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# Hesiod's Theogony: from Near Eastern Creation Myths to Paradise Lost

By Stephen Scully



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Stephen Scully both offers a reading of Hesiod's *Theogony* and traces the reception and shadows of this authoritative Greek creation story in Greek and Roman texts up to Milton's own creation myth, which sought to "soar above th' Aonian Mount [i.e., the *Theogony*]...and justify the ways of God to men." Scully also considers the poem in light of Near Eastern creation stories, including the *Enûma elish* and Genesis, as well as the most striking of modern "scientific myths," Freud's *Civilization and its Discontents*. Scully reads Hesiod's poem as a hymn to Zeus and a city-state creation myth, arguing that Olympus is portrayed as an idealized polity and--with but one exception--a place of communal harmony. This reading informs his study of the *Theogony*'s reception in later writings about polity, discord, and justice. The rich and various story of reception pays particular attention to the long Homeric Hymns, Solon, the Presocratics, Pindar, Aeschylus, Aristophanes, and Plato in the Archaic and Classical periods; to the Alexandrian scholars, Callimachus, Euhemerus, and the Stoics in the Hellenistic period; to Ovid, Apollodorus, Lucian, a few Church fathers, and the Neoplatonists in the Roman period. Tracing the poem's reception in the Byzantine, medieval, and early Renaissance, including Petrarch and Erasmus, the book ends with a lengthy exploration of Milton's imitations of the poem in *Paradise Lost*. Scully also compares what he considers Hesiod's artful interplay of narrative, genealogical lists, and keen use of personified abstractions in the *Theogony* to Homeric narrative techniques and treatment of epic verse.



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### Editorial Review

#### Review

"Stephen Scully offers a terrific overview of Hesiod's *Theogony*, the work that was the ancient Greek counterpart to Genesis 1 and 2, the two biblical creation myths...Scully's is not a survey of theories of myth and need not be. As a rich presentation of Hesiod's *Theogony* from almost all angles in its history, it is excellent." --Robert A. Segal, *Reading Religion*

"Scully has long been interested in the *polis*, as his excellent 1990 study, *Homer and the Sacred City*, demonstrated, and this new volume about Hesiod's *Theogony* is, in a sense, an extension of that interest. An equally exciting aspect of this comprehensive study is its clear and full discussion of Hesiod's until-now overlooked literary methods, in which personification reflects psychological reality, or flows from action, and in which common nouns, in their shifting meanings, follow the narrative arc of the poem." -- *Rivista di poesia comparata*

"Scully's book is both readable and accessible. I tried it out on a graduate seminar on Hesiod this semester, and it generated considerable discussion and undoubtedly contributed to a broadening of the perspective of all participants (myself included). I can certainly recommend it not only for this use but for anyone concerned with the Hesiodic corpus and its history." --Bryn Mawr *Classical Review*

"With its diachronic structure, this book tells a story. It is a story which has a distinct way of carrying the reader along with it, and by the final pages one cannot help but join with the author in lamenting the passing of ancient Greek polytheism, and the loss of the memory of a 'pagan vision of Olympian paradise'." --*The Classical Journal*

#### About the Author

**Stephen Scully** is Associate Professor of Classical Studies at Boston University. He has published on Homer, Hesiod, Sophocles, Plato, Vergil, George Chapman, and Freud. His books include *Homer and the Sacred City*, Euripides' *Suppliant Women*, with Rosanna Warren, translation, essay, and notes, and Plato's *Phaedrus*, translation, essay, and notes.

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