

THEOLOGIES OF THE FAMILY IN  
HOMER AND HESIOD

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**Divergent receptions**

I start with some brief observations about the reception of Homer and Hesiod. In antiquity, these two poets were routinely mentioned together as religious experts. Herodotus, for example, declared: 'It was Hesiod and Homer who first explained to the Greeks the birth of the gods, gave them their names, assigned them their honours and spheres of expertise, and revealed their appearance.'<sup>1</sup> Not all ancient thinkers accepted the religious authority of these two poets, but they generally saw them as offering the same picture of the gods. Xenophanes, the earliest extant author to mention them by name, complained: 'Homer and Hesiod ascribed to the gods every action / that causes shame and reproach among human beings: / theft, adultery, and cheating each other.'<sup>2</sup> Plato followed suit, repeatedly criticising both Homer and Hesiod for their immoral portrayal of the gods. In the second book of the *Republic*, for example, he mixed quotations from the *Theogony* and the Homeric epics, explaining why they were objectionable, and mounting 'a wholesale rejection of traditional Greek polytheism'.<sup>3</sup> For Plato, as for others before and after him, criticising Greek views about the gods meant engaging with the epics of both Homer and Hesiod.<sup>4</sup> This point is often overlooked in the study of Greek religion: although there were no sacred

<sup>1</sup> Hdt. 2.53.2–3.

<sup>2</sup> Xenoph. fr. 21 B 11 DK.

<sup>3</sup> Roochnik 2009: 165.

<sup>4</sup> For the interaction between the receptions of Hesiod and Homer in antiquity, see Koning 2010, who emphasises their role as religious experts.

texts, the epics of Homer and Hesiod had authority, and inspired sustained theological debate.

Very much in contrast with this ancient tendency to treat Homer and Hesiod together as religious experts, modern readers have often underlined the differences between their representations of the gods – differences of fact (for example concerning the genealogy of Aphrodite),<sup>5</sup> but also of tone and approach: Hesiod seems more abstract, more prone to personification; Homer livelier and more entertaining. Nineteenth-century studies of ancient religion articulate clearly these perceived differences between Homeric and Hesiodic depictions of the gods – and these studies are, however subterraneously, still influential today. So, for example, approaches to Gaia, the Earth Mother, are shaped by Bachofen's *Das Mutterrecht: Eine Untersuchung über die Gynaikokratie der Alten Welt nach ihrer religiösen und rechtlichen Natur* (Basel, 1861).<sup>6</sup> As Georgoudi points out, 'many scholars, whether or not they refer explicitly to Bachofen, have accepted the general, and often vague, notion that a feminine divinity, a mistress of nature, was the dominant religious figure in prehistoric or pre-Hellenic Mediterranean societies'.<sup>7</sup> Even those who reject such views of prehistoric religion are often prepared to interpret Gaia in terms of individual cognition and development: the mother is apprehended first and this – they argue – is the reason why she dominates the early stages of the history of the cosmos in Hesiod's *Theogony*.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup> On the various versions of the genealogy of Aphrodite in early hexameter epic see, for example, Olson 2012.

<sup>6</sup> For an interpretation of this book as a contribution to the history of religion, see Momigliano 1987: 91: 'It is the purpose of this lecture to try to define the place of Bachofen inside the movement of studies of the history of religion in the nineteenth century. That is not the place where he is often found ... but I venture to believe that it is the place in which he, Bachofen, would have liked to find himself.' For the legacies of Bachofen in anthropology, see Cantarella 1988.

<sup>7</sup> Georgoudi 1992: 458. She quotes Jane Harrison 1903 and W. K. C. Guthrie 1950 in support of her statement, and both have of course been influential in subsequent scholarship.

<sup>8</sup> See especially Caldwell 1989, quoted below. Strauss Clay 2003 does not offer an explicitly Freudian reading of the *Theogony*, but makes several points that are compatible with one, starting from her opening premise: 'Unlike the biblical Genesis, Hesiod's model for the coming into being of the cosmos is not that of purposeful

Bachofen himself often blended personal and historical perspectives; in this respect, it seems significant that his study of early matriarchy was dedicated to his own mother. More generally, *Das Mutterrecht* explores the connections between ancient religion and individual desire: 'Hesiod's world, with its dominant mother ... how close it is to the pictures of a lost happiness which always centre round the dominance of motherhood', he wrote.<sup>9</sup> It is possible to trace a line between this kind of historical/psychological approach and some recent interpretations of the *Theogony*. Thus Caldwell, for example, writes: 'The transition from symbiosis to separation ... appears in the Hesiodic myth as the emergence of Gaia, the mother who is the first object of the child's perception and the first structuring principle in the child's life.'<sup>10</sup> Although neither Bachofen nor Freud was particularly interested in Hesiod, and although their work is in turn rarely acknowledged by scholars working on early epic, current approaches to the *Theogony* can easily be connected to nineteenth-century theories about prehistory and the subconscious. Links of this kind become especially productive, in my view, when they are made explicit.<sup>11</sup>

The case of Homer is different. His gods are seldom thought to reflect deep religious, historical or psychological truths. They are firmly approached as literary creations, examples of 'sublime frivolity'.<sup>12</sup> This frames their interpretation in terms of poetic licence, and social recreation.<sup>13</sup> Thus Slatkin, for example, describes the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* as 'resolutely secular. Indeed, it may be said that the artistic goals and social function of the poems transformed their

creation by a designing Creator, but follows instead the procreative pattern of a human family' (14). See also notes 27 and 28 below.

<sup>9</sup> Bachofen 1967: 81. He was particularly interested in the Hesiodic *Catalogue of Women*, which he interpreted as historical evidence for matrilinear social structures.

<sup>10</sup> Caldwell 1989: 132.

<sup>11</sup> Leonard 2013 demonstrates this.

<sup>12</sup> The phrase 'erhabener Unernst' was coined by Reinhardt 1938: 25; Griffin 1980: 199 offered the apt translation 'sublime frivolity'.

<sup>13</sup> Poetic licence, as a category of literary criticism, was conceived precisely as a means for dealing with the gods in ancient epic: Graziosi 2013a: 167.



inherited elements and shaped their specific representation of the gods more than did any particular religious belief or practice.<sup>14</sup> Again, this position can easily be traced back to nineteenth-century scholarship. In his *Études d'histoire religieuse: Les religions de l'antiquité* (Paris, 1857), Ernest Renan, for example, contrasts the depiction of the gods in Hesiod's *Theogony*, which he calls 'un premier rudiment de théologie nationale', with the salacious stories found in the Homeric epics. He insists that, unlike Hesiod, 'Homer is a very bad theologian, since his gods are nothing but poetic characters, at the same level as human beings ... The most respectable myths become saucy stories in his hands, pretty themes for recitation, with an entirely human colour.'<sup>15</sup>

This chapter attempts to set up a dialogue between ancient and modern receptions, asking why it is that Homer and Hesiod were said to share the same views about the gods in antiquity, whereas in nineteenth-century scholarship (and today) Hesiod features in grand theories about prehistoric religion and the unconscious, while Homer's gods are approached as mere literary creations, and often even designated as 'secular'.<sup>16</sup> The point is not to dismiss out of hand modern approaches, or indeed early responses to the gods in epic, but rather to ask to what extent Homer and Hesiod share a coherent understanding of the gods, and what that understanding might involve. These questions seem to me broadly theological in orientation, especially if we adopt a definition of theology as 'a systematic expression of beliefs' and 'a clarification of their relation to other areas of belief' – for example, a clarification of how Homeric and Hesiodic visions of the gods relate to each other, but also how they fit with broader social, religious and

philosophical positions.<sup>17</sup> It makes sense to investigate these questions by focusing on a specific theme, and that of divine conflict in the *Theogony* and in *Iliad* 21 seems ideally suited. This choice is motivated by two considerations. First, the differences between Homeric and Hesiodic depictions of the gods are particularly obvious in relation to this theme: the Hesiodic myth of succession is presented as an issue of cosmic significance, whereas the 'Theomachia' of *Iliad* 21 is introduced as a source of amusement for Zeus (and hence surely also for Homeric audiences). Second, a focus on Olympian family dynamics can be useful not only in order to explore whether Homer and Hesiod share similar beliefs about the gods, but also in order to relate those beliefs to some broader social, historical and ethical concerns.

Since the days of Bachofen and Renan, classical scholars have developed a much better understanding of the composition, context and contents of early Greek epic. Largely as a result of Milman Parry's work, scholars are now agreed that individual hexameter poems belong to a wider epic tradition which shares the same techniques of composition, and displays remarkable linguistic coherence.<sup>18</sup> To be sure, some studies try to date specific poems relative to one another on the basis of linguistic variations,<sup>19</sup> but such variations are small-scale compared to the overall impression of resonant coherence. In terms of content, individual poems share not only particular expressions, or formulae, but a sense of how the world developed from its origins to life as it is now. This historical vision is, in fact, embedded in the very formulae that characterise the early hexameter tradition: Zeus is 'son of Kronos' and 'father of gods and men'; the heroes belong to a distant past, are 'godlike' and hence much stronger than 'men such as they are nowadays'.<sup>20</sup> Each poem explicitly and

<sup>14</sup> Slatkin 2011: 217.

<sup>15</sup> Renan 1857: 64–5, translation my own.

<sup>16</sup> As well as Slatkin, quoted above, see, for example, Redfield 1994: 247: 'the *Iliad*, although "pervaded from end to end by an elaborate polytheism", is in virtue of the characteristic ambiguities of its elaboration a founding document of Greek secularism ... The role of the gods in the story is destabilizing; they act not so much to decure an intelligible cosmos as to account for the unintelligible variations within it.' I find this argument surprising: ambiguity and unknowability are important aspects of many sacred accounts of the divine.

<sup>17</sup> Hinells 1984: 328.

<sup>18</sup> See Parry 1971, together with the discussion of his legacy offered in Graziosi and Haubold 2005.

<sup>19</sup> Janko 1982 is the most influential example of this approach.

<sup>20</sup> The expressions 'son of Kronos', 'father of gods and men' and 'godlike' are ubiquitous; for heroes stronger than 'men such as they are nowadays' see Hom. *Il.* 5.302–4, 12.445–9 and 20.285–7.

carefully indicates its place within this shared understanding of the world and its history.<sup>21</sup> The *Theogony* starts at the very beginning of everything; the Homeric epics are set in the age of the heroes; Hesiod's *Works and Days* describes the present, a terrible age when men have to work in order to secure a living from the land. The passing of time, and the succession of different ages, affects not only the history of mortals, but also that of the gods. As Strauss Clay argued in *The Politics of Olympus*: 'the Homeric poems show us the fully perfected and stable Olympian pantheon in its interaction with the heroes; the *Theogony* reveals the genesis of the Olympian order and ends with the triumphal accession to power of Zeus. Between theogonic poetry and epic there remains a gap, one that is filled by the Olympian narratives of the longer hymns.'<sup>22</sup> Early audiences would not necessarily have known or cared about the relative dates of composition of individual hexameter poems, but they would have recognised that the *Theogony* gave an account of the beginning of the cosmos, that the age of the heroes came later and that, from the perspective of the present, the heroes themselves were long dead. In order to understand the portrayal of the gods in the *Theogony* and *Iliad* 21, it thus seems useful to adopt an approach which takes into account the internal chronology of the poems, rather than possible dates of composition, and ask whether that chronology affects the dynamics of divine conflict.

### The right of the mother

Gaia, the Earth Mother, plays an important role in Hesiod's *Theogony*. If we take χάος at 116 to mean something like 'gaping void' or 'chasm', then she is the very first form of existence in the history of the cosmos.<sup>23</sup> Quite what she is, however, remains unclear. From her very first appearance, Gaia seems

<sup>21</sup> This point is made at greater length in Graziosi and Haubold 2005.

<sup>22</sup> Strauss Clay 1989: 15.

<sup>23</sup> See West 1966 *ad loc.*

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to be both material earth and anthropomorphic goddess (*Th.* 116–18):<sup>24</sup>

ἦτοι μὲν πρώτιστα χάος γένετ'· αὐτὰρ ἔπειτα  
Γαί' εὐρύστερνος, πάντων ἕδος ἀσφαλὲς αἰεὶ  
ἀθανάτων οἳ ἔχουσι κάρη νιφόεντος Ὀλύμπου.

First came chasm; and then came  
broad-breasted Earth, secure seat for ever of all  
the immortals who occupy the peak of snowy Olympus.

The epithet εὐρύστερνος, 'broad-breasted', presents the goddess as a figure with a recognisably human appearance.<sup>25</sup> The phrase ἕδος ἀσφαλὲς, by contrast, suggests something rather inanimate, a secure place where the Olympian gods may reside. Line 117 anticipates the trajectory of the whole poem, since in the course of Hesiod's narrative Gaia gradually loses her anthropomorphic characteristics.<sup>26</sup> In the beginning, she behaves very much like an anthropomorphic figure, giving birth to several deities, including one 'equal to herself', Ouranos.

On becoming her sexual partner, Ouranos tries to constrain her powers of generation, and thus commits the first act of evil in the history of the cosmos (154–60):

δοσοὶ γὰρ Γαίης τε καὶ Οὐρανοῦ ἐξεγένοντο,  
δεινότατοι παῖδων, σφετέρῳ δ' ἤχθοντο τοκῇ  
ἐξ ἀρχῆς· καὶ τῶν μὲν ὅπως τις πρῶτα γένοιτο,  
πάντας ἀποκρύπτασκε καὶ ἐς φάος οὐκ ἀνέσκε  
Γαίης ἐν κευθμῶνι, κακῶ δ' ἐπετέρπετο ἔργῳ,  
Οὐρανός· ἢ δ' ἐντὸς στοναχίζετο Γαῖα πελώρη  
στεινομένη, δολίην δὲ κακὴν ἐπεφράσσατο τέχνην.

For all those that were born of Gaia and Ouranos  
were most fearsome 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 Gaia, and would not

<sup>24</sup> All translations of Hesiod are based on West 1988, with slight adaptations.

<sup>25</sup> In early hexameter poetry, the epithet is used only of Gaia, and of her only in the *Theogony*, though cf. βαθυστέρνον πλάτος αἰης in *Cypria* fr. 1, quoted below, pp. 47–8.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Strauss Clay 2003: 15: 'Hesiod describes Gaia proleptically as the "seat of gods of all the gods who inhabit Olympus", gods who have not yet been born. From the beginning, then, Hesiod alludes to the final disposition of the cosmos, a disposition that is somehow immanent from the outset.'



let them into the light; and he took pleasure in the evil work,  
did Heaven, while the huge Earth was tight-pressed inside,  
and groaned. And then she thought up an evil trick.

Ouranos' behaviour is explicitly condemned in the poem: not only is he said to indulge in 'evil work', but we are told that he takes pleasure in it.<sup>27</sup> His violence in turn provokes Gaia to further evil. She makes a sickle, instructs her children about her intention to have Ouranos castrated, hears that Kronos is willing to help her and rejoices in her heart. Kronos, for his part, gives a clear rationale for deciding to help his mother (170–3):

Μῆτηρ, ἐγὼ κεν τοῦτό γ' ὑποσχόμενος τελέσαιμι  
ἔργον, ἐπεὶ πατρός γε δυσωνύμου οὐκ ἀλεγίζω  
ἡμέτερου· πρότερος γάρ ἀεικέα μῆσατο ἔργα.  
Ὡς φάτο· γήθησεν δὲ μέγα φρεσὶ Γαῖα πελώρη.

'Mother, I would undertake this task and accomplish  
it – I am not afraid of our unspeakable father. After all, he  
began it by his ugly behaviour.' So he spoke,  
and massive Earth was greatly delighted in her heart.

When Ouranos next spreads over Gaia, 'pulling over the night, and demanding sex' (176–8), Kronos emerges from the body of his mother and castrates his father.<sup>28</sup> As often, the passage is both abstract and anthropomorphic: Hesiod evokes the onset of evening, as the dark sky spreads over the earth, but also describes a scene of terrifying human sex.

There are obvious parallels in the behaviour of Gaia and Ouranos: evil action (κακῶ ... ἔργῳ) is met with an evil trick (κακῆν ... τέχνην).<sup>29</sup> Ouranos 'takes pleasure' in inflicting pain on Gaia, while she is 'delighted' that Kronos supports her castration plans. And yet there are differences too. Ouranos is the

<sup>27</sup> Strauss Clay 2003: 17 interprets Kronos' evil act with a precision which is not, in my view, quite warranted by the details provided in the text: 'Hesiod relates how Uranus refused to allow his offspring to be born, "but kept all of them hidden and did not allow them to come up into the light" (157) – apparently by blocking the birth canal through continuous sexual intercourse.' In fact, lines 176–8 suggest that Ouranos demands sex at night, rather than inflicting it continuously.

<sup>28</sup> Strauss Clay 2003: 17 rightly points out that 'Gaia justifies her actions in moral terms based on the doctrine of vengeance', and further points to a problem: 'once set in motion ... the cycle of revenge, fueled by mutual hatred of parent and child, can only repeat itself'.

<sup>29</sup> See further Arthur 1982: 65.

first perpetrator; Gaia acts in self-defence. Ouranos is entirely selfish; Gaia creates a degree of consensus. She is clever, he is a brute. Moreover, although Ouranos is said to be 'equal' to Gaia (126), he loses out in their confrontation.

After Kronos castrates his father, he in turn faces the danger of succession. Indeed, Gaia and Ouranos prophesy to him that he will be defeated by his son Zeus (463–5).<sup>30</sup> As a protective measure against the threat of being deposed, Kronos tries to take over the process of gestation by eating his own children.<sup>31</sup> Rhea seeks help from her own parents, Gaia and Ouranos, in order to save her youngest son, Zeus. In the event, Gaia alone comes to her rescue, and ensures that Zeus is saved. We are told that Kronos is 'tricked by the cunning schemes of Gaia' (494) and 'beaten by the strength of his own son' (496): this is a replay of what happened in the previous generation, since in that case too Gaia's cunning was accompanied by a son's violent act against his father. Once in charge, Zeus frees his siblings and liberates the Cyclopes too. They, in turn, grant him the gift of the thunderbolt as a sign of their gratitude. It is precisely by using that weapon, which we are told was once hidden inside Gaia's body (505), that Zeus finally defeats the Earth Mother.

In order to seal his supremacy, Zeus has to vanquish the Titans, and he does so by listening to the advice of Gaia who, we are told, 'explains everything very clearly' to him and to the other Olympian gods (626f.). The final titanic conflict is that between Zeus and Typhoeus, who is the youngest and last son of Gaia (821). This confrontation ends with the melting down of Gaia herself, as a form of collateral damage. The most amazing conflagration happens, in fact, after Typhoeus is already dead (857–67):

αὐτὰρ ἐπεὶ δὴ μιν δάμασε πληγῆσιν ἰμάσσας,  
ἦριπε γυιωθεῖς, στονάχιζε δὲ Γαῖα πελώρη·  
φλὸς δὲ κεραυνωθέντος ἀπέσσυτο τοῖο ἀνακτος  
...  
πληγέντος, πολλή δὲ πελώρη καίετο Γαῖα  
αὐτμῇ θεσπεσίῃ, καὶ ἐτήκετο κασσίτερος ὥς

<sup>30</sup> For discussion of this detail see below, p. 44.

<sup>31</sup> Arthur 1982 and Zeitlin 1996: 78–9 offer powerful readings of Hesiod's succession myth as a struggle over reproduction.

τέχνη ὑπ' αἰζήων ἐν ἑυτρήτοις χρόνοις  
θαλφθεῖς, ἢ σίδηρος, ὃ περ κρατερώτατός ἐστιν,  
οὐρεὺς ἐν βήσσησι δαμαζόμενος πυρὶ κηλέω  
τήκεται ἐν χθονὶ διῇ ὑφ' Ἡφαίστου παλάμησιν·  
ὥς ἄρα τήκετο Γαῖα σέλαι πυρὸς αἰθόμενιο.

When Zeus had overcome Typhoeus, hitting him with his blows,  
Typhoeus collapsed crippled, and the huge Gaia groaned.  
Flames shot from the thunderstruck lord where he was smitten,

...  
The huge Gaia burned  
far and wide with unbelievable heat, melting like tin heated  
by the skill of craftsmen in crucibles with bellow-holes,  
or as iron, which is the strongest substance, when it is  
overpowered by burning fire in mountain glens, melts  
in the divine ground by Hephaestus' craft:  
even so was Gaia melting in the glare of the conflagration.

This passage contains one of the very few similes in Hesiod's poetry, and it is used to underline the moment when Zeus melts down Gaia. We may well ask what happens to her after this treatment. For a start, it seems that she never generates horrible monsters like Typhoeus again. More generally, her cunning seems curbed. Editors of texts that describe later phases in the history of the cosmos, after this meltdown, print γαῖα far more often than Γαῖα, although Gaia (the capital goddess) does feature occasionally.

Even Ouranos, after his castration, acts twice more in the *Theogony*, on both occasions together with Gaia, warning patriarchs in danger of being replaced by their sons (463–5 and 891–3). How active these interventions are remains, however, open to question: perhaps the demise of Ouranos functions, in itself, as a piece of advice or prophecy for Kronos and Zeus.<sup>32</sup> At any rate, when faced with the danger of succession, Zeus combines the strategies of his father and his grandfather: he prevents birth *and* eats his children, by swallowing his pregnant wife Metis.<sup>33</sup> That strategy finally works. Metis was due

<sup>32</sup> West 1966 *ad* 463 rightly casts doubt on Ouranos' levels of participation here, noting that he 'does not appear elsewhere in an oracular capacity', whereas 'Gaia is said to have been the first occupant of the Delphic oracular seat ... and elsewhere too there are traces of oracular connections. ... Uranos probably appears here and in 891ff. merely as a complement of Gaia.'

<sup>33</sup> See further Arthur 1982: 78.

to deliver twins, a boy and a girl – but Zeus lets out of his head only the girl, Athena. She remains a virgin, so she cannot switch her loyalties from her father to a son. As a result, Zeus remains ruler and 'father of gods and men' for ever more.

In the succession myth as a whole, there is a sense of development and change.<sup>34</sup> Control over gestation and birth gradually shifts from the mother to the father. Violent conflict starts off absolute and elemental, but gradually begins to include a degree of mediation, consensus and gift-exchange. Ouranos acts on his own behalf; Gaia requires the help of Kronos; Rhea then follows parental advice, and achieves her ends though the active intervention of Gaia. Zeus, finally, acts on the advice of both Gaia and Ouranos, and eventually receives the gift of the thunderbolt in exchange for freeing the Cyclopes. It is with this gift (and token of consensus) that he melts down Gaia herself, and inhibits her powers of generation and cunning. Zeus' attack on Gaia is necessary, not least because she played a powerful role in the creation of the world, and at every stage in the succession myth: she now needs to be brought under control. What remains to be seen is what happens to both Gaia and family dynamics after the rule of Zeus is established.

Just as Gaia ceases to give birth to gods and monsters, so Zeus himself also stops generating gods, and starts to father mortals. The end of *Theogony* traces the transition from the generation of gods to that of mortal men. Hermes is the youngest son of Zeus and a goddess (938–9). Dionysus is the son of Zeus and a mortal woman but, our text specifies, both Semele and Dionysus are granted immortality (940–2). Heracles is the next borderline case: although he is the son of Alcmena, he is given an immortal wife and allowed to live forever (943–4). After that, the Muses are invited to sing of the goddesses who had sex with men and gave birth to godlike mortals (965–8). Next, the Muses are asked about the women who slept with gods and gave birth to the heroes: and this is where the *Catalogue of Women* begins. The heroic children of these women will die, and therefore the process of generational

<sup>34</sup> See Arthur 1982 and Strauss Clay 2003: 12–30.



succession will be reconfigured as unavoidable and normal. What the male gods refused to accept – generation and generational change – mortals have to accept as the only human form of continuity in the face of death. Viewed from the perspective of ordinary mortals, the behaviour of male gods in the *Theogony* is objectionable. Human fathers may like to remain in charge forever, but they cannot – nor should they try and resort to the kind of behaviour displayed by Ouranos, Kronos or Zeus. The text of the *Theogony* makes that clear: explicit value judgements condemn Ouranos' first act of violence. The condemnation is interesting. From a human perspective, hating one's own children, preventing them from being born or eating them is of course objectionable. From a divine perspective, however, the wish to remain in power is understandable, and may even seem legitimate. The *Theogony* solves the problem of divine succession by bringing the generation of gods to an end, and beginning a process of human birth and death: what the gods cannot handle, mortals must bear.

It seems noteworthy that, after the rule of Zeus is established, Gaia concerns herself not just with generation, but also with human death. In the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, for example, she colludes with Zeus, produces a beautiful flower and thereby ensnares Persephone, who falls into Hades while trying to pick it.<sup>35</sup> Persephone's subsequent visits above ground, and returns down into the realm of Hades, mark the seasons, and thus establish an agricultural pattern whereby Gaia provides sustenance for mortals. At the same time, her visits are linked to human death and the afterlife, as the hymn itself, and the Eleusinian mysteries to which it was linked, make clear.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>35</sup> See further Rudhardt in Foley 1994: 205: Zeus 'must open a gap through which Hades might pass in the boundary that separates their two worlds', and Arthur 1977: 14: 'Gaia [Earth] cooperates in the scheme to assert male dominion: Persephone was seduced by the beauty of the narcissus' (the essay is reprinted in Foley 1994).

<sup>36</sup> About Gaia's appearances in the *Hymn*, Foley 1994: 53 writes as follows: 'whereas Gaia earlier grew the narcissus as a trap for Persephone at Zeus's behest (8–9), Demeter now prevents the earth (Gaia) from sending up the seed (306–7)'. The threat of famine is eventually dispelled, and a regular agricultural pattern is established. Human beings thus live, eat and die, much in the manner described by Apollo in *Il.* 21.462–7, a passage discussed below. On Gaia and agriculture in the

In another important early text, Gaia is associated with the death of the heroes: the Trojan and the Theban wars are presented as a means of lightening her burden, thus ensuring sustainability and cosmic order.<sup>37</sup> A scholiast commenting on the 'plan of Zeus' at the beginning of the *Iliad* takes the expression to refer to the whole Trojan War, rather than the more specific conflict between Achilles and Agamemnon, and claims that, in the *Cypria*, Zeus planned the war in response to Gaia's suffering (*Cypria* fr. 1 EGF):

ἄλλοι δὲ ἀπὸ ἱστορίας τινὸς εἶπον εἰρηκέναι τὸν Ὀμηρον. φασὶ γὰρ τὴν Γῆν βαρουμένην ὑπὸ ἀνθρώπων πολυπληθίας, μηδεμιᾶς ἀνθρώπων οὐσης εὐσεβείας, αἰτῆσαι τὸν Δία κουφισθῆναι τοῦ ἄχθους· τὸν δὲ Δία πρῶτον μὲν εὐθύς ποιῆσαι τὸν Θηβαϊκὸν πόλεμον, δι' οὗ πολλοὺς πάνυ ἀπώλεσεν, ὕστερον δὲ πάλιν τὸν Ἰλιακόν, συμβούλῳ τῷ Μῶμῳ χρησάμενος, ἣν Διὸς βουλὴν Ὀμηρὸς φησιν, ἐπειδὴ οἷός τε ἦν κεραυνοῖς ἢ κατακλυσμοῖς ἅπαντας διαφθεῖρειν· ὅπερ τοῦ Μῶμου κωλύσαντος, ὑποθεμένου δὲ αὐτῷ γνῶμας δύο, τὴν Θέτιδος θνητογαμίαν καὶ θυγατρὸς καλῆς γένναν, ἐξ ὧν ἀμφοτέρων πόλεμος Ἑλλήσι τε καὶ βαρβάροις ἐγένετο, ἀφ' οὗ συνέβη κουφισθῆναι τὴν γῆν πολλῶν ἀναιρεθέντων. ἡ δὲ ἱστορία παρὰ Στασίῳ τῷ τὰ Κύπρια πεποιηκότι, εἰπόντι οὕτως·

ἦν ὅτε μυρία φύλα κατὰ χθόνα πλαζόμεν' <αἰεῖ>  
<ἀνθρώπων ἐ>βάρυ<νε βαθυ>στέρνου πλάτος αἴης,  
Ζεὺς δὲ ἰδὼν ἐλέησε καὶ ἐν πυκιναῖς πραπίδεσσι  
κουφίσαι ἀνθρώπων παμβώτορα σύνθετο Γαῖαν,  
ρίπτισσας πολέμου μεγάλῃν ἔριν Ἰλιακοῖο,  
ὄφρα κενώσειεν θανάτῳ βάρος. οἱ δ' ἐνὶ Τροίῃ  
ἦρωες κτείνοντο, Διὸς δ' ἐτελείετο βουλή.

Others have said that Homer was referring to a myth. For they say that Gaia, being weighed down by the multitude of people, there being no piety among humankind, asked Zeus to be relieved of the burden. Zeus first and at once brought about the Theban War, by means of which he destroyed very large numbers, and afterwards, the Trojan one, with Blame as his adviser, this being what Homer calls the plan of Zeus, seeing that he was capable of destroying everyone with thunderbolts or floods. Blame prevented this, and proposed two ideas to him, the marriage of Thetis to a mortal and the birth of a beautiful daughter. From these two events war came about between Greeks and barbarians, resulting in the lightening of Gaia as many were killed. The story is found in Stasinus, the author of the *Cypria*, who says: 'There was a time when the

*Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, see further Felson Rubin and Deal 1980, revised and reprinted in Foley 1994.

<sup>37</sup> For further discussion, see Graziosi and Haubold 2005: ch. 4.

countless races of men roaming constantly over the land were weighing down the deep-breasted Gaia's expanse. Zeus took pity when he saw it, and in his complex mind he resolved to relieve all-nurturing Gaia of mankind's weight by fanning the great conflict of the Trojan War, to void the burden through death. So the warriors at Troy kept being killed, and Zeus' plan was fulfilled.<sup>37</sup>

There are several points of contact between this passage and the myth of succession in the *Theogony*. In both cases, we are confronted with the oppression of Gaia, whose body is weighed down either by Ouranos or by the multitude of mortals. Again, in both cases, violence is used to lighten Gaia's burden, and make space for new generations. But there are also differences: Zeus, far from having to assert his power over Gaia, whom he already melted down in the *Theogony*, can now take pity on her and ensure that she remains at peace, by instigating the Theban and the Trojan wars. This kind of logic, whereby human beings suffer in order to preserve the peace of the gods and the stability of the cosmos, finds many parallels in the ancient world. In the Near East, men are said to work to ensure the gods' leisure.<sup>38</sup> In the Greek world, Hermes is taught not to steal from Apollo, and becomes the protector of human thieves.<sup>39</sup> Similarly, Aphrodite is punished because she makes Zeus fall in love at her whim, but can inflict her power on mortals without fear of retaliation.<sup>40</sup> In the *Cypria*, at least as summarised by the scholiast, the Theban and the Trojan wars are there to ensure that the divine order remains stable. Gaia instigated conflict among generations of gods, and is now the cause of human wars.

### Sublime frivolity

Although the *Cypria* presents the Trojan War as a means of preserving divine stability, the gods are never entirely pacified: as befits a polytheistic system, they maintain their own characters and perspectives, and thus retain also the potential for conflict.

<sup>38</sup> See, for example, the Babylonian poem of the flood, *Atrahasis*, Tablet I (OB version); and *Enuma Elish*, Tablet VI.7–8.

<sup>39</sup> See, especially, the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes*.

<sup>40</sup> This point is well articulated in the longer *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite*.

In the *Iliad*, they even engage in a 'battle' on the Trojan plain, thus in some way paralleling the mortal war that is also raging there. Some mighty lines of poetry introduce the 'Theomachia' at 21.385–90: heaven and earth ring out, as the gods line up. The term used is *χθών* rather than *γᾶ* ('the ground', rather than 'earth' in all its depth and vitality), but there is no mistaking the cosmic resonance of the scene.<sup>41</sup> Ouranos even 'sounds the trumpet', announcing battle – an expression that attracted much debate in antiquity.<sup>42</sup> Whatever the exact tone of that phrase, these 'cosmic sound effects' are soon punctured by Zeus' laughter, as he settles on Mt Olympus, and prepares to enjoy the spectacle of the other gods fighting each other on the plain.<sup>43</sup> It seems that, right from the outset, we are invited to view this conflict as art, or at least entertainment – not just for Zeus, but also for us, who share the elevated perspective of the poet and the Muses.<sup>44</sup>

ἐν δ' ἄλλοισι θεοῖσιν ἔρις πέσε βεβριθυῖα  
ἀργαλή, δίχα δέ σφιν ἐνὶ φρεσὶ θυμὸς ἄητο·  
σὺν δ' ἔπεσον μεγάλῳ πατάγῳ, βράχε δ' εὐρεῖα χθών,  
ἄμφι δὲ σάλπιγξεν μέγας οὐρανός, διὲ δὲ Ζεὺς  
ἦμενος Οὐλύμπῳ· ἐγέλασσε δὲ οἱ φίλον ἦτορ  
γῆθοσύνη, δὲ δ' ὄρατο θεοὺς ἔριδι ξυνιόντας.

Then a painful, weighty conflict descended on the other gods,  
and the spirit in their hearts was blown in contrary directions.  
They collided with a great crash, and the broad earth groaned,  
and the great high sky sounded its trumpet; Zeus heard it  
as he sat on Olympus, and laughed with delight in his  
dear heart when he saw the gods clashing in strife.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>41</sup> Compare an earlier passage introducing the battle of the gods, which also has cosmic grandeur: *Il.* 20.56–65. As Griffin 1980: 185 and Schein 1984: 50–1 rightly note, the passage closely resembles the beginning of the conflict between Zeus and Typhoeus in *Hes. Th.* 847–52.

<sup>42</sup> Plin. *Ep.* 9.26.6 suggests that readers should consider carefully whether expressions like this one are *incredibilia* ... *et inania* or *magnifica caelestia*. Ancient critics generally express their propensity for one or the other view: Demetr. *Eloc.* 83 argues that Ouranos' trumpet produces an effect of *μικροπρέπεια*, whereas Ps.-Longinus 9.6 finds the image striking, novel and powerful. The scholia *ad loc.* worry that 'sounding the trumpet' is a late phenomenon, and does not belong to the age of the heroes. See also Philostr. *Her.* 5.9–10, p. 162f., quoted below.

<sup>43</sup> 'Cosmic sound effects' is the phrase used by Richardson 1993 *ad* 21.387–8.

<sup>44</sup> On the divine perspective of the poet of the *Iliad* and his audiences, see further Graziosi 2013b.

<sup>45</sup> *Il.* 21.385–90. Translations of Homer are based on Verity 2011.



Some ancient readers appreciated the ‘Theomachia’ for its dramatic qualities, while criticising Homer’s theology, on the ground that the gods seemed too human. Thus Philostratus, for example, observed:<sup>46</sup>

καὶ τὰς μάχας δέ, ὅποσαι Ποσειδῶνι μὲν πρὸς Ἀπόλλω, Λητοῖ δὲ πρὸς Ἑρμῇ ἐγένοντο, καὶ ὡς ἐμάχοντο ἡ Ἀθηνᾶ τῷ Ἄρει καὶ ὁ Ἥφαιστος τῷ ὕδατι, ταῦτα τὸν Ὀρφῆως τρόπον πεφιλοσοφῆσθαι τῷ Ὀμήρῳ φησὶ καὶ οὐ μεμπτὰ εἶναι πρὸς ἐκπληξιν καὶ θεῖα, ὥσπερ τὸ “ἄμφι δὲ σάλπιγξε μέγας οὐρανός”, καὶ <ὡς> “Ἄιδωνεύς τοῦ θρόνου τινασσομένης τῆς γῆς ἐκ Ποσειδῶνος.” μέμφεται δὲ τοῦ Ὀμήρου ἐκεῖνα· πρῶτα μὲν ὅτι θεοὺς ἐγκαταμίξας ἀνθρώποις περὶ μὲν τῶν ἀνθρώπων μεγάλη εἴρηκε, περὶ δὲ τῶν θεῶν μικρά καὶ φαῦλα ...

[Protesilaus] says that, like Orpheus, Homer represented truly the battles between Poseidon and Apollo and between Hermes and Leto, as well as how Athena fought with Ares and Hephaistos with the river. And these battles are divine and not contemptible for their thrill, as the verse goes, “Great heaven trumpeted on all sides” [21.388], and also “Aidoneus leapt up from his throne, when the earth was shaken by Poseidon” [20.57–67]. But he finds fault with Homer for the following things. First, because, after intermingling gods and mortals, Homer spoke highly about mortals, but contemptibly and basely about the gods ...<sup>47</sup>

Philostratus praises Homer for achieving ἐκπληξίς, ‘the thrill of shock’. This comment fits a well-established tradition of ancient criticism. In the *Poetics*, Aristotle criticises Homeric depictions of the gods, which he considers unlikely as well as immoral: ‘probably what is said [about the gods] is neither true nor better than the truth, but rather what Xenophanes maintains’.<sup>48</sup> Still, he offers a literary argument in defence of

<sup>46</sup> Philostr. *Her.* 25.9f.

<sup>47</sup> The translation is based on Berenson MacLean and Bradshaw Aitken 2003.

<sup>48</sup> It may be useful to quote the context of this statement in full. *Poetics* 1460b32–7: πρὸς δὲ τούτοις ἐὰν ἐπιτιμᾶται ὅτι οὐκ ἀληθῆ, ἀλλ’ ἴσως <ὡς> δεῖ, οἷον καὶ Σοφοκλῆς ἔφη αὐτὸς μὲν οἷους δεῖ ποιεῖν, Εὐριπίδην δὲ οἷοι εἶναι, ταύτην λυτέον. εἰ δὲ μηδετέρως, ὅτι οὕτω φασιν, οἷον τὰ περὶ θεῶν· ἴσως γὰρ οὐτε βέλτιον οὕτω λέγειν οὐτ’ ἀληθῆ, ἀλλ’ εἰ ἔτυχεν ὥσπερ Ξενοφάνει· ἀλλ’ οὖν φασι.

Next, supposing the charge is ‘That is not true’, one can solve the problem by saying ‘But perhaps it ought to be’, just as Sophocles said that he portrayed people as they ought to be and Euripides as they are. If neither of these will do, then ‘Because that is what people say’, as is the case concerning the gods. Probably what is said is neither true nor better than the truth, but rather what Xenophanes maintains – but all the same that is what is said about the gods.

the gods in epic.<sup>49</sup> He insists that their depiction can be justified if it contributes to the aim of poetry (namely the katharsis of the emotions) and produces a more thrilling effect than could be achieved by more credible representations:<sup>50</sup>

ἀδύνατα πεποιήται, ἡμάρτηται· ἀλλ’ ὁρθῶς ἔχει, εἰ τυγχάνει τοῦ τέλους τοῦ αὐτῆς (τὸ γὰρ τέλος εἶρηται), εἰ οὕτως ἐκπληκτικώτερον ἢ αὐτὸ ἢ ἄλλο ποιεῖ μέρος.

If something impossible has been portrayed, that is an error. But it is justifiable if the poet thus achieves the aim of poetry (what that aim is has been already stated) and makes that part or some other part of the poem more thrilling.

This invitation to judge the Homeric gods according to ‘the aim of poetry’ remains influential. Modern readers seldom discuss the ‘Theomachia’ from a theological perspective, and focus rather on its effectiveness as poetry. They argue that the deep tragedy of human conflict is thrown into relief by the sublime frivolity of the gods, who may well engage in their own Trojan battle, but cannot be taken seriously because, after all, they do not die. Leaf, for example, ascribes to Zeus a literary sensibility, noting that he ‘appears to have a just appreciation of the whole combat as a parody of serious fighting’.<sup>51</sup> Scholars who insist that the Homeric gods should, on the contrary, be taken seriously, tend to avoid the ‘Theomachia’, because it would weaken their arguments. Griffin, for example, writes:

If the poems are to be taken seriously at all, then it would seem that the gods who preside over them must be taken seriously, too. And it is clear that the gods are not to be taken seriously if they can be treated as an entertaining literary device, either to avert monotony and vary the atmosphere, or to produce situations for the human characters in the poems which are not specifically divine or religious, but simply represent, in striking form, conflicts of ordinary human life.<sup>52</sup>

This kind of comment easily leads to an awkward, yet frequent, compromise concerning the gods in Homer. Kearns states it most clearly:

As long as we focus on the main drift of the poem, and what human–divine relations tell us about the human condition, we have a vision that is at once

<sup>49</sup> See further Feeney 1991: 25–9 and Graziosi 2013a: 77–9.

<sup>50</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics* 1460b23–6.

<sup>51</sup> Leaf 1900–2 ad 21.390.

<sup>52</sup> Griffin 1980: 144f.

heroic and (especially in the case of the *Iliad*) tragic. If we allow the focus to shift to the Gods themselves – and the poet of the *Iliad* seems sometimes to encourage this, with his frequent scene-setting on Olympus – the result is entertaining, intriguing, but ultimately problematic.<sup>53</sup>

On this reading, it seems that the Homeric gods are to be taken seriously when they affect mortals, but can be dismissed as light entertainment when their interactions with one another are described. This observation is useful but, as it stands, offers an insufficient account of the gods in Homer. In what follows, I place Kearns' observation in a broader interpretative framework, and show that even the 'Theomachia' of *Iliad* 21 offers serious theological insight – particularly when considered in relation to patterns discernible across the early hexameter tradition. I take as my cue a detail that has so far received little critical attention: gender imbalance.

In *Iliad* 21, females are keen to fight, whereas male gods seem strangely reluctant. To be sure, Ares formally opens hostilities, as suits his role as the god of war. But he claims, with some reason, that he is only paying Athena back for her insults earlier in the narrative (21.396–9), when she had him wounded by a mere mortal (5.855–8). It is, at all events, Athena who delivers the first blow. She hurls a massive rock, and knocks Ares unconscious. Aphrodite then tries to rescue Ares (and here there might be a hint at their illicit affair); at which point Hera gets involved, encouraging Athena to go after Aphrodite too. And so she does, speeding after her with glee. Athena quickly rounds on Aphrodite and hits her on her breasts, knocking her unconscious too. At this point Poseidon suggests to Apollo, with almost comical reluctance, that perhaps the two of them ought to fight each other too (21.436–40):

Φοῖβε τίη δὴ νῶϊ διέσταμεν; οὐδὲ ἔοικεν  
ἀρξάντων ἑτέρων· τὸ μὲν αἴσχιον αἰ κ' ἀμαχητὶ  
ἴομεν Οὐλύμπῳ Διὸς ποτὶ χαλκοβατὲς δῶ.  
ἄρχε· σὺ γὰρ γενεῇφι νεώτερος· οὐ γὰρ ἔμοιγε  
καλόν, ἔπει πρότερος γενόμεν καὶ πλείονα οἶδα.

<sup>53</sup> Kearns 2004: 72f.

'Phoebus, why do we two keep our distance? It is not right when the others have begun hostilities, and will be even more shameful if we return to Zeus' bronze-floored house on Olympus without a fight. You go first; you are younger by birth, and it would not be proper for me to start, since I am older and wiser than you.'

Poseidon continues with a long speech about how he and Apollo together worked in the service of the Trojan king Laomedon for a year – building the walls of Troy and tending his cattle – and how the arrogant king then failed to pay them, and even threatened them with mutilation and slavery. Surely Apollo ought to remember that slight, and stop supporting the Trojans. It must be said that, as an attempt to provoke violence, this speech seems rather weak. It is true that Poseidon rebukes Apollo, but he also reminds him of a joint venture, and an insult they both suffered. In short, it seems that the two gods have cause to resent Laomedon and his people, but hardly each other. Apollo replies with customary detachment (21.462–7):

Ἐννοσγαι' οὐκ ἂν με σάοφρονά μιν μῆσσαι  
ἔμμεναι, εἰ δὴ σοὶ γε βροτῶν ἔνεκα πτολεμῆξω  
δειλῶν, οἳ φύλλοισιν ἑοικότες ἄλλοτε μὲν τε  
ζαφλεγέες τελέθουσιν ἀρούρης καρπὸν ἔδοντες,  
ἄλλοτε δὲ φθινύθουσιν ἀκήριοι. ἀλλὰ τάχιστα  
παινώμεσθα μάχης· οἳ δ' αὐτοὶ θηριάζουσιν.

'Shaker of the Earth, you would not say I was possessed of a sound mind if I were to fight with you for the sake of mortals – wretched creatures, who like leaves at one time flourish in a blaze of glory, feeding on the fruits of the tilled earth, and at another wither spiritlessly away. No, let us leave the battle immediately, and let the mortals fight on by themselves.'

Poseidon insists on respecting family structures: Apollo should hit him first, since he is younger, and need not be expected to behave wisely. But Apollo is, of course, wise – and refuses to fight altogether.<sup>54</sup> It would make no sense to come to blows over mere mortals, who flourish and die like leaves.<sup>55</sup> The seasons, agriculture and death characterise the human condition,

<sup>54</sup> On the wisdom which Apollo displays in answering Poseidon, see Otto 1954: 66.

<sup>55</sup> On the simile of the leaves, in its different ancient permutations, see Sider 1996.



but need not concern the gods. It is Artemis who tries to rekindle the battle, by supplying a proper insult (21.472–4):

φεύγεις δὴ ἐκάεργε, Ποσειδάωνι δὲ νίκην  
πάσαν ἐπέτρεψας, μέλεον δὲ οἱ εὖχος ἔδωκας  
νηπύτιε τί νυ τόξον ἔχεις ἀνεμώλιον αὐτως;

'So, Shooter From Afar, you are running away, handing the victory entirely to Poseidon, giving him a chance to boast – for nothing. You fool, what is the point of carrying that futile, useless bow?'

These words are meant to hit where it hurts, since Apollo does not as a rule use his bow in battle. Unlike his sister, he does not even hunt with it. In the *Iliad*, and in Greek religion more generally, Apollo's bow and arrows seem somewhat metaphorical: they bring disease to mortals and animals, but are not generally used in martial contexts.<sup>56</sup> So here Artemis, the wild sister, tries to provoke Apollo, but he does not even bother answering her. It is Hera who intervenes, showing Artemis exactly where her arrows might belong. She grabs a few from her quiver and starts slapping Artemis on her cheeks with them, meanwhile holding both her wrists with one hand. As Artemis twists this way and that to free herself, the remaining arrows fall from her quiver, and scatter on the ground – thus providing a humorous commentary on Artemis' epithet ἰοχέαιρα, 'scatterer of arrows' (21.489–96).

When Hera is done, she lets go of Artemis, who runs away like a dove chased by a hawk. Hermes, at this point, considers his options. He has just witnessed the way Hera dealt with Artemis, and fears that Leto – Artemis' own mother – might inflict a similar indignity on him. He has been lined up to fight against her, but now he thinks better of it, and tells Leto that he could never hope to defeat her, thus effectively waving a white flag.<sup>57</sup> Leto agrees to leave Hermes alone, and tidies up after Artemis instead. Just as a mother picks up toys from the

<sup>56</sup> See Burkert 1985: 146.

<sup>57</sup> According to Richardson 1993 *ad* 21.497–501, Hermes behaves with 'ironic courtesy': this seems a good description, even if Richardson fails to see how it is part of a wider pattern: apart from Ares, the gods in general do not stoop to fighting with females.

floor, so Leto collects her daughter's arrows, and finally restores some order to the scene. Meanwhile, Artemis herself reaches Olympus, still tearful and shaking, just like any little girl whose ears have been boxed by a powerful stepmother.<sup>58</sup> Zeus takes his daughter onto his lap, laughs gently, and asks her what the matter might be. And with this little domestic scene between Artemis and her daddy, which so charmed Callimachus, the battle of the gods comes to an end.<sup>59</sup>

Goddesses are out of control in the 'Theomachia': they hit each other on their breasts and cheeks, talk wildly and incite violence. The gods, by contrast, are restrained, even reluctant to fight. For all the many detailed observations on the battle of the gods, scholars have failed to account for this general pattern. The reversal of traditional gender roles adds to the impression that we are dealing with a domestic farce. Females hitting each other provide low entertainment – and highlight by contrast the serious fighting that is happening among men on earth. As a literary reading, this kind of observation works well. It does little, however, to answer the theological questions with which I started. In order to explore the possible connections between Homeric and Hesiodic portrayals of the gods, it is useful to return to the history of the cosmos, as embedded in the early epic tradition. At a general level, this history seems to be characterised by two complementary traits: personal weakening on the one hand, and social progress on the other.<sup>60</sup>

Gods are stronger than heroes, who in turn are stronger than 'men such as they are nowadays'. At the same time, social norms and structures develop only gradually, as individuals weaken and seek consensus. This is already clear in the transition from the rule of Ouranos to the reign of Zeus. Ouranos attempts to retain his power by force alone. In later generations, the world becomes more complex: more and more gods are born, and power needs to be negotiated between them.

<sup>58</sup> Demetrios rightly comments that Hera treats Artemis like a little child, and she behaves like one: Schol. Ge. *ad* Il. 21.491.

<sup>59</sup> On the way Callimachus *Hymn* 3 reworks the depiction of Artemis in *Il.* 21, see further Ambühl 2005: 245–95.

<sup>60</sup> For further discussion, see Graziosi and Haubold 2005: esp. chs 2 and 4.

Zeus has supreme authority, but he does not simply rule by force: he distributes different honours among the gods and rules with the help of his daughter Δίκη, Justice (*Th.* 902). Thus, for example, he distributes τιμαί among the gods of Olympus, making sure that each enjoys due honour (*Th.* 74). Even though divine relationships become more sophisticated and consensual in the course of time, the society of the gods remains fairly primitive in comparison with human social structures. The overall framework, on Olympus, is the family: the concept of leadership in a non-biological sense is alien to the gods.<sup>61</sup>

Another important difference between divine and human society concerns the institution of the city.<sup>62</sup> Gods live in 'Olympian houses', Ὀλύμπια δώματ'α, human beings, by contrast, live in city states. If we look at the distribution of the word πόλις in early Greek epic, an interesting pattern emerges: it is absent from the *Theogony*,<sup>63</sup> and makes its first appearance in the age of the demigods as described in the *Catalogue of Women*, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. The myth of the ages, as told in *Works and Days* 109–201, reveals a similar pattern. The emphasis there is, of course, on the degeneration of individuals, but a counter-history of institutional progress can clearly be discerned. There is little evidence of social organisation in the golden age, and golden-age men are said to roam the earth as perennial nomads after their death (125). Families and houses are first mentioned in the silver age (130f.).<sup>64</sup> Bronze-age men too are explicitly said to live in houses, both before and after their death (lines 150 and 153, respectively). Cities make their first appearance in the age of the heroes, if we assume that 'Thebes of the seven gates' is

envisaged as one.<sup>65</sup> The word πόλις finally appears in Hesiod's description of the Iron Age.<sup>66</sup>

From an ethical point of view, the gods offer some lessons about how to live in a family, but their affairs do not seem to have a fully-fledged political dimension. In the domestic sphere, however, there is some agreement between different poems: the emphasis is on the need for male restraint, in both the *Theogony* and *Iliad* 21. Ouranos, Kronos and Zeus do immense violence to their sexual partners and children in order to cling to their position of supreme power forever. Mortal men cannot do that, nor indeed should they try. Explicit value judgements in the *Theogony* warn against preventing the process of birth, hating one's own children or refusing to be succeeded. These are evil things, from a human perspective. Only Zeus can remain in charge forever: mortal fathers must die; it follows that birth and succession are, for them, the only answers to mortality.<sup>67</sup> *Iliad* 21 illustrates how things might be run within a patriarchal family, when one man is (however temporarily) in power, like Zeus. Females can at times get out of control, but the important thing is to keep calm and act with good-humoured detachment. As Apollo points out, it makes no sense to get dragged into a mighty fight over small matters. Precisely because Zeus is firmly in control, he can enjoy the spectacle of the 'Theomachia'. Other sensible male members of his family likewise refuse to get embroiled. Real conflict happens on the human plane, and at the level of the city, not the patriarchal family.

### Convergent receptions

In the *Politics*, Aristotle sets out to examine how human society developed 'from the beginning', ἐξ ἀρχῆς – an expression that echoes Hesiod's own opening at the beginning of the succession myth. It is remarkable, in fact, how close Aristotle's

<sup>61</sup> Zeus is said to rule as a 'king' over the other gods at Hes. *Th.* 883–5 and 886, but the other gods are not his people or political subjects, they are his family. As Simon 1998: 58 rightly points out, Zeus is powerful partly because he populates Olympus with his own children. On familiar and monarchic models of leadership see below, pp. 58–61.

<sup>62</sup> On the history of the πόλις, as portrayed in early hexameter epic, see Haubold 2005.

<sup>63</sup> The gods of the *Theogony* live in houses, not cities: vv. 40, 43, 63, 64, 75, 114, 285, 303, 386, 410, 455, 726–35 (the prison of the Titans), 744, 751–3, 758, 767, 777–9, 783, 804, 816, 933.

<sup>64</sup> Hes. *Op.* 130–1.

<sup>65</sup> Hes. *Op.* 162.

<sup>66</sup> Hes. *Op.* 189.

<sup>67</sup> Thetis, for all that she is a goddess, understands this. When Achilles grieves bitterly for Patroclus, she suggests to him that he should eat, and sleep with a woman – i.e. affirm what sustains human life in the face of death (24.128–32).



account is to the *Theogony*, and more generally to the history of the cosmos as embedded in early hexameter epic.<sup>68</sup> Aristotle, like Hesiod, begins with a mating between male and female, 'for the purpose of generation' (*Pol.* 1252a25–8):

Εἰ δὴ τις ἐξ ἀρχῆς τὰ πράγματα φυόμενα βλέπειεν, ὥσπερ ἐν τοῖς ἄλλοις, καὶ ἐν τούτοις κάλλιστ' ἂν οὕτω θεωρήσειεν. ἀνάγκη δὴ πρῶτον συνδυάζεσθαι τοὺς ἀνεν ἄλληλων μὴ δυναμένους εἶναι, οἷον θῆλυ μὲν καὶ ἄρρεν τῆς γεννήσεως ἕνεκεν.

In this subject [of politics] as in others, the best method of investigation is to study things in the process of development from the beginning. The first coupling together then to which necessity gives rise is that between those who are unable to exist without one another: for instance the union of female and male for the purpose of generation.

This original mating gives rise to the household, and several households together create a settlement. The earliest form of constitution is the monarchy, because just as each man is a ruler in his own household, so one dominant household governs the households of less assertive relatives in the settlement itself, and in more distant colonies. In Aristotle's view, monarchy is a rather primitive form of government, in that it is an extension of the familial model. He argues that it belongs to societies which have not yet fully developed into city states. He also points out that the familial/monarchic model colours widespread assumptions about the gods (*Pol.* 1252b25–6):

καὶ τοὺς θεοὺς δὲ διὰ τοῦτο πάντες φασὶ βασιλεύεσθαι, ὅτι καὶ αὐτοὶ οἱ μὲν ἔτι καὶ νῦν οἱ δὲ τὸ ἀρχαῖον ἐβασίλευοντο, ὥσπερ δὲ καὶ τὰ εἶδη ἑαυτοῖς ἀπομοιοῦσιν οἱ ἄνθρωποι, οὕτω καὶ τοὺς βίους τῶν θεῶν.

This explains why all people speak of the gods as ruled by a king, because some of them are still so ruled and others used to be. Because human beings imagine that the gods are shaped in their own image, so they suppose that their manner of life is also like their own.

All people have essentially the same view of the gods, and that view is modelled on a social structure known to all different

<sup>68</sup> Scholars have generally failed to see this, despite the fact that the opening chapters of the *Politics* are peppered with references to and even quotations from Homer and Hesiod. So, for example, Phillips Simpson 2002 ad 1252b9 notes one quotation from Hesiod's *Works and Days*, but completely fails to acknowledge Aristotle's sustained engagement with Hesiod's theology of the family. The same is true of Saunders 1995, both ad 1252b9–15 and ad 1252b15–27 (quotation from the *Odyssey*).

cultures, namely that of the family/monarchy.<sup>69</sup> Only some human societies have developed further, into fully political communities, and the gods have not. Aristotle is clear about this: 'the city state is a natural development, and man is by nature a political animal; by contrast, someone who is by nature, rather than merely by fortune, citiless is either below or above human ... Someone incapable of entering into partnership, or who is so self-sufficient that he has no need to do so, and therefore is not part of a city, must either be a beast or a god.'<sup>70</sup> The family answers for the basic animal, human and divine needs of generation. The πόλις provides for the more complex forms of mutual support required by human beings alone.

Ethical judgements in favour of male restraint, in both the *Theogony* and *Iliad* 21, provide guidance for how to behave in the family, rather than the city. Each patriarch can play Zeus in his own home – each is king of his own castle; and, within that castle, both Hesiod and Homer suggest that he should not be violent. Females can provoke: the process of generation and succession is, in itself, a challenge to patriarchal rule, but must be accepted because it is the only human answer to death. Moreover, under the rule of one patriarch, female squabbles are best treated with a degree of humour and detachment. Proper conflict is played out between men, and at a political rather than familial level: for all that Helen instigated the Trojan War, it then became something that could not just be settled by Priam as a private family matter.<sup>71</sup> It follows that the gods in epic offer no guidance on the problem of human

<sup>69</sup> Graziosi 2013a offers a broad-ranging exploration of the gods of Olympus as international figures of the imagination.

<sup>70</sup> See Arist. *Pol.* 1253a1–4 and 27–8: ἡ δ' αὐτάρκεια καὶ τέλος καὶ βέλτιστον. ἐκ τούτων οὖν φανερόν ἐστι τῶν φύσει ἡ πόλις ἐστὶ, καὶ ὅτι ὁ ἄνθρωπος φύσει πολιτικὸν ζῷον, καὶ ὁ ἀπολις διὰ φύσιν καὶ οὐ διὰ τύχην ἥτοι φαῦλός ἐστιν, ἡ κρείττων ἢ ἄνθρωπος. ... ὁ δὲ μὴ δυναμένος κοινωνεῖν ἢ μὴδὲν δεόμενος δι' αὐτάρκειαν οὐθὲν μέρος πόλεως, ὥστε ἡ θηρίον ἢ θεός.

<sup>71</sup> This is something that puzzled some ancient readers. Herodotus, *Hist.* 2.120, insisted that Helen could not have been in Troy at all, otherwise Priam (as the patriarch in charge) would have surely returned her to Menelaos. Philostratus *Her.* 25.11, endorsed that view. Homer, however, presents the Trojan community as torn between familial and political allegiances, see further Graziosi and Haubold 2010, esp. Introduction.

war – which is at times configured precisely as a requirement of divine peace.<sup>72</sup> It is this theological standpoint that adds weight to scenes like the encounter between Hector and Andromache in *Iliad* 6 – where Hector is torn apart by a model of male restraint in the family and male aggression on the battlefield.<sup>73</sup> There is no Olympian equivalent to his dilemma.

My insistence that the gods of Homer and Hesiod live within the basic structure of the family does not mean, of course, that they have no relevance to human politics. Depending on circumstance, the gods of epic were used to make important political statements. In classical Athens, the difference between political government and the Olympian household was quite obvious, and was reflected in the writings of Aristotle. In the Hellenistic period, by contrast, Olympian and political order were more closely aligned. The actions of rulers could conveniently be explained by reference to the gods, as depicted in Homer and Hesiod: Theocritus, for example, tactfully suggested that Ptolemy Philadelphus behaved like Zeus (rather than an ordinary human pervert), when he married his own sister Arsinoë.<sup>74</sup> But the point I want to make here is essentially the point that Aristotle makes: the social structure of the gods is familial.

Even the divergent receptions with which I started share this one insight, that the gods of Homer and Hesiod are best interpreted as a family. Hesiod, Bachofen and Freud speak of monstrous acts of domestic violence, buried deep in the history of the cosmos and/or the human psyche. Homer, by contrast, offers more light-hearted scenes of daily life: the uncle who reluctantly allows himself to be dragged into a family feud; the sister who tries to provoke her brother, the stepmother who boxes her ears as a result; the cheeky adolescent bowing to the supposedly superior strength of his step-aunt; the mother who picks up scattered arrows from the ground; the father consoling his sobbing daughter. These scenes are not simply frivolous,

<sup>72</sup> See *Cypria* fr. 1 *EGF*, quoted above.

<sup>73</sup> The precise dynamics of Hector's dilemma are analysed in Graziosi and Haubold 2010.

<sup>74</sup> Theoc. *Idyll* 17.126–34.

nor do they constitute bad theology. Particularly when set in dialogue with Hesiodic representations of the gods, they reveal a coherent system of beliefs, which intersects with dominant Greek views of history, society and ethics. Hesiod and Homer set up the family as a context where peace must obtain, and where male restraint is necessary. Such restraint comes relatively easily to the gods, once the reign of Zeus is established. It is harder to achieve for mortals, because it must be accompanied by an acceptance of death and succession.

This theological and ethical insight has obvious relevance to the poetic projects of Homer and Hesiod, since death and succession are, respectively, key themes in the *Iliad* and the *Theogony* – but it seems to me that it sheds light also on ancient society, and that more work could be done to investigate the relationship between the divine and the human family. Greek religion has long been declared a religion of the polis, and this helps to explain why modern scholars fail to notice what Aristotle explicitly states in his *Politics*, namely that the gods live in a family, and have no need for a city. We need to ask not only whether there is a theology of the polis, as the editors of this volume do in their Introduction, but also whether there are theologies of the family, what bearing they have on specific domestic issues (including violence and intergenerational justice, as discussed in this chapter) and how, given the mismatch between divine and human social structures, they relate to politics and the polis.