

Touring Tartaros with Hesiod: Poetic Vision in *Theogony*

Within epic, a journey to the underworld is commonplace; Odysseus, Aeneas, and even Ovid's Orpheus all visit the underworld. Accordingly, one notable feature of Hesiod's *Theogony*, apart from the gods' origins and Pandora's presumable introduction, is the long description of Tartaros. The poet himself identifies Tartaros as one of the first beings in the universe. But who visits Tartaros in *Theogony*? I offer a new way of reading the text in relation to the Tartaros passage. Hesiod invites the audience to visit a subversive Tartaros by means of an *ekphrasis*.

This paper will argue that Hesiod provides an *ekphrasis* of Tartaros following the Titanomachy. The vivid description possesses many similarities to traditionally identified *ekphraseis*, such as the shield of Achilles from the *Iliad* or Pandora's crown in *Works and Days*. The Tartaros *ekphrasis* offers alternative vision to the audience, blinded by Zeus' lightning, and a subversive element whereby the poet possesses authority in a world-order established by Zeus.

I will introduce the *ekphrasis* and attempt to situate it among other much debated passages of *Theogony*. The subversive nature derives from the represented opposition between Zeus' Olympus and threats housed within Tartarus. Hesiod also significantly notes that Zeus is responsible for creating rulers, whereas Apollo creates poets. This much debated passage divulges a tension between poets and kings, such as Zeus. Hesiod, as a poet displaying his skills and authority to his audience, appears in direct opposition to Zeus. Hesiod poetically guides the audience to and through Tartaros in the *ekphrasis*. He depicts threats to Zeus' rule literally underlying Olympus and asserts his own poetic authority by displaying this threat.

Without poets, the importance of the gods is inexistent. Epic memory, represented by the Muses (daughters of Mnemosyne herself), relies on poets such as Hesiod to relate the gods' honors in a way intelligible to mortals. Indeed, poets possess power over the word and world of

the poem; they must create order from chaos with language, much in the same way as Zeus organizes the world. Muses inspire the poet, who then relates the experience in the poem. By showcasing Tartaros, Hesiod attests to his own rhetorical skills and authority. The poet asserts his ability to create order in his own poetic universe where Tartaros subverts Olympus. The *ekphrasis* enlightens the audience of Hesiod's artistic and rhetorical abilities as well as of his power in relation to the gods.

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