

HESIOD From Theogony ca. 700 B.C.E.

Hesiod was one of the earliest Greek authors, along with Homer (see Document 5-1). His most famous work, *The Works and Days*, describes contemporary Greek society and recounts how his brother unlawfully took his family's inheritance. The creation story included here appears in his other major work, *Theogony*, which means "the birth of the gods." *Theogony* describes a war between the Titans and the Olympian gods. While the story is told in Greek, and is elaborated on by later Greek authors, earlier versions have been discovered from the Near East.

First of all there came Chaos,
and after him came
Gaia³ of the broad breast,
to be the unshakable foundation
of all the immortals who keep the crests
of snowy Olympos,⁴
and Tartaros⁵ the foggy in the pit of the wide-wayed earth,
and Eros, who is love, handsomest among all
the immortals,
who breaks the limbs' strength,
who in all gods, in all human beings overpowers the intelligence in the breast,
and all their shrewd planning.
From Chaos was born Erebus, the dark,
and black Night,
and from Night again Aither and Hemera,
the day, were begotten,
for she lay in love with Erebus
and conceived and bore these two.
But Gaia's first born was one
who matched her every dimension, Ouranos, the starry sky,
to cover her all over,
to be an unshakable standing-place
for the blessed immortals.
Then she brought forth the tall Hills,
those wild haunts that are beloved
by the goddess Nymphs who live on the hills
and in their forests.
Without any sweet act of love
she produced the barren
sea, Pontos, seething in his fury of waves,
and after this
she lay with Ouranos, and bore him
deep-swirling Okeanos

the ocean-stream; and Koios, Krios,
Hyperion, Iapetos,
and Theia too and Rheia, and Themis,
and Mnemosyne,
Phoibe of the wreath of gold,
and Tethys the lovely.⁶
After these her youngest-born
was devious-devising Kronos,
most terrible of her children;
and he hated his strong father.

Study Questions:

1. According to Hesiod, where does the world come from?
2. How does Hesiod describe the gods? Do they appear to share more traits with humans or more traits with the natural world?

3 Gaia: The Earth.

4 Olympos: In Greek mythology, the mountain where the gods lived.

5 Tartaros: The prison beneath the Underworld.

6Koios ... Tethys the lovely: Those named were all Titans who were overthrown by the Olympian gods.