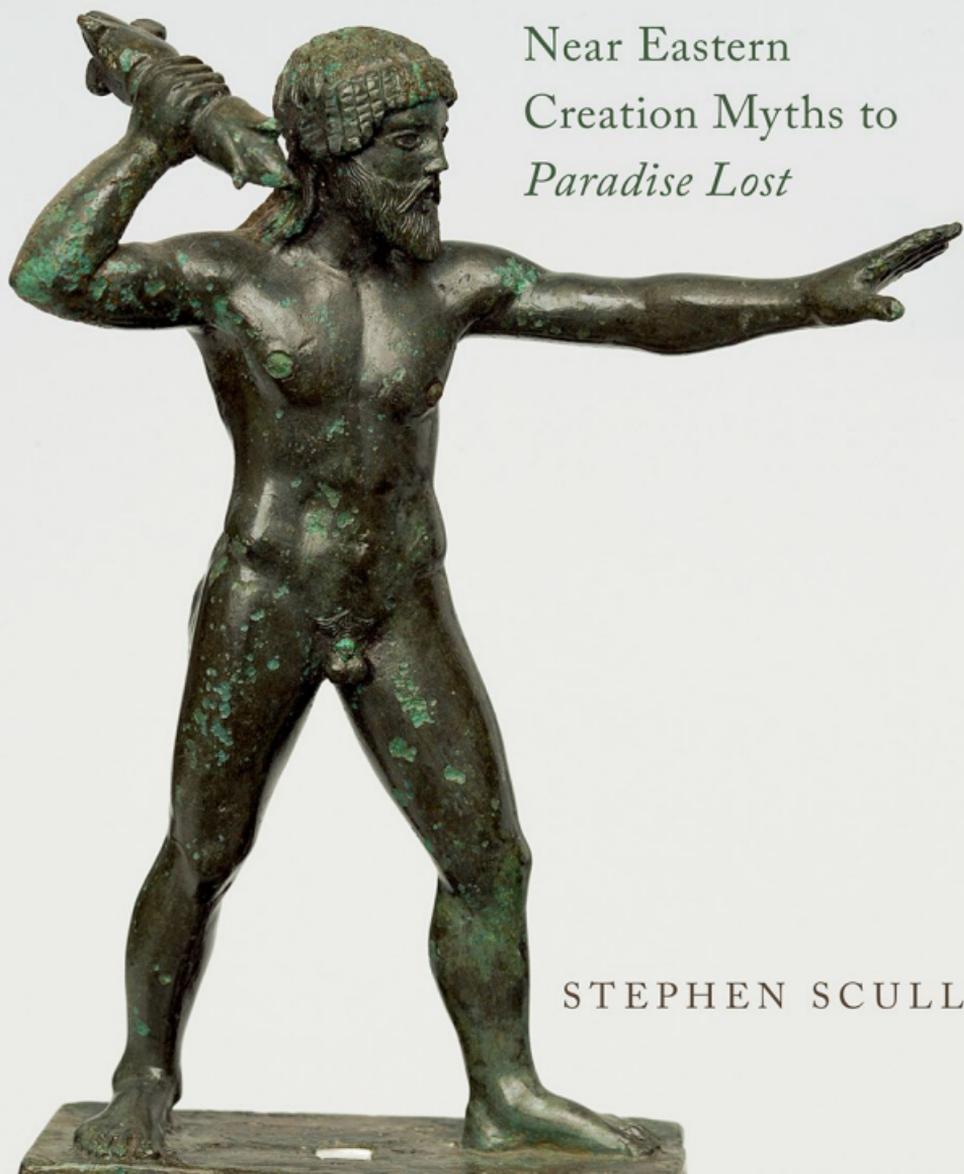


HESIOD'S

Theogony

From
Near Eastern
Creation Myths to
Paradise Lost



STEPHEN SCULLY

Hesiod's *Theogony*

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FROM NEAR EASTERN CREATION
MYTHS TO *PARADISE LOST*

Stephen Scully

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For
Ben, Katherine, and Chiara

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{ ABBREVIATIONS }

<i>AJP</i>	<i>American Journal of Philology</i>
<i>BICS</i>	<i>Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies, University of London</i>
<i>BMCR</i>	<i>Bryn Mawr Classical Review</i>
<i>CA</i>	<i>Classical Antiquity</i>
<i>CJ</i>	<i>Classical Journal</i>
<i>CP</i>	<i>Classical Philology</i>
<i>CQ</i>	<i>Classical Quarterly</i>
<i>CR</i>	<i>Classical Review</i>
<i>CW</i>	<i>Classical World</i>
<i>G & R</i>	<i>Greece and Rome</i>
<i>GRBS</i>	<i>Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies</i>
<i>HSCP</i>	<i>Harvard Studies in Classical Philology</i>
<i>JHS</i>	<i>Journal of Hellenic Studies</i>
<i>LfggE</i>	<i>Lexikon des frühgriechischen Epos</i>
<i>LIMC</i>	<i>Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae</i>
<i>MH</i>	<i>Museum Helveticum</i>
<i>PCPS</i>	<i>Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society</i>
<i>QUCC</i>	<i>Quaderni Urbinati di Cultura Classica</i>
<i>RE</i>	<i>Real-Encyclopädie der klassischen Altertumswissenschaft</i>
<i>RÉG</i>	<i>Revue des études grecques</i>
<i>RM</i>	<i>Rheinisches Museum für Philologie</i>

Hesiod's *Theogony*

Introduction

The *Theogony* belongs to a group of creation tales found through the eastern ancient Mediterranean. Like others in this group, it narrates—and to some extent “explains”—a movement from cosmic origins to the making of culture and from “family” to “city.” In the case of the *Theogony*, this is also the movement from natural biological reproduction to Zeus’s extraordinary birth of Athena from his head, and from generations of familial violence to the making of a political order that is stable, permanent, and—for the most part—harmonious. Hesiod tells the story through myth, that is, through (divine) genealogical stories. He also tells it through personified abstractions, with many divine names being common nouns, like Earth, Sky, Ocean, Night, but also Discord, Quarrel, Lies, Bad-Governance, Good-Governance, Justice, and Eirene (Social Peace). From start to finish, the poem consistently refers to Zeus and his political achievements, inviting one to read the cosmogonic story as a hymn to Zeus and as a city creation myth.

While Hesiod’s poem has long ago receded into the shadows of our cultural memory, the power and urgency of creation stories are as much with us today as they were two millennia ago. We in the United States know this well, as throughout our country in our homes, our local school committees, and our courts, we have debated the merits of Darwinian and Creationist accounts of the origin of humankind. Origin stories matter because they inform how we think of ourselves and our place in the universe. Unlike Darwin’s exclusive focus upon the descent of species, the Hebrew Bible and Hesiod also offer an account of the origin of the universe, and of time and space themselves.

Here again, in the past century and a half science has given us its own story of cosmic creation. This story, initially told in the language of mathematics, has forever changed our picture of the universe and of our place in it. Gone is the view of our Milky Way as the sole galaxy in a static and eternal universe, the only bright light surrounded by dark and empty space. Within the span of our lifetimes, the spectacular Hubble Space Telescope and instruments capable of reading radio signals from deep space have revealed beyond question that our galaxy is but one of billions of galaxies, perhaps as many as 400 billion, and a relatively late-born galaxy at that, in an ever-expanding universe.

Today, most astronomers accept the view that our universe was violently wrenched into birth roughly 13.8 billion years ago. As with Darwin's story of evolution, in this story verifiable fact and scientific hypothesis have supplanted the language of myth and the authority of the Muses. Even as the Big Bang theory of time and space confounds the imagination, it fascinates and spellbinds. The latest discoveries are front-page news, as when in July of 2012 it was announced that experiments at CERN's Large Hadron Collider observed a new particle consistent with the Higgs boson, the "God" particle, hypothesized 50 years earlier. In quick succession, in March of 2014 an observatory in Antarctica reported that it had detected primordial gravitational waves, the first ripples in the fabric of space-time at the moment of the cosmic explosion. But by July of the same year, the confident claims of March were seriously challenged. Such is the beauty of science, ever probing to find either consistency in or alternative explanations for the natural world.

Not so different from Hesiod's creation story, this cosmogonic narrative posits origin out of chaos, with evolution unfolding restlessly thereafter through progressive unification of primordial elements, but the understanding of this chaos and creation differs from Hesiod's in at least two important ways. For Hesiod, *χάος* (the word first appearing in extant Greek in the *Theogony*) was understood as a gap, an initial opening that made movement and division, birth and life, possible. Whether Hesiod thought the question unanswerable or unimportant, he never discusses what it was that existed on either side of that gap. In Big Bang theory, chaos has a very different meaning. It does not refer to an opening but to an intensely dense and hot submicroscopic speck, a billionth the size of a nuclear particle, of primordial plasma of indeterminate energy and matter. Some scientists think of that plasma as a particularly dense primordial egg, not unlike the cosmic egg that some Orphic stories posit at the beginning of creation. At the moment of cosmic inflation, the rather bland scientific term used to describe the Big Bang (or the violent opening, if you will), the nature of the plasma was forever changed and "reordered," erasing, it is thought, all traces of its earlier composition. As Hesiod's opening occurs without explanation, an event beyond his ken, there is no known trigger of the cosmic inflation. It falls to the realm of belief whether one prescribes it—and the mathematical beauty of the emerging universe—to an impersonal nature or to a creator god. At present, much else about our universe also remains mysterious and inaccessible to scientists, including the identities of the "dark matter" (a gravitational force) and "dark energy" (an expansion force), which together are thought to make up 95 percent of space. It is equally difficult for scientists to explain the miraculous spark of life that turned inanimate into animate matter. Such are the frontiers that scientists continue to probe, seeking to map out the unknown and to turn hypothesis and story into history. In Hesiod, there is no distinction between inanimate and animate as for him the creation of the universe and the creation of life are one and the same: figures

like Earth, Eros, Night, Sea, and Sky are both primordial essences and living gods. And in Hesiod all is story, revealed to him by divine Muses who are capable of telling true stories or false ones sounding true. Intriguingly, Hesiod never reassures us that the theogony he learns from them belongs to the first category.

Hesiod's vision of creation differs from that of astral cosmogony in another significant way, as well. Today's cosmologists only concern themselves with natural phenomena and the physical laws of matter and energy fields. They have little to say about humankind other than to note the striking idea that human beings, like everything else in the universe, are star children, composed of the same primordial gas and dust as are the galaxies. But the Big Bang story has nothing to say about our personal beings and social selves. For that, the link between cosmogony and the human condition, we must turn to science fiction writers and philosophers.

It is precisely this link between cosmic generation and the creation of society that most interests Hesiod. Like a number of other creation stories from the ancient Mediterranean, from both Semitic and Indo-European peoples, Hesiod sees a tension between sexual reproduction and an anarchic Aphrodite, on the one hand, and social harmony, on the other. Primordial Eros is a dynamic and creative force from which wellsprings of violence burst forth, especially violence within the familial unit. A late god, born in the third generation of gods, Zeus comes into a world and into a family setting that is already rife with discord, quarrels, and bloodshed. He succeeds in breaking free from an inherited cycle of violence that beset his father and father's father, in part by creating an enclosed space, called Olympus, set apart from the larger world. Within that space, he creates a mode of existence that sets divine order apart from nature's nature. Through the Muses in the form of a sacred gift, this new order reaches down to humankind, enabling those in a πόλις to rid themselves of great quarrel (μέγα νεῖκος) and to live in communal harmony.

This view of a divide between nature and culture is deep-seated in Western myth and thought. In our times, it surfaces most prominently in another modern creation story—Freud's composite “scientific myths” about the nature of the human psyche and the making of civilization, expressed most fully in *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1931).

The science of these constructs stems from Freud's study of human psychology. The mythic component has two dimensions: 1) his own imagined story of human social evolution from primordial times to the present day and 2) his construct of the psyche as an ever-fluctuating conflict between two primordial instincts: Eros and Thanatos, Love and Death. As Freud put it shortly after the publication of *Civilization and Its Discontents*: “My interest, after making a long-long *détour* through the natural sciences, medicine, and psychotherapy, returned to the cultural problems which had fascinated me long before.... I perceived ever more clearly that the events of human history, the

interactions between human nature, cultural development and the precipitates of primaeval experience... are no more than a reflection of the dynamic conflicts between ego, the id, and the superego, which psychoanalysis studies in the individual—and are the same process repeated upon a wider stage.”¹ At about the same time, he wrote the following about Eros and Thanatos: “The theory of the instincts is so to say our mythology. Instincts are mythical entities, magnificent in their indefiniteness. In our work we can never for a moment disregard them, yet we are never sure that we are seeing them clearly” (*SE* 22: 95).²

There can be no question of direct influence from Hesiod in Freud's own creation story, even though its account of family violence, civic order, and the taming of Eros, re-echoes suggestively, as if a cultural palimpsest, with Hesiod's own themes in the *Theogony*.³ For an understanding of this unrealized cultural writing-over, I draw on Richard Armstrong's assessment of Freudian psychoanalysis, which, he writes, taps into “the uncanny after-work generated by the archive of ancient culture, ... reflect[ing] ... the cultural logic, the values, the textual maneuvers, and nuances, and even the psychological interests of the ancient world” (2005: 5).

Freud's myth tells the story of human evolution from the incipient family (the male bonding with the female for the pleasure of a steady sexual partner, the female with the male for the protection of her children) to full-blown civilization. At the core of this story is a taming of the “crude and primary instinctual impulses,” “curbing” and “severely impairing” an inborn pan-sexuality of auto-eroticism, incest, and socially prohibited perversions (*SE* 21: 79–82). Of this taming, Freud writes: “It is impossible to overlook the extent to which civilization is built up upon a renunciation of instinct, how much it presupposes precisely the non-satisfaction (by suppression, repression or some other means?) of powerful instincts” (97). At best, civilized man sublimates these impulses; at worst, he represses them. In the most extreme form of this redirection, Freud claims that advanced societies give the impression that the sexual life of civilized man becomes, like his hair, an unnecessary appendage (cf. 101–5).

The painful repression of the Love Instinct stems from the necessary taming of the Death Instinct, which must be suppressed at all costs.⁴ This annihilating instinct, directed both against the self and others, is summarized in the expression *homo homini lupus*, man is a wolf to man. As a mythic construct, Freud portrayed it as the myth of the Primal Horde, initially outlined in *Totem and Taboo* (1913). It tells a communal Oedipal story wherein a horde of sons kills *en masse* a domineering father and, then, out of a sense of guilt, forms a pact that is intended “to prevent a repetition of the deed,” as Freud describes it in *Civilization and Its Discontents* (*SE* 21: 132).

For Freud, the sublimation and containment of an individual's instincts can only be achieved, in the end, at the communal level:

Human life in common is only made possible when a majority comes together which is stronger than any separate individual and which remains united against all separate individuals. . . . This replacement of the power of the individual by the power of the community constitutes the decisive step of civilization. The essence of it lies on the fact that the members of the community restrict themselves in their possibilities of satisfaction, whereas the individual knew no such restrictions.” (SE 21: 95)

“The liberty of the individual,” as he says, “was greatest before there was any civilization” (95). While this move to community and civilization is essential for the health and well-being of all humankind, it also comes at a great cost. Even short of civilization’s greatest imperative, “Love thy neighbor as thyself;”⁵ the evolution of civilization leads to disequilibrium: “If the evolution of civilization has such a far-reaching similarity with the development of an individual, and if the same methods are employed in both, would not the diagnosis be justified that many systems of civilization—or epochs of it—possibly even the whole of humanity—have become ‘neurotic’ under the pressure of civilizing trends?” (141).⁶

Even with this melancholic recognition of the cost of civilization’s restraints, Freud’s myth is clearly at its core a city creation myth. It is similarly anti-natural, as it “justifies” the curbing of nature’s polymorphic *eros* as a necessary prelude to free humankind from inborn human violence. A challenging (and, surely, a culturally determined) component of Freud’s understanding of this creation myth is that women, “represent[ing] the interests of the family and of sexual life,” are “little capable” of sublimating primal instincts: they “are forced into the background by the claims of civilization [and] adopt a hostile attitude towards it” (SE 21: 103).⁷ None of this thinking stems directly from the Babylonian *Enûma elish* or Hesiod’s *Theogony*, although similar views of the primal female’s hostility to civilization are depicted in Tiamat’s effort to kill Marduk and in Gaiá’s desire to destroy Zeus when she creates Typhoeus. In these different faces, the patriarchal ideology of city myths has a long history, reaching back 3000 years.

Hesiod was not read at the Gymnasium in Freud’s day, and it is uncertain whether Freud encountered his writings in college. Shortly after publishing *Civilization and Its Discontents*, he alludes to the poem briefly when writing on Prometheus and the theft of fire (1932),⁸ but there is no indication in that study that he engaged himself with the *Theogony*’s broader themes, and nowhere else in his writings does he refer to Hesiod’s creation myth. Yet in one of those splendid and uncanny ironies of history, at the very end of his life in the very last paragraph of one of his last (and unfinished) essays, he retells the Cronus-Zeus myth from memory. A few months before his death in 1939, when in London without much of his library at hand and in poor health, memory tricked him. Writing on childhood pathologies triggered by sexual desires and

feelings of endangerment, Freud thinks of Cronus in the following reconstruction: "At this point it is impossible to forget a primitive fragment of Greek mythology which tells how Kronos, the old Father God, swallowed his children and sought to swallow this youngest son Zeus like the rest, and how Zeus was saved by the craft of his mother and later on castrated his father."⁹ First, he remembers the tale as "a primitive fragment of Greek mythology" and recasts it as if it were a variation of the Oedipal conflict. While Hesiod's myth unfolds over three generations—1) old Father Sky refuses to let his children reach the light of day, leading his son Cronus to castrate him in order to be born; 2) Cronus in turn swallows his own children, as soon as they are born, in order not to be overthrown; and 3) Zeus, saved by his grandmother, grows up to defeat his father *and* the other Titans *with an army**, Freud remembers it as a two-generation story where Father Cronus swallows all of his children except Zeus, who, saved by his mother, grows up to *castrate* his father.

This late-in-life reconstruction of the *Theogony* helps explain why the Greek creation myth never greatly appealed to Freud. In contrast to his almost exclusive focus upon the child in the family story, the primitive myth plays equal, or greater, attention to the father's hatred—and fear—of his children. Sky is described as "rejoicing in his evil doing" (*Th.* 158–59) when he prevents his offspring from being born, and Cronus re-echoes his father's anxiety about his own children when he tries to swallow them at birth. Even in the Oedipus story, Freud has little to say about Laius's (and Jocasta's) attempted murder of Oedipus, while he considers the son's murder of the father "normative development." The *Theogony* might have offered some grist for Freud's mill when it describes Cronus as "hating his lusty father" (*Th.* 138), but it is the mother who invites this castration, and the three-generation sequence is not concise from Freud's vantage point.

In ways that Freud did not see, however, the ancient myth and Freud's modern "scientific" version imagine a similar need for the Olympians, or humankind, to escape from the natural conditions into which they were born. As Jonathan Lear points out in a discussion of *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1990: 14), when looking for the opposite of the Love Instinct, Freud would have been better served if he had used Hesiod's political terms *Eris* and *Neikos* (Discord and Quarrel, or, in Lear's rendering, Hate and Quarrel) rather than the biological Death Instinct. For Freud, as for Hesiod, the biological struggle between life and death is secondary to a social and psychic conflict between interpersonal union and harmony, on the one hand, and strife and hatred, on the other. For both mythographers, stability, permanence, and harmony are only obtainable if the social order can become as free from the biological imperative as possible. But they differ importantly in specifics. In Hesiod, as just noted, the father initiates the violence against the son. Also, unlike Freud's myth of a primal horde where the father-slashing children create the first social contract *en masse*, in the *Theogony* Zeus's creation of a new

* Unless otherwise noted, *italicized* words signify author's emphasis.

civic order can only be achieved by a mythic solution, and that is by his swallowing Metis and becoming the sole parent of Athene. But it is in their respective views of the endpoint that the two myths diverge most severely. For Freud, civilization is a malaise, an uneasiness, as the current title has it, *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur*. Or, it is even worse if we choose Freud's original title, *Das Unglück in der Kultur* (*The Unhappiness in Civilization*). This dis-ease stems from man's conflicted state, at once drawn to and horrified by instincts that he must sublimate or repress. For Hesiod, by contrast, the beginning of evolution is beset by evils, manifest by both paternal and maternal acts of violence, and the creation of Olympus, limited as the space is within the larger world, is a welcome enclave. In the *Theogony*, anything that is good in the universe comes late, and, more often than not, it is associated with life within that enclave: good governance, cherished customs, and the pleasing song and dance of the like-minded Muses. Unlike Freud,¹⁰ Hesiod does not consider a universal solution to this conflict but a spatial one where Zeus, and honey-tongued kings in the city agora, can create a place that keeps at bay disruptive gods like Discord, Lies, and Quarrels. In the *Theogony*, even this is not achievable within the marriage of Zeus and Hera.

Nevertheless, almost a century ago now, Freud helped us to look upon Greek myths as expressions, often buried, of the human psyche. His "scientific myths," individually and collectively, illustrate how secular modernism replaces divine cosmogonies with biological and psychological "truths." As Hesiod did in a mythic and proto-philosophical context, so Freud in a psychological and social context sought to work out a new understanding of man's relation to nature and culture. The "science" of Freud's myths reduces the prismatic, open-ended expansiveness of mythic stories, as he looks for primal causes; about the Love and Death instincts he writes that, although as mythical entities they are indefinite, "to my mind they are far more serviceable from a theoretical standpoint than any other possible ones; they provide that simplification, without either ignoring or doing violence to the facts, for which we strive in scientific work" (*SE* 21: 119).¹¹ Unlike ancient allegorists who sought to save myths by deflecting attention away from their sordid literalness, Freud's reductionist tendencies embrace the violent emotions in myth, finding in them an expression of psychic truths which later, more "sophisticated" Western narratives paper over. Even so, his scientific use of myth reduces complexity of symbol and character to useful didacticism. Thus, in the myth of the first families in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Freud only sees the first fathers as protectors of the young and in the Oedipus complex he focuses exclusively on the child's fear of castration, in both cases ignoring the father's hostility toward the child that is an initial part of the *Theogony* and Oedipus myth, as discussed above.

By contrast, the *Theogony*, and Greek myth in general, are open-ended and multi-directional. The familial triangle of father, mother, and son is filled with violence and attraction from every possible direction and emotion. A son can be attracted to or repelled by the father—similarly, in regard to his mother.

But, just as likely, a father can embrace or fear that child and a mother can desire to save or kill her offspring. Not to be overlooked, these myths endlessly explore the multiple forms of attraction and repulsion between the parents, as well. Aristotle's classification of myths captures their multi-directional nature: they "occur," he says, "within the sphere of natural affections—for example, when a brother kills a brother, or a son his father, or a mother her son, or a son his mother, or something equally drastic—that is the kind of action a poet must try for" (*Poetics* 1453b). To that extent, myths like Hesiod's *Theogony* and the Babylonian *Enûma elish* are bolder in their depiction of the emotions that wreak havoc upon the biological family than Freud's Oedipal complex. They are also more expansive in their imaginings of civilization's glories.

We no longer remember many of the names and places in Hesiod's telling, but the patterns of familial violence that he told and his turning of that dynamic into an argument for civilization are still with us, in part because of Freud. Reductionist and scientific as his modern myth-making is, and as poorly as he remembered the "primitive fragment" of old, his *Civilization and Its Discontents* vividly renders a narrative by which we can richly interpret Hesiod's myth, the oldest, most authoritative, and most enduring of the Greek myths of origins.

In addition to its study of the *Theogony*, this book explores how the poem has inspired and influenced, has been constructed and reconstructed, in the story of its reception and afterlife in later, more rationalistic ages. These reworkings are found both among peoples and cultures who believed in the Greek (and Roman) pluralistic pantheon of gods and those, ancient and modern, who looked upon pagan beliefs with disdain. The book concludes with a consideration of the poem as reflected in *Paradise Lost*, Milton's own vision of creation that draws deeply from and reflects upon the ancients, as well as its more obvious Hebrew and Christian sources.¹²

Points of Comparison

HESIOD AND HOMER; THE *THEOGONY* AND *GENESIS*

Hesiod and Homer

Unlike the poet(s) of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, Hesiod identifies himself by name in the *Theogony*, speaks in the first person in the *Works and Days*, and offers tantalizing bits of personal history in both poems. A good case can be made that both his name and personal biography are generic, describing a character type rather than a particular person.¹ In antiquity, numerous interpretations of his name Ἡσίοδος were proposed, ranging from: (1) “I speak of festivity” [combining a rare word for enjoyment/ festivity (ἦσις) and “I am versed in” (εἶδω)], to (2) “I shall cast a road” [combining “I shall cast” (ῆσω) and “road” (ὁδός)], to (3) “he who travels on an auspicious road” [combining “auspicious” (αἰσία) and “road” (ὁδός)]. Today, the preferred reading is “he who delights in the road,” or Enjoyroad [combining the future of the verb “I delight” (ῆδομαι) and “road” (ὁδός)], a spirited name for a sea-adventuring father to give a son. If so, it was ill chosen, as Hesiod was by his own account a most reluctant traveler.² Hesiod reveals his name in the *Theogony*, in a duly famous and much-imitated passage describing how the Olympian Muses transformed a Boeotian shepherd on wooded Mt. Helicon into a famed singer who knows about the beginning of the universe and Zeus’s making of Olympus (*Th.* 22–34). Glenn Most attractively proposes that Hesiod himself reinterpreted the meaning of his name to Songsender after the Muses’ intervention.³

The ancients attributed 16 songs to Hesiod, but he was most famous for 4: the *Theogony*, *Catalogue of Women* (now in fragmentary form), *Works and Days*, and the *Shield*, a short narrative poem about Heracles. Today, only the *Theogony* and *Works and Days* are thought to be by Hesiod,⁴ the *Theogony* being the first.

In Archaic and Classical times, the Greeks knew Homer and Hesiod as ἀοιδοί (singers), using the same hybrid “epic” dialect. By the fifth century, Greeks began calling them poets, ποιητής in the singular, literally a “maker” or “one who crafts or writes verses,”⁵ and a few centuries later in the Hellenistic period, critics began to distinguish Homeric “narrative” epic from Hesiodic

“hymnic” epic (*Theogony*) and “didactic” epic (*Works and Days*). Both ancients and moderns have generally regarded the two singers to be roughly contemporary, living circa 675 BCE,⁶ when the art-speech of ἔπη (epic) was easily comprehended by all Greek-speaking peoples from Asia Minor to Sicily and from the Black Sea to the shores of North Africa.

Even though Hesiod was from the Aeolic-speaking region of Boeotia in mainland Greece and Homer was from the Ionian-speaking Greeks on the Asia Minor coast, there are remarkably few regional differences in their spelling and vocabulary. Interesting exceptions exist, such as πόλις, the single word in Homer for all human settlements, regardless of size, whereas Hesiod has the term κώμη (*W&D* 639), of Doric origin, to describe his village of Ascra. Also, rather curiously, Hesiod uses more exclusively Ionic features than does Homer, as in the instance when he refers to the Ionian month of Λῆναιὸν (*W&D* 504) even though a local Aeolic form was readily at hand.⁷

Defining the genre of Archaic ἔπη is not an easy order beyond classifying its formal characteristics: its artificial, hybrid dialect, its verse in successive dactylic hexameters, and its highly formulaic phrasings, created over centuries to serve the needs and aesthetics of oral composition. Thematic classification proves problematic; to say, as some have, that epic refers to Muse-inspired songs of past deeds, ranging in time from the birth of the gods to age-old heroes,⁸ leaves little room for poems like *Works and Days*, where Hesiod speaks in the first person about current toils with his brother Perses. Nor does it include mock epics like the *Batrachomyomachia* (*Battle of Frogs and Mice*), which some in antiquity attributed to Homer, or the philosophical poems of the Presocratics. From this vastly popular medium, the Greeks by 600 BCE singled out Homer and Hesiod as the two mighty suns of ἔπη, looked to as much for their educational illumination as for their poetic brilliance.⁹ In most instances, Homer was considered the greater of the two lights, but by no means was this always the case. They also came under heavy censure, with ever-growing vigor over the centuries.

Also from early times, the Greeks imagined the two in a poetic face-off. The *Certamen*, which tells this story (dating in its present form to the second century CE, but with large portions traceable at least back to the fourth century BCE), offers both lives of the two singers and the story of their competition at Chalcis on Euboea: Hesiod would begin a verse that Homer had to complete, and each recited “the ‘best’ of his poetry. (This itself was a clear sign that the Greeks saw them as coming out of the same poetic tradition.) Against the people’s acclaim, King Panedes (did the Greeks understand the name to mean All-Knowing?), presiding over the contest, handed the victory tripod to Hesiod, on the grounds that a poem about agriculture and peace (the *Works and Days*) was more useful for a community than one about war (the *Iliad*).¹⁰

In modern times, the important but unfortunately unanswerable question of writing dogs Hesiodic and Homeric studies. By the end of the eighth century, the Greeks had developed an alphabetic writing system that was used,

among other things, to record hexameter verses on drinking cups. It is unknown if Hesiod or Homer was literate or if either one “took advantage” of this new technology when composing (although how writing might have aided composition at this time has never been clearly demonstrated). If they did not commit their songs to writing, they may either have recited them to scribes or had them memorized by rhapsodes who retained the songs (perhaps in a fluid state) for a period of time before transcription. Some take Hesiod’s act of naming himself as proof of writing, as a singer before a live audience would feel no such need, while others see the name Hesiod (if Songsender) as a generic descriptor of the oral song tradition.¹¹

However the *Theogony* gained its present form, it displays a poet in command of his medium at almost all levels—from the word, to the phrase, to the line, and ever outward to the broad shaping of the song itself. Our task is to make as much sense of the poem as we can, including asking how Hesiod’s personal comments function within the poems themselves and help to establish narrative authority.

Compared to Homer, Hesiod may seem parochial and small-minded, with narrow concerns. In the *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (1974), for example, C. A. Trypanis, a classicist, literary critic, translator, and poet, writes that “didactic epics” (i.e., Hesiod) were for “the peasant of Boeotia rather than the Ionian aristocrat, being concerned with the morality and beliefs of the small farmer toughly confronting a life of ceaseless labor and few rewards” (326). And, indeed, Homer’s broad canvas in the *Iliad* frames the battle of Troy under the watchful eye of the Olympian gods and includes a catalogue of participants that embraces most of the known world; his *Odyssey* explores regions even further afield, from Calypso’s home at the “navel of the sea” to distant lands of the Cyclopes and Phaeacians, to the fjord-like regions of the Laestrygonians, and even to the Underworld. But, of course, Trypanis’s view is unwarranted. In the *Works and Days*, Hesiod’s eye rarely roams outside his isolated village under Helicon. He does not even look to the larger πόλις of Thespieae a few kilometers away. But a bitter family quarrel over a small local farm is placed within the context of the five ages of man and Prometheus’s struggle with Zeus. Far from a blinkered horizon, these broadened vistas enlarge the local poet’s concerns into something approaching Homer’s universal themes. Similarly, the *Theogony* begins with reference to the local Muses on Mt. Helicon but evolves seamlessly into the Muses of Mt. Olympus, who narrate the expansive story of the birth of the gods and the origins of the universe. For all his local focus, Hesiod opens up his immediate world to vast horizons.

HESIOD AND HOMER ON THE GODS

In broad outline, Hesiod and Homer tell a similar story of creation and of Zeus, a third-generation god, the son of Cronus, who married Hera and fathered

many of the Olympians. Herodotus (in the fifth century) famously says that the two of them gave the Greeks the names and attributes of their gods:

Whence each of the gods came into being, or whether they always existed, and what their forms were, these things the Greeks did not know until recently – yesterday, so to speak. Hesiod and Homer lived 400 years before my time, I believe, and not more. They were the ones who *established a theogony** (ποιήσαντες θεογονίην) for the Greeks, gave the gods their titles (epithets), defined their honors and functions, and described their forms. Those said to be older poets than these men, are, in my opinion, younger.¹²

(2.53.1–3; MOST OF IT QUOTED IN MOST 2006: T98)

Herodotus appears to stress Hesiod over Homer, as the naming of him before Homer and the word theogony might suggest. As Friedrich Solmsen wrote long ago, Hesiod was the one who questioned “what does Zeus represent? What is the nature of his government? . . . To trace the whole history from the origin of the Earth to the organization of Zeus’ empire was to view him in the right perspective,”¹³ whereas Homer did not greatly concerned himself with how Zeus attained supreme power. Or, as Barbara Graziosi and Johannes Haubold have more recently put it (2005: 36, 38): “the Homeric and the Hesiodic epics describe the same world, albeit from different perspectives and at different stages of development. This shared vision of the cosmos lies at the heart of the early epic tradition. . . . If Hesiodic poetry gives a general account of the history of the cosmos from its origins to the present day, the poems attributed to Homer ‘zoom in’ and explore in detail crucial moments within that history.” But we should note that Herodotus’s use of the word “theogony” does not refer to Hesiod’s poem by title,¹⁴ and much in this statement does not fit Hesiod closely: although he names many more gods than does Homer and his genealogies are far more complete, Hesiod is less concerned with the honors and functions of individual gods than he is with Zeus’s mode of governance, and he is virtually silent about many prominent Olympians, including Apollo, Artemis, and Poseidon.

With a few exceptions, Herodotus also thinks that the Greek gods came from Egypt (2.50). Modern historians of Greek religion have reason to question both claims: far from originating with Hesiod and Homer, the names and epithets for many of the Greek gods are already found on Mycenaean Linear B clay tablets from 1200 BCE. Some of these names appear to be pre-Greek, others have been imported from the Near East (see Chapter 3), and still others are of Indo-European descent. But, still, the historian has a point: in lieu of a priestly class and sacred texts, Hesiod and Homer gave the Greeks their nomenclature for the gods, Olympians and otherwise. A generation or two before Herodotus, the

* Unless otherwise note, *italicized* words in a translation or greek passage signify author’s emphasis.

Greek philosopher Xenophanes put it another way: “All of those things which are blameworthy and a reproach among men, both Homer and Hesiod have attributed to the gods: to steal, to commit adultery, and to deceive one another.”¹⁵

But if Homer and Hesiod agree in broad outline, they differ significantly in their portrait of Zeus and the character of Olympus. The Zeus of the *Iliad* is an abusive ruler, quick to threaten another god with physical punishment if he—or she—crosses his will. This Zeus rules by virtue of his superior strength (8.19–26 and 15.180–81). Under a veneer of festivity and civility, a mood of fear and hostility pervades Olympus. The laughter of the gods at the banquet table is less a sign of good cheer than of released tensions when the gods see a lame Hephaestus trying to restore Olympian harmony (*Il.* 1.595–600). Hera’s fear of Zeus is expressed in the furrow on her brow even as she speaks of his will with a smile on her lips (*Il.* 15.101–3).¹⁶ The *Iliad* repeatedly depicts Olympus as a place rife with rivalry, jealousy, and resentment. Zeus and Hera are the primary offenders, both stirring up ἔρις and νεῖκος, discord and quarrel, against each other (cf. *Il.* 1.519–21, 4.5–6, 4.37–38, and 21.513), but other gods contribute to the turmoil on Olympus as well (cf. *Il.* 1.396–594, 14.256–62, 15.11–193). In the *Odyssey*, Zeus rules Olympus with a smoother hand,¹⁷ but even here his rule is a far cry from what we find in Hesiod’s *Theogony*.

In the *Iliad*, Zeus attains supreme power by lot when Zeus, Poseidon, and Hades divvied up their portions of the cosmos by chance (cf. *Il.* 15.189–93). Nothing could be further from Hesiod’s vision of how Zeus gains the kingship on Olympus when, by virtue of his good statesmanship and Earth’s sanguine advice, the Olympians elect him to be their king and lord.

Hesiod is the first poet to concern himself with a Zeus who makes Olympus a place of communal harmony, based upon a principle of laws and cherished customs.¹⁸ Unlike the Iliadic portraiture of Zeus, the *Theogony* depicts Zeus as an ideal king who rules according to a principle of shared governance (65–79). All of his power comes from what others have given him. He does not change the universe, nor could he if he wanted to, but he can and does create a new kind of community set apart from the rest of the cosmos, a space free from discord, quarrel, and lies (782–85). Hesiod’s Zeus uses Bia (Violence) to overthrow the Titans,¹⁹ but even in this fight his power and weaponry come in the form of gifts bestowed upon him by those grateful for his aid and inclusive policies. Far from gaining Olympus by lot, Zeus comes to power and rules by a fair distribution of honors (73–74, 383–403, and 881–85).²⁰

Other differences between Homer and Hesiod regarding creation also need to be noted. The word Chaos does not appear in Homer; in the *Iliad*, Oceanus is referred to as the “origin of the gods” and his mate Tethys as the “mother of the gods” (14.201; cf. 14.246). In the *Iliad*, Zeus reveres, even fears, “Night, subduer of gods and men” (14.259–61). Zeus and Dione are the parents of Aphrodite (5.370–418), and Zeus and Hera create Hephaestus. In only one instance (*Od.* 24.60) does Homer speak of nine Muses (unnamed); the usual

reference is to a single, nameless Muse. Some of these divergences can be traced to Near Eastern origins, although in general no text shows greater affinity with Near Eastern myths than does the *Theogony*.²¹

A further difference between the *Iliad* and the *Theogony* concerns Zeus's relation to the human πόλις. This difference raises central questions about the *Iliad* itself: Is Troy doomed because of its sins? Gasper Griffin speaks for many when he writes: "It is vitally important for the *Iliad* that at bottom, beneath all the apparent indifference or amorality of heaven, the cause of the Achaeans is just" (1995: 80).²² But is this so? While mortals discuss the gods avenging Helen's abduction, Zeus does not. Little in the *Iliad* suggests that Zeus is concerned with justice or that he destroys Troy for its crimes. Rather, he oversees the existence of things. Much more than Hera, Athena, or Poseidon, he insists on the fall of Troy, even as he says that "there is no city in all the world under the sun and starry heaven/that has ever been more honored in my heart than sacred Ilios" (4.45–46). Sacred though Ilios may be, placement within the frame of sun and stars seems to confirm its mortality, a "city of mortal men." In the *Iliad*, Troy stands for all cities; its fall is not a story of crime and punishment; its fate is not that of a particular city for a particular crime.²³ Rather, it is a mark of the paradoxical nature of every city, both sacred and mortal.

This duality is suggested a second time in the scene just mentioned, when Hera says that she will allow any of her favorite cities to be destroyed, whenever Zeus so chooses, whether it be Mycenae, Argos, or Sparta (*Il.* 4.51–53). Again, the fall of these cities is not a case of crime and punishment, but rather of an Iliadic theme that the city, humankind's grandest achievement (and much grander than anything the greatest of heroes may do on the battlefield), is also finally like all things mortal. The city wall attempts to separate those in the city from nature's mutability, but finally the city is of nature and subject to its cycle. Achilles is Zeus's agent for this fall. The *Iliad*, so read, is an uncompromising poem, at once celebrating the πόλις as the glory of human achievement and acknowledging at the same time its limit.²⁴ Zeus sees that Troy meets its end.

Turning to Hesiod, the contrast is dramatic. His Zeus is primarily a god of justice and sound statesmanship. Born into time and violence, he creates an (idealized) enclosure of social order that is permanent and stable. From him, through the Muses, Zeus's kings can pass the attributes of this idealized enclave onto humans in a civic context.

HESIOD AND HOMER: STYLISTIC COMPARISONS

Hesiod and Homer also differ in style. Scholars often criticize Hesiod for being a bungler of formulaic phrasing, and certainly no Homer. "Old formulas from the Ionian tradition, even when not varied, are combined with each other in a clumsy, redundant, or colourless manner," according to Geoffrey Kirk (1960). Martin West's characterization shows no mercy: "it is as if an artisan with big,