Theogony

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF HESIOD

Hesiod is one of the oldest known Greek poets, writing in the eighth and seventh century B.C., roughly contemporaneous with Homer. Very little is known about Hesiod (even his lifespan is somewhat contentious), though scholars have been able to piece together bits of Hesiod's life based on admissions in his own poems. For instance, most scholars agree that Hesiod hailed from Boeotia (central Greece), and his father was originally from Cyme. Hesiod's poems, like that of Homer, draw their subject matter from myth and legend, detailing the struggles of gods, goddesses, and heroes, as well as more everyday influences such as agricultural and pastoral life in ancient Greece. Hesiod is best known for his poems *Works and Days* and the *Theogony*. While Hesiod was certainly influenced by existing mythology, as well as by older oral compositions, he also spun many of his own tales; Hesiod himself is the source of many of the oldest versions of Greek myths, including the stories of Pandora, Prometheus, and more.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Hesiod wrote in the eighth and seventh centuries B.C., a time poised between the peaks of the semi-mythical Mycenaean age that much epic poetry takes as its subject matter, and the widespread cultural and political achievements of fifth-century B.C. Athens. As Greece recovered from the so-called "Greek Dark Age" that spanned the twelfth to the ninth centuries B.C., epic poetry flourished, drawing on existing oral and religious traditions. Hesiod's poetry is also influenced by the largely agricultural society of ancient Greece, with pastoral wisdom and a keen sense of dependence on the natural world suffusing his poems.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Writing the eighth and seventh centuries B.C. in Greece, Hesiod was immersed in the myth and epic poetry of his contemporaries. However, few other works from this time have survived, with Hesiod's poetry in some cases representing the oldest extant version of certain myths. One notable contemporary is the poet Homer, who also wrote in the epic vein and composed works such as *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, although it is a matter of scholarly debate whether Hesiod and Homer were aware of each other's work. Along with Homer, Hesiod was in some ways considered to be the founder of Greek epic poetry, and his influence upon subsequent generations of writers was significant. Poets and dramatists in classical Greece such as Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides also drew from the rich tapestry of Greek myth to craft works like the *Oresteia* (*Agamemnon*, *The Libation Bearers*, *The Eumenides*, *Oedipus Rex*, and the *The Bacchae*. In later centuries, Roman poets like Virgil show the influence of Hesiod's pastoral poetry in works like *The Aeneid*.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Theogony*
- **When Written:** c. 700 B.C.
- **Where Written:** Boeotia
- **When Published:** N/A
- **Literary Period:** Archaic Greece
- **Genre:** Epic Poetry
- **Setting:** Greece
- **Climax:** Zeus wins in the battle against the Titans.
- **Antagonist:** Heaven, Kronos
- **Point of View:** Third-person omniscient

EXTRA CREDIT

Divine Intervention. Hesiod claimed that he began writing poetry after encouragement from the Muses, goddesses representing the creative arts, when they visited him as he tended sheep as a young man.

Influence. The mythology detailed in the *Theogony* is thought to have had near-eastern influences, most notably Babylonian and Hittite.

PLOT SUMMARY

The *Theogony* details the genealogy of ancient Greek gods, from the beginning of the universe through the Olympian gods and various monsters and heroes descended from them. The poem begins with an invocation to the Muses typical of epic poetry, but with a twist: Hesiod claims that the Muses themselves once descended to visit him and taught him "fine singing." Hesiod then describes the origins of the Muses and describes their benefits to men who gain their favor, including good judgment, beautiful speech, and reverence from peers.

The poem goes on to describe the beginning of the universe: Chasm and Earth come into being, followed by Tartara and Eros. Eros is to act as the implicit guiding force behind much of the rest of the poem, which focuses on successive generations of gods and goddesses being conceived and born.

Heaven is born from Earth, and many more divine beings are

born from their union, including their son Kronos. Heaven, wary of the threat his new children might pose against his dominance, locks them with their mother Earth in a cave, visiting only at night when he is "desirous of love." Earth and Kronos soon hatch a plan to overthrow cruel Heaven, and Earth crafts an adamantine **sickle** (a curved, sword-like weapon) with which to do the job. Next time Heaven visits, Kronos ambushes him and castrates him with the sickle, effectively ending his reign over the gods and assuming the role of king of the gods in his stead.

The genealogy of gods continues, charting the births of numerous gods and goddesses, nymphs, heroes, and monsters. Hesiod also includes various myths such as that of Medusa and Heracles, as well as a lengthy description of Hecate, who is especially involved in human affairs and generous toward her worshippers.

The poem then returns to succession, detailing the children born to Kronos and Rhea. Wary of the fate of his father, Kronos swallows each of these children back into himself once they are born, having learned from Earth and Heaven that he would one day be defeated by his own child. Rhea, however, bore Zeus in secret and gave him to Earth to raise, while tricking Kronos into swallowing a disguised stone in Zeus' place. Once he matured, Zeus, too, tricked his father, forcing Kronos to spit back up all of the children—Zeus' siblings—that he had swallowed.

The poem then details another episode of trickery, as Prometheus attempts to trick Zeus into taking a smaller cut of meat after a sacrifice. Prometheus also steals fire for humans, prompting additional rage from Zeus. Hesiod details that Prometheus' punishment is to be chained up, his liver eaten by eagles, for eternity, while humankind's punishment takes the form of a woman, Pandora, and her box of evils, as well as the female race more generally, whom Hesiod describes as "a great affliction."

Zeus and the other Olympians then wage war against Kronos and the Titans, with the help of other gods and goddesses whom Kronos had spurned, including Obriareos, Kottos, and Gyges. They triumph over the Titans, and Zeus locks them away in Tartarus so that they cannot escape to cause further conflict.

Hesiod goes on to describe the origins of a variety of other deities, monsters, and heroes related to or otherwise descended from the Olympians. Earth then bears a new rival to Zeus' power, Typhoeus, whose father was Tartarus. Threatened by his power, Zeus does battle with him, eventually obliterating him entirely.

Zeus has other children, as well. When his first wife, Metis, is pregnant with Athena, Zeus swallows her, fearing a child who might overtake him, and gives birth to Athena out of his head instead. The poem ends by detailing the genealogies of various other mythological characters, including notable mythological figures who have both human and divine parents.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Zeus – The protagonist of the poem, Zeus is the king of the gods and the son of Kronos and Rhea. In the religious beliefs of Hesiod's time, Zeus was the supreme deity, with power over every aspect of the human and divine worlds. In the poem, one his epithets is "loud-**thundering**," emphasizing his extreme power and control over both realms of existence. Rhea gives birth to Zeus in secret and hides him in order to protect him from his father, Kronos, who is intent on swallowing all of his children so as to not have his power threatened. Zeus later tricks Kronos into regurgitating all of his children, and wages war against him, eventually triumphing with the help of Olympian and Titan allies alike. The poem also details many of Zeus' other exploits; at one point, when Prometheus tricks Zeus into accepting a smaller portion of a meat sacrifice and also steals fire to give to humans, Zeus punishes Prometheus for both offenses by having him chained to a rock, his liver feasted upon by eagles. Zeus also gifts Pandora and her box of evils to humans as punishment for accepting Prometheus' fire. Like his father before him, Zeus' anxiety over his own reign manifests itself in control over his children. He swallows his first wife, Metis, when she is pregnant with Athena, giving birth to Athena from his head instead, in order to ensure his continued power, control, and dominance. Similarly, he preemptively destroys the god Typhoeus before he can become a legitimate threat to his rule. Zeus also fathers many important deities in Greek mythology, as well as various heroes and heroines.

Kronos – Kronos, one of the antagonists of the poem, is the son of Heaven and Earth. He is a central player in the myths of succession detailed in the *Theogony*, as he overthrows his own father, Heaven, and then is subsequently overthrown by his son, Zeus. Early in the poem, when Heaven traps Earth and her children inside a cave in order to prevent them from usurping his power, Kronos and Earth conspire to ambush and defeat him. While Earth proposes to all of her children that they overthrow him together, only Kronos is courageous enough to take her up on the offer. With Earth's help, Kronos ambushes Heaven and castrates him with a **sickle** made of adamant, both physically and symbolically casting him from power. Kronos subsequently takes his father's place as king of the gods, but continues his father's attitude of healthy skepticism toward one's children: Kronos swallows all of his children by Rhea after they are born, so that none of them might one day contest his power. Only his son Zeus, hidden away by Rhea through trickery, is able to escape this fate. Zeus later overthrows Kronos and, after a prolonged conflict, banishes him to Tartarus along with the rest of his allies.

Heaven – Heaven is born from Earth during the initial pages of the *Theogony*, and goes on to father several children with her, including Kronos and Rhea. Like Earth, Heaven is central to the creation myth and is both a place and a character—a mythic substance spanning the entire known world, as well as an individual with a genealogy and a distinct personality. Heaven represents the first iteration of the succession myth, in which sons overthrow their fathers in often bloody and gruesome ways. Heaven and Earth have several children together, known as the Titans. Wary of the threat these children pose to his own continued power, Heaven locks them in a cave with their mother so that they do not have the opportunity to rebel against him. However, vengeful Earth soon plots with her son Kronos to ambush and defeat Heaven, creating a **sickle** made of adamant to do with job. With Earth's help, Kronos uses the sickle to castrate and overthrow his father, thereby ending Heaven's reign over the gods and beginning his own domination. Heaven's severed genitals and blood generate several new gods and monsters, including Aphrodite. Heaven goes on to help his grandson, Zeus, conspire against Kronos, eventually resulting in Kronos' downfall.

Earth – Earth is the second divinity listed in the *Theogony*, emphasizing her essential nature and continued importance throughout the poem. Second only to Chasm, Earth represents a foundational principle of existence, both a place in which the action of the poem occurs, as well as an influential character. She is the first mother figure introduced in the poem, and her descendants' genealogies comprise a large portion of the *Theogony*. Earth's many children include Heaven, with whom she comes to share a romantic and sexual relationship, as well as the Titans Rhea and Kronos, among many others. After Heaven shuts Earth and her children in a cave, she conspires with Kronos to overthrow him, crafting a **sickle** of unbreakable adamant with which to ambush him. With the success of their plan, Heaven is castrated and cast from power, while Kronos assumes the role of the king of the gods. Earth later helps Rhea hide her son Zeus away from Kronos, raising Zeus on Crete before he, too, continues the cycle of succession and overthrows his father. With Tartarus, Earth later gives birth to Typhoeus, a monstrously strong and powerful god whom Zeus destroys before Typhoeus can become a rival for power.

Rhea – Rhea is the mother of Zeus and the other Olympians. Her husband, Kronos, swallows all of her children prior to Zeus, fearing that they might one day usurp his power. With the help of Earth and Heaven, however, Rhea gives birth to Zeus in secret, while tricking Kronos into swallowing a rock instead of the infant god. Rhea later supports Zeus' insurrection against Kronos, continuing the cycle of succession.

The Muses – The Muses, the nine daughters of Zeus and Memory, are goddesses who are patrons of the creative arts. At the beginning of the poem, Hesiod claims that they appeared to him once as he tended sheep as a young man, and taught him the art of poetry and how to sing and compose songs. If granted the Muses' favor, men are blessed with the admiration of their peers, beautiful speech, and sound judgment. The Muses names are Clio, Euterpe, Thaleia, Melpomene, Terpsichore, Erato, Polyhymnia, Urania, and Calliope.

Prometheus – Prometheus is a trickster god who quickly gets into trouble with Zeus. He tricks Zeus into selecting a smaller portion of meat after a sacrifice, arousing his anger. He also steals fire from Zeus and gifts it to human beings. As a result, Zeus punishes him by chaining him up on a mountain, with an eagle that comes to eat his liver every day. Heracles eventually frees Prometheus from his punishment, albeit with Zeus' permission.

Tartarus – Tartarus, also sometimes known by the plural form Tartara, is both a god and a shadowy realm similar to the underworld. He comes into being along with Chasm and Earth. Like Earth and Heaven, Tartarus is both a place and a character, representative of the gloomy farthest reaches of existence. When Zeus defeats Kronos and the other Titans, he banishes them to Tartarus, a remote, dismal place that even other gods fear. Tartara is the father, with Earth, of Typhoeus, a terribly strong and fearsome god. Zeus destroys Typhoeus before the young god can pose a substantial threat to his power.

Eros – Eros is one of the first divinities to come into existence. While he takes part in little of the action explicitly in the poem, he is implicitly the motivating factor behind many of the events, from genealogical descent to violent succession. As the principle of romantic and sexual love and generation, Eros has an outsized influence on the poem, and as such is listed near the beginning of the genealogies.

Kottos, Briareos, and Gyges These three mighty gods are the sons of Heaven and Earth. Because of their extreme strength and ferocity, Kronos imprisons them so that they don't threaten his rule. Zeus later frees them, and they lend their forces to his war against his father, helping to turn the tide and win the battle for the Olympians. When Zeus later imprisons the other Titans are imprisoned in Tartarus, these three gods stand guard to make sure that the Titans do not escape.

Hecate – Hecate is a goddess who is especially devoted to her worshippers, and can grant good favor to men. Her blessings arise in the form of good harvest in the fields and bounty from the sea, and she represents the essential link between the human and divine worlds that exists throughout the poem.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Metis – Metis is the first wife of Zeus. When she is pregnant with Athena, Zeus swallows Metis (and the unborn Athena) so that her potential children will not pose a threat to his power. Zeus then gives birth to Athena from his head, exerting his power and control over her.

Athena – Athena is the child of Metis and Zeus, representative

of wisdom. When Metis is pregnant with Athena, Zeus swallows them both, and gives birth to Athena out of his head so as to exert control over his children and prevent any potentially rebellious children from being born.

Chasm – Chasm is the first divinity that comes into existence in the *Theogony*, setting the stage for everything that follows. Earth, Tartarus, Eros, and Heaven follow after Chasm in quick succession, representing the fundamental forces and characters that motivate the plot of the *Theogony*.

Typhoeus – Typhoeus is the son of Earth and Tartarus, born much later than Earth's other children with Heaven. Because he is incredibly strong and powerful, Zeus destroys the young god so that he can never threaten Zeus' power.

Hera – Hera is one of Zeus' wives, who is sometimes in conflict with him. She has several children, most notably Hephaestus, the god of volcanoes and metalworking.

Themis – Themis is a daughter of Earth and Heaven, and has several children with Zeus.

Aphrodite – Aphrodite is a goddess of beauty and love, and is born from the foam that Kronos' severed genitals create when they are cast into the sea. Like Eros, she is associated with love and procreation between both humans and divinities.

Medusa – Medusa is a fearsome monster with snakes for hair and eyes that turn men to stone. The hero Perseus kills her

Heracles – Heracles is a son of Zeus and a famous hero in Greek mythology. Half-human and half-divine, Heracles engages in a variety of adventures, slaying Medusa and freeing Prometheus from his bondage.

Hephaestus – Hephaestus, the son of Hera, is the god of craft and blacksmithing. He helps Zeus craft Pandora and her box of evils, a punishment for humans after Prometheus steals fire for them.

Perseus The hero who kills Medusa.

THEMES

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CYCLES OF SUCCESSION

Throughout Hesiod's *Theogony*, a poem from circa 700 B.C., the poet details the multiple successions that occur in the realm of the gods. From the origins of the first Greek gods and goddesses, to the rise of the Titans, to their overthrow by the Olympians, succession is shown to be a natural dynamic among the gods. However, this process reaches its conclusion as well as its ultimate zenith with Zeus, illustrating the ways in which not only brute force, but also craft, compromise, and collaborators are necessary to obtain and maintain power.

As a child, the Titan Kronos overthrows his father, Heaven, in order to become king of the gods. While Kronos does employ trickery in order to deceive and overpower his father, it is significant that he largely acts alone, which characterizes his succession as an individual shift of power rather than the culmination of a larger, cooperative conflict. From the beginning, Heaven hates and fears his children, locking them inside a cave with their mother, Earth, so that they won't pose a threat to his power. With help from his mother, Kronos schemes to ambush Heaven and attack him with a **sickle** (a curved, sword-like weapon) made of adamant. Here Heaven is characterized as doing "wicked work," and the imprisonment of his children and their mother is "ugly behavior." Meanwhile, Kronos is depicted as a hero, claiming that he is "not afraid of our unspeakable father." Succession here is depicted as an actively good thing—the overthrow of a despotic ruler by his brave and heroic son. When he ambushes his father, Kronos castrates him—both literally in the context of the story, as well as figuratively in terms of his power over the gods and his ability to act as ruler and father. This also thwarts his ability to create other powerful children who might one day challenge Kronos' rule. Here, the poem seems to indicate that sons overthrowing their fathers is—while sometimes violent—inevitable, natural progression. Nevertheless, in assuming his father's position as king of the gods without cooperating with others in order to consolidate his power, Kronos sets himself as just another iteration of the same cycle rather than a true innovation.

When Zeus then overthrows his father Kronos, he continues the cycle of succession. However, he does so with the help his own craft as well as a cadre of other gods—both Olympian and Titan—and in doing so cements his power not only over Kronos, but over the entire divine realm. Kronos, like his father before him, is immediately distrustful of his offspring by Rhea, and swallows them so that "none but he […] should have the royal station among the immortals." He has already learned from Heaven and Earth that one of his own children will be his undoing. However, with the help of her parents, Rhea gives birth to Zeus in secret and is able to fool Kronos by giving him a stone to swallow in the baby's place. Here, Kronos is shown to be subverting the natural order, literally swallowing his children so that they return to his body rather than succeed him in the world. He also directly imitates his own father, with similar consequences. However, this iteration of the succession is significant because Zeus does not declare war on his father by himself—instead, he tricks Kronos into spewing back up all of Zeus' siblings, and also enlists the help of the specific Titans that Kronos had treated poorly. This coalition of gods, with

Zeus at its head, is much more powerful than a single god acting alone. Zeus and his allies war against the Titans, eventually overthrowing them and banishing the offending gods to "a place of decay, at the end of the vast earth" where there is "no way out." In this way, Zeus fulfills the cycle of succession and takes his father's place as the ruler of the gods, and fathers a new generation of immortals. Zeus repeats the cycle that his father carried out before him, illustrating the cyclical nature of the succession myth. However, this new iteration of the cycle marks a significant departure, as this time an entire generation of gods have risen up against their forebears, and named Zeus their leader, cementing his power.

Unlike his father and grandfather, however, Zeus represents the pinnacle of divine power. He succeeds in holding onto his power and preventing another succession not only through brute force, but also through cooperation and compromise that ensures continued change and growth in the divine realm, albeit with Zeus still at its head. Zeus is careful to destroy any potential threats to his power quickly, as when he destroys Typhoeus, an exceedingly strong Olympian god, who "would have become king of mortals and immortals, had the father of gods and men not taken sharp notice." He also swallows Metis, the mother of Athena, before she gives birth to the goddess, "so that no other of the gods, the eternal fathers, should have the royal station instead of Zeus." Here Zeus breaks the cycle of succession, and comes to represent divine permanence, immortality, and authority rather than cyclical change. However, this doesn't mean stagnation, as it did with previous generations—instead, Zeus allows for birth and change on his own terms, and only uses force against those who pose a true threat to his authority. Unlike his father and grandfather, Zeus does not try to halt the generative cycle completely. Instead, he fathers many children, impressive gods and goddesses in their own right, as well as many half-divine heroes and heroines. In this way he innovates upon the cycle, allowing change and growth to take place while still maintaining his position of power. Zeus has literally defeated Kronos—who, fittingly, is the god of time—in order to remain the king of heaven perpetually.

In the successions of power among the gods, the poem illustrates the cyclical succession that takes place between parent and child, one generation to the next. Zeus is unique in that he is the ultimate god, and new generations are unable to surpass him. Zeus maintains his power not only through the exercise of force, but also through an alliance with other gods and goddesses, transforming the cycle of succession from one of individual fathers and sons to one that incorporates the entire divine realm.

FAMILY AND GENEALOGY

Throughout the *Theogony*, Hesiod details an extensive chronology of the various gods and goddesses, listing dozens of gods and their genealogies and relations to one another. These include personifications of abstract concepts such as Death, Sleep, and Memory, as well as divinities with more fully fleshed-out histories and personalities, like Hera and Athena. Ultimately, family and genealogy is presented as a way of ordering the universe. The poem suggests that the whole of existence can be fit into this schema, resulting in a world that, while sometimes violent and unpredictable, has a fundamental underlying structure that is based in family and relation.

Hesiod begins the poem by detailing the creation of the universe. He lists the initial gods and goddesses who make up the foundation of the world, suggesting that gods and goddesses are the axis around which the rest of the universe is organized. Chasm, Earth, Tartarus, and Eros are the first listed gods, and take primacy as some of the first ordering principles in Hesiod's *Theogony*. Chasm, while not entirely chaotic, is the void from which everything else springs and is put into order. Earth and Tartarus, meanwhile, are the boundaries of the universe, and are both personified deities as well a setting for the other gods and goddesses to inhabit. Eros, symbolic of romantic and sexual love, is the generative principle from which all the subsequent gods and goddesses are produced. Next come other physical features, such as Heaven, Night, Day, and Sky. These are additional foundational elements that make up the basis of the world. Here the *Theogony* again uses genealogy to explain and order the world, making coherent sense of a diverse array of different elements.

Heaven and Earth produce together a new kind of gods and goddesses, including Kronos and the other Titans, which expand the existing schema to include divinities representing both natural forces and human ideas. Elements of the natural world (like the sea) and of human existence (like memory and dreams) are all rooted in a divine genealogy that structures and organizes the world. These gods and goddesses represent a new generation of divinities, one that is based both in the natural world and the human one. Concepts such as time, memory, and the sea are represented as the children of Heaven and Earth and as fundamental ordering principles of the world, along with powerful, terrifying creatures like the Cyclopes. In Hesiod's conception of the universe, gods and goddesses come into being from other gods and goddesses, and all are intimately connected to one another through their relational ties. This is followed by additional genealogies—the children of Night, including Death, Sleep, and Dreams, various goddesses and nymphs of the sea, Iris the messenger, the Sun and Moon, and many others. Here Hesiod chronicles an extensive list of the various properties of the world and human existence, from particular afflictions like Old Age to more general ones like the Winds. Everything fits into place according to their genealogy, which both explains how they came into being and situates them within the wider world.

With the genealogies of the Olympian gods and their

descendants, the divine order of the world fully extends to the human, incorporating gods, goddesses, and human heroes into one coherent system. Zeus fathers deities like the Graces, the Muses, Apollo, Artemis, Dionysus, and heroes like Heracles. This cements his role as a god who can be a father without relinquishing his power, as well as fleshing out the world with a vast array of gods and goddesses who perform different roles and more fully integrate the human, the natural, and the divine. Various goddesses also bear both other divinities and half-human, half-divine children like Achilles, Jason, and Wealth. The realm of the divine now stretches fully into the realm of the human, and the litany of the *Theogony* has grown to encompass every aspect of human existence and mythology.

From the initial gods and goddesses listed in the *Theogony* to the partially human heroes and heroines listed at its conclusion, the poem constructs an orderly universe in which everything is organized according to genealogy and family relationship. The poem's emphasis on the importance of genealogy speaks to the social fabric of ancient Greece, in which genealogy served as a map to understand how individuals fit into their family, community, and the wider world. By chronicling the genealogy of gods and goddesses, Hesiod takes things a step further, showing that all of existence is part of an intricate web of relation that stems back to the gods.

VIOLENCE AND POWER

Throughout the *Theogony*, violence is used as a necessary tool in order to obtain and preserve power by gods and humans alike. From the initial conflicts between successive generations of gods and goddesses, to the violent exploits of the Heroic Age, bloodshed and brutality are essential components of the poem. However, in the *Theogony* these acts of violence are not always entirely negative, but rather part and parcel with power, change, and generation—a necessary part of life.

Violence isn't necessarily gratuitous in the poem, as it can sometimes serve a greater purpose. For instance, seemingly extreme violence is used as a means of obtaining and securing power by the gods, from Kronos' clash with his father, Heaven, to the Olympian's war against the Titans. Kronos' castration of Heaven, and Zeus' subsequent triumph over Kronos, both primarily rely upon violence in order to succeed. Indeed, the violence is so powerful that it affects the very foundation of the universe, as in the Olympians' battle against the Titans: "Both sides displayed a feat of main force; and the boundless sea roared terribly round about, the earth crashed loudly, and the broad sky quaked and groaned." While violence is in this case partially destructive, it is necessary in order for the Olympians to obtain power, meaning that violence can also be productive. Zeus' strength and use of violence is depicted as unambiguously good, with Zeus, the most powerful god, representing the pinnacle of divinity. When Zeus punishes Prometheus for tricking him and stealing fire for humans, for instance, Zeus is characterized as "mighty," "high-thundering," and one "whose designs do not fail," even as he enacts horrible punishments against Prometheus and mankind. Zeus' use of violence not only maintains his supremacy over both the divine and mortal realms, but also highlights the way in which the power of the gods can have a profound effect on human life, for both good and ill.

Though often problematic and unsettling for modern readers, violence in the form of rape and coercion is used against women throughout the poem both to both perpetuate oneself and to control one's descendants. However unsavory, this form of violence is used as a means to ensure the legacy and continued dominance of powerful gods and men. For instance, Heaven traps Earth along with her children in a prison, and she is described as "tight-pressed inside." When Heaven visited Earth before the ambush, he was "desirous of love" and "spread himself over Earth, stretched out in every direction." Heaven uses violence both in terms of fathering children onto Earth, and in keeping them trapped against their will, all in order to ensure his continued dominance in the realm of the gods. Similarly, and perhaps more disturbingly, Kronos fathers many children from Rhea but insists on swallowing them back into himself, until his scheme is disrupted by Rhea and Zeus. Zeus himself swallows his first wife Metis before she can bear him a son who might challenge his rule. Throughout the *Theogony*, the threat that women and children pose to the established order must be met with violence in order to maintain the status quo. Male characters in the poem utilize violence against women and children in order to control their lineages and to ensure their continued power.

Even in the human realm, heroes and heroines must make use of violence as a matter of course in their interactions with the world. In the world of the *Theogony*, violence, while sometimes gruesome, is an accepted and even celebrated means of obtaining power and propelling humans toward their goals. From Achilles "lionheart, breaker of men," to heroes like Jason and Heracles, violence is a necessary part of success and a path towards immortality, in song if not in fact. These "children resembling the gods" must use god-like violence in order to achieve their aims. The other god-sprung creatures are all ferocious monsters, who use violence to stake their claim in the world of men. Creatures like the Chimera, the Sphinx, and the Nemean Lion are all described as terrible and physically threatening, "an affliction for men." Although they are not themselves gods, their godlike characteristics are expressed in the form of their violent and chaotic natures.

Throughout the poem, violence is characterized as a tool used to achieve and maintain power, catalyze change, and guarantee a lineage, regardless of the consequences. While in some instances this violence is criticized—such as the actions of Heaven and Kronos—for the most part violence takes on a

neutral significance, and in many instances is viewed as a necessary and even beneficial force in the world. While for modern readers these appeals to violence can be surprising and upsetting, the poem taps into visceral and often disturbing mythology in order to describe and contextualize some of humanity's darkest impulses.

THE NATURAL AND DIVINE WORLDS

In the *Theogony*, the poet describes the natural and the divine world as being closely linked and sometimes almost indistinguishable from one another, like in the instances of personified deities like the Winds, the Sea, and the Sun and Moon. This link between the natural and divine worlds emphasizes that humans are forced to rely on two forces larger than themselves—nature and divinity—in order to thrive. Ultimately, Hesiod makes the case in the poem that the everyday world is suffused with the divine, and that humans must appropriately revere the gods in order to ensure good fortune.

Hesiod makes special note of the goddess Hecate for her ability to bestow bounty from the land and the sea, emphasizing the link between the natural and divine realms. Those who worship Hecate are handsomely rewarded: "To those too who till the surly grey, and who pray to Hecate and the **strong-thundering** Shaker of Earth, easily the proud goddess grants a large catch; but easily she takes it away when it is sighted, if she so chooses. She is good for increasing the livestock in the folds together with Hermes. Herds of cattle and broad herds of goats and flocks of fleecy sheep, if so she chooses, she makes great out of small, and less out of many." This passage illustrates the ways in which the divine can have a direct effect on the natural world toward human benefit—divine favor is bestowed to worshippers of Hecate in the form of tangible agricultural reward. In terms of those who pay proper reverence to Hecate, "great favour readily attends him, if the goddess is well disposed to his prayers, and she grants him prosperity, for she has the power to do so." While in later centuries Hecate took on a more ambivalent nature, associated with magic and witchcraft, here she is unambiguously good, and intimately tied to the natural world. Through Hecate, the poem highlights that the divine is not separate from nature or humanity, but instead infuses every aspect of human existence, and has tangible, significant effects upon the world.

Wealth, the son of Demeter and a human hero, is indicative of good harvest and agricultural prosperity, emphasizing the integration of the divine and the human in the form of a god that is descended from and embodies both worlds. Wealth is conceived by the earth goddess Demeter and the hero Iasius in "in a thrice-turned fallow field, in the rich Cretan land," indicating his connection to the natural world and to agricultural bounty. The bounty that the god Wealth represents is that of grain and good harvest, and "whoever encounters him, into whosever hands he comes, he makes him rich and bestows much fortune upon him." Here, worldly success and the connection between the divine and the natural is borne out in the personification of Wealth itself.

Throughout the poem, the natural world is constantly intertwined with the divine, both for good and ill, in the form of gods and goddesses. While this close link sometimes works in humanity's favor, it can also result in catastrophe. Even though the natural world is suffused with the divine, it's not necessarily suffused with goodness and good fortune—gods and goddesses, in all of their power, have the ability to shake up the natural world to disastrous effect. Many lesser deities crowd the streams, rivers, and forests in the form of nymphs and naiads. Other, less positive effects also occur, such as the winds that spring from the defeated Typhoeus, which "rage with evil gusts" and "blow different at different times, scattering ships and drowning sailors." The natural world is thus constantly imbued with the divine, with lesser gods and goddesses populating the world with both good and bad effects. Even when the immortals are concerned only with their own affairs, they still have an outsized effect on the world around them, as when the battle between the Titans and the Olympians rocks the world: "Great Olympus quaked under the immortal feet of the lord as he went forth, and the earth groaned beneath him. A conflagration held the violet-dark sea in its grip, both from the **thunder and lightning** and from the fire of the monster, from the tornado winds and the flaming bolt. All the land was seething, and sky, and sea; long waves raged to and fro about the headlands from the onrush of the immortals, and an uncontrollable quaking arose." While the battle that takes place on Olympus primarily concerns the gods, the effects of it are widespread, and extend even to the more fragile natural and human worlds, revealing the link between the natural and divine worlds.

In the *Theogony*, the natural and the divine are intimately connected for both good and ill. This can take the form of dangerous natural disasters inspired by the warring gods or malicious monsters, or more beneficial interactions such as those of Hecate or Demeter. In the poem, there is no separation between the human and the natural, or the human and the divine—instead, they all overlap one another. Ultimately, the poem emphasizes that humankind is at the mercy of both nature and the divine, with gods and goddesses, natural forces, and human culture and civilization inextricably intertwined.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

THE SICKLE

In the *Theogony*, the sickle (a type of curved sword) is representative both of violent succession of power, as well as a link to the natural world and the cycles of life, death, and regeneration. Upset with Heaven's cruel treatment of her and her children, Earth crafts a sickle from unbreakable adamantine in order to use it against him. Kronos, one of Earth's children, volunteers to conspire with her in this plan. The next time Heaven visits the cave where he's forced his family to reside, Kronos sets an ambush and uses the sickle to castrate his father. The sickle is thus representative of the violent succession of power from one generation to the next, as Heaven is literally unable to bear any more children and has lost his generative power (made all the more final by the fact that his genitals fall into the sea). That the sickle is made out of adamantine, an unbreakable material, further reinforces its nature as an object of power and violence.

At the same time, however, the sickle also symbolizes the fundamental link between the divine and the natural worlds. It is crafted by Earth, who by her very nature bridges the natural and the divine. In ancient Greece, sickles were also used to harvest crops, and are symbolic of agricultural bounty and the changing of seasons. The sickle's symbolic significance is twofold, then, as it is both the tool for violent, life-defying action, and a tool of harvest and natural plenty.

THUNDER AND LIGHTNING

Thunder and lightning are some of Zeus' most powerful weapons, and are symbolic of his total command over both the realm of the gods and the human world. Hesiod emphasizes that "his is the thunder and the smoking bolt" because of Zeus' continued dominance as the king of the gods; even the epithet "loud-thundering" reveals Zeus' towering power and supremacy. This power was given to Zeus by the Cyclopes, and Zeus uses it to maintain control over his subjects. In particular, he utilizes thunder and lightning to defeat Typhoeus before he can pose a threat to his rule.

Like the **sickle**, thunder and lightning also symbolize the intimate link between the natural and divine worlds. Thunder and lightning accompany rain, which is essential and life-giving. At the same time, however, lightning can wreak terrible destruction upon the Earth, as it does when Zeus battles the Titans as well as when he destroys Typhoeus. Both thunder and lightning are terrifying in their effect, and difficult to oppose, and as such they are fitting weapons for Zeus as the king of the gods. Ultimately, thunder and lightning are symbolic of divine power as well as the divine's intimate connection to the natural and human world.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Oxford University Press edition of *Theogony and Works and Days* published in 2009.

Theogony Quotes

From the Muses of Helicon let us begin our singing, that haunt Helicon's great and holy mountain, and dance on their soft feet round the violet-dark spring and the altar of the mighty son of Kronos.

Related Characters: The Muses, Kronos, Zeus

Related Themes:

Page Number: 3

Explanation and Analysis

Beginning the poem with a traditional invocation to the Muses, Hesiod asks that they bless him as a poet and allow him to compose a skillful work of art. In doing so, he situates the Muses as the daughters of Zeus, emphasizing the ways in which their genealogy gives them their power and significance, along with the ability to bestow artistic skill upon humans. Similarly, Hesiod describes Zeus in relation to his own father, Kronos, foreshadowing the events that will take place later in the poem and emphasizing the importance of genealogy from the outset. Even though he is the king of the gods, Zeus himself is situated in the broader realm of the gods in terms of his family relationships.

In addition, Hesiod plays up the connection between the divine and the natural world, illustrating how the Muses are situated in nature, describing the "holy mountain" and "violet-dark spring" that the Muses dance around in tandem with the "altar of the mighty son of Kronos." For Hesiod, poetry and religious ritual are intimately tied to nature and the pastoral world, gesturing to his status as both artist and shepherd.

Whomsoever great Zeus' daughters favour among the kings that Zeus fosters, and turn their eyes upon him at his birth, upon his tongue they shed sweet dew, and out of his mouth the words flow honeyed; and the peoples all look to him as he decides what is to prevail with his straight judgments. His word is sure, and expertly he makes a quick end of even a great dispute. This is why there are prudent kings: when the peoples are wronged in their dealings, they make amends for them with ease, persuading them with gentle words. When he goes among a gathering, they seek his favour with conciliatory reverence, as if he were a god, and he stands out among the crowd.

Such is the Muses' holy gift to men.

Related Characters: The Muses, Zeus

Related Themes:

Page Number: 5

Explanation and Analysis

At the beginning of the poem, Hesiod continues his extended invocation of the Muses, describing the "holy gift" they bestow upon lucky mortals. Again, their familial relationship to Zeus is emphasized, illustrating the importance of genealogy as an ordering principle in Hesiod's world. The Muses' direct connection with the human world is also highlighted in the description of their blessings: phrases like "shed sweet dew" and "words flow honeyed" makes the Muses' gifts seem akin to the bounty of nature and agriculture, and intimately connected with the material world. Rather than being confined to the world of gods and goddesses, the Muses can have real, direct impacts upon the world and the people in it. Similarly, the blessing of the gods can elevate mere men to semi-divine status, as one honored with the Muses' gifts is treated "as if he were a god" by their followers and peers, and their "straight judgments" are reminiscent of Zeus himself.

For all those that were born of Earth and Heaven were the most fearsome of children, and their own father loathed them from the beginning. As soon as each of them was born, he hid them all away in a cavern of Earth, and would not let them into the light; and he took pleasure in the wicked work, did Heaven, while the huge Earth was tight-pressed inside, and groaned.

Related Characters: Heaven, Earth, Kronos

Related Themes:

Page Number: 7

Explanation and Analysis

Earth and Heaven, two of the initial deities of the poem, give birth to a succession of gods and goddesses, "fearsome children," known as the Titans. From the beginning, Heaven is suspicious of these children, and, fearing that they pose a threat to his power and authority, locks them and their mother in a cave. Heaven is immediately depicted as an antagonist to be overthrown, taking "pleasure in wicked work" and exacting violence upon Earth, who is uncomfortably contained inside the cave, and his children, who are similarly imprisoned. This is an almost unnatural subversion of the mandate established early on in the poem to have children and beget successive generations—Heaven tries to lock up his children so that they, in turn, might not grow up to usurp his power.

In the violent, often bloody world of the *Theogony*, gods must use any means necessary, no matter how savage, to secure their power. At the same time, however, Heaven is clearly painted in an unfavorable light, described as a vicious tyrant ripe for overthrowing, setting up the readers of the poem to sympathize deeply with Earth and her children.

Great Heaven came, bringing on the night, and, desirous of love, he spread himself over Earth, stretched out in every direction. His son reached out from the ambush with his left hand; with his right he took the huge sickle with its long row of sharp teeth and quickly cut off his father's genitals, and flung them behind him to fly where they might.

Related Characters: Heaven, Earth, Kronos

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 8

Explanation and Analysis

In this quote, Kronos ambushes, castrates, and ultimately defeats his father, Heaven. But the violence isn't only one-sided. Hesiod uses a polite euphemism, "desirous of love," to describe Heaven's rape of Earth against her control or wishes, illustrating the sometimes shockingly casual attitude of the poem toward sexual violence. While on a human level the poem describes an act of violence, at the same time it illustrates Heaven "stretched out in every

direction" against Earth, imitating the relationship between the planet and the night sky. In this way, the identity of the natural and the divine is blurred, and Heaven and Earth are at once characters with complex identities and motivations as well as representations of elemental natural forces.

Heaven's punishment for his misdeeds is fitting: his genitals are cut off, effectively castrating him and both physically and symbolically removing him from power. Kronos is able to best his father through cunning and trickery as well as violence, emphasizing the ultimate failure of brute force against skill.

For he learned from Earth and starry Heaven that it was fated for him to be defeated by his own child, powerful though he was, through the designs of great Zeus. So he kept no blind man's watch, but observed and swallowed his children.

Related Characters: Kronos, Earth, Heaven, Zeus

Related Themes:

Page Number: 17

Explanation and Analysis

Like his father before him, Kronos is fearful and suspicious of his children, lest they overtake take him and usurp his power. Although he knows that his downfall has already been foretold, he does everything in his power to try to escape his fate. Unlike Kronos, however, he does more than simply imprison his children. Instead, he swallows them back into himself, effectively negating their very births. In doing so, he is able to pause the cycle of succession, essentially halting the generative process in its tracks so that he can be king forever, without having to worry about any future sons or daughters who might pose a threat to his power. Here, again as with Kronos, violence is enacted against women and children in order to secure male power. Rather than condemn this use of force, the poem is ambivalent, not exactly valorizing Kronos but at the same time commending him for keeping "no blind man's watch."

Then she wrapped a large stone in babycloth and delivered it to the son of Heaven, the great lord, king of the Former Gods. Seizing it in his hands, he put it away in his belly, the brute, not realizing that thereafter not a stone but his son remained, secure and invincible, who before long was to defeat him by physical strength and drive him from his high station, himself to be king among the immortals.

Related Characters: Rhea, Kronos, Zeus

Related Themes:

Page Number: 17

Explanation and Analysis

Despite his best efforts, here Kronos is ultimately unable to halt the cycle of succession forever, and Rhea tricks him into swallowing a stone rather than his son, Zeus. Hesiod depicts this deception with an air of inevitability: Kronos is the king of the "Former Gods," and Zeus is "secure and invincible." While Kronos is successful in gaining power from Heaven, he cannot hold on to it forever, and must eventually cede it to his own son. Kronos is also depicted in an unflattering light, described as "the brute" who would put a child "in his belly" without a second thought. Kronos is violent and cruel, which is not necessarily entirely negative, but, significantly, he is also life-denying, unable to let successive generations of gods grow and thrive. As such, the only proper "king among the immortals" can be Zeus, who is able to maintain his power through violence without completely stifling the generative impulse among the gods.

The Olympian Lightner called all the immortal gods to long Olympus, and said that whoever of the gods would fight the Titans with him, he would not smite any of them down from his privileges, but each one would keep the honour he had had before among the immortal gods. And he said that whoever was unhonoured by Kronos and unprivileged, he would set him in the path of honour and privileges, as is right and proper.

Related Characters: Zeus, Kronos

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 14

Explanation and Analysis

Here Zeus exhorts the other gods to join him in the struggle against the Titans in order to ensure victory over Kronos. Unlike his father and his grandfather before him, Zeus does not take on the struggle of succession alone; instead, he enlists the help of others, including both Olympian and Titan gods in his fight, as long as they're willing to respect his rule. Zeus is the first instance in the poem of this sort of generous, consensus-based leadership, one in which allies

are rewarded for their service with "honour and privileges, as is right and proper." Zeus also plays up the fact that his father has not honored these other gods; in fact, he has done the opposite and punished them unjustly. This strategy separates Zeus from the kings who have come before him, and it proves integral to his eventual success. The passage also highlights Zeus' power, indicating with the epithet "Olympian Lightener" that Zeus has supreme control over the powerful weapons of thunder and lightning.

❝ For from her is descended the female sex, a great affliction to mortals as they dwell with their husbands—no fit partners for accursed Poverty, but only for Plenty. As the bees in their sheltered nests feed the drones, those conspirators in badness, and while they busy themselves all day and every day till sundown making the white honeycomb, the drones stay inside in the sheltered cells and pile the toil of others into their own bellies, even so as a bane for mortal men has high-thundering Zeus created women, conspirators in causing difficulty.

Related Characters: Zeus, Prometheus

Related Themes:

Page Number: 20

Explanation and Analysis

This passage describes Zeus' punishment to humankind for accepting Prometheus' gift of fire: Pandora and her box of evils, from whom, Hesiod claims, the entire "female sex" is descended, who are "a great affliction to mortals." Here, the casual misogyny found in the poems discussion of rape and sexual violence rears up again in the form of derogatory descriptions of women. While Pandora technically is a curse against the entire human race, Hesiod takes great pains to emphasize that she is a woman. He goes on to compare women to drone bees (which, ironically, are male bees), who stay "inside the sheltered cells" of the beehive and "pile the toil of others into their own bellies." Thus, women are described as dependents who use men for sustenance without working themselves, illustrating the subtle, and often not-so-subtle, gender discrimination that Hesiod interjects throughout the poem.

In the metaphor relating women to bees, Hesiod again draws close parallels between the natural, human, and divine realms. Zeus's punishment mingles with the description of a beehive, as well as a description of social interaction between men and women in an agricultural world. Ultimately, the three realms inform and inspire one another, and are impossible to disentangle throughout the poem.

❝ Great Olympus quaked under the immortal feet of the lord as he went forth, and the earth groaned beneath him. A conflagration held the violet-dark sea in its grip, both from the thunder and lightning and from the fire of the monster, from the tornado winds and the flaming bolt. All the land was seething, and sky, and sea; long waves raged to and fro about the headlands from the onrush of the immortals, and an uncontrollable quaking arose. Hades was trembling, lord of the dead below, and so were the Titans down in Tartarus with Kronos in their midst, at the incessant clamour and the fearful fighting.

Related Characters: Zeus, Tartarus, Kronos

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 28

Explanation and Analysis

After he has cast down the Titans and banished them to Tartarus, Zeus still has to face continued threats to his power. One of the most potent threats comes in the form of Typhoeus, the son of Earth and Tartarus. Like Zeus, Typhoeus is extremely powerful, and is poised to grow even more so as he grows up. Zeus, however, sees in Typhoeus his potential downfall, and jumps at the chance to destroy Typhoeus before he can grow too powerful. While Zeus used compromise and consensus to topple Kronos from power, his victory over Typhoeus is one of pure, brute force: the "incessant clamour and fearful fighting" is a show of power that is literal and violent. Zeus eventually succeeds in defeating Typhoeus not because of any trickery, but simply because of superior firepower.

The effects of the battle between the two gods are felt not only in the divine realm—it also has an outsized effect on the natural world. According to Hesiod, the land "was seething, and the sky, and the sea," the entire natural world filled with an "uncontrollable quaking." Natural disaster and divine wrath are equated here, with Zeus, wielder of lightning and thunder, capable of significant devastation.

> Farewell now, you dwellers in Olympus, and you islands, continents, and the salt sea between. But now, Olympian Muses, sweet of utterance, daughters of aegis bearing Zeus, sing of the company of goddesses, all those who were bedded with mortal men, immortal themselves, and bore children resembling the gods.

Related Characters: The Muses, Zeus

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 31

Explanation and Analysis

Toward the end of the poem, Hesiod pivots from describing the divine children of other gods, to children whose parentage is mixed—half god, half human. In doing so, he emphasizes that it is genealogy that orders the entire universe of the poem, from the huge, elemental figures of Heaven and Earth to the human heroes and heroines that populate the heroic age. These are children "resembling the gods," but they are still human, and represent the furthest reaches of the genealogical organizing principle expressed at the outset of the poem.

The passage also highlights the intermixture of the natural, human, and divine, not only in its description of half-human, half-immortal children, but also in its description of nature. The "dwellers in Olympus" are listed alongside "islands, continents, and the salt sea between" as if they are part of the same category of things. Indeed, the distinction between divine entities and geological features like oceans and islands is sometimes nonexistent, with nymphs, gods, and goddesses coming to represent various features of the natural world.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

THEOGONY

Hesiod begins his poem by invoking the Muses. He claims that the Muses appeared to him while he was tending sheep as a young man, and taught him the arts of song and poetry. He then details the history of the Muses, who are the nine daughters of Zeus, the king of the divine world, and the goddess Memory. Zeus gives the Muses power over the creative arts, including the ability to appear before and inspire mortals. The Muses, whose "carefree hearts [are] set on song," bestow many blessings upon the men they favor, including beautiful speech, sound judgment, and the admiration of their peers. "Prudent kings" who have found favor with the Muses can easily diffuse conflict with their words and appeal to their people, who venerate them "as if [they] were a god." The Muses will help Hesiod tell the story of the *Theogony*, making his poetry beautiful.

Here, Hesiod makes the Muses' connection to Zeus explicit, emphasizing the fact that they are his daughters. As a result, he also emphasizes his own connection to Zeus, implying that because the Muses have decided to bestow their favor upon them, he is, by extension, also in Zeus' good graces. Hesiod's poetic ability is implied to be an indirect gift from Zeus, who grants the Muses the power to bestow artistic skill on worthy mortals. Hesiod begins the poem by emphasizing the cohesive nature of his world, one in which the human, the divine, and the natural comingle.

Hesiod then begins the *Theogony* in earnest, describing the first divinities that arise, among them Chasm, Earth, Tartarus, and Eros. These gods and goddesses are the foundation of the universe from which everything else—like Night and Day—subsequently stems.

These first deities provide both the material and genealogical basis for the rest of the poem; they are the forebears of all subsequent gods. These deities are both the places in which much of the action of the poem takes place, as well as characters with distinct personalities and genealogies. From the start, Hesiod emphasizes the way in which the natural and the divine intermingle: with gods and goddesses like Earth bridging the gap between the physical and the material, the world is suffused with the divine from the first moments of its existence.

Earth bears Heaven, and together they have many children, including Kronos, Rhea, and Kottos, Briareos, and Gyges From the start, Heaven is wary of his children and fearful that they might someday rise up and usurp his power. As a result, he imprisons Earth and her children in a cave, only visiting when he is "desirous of love."

Heaven's fear of his own children prompts him to brutal action in order to protect his rule, illustrating the ways in which violence can be used to maintain power. Similarly, Heaven essentially imprisons and rapes Earth, exerting violent patriarchal force in order to maintain dominance over her.

Frustrated with Heaven's cruel treatment, Earth crafts a **sickle** (a kind of curved sword) of unbreakable adamantine, and entreats her children to conspire with her against him and set up an ambush. Only Kronos is courageous enough to take Earth up on her offer, vowing to exact revenge upon his "unspeakable father" for his wicked actions.

The conflict between Heaven and Kronos begins the initial cycle of succession in the realm of the gods. Once again, a violent action, this time in the form of an ambush, is necessary to secure power. The sickle, representative of both violent action as well as agricultural bounty, emphasizes the connection between the divine and natural worlds, as well as the implicit link between violence and generation.

Kronos, along with his mother, Earth, sets up an ambush for the next time Heaven comes to visit. When the time comes, Kronos uses the **sickle** to castrate Heaven, effectively defeating him and assuming his position as the ruler of the divine realm. The drops of blood from Heaven's injury create the Furies, Giants, and some nymphs. Heaven's genitals fall into the sea, creating a white foam from which the goddess Aphrodite is born.

Here Kronos fulfills the initial cycle of succession, deposing his father and setting himself up as the new king of the gods. In doing so, however, he replicates the existing power structures, foreshadowing his own eventual fate. The gods and monsters that spring from Heaven's blood and genitals emphasize the sometimes gory details of genealogy and birth.

Hesiod continues the genealogy of the gods, listing the parentage of various divinities as well as creatures like nymphs. One of these figures is Medusa, a Gorgon who is slain by Perseus The genealogy continues with a list of monsters who in turn give birth to more monsters. Some of them continue to haunt humankind, while some have been slain by heroes such as Heracles.

Hesiod continues to emphasize genealogy throughout the poem, illustrating the ways in which the entire divine realm can be organized according to family relation. These gods, heroes, and monsters do not shy away from using violence to achieve their aims.

Hesiod then details the attributes and worship of Hecate, a goddess who is particularly attentive to her followers and guarantees good harvest and bounty to those who worship her. Hecate is especially honored among the gods because of this connection, and is held in high regard by Zeus himself.

Hesiod's description of Hecate emphasizes the intimate connection between the human, the divine, and the natural. In favoring her devout worshippers, Hecate blesses them with natural bounty and agricultural good fortune, illustrating the inextricable connections between nature, humans, and the gods.

Rhea and Kronos have many children but, fearing the same fate as his father, Heaven, Kronos swallows them back into himself so that they will not threaten his power. Unhappy with this state of affairs, Rhea conspires with Earth and Heaven to trick Kronos and spare the baby Zeus, whom she is pregnant with, from being consumed. Instead, she gives birth to Zeus in secret and gives him to Earth to raise, while giving Kronos a swaddled rock to swallow in place of the baby.

Kronos, like his father before him, uses brute force to attempt to secure and maintain his power, and believes that his children pose a distinct threat to his authority. Meanwhile, Rhea is powerless to defy Kronos' cruel actions, illustrating the ways in which violence is used against women and children throughout the poem in order to exert and maintain power.

When Zeus matures, he begins to pose a significant threat to his father, Kronos. He even tricks Kronos into spitting back up the children—Zeus' siblings—that he has swallowed, thereby gaining valuable allies in his conflict against the Titans. Zeus also sets the Cyclopes free from the bondage Kronos placed upon them, further strengthening his forces.

Unlike his father and his grandfather, Zeus makes significant use of his allies both among the Olympians and Titans, illustrating the ways in which compromise and collaboration are necessary to obtain and maintain power.

The poem then details a conflict between Prometheus and Zeus. During a ritual sacrifice, Prometheus tricks Zeus into taking a lesser portion of meat. He also steals divine fire and gifts it to humankind against Zeus' wishes. As a result, Zeus has Prometheus chained to a mountain, condemned to have his liver eaten daily by an eagle. Zeus also dispenses punishment to humans in the form of Pandora and her box of evils, as well as the curse of females more generally.

While Prometheus may be an especially crafty god, even he cannot escape the violent retribution of Zeus, who punishes him with endless torment of the most gruesome sort. The connection between the divine and the human is embodied in Prometheus' gift of fire to humans, as well as in the punishment humanity receives (like sickness and death) from Zeus in the form of Pandora's box. The story of Pandora and her infamous box is further detailed in Hesiod's poem Works and Days.

Zeus and the other Olympian gods wage war against Kronos and the other Titans for control of the divine realm. Zeus enlists the aid of Kottos, Briareos, and Gyges, whom he frees from their bondage. In thanks, they gift Zeus with "**thunder and lightning** and the smoking bolt, which mighty Earth had kept hidden up to then." After the battle has waged on for some time, Zeus encourages his forces to redouble their efforts. With renewed vigor, they finally conquer Kronos and his allies, banishing them to Tartarus. Zeus assumes rule as king of the gods in his victory.

Zeus uses his powerful allies in order to challenge and triumph over the reigning Titans, helmed by his father, Kronos. Unlike Kronos, Zeus uses his skill as a leader and collaborator in order to prevail; however, strength and violence are not without their merit, as the savage Obriateos, Kottos, and Gyges make a significant impact during the battle.

Hesiod then details other inhabitants of the underworld adjacent to Tartarus, including the river Styx, whose waters compel the drinker to speak the truth. Zeus relies on water from the Styx for other gods and goddesses to swear oaths upon.

Here Hesiod further elaborates upon genealogy, emphasizing the ways in which everything in the divine realm is connected by blood, from the heights of Olympus to the depths of Tartarus.

After Zeus assumes power, Earth bears a final child, this time with Tartarus, who is named Typhoeus. Typhoeus is remarkably strong and formidable, and poses a significant threat to Zeus' power. Thinking ahead, Zeus quickly moves to preemptively destroy Typhoeus before Typhoeus has the chance to overthrow Zeus. While they wage a fierce battle, Zeus is eventually victorious, and all that is left of Typhoeus are some vicious winds that don't bode well for sailors.

Zeus, unlike his father and grandfather before him, excels at using collaboration and compromise to get and keep his power. However, he also relies on brute force, especially in his destruction of Typhoeus, whom he brutally kills before the young god can pose a threat to Zeus' power. While Typhoeus may have been thoroughly defeated, he still has a lingering presence in the natural world in the form of stormy weather.

Zeus takes the goddess Metis as his first wife, but swallows her when she is pregnant with Athena, fearing the threat that any clever new children could pose to his continued power. Zeus then takes a succession of other lovers and wives, resulting in a great many children both human and divine. He also gives birth to Athena from his own head, rather than allowing Metis to give birth to her.

Zeus continues to use violence to prevent further succession and to maintain his power, even as he allows new generations to be born. While Zeus does have children, he exerts complete control over them, as in the case of Athena and Metis, refusing to allow his first wife to give birth to and collaborate with a child that could potentially spell his doom.

Hesiod then details the genealogies of many other divine beings and heroes, including those with half-divine, half-human parentage such as Heracles, a prominent hero who partakes in many adventures, including slaying the monster Medusa and freeing the god Prometheus. Hesiod thus completes the historical genealogy from the first moments of existence up until the heroic age.

By incorporating the details of genealogy and succession from the birth of the universe up to the exploits of human heroes and heroines, Hesiod situates the world of the poem as one that is ordered by and relies upon ties of family relation. Significantly, even in the human world, violence is consistently used as a means to achieve one's goals, no matter how brutal.


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