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Document Analysis- Assignment 1

## Introduction

The source for the analysis is an extract from Hesiod's Theogony, which shall be used to depict the relationship between gods and mortals. The Theogony was composed during 730-700 B.C., and it is an account of the creation of the universe and the origin of the Greek Gods and their purpose. We will be working with the translated version of the Theogony by Dorothea Wender and analysing the lines 25-42 from "The Muses once taught Hesiod..." to "...And at the end".

## Analysis

It is evident from the lines "And plucked and gave a staff to me, a shoot of blooming laurel, wonderful to see" and "The Muses since taught Hesiod to sing sweet songs"<sup>1</sup> that the Gods possessed the power to bring about significant changes to a mortal's life. In this case, Hesiod, a shepherd, had his life turned around and began his career as a poet and a musician who conveyed the story of the gods through his works. The first words spoken by the Muses to Hesiod "Rustic shepherds, worthless reproaches, mere stomachs"<sup>2</sup> reflect on the condescending nature of the muses, which is more human-like<sup>3</sup>. They look down on his profession as a shepherd and compare it to his herd who live on minimum to fill up their bellies.

The muses possess the ability to tell the truth or lie similar to the truth; the inability to distinguish between the two raises paradoxes which to this day has perplexed historians<sup>4</sup>. Some identify it as a purpose that in telling lies some truth or good might come out of it, which could benefit the mortals. Another interesting explanation could be that the Muses could speak literally and figuratively and passed this down to Hesiod to use it in his work. This makes one wonder if Hesiod's work is inspired by the Gods, or is it all just a convincing lie?

It is interesting to note that lines 33 and 34 are in direct quotes whereas the rest of the speech of the muses is indirect, this could be because of the riddling and paradoxical nature of the statement made by the Muses in regards to their ability to tell absolute truth or lies which seem similar to the truth.

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<sup>1</sup> Th. 26-27

<sup>2</sup> Th. 28

<sup>3</sup> Jenny Strauss. Clay, *Hesiod's Cosmos* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 57.

<sup>4</sup> Joshua Katz and Katharina Volk, *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* (London: Soc. for the Promotion of Hellenic Studies, 1880), 122.

In the following lines, the muses bless Hesiod with the gift of divine voice with the purpose to celebrate the past and the things to come<sup>5</sup>. This gift of divine voice to know about the past and future in a sense makes him a prophet of the muses, who speak through Hesiod and pass on their knowledge to the future generations. This could potentially display the dependency between the Gods and mortals. The Muses again sound abrupt here since they declare him as a poet of the gods but do not give him a chance to accept or reject the offer, this resembles more to an order than an offer and displays the commanding nature of the gods<sup>6</sup>.

In the lines, "To sing the race of the blessed ones who live forever and to hymn Muses first and at the end"<sup>7</sup> could indicate that through the works of Hesiod the Muses and the Gods want to pass on the message of their origin, invincibility and immortality among the mortals. The Muses demand that their praises be sung at first and at the end, this could make an inference that the Muses want significant attention and want to be kept in high regards by the mortals, maybe even at par with Zeus.

## Conclusion

These lines give us an insight into the relationship between mortals and the gods, how similar the two groups are but at the same time, remind us of the hierarchal gap between the mortal and divine plain. It displays the influence the gods can have on a mortals life and turn them into something more desirable in society, but also command them to do the gods bidding. This also reflects on the harsh nature of the gods, which could also be seen in many more instances in different ancient Greek sources. In all the gods seem more alike to mortal kings or queens who are aware of their power and influence.

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<sup>5</sup> Th. 39

<sup>6</sup> Th. 36

<sup>7</sup> Th. 37

## References

Wender, Dorothea. Essay. In *Theogony ; and, Works and Days*, 22–25. London: Penguin, 2004.

Clay, Jenny Strauss. *Hesiod's Cosmos*. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

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