

The Role of *Γαῖα πελώρη* in Hesiod's *Theogony*

In Hesiod's *Theogony*, one of Gaia's most common epithets is *πελώρη*. This paper seeks to demonstrate how *Γαῖα πελώρη* functions as a monstrous being—consequential in the realms of politics and gender on a cosmic scale. The epithet itself—*πελώρη*—suggests a connection with the monstrous. The usage of *πελώρη* and its related forms is rather limited, appearing only 34 times in the TLG corpus, 14 of which are in the *Theogony*. *πέλωρος* is defined as ‘monstrous, prodigious, huge.’ (LSJ) Entities described as such are often alive and a divinity. M.L. West translates *Γαῖα πελώρη* as “huge Earth” (West 7) and Athanassakis, “Gaia, the broad breasted” (Athanassakis 14). Though such translations emphasize Gaia's size, they erase the sombre connotation *Γαῖα πελώρη* of monstrosity. Monsters are a blight to order—creators of an “anti cosmos” (Clay 115). Gaia is first introduced as “*Γαῖ' εὐρύστερνος, πάντων ἔδος ἀσφαλὲς αἰεὶ ἀθανάτων*” (*Theogony* 116-7). This suggests Gaia as an emblem of stability and order, not monstrosity. Indeed, *Γαῖ' εὐρύστερνος*, the *ἔδος ἀσφαλὲς* is a bringer of order, however, this is not the Gaia who acts during the Successions of the *Theogony*.

During the Succession Myths, the actions of *Γαῖα πελώρη* shows a clear proclivity to opposing order. Metrically, *Γαῖα πελώρη* always appears in the final two feet of a line. She appears 5 times during the 3 Succession Myths: twice each with Ouranos and Zeus and once with Kronos. In each Succession, the first *Γαῖα πελώρη* marks her beginning to overthrow the current ruler. It alerts the reader of the ensuing cosmic political upheaval. At every point, *Γαῖα πελώρη* disrupts the contemporary political system and opposes order—a key characteristic of monstrosity. She even attempts an overthrow of Zeus after the Titanomachy.

In what ought to be the final iteration of cosmic power, *Γαῖα πελώρη* begins one final attempt to change the kingship. Through this, she inadvertently confirms Zeus as ultimate ruler of the cosmos. Even *Γαῖα πελώρη* could not usurp him, and, after the Typhonomachy, Gaia shows unwavering support to Zeus and never initiates political upheaval as *Γαῖα πελώρη* again. The last occurrence of *Γαῖα πελώρη* comes at the defeat of Typhoeus. At this point, “στονάχιζε δὲ γαῖα πελώρη” (*Theogony* 858), mirroring the first occurrence of *Γαῖα πελώρη*: “ἢ δ’ ἐντὸς στοναχίζετο Γαῖα πελώρη” (*Theogony* 159). Gaia’s role as *Γαῖα πελώρη* ends as it begins: groaning. With this, *Γαῖα πελώρη*—the monstrous opponent of order—is finished. Gaia affirms the reign of Zeus and takes her place as the seat of the gods; she assumes the role she was destined to hold: *Γαῖ’ ἐρύστερνος*.

Throughout the narrative of the *Theogony*, one of the key conditions for *Γαῖα πελώρη* to appear is gender-based violence. First, When Ouranos cruelly violates Gaia, *Γαῖα πελώρη* responds to the “πατρὸς ἀτασθάλου...πρότερος γὰρ ἀεικέα μήσατο ἔργα” (*Theogony* 164, 6). When Kronos commits violence against Rhea in like kind, *Γαῖα πελώρη* responds. Finally, when Zeus commits wanton ecological damage, *Γαῖα πελώρη* responds. Though not a sexually violent offense, Zeus still commits violence against a female deity, Gaia herself. Through these three Successions, there is an emergence of the male deity at the expense of the female in terms of expression of power. Generally, female power is expressed by *μήτις* and male power by *βία* (Holmberg 2). The male deities increase in *μήτις* as female deities (Gaia) decreases in *μήτις*.

When *Γαῖα πελώρη* plots to overthrow Ouranos, she “δολίην δὲ κακὴν ἐπεφράσσατο τέχνην” (*Theogony* 160). Against Kronos, she and Ouranos “οἱ πεφραδέτην” (*Theogony* 475). Against Zeus, “ὀπλότατον τέκε παῖδα Τυφωέα” (*Theogony* 821). *Γαῖα πελώρη* goes from reliant on trickery to merely reacting without any hint of *μήτις*. On the other hand, the male kings go

from only possessing *βία* (Ouranos) to possessing *βία* as well as being indwelled with *μήτις* (Zeus). Male *μήτις* tends to benefit society and order, while female *μήτις* tends to oppose it (Holmberg 3). Indeed, *Γαῖα πελώρη* uses her *μήτις* monstrously—to oppose order; Zeus uses his *μήτις* to order the cosmos. Through these deities, a power struggle between genders results in Hesiod’s final cosmic order where the male (Zeus) rules by *βία* and *μήτις* and the female (*Γαῖα πελώρη*) becomes tamed and placed in subservience where her *μήτις* can no longer foster disorder.

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See LSJ sv *πέλωρος*, -α, -ον