**The Hellenistic Nature of Hector**

“Eyes glaring bright as a Gorgon’s eyes / or Ares’, man-destroying Ares’.” (Homer, The Iliad, Book 8, page 242, lines 397-398).

Homeric similes are commonly praised for having attributes to nature, but what was considered to be nature didn’t just stop at plants or weather -- it also attributed to mythology, which, in his time, is considered a form of nature itself. However, while this could sound like a blatant cop-out from tying what doesn’t appear to have any basis on nature into a thing about nature, that is not true. In this simile, Homer refers to the Gorgons, which are the snake-haired monster women from Hellenistic mythology, who are so ugly that to look into their eyes will turn one to stone. The most famous one, obviously, is Medusa, who was slain by the demigod, Perseus, and her decapitated head was used to turn people to stone. While Gorgons are mythological, they are attributed to snakes and statues, and the mythology of them wouldn’t exist without the nature of those things themselves.

However, this simile isn’t just strange in the way that it parallels nature and mythology -- the phrasing is an unusual take on the Gorgon mythology itself. While Gorgons are known for being so ugly that looking them in the eye will turn one to stone, to describe their eyes as “bright” isn’t something that is very heard of. To call them “bright” brings a lot of unusual implications -- that perhaps Gorgons eyes glow, that their ugliness is so distracting that it’s similar to light, that the gaze of Gorgons is somehow alluring or simply so powerful and quick that it mimics light.

This, notably, brings back into the similes about nature -- while, again, the quote doesn’t originally SOUND like it takes much from nature, the Gorgon’s gaze is being compared to light, which, obviously, is something that comes from nature. To say that a Gorgon’s gaze is like light is to say that it is powerful, quick, and, oddly enough, natural. This could be just an overanalysis, but Homer is known for having written in some very misogynistic ways about women, such as how much he contributed to Hera being diminished as just being “Zeus’ wife” instead of her original reputation as one of the original gods born from Cronos himself.

However, even when one puts aside how this is a simile about the Gorgons, there’s still another detail to this -- this is someone *else* being compared to the Gorgons, and thus being compared to the Gorgons being compared to nature. This is not jut a simile in how most are just “X is like X,” this is more of “X is like X, which is like X.” However, one can also notice, that, while it does inherently follow that method, it doesn’t have the same structure. Instead of saying “eyes glaring brightly like light, which were like a Gorgon’s eyes,” it says, “Eyes glaring bright as a Gorgon’s eyes.” This means that while there is a double simile in the simile itself, it’s more hidden and one has to read between the lines to see it.

One could argue that the original quote doesn’t inherently imply “eyes glaring brightly like light,” and that this is all just looking way too much into this. That’s a fair way to see it, but that doesn’t mean it’s an accurate rebuttal. For starters, the word “bright” itself usually implies light, because light itself is needed in order for something to be bright. The word, “bright,” in this context, is meant to emphasize intensity, which could mean that this could be taken as “eyes glaring intensely as a Gorgon’s eyes.” That’s fair, which, could, admittedly mean that the word “bright” itself is a mistranslation. However, the word “bright” doesn’t solely mean “intense,” nor does it solely mean “light.” Therefore, it can mean both of these things at once. One of the many great things about language is how much can be said with so few words, and this is a fantastic example.

However, even if this wasn’t a double simile, there’s still something to be said for how this quote in particular encapsulates and illustrates the thematic concern. In the context of this quote, Homer is talking about how the Trojan warrior Hector rode his horses in war, as an enemy of the Greeks and as someone who disapproved of the Trojan War itself. While it makes sense that an enemy is being compared to the Gorgons, he’s also being compared to one of their own gods, described as “man-destroying.” Ares, notably, is the Greek god of war and courage. This means that while Hector is being seen as vile as a monster like Medusa, he’s also being compared to the vengeance of the Hellenistic gods themselves and thus showing that he as someone who opposes the war entirely has a bit of both sides to him.

However, all of this glosses over what the main focus of this simile is -- anger. Fierceness. Hector isn’t just being compared to the Gorgons and Ares because both of those are terrifying, but he’s also being compared to them because both the Gorgons and Ares are vengeful, angry beings. Much of the Iliad is focused on how the gods themselves took a part in the Trojan War, so it makes sense to say that Hector’s rage could encompass Ares himself. While the Gorgons aren’t gods in any way, Medusa herself was turned into one as a punishment from them. Therefore, to compare Hector to both the Gorgons and Ares illustrates the complicated relationship he has as someone who doesn’t want the war to exist in the first place, and, as was said earlier, illustrates the ties he holds to both sides.

Now, one could ask, even after the mythology bit, what does this all have to do with nature? Easy. Nature is defined as surroundings, and Homer is illustrating the “nature” of Hector. That could sound like a stretch, but everything is intertwined and Homer is known for showing the complicated nature of who these Greek and Trojan warriors were alongside the Hellenistic gods themselves. By using this simile, Homer illustrates how even Hector, the greatest Trojan warrior in the Trojan War itself, encompassed elements of Hellenistic mythology, showing that even his own spirit was a part of Homer’s surroundings.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**

Homer, et al. *The Iliad. (Pbk.)*. Penguin, 1990.