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PROLOGUE

They Contain Multitudes

The ancient Greeks are still very much with us. The modern city of Athens boasts streets named for the lawgiver Solon, the admiral Themistocles, the god Hermes. The main shopping street in Rhodes is Socrates Street, and a labyrinth of lanes off the southern part of the street leads to Pythagoras Street. Every year on the first Monday of Lent the people of Tyrnavos in northern Greece honor the god Dionysus by parading through the streets bearing phalluses they have made of clay, wood, and bread and inviting passersby to kiss their creations. Although the Greek that is spoken today throughout the Greek mainland and islands differs markedly from ancient Greek—just try to order a meal in the language of Plato!—in the nine small towns that make up Grecia Salentina in south Italy a tongue far closer to the language of the ancients is often heard: the dialect known as Griko. It is the last linguistic survival of the culture of Magna Graecia (Greater Greece), as Sicily and southern Italy were known in antiquity.

We need not be in Europe to feel the Greek presence. Freudian psychoanalysis makes much of the story of Oedipus, and cognitive behavioral therapy is grounded in the teachings of Zeno and the Stoics. Writers in cultures as different as those of France and Nigeria, South Korea and Colombia, Egypt and the United States have found in the story of Oedipus a useful platform for addressing the concerns of their own societies. In New York City, where I live, the Greek heritage is kept alive by the philanthropy of Aristotle Onassis, named for the famous

FIGURE 0.1. Sicily theater. Palazzo Acreide (Province of Syracuse), Sicily: Greek theater of Akrai, 3rd–2nd BCE. The city is mentioned by Thucydides and was part of Magna Graecia. Alfredo Dagli Orti / Art Resource, NY.

philosopher, and of John D. Rockefeller, Jr., who provided inspiration and the funding for the remarkable works of art at Rockefeller Center in midtown Manhattan, including the outsize bronze statues of Atlas and Prometheus. Here in the United States there are more than twenty cities named Athens, and nearly that many Spartas; sixteen states can boast Homers; Achilles Streets can be found in California, in Nebraska, and in New Jersey. Only Nashville, Tennessee, however, can boast its own Parthenon, complete with a statue of Athena by sculptor Alan LeQuire that at nearly forty feet is one of the largest indoor sculptures in the world.

But the ancient Greeks were not a monolithic bunch. Achilles did not look at the world at all in the same way as Socrates, who in turn differed from Aristotle, who differed from the Stoics. Like most people, ancient Greeks were a bundle of contradictions. Given to waxing lyrical about the joys of freedom, they also kept huge numbers of hapless slaves in subjection. Home to an extraordinary proliferation of different schools of

thought about both gods and mortals, Greece was also a place where people could be put to death for things they thought or said about religion—even in Athens, where freedom of expression was one of the watchwords of the democracy. Greeks were both contradictory and complex.

We know much more about some than about others. Of the thought patterns of the poor, the female, the enslaved, we have little evidence. We know a good deal about how free Greek men thought about these "muted groups," but little about what people who belonged to these groups believed about anything. Although the Athenian Aristophanes wrote three comedies about women that tell us a great deal about how men imagined women's thought patterns, they reveal little about the thinking of actual women. We would know much more if we knew which sex had invented which myths; surely a number of the Greek myths that have come down to us had been formulated by women, who then as now engaged in storytelling with their children. Even the urban, elite males to whom we owe the bulk of the surviving literature, however, revealed a wide variety of outlooks, and though not many women left a record of their thoughts, some did.

The Spartan Tyrtaeus, a poet of uncertain date, identified martial courage as the only valid measure of a man. I would not take account of anyone, he wrote, just because he is athletic, or rich, or powerful, or handsome, or indeed had every one of these qualities but lacked a fighting spirit; but in warfare, he contended,

> Lies excellence, the very finest thing
> In all the world, surely the fairest prize
> A youth can seek to win, a noble boon
> His city and its people share with him,
> When someone stands among the foremost spears
> Planting his feet with no thought of foul flight,
> His soul and steadfast heart superbly trained,
> Encouraging the man who stands nearby.
> . . .
> And he who, fighting in the foremost ranks,
> Loses his dear life showers on his city

And all his countrymen, and on his father
The greatest glory, bearing many wounds
In front, through breastplate and through sturdy shield. . . .
(12, 13–26; Stobaeus, *Anthology* 51. 1, 5)

Those sturdy shields protected not only the wearer but also the man next to him, and it was impressed on Greek soldiers that nothing could be more shameful than throwing away one's shield and running. The outspoken seventh-century mercenary Archilochus from the Aegean island of Paros cannot have been alone in questioning this ideology in eminently unheroic verse:

No doubt some Thracian guy has got my shield.
More power to him. It's in perfect shape,
But I was forced to leave the thing behind
Under a bush. Me, though, I got away!
The hell with that old shield since I can buy
Another one that's every bit as good.
(Cited in Plutarch, *Spartan Institutions*, 34)

Not surprisingly, the fifth-century poet Pindar from Thebes, north of Athens, who received substantial commissions for composing odes in honor of athletic victories, defines excellence in terms of physical prowess, writing in connection with the Pythian games in honor of Apollo (so named because of Apollo's reported slaying of the serpent/dragon Pytho):

Only a god's heart is untouched by pain,
But fortunate and worthy of acclaim
By all the wisest poets is the man
Who wins a victory by means of excellence
Of hands or speedy feet, the man who gains
The greatest prizes from his daring strength
And in his lifetime sees his stripling son
Duly rewarded with a Pythian crown.
Though he can never reach the brazen sky,
Of all the glories mortals can attain
His voyage takes him to the farthest shore. (*Pythian* 10. 21–29)

The philosopher Xenophanes from Colophon in Anatolia had a different perspective. If a man should win in some event at Olympia, he says, his fellow townsmen would make a colossal fuss over him, but he would not deserve it as Xenophanes does:

> For better than the strength of man or horse
> Is wisdom of the kind I call my own.
> People, though, don't think clearly about this:
> It is not right to value simple strength
> Above the sacred wisdom of the mind.
> For if among the populace there's one
> Who's good at boxing or at wrestling,
> Who wins the arduous Pankration,
> Or the pentathlon, or a runner, say—
> Since racing skill, of all the tests of strength,
> Receives the greatest honor at the Games—
> This would not make his city better run. (Athenaeus, 10. 423–31)

The most famous female poet of antiquity attested to the outsize role war played in the Greeks' frame of reference when she wrote

> Some say of all the sights one could behold
> The loveliest is cavalry; some say,
> No—infantry! Still others say a fleet.
> I see things differently. I say that she
> Whom one loves best is the most beautiful. (16. 1–4)

Sappho goes on to express her sorrow at the departure of her beloved Anactoria, whose radiant face she would rather see than all the armed forces of wealthy Lydia.

Some Greeks hated democracy, while others praised it. Everywhere on earth, claimed an anonymous enemy of popular government,

> The best element is opposed to democracy, for among the best people there is the least licentiousness and wrongdoing but rather the most scrupulous concern for what is admirable, whereas among the people there is the greatest disorder and wickedness, because poverty

> drives them to shameful deeds, and the lack of money can result in ignorance and lack of education. (pseudo-Xenophon, *The Athenian Constitution*, 1. 5)

While acknowledging the prevalence of hostility to democracy, the Sicilian politician Athenagoras took a different position. Someone, he concedes, will say

> that democracy is neither intelligent nor fair and that it is rather the rich who are best fitted to govern. I say, however, that "the people" is the name of the whole state, the elite only one segment of it. In addition, the rich are the best at administering the treasury, the wise the best at framing issues, but the people are best at listening to arguments and judging among them, and that all these functions have their place in a democracy. But what actually happens in an oligarchy is that the few give the many their share of risks and then, not content with the lion's share of the profits, take them all. (Thucydides, 6. 39. 1–2)

Plainly there was no such thing as "the Greek value system." Most Greeks believed in the Olympian gods, but a few expressed skepticism. There was no consensus about what people could expect after they died. The Greeks have often been perceived as warlike by temperament, but the war between Athens and Sparta that ravaged Greece from 431 to 404 owed its length in part to powerful ambivalences on both sides, and even after their declaration of war the Spartans sent to the oracle of Apollo at Delphi to inquire whether they should really go ahead with it. Every opportunity for peace throughout the years of fighting was greeted with heated disagreement on both sides. And of course opinions sometimes changed over the course of a lifetime. In the quarter century that separated *Oedipus the King* (*Oedipus Rex*) from *Oedipus at Colonus*, the playwright Sophocles came to think differently about questions of fate, gods, and human agency. The same philosopher who in his *Republic* scandalized public opinion by suggesting that women could govern as well as men dotted his other works with strikingly misogynistic remarks, regularly classing women with children and contending that wicked and cowardly men would be reincarnated as women

FIGURE 0.2. Delphi. The structures at the imposing site of Delphi included this magnificent round temple in the sanctuary of Athena Pronaia. The remains of the twenty Doric columns that surrounded it are still visible. Manuel Cohen / Art Resource, NY.

(*Timaeus* 90e–91a). Some values and beliefs, however, were widely shared. Inscribed on the temple of Apollo at Delphi were the words *mēden agan*: nothing in excess (along with the equally sage caution *gnōthi seauton*: know yourself—that is, recognize that you are a mortal with mortal limitation, and not a god—and with this few would have disagreed.

It is the aim of this book to explore areas of dramatic divergence, areas of subtle difference, and areas of broad agreement. In so doing, we will look at diverse areas of Greek thought and action: politics, religion, performance, competition, literature, and myth. Because myth affected every area of Greek life, we will begin there, bringing onto the stage the rollicking adventures of lovers and warriors, murderers and monsters, and indomitable forces of nature, always asking ourselves: what on earth are we to make of these extraordinary tales that have continued to capture the human imagination over two thousand years into the future?

CHAPTER 1

A World of the Imagination

> We are meaning-seeking creatures. Dogs, as far as we know, do not agonise about the canine condition, worry about the plight of dogs in other parts of the world, or try to see their lives from a different perspective. But human beings fall easily into despair, and from the very beginning we invented stories that enabled us to place our lives in a larger setting, that revealed an underlying pattern, and gave us a sense that, against all the depressing and chaotic evidence to the contrary, life had meaning and value.
>
> —KAREN ARMSTRONG, *A SHORT HISTORY OF MYTH*

> But a myth, to speak plainly, to me is like a menu in a fancy French restaurant: glamorous, complicated camouflage for a fact you wouldn't otherwise swallow, like maybe lima beans.
>
> —WILLIAM PETER BLATTY, *THE EXORCIST*

Every Greek lived in at least two worlds. On the one hand, there was the mundane world of the everyday: for women, childbearing and homemaking; for men, farming, sometimes commerce; for citizens, soldiering and politicking; for slaves, backbreaking work of all kinds. On the other, there was the extraordinarily imaginative world of myth, vibrantly alive in literature, art, religion, and in simply every Greek mind. Some fiercely, others with a bemused sense of irony, the Greeks believed in a

glorious past that was in every sense fabulous. Few Greeks had much sense of a historical past. What we would call social studies was not part of the school curriculum, and in any case written records with which the past might be reconstructed were scarce. But to grow up in ancient Greece was to be exposed to a pool of amazing tales about a very different universe, a remote past in which gods and mortals mingled comfortably, indeed interbred—a realm in which Earth, having mated with Sky, produced one-eyed giants and creatures who might sport fifty heads and a hundred arms; where the king of the gods seduced the queen of Sparta in the guise of a swan; where a man accidentally married his mother; where people were transformed into birds and bears and stars and trees; where a goddess killed a giant by picking up Sicily and throwing it at him and a god was so afraid of being overthrown by one of his children that he swallowed each of his offspring at birth. Love affairs both heterosexual and homosexual, jealousy, dismemberment, herbs that restore people to life, prophecies and vain attempts to escape them, fiery battles, thrilling chase sequences—it was all there.

These tales had in turn been invented at some point in the past by other Greeks who had also farmed and reproduced and kept house and fought and traded—mostly by men, to judge from their largely sexist and patriarchal cast, but some surely by women. The story of how the unsuspecting Persephone was kidnapped by her uncle the king of the Underworld as a child but was eventually enabled to spend a good chunk of her time at home with her mother smacks of invention by some female longing for the secure days before she was snatched from the care of her female relatives and compelled to marry an older man she barely knew. Some were invented from whole cloth, some derived from observations of the natural world, some inspired by riveting tales from the Near East. Like all myths, those of the Greeks fall into certain readily identifiable categories, with considerable interconnection and overlap. There are myths of origin designed to explain and justify the existence of the basic building blocks of civilization, which for the Greeks included such phenomena as patriarchy, marriage, law, and animal sacrifice. These stories sometimes overlap with myths about relations between gods and humans. There are myths of conflict between parents and

children, particularly fathers and sons. Some of these intersect with myths of origin, as when the reign of Zeus on Olympus is traced first to his overthrow of his father Kronos and ultimately to Kronos's overthrow—and castration—of his own parent, Ouranos. Some myths explain how the universe came to be, while others set up rules for how humans are to define their place in it. (The same can be said of philosophy.) There are myths of progress and myths of decline. A number of myths offer variations on the theme of the hero's quest, while others showcase the rite of passage from one stage of life to another—from virgin to wife, or from adolescent boy to responsible adult member of the community. The latter often intersects with myths of subduing monsters of one kind or another—which in turn intersect with myths of the establishment of order out of disorder.

The Greeks were born storytellers, and what is a myth if not a story? A story, moreover, is a way of organizing information and of explaining the mysteries of life. What science and philosophy would later approach in theory and abstraction, myth approached in concrete stories: told around a campfire, recited beside an altar, related to children by their elders, chiseled in stone or painted on a vase. The stories we call myths made themselves felt in every aspect of culture in the Greek world, where art and literature were unimaginable without them. But what exactly is a myth, and why does myth come into being in all cultures? What need does it fill?

We might say that myths are narratives that have special meaning for a culture, set in a distant past when the universe with which people later became familiar had not yet taken shape: narratives that unveil a sacred world. All Greek myths, for example, posit a world of kings and queens, princes and princesses rather than of oligarchies and democracies; before that a world with no people at all, only gods; and before that a world without either gods or people. The principal characters must include some supra-human beings: gods, demigods, heroes with extraordinary powers no longer accorded to mortals. Greek heroes are not necessarily altruistic or kind like modern heroes, who put others before themselves. They can be very self-centered, like Achilles. Living in a mythical time, heroes do not have paying jobs. Monster-slaying

is not so much a job as an avocation (sorry, Heracles). Heroes do not run for office. They do not read or write or trade; they do not come down with colds or develop acne. They may, like Zeus, pile one wife on another, but they never divorce. Myth lies somewhere on the spectrum between history and fiction. It is closer to history in that at least at some time it was believed actually to have happened, closer to fiction in that the events it describes are more exciting and unusual than those of everyday life. Aristotle maintained that poetry—the only kind of fiction he knew—was superior to history because history dealt with a small range of particulars and poetry with a wide range of possibilities (*Poetics*, 1451b). Myth, however, goes poetry one better, for it also deals with impossibilities alternately horrifying and delightful.

A priceless guide to the ideology and organization of a civilization, myth remains of uncertain origin, and we must ask with K. K. Ruthven whether it is "an expression of our freedom to invent alternative realities or . . . merely an agent of those powerful forces (personal and traumatic, or racial and primordial) which determine our lives."[1] In the nineteenth century the Scottish scholar William Robertson Smith maintained that myths were developed to explain rituals, whereas the British classicist and polyglot Jane Ellen Harrison maintained that while myth was closely bound up with ritual, it was not designed to explain it; rather it functioned as the narrative correlative of ritual. For anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski myth served as a pragmatic charter of wisdom, faith, and values designed to undergird the basic structure and ethos of a society. Structuralist Claude Levi-Strauss saw myth as encapsulating fundamental binary oppositions. Myths, he argued, work to organize perceptions of the world by setting up oppositions like chaos and order, sky and underworld, male and female, old and new. Sigmund Freud viewed myths, much like dreams, as a reflection of a particular society's anxieties and desires, a construction that allotted a substantial role in the formation of myth to the unconscious. Though each civilization's myths are distinctive, however, underlying patterns certainly appear—what psychoanalyst Carl Jung, who saw myth as the product of a collective unconscious, called "archetypes."

Even different practitioners of the same approach can differ widely among themselves in interpreting myths. In his study of myth and psychoanalysis, Robert Eisner has identified several contrasting psychoanalytic approaches to the myth of Oedipus, treated most famously by Sophocles in his tragedy *Oedipus the King*. The story is well known. Having heard a prophecy that their son would grow up to kill his father and marry his mother, King Laius of Thebes and his wife Jocasta give the baby to a shepherd with instructions to abandon him to his fate, with his ankles pierced and tied to prevent his crawling to safety, a development that seems to explain his name *Oedi-pus* (swollen foot), although it's certainly suggestive that the Greek verb for knowing was *oida*, and knowledge plays a large role in his story. The shepherd, however, takes pity on the infant, who is instead adopted by the king and queen of Corinth. Returning as an adult to Thebes, and having no idea of his true identity, he kills Laius in a fight along the road and marries his widow, thus fulfilling the prophecy. For one psychoanalyst, the myth is plainly the story of a deprived child. No, says another; rather it is the case history of a child who has been adopted. A third analyst has a different interpretation: Oedipus has an inferiority complex because of his handicap—the lameness that ensued from having his ankles pierced. Another sees him as a battered child: for heaven's sake, his parents tried to kill him! Still another focuses on his relationship with his mother/wife and sees Oedipus in patients who have been seduced as children by psychotic parents.[2]

No single scaffold can hope to accommodate the rich fabric of Greek myth. Certainly, myth serves to connect people with an imagined past and with another, transcendent dimension of reality. Shared belief enhances community cohesion. It was probably their myths above all that united the far-flung Greeks into a cohesive culture, for myths provided a huge body of shared cultural referents. Some myths are plainly etiological (from Greek *aition*, cause), articulating the rationale behind the organization of society or accounting for natural phenomena. The story of the subordination to Zeus of Hera, previously a powerful goddess in her own right, normalized patriarchy. (Hera's perpetual ill temper is normally ascribed to her husband's compulsive philandering, but

resentment over her demotion might have played a part as well.) Some explain natural phenomena. The snatching of Persephone, daughter of the agriculture goddess Demeter, by Hades, god of the Underworld, accounted for the existence of seasons. When Persephone was with her husband in the Underworld, Demeter was so disconsolate that nothing could grow, but when she began to divide her time between her husband and her mother, the land was barren when she was in the Underworld but fruitful when she was on earth. Why are crows black? At one time all crows were white, but when the crow Apollo had sent to keep an eye on his beloved Coronis informed the jealous god that Coronis was having sex with the mortal Ischys, the enraged Apollo, conflating the message with the messenger, turned it black.

Some myths seem to be etymological. When an irate Zeus decided to destroy the human race by flooding the earth, the oracle of the goddess Themis instructed the survivors Deucalion and his wife Pyrrha to repopulate the world by throwing the bones of their mother over their shoulders, whereupon they picked up stones—*laas*—from "mother Earth" and tossed them backward. The Greek word for "people" was *laos*, though the derivation is fanciful. The island Anaphe (*Revelation*) owed its name to the rescue of Jason and Medea by Apollo as they were returning to Greece with the golden fleece. When they found themselves imperiled by a violent storm at sea, Apollo shot an arrow into the water, causing a flash of lightning that illuminated an island offering safe anchorage, and this island they named Anaphe because it had been *revealed* to them by Apollo.

Indubitably, some myths do explain a ritual—or at least were believed to do so. Several of these are scattered through the first- or second-century CE compendium *The Library of Greek Mythology*, sometimes thought to be written by a man known as Apollodorus, although that was probably not the author's real name. Apollodorus tells how when Jason and Medea erected an altar to Apollo on Anaphe and sacrificed there, twelve of Medea's slave girls lobbed indecent jokes at the Argonauts; this, Apollodorus says, is why women make jokes during sacrifices to Apollo on Anaphe. When Minos received word of his son's death while he was in the middle of sacrificing to the Graces on the

island of Paros, Apollodorus writes, he completed the sacrifice but cast the ritual garland from his head and demanded that the customary flutes be silent; and that, Apollodorus explains, is why people sacrifice to the Graces on Paros without flutes or garlands.

The women's festival of the Thesmophoria was grounded in several myths, some of which were surely invented to explain the proceedings there. Demeter, so the story went, was so disconsolate after Persephone's disappearance that upon her arrival in Eleusis she at first declined the couch offered to her by the queen Metaneira and only agreed when the queen's slave Iambe offered her a fleece-covered stool:

> The goddess sat a long time on the stool,
> Silent and sorrowing, and by no word
> Or sign would she greet anyone at all;
> She sat, unsmiling, would not eat or drink,
> Pining and longing for her deep-girt child,
> Until astute Iambe intervened
> With jests and quips. Then did the goddess smile,
> The holy lady; then with joyful heart
> Demeter laughed, and ever afterward
> Iambe never failed to cheer her moods.
> (*Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, 198–205)

It was this playfulness that was put forward to explain the cutting jests exchanged by women at the Thesmophoria, and a parallel tale about the elderly Baubo accounted for the evident vulgarity of the women's remarks. Injured by Demeter's rejection of the food and drink she had offered, Baubo evidently lifted her dress and exposed herself to the goddess—which delighted Demeter so greatly that she happily received the proffered sustenance. Iambe's name meanwhile became enshrined in the name iambics given to a genre of Greek poetry that involved invective (usually, though not always, in an iambic meter) aimed sometimes at society as a whole, sometimes at individuals, and very frequently at women. Archilochus, Semonides, and Hipponax were the most famous of the iambic poets. Archilochus was said to have lambasted the family of a young woman whose father had broken

their engagement in such savage lines that they hanged themselves; Semonides composed a satire on women, discussed later in chapter 5, in iambics. The searing iambics of Hipponax were said to have had a similar impact on the sculptors Bupalus and Athenis, whose comical likenesses of him had provoked his wrath.[3] From being embedded in a happy story of female bonding, the word came to be associated with punitive verbal assaults.

Still other phenomena were reflective of the particularly dramatic aspects of real life, like kidnappings and rapes and cattle rustling. Tragedies happen that parallel those with which real humans were familiar. Athamas, maddened by an irate Hera, killed his oldest son when he mistook him for a deer; this still happens today, even leaving Hera out of the equation. Snakes abound, and numerous discarded snakeskins dot the Greek countryside. Orpheus's bride Eurydice was said to have died after stepping on a poisonous snake. The poet Anyte from Mytilene on Lesbos commemorated a dog of whom she (or the person who commissioned the verses) was fond who suffered the same fate:

> You too, beside the tangles of a bush
> With all too many roots, dear Locrian hound,
> Swiftest of all the pups who loved to bark—
> Into your nimble paw a gleaming snake
> With speckled throat injected cruel poison. (*Palatine Anthology* 16. 291)

The various myths that congregated around the figure of Prometheus served to explain a good bit. Hesiod tells how Prometheus's theft of fire, which Zeus had hidden from mortals, improved the lot of humankind no end, accounting for both heat and cooking. Another tale explained why it was that sacrifice, the central ritual of Greek religion, was followed by a delightful banquet in which humans got to divide up the meat while the gods luxuriated in the savory aroma of the smoke rising from the barbecue. Prometheus, it seems, tricked Zeus into choosing an offering of the bones of a sacrificed animal rather than the meat by dressing them artfully in glistening fat. Zeus was not best pleased, and the antics whereby Prometheus sought to benefit mankind so angered the king of the gods that he devised a dreadful punishment for man in

the form of woman: "An evil thing," wrote Hesiod, "in which they may all delight while they embrace their destruction" (*Works and Days*, 57–58). Ordering Hephaestus to craft the basics—a beautiful, strong female body with the voice of a human but the beauty of a goddess—he commanded the other gods to provide the new creation with a variety of other gifts, hence her name, Pandora, "all gifts." Athena, goddess of crafts, would teach her weaving; Aphrodite, goddess of love and sex, would lavish her with charm and sex appeal; and the versatile messenger god Hermes, also the god of robbers, would be responsible for endowing her with a mind shameful as a dog's and the sly cunning of a thief. She was, in short, trouble. Appearances, the story served to suggest, are not to be trusted. As in the case of Prometheus's deception of Zeus, what looked good on the outside was not good on the inside, and a vast corpus of Greek literature would go on to paint women as deceitful. As if the appearance of woman on earth were not affliction enough, Pandora was also given an ominous jar. For, Hesiod wrote,

> The tribes of men had once lived on the earth
> Free utterly from evils, from harsh toil,
> And innocent of death brought by disease,
> For men who suffer always grow old fast.
> The woman, though, removed the jar's huge lid
> Lifting it in her hands, and then she spread
> Its contents—miseries for men, they were.
> She knew it, too. (*Works and Days*, 90–95)

Prometheus had a great deal to account for. Zeus certainly thought so, since he had him chained to a rock where an eagle fed perpetually on his liver. Not only did his well-meaning appropriation of sacrificial meat and his theft of fire result in saddling man with the plague of women, but man's erstwhile life of ease was also replaced with one of hardship. Before the arrival of Pandora, Hesiod says, men lived free of the hard work and illness that led to early death. The post-Pandora world, by contrast—the world problematically composed of two sexes—was ridden with disease and endless toil. The comfortable relationship that had once existed between gods and mortals (all the mortals evidently being

male) had been severed. Once similarly lighthearted, the lives of gods and mortals had now become dramatically differentiated, the one remaining carefree, the other full of apprehension. In Hesiod's construct, then, women were created as a means for separating men—for there had as yet been no women—from the gods.

What were these gods like who endowed Pandora with her various attributes? The Greeks conceived their gods as outsize humans in appearance, albeit consistently good-looking where mere mortals varied drastically in pulchritude. They were often surrounded by an aura, although not when they were in disguise (which was a great deal of the time, as they were able to change into animal or human form at will), and sometimes they manifested themselves simply as forces of nature. They had considerable knowledge about the future, but they were not omniscient, as the dynamics of polytheism precluded both omniscience and omnipotence. The gods were temperamental and prone to quarreling with one another: god Alpha often plotted against god Beta, deceived god Gamma, or stymied the plans of god Delta. No god, however, could undo what another god had done. In Euripides' *Hippolytus*, Artemis is helpless to save her devotee Hippolytus and his stepmother Phaedra when Aphrodite has plotted their destruction. She explains:

> This is the custom here among the gods:
> No god can contravene another. We must yield,
> Standing aside, and let things take their course. (137–39)

Greek gods could not simply snap their fingers and will something to be done, as the god of the Hebrew Bible did when he said, "Let there be light." When they want someone dead, for example, they go about it in a very literal way. To gratify his priest Chryses by bringing plague upon the Greeks encamped at Troy, Apollo strides down from Olympus, his bow and quiver clanging on his shoulder, and showers them with poison arrows. In the battle between the gods and the giants, Hephaestus kills Mimas with missiles of red-hot iron while Dionysus kills Eurytos

with his wand; Athena for her part does away with Encelados by hurling the island of Sicily at him. At other times, however, gods could be conceived as disembodied principles, possibly even figures of speech, as when people used "Aphrodite" to mean sex.

While not unlimited, however, the gods' powers were extraordinary. Though I have never tried, I should imagine that it takes a great deal of strength to pick up Sicily and throw it. They showed their exceptional nature even in earliest childhood. No sooner had he emerged from his mother Maia's womb than Hermes cast off his swaddling clothes and stole a herd of cattle belonging to his older brother Apollo, concealing them in a cavern except for two that he sacrificed and cooked for his dinner. He then returned to his cave and his swaddling clothes to play the wide-eyed innocent. Not surprisingly, he grew up to be hailed as the god of thieves. Gods developed at an astonishing speed. Zeus reached adulthood within a year of his birth, and his daughter Athena was born fully grown, clad in armor. Their diet was radically different from that of mortals, for in place of bread and wine they dined on ambrosia and drank nectar.

The myths of the Greeks were rife with conflict, struggle, and bloodshed—though the gods did not literally bleed, as their veins were filled not with blood but rather with a thin, watery ethereal substance called ichor. Nectar, ambrosia, ichor: divine DNA was not like yours or mine. The violence that ran like a leitmotif through Greek mythology took many forms. The slaying of monsters was one obvious way in which a hero like Heracles or the Athenian prince Theseus could manifest his heroism and enact his masculinity: monsters were always done in by males, never by females. It is hard to decide which came first, heroes or monsters. Were heroes created to dispatch monsters, or were monsters created to give heroes a way to discharge their energies in a socially constructive way? Greek myth teemed with unnatural creatures of various kinds, some more dangerous than others. By sketching out these inhuman beings the Greeks explored and played with what it meant to be human. Monstrosity defined humanity. Some were rather appealing, such as the satyrs, men with horse features, going on two cloven legs but with equine ears, mane, and tail. Greek satyrs were particularly partial to both drink and nymphs and were associated with Dionysus. They

embodied lack of self-control and were regularly portrayed with erections, often masturbating, and they were more amusing than frightening. Also to be found in the woods were centaurs, who sported the bodies of horses but the heads and torsos of men and were more social than satyrs, generally congregating in groups. As nearly all satyrs and centaurs were male (visual evidence shows occasional exceptions), there was some disagreement as to how they reproduced their kind. Centaurs were perceived as every bit as lustful as satyrs but with a tendency toward violence when inebriated, which was a great deal of the time. Relief sculpture on the south side of the Parthenon shows a battle that ensued when the centaurs, guests at the wedding of Theseus's friend Peirithous, king of the Lapiths, tried to carry off the bride and many of their fellow invitees. Although centaurs were generally considered to be wild and uncivilized, one of their number, Chiron, possessed extraordinary wisdom and served as tutor to Achilles, Jason, and Apollo's son the healing god Asklepios (hence Chiron's modern nickname, Centaur for Disease Control). Although they could be dangerous, they were not grotesque.

The same could be said of the Minotaur. Though he fed eagerly on hapless humans who inadvertently wandered his way, he was hardly responsible for the awkward circumstances of his birth. The child who resulted from the Cretan queen Pasiphae's passion for a beautiful bull, he was an embarrassment to his family and thus consigned to the maze of the labyrinth; one wishes the unfortunate creature, blameless in the circumstances of his conception, had been able to enjoy a fuller life. The Cyclops Polyphemus who gobbled up Odysseus's crew might well frighten children, to whom all adult authority figures appear as big as giants, but his creepiness quotient is not high enough to strike cold terror in adults. Still other creatures were positively helpful, like the winged white horse Pegasus who assisted the hero Bellerophon in killing the Chimera. In fact, Pegasus was quite lovely to look at. The Chimera's particular combination of characteristics was fearsome—she was a conglomeration of a lion, a goat, and a snake—and she breathed fire to boot. Bellerophon was finally able to kill her only by approaching on Pegasus and thrusting his spear into her mouth with a lump of lead attached, which, melted by the creature's flaming breath, choked her.

Inevitably, the scariest monsters that sprang from the Greek imagination—the ones who really instilled primal terror—were those who most departed from accepted bodily norms and were most inclined to do harm. Among the most unsettling were creatures who had once been beautiful women, as these occasioned profound anxiety in both women who feared the loss of their looks and men who feared powerful females. Medusa, for example, had been a stunner (with, of all things, unusually beautiful hair) before she had the bad luck to catch Poseidon's eye. When the god raped her in Athena's temple, Athena was so aggrieved that she thought punishment was in order. As so often, this punishment fell not on the rapist but on his victim. The goddess turned Medusa into the forbidding Gorgon she is still known as today, a hideous creature, her lovely locks now hissing snakes, whose gaze turned anyone on whom it fell to stone. The motif of snaky hair crops up again in the dread Furies who leave their homes in the Underworld to avenge murdered kin. Even Athena in Aeschylus's *Eumenides* is taken aback at their appalling appearance. Who might they be? she inquires, for in them she sees

> no race of creatures ever brought to birth,
> neither of goddesses seen by the gods
> nor formed with shapes resembling those of mortals. (410–12)

It is not actually flippant to suggest that both Medusa and the Furies epitomized "bad hair days," symbolizing the inability to tame a serpentine tangle that has taken on a life of its own beyond the control of the head from which it sprang.

Other creatures were horrifying more in behavior than in appearance. The woman-bird hybrids known as the Harpies, though surely disconcerting to behold, repelled not by their looks but by their habits. They seem, like Medusa, once to have been normal women with exquisite hair. In their hybrid incarnation, however, they were given to snatching away the tasty dishes hopeful consultants brought the seer Phineas just as he was about to start eating—and seeing to it that the little they left was disgusting. Apollonius Rhodius tells the tale in the *Argonautica*:

Sometimes they left not a morsel; at other times, only a little.
And thus they ensured that the man would endure a life full of torment.
Over it all they would pour a stench that was utterly loathsome.
Nobody dared even stand near the food, let alone lift it
Up to his mouth, so great was the stink of the creatures' leavings.
(2. 189–93)

Granted the gift of prophecy by Apollo, Phineus had gotten carried away and revealed the will of Zeus in all its detail, whereupon the king of the gods took away his eyesight and sicced these sadistic creatures on him. Their name derived from the verb *harpazō*, to snatch, but the vile odor they imparted to their leavings made clear their truly fiendish nature. They did not simply want Phineus's food for themselves. Rather, they were determined that he should starve—just as he thought he was about to be fed.

Hurtful deeds are not the province of sadistic monsters alone. It comes as something of a shock when in the *Iliad* the ghost of the exceptionally gentle Patroclus recalls how he came to be so close to the hero Achilles: his father had spirited him away when still a child to safety in the home of Achilles' father Peleus because he was, in effect, wanted for manslaughter. Just like a fool, he says,

not really meaning to do it, but angry because of a game
A silly game of dice, I killed Amphidamas's son. (23. 85–88)

The celebrated inventor Daedalus was said to have come to Crete, where he designed the famous labyrinth, because he had been exiled for killing his nephew. The most revered of all Greek heroes, Heracles, in adolescence had struck and killed his music teacher out of frustration during a lesson, and it was as a penance for killing his wife and children in a fit of madness that the priestess at Delphi had ordered him to perform his famous twelve labors.

The mythology of the Greeks was both national—if one may use that word of a civilization that spread over hundreds of nation-states—and

regional. While some myths were recounted in all parts of the Greek world, others pertaining to deified local heroes were of more limited distribution. Thebes was particularly rich in local myths. Thebans enjoyed telling how Semele had given birth there to Dionysus, how their founder Cadmus had brought the alphabet from Phoenicia, how Teiresias had been born there; they also had the dubious honor of being home to the unfortunate house of Oedipus. Athenians were particularly fond of myths that featured their tutelary deity Athena or their local hero Theseus, whose journey to Athens to assume his rightful place as the king's son afforded one opportunity after another to enact his heroism, dispatching a series of high-profile malefactors. The most famous was the rogue smith Procrustes, known for the iron bed to which he insisted on fitting all passersby, stretching the short and lopping off the legs of the tall; administering a dose of his own medicine, Theseus put an end to Procrustes by fitting him to the very same bed. The Spartans, meanwhile, though they certainly had a temple to Athena, were heavily invested in the cult of Helen—the hometown girl made bad in the *Iliad*, but good, as we shall see, in the *Odyssey*—and Heracles, believed to be the ancestor of the Spartan kings. Like the Spartans, Heracles was renowned more for brawn than for brain. He slept with each of the 50 daughters of Thespios on consecutive nights under the impression that they were all the same person. To be sure, it was probably dark at the time. Nonetheless . . .

The cast of characters tended to be gods, Olympic and otherwise; demigods; and illustrious individuals (along with their families) believed to have lived around the time of the Trojan War. The countryside, moreover, was believed to teem with wild creatures of various kinds, and these regularly made their appearance in myth. Nymphs abounded—tree nymphs (dryads), mountain nymphs (oreads), and water nymphs (naiads). (Champion swimmer Diana Nyad is aptly named.) Nymphs were universally fair of form and face, with appealingly careless locks that never required the ministrations of a professional. They were fond of dancing, and very good at it. The occasional nymph was immortal, like Achilles' mother Thetis, but most nymphs simply lived for a very long time, though they never lost their looks—unless like the unfortunate Callisto, they were turned into animals by wrathful divinities, or

like poor Echo, who, falling in love with the self-absorbed Narcissus, so lost her sense of self that she eventually dwindled into nothing but an . . . echo. Most nymphs, however, remained beautiful until the end, which came, in the wry calculations of folklorist William Hansen, at the conclusion of 194,400 years. Hesiod, Hansen points out, shows us a nymph declaring that a crow lives for nine human generations, a stag four times as long as a crow, a raven three times as long as a stag, a phoenix nine times as long as a raven, and a nymph ten times as long as a phoenix; and so, calculating a human generation at twenty years . . .[4] The lives of nymphs were largely free of care. The sorrows sparked in Thetis by the sufferings of her beloved son Achilles were exceptional, for few nymphs married or bore children. Nymphs were generally atypical of Greek females in their sexuality. Although some were chaste followers of Artemis (herself something of a super-nymph), many were promiscuous and frolicked uninhibitedly with such males as frequented the forests—satyrs, for example.

Greek myth contained a strong dose of folktale. From folktale comes the motif of the poisoned gift that appears in the story of Heracles' death at the hands of his jealous wife Deianeira. Similarly, the wronged Medea murdered her husband Jason's new bride by bestowing on her the gift of a flammable garment. The stories of both Bellerophon and Jason are built on the folk motif of the man sent on a seemingly impossible quest meant to end in his death. He is then set a series of extraordinarily dangerous and seemingly impossible tasks, which he completes successfully, thereby not only avoiding death but winning the hand of the local princess as well. When Proitos, king of Tiryns in the Peloponnesus, suspects his guest Bellerophon of having tried to seduce his wife, he sends Bellerophon to visit her father King Iobates in Anatolia. With him he sends a letter instructing Iobates to kill him, but, squeamish about killing a guest at his hearth, Iobates instead assigns him three tasks. The first entails killing the fearsome fire-breathing Chimera, which he accomplishes by stuffing a block of lead down her throat. When Bellerophon is equally successful in the other tasks put before him, Iobates marries him to another one of his daughters—and splits his kingdom with him to boot.

The story of Jason and the golden fleece is better known. Alarmed by a prophecy suggesting that Jason might murder him, his wicked uncle Pelias, who has wrested the throne of Iolcos from Jason's father, its rightful occupant, sends the young man off to Colchis on the Black Sea (the modern Sochi, where the winter Olympics were held in 2014) with instructions to retrieve the famous golden ram's fleece in the possession of King Aietes. Setting out on the ship *Argo*, Jason and his crew become known as the Argonauts, sailors of the *Argo*. Their journey requires them to overcome many challenging obstacles, not least of them the terrifying Sympleglades, mobile cliffs that clashed together as ships passed through them, crushing ship and crew alike. When the crew finally arrive safely in Colchis, King Aietes promises to hand over the fleece on condition that Jason perform two daunting tasks, yoking a pair of fire-breathing bulls and sowing dragon's teeth. With the aid of the king's daughter the sorceress Medea, who has conveniently fallen in love with the stranger (as princesses are wont to do), Jason successfully yokes the bulls and defeats the armed men who spring up from the ground sown with the dragon's teeth. Aietes still proving unwilling to surrender the fleece, Jason and Medea make off with it and return to Iolcos, where they take vengeance on Uncle Pelias.

The story of Theseus and the Minotaur offers a variant on the motif. After several years during which the Athenians regretfully accede to King Minos's demand for seven youths and seven maidens to be sent to Crete to be devoured by the Minotaur in compensation for the death of Minos's son Androgeos in Athenian territory, Theseus demands to be one of the youths, hoping to put an end to both the Minotaur and the tribute. After Theseus has slain the Minotaur with the help of the local princess Ariadne, he abandons her (though she has the good fortune to be rescued by, indeed married to, the god Dionysus). Returning to Athens, he forgets to put up the white sail that was to serve as reassurance to his father, Aegeus, that he had survived his ordeal, and it is his father who dies: seeing the black sail Theseus has forgotten to change and believing his son to have perished, he jumps to his death into the sea that now bears his name. Indirectly, then, Theseus too kills the man who had sent him on his mission. Oedipus was only one of many figures

who brought about the death of his father in Greek myth, where intergenerational tension plays a prominent role.

Except for Zeus's brother Hades, who ruled the land of the dead, the principal gods were thought to live on Mount Olympus in northern Greece. At nearly 10,000 feet and shrouded in cloud cover, Olympus was sufficiently formidable to discourage any cheeky climbers bent on refuting this belief. In historical times, the Olympian gods formed an extended patriarchal family with Zeus at the head. But it was not always so. It was Homer and Hesiod, said the historian Herodotus, "who taught the Greeks the descent of the gods, giving them names and allotting to them their special skills and honors and describing their appearance" (2. 53. 2). While the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* depict the Olympian gods manifesting the personality traits and family relationships with which all Greeks came to be familiar, it was Hesiod who took it upon himself to integrate the various tales about the Olympians into a cohesive narrative, and to add to it an account of the very origins of these gods—and indeed of the universe that begat them.

The underlying leitmotif of Hesiod's narrative is the movement from an amoral and unstable universe to a just world subject to Zeus *pater andrōn te theōn te,* father of gods and men. Much of Greek mythology concerns the ill-considered attempts of both gods and mortals to tamper with this order and the punishments that attend them. Hesiod's *Theogony* is organized around the story of Zeus's rise to power and subsequent consolidation of his masculine authority. The poet makes plain, however, that the universe came into existence well before Zeus made his appearance. In Hesiod's construct, the universe is anterior to the gods and was not created by them; indeed various forces of nature are their ancestors. The poet does not say just when or how or why, but at some point *Chaos,* as he calls it in Greek, came into being: not chaos as the English word is understood today, but a yawning gap, an empty space of darkness and disorder. Chaos was soon joined by Gaia (Earth), who literally grounds the previously formless universe; by Tartarus (the deepest part of the Underworld); and by Eros, the dynamic force of desire that will facilitate generation. Most components of what came to be the natural world descended in one way or another from either

Chaos or Gaia, created sometimes by sexual intercourse, sometimes by asexual reproduction, something of which deities were evidently capable. Much later the goddess Hera while estranged from Zeus was said to have engendered Hephaestus in this way, without any sexual partner. Chaos on its own produced Darkness and Night, who in turn mated to produce Brightness and Day. Gaia reproduced parthenogenically as well, giving birth to Ouranos—Sky. After this, however, sex was normally requisite for reproduction.

In no way discouraged by the fact that they were mother and son, Gaia mated with Ouranos. After all, choice of partners was then severely limited. To Ouranos Gaia bore Kronos and eleven other formidable deities of colossal force known as the Titans, as well as a number of unusual creatures: the three one-eyed giants known as Cyclopes (Orb-eyed ones) and the three so-called Hundred-Handers (who also boasted fifty heads). Ouranos, though inordinately fond of sex, was less than enthusiastic about its consequences. In fact, he hated his children so much that no sooner did they appear than he shoved them back into Gaia, causing her no small amount of suffering both emotional and physical. So painfully distended that she was ready to burst, the earth goddess persuaded Kronos to attack his clingy sex maniac father with an adamantine sickle she had wrought from the molten metal deep within her. When next Ouranos visited her, he got quite a surprise:

> Huge Ouranos, full of desire, brought on night,
> And spread himself all over Earth, his mate.
> The son then from his hiding place, his ambush,
> Stretched out his left hand; in his right, he took
> The long and jagged sickle. One fell stroke
> Sufficed to reap his father's genitals
> And cast them off where they would fall to ground.
> Not vainly did they fall from Kronos's hand,
> For earth receiving all the bloody drops
> Bore the strong Furies as the seasons passed.
> She bore the Giants with their gleaming armor.
> . . .

Genitals floating far across the main
Gave rise to shining foam, the product of
Immortal flesh, and in it grew a maiden.
. . .
Her gods and men alike call Aphrodite. (*Theogony* 176–95)

The rage of father against child and child against father gives birth to both sexual passion and a cycle of vengeance, for the Furies, ghastly to look upon with writhing snakes for hair, had as their charge the relentless hounding of those who had murdered the most inappropriate of victims—parents, guests, suppliants. And not only that. Ouranos's vain attempt to stop time and have the earth to himself has been foiled by the maternal love that will move history forward in succeeding generations.

Kronos, however, was no more cut out for parenthood than his father. Having discovered that he was fated to be overthrown by one of his sons, he made a point of gulping down each of his children as it was born. His sister and increasingly unwilling consort Rhea understandably sought a means of both protecting their next child and avenging herself upon Kronos. Hiding her new baby in a cave on the island of Crete, she presented Kronos not with the infant he was expecting but rather with a stone wrapped in swaddling clothes, for which trick, the poet Corinna maintains, "she won great honor from the immortal gods."[5] This stone Kronos obligingly swallowed, leaving baby Zeus to grow to maturity in the care of the nymph Adamanthea. Or the goat Amalthea—who was also sort of a nymph. Or his grandmother Gaia. Greek myths were not known for their consistency. Another female poet, Moero, wrote that Zeus was nursed by birds, who brought him ambrosia from the ends of the earth, with the assistance of an eagle,

Who, ever drawing nectar from a rock.
Brought cunning Zeus the beverage in his beak.[6]

Indeed, another myth made Aphrodite the daughter of Zeus by one of his many consorts, Dione, a Greek word really just meaning "female counterpart of Zeus"; Swiss historian Walter Burkert has wittily dubbed Zeus and Dione "Mr. and Mrs. Heaven."[7]

In the fullness of time Kronos was forced to vomit up the children he had swallowed. Zeus then set about establishing himself as ruler over a well-ordered cosmos, a project in the course of which he underwent many trials. His aunts and uncles the formidable Titans resisted him vigorously, though after a war of ten years Zeus was finally able to prevail. More trouble, however, lay in store, for the monster Typhon challenged Zeus for supremacy, a challenge that threatened everything for which Zeus had worked, as the forces of chaos made one final stand against justice and harmony. Typhon's appearance was so horrifying that upon laying eyes on him even the Olympian gods fled in terror. Out of his shoulders grew a hundred dragons' heads, their snaky tongues flickering ominously. Each fearful head burned with fire, and in each one were voices uttering the most unsettling sounds, the indescribable cries of every imaginable creature. The earth, the sea, and even the Underworld felt the heat generated by the struggle as Typhon's raging fires did combat with the scorching winds from Zeus's lightning bolts, but Zeus at last prevailed and hurled the monster deep into the pit of Tartarus.

It is difficult to know whether the persistent topos in Hesiod's narrative of mothers inciting their sons to harm and displace their fathers derived from the patterns of real life. After all, adolescent Greek girls often as young as fourteen were customarily married off to men of thirty or so, generally in arranged marriages. Frequently having a limited attachment to their husbands, they probably did bond closely with their children, who generally arrived not long after they had put away their dolls. According to Hesiod, however, his remarkable account of how the world came to be as it was had been poured into his ears by the Muses "while he was shepherding lambs by Mount Helicon, reverend and holy" (*Theogony* 23).

If so, we must wonder where the Muses had gotten these stories. Who were the Muses' muses? Similar tales were circulating to the east, and it seems impossible to determine the relationship of these yarns to one another. The narrative traditions of Anatolia and Mesopotamia shared Hesiod's conception of the beginning of time as a period of disorder and anarchy followed by a violent succession of rulers. The discovery of cuneiform tablets recording Hittite myths about the origins of the gods has

brought to light striking parallels between Greek and Hittite accounts.[8] The Hittite poem *Kingship in Heaven* tells of a succession of gods similar to the one recounted by Hesiod. After deposing the god Alalu, we read, Anu took over the monarchy and was served by his son Kumarbi, who sat at his feet and gave him his food and drink. In the ninth year of Anu's reign, however, Kumarbi challenged him for the kingship, biting off and swallowing his penis, whereupon his father informed him that he had impregnated him with several gods, including the storm god Teshub. Having heard that Teshub would usurp his power, Kumarbi . . . at this point the tablet is damaged, but it seems that Kumarbi gives birth to another god, whom he announces he will destroy by eating him—and is given what seems to be a stone in the child's place. He subsequently gives birth to Teshub, evidently through his penis.[9]

Both the *Theogony* and *Kingship in Heaven* feature a succession of male gods, the castration of a god by his successor, inappropriate swallowing, male pregnancy, and the conflation of a god and a stone. The parallels are striking, and there are also conspicuous similarities to other Greek accounts. In 1962 a papyrus was discovered near the Derveni Pass in northern Greece. The poem it contained was written around the middle of the fourth century BCE and purports to be the work of the legendary poet Orpheus, who, if he really lived (Aristotle had his doubts, and so do I) would have died centuries earlier. The creation myth the Orphic text contains departs from Hesiod's in several ways, the most arresting of which is that it depicts Zeus swallowing the genitals of a god who appears to be Kronos and thereby becoming pregnant with all the other gods and goddesses, just as Kumarbi gives birth to various gods after swallowing the genitals of Anu.[10]

What are we to make of these parallels? Though the Hittite account is far earlier than the Greek ones, it is not at all clear that Hesiod and his successors were familiar with Hittite literature. Quite possibly they both descended from a common source, but some of these motifs appear in other cultures as well—Egypt and Babylon, for example. It may well be that contact among cultures offered access to a common store of constructs and motifs, or that we need to fall back on Jungian notions of archetypes.

Never dethroned, Zeus ruled eternally. Conflicting family trees accounted for the dozen or so gods who were believed to enjoy carefree lives on Olympus. Zeus, Hesiod reports, first married the clever Titan Metis, profiting from her wise counsel: in many ways Metis was intelligence personified (or, I suppose, deified). Whereas Kronos had swallowed his offspring after hearing that he was fated to be overthrown by one of them, Zeus, having heard that Metis would give birth to a son greater than his father, dealt with the problem by swallowing Metis herself while she was pregnant with Athena, thus ensuring that she would never bear this dreaded boy. Born directly from the head of Zeus (an interesting fantasy of male pregnancy), Athena came to join the small cadre of Olympians already in existence—her father Zeus and his siblings Poseidon, Demeter, and Hades. The rather unexciting Hestia was the goddess of the hearth and its flame. Hades had equal status to the Olympians, though he was not technically one of them, as he presided over the kingdom of the dead in the Underworld—or, as it was called after him, Hades: confusingly, Hades was the name both of the god and of the Underworld over which he presided. The earth not only housed the dead. It was also the source of life in the form of vegetable and mineral products, and thus Hades had another name, Pluto, meaning "wealth," a happier designation by which he came to be known at Rome. Zeus married his sister Demeter, fathering Persephone; his subsequent marriage to a second aunt, the Titan Themis (divine law), produced the Fates and the Horai (hours/seasons). From his final marriage, to Hera, was born Ares, and during that marriage Hera gave birth to Hephaestus—on her own, Hesiod says, the forger god having no father (although other traditions claimed that he was sired by Zeus). Having married both Intellect and Law, Zeus has now brought a just order out of mindlessness and anarchy. Significantly, he does marry, unlike grandfather Ouranos and father Kronos, who simply forced themselves on Gaia and Rhea. Civilization has arrived, and though patriarchy has been tamed a bit, it has also become entrenched as part of the order of things.

Finding marriage confining, however, Zeus expanded the roster of gods through a series of couplings with other females both mortal and

(continued...)

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