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HOW TO DEAL WITH A HESIODIC PERPLEXITY

Abstract

Hesiod's account of Cronus' castration of Sky in the *Theogony* is a well-known interpretative *crux* that poses perplexities in many regards. This article examines the hermeneutic techniques, especially allegoresis and etymology, by means of which ancient and medieval scholars tried to deal with it.

Keywords: ancient scholia, medieval scholia, Hesiod, *Theogony*, allegoresis, etymology

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1. *Introduction*

What is the commentators' attitude toward their base-authors when the latter make a mistake or their texts have something that sounds problematic? This is the fundamental question that Francesca Schironi invites us to consider in our contributions to this special issue of *Aevum Antiquum*. In fact, the question, as she herself recognizes, is rather more complicated than it might seem to be at first. For commentators generally have no access whatsoever to their base-authors except via the texts that they are commenting on. So when commentators refer to their author, they are at least sometimes likely to have in mind not so much the historical individual who in reality bore that name centuries earlier as rather the postulated writer of the text they have before themselves – *i.e.*, the author is a hermeneutical regulating principle whose ultimate fictionality does not in the least make it any less constraining (this is of course just as true nowadays as it was in antiquity).

Thus the relation between base-author and text is itself already fraught. But matters become all the more delicate when terms like 'mistake' or 'problematic' enter the discussion. 'Mistake' or 'problematic' in terms of what

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precisely? As Francesca Schironi amply demonstrates, there is a very broad spectrum of highly heterogeneous criteria, the alleged violation of any one of which can trigger a commentator's decision to discuss the meaning of a text. These criteria can range from the apparently most trivial to the apparently most distressing, and they might include such issues as orthography, morphology, semantics, syntax, narrative or logical consistency, social propriety, religious piety, and truth to nature (this list is of course incomplete). Moreover, the commentator's intervention can deploy a large number of different procedures – emending the text, altering the meaning of the words, allegorizing the passage, etymologizing its key words, accusing the author of ignorance or mendacity or worse – and the choice of procedure will depend not only upon the commentator's personal tastes but also upon the prestige of the base-author and the institutional context of the commentarial act; for example, canonical authors who provide the basis for instruction in schools are unlikely to be accused of grammatical, moral, religious, or cognitive sins.

In the case of texts written by medical, scientific, or mathematical authors, commentators often focus upon apparent discrepancies with regard to the 'natural' or 'correct' state of affairs to which those authors seem to be making reference (though for example Galen's commentaries on Hippocrates show how many other kinds of issues such a commentator can feel impelled to discuss)¹. That is to say, in these cases the factors the commentator must deal with are the text, the base-author, and 'reality' (this last is of course an extremely problematic term which would have to be unpacked). But what about mythic texts like Hesiod's *Theogony*? Here the commentator confronts not only the realm of 'reality' if he allegorizes the poem as an expression of a doctrine of natural philosophy but also the ambiguous category of 'myth' as well. We moderns have learned since the 18th century to distinguish sharply between the diffuse body of orally transmitted myths and the specific poetic texts in which surviving versions of them were formulated²; but the ancient understanding of these matters seems to have been far more nebulous. For one thing, after a certain time the primary access to the myths for most of the ancients was by the (oral or written) mediation of the classic poetic texts and by prose mythographic handbooks which were generally derived from those very same texts. So even if in later times ancient authors refer to a given myth rather than to a text which recounted this myth, in fact their reference must ultimately be to the text since they possessed no other source for the myth. And for another, the authority and prestige of the classic poetic texts was secured by their foundational role in school teaching; for adults who as

¹ See Roselli in this volume.

² See Most 1999.

children had studied Homer and Hesiod intensely and for years, such texts must have become so ingrained in their minds that it would have seemed counter-intuitive or even impossible to distinguish the poem from the myth. There are of course occasional exceptions to these generalizations, as to all generalizations: thus the first-century CE Stoic philosopher Cornutus (to whom we shall return later) suggests at one point that Hesiod might have inherited correct doctrines (*i.e.* the ones that lend themselves easily to Stoic allegoresis) from lost predecessors but had marred these by adding to them his own more mythic views (*i.e.* the ones that are more recalcitrant to allegorization)³. Yet Cornutus cites no evidence in support of this hypothesis, nor did there exist any evidence that he could have cited; he makes the suggestion not as part of a systematic argument about the differences between myths and poems but instead as an excuse for the rather implausible artificiality of some of the explanations he has been offering, and he immediately moves on to other matters. What is in fact most remarkable is just how rare such assertions were in antiquity.

Turning now to a particularly notorious episode in Hesiod's *Theogony* and to its remarkable exegetical reception in antiquity and the Middle Ages should make these general points clearer.

2. *The castration of Sky in Hesiod's Theogony*

The cosmogony in Hesiod's *Theogony* is certainly replete with all kinds of strange features – parthenogenesis, characters with too few features (one eye) or too many (a hundred hands), giant snaky monsters with fire-breathing heads, to name only these. But near its beginning, something happens that appears to be particularly outrageous. Sky (Ouranos)⁴ has been enjoying frequent sexual intercourse with his dear mother Earth (Gaia) and together with her has produced twelve children (132-138) – and then six more, three Cyclopes (139-146) and three Hundred-Handers (147-153). Sky rejoices in concealing the last two groups in a hiding place inside Earth (154-158)⁵. But

³ Corn. *Nat. deor.* 17.

⁴ In accordance with Most 2018, the god whom Hesiod calls Ouranos is referred to in this article as Sky.

⁵ Does Sky conceal within Earth not only the last two groups of his children with her but also the first twelve offspring? The matter is not straightforward. There is something to be said for what appears to be a view shared among many scholars that Earth is 'constricted' because all of her children are still inside her; it fits a widely accepted interpretation that the children cannot be born because of Sky's continuous copulation, and it is at least possible that ὄσσοι (154) refers to all the children. On the other hand, line 176 seems to imply that Sky is not continually having intercourse (see also the passage from Cornutus below), and it is also possible, and grammatically perhaps more likely, that the

Earth finds herself less happy with this arrangement: she is certainly capacious, but these last children may well be monstrous not only in form but also in size and for all her generous dimensions she is starting to feel constricted (159-160). So she devises a plan to stop Sky from continuing to perform what she calls his «evil outrage» (κακὴν... λώβην, 165): she fashions a sickle and asks her children to avenge her (159-166). But all of them are too terrified of their father to help her (167-168) – all, that is, except Cronus, the youngest of the twelve, who hates his vigorous (θαλερόν, 138) father and enthusiastically volunteers his services (168-172). This is what happens next:

Hes. *Th.* 173-182

ὥς φάτο· γήθησεν δὲ μέγα φρεσὶ Γαῖα πελώρη·
 εἶσε δέ μιν κρύψασα λόχῳ, ἐνέθηκε δὲ χερσὶν
 ἄρπην καρχαρόδοντα, δόλον δ' ὑπεθήκατο πάντα. 175
 ἦλθε δὲ νύκτ' ἐπάγων μέγας Οὐρανός, ἀμφὶ δὲ Γαίῃ
 ἱμείρων φιλότιτος ἐπέσχετο, καὶ ῥ' ἐτανύσθη
 πάντῃ· ὁ δ' ἐκ λοχέοιο πάϊς ὠρέξατο χειρὶ
 σκαίῃ, δεξιτερῇ δὲ πελώριον ἔλλαβεν ἄρπην,
 μακρὴν καρχαρόδοντα, φίλου δ' ἀπὸ μήδεα πατρὸς 180
 ἐσσυμένως ἤμησε, πάλιν δ' ἔρριψε φέρεσθαι
 ἐξοπίσω.

So he spoke, and huge Earth rejoiced greatly in her breast. She placed him in an ambush, concealing him from sight, and put into his hands the jagged-toothed sickle, and she explained the whole trick to him. And great Sky came, bringing night with him; and spreading himself out around Earth in his desire for love he lay outstretched in all directions. Then his son reached out from his ambush with his left hand, and with his right hand he grasped the monstrous sickle, long and jagged-toothed, and eagerly he reaped the genitals from his dear father and threw them behind him to be borne away (Text and translation from Most 2018).

From the bloody drops were born Erinyes, armed Giants, and the Melian Nymphs; and from the white foam, which arose from the sea as Sky's genitals hit the water (or perhaps from the semen they contained), the goddess Aphrodite (182-206).

There are many strange things about the early stages of Hesiod's account

ὅσσοι refers to only the most terrible of the children, presumably the Cyclopes and Hundred-handers. Furthermore, Sky only curses the Titans after Cronus has castrated him, and not the others, and there is something odd about Earth summoning the Titans and giving Cronus a sickle while they are still inside her – but this could also fit a mythological mode of thinking that is at variance with modern notions of logical thought.

of the beginning of the world; yet this is surely one of the strangest. And yet Hesiod tells the story without commenting on it or evaluating it in any way, simply as an indisputable fact of mythic history⁶. When Earth's other children refuse to avenge their mother, it is not because they find her proposal repugnant or morally offensive, but because they dread their father (δέος, 167). The only hint that Hesiod himself might have found something a bit distasteful in these proceedings is that he mentions that while Cronus held the sickle with his right hand he stretched out his left hand (178-180) – but to do precisely what? Evidently, Cronus must have taken a firm hold on his father's genitals with his left hand if he could then have been able to cut them off with his right hand. But Hesiod does not tell us this explicitly. Presumably, he preferred for reasons of delicacy not to focus our attention too much on the son's act of seizing his father's genitals (though the implicit meaning is indubitable): this is a form of euphemism by aposiopesis.

Why then does Hesiod have Earth and Cronus conspire to castrate Sky? In terms of Earth's own needs, this is clearly the only way that she can prevent her severe case of postpartum constipation from becoming even graver: since Sky is immortal, she cannot kill him, but at least by having him castrated she can ensure that he will produce no more children to conceal within her. It is presupposed but not made explicit that Earth cannot perform this deed by herself (why she cannot is an interesting question) but needs someone else, presumably a male god, to do it. As for Cronus, we are told at his birth that he hates his father; and as it happens, after Cronus has castrated Sky he goes on to succeed him as ruler of the world, though it is not indicated in any way beforehand that this will happen. The link between male sexual potency and kingship is presupposed as self-evident but is not made explicit. Modern scholarship has identified the theme of the primeval separation between sky and earth as a topic found in a number of mythologies throughout the world and has generally assumed that something like this might underlie Hesiod's own account of Cronus' castration of Sky, or at least that of his sources, however he himself may have understood them⁷. It is not impossible that some such subterranean links might indeed connect Hesiod's gruesome tale with these non-Greek mythologies, though it must be pointed out that nothing in the text makes this clear, that the Greeks in general seem to have been quite

⁶ As Stoddard 2004 has shown, Hesiod seems to be more involved in his narrative than Homer, occasionally using evaluative and focalizing language that in the Homeric poems is restricted to characters. Nevertheless, he never explicitly expresses any sense of wonder or bewilderment at the mythic events that he narrates.

⁷ See e.g. Rutherford 2009, p. 11: «In Hesiod, Kronos castrates Ouranos with a scythe, which clearly symbolizes the separation of earth and sky». Cf. West 1966, pp. 19, 211-212 *ad* 154-210, who attributes the origin of this interpretation to Lang 1884, pp. 45-66. Staudacher 1942 is a standard work on this topic but is very outdated; see also Numazawa 1984.

ignorant of the mythologies involved⁸, and that no one in antiquity seems to have read the story in this light.

But there are also other, more profound motivations within Hesiod's story itself for him to tell it in this way. The first divine generation must be removed from the scene if later generations are to have room for their own actions: Hesiod presupposes as self-evident, but does not explain, that once Sky has been castrated he will no longer play an active role in this theogony; and in fact, beyond cursing his first twelve children (207-210: and yet only Cronus was really to blame), Sky henceforth virtually disappears from the narrative. Moreover, Sky's increasingly monstrous reproductive tendencies must yield to the softer and more recognizable sexuality of Aphrodite if the loves of the gods and of men will be able to dominate the world in a way that is recognizable for Hesiod's human recipients. But there is also a third consideration, involving the fundamental teleology of Hesiod's whole account. Hesiod's *Theogony* is directed towards an epic war between the Titans (the generation of Sky's children) and the Olympians (the generation of Cronus'), and it is only when Zeus and the other Olympians have decisively defeated the Titans that Zeus can finally impose his rule of law and justice on the world. From the generation of Sky's children, the Olympians led by Zeus manage to receive the crucial military support of the Cyclopes and the Hundred-Handers, doubtless due to their resentment at Sky's having buried them alive in their mother Earth. Moreover, if we assume that the Titans were in fact not incarcerated in Earth but escaped their confines after their birth, it is obvious that the victory of the Olympians would never have been possible if Sky had been permitted to continue producing further Titans who would eventually have outnumbered and defeated the Olympians. The only way to prevent this from happening, given that Sky cannot be killed, was to prevent him from reproducing further with Earth. So Earth's self-interest ultimately coincided with Zeus', and with Hesiod's – and, for that matter, with ours.

3. *Ancient Reactions to this Episode*

Nothing whatsoever of these explanations appears to have been explicitly mentioned by any ancient author. As is generally the case, ancient scholars and interpreters tended not to link elements of the texts they read to larger structures and themes but instead atomized them into small clusters of verses, single lines or even just words, considering them as individual exegetical

⁸ Arguing against this view is Lardinois 2021.

monads. In the present case, one explicit reaction in antiquity to the castration story in general seems to have been horror and disgust. Plato's comment in the *Republic* is not only typical, but also historically significant and highly influential⁹:

Resp. II 377e-378b

Πρῶτον μὲν, ἦν δ' ἐγώ, τὸ μέγιστον καὶ περὶ τῶν μεγίστων ψεῦδος ὁ εἰπὼν οὐ καλῶς ἐψεύσατο ὡς Οὐρανός τε ἠργάσατο ἃ φησι δρᾶσαι αὐτὸν Ἡσίοδος, ὃ τε αὖ Κρόνος ὡς ἐτιμωρήσατο αὐτόν. τὰ δὲ δὴ τοῦ Κρόνου ἔργα καὶ πάθη ὑπὸ τοῦ ὕεος, οὐδ' ἂν εἰ ἦν ἀληθὴ ὥμην δεῖν ῥαδίως οὕτω λέγεσθαι πρὸς ἄφρονάς τε καὶ νέους, ἀλλὰ μάλιστα μὲν σιγᾶσθαι, εἰ δὲ ἀνάγκη τις ἦν λέγειν, δι' ἀπορρήτων ἀκούειν ὡς ὀλιγίστους, θυσασμένους οὐ χοῖρον ἀλλὰ τι μέγα καὶ ἄπορον θῦμα, ὅπως ὅτι ἐλαχίστοις συνέβη ἀκοῦσαι.

Καὶ γάρ, ἦ δ' ὅς, οὐτοί γε οἱ λόγοι χαλεποί.

Καὶ οὐ λεκτέοι γ', ἔφην, ὦ Ἀδείμαντε, ἐν τῇ ἡμετέρᾳ πόλει. οὐδὲ λεκτέον νέῳ ἀκούοντι ὡς ἀδικῶν τὰ ἔσχατα οὐδὲν ἂν θαυμαστὸν ποιοῖ, οὐδ' αὖ ἀδικοῦντα πατέρα κολάζων παντὶ τρόπῳ, ἀλλὰ δρῶν ἂν ὅπερ θεῶν οἱ πρῶτοί τε καὶ μέγιστοι.

Οὐ μὰ τὸν Δία, ἦ δ' ὅς, οὐδὲ αὐτῷ μοι δοκεῖ ἐπιτήδεια εἶναι λέγειν.

"Firstly", I said, "is the man who told the greatest lie about the greatest matters and told that lie badly, about how Sky accomplished what Hesiod says he did, and furthermore how Cronus took revenge on him. And as for Cronus' deeds and sufferings at the hands of his son, even if they were true, I would not think they should be told to fools and youngsters in this lighthearted way, but should be kept strictly quiet. And if there were any need to tell the story, then as few as possible should hear it in secret, after sacrificing not a pig, but some huge victim, so hard to get hold of that as few as possible hear the story".

"My word", he said, "these stories are dangerous stuff!".

"What is more they are not to be told in our state, Adeimantus", I said, "and a young listener is not to be told that by committing the worst of crimes he would be doing nothing remarkable, not even if he were punishing his father in every way for doing wrong, but he would be doing what the first and greatest of the gods did".

"Certainly not", he said; "I don't myself think that it seems suitable to tell such stories".

(Text and translation adapted from Christopher Emlyn-Jones and William Preddy, Loeb Classical Library)

⁹ See for examples of the influence of this Platonic passage e.g. Philo *Provid.* 2, 34-35; Theodoret *Affect.* 36.

Socrates begins by emphatically calling this story and the others connected with it in the *Theogony* a ‘lie’ or a ‘fiction’ – and indeed, a badly made one (ψεῦδος ὁ εἰπὼν οὐ καλῶς ἐψεύσατο, 377e). But in fact he seems to be far less concerned with the question of the veracity of Hesiod’s account for its own sake than with the deleterious effects it is likely to have on its recipients: even if it were true it should not be told so easily to people who lacked the requisite intelligence or maturity to be able to deal with it correctly (378a). Thus, as Francesca Schironi has shown in her article in this volume, its truth is not really the issue, but instead its moral consequences¹⁰. Elsewhere Plato shows explicitly the kind of danger that he only hints at here: in his *Euthyphro*, the title character attempts in vain to justify to Socrates the lawsuit that he is impiously bringing against his father by the treatment that Cronus and Zeus meted out to their own fathers (*Euthphr.* 6a). Plato’s moral outrage at the story of Cronus is conveyed by a small but telling detail: he does not deign to say exactly what it was that Cronus did to his father but chooses instead to refer to it only obliquely with the vague phrase «how Cronus took revenge on him» (ὅ τε αὖ Κρόνος ὡς ἐτιμωρήσατο αὐτόν, 377e-378a) – a form of euphemism by circumlocution.

4. *Ancient Exegesis*

How did ancient exegetical scholarship deal with this Hesiodic perplexity¹¹? The *scholia vetera* never assert anywhere that Hesiod’s account of Cronus’ castration of Sky is false. Instead, they deploy the two fundamental instruments of etymology and allegoresis – the preferred exegetical tools whenever the ‘surface text’ is deemed obscene, illogical, inconsistent, or otherwise unsatisfactory – in order to rescue its truth by displacing its reference from the world of myth to the world of nature¹². In other words, they do not locate the veracity of Hesiod’s story in its relation to some mythical event involving gods in a single early moment of the history of the world, but rather, by means of allegoresis, in its indication of a physical event involving mechanical forces that functioned in an early moment of the history of the world and whose consequences continue to

¹⁰ So in general in antiquity. An exception: [Clem.] *Homil.* 2. Xenophanes criticizes other myths as being fictions and implies that they are untrue; he does not refer in the surviving fragments to Cronus’ castration of Sky but, if asked, he would doubtless have rejected this story too as false. Of course, Xenophanes eschews allegoresis.

¹¹ The texts and translations cited below, and the whole conception of this article, derive from years of intense collaboration and discussion between the two of us which will result shortly in Koning-Most (forthcoming). For further details and bibliography on the texts presented here, see that volume.

¹² On allegoresis and etymology, see Most 2016.

function throughout history into the present time. With regard to this physical meaning, Hesiod's story is completely true – indeed, if a story is to be interpreted allegorically, it must be considered to be true (otherwise it will be not allegorized but rejected and providing an allegory for it would make no sense whatsoever). The allegoresis extracts certain elements – objects or actions, not necessarily the most prominent ones – from Hesiod's mythic tale and reapplies them to the physical account where they continue to work as they did in the myth but now are recodified and applied to different persons and things. And this allegoresis is supported by a procedure of etymology whereby the names of the mythic personages are analyzed in such a way that they can be shown to be made up of elements that convey the same message as the allegoresis does. Sometimes the etymologies can make do with a bare minimum of phonemes; often they seem rather arbitrary; almost always they are untenable from the point of view of modern linguistic science. But they seem to provide the smoking gun of unassailable evidence in the undeniable reality of the divine name to legitimate the allegorical interpretation, which by contrast can sometimes seem rather nebulous. Perhaps too the etymologies were useful in the ancient classroom, to fix in the students' memories the concrete association between a deity's name and its meaning which could serve to anchor the looser association between the myth's details and their signification.

There are two fundamental models of understanding Cronus' castration of Sky in the *scholia vetera*. The first one allegorizes Cronus as separation and etymologizes his name as 'separation':

Schol. vet. in Hes. Th. 137 Di Gregorio:

τοὺς δὲ μέθ' ὀπλότατος: Κρόνον τὴν ἀπόκρισιν τῶν στοιχείων, ἣν ἀπ' ἀλλήλων ποιησάμενα ἐν εὐταξίᾳ λοιπὸν διέμειναν.

After these, [scil. Cronus was born,] the youngest of all: Cronus is the separation (apokrisis) of the elements; after they had made this separation from one another they remained in good order forever after.

Schol. vet. in Hes. Th. 459 Di Gregorio:

καὶ τοὺς μὲν κατέπινε Κρόνος μέγας: ...ἄλλοι δέ φασι Κρόνον εἰρῆσθαι, ὅτι πρῶτος θεῶν εἰς κρίσιν ἐπέβαλε.

Great Cronus would swallow these down: ...Others say he is called Cronus because he was the first of the gods to proceed to separation (krisin).

Here the allegoresis focuses upon the act of separation by which Cronus castrated Sky, *i.e.* separated his genitals from his body (but reference is also being made to Cronus' other notorious crime, his devouring of his children). Cro-

nus' activity remains exactly the same, but now Sky and his genitals vanish, to be replaced by the elements¹³. Here and elsewhere, the scholia presuppose a cosmogonic model similar to that of Anaxagoras, in which everything was mixed up at the beginning and then was distinguished and separated at a later time¹⁴. This allegoresis operates by a certain sleight of hand: for in the Hesiodic text Cronus' act of separation is performed on Sky, but in the explanation it is applied to Cronus' fellow Titans, which throughout the exegetical tradition for this passage are equated with the elements¹⁵. But it is apparently supported by the etymology of Cronus' name as *krisis* or *apokrisis*¹⁶ ('separation'): the phonic similarity may seem scant, but it is evidently considered to be strong enough to be acceptable, especially in conjunction with the allegoresis.

A Stoic variant of this interpretation, attributed to Chrysippus himself, maintains the same concept of separation and the same etymology but applies these not to the beginning of the creation of the world but instead to ordinary meteorological events in our present world:

Schol. vet. in Hes. Th. 459 Di Gregorio:

καὶ τοὺς μὲν κατέπινε Κρόνος μέγας: ...Χρύσιππος δέ φησιν ὅτι, καθύγρων ὄντων τῶν ὅλων καὶ ὄμβρων καταφερομένων πολλῶν, τὴν τούτων ἔκκρισιν Κρόνον ὠνομάσθαι.

Great Cronus would swallow these down: ...Chrysippus [SVF II 1090] says that when everything is very wet and many rainstorms come down, their separation (*ekkrisis*) is named Cronus.

Here the relation of the explanation to the myth seems tangential at best; perhaps nothing more is involved than the same general kind of vertical movement from above to below in both the 'surface text' and the physical allegory. In Chrysippus, as in other philosophical authors like Cornutus and Plotinus whom we shall encounter below, one might well ask whether what we see is exegesis in the strict sense, *i.e.* an interpretative activity directed above all to the explication of an authoritative but troublesome text. Is Hesiod's text problematic in Chrysippus' eyes? Does he intend his meteorological explanation to rescue the archaic poet? Or is he simply using the myth in order to support a natural philosophical point? Certainly Chrysippus' focus here is

¹³ Throughout the ancient and medieval exegetical tradition for this passage, the Titans are taken as designating the elements. We expect to return on another occasion to this topic.

¹⁴ See for example Anaxagoras D9, D10, D12 Laks-Most = B1, B2, B4 Diels-Kranz.

¹⁵ Naturally, in our minds the separation of Sky's genitals from his body also implies a separation from Earth, but the exegetical texts do not make this explicit.

¹⁶ In this article we use boldface for certain letters in the transcriptions of etymologies in order to give some idea of the phonetic similarities that seem to be intended.

not so much on Hesiod's poetry as rather on his own meteorology. But he is attempting to bolster his scientific argument with reference to evidence drawn from a myth which is recounted by a celebrated ancient poet in a text with which both he and his audience seem to be familiar (note his *katapheromenōn* corresponding to Hesiod's *katēpine*) and by means of an etymology (deriving *Kronos* from *ekkrisin*) which is found throughout the exegetical tradition. If Chrysippus and his philosophical colleagues seem to speak more about the myth and less about the poem this is surely not because they or their audience had some other access to the myth than the poem, but because it was part of the *ethos* of philosophy, the literary genre in which they were writing, not to remain stuck in the texts as philologists were, but instead to move upwards beyond them in a more conceptual direction. That is, it is a question of professional identity. Thus, if Chrysippus is not performing exegesis himself in the first instance, he remains an extremely valuable testimonium to the exegetical tradition.

The second model is based upon the fact that it was very easy for any speaker of ancient Greek to think of *chronos* ('time') upon hearing the name *Kronos* ('Cronus'): the difference is merely the aspiration of the initial consonant, though linguistically the alteration is much less obvious than any of the ancients probably realized (in fact, the etymology of Cronus is debated). So it is not surprising that the *scholia vetera* repeatedly identify Cronus with time (though, as we shall see in a moment, this explanation fits his devouring of his children much better than it does his castration of his father)¹⁷:

Schol. vet. in Hes. Th. 137 Di Gregorio:

τοὺς δὲ μέθ' ὀπλότατος: ...ἢ Κρόνον τὸν χρόνον, ὅτι τὰ μὲν κρύπτει ὁ χρόνος, τὰ δὲ φαίνει· ἢ ὅτι λεληθότως παρέρχεται.

After these, [scil. Cronus was born,] the youngest of all: ...Or Cronus (Kronos) is time (chronos), because time hides some things but brings others to light; or because it goes by unnoticed.

Schol. vet. in Hes. Th. 459 Di Gregorio:

καὶ τοὺς μὲν κατέπινε Κρόνος μέγας: ...νομίζεται δὲ πᾶς Οὐρανοῦ καὶ Γῆς, ὅτι ἐκ τῆς ἐπιτολῆς τῶν ὑπὲρ γῆς καὶ ὑπὸ γῆν ἄστρων ὁ χρόνος γίνεται. διὰ γὰρ τούτου καὶ ἡμερονύκτιον καὶ μῆνα καὶ καιρὸν διορίζομεν. καταπίνειν δὲ λέγεται τὰ τέκνα, ὅτι ὅσα διὰ χρόνου γίνεται τῷ χρόνῳ πάλιν συνδιαφθείρεται.

¹⁷ For another passage in the *scholia vetera* identifying Cronus with time, see *Schol. vet. in Hes. Th. 138* Di Gregorio.

Great Cronus would swallow these down: ...He is considered to be a child of Sky and Earth because time comes about from the rising of the stars above and below the earth. For it is by means of him that we measure a day, a month, and a season. He is said to swallow his children, because everything that is born by means of time is destroyed in turn by time.

This interpretation is doubtless more satisfactory from the etymological point of view than the first one in terms of *krisis* was; but it obviously applies much better to the latter part of the story of Cronus, when he tried to conceal all his children, than it does to the earlier account of his castration of Sky. After all, it was a commonplace in Greek thought that time conceals what it brings to light, *i.e.* that it destroys everything that it generates. But how could time possibly cut off the sky? However, it might be suggested that perhaps there is a trace in the second passage of an attempt to connect a physical allegory of Cronus' 'separation' of Sky's genitals to the etymology of Cronus' name as *chronos* in the use of the word *diorizomen* ('we measure'), which can also mean 'we separate' – that is, we separate the sky into measurable units and thereby establish the units of time.

In the case of another scholium, there can be little doubt that it is making a brave attempt to combine both of the two interpretations indicated hitherto, and therefore also both of the two etymologies:

Schol. vet. in Hes. Th. 459 Di Gregorio:

καὶ τοὺς μὲν κατέπινε Κρόνος μέγας: ...ἡ δὲ ἐκτομὴ αὐτοῦ οὕτως ἀναλύεται· ὅτι τοῦ Οὐρανοῦ καὶ τῆς Γῆς μίξεως γενομένης ἐξωγονεῖτο πολλά· εἶτα τοῦ χρόνου ἕκαστα διακρίναντος καὶ τὰ γεννηθέντα ἐκ τῆς πρὸς ἄλληλα μίξεως ζωογονοῦντος, ἐκτετμήσθαι τὸν Οὐρανὸν εἴρηται.

Great Cronus would swallow these down: ...His act of castration is analyzed in this way: that after the sexual intercourse of Sky and Earth, many living creatures were born; and then, when time (*chronos*) had separated (*diakrinantos*) each one and was producing the creatures born from the sexual intercourse among themselves, it is said that Sky was castrated.

Here we have a reference to an early stage of cosmogony (not to the earliest stage, as in the first allegoresis), in which the interpreter seems to invent out of whole cloth the idea that many living creatures are born after Sky and Earth have intercourse; these then have to be separated out (*diakrinantos*) into the different species so that creatures can start to be born from the sexual intercourse of creatures of one species with other ones of the same species, and this process of separation is something that can only have occurred over the course of time (*chronou*). The exegesis is ingenious, and while its relation

to the text of Hesiod is tenuous it may have been influenced by reports about Empedocles' theory of zoogony¹⁸. But it is hard to see the application to Sky's castration as being fully justified; presumably the idea is that since Sky is no longer generating the creatures himself, but instead they are generating one another, he might be said to have lost his reproductive function, *i.e.* to have been 'cut out' of the process, or castrated. This may be the best available interpretation, but admittedly it is somewhat strained.

Both of these basic explanations are found not only in the *scholia vetera* but also in exegetical sections of other authors who discuss this episode in passing in the course of philosophical or theological disquisitions directed towards other issues than the elucidation of Hesiod's obscurities¹⁹. This is not surprising: after all, such authors will have read Hesiod's poems in school and will thereby have used commentaries which bear some, admittedly highly uncertain relation to the *scholia vetera* that have reached us. Passages like the ones cited in the note have the status of testimonia with regard to the directly transmitted *scholia vetera*; and in the other direction these authors give evidence for the diffusion of material from the *scholia vetera* throughout ancient learned culture as a whole.

But there are also two cases in which explanations of this episode appear in exegetical sections of non-exegetical authors which do not coincide with any of the material in the surviving *scholia vetera*. One is found in Cornutus' *Compendium of Greek Theology*:

Corn. *Nat. deor.* 7

Τελευταῖον δὲ ὁ μὲν Κρόνος ἱστορεῖται συνεχῶς κατιόντα ἐπὶ τῷ μίγνυσθαι τῇ Γῇ τὸν Οὐρανὸν ἐκτεμεῖν καὶ παῦσαι τῆς ὕβρεως, ὁ δὲ Ζεὺς ἐκβαλὼν αὐτὸν τῆς βασιλείας καταταρταρῶσαι. διὰ τοῦτο αἰνίττονται ὅτι ἢ τῆς τῶν ὅλων γενέσεως τάξις, ἢν ἔφαμεν ἀπὸ τοῦ κραίνειν Κρόνον εἰρῆσθαι, τὴν γινομένην τέως πολλὴν ῥύσιν τοῦ περιέχοντος ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν ἔστειλε λεπτοτέρας ποιήσασα τὰς ἀναθυμιάσεις.

Finally, it is reported, Cronus castrated Sky, who was incessantly descending in order to have sexual intercourse with Earth, and put a stop to his outrage; and Zeus cast Cronus out from the kingship and hurled him down into Tartarus [cf. Hes. *Th.* 490-491]. They hint thereby that the arrangement of the origin of the universe, which we said [cf. *Nat. deor.* 3, p. 3.10 Torres] was called 'Cronus' (*Kronos*) from *krainein* ('fulfilling'), curbed the flowing towards the

¹⁸ Cf. Emp. D151 Laks-Most = A72 Diels-Kranz.

¹⁹ Cronus is separation: [Clem.] *Homil.* 13. Cronus is time: Corn. *Nat. deor.* p. 2 app. crit. 15-16 Torres; [Clem.] *Recogn.* X 31, *Homil.* 6, 7 and 6, 13; Psellus, *Treatise* 47, p. 169.30-35 Duffy.

earth (which had been intense up to that moment) on the part of what was surrounding it, by making the evaporations finer.

This is a particularly rich and complex allegoresis in which the myth of Sky's incessant sexual encroachment upon Earth (not Earth's angry resentment at his tendency to keep his children imprisoned inside her) is referred to a stage in cosmogony in which the evaporations or elemental movements became less dense and as a result the intense flow of the atmosphere towards the earth was reduced (*i.e.* cut back); it is supported by an etymology, not attested elsewhere, of Cronus from *krainein* ('to fulfill'). Perhaps the arrangement of the universe is being thought of as a kind of *krisis* ('separation'); and surely the reference to the *rusin* ('flowing') towards the earth must have some connection with the goddess Rhea (often associated with some sort of cosmic 'flow' because of her name). It is not impossible that Cornutus has invented this explanation himself, or has taken it from a Stoic source which is otherwise lost and cannot be identified. But it might also have appeared in ancient commentarial literature which either was not taken up into the *scholia vetera* or was taken up and then was omitted. As we saw earlier, Cornutus' philosophical approach means that, like Chrysippus above, he is applying the results of exegesis rather than performing exegesis directly himself; but his proximity to the Hesiodic text is indicated by his constant prose paraphrases for Hesiod's poetic language; and it is not accidental that an anonymous medieval author later interpolated into his text a passage of direct exegesis of Hesiod which has been preserved in a small part of the tradition²⁰.

The other passage in which exegetical material in a non-exegetical author is not paralleled in the surviving *scholia vetera* appears in Plotinus:

Plot. *Enn.* V 8, 13

Ὁ οὖν θεὸς ὁ εἰς τὸ μένειν ὡσαύτως δεδεμένος καὶ συγχωρήσας τῷ παιδὶ τοῦδε τοῦ παντὸς ἄρχειν – οὐ γὰρ ἦν αὐτῷ πρὸς τρόπον τὴν ἐκεῖ ἀρχὴν ἀφέντι νεωτέραν αὐτοῦ καὶ ὑστέραν μεθέπειν κόρον ἔχοντι τῶν καλῶν – ταῦτ' ἀφείξ ἔστησέ τε τὸν αὐτοῦ πατέρα εἰς ἑαυτόν, καὶ μέχρις αὐτοῦ πρὸς τὸ ἄνω· ἔστησε δ' αὖ καὶ τὰ εἰς θάτερα ἀπὸ τοῦ παιδὸς ἀρξάμενα εἶναι μετ' αὐτόν, ὥστε μεταξὺ ἀμφοῖν γενέσθαι τῇ τε ἑτερότητι τῆς πρὸς τὸ ἄνω ἀποτομῆς καὶ τῷ ἀνέχοντι ἀπὸ τοῦ μετ' αὐτόν πρὸς τὸ κάτω δεσμῷ, μεταξὺ ὧν πατρός τε ἀμείνωνος καὶ ἡττονος υἱέος.

Therefore the god [*i.e.* Cronus], who is bound [cf. Hes. *Th.* 718] so that he remains in the same way and who has yielded to his son his rule over this

²⁰ The text of this addendum is edited in Torres 2018, app. crit. to p. 2, line 16.

universe – for it would not have been in accordance with his character for him to relinquish his rule in the higher world and to seek after a [*scil.* different] rule, inferior to himself and later, out of satiety (*koros*) with beauties [*i.e.* the transcendent ones] – lets these things here go and establishes his father in himself, extending as far as him [*i.e.* Sky] upwards; and he has established in turn in the opposite direction what begins to exist starting from his son after himself, so that he comes to be between the two, because of the difference of his cutting with regard to what is upwards and by the bond holding him above what comes downwards after him: he is between a better father and a worse son.

Plotinus' allegoresis is not only unique outside the Neoplatonic tradition to which he helps give rise, it is also unusual within Plotinus himself, given that he indulges far less in interpretation of the early poets than his Neoplatonic successors do. Plotinus interprets the Hesiodic genealogical sequence Sky-Cronus-Zeus allegorically as a representation of the metaphysical sequence One-Intellect-Soul. Cronus mediates between on the one hand the One (Sky), from which he has distanced himself by cutting it, and on the other hand Soul (Zeus), from whom he is both linked and separated by the indissoluble bonds that keep him located in the central position, where his condition is one of delighted satisfaction with all the beautiful things his layer of reality has to offer. Plotinus takes individual elements of the myth – the cutting, the bonds – and isolates them from their narrative context so that he can reapply them in a highly creative way in support of his metaphysical doctrine: Cronus does indeed perform a cutting of Sky, but it is not an emasculation but instead a cutting off, whereby Sky, as the highest and perfectly transcendent region, become *absolutus* in the literal sense, 'disconnected' from the other layers of reality; and he is indeed bound by Zeus, but these bonds are not a constraint but an expression of interconnectedness. It is very hard to imagine that such complex allegoreses ever figured in the ancient exegetical tradition – or that any student would have understood them if they had. So they are not intended to enter the ordinary schoolroom; like those of Chrysippus and Cornutus, they manifest the philosopher's familiarity with the classical texts and with their exegetical tradition and they help convince students who share this same familiarity, without getting entangled in philological minutiae.

5. *Medieval Exegesis*

The *scholia vetera* transmitted to the Byzantine Middle Ages what survived from the scholarship of antiquity. But the Byzantines not only studied the ancient scholia, they also created their own bodies of exegetical material; some of these are compilations and are referred to by modern scholars as the *scholia*

recentiora, while others can be assigned to single scholars (some of whom remain anonymous). In part these repeat ancient explanations. For example, in his commentary on the *Theogony*, probably dating from sometime in the 11th or 12th century, John Diaconus Galenus explained Cronus as separation (*ad* 459) or as time (*ad* 134); the latter etymology is found also in the so-called *Anonymous Exegesis* (*ad* 459), presumably from about the same period, and in the *scholia recentiora* (*ad* 178 p. 228.23-27 Flach). So too, Galenus' etymology of Cronus as *koron noun* ('pure mind', *ad* 617) harks back to an etymology in Plato's *Cratylus* (396b).

But the Byzantine scholars, working in a very different historical and religious context, also contribute several new ideas to the tradition of exegesis of Cronus²¹. In particular, all three of the ones just cited interpret the myth of Cronus as an allegory of the procedure by which humans perform agriculture²²: Galenus *ad* 171; the *Anonymous Exegesis ad* 159 and 178; and the *scholia recentiora ad* 181 (which is derived from Galenus' commentary). Here are two of their interpretations in full. First, Galenus:

Io. Gal. in Hes. *Th.* 171

πατρός γε δυσωνύμου: “δυσώνυμος” δὲ ὁ οὐρανὸς λέγεται κατὰ ἀντίφρασιν, ἥγουν διότι ὥρεϊ, τουτέστι φυλάσσει καὶ ἔνδον ἑαυτοῦ ἀποκλείει τὰ πάντα· τοῦτο δὲ οἶον ἀπ᾽ ἄδον δοκεῖ κατὰ τὸν μῦθον τοῖς τηρουμένοις. λέγεται δὲ, πολλῶν καὶ ἄλλων τῆς Γῆς τε καὶ τοῦ Οὐρανοῦ ὄντων παίδων, μόνος ὁ Κρόνος τὴν κατ’ αὐτοῦ βουλὴν μελετῆσαι καὶ ἄρπην ἐν χειρὶ κατασχεῖν, παρόσον ὁ χρόνος μετακυλινδούμενος, τῶν ἐξ οὐρανοῦ τε καὶ γῆς ἀναδιδομένων καρπῶν καὶ τῆς γονιμότητος ἀφανιστικός ἐστίν ἢ θεριστικός· τοῦ γὰρ θέρου ἐλθόντος, θερίζουσι τὰ ὄρια οἱ ἄνθρωποι δρεπάνας ἐν χερσὶν ἔχοντες, τὴν ἐξ οὐρανοῦ δηλαδὴ εὐκράτως τοῖς σπέρμασι καὶ ἐκ γῆς ἐντεθεῖσαν γονιμότητα. πάλιν δὲ ῥίπτουσι “φέρεσθαι ἐξοπίσω”, παρόσον τοὺς σπόρους ἐκ τῶν θερισθέντων ποιοῦσι.

Evil-named father: The sky (*ouranos*) is called “evil-named” by antiphrasis, because it protects (*ōrei*), *i.e.* guards and locks up everything within itself; this seems to be in disaccord with things being preserved according to the myth. Although there were many other children of Earth and Sky, only Cronus is said to have devoted himself to the plot against Sky and to have taken the sickle in his hand, inasmuch as time (*chronos*), as it revolves around, destroys or reaps (*ther-*

²¹ See also Galenus *ad* 383, where Cronus is etymologized as *korainontos* (apparently ‘black’ or ‘invisible’), presumably referring to his concealment of his children.

²² For a remarkable Christianized allegoresis of Cronus, see Galenus *ad* 617. We expect to return to this passage on another occasion in a more general study of this and other Byzantine commentaries.

istikos) the crops that grow from the sky and earth and their generative power. For when the summer (*theros*) comes, people hold sickles in their hands and harvest (*therizousi*) what is ripe, evidently the generative power that is implanted into the seeds from the sky and from the earth in a temperate fashion. In turn they “throw them to be borne away backwards” [*Th.* 181-182], insofar as they make the sowings out of what has been harvested.

For the first time, as far as we can tell, the myth is explained explicitly with reference not to a primordial cosmogonic event (nor even to a recurrent meteorological one, as in the passage from Chrysippus noted above), but instead to an ordinary, perfectly quotidian human activity. Cronus’ baleful primordial sickle becomes an everyday agricultural instrument; the reaping of Sky’s genitals, which in Hesiod (ἤμησε, *Th.* 181) had been an extraordinary symbol for Cronus’ monstrous act of castration, is now restored to its literal meaning of the farmers using a sickle to cut off the edible portions of their crops during the annual harvest – it is obvious we are dealing here with a recurring phenomenon: this happens every summer as Cronus «revolves around». The interpretation is further ‘proven’ by Cronus throwing Sky’s genitals away backwards, a gesture that apparently resembles a typical harvesting technique²³. Galenus thus already propounds an interpretation of Cronus as a prototypical farmer or inventor of agriculture, predating the views of certain modern scholars by many centuries²⁴.

According to the reading preserved in Galenus, Sky is (with the aid of etymology) cast as a guardian here, unwilling to release the fruits of his generative powers – hence the necessary intervention of Cronus. Galenus states clearly that these powers are shared with Earth, a union that is further explained by the Anonymous:

Anon. *Exeg. in Hes. Th.* 159

ἡ δ’ ἐντὸς στοναχίζετο: ἡ δὲ γῆ, φησί, ποτὲ μὲν πολλὰ ἀναφιεῖσα, ποτὲ δὲ ὕδατώδη πλημμύραν ἐν ἑαυτῇ δεχομένη, “ἐστοναχίζετο” καὶ ἐστενοχωρεῖτο. ἐμηχανήσατο δὲ “δολίαν”, ἥγουν συνετὴν τέχνην. κατασκευάσασα γὰρ ἀπὸ ἀδάμαντος, ἥτοι σιδήρου, δρεπάνην εἶπε τοῖς φίλοις πᾶσι παισί· τιμωρησώμεθα τὸν ὑμῶν πατέρα. πάντων δὲ πρὸς τοῦργον δειλανδρησάντων, ὁ Κρόνος μόνος ἐθάρρησε τοῦτο ποιῆσαι.

²³ Cf. Anon. *Exeg. in Hes. Th.* 174, focusing on a similar harvesting technique: «Just as men who sit in ambush lie in wait and are hidden, so too harvesters, sitting down as if in a kind of ambush, reap the ears of corn. So it is the earth, he is saying, that has taught humankind how they must pursue these matters. She also gave them a “sickle with jagged teeth” and provided them with all kinds of devices [cf. *Th.* 175]». It is the similarity in posture in the story (and not etymology) that opens up the allegory. And «the rest is mythical».

²⁴ See e.g. Baldry 1952 for Cronus as a harvest-god; West 1966, p. 218 opposes the view; see, more recently, Tralau 2018.

καλῶς δὲ τοῦτο εἶπε. πάντα γὰρ τὰ ἐκ τῆς γῆς προερχόμενα μητέρα κέκτηνται ταύτην. τινῶν δὲ τούτων μὴ δυνηθέντων στήσαι τὴν τῶν ὑδάτων ἄτακτον φορὰν μηδὲ καλῶς μετέρχεσθαι τὰ τῆς γῆς, μόνος ὁ Κρόνος δηλονότι ὁ ἀρχαιότατος τῶν ἀνθρώπων <τοῦτο ἐδυνήθη, θάρρησαντες δὲ> μετήεσαν μὲν τὰ τῆς γῆς, τοῦ δὲ οὐρανοῦ οὐδὲ ὀλίγον ἐφρόντιζον.

But [scil. huge Earth] groaned within: The earth, he says, sometimes sending up many things and sometimes receiving within herself a watery flood, “groaned” and was constricted. She contrived a “trick”, *i.e.* an intelligent strategy. For after she had prepared a sickle out of adamant, *i.e.* iron, she said to all her beloved children, “Let us punish your father”. All the others reacted to this task with cowardice, and only Cronus had the courage to do it. And Hesiod has said this well. For all the things that come forth from the earth have her as their mother. And while some of them were unable to stop the disorderly rush of the waters and to pursue well the matters of the earth [*i.e.* agriculture], only Cronus, obviously the most primeval human being, <was able to do this, and when they had taken courage> they pursued the matters of the earth, while they cared not even a little bit for the heavens.

In this passage, Sky and Earth are more clearly connected by the «watery flood» that Earth receives from Sky. In contrast to Galenus, the Anonymous takes a diachronic perspective: Cronus (again singled out as the only one daring to oppose Sky) wields his sickle and cuts off the «disorderly rush of the waters» that troubled Earth – perhaps not so much hinting at the reaping of corn but rather at the practice of irrigation, the ‘ordering’ of water, or, perhaps more likely, the sowing of seed²⁵. Cronus is thus not likened to everyday farmers, but hailed as the inventor of agriculture, that «most primeval human being», getting help from Earth (whose «trick» becomes a *technē*, a strategy or skill). From his act onwards, people do not care about the heavens anymore (echoing Cronus’ own words in *Th.* 171-172, «I do not care at all about our evil-named father») as they can replace Sky’s generative function and focus on earth alone.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, throughout its millennial duration, scholars dealt with this particular Hesiodic perplexity by physical allegories supported by etymologies. Whereas Plato in outrage rejects the myth as false and hence refuses to

²⁵ Cf. the mention of the «temperate fashion» in the passage from Galenus. Agriculture is a profession that depends on measure and regularity. See also the passage from Cornutus quoted above, stating that Cronus «curbed the flowing towards the earth».

countenance attempts to save it by means of exegesis, the scholarly traditions do not question its truthfulness and attempt to salvage this by allegoresis. The transmitted scholia focus much less on the problems posed by the myth than on the solutions they offer for them; this may be due to the abridged and compilatory character of our scholia, partly to a scholastic emphasis not on what is wrong with the text but on how it is to be understood. But the millennial effort to explain this passage is eloquent testimony to the perplexity that its readers felt. The tradition reveals, as all traditions do, both continuities over time and innovations that are tied to changes in world view and historical context. The interpreters saved the truth of the myth by referring it not to problematic divinities but to real natural processes – either to one-time events during the creation of the world or to recurrent events in our own world once this had been established. The latter is far more frequent in Byzantine scholia than in the scholia vetera and may even have been a Byzantine development. If so, this may have been because of the greater centrality and importance of the *Works and Days* in Byzantine culture compared to the *Theogony* (interpreting the myth in terms of ordinary agricultural practice would have aligned this passage of the *Theogony* with the Hesiodic poem that people knew better and hence made it more acceptable), perhaps too because of pressure from a competing and far more prestigious account of the origin of the world, namely the one in Genesis (thereby rendering an interpretation in terms of pagan philosophical cosmogony less attractive). From Philo onwards, it was common to compare Genesis to the *Theogony*, and Moses to Hesiod – and whereas the Biblical account was always credited with the full truth, medieval scholars found much that they were able to explain in their natural world by having recourse to Hesiod as well.

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