illustrated by the *Works and Days*, are also reflected in individual sections of our text, especially in those concerning the characterisation of the figure of Hesiod. In the *Certamen* it is always Hesiod who asks questions, with Homer successfully replying – and receiving the general approval of the public. For instance, after Homer has answered the very first round of questions, we read:

ῥηθέντων δὲ τῶν ἐπῶν, οὕτω σφοδρῶς φασὶ θαυμασθῆναι ὑπὸ τῶν Ἑλλήνων τοὺς στίχους ὥστε χρσοῦς αὐτοὺς προσαγορευθῆναι, καὶ ἔτι καὶ νῦν ἐν ταῖς κοιναῖς θυσίαις πρὸ τῶν δείπνων καὶ σπονδῶν προκατεῦχεσθαι πάντας.

And after the verses were spoken, they say that the lines were so deeply admired by the Greeks that they were called ‘golden’, and even now

⁹ Throughout this chapter, the text and translation of the *Works and Days* are taken from Most 2006.

¹⁰ As has been noted, Hesiod in this passage is reacting competitively to the tradition of heroic epic, of which Homer is presented, in the story of the Chalcidean contest, as the representative *par excellence*. By showing his awareness of the right time for sailing, Hesiod differentiates himself from the epic heroes who had to wait before sailing from Aulis to Troy; furthermore, the formulae with the epic epithets καλλιγύναιξ and ἱερῆ are reversed by comparison with the heroic epics. See Rosen 1990 and 1997: 478–9, Graziosi 2002: 169–70.

all people perform them in the common sacrifices before meals and libations.

Certamen 90–4¹¹

Homer's success encourages Hesiod to pose questions of increasing difficulty. Hence, he turns to a more complicated – and spectacular – form of inquisition:

ὁ δὲ Ἡσίοδος ἀχθεσθεὶς ἐπὶ τῇ Ὀμήρου εὐημερίᾳ ἐπὶ τὴν τῶν ἀπόρων ὥρμησεν ἐπερώτησιν ...

Hesiod, annoyed by Homer's success, turned to posing insoluble challenges ...

Certamen 94–5

Hesiod then turns to a yet more sophisticated poetic game, the 'ambiguous propositions', discussed below. Finally, consumed by envy (φθονῶν), he asks Homer philosophical questions:

κατὰ πάντα δὴ τοῦ Ὀμήρου ὑπερτεροῦντος φθονῶν ὁ Ἡσίοδος ἀρχηται πάλιν ...

Since Homer was constantly holding the lead, the envious Hesiod starts again ...

Certamen 149–50

Both the opponent's success as Hesiod's main source of motivation for creating poetic challenges of increasing difficulty, and the characterisation of Hesiod himself, recall the description of poetic endeavour in the *Works and Days*. Not far from the very beginning of the poem, Hesiod famously claims:

... ἀγαθὴ δ' Ἔρις ἦδε βροτοῖσιν.

25 καὶ κεραμεὺς κεραμεῖ κοτέει καὶ τέκτονι τέκτων,
καὶ πτωχὸς πτωχῷ φθονέει καὶ ἀοιδὸς ἀοιδῷ.

... and this Strife is good for mortals. And potter is angry with potter, and builder with builder, and beggar begrudges beggar, and poet poet.

Works and Days 24–6

The Hesiodic passage identifies φθόνος as an important element in archaic poetic competitions, and, on a general level, the presence of φθονῶν at *Cert.* 149 reflects the centrality of this element for an epic poet. But at the same time, it is not impossible that the author of the

¹¹ Throughout this chapter, the text and translation of the *Certamen* are my own.

Certamen had this specific Hesiodic passage in mind, and intended to make a pointed reference to it: the *Certamen* may be setting in action a perceptive reading of a Hesiodic passage, one that leaves the reader room for interpretation. In the *Works and Days*, φθόνος is connected to the Good Strife that encourages productivity and self-improvement. Thus, Hesiod may be seen as acting in accordance with his own teaching, since he is constantly stimulated to do better by the success of his opponent.¹² However, the contrast with Homer's peaceful yet successful attitude throughout the contest is made very clear in the *Certamen*, and a reader may wonder whether Hesiod, while competing against Homer, is calling into question his own conception of φθόνος by giving it a negative connotation.¹³

Competition was crucial not only to the epic poets, but also to the traditional performers of the epic poems: the rhapsodes. As Collins argues,¹⁴ the exchanges of verses in the *Certamen* give us an idea of the range of technical skills that were employed in an accomplished rhapsode's performance. In fact Alcidas, who elsewhere shows interest in contemporary rhapsodic performances (*On Sophists* 14), seems here to be 'manipulating a rhapsodic framework',¹⁵ and the verses in the *Certamen* may indirectly reflect actual rhapsodic recitals of set pieces as we know them from the extant evidence. At the Panathenaic festivals rhapsodes used to perform in turn, taking over the recitation from the previous performer – just as Homer and Hesiod in the *Certamen*. This rule, as Plato explains, was introduced by Hipparchus:

τῶν Πεισιστράτου παίδων ἦν πρεσβύτατος καὶ σοφώτατος, δς ἄλλα τε πολλὰ καλὰ ἔργα σοφίας ἀπεδείξατο καὶ τὰ Ὀμήρου ἔπη πρῶτος ἐκόμισεν εἰς τὴν γῆν ταυτηνί, καὶ ἠνάγκασε τοὺς ῥαψωδοὺς Παναθηναίοις ἐξ ὑπολήψεως ἐφεξῆς αὐτὰ διέναι, ὥσπερ νῦν ἔτι οἶδε ποιοῦσι.

[Hipparchus] was the oldest and wisest of Pisistratus' sons, and besides the many other fine works of wisdom he delivered, he was the first to bring Homer's epics to this country, and he forced the rhapsodes at the

¹² See, e.g., Koning 2010: 257–8.

¹³ See, e.g., Clay 2003: 179 on Hesiod being a 'bad sport' here.

¹⁴ Collins 2004, esp. Part III: *Epic Competition in Performance: Homer and the Rhapsodes* (167–222).

¹⁵ Collins 2004: 189. In this respect, it is important to note that in the *Certamen* the verb ῥαψωδέω is used twice in connection with Homer: ποιήσαντα γὰρ τὸν Μαργίτην Ὀμηρον περιέρχεσθαι κατὰ πόλιν ῥαψωδοῦντα (55–6: 'For after composing the *Margites*, Homer wandered from town to town and performed his poems'); ἐκέθην δὲ παραγενόμενος εἰς Κόρινθον ἔρραψωδαι τὰ ποιήματα (286–7: 'As he went from there to Corinth, he performed his poems').

Panathenaea to perform them by turn-taking and in succession, as they still do now.

Plato, *Hipparchus* 228b5–c1¹⁶

Such recitation by turn-taking, as Collins points out, might have allowed for the display of various improvisational techniques; performers could stop their recitation at a point where the next rhapsode would find it difficult to take over, thus challenging him to find suitable connections to the previous verse or scene.¹⁷ A passage from the *Iliad* may be adduced to illustrate Collins' argument. Diomedes has just wounded Aphrodite:

340 ... ῥέε δ' ἄμβροτον αἶμα θεοῖο
 ἰχώρ, οἶός περ τε ῥέει μακάρεσσι θεοῖσιν
 οὐ γὰρ σῖτον ἔδουσ', οὐ πίνουσ' αἰθοπα οἶνον
 τοῦνεκ' ἀναίμονες εἰσι καὶ ἄθάνατοι καλέονται.

340 ... the goddess' deathless blood flowed;
 this was ichor, the kind of blood that flows in the blessed gods,
 for they eat no bread, and do not drink gleaming wine,
 and so are without blood, and men call them immortals.

Iliad 5.339–42¹⁸

The first verse suggests that the goddess Aphrodite sheds real blood – just like an ordinary mortal. Although it is defined as ἄμβροτον ('immortal'), this blood still creates a problem, which is then resolved by the next line in enjambment. This is not normal blood, we are told, but ἰχώρ, a different, immortal substance.

The similarities between cases such as this and the techniques used in the exchange of verses in the *Certamen* are apparent. At 107–37, the section of the contest devoted to the exchange of 'ambiguous propositions' (102–3: ἀμφίβολοι γνῶμαι), Hesiod challenges Homer with non-sensical and problematic claims, and Homer has to complete the verse with another one in a manner that restores normality. Just as the Iliadic line states a theological impropriety, Hesiod's verses present, more or less explicitly, improper views on issues that mattered to the Greeks, such as the behaviour of heroes and the nature of the gods. Homer re-elaborates

¹⁶ My text and translation (Bassino 2013).

¹⁷ Note that verbal games and challenges of this kind did not occur only in rhapsodic contests: see Collins 2004 on verse-capping in tragic and comic stichomythia, and sympotic performance of elegy.

¹⁸ Throughout this chapter, the text of the *Iliad* is from van Thiel 1996; translations are from Verity 2011.

the inappropriate and unpopular views expressed by Hesiod's claims and turns them into commonly held values.

This very same section of the *Certamen*, illustrating how rhapsodes may have interacted with each other in the context of traditional epic performances, is also representative of the antagonism between a conservative and an innovative approach to epic, championed respectively by rhapsodes and sophists. As has been noted, the contents of the challenges in the *Certamen* reflect typically sophistic preoccupations.¹⁹ But sophistic influences on this text can also be detected in terms of syntax. Usually, epic hexameters (such as most of those found in the Homeric and Hesiodic poems) stand on their own grammatically, and express a self-contained thought; enjambment may expand or elaborate on that thought, but rarely causes a substantial change in the syntax of the previous line.²⁰ In the *Certamen*, too, Hesiod's verses stand on their own grammatically and express ideas that can be conceived in principle, but (as in the verse about Aphrodite's blood from *Iliad* 5) are problematic at the level of content. Unlike the Iliadic line, however, the impropriety is here resolved at the level of syntax: Homer's verse enjambes an element of Hesiod's, and gives it a new syntactical structure by reinterpreting it as requiring necessary enjambment. The final result is that each proper unit of thought is now contained in two lines, rather than in one, as is generally the case in the Homeric poems. The peculiar use of enjambment in the *Certamen* and the complex syntax typical of prose seem to represent the interactions between traditional rhapsodes and new intellectual influences.

Here are some examples. Lines 113–14 address what we might call the proper division of roles between men and women:

(Hes.) οὗτος ἀνὴρ ἀνδρός τ' ἀγαθοῦ καὶ ἀνάκιδος ἐστὶ
 (Hom.) μητρός, ἐπεὶ πόλεμος χαλεπὸς πάσῃσι γυναιξίν.

(Hes.) This man is the son of a good man and a coward
 (Hom.) mother, since war is hard for all women.

Certamen 113–14

Hesiod applies two opposite adjectives to the same person: a father is said to be both good and a coward – a contradiction in terms. Homer then enjambes the second adjective, ἀνάκιδος ('coward'), with a new, feminine noun, μητρός ('mother'). The man is now said to be the son of a good man and a coward mother: war, as Homer goes on to explain, is hard for

¹⁹ See Graziosi 2001.

²⁰ On Homeric enjambment see, e.g., Kirk 1966, Parry 1971, Higbie 1990, Bakker 1990, Clark 1997.

women. As Graziosi suggests, the play on the double value of ἀναλκις as both a feminine and masculine adjective may reflect early fifth-century concerns about Homeric language.²¹ For example, Protagoras (80 A 28–29 DK) remarked that the word μῆνιν ('wrath') in *Il.* 1.1 should be masculine, although Homer uses it as feminine. In this exchange Homer is correcting Hesiod's language – as well as changing his syntax – because ἀναλκις is an adjective for women.²² When it is applied to a Homeric 'good man' (ἀγαθὸς ἀνὴρ), it is always used as a rebuke to blame his lack of ἀλκή and inability to wage war, which explains why Homer, in the *Certamen*, prefers to separate the adjective ἀναλκις from the 'good man' of Hesiod's line.²³

In another exchange, the two poets give examples of improper and proper thoughts about the gods:

(Hes.) αὐτὰρ ἐπεὶ δμῆθη γάμῳ Ἄρτεμις ἰοχέαιρα
(Hom.) Καλλιστῶ κατέπεφνεν ἄπ' ἀργυρέοιο βιοῖτο.

(Hes.) As she had yielded to marriage, Artemis shooter of arrows
(Hom.) killed Callisto [with an arrow] from her silver bow.

Certamen 117–18

Artemis, the virgin goddess, cannot yield to marriage, as Hesiod's verse suggests. Homer therefore enjambes 'had yielded to marriage' (δμῆθη γάμῳ) with another subject, Callisto (Καλλιστῶ). He thus clarifies that it was not the goddess, but Callisto, who got married. But since Callisto had sworn to preserve her virginity in honour of Artemis, the goddess shot her with an arrow. This exchange, too, may be seen as reflecting fifth-century sophistic concerns about language. Homer's answer suggests solving the impropriety by means of a different distribution of words among the sentences in the couplet – that is, moving an imaginary comma from the end of the verse to after γάμῳ; in a similar vein, a fragment from Democritus (68 B 22 DK) deals with the possibility of alternative word division in the Homeric poems.²⁴ This section of the *Certamen*, therefore, shows how the rhapsodes who composed these lines established a constructive dialogue with new intellectual developments, and responded to sophistic challenges by exploiting possibilities inherent in the Homeric tradition, such as enjambment.

²¹ Graziosi 2001: 67.

²² See, e.g., *Il.* 5.330, where ἀναλκις is used in connection with Aphrodite, and 5.349–50.

²³ See also Kirk 1990: 97. For ἀναλκις as a rebuke for warriors, together with ἀπτόλεμος ('unwarlike'), see *Il.* 2.201, 9.35, 9.41.

²⁴ Graziosi 2001: 66–7.

The *Certamen* reflects at least three different aspects of the epic tradition, all of which were shaped by constructive competition: the composition of major poems in the archaic period as illustrated by the *Works and Days*; competitions in the recital of set pieces, where one rhapsode followed another; competition between new intellectual developments of the classical period and the restoration of traditional epic values.

Conflict as an Epic Theme

At the end of the competition, after Homer has brilliantly answered all the questions proposed by Hesiod, King Panoides asks the two poets to perform what they consider to be the finest passages from their poetry (178). The choice of the works from which the passages have been drawn, the choice of the passages themselves and the final verdict effectively set up and develop a contrast between war and peace in poetry, and between ethics and aesthetics. Hesiod chooses as his finest piece of poetry *Works and Days* 383–92, the opening of the farmer's calendar:

- 180 Πληιάδων Ἀτλαγενέων ἐπιτελλομένων
ἄρχεσθ' ἀμήτου, ἀρότιό τε δυσσομένων
αἱ δὲ τοι νύκτας τε καὶ ἡμέρας τεσσαράκοντα
κεκρύφεται, αὖθις δὲ περιπλομένου ἐνιαυτοῦ
φαίνονται, τὰ πρῶτα χαρασσομένοιο σιδήρου.
185 οὗτός τοι πεδίων πέλεται νόμος, οἳ τε θαλάσσης
ἐγγύθι ναιετάουσ', οἳ τ' ἄγχεα βησσήεντα
πόντου κυμαίνοντος ἀπόπροθι πύονα χῶρον
ναίουσιν· γυμνὸν σπεῖρειν, γυμνὸν δὲ βοωτεῖν,
γυμνὸν τ' ἀμάειν, ὅτ' ἂν ὥρια πάντα πέλωνται.

When the Atlas-born Pleiades rise, start the harvest, and the ploughing, when they set. For forty nights and days they lie hidden, and after the year has gone round again they appear, for the first time, when the iron is sharpened. This is the law of the land for those who dwell close to the sea as well as those who inhabit the winding valleys, fertile terrain distant from the swelling sea. Sow naked and plough naked, and harvest naked when everything is in due season.

Certamen 180–9

Homer describes a battle scene by stitching together two passages from *Iliad* 13 (126–33 and 339–44).

ἀμφὶ δ' ἄρ' Αἴαντας δοιοὺς ἴσταντο φάλαγγες
καρτεραί, ὅς οὐτ' ἂν κεν Ἄρης δνόσαιτο μετελθών,
οὔτε κ' Ἀθηναίη λαοσσόος. οἳ γὰρ ἄριστοι
κρινθέντες Τρώας τε καὶ Ἑκτορα δῖον ἔμμνον

- 195 φράξαντες δόρυ δουρί, σάκος σάκει προθελύμνω·
 ἀσπίς ἄρ' ἀσπίδ' ἔρειδε, κόρυς κόρυιν, ἀνέρα δ' ἀνήρ,
 ψαῦον δ' ἵπποκομοὶ κόρυθες λαμπροῖσι φάλοισι
 νεούντων· ὥς πυκνοὶ ἐφέστασαν ἀλλήλοισιν.
 200 ἔφριξεν δὲ μάχῃ φθισίμβροτος ἐγχείησι
 μακραῖς, ἃς εἶχον ταμείχρους. ὅσσε δ' ἄμερδεν
 αὐγὴ χαλκείῃ κορύθων ἄπτο λαμπομενάων
 θωρήκων τε νεοσμήκτων σακέων τε φαεινῶν
 ἐρχομένων ἄμυδις, μάλα κεν θρασυκάρδιος εἶη
 ὃς τότε γηθήσειεν ἰδὼν πόνον οὐδ' ἀκάχοιτο.

Around the two Ajaxes the battle lines stood strong, and neither would Ares have found fault, had he joined them, nor Athena who rouses the people. For the best chosen men were awaiting the Trojans and godly Hector, joining spear close to spear, shield to overlapping shield; shield pushed on shield, helmet on helmet, man on man, and the horsehair crests on the bright helmet ridges touched as they were bending forward; so compact they stood against each other. The deadly battle bristled with the long skin-cutting spears they were holding. The gleam of the bronze from the bright helmets, the newly polished corslets, and the shining shields dazzled the eyes as they came close against each other. The man who enjoyed watching this struggle and did not feel consternation would have been most bold of heart.

Certamen 191–204

Neither the *Works and Days* nor the *Iliad* has so far been mentioned in the *Certamen*, and the fact that the finest passages come from these two works is never discussed.²⁵ But the narrative reasons for the choice of *Works and Days* and the *Iliad* as the sources for the poets' finest passages are more important than consistency in the loose framework in which the contest episode is set: the choice of those two works allows the *Certamen* to take up and further elaborate the traditional opposition between Homer and Hesiod based on their different subject matters, namely war and peace. This was an established opposition already in the fifth century. This is how Aristophanes, for example, characterised the two poets:

- 1035 γῆς ἐργασίας, καρπῶν ὥρας, ἀρότους· ὁ δὲ θεῖος Ὅμηρος
 ἀπὸ τοῦ τιμῆν καὶ κλέος ἔσχεν πλὴν τοῦδ', ὅτι χρήστ' ἐδίδασκεν,
 τάξεις, ἀρετάς, ὀπλίσεις ἀνδρῶν;

²⁵ Homer is said to have composed the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* after the contest (275–6), while no work by Hesiod is ever mentioned in the text.

... Hesiod on agriculture, the seasons for crops, and ploughing. And where did the godlike Homer get respect and renown if not by giving good instruction in the tactics, virtues, and weaponry of men?

Aristophanes, *Frogs* 1033–6²⁶

The choice of a passage from *Works and Days* for Hesiod is an obvious one: as we have seen, it is in that work, at verses 648–62, that Hesiod famously proclaims his victory in a poetic competition. The selection of *Works and Days* 383–92, then, proves most appropriate for this context in many ways. On a general level, as Koning observes, this passage from *Works and Days* 'underlines like no other Hesiod's image of the peace-loving farmer poet; it is difficult to find another passage in his work that is so quiet and peaceful'.²⁷ In fact the passages dealing with quarrels and conflicts in Hesiod's works are many, from the quarrel with Perses in the *Works and Days* to the fights among the gods in the *Theogony*. The *Certamen*, however, avoids mention of this kind of material – indeed, Hesiod's performance stops just before the reference to the poet's quarrel with his 'foolish' brother Perses, where Perses is warned not to go begging to his brother's house, because the latter is not willing to give him any further help.²⁸ The *Certamen*'s selection, therefore, presents as the core of Hesiod's poetry a description of the cyclic rise of the Pleiades, a constellation that every year, in the same way, guides men in their productive agricultural activities. West proposes that, in an alleged 'original' version of the story of the contest, Hesiod might have performed a longer selection than the one presented here in the *Certamen*, and might have included the rebuke to Perses as well.²⁹ But, leaving aside the question of what other versions may have circulated, it is important to note that according to our extant *Certamen* the core of Hesiodic poetry is *Works and Days* 381–92,

²⁶ Text and translation: Henderson 2002. On the relationships between *Frogs* and the *Certamen* see note 39 below. Other relevant sources are discussed by Graziosi 2002: 168–84 and Koning 2010: 269–84.

²⁷ Koning 2010: 252.

²⁸ The *Certamen* seems to modify *ad hoc* the Hesiodic text to leave out the rebuke to Perses. While in the *Certamen* the quotation ends with the verse γυμνὸν τ' ἀμάειν, δτ' ἐν ὥρια πάντα πέλωνται, in the *Works and Days* the passage goes on as follows: γυμνὸν δ' ἀμάειν, εἰ χ' ὥρια πάντ' ἐθέλησθα | ἐργα κομίζεσθαι Δημήτερος, ὥς τοι ἕκαστα | ὥρι' ἀέξηται, μή πως τὰ μέταξέ χατίζων | πτώσσης ἀλλοτρίους οἴκους καὶ μηδὲν ἀνύσσεις· | ὥς καὶ νῦν ἐπ' ἔμ' ἤλθες· ἐγὼ δέ τοι οὐκ ἐπιδώσω | οὐδ' ἐπιμετρήσω· ἐργάζεο, νήπιε Πέρση ... ('Harvest naked, if you want to bring in all of Demeter's works in due season, so that each crop may grow for you in its season, lest being in need later you go as a beggar to other people's houses and achieve nothing – just as now you have come to me. But I shall not give you anything extra, nor measure out extra for you. Work, foolish Perses ...').

²⁹ West 1967: 442 n. 3.

which does not include the conflict with Perses: the selection is carefully tailored to suit this version of the story. Just how appropriate the selection is for Hesiod is demonstrated by the way in which other ancient sources underline the ethical value of these verses, thus making them particularly compatible with the final verdict. According to the judge of the competition, it is just (208: δίκαιον) for Hesiod to win because he sings of peace and agriculture; according to a scholium to *Works and Days* 381–2, these verses encourage a life of agriculture and the just (δίκαιον) income that derives from it.³⁰

The appropriateness of the passages chosen by Homer and Hesiod as a means of highlighting the contrasts described above emerges fully when the two passages are read together.³¹ They respond to each other in a number of details which are used in one context as symbols of peace, and in the other as means of describing war. Both passages start by presenting an image of non-human entities and then focus on men: Hesiod mentions the constellation of the Pleiades that regulates the productive cycle of agriculture (180), while Homer mentions the gods Ares and Athena rejoicing in the spectacle of the battle (192–3). The Hesiodic man works in order to ensure a means of life for himself, while the Homeric fighters strive in the ‘deadly battle’ (199: μάχη φθισίμβροτος). Iron is sharpened in the Hesiodic passage to reap (184), but the Homeric ταμείχρους (200: ‘skin-cutting’) indicates that in other contexts metal can be an instrument of death.³² The Hesiodic man is emphatically and repeatedly said to be naked, while the Homeric heroes are covered by their armour. The image of the battle that in the Homeric passage ‘bristled with long spears’ (199–200: ἔφριξεν δὲ μάχη φθισίμβροτος ἐγχείησι | μακράς) recalls the image of a Hesiodic grain field, and responds to the literal reaping in Hesiod’s finest passage.

As with Hesiod’s performance, the question has been raised of whether an ‘original’ performance by Homer could have been longer than the

³⁰ Σ *Op.* 381–2 Pertusi: τὰ δὲ ῥηθησόμενα τῶν μὲν κακοπραγίων ἀπάγει τὸν ἀκροατὴν, ὅγχι δὲ ἐπὶ τῶν γεωργικῶν βίον καὶ τὸν ἐκ τούτου δίκαιον πόρον (My translation: ‘What will be said distances the listener from wrongful deeds, and brings [him] closer to a life of agriculture and the just income that derives from it’).

³¹ On this point see also Hunter 2009 and 2014: 302–15, Koning 2010: 253.

³² Homer’s ‘skin-cutting spears’ (199–200) will have been made not of iron, but of bronze (which is mentioned in relation to helmets, corslets, and shields at 201). But the two passages are related to each other in that they present two very opposite activities – one productive and one destructive – for which men can use sharpened metals. Remarkably, the text draws this contrast by referring to two metals which are particularly important to the two poets and are representative of their poetry: bronze, as mentioned above, is the metal of which weapons are made in the Homeric poems; iron marks the present age of human labour and toil in Hesiod’s *Works and Days* (174–201).

one presented here, especially since the *Certamen* stitches together two sequences of verses from Book 13 of the *Iliad*, where they are separated by some two hundred lines that may have been included in the *Certamen*’s source or in other versions of the story.³³ But also in this case, it should be noted that it is to the selection as it stands that the *Certamen* entrusts the presentation of the core of Homeric poetry, whatever other versions may have circulated. I suggest that the verses selected as Homer’s finest have been presented as we see them in order to provide us with a means of exploring the relationship between the Muses, the poet, and the audience: the poet allows the audience to share the divine gaze on something that their human nature would not in reality choose to witness – the sight of war and death. In Homer’s passage we are presented with a close comparison between two perspectives on war: the view of the gods and the view of humans. In the first few verses, the gods are presented as spectators who enjoy the sight of battle (191–3). In the second section, the reaction of a person who watches the spectacle from within would be quite different: a man who is not bold of heart would not enjoy it, given that for men, including the human spectator and those who are fighting, war means death (203–4). Only a god – or a Homeric audience who listen to the description of the events – can enjoy it.³⁴ Indeed, the public in the *Certamen* claim that these verses are ‘extraordinary beyond expectation’:

θαυμάσαντες δὲ καὶ ἐν τούτῳ τὸν Ὅμηρον οἱ Ἕλληνες ἐπήνουν, ὥς παρὰ τὸ προσήκον γεγονότων τῶν ἐπῶν, καὶ ἐκέλευον διδόναι τὴν νίκην.

On this occasion too, the Greeks in admiration praised Homer, as his verses were extraordinary beyond expectation, and they asked [Panoïdes] to award him the victory.

Certamen 205–7

The internal and the external spectator of this scene differ in that while the former is quite literally risking his life, the latter is safe and, therefore, in a position to enjoy the aesthetic pleasure derived from the sight of the magnificent spectacle – precisely as are Ares and Athena. Thanks to the mediation of the poet, the position of the external spectator is equal to that of the gods. The power of this description, moreover, strikes the readers’ feelings in such a way as to bring about subsequent reflection on

³³ The idea was proposed in Nietzsche 1870: 528–32.

³⁴ As Janko 1992: 89 notes in his commentary on this Iliadic passage, ‘if we were really watching it, we could not enjoy it as we enjoy this description’.

what they have been hearing during the epic performance. In order for this to be a productive reflection on human nature and suffering, and not to cross the boundary into personal tragedy, detachment is needed.³⁵

By putting at the centre of Homeric poetry its ability to allow humans to see and experience conflict safely, and thus allowing them to partake in the divine perspective, the *Certamen* is actually giving a perceptive reading of the Homeric epics themselves. As recent studies have shown, the ability to turn listeners into spectators is a crucial feature of Homer's poetry, and was already recognised in antiquity.³⁶ The verses presented in the *Certamen* are indeed only a selection of those that affect this transformation. The reaction to the sight of war by gods can be found also, for instance, in Book 17, where Athena and Ares are presented as spectators to a similar battle scene and, exactly as in the scene described in the *Certamen's* selection, they do not find fault with the sight of the savage struggle before their eyes.

... περὶ δ' αὐτοῦ μῶλος ὀρώρει
ἄγριος· οὐδέ κ' Ἄρης λαοσσόος οὐδέ κ' Ἀθήνη
τόν γε ἰδοῦσ' ὀνόσαιτ', οὐδ' εἰ μάλα μιν χόλος ἴκοι·

... So a savage struggle arose over him,
and neither Ares who drives the soldiery on nor Athena
could have made light of it as they watched, not even if they
were deeply angry.

Iliad 17.397–9

But even more relevant is this passage:

540 ἐνθά κεν οὐκέτι ἔργον ἀνὴρ ὀνόσαιτο μετελθών,
ὅς τις ἔτ' ἄβλητος καὶ ἀνούτατος ὀξεῖ χαλκῷ
δινεύοι κατὰ μέσσον, ἄγοι δέ ἐ Παλλὰς Ἀθήνη
χειρὸς ἑλοῦσ', αὐτὰρ βελέων ἀπερύκοι ἔρωήν·
πολλοὶ γὰρ Τρώων καὶ Ἀχαιῶν ἦματι κείνῳ
πρηνέες ἐν κονίῃσι παρ' ἀλλήλοισι τέταντο.

540 Then no longer could any man have faulted their war-work as he
entered the action – anyone who, as yet uninjured and unstabbed by
piercing bronze, was roaming in the thick of battle, with Pallas Athena
taking him by the hand and holding off the missiles' onset;
for on that day many men of the Trojans and Achaeans
lay sprawled next to each other, face down in the dust.

Iliad 4.539–44

³⁵ On this point see Macleod 1983.

³⁶ See especially Graziosi/Haubold 2010: 1–8, Clay 2011: 1–37.

A man who entered the battlefield under divine protection would enjoy the spectacle of war work. The selection of passages in the *Certamen* articulates the difference between the representation and experience of conflict – a difference that remains important through the centuries. Eustathius, commenting on the passage quoted above, remarks that the man watching the battle scene in safety can be identified with the public who listens to the poet's performance:

τοιοῦτος δ' ἂν εἴη θεατῆς ὁ τοῦ ποιητοῦ ἀκροατῆς, ὅς οὐ τῶν τοῦ πολέμου
κακῶν μετέχει, ἀλλὰ τοῦ τῶν πολεμικῶν διηγήσεων κατὰ νοῦν ἀπολαύει
καλοῦ θεάματος, ἀκίνδυνος τὴν μάχην περιῶν.

A spectator of this sort would be the man who listens to the poet, one who has no part in the evils of war, but enjoys the beautiful spectacle of the war narratives in his mind, and is safe while going around the battle.

Eustathius, *Commentary on the Iliad* 506.6–8³⁷

The spectator in Eustathius' passage is essentially in the same position as the audience who listen to Homer in the *Certamen*; Homer plays the role of Athena, taking the audience by the hand and leading them through terrain they could not otherwise enjoy.³⁸

After emphasising how Homer's poetry, rather than Hesiod's, is divinely inspired, on the ground that it allows the audience to experience something that the gods enjoy, the text awards the victory to Hesiod:

θαυμάσαντες δὲ καὶ ἐν τούτῳ τὸν Ὅμηρον οἱ Ἕλληνες ἐπὶ πρῶτον, ὡς
παρὰ τὸ προσῆκον γεγονότων τῶν ἐπῶν, καὶ ἐκέλευον διδόναι τὴν
νίκην. ὁ δὲ βασιλεὺς τὸν Ἡσίοδον ἐστεφάνωσεν εἰπὼν δίκαιον εἶναι τὸν
ἐπὶ γεωργίαν καὶ εἰρήνῃν προκαλούμενον νικᾶν, οὐ τὸν πολέμους καὶ
σφαγὰς διεξιόντα.

³⁷ Text: van der Valk 1971; my translation.

³⁸ There is another hint at Homer's privileged connection with the divine in his finest passage as presented in our *Certamen*, this too connected to the possibility of seeing the spectacle of war: although 'eyes were dazzled by the glint of bronze' (200–1) from the arms, Homer is still able to see the battlefield and describe it for us. A passage from one of Homer's ancient biographies explicitly presents Homer's exceptional visual ability as a gift from the Muses: ἐλθόντα γὰρ ἐπὶ τὸν Ἀχιλλέως τάφον εὐχασθαι θεάσασθαι τὸν ἥρωα τοιοῦτον ὅποιος προῆλθεν ἐπὶ τὴν μάχην τοῖς δευτέροις ὅπλοις κεκοσμημένος· ὁφθέντος δὲ αὐτῷ τοῦ Ἀχιλλέως τυφλωθῆναι τὸν Ὅμηρον ὑπὸ τῆς τῶν ὅπλων αὐγῆς. ἐλεθθέντα δὲ ὑπὸ Θέτιδος καὶ Μουσῶν τιμηθῆναι πρὸς αὐτῶν τῇ ποιητικῇ. ('When he went to the tomb of Achilles, he prayed that he might see the hero just as he was when he proceeded to battle adorned in his second set of armour. When he saw Achilles, Homer was blinded by the gleam of his armour; but Thetis and the Muses, feeling pity for him, honoured him with the gift of poetry', Anonymous *Life of Homer* 6.5; text and translation are from Bassino 2013.) It is therefore thanks to the Muses that Homer sees and describes for us Achilles' armour in Book 18, and the battle in Book 13. Homer appears as a

On this occasion too, the Greeks in admiration praised Homer, as his verses were extraordinary beyond expectation, and they asked [Panoides] to award him the victory. But the king crowned Hesiod, saying that it was just for the one who promoted agriculture and peace to win, and not the one who expounded wars and slaughters.

Certamen 205–10

Panoides' controversial verdict represents a form of literary criticism; more specifically, it engages with the complex issue of whether we should judge poetry on the basis of its aesthetic or ethical values.³⁹ Panoides decides to value agriculture and peace over war, and it is hard to disagree with him from an ethical point of view. But it is the audience who give an aesthetic judgement: they take into account the θαῦμα that poetry produces, the 'wonder' derived from the experience of sharing the divine gaze on human mortality – and indeed human killing. In Hesiod's passage there is nothing to produce this reaction; his verses describe what a human spectator can watch by himself, without needing a divine guide or protection, and do not provoke that mixture of pleasure and fear that underpins the greatness of Homer's verses. There is no reason to remark on the stable cycle of the seasons and make it the object of a poem, except that two separate conflicts provide suitable occasions: within the Hesiodic poem, instruction is needed because of a conflict between brothers, and Perses' inability to do what is expected; within the *Certamen*, the passage is recited because of a conflict between poets. In fact, Panoides' judgement in favour of peace turns to be divisive, in that

divinely inspired poet throughout the *Certamen*, where we twice find the formula θεῖος Ὅμηρος, 'divine Homer' (309 and 338).

³⁹ The debate on whether poetry should be judged on the basis of aesthetic or ethical values can be traced to at least the fifth century BC, and is at the core of the 'earliest sustained piece of literary criticism surviving in the Western tradition' (Sommerstein 1996: 14): the competition between Aeschylus and Euripides in Aristophanes' *Frogs*. In this play, Dionysus famously chooses the winner, Aeschylus, on the basis of his ability to offer useful advice to Athens at a difficult time for the city. The similarity to the contest of Homer and Hesiod is striking – both competitions end with the victory of the poet who benefits the community. However, it is not easy to unfold the precise relationship between the two episodes. The tradition of the contest between Homer and Hesiod must have already been in circulation at the time of Aristophanes, and the final verdict must, as always, have been in favour of Hesiod. Aristophanes may thus have been inspired by the tradition of the contest between the two great epic poets. But the figure of Panoides is not attested before the third century BC (P.Petr. I 25 (1)), and it is impossible to know precisely which version of the final verdict Aristophanes might have known. See Heldmann 1982, O'Sullivan 1992, Sommerstein 1996, Cavalli 1999, Rosen 2004.

it runs counter to general consensus.⁴⁰ Ultimately, the *Certamen* seems to suggest that while the aim of true art is to create peace and consensus, as embodied by Homer's performance and the public's unanimously positive reaction to it, favouring peace as the object of art disrupts aesthetic appreciation.

⁴⁰ Here, too, the *Certamen* seems to draw inspiration from the Homeric epics themselves. As Elmer 2013: 220 has pointed out, the whole episode is 'constructed in terms that are carefully taken over from the *Iliad*'s portrayal of consensus and its discontents': it recalls the opening assembly of the *Iliad*, an 'example of injustice but also a violation of social norms' where the king, Agamemnon, 'defies collective will in favour of his own inclination'.