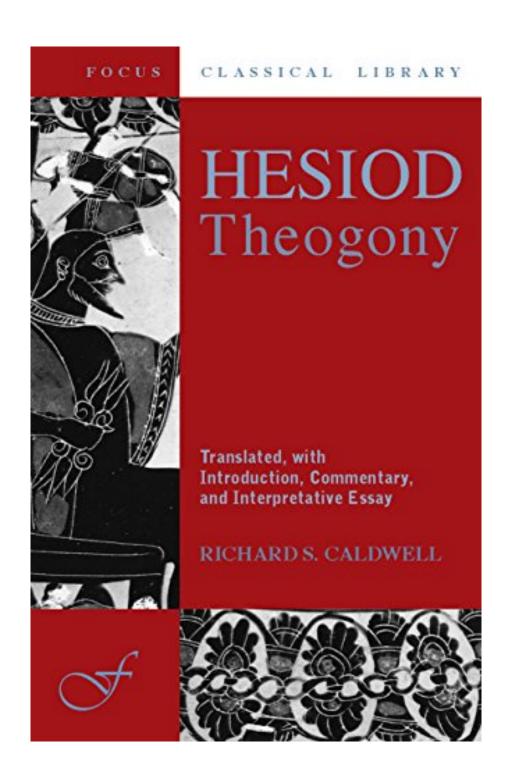


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This translation contains an introduction, commentary and interpretive essay and well as numerous notes and annotations to provide the history and background of the epic, and the mythological context in which it is placed. Hesiod's straightforward account of family conflict among the gods is the best and earliest evidence of what the ancient Greeks believed about the beginning of the world. Includes Hesiod's "Works and Days", lines 1-201, and material from the Library of Apollodorus.

Sales Rank: #748101 in eBooks
Published on: 2015-01-02
Released on: 2015-01-02
Format: Kindle eBook

Most helpful customer reviews

59 of 60 people found the following review helpful.

Ian Myles Slater on An Excellent Package

By Ian M. Slater

This is a review of the extensively annotated translation of "Hesiod's Theogony" by Richard S. Caldwell --just in case, as sometimes happens, it appears with a different translation. For those who are not familiar with it already, this is an account, in Homeric verse, of how the organized universe arose, expressed through generations of gods, their struggles for supremacy, and the culminating triumph of Zeus, with the great Olympians and a multitude of nature-deities listed along the way. Told in noble hexameters, it is an extremely violent story, full of abusive parents, mutilations inflicted by rebellious offspring, divine cannibalism, and a whole succession of other behaviors the Greeks themselves considered repellent. The philosophers had real problems with this work -- one can understand why Plato wanted to ban poets from the ideal state.

As it happens, I own most (but not quite all) of the currently or recently available English translations: those by Apostolos N. Athanassakis, Norman O. Brown, Hugh G. Evelyn-White (bilingual edition, Loeb Classical Library), R.M. Frazer, Richmond Lattimore, Dorothea Wender (Penguin Classics), and M. L. West (Oxford World's Classics). Except for Brown, who also covers only the "Theogony," they all contain at least the other main Hesiodic poem, "Works and Days" as a companion piece. West is also the editor of a Greek text, with extensive commentary. In this crowded field, in which the renderings of Athanassakis and Lattimore are notable for the quality of their poetry, Caldwell stakes a claim to utility.

The introduction contains numerous tables, displaying the relationships of various sets of gods, nymphs, monsters, and others, His translation is set out in verse lines, with running numbers at intervals of five, which makes locating references extremely easy. (No headnotes identifying thirty or fifty-line blocks of material!) An essay on the "Psychology of the Succession Myth" (rather simplistically Freudian, but interesting) is followed by a translation of some the most important related material from "Works and Days," and (hurray) parallel passages from a late prose compendium of Greek mythology, the Bibliotheke of Apollodoros (better known as the "Library of Apollodorus"). He has a useful (if now slightly dated) discussion of the main Near Eastern parallels. (Brown also discusses the comparative and psychological aspects of the poem, from

different perspectives; his psychological treatment seems to me subtler, and more closely related to the political reading he offers.) [To be fair, I should have mentioned when this review was originally posted that Caldwell is here offering a simplified form of the argument in his 1985 book "The Origin of the Gods: A Pscyhoanalytic Study of Greek Theogonic Myth."]

There is a very good index-glossary. Most useful of all, however, are the running annotations. They range from the most elementary (assuming no prior knowledge of Greek myth or literature) to impressively advanced (issues of structure, technique, and deeper meanings). Caldwell explains that he has drawn heavily on West's commentary, which is nice, because West himself incorporated many of his conclusions implicitly in his prose translation, without the arguments that accompanied his text editions.

Given Caldwell's attention to detail, if you are a novice in the field who doesn't plan to build up even a small collection, but is willing to read a single volume with close attention, this might be your best choice. Those who already know the subject are likely to find it attractive, although sorting through such basic reminders as "Zephyros is the west wind, Boreas the north wind" in search of interpretive insights can be a test of patience.

21 of 21 people found the following review helpful.

Difficult to read!!

By Howard Schulman

Despite the numerous 5-star reviews here I'm going to have to give this a 3--the translation was just plain hard to read, even though I do like the verse format as opposed to the "paragraph" format. Even the introduction was written in very formal language. I actually bought this edition based on all the perfect ratings here, even though I also wanted to read Works and Days (this edition only has Theogony) and bought another edition that had WD in addition to Theogony. The translation of Theogony in the other edition (West) was so much easier to read. Also, the overabundant footnotes in Caldwell break up the normal reading flow. Too much! I got through it, but it wasn't really fun. And I've recently read the Odyssey, the Iliad, Herodotus, and several other overview books on ancient Greece, so I'm not a total novice here. This edition may be good for the profession but not the enthusiast.

17 of 18 people found the following review helpful.

A great piece of work!

By A Customer

Hesiod's "Theogony" is excellently translated by Richard S. Caldwell. I have read other translations of Hesiod but preferred this one because it is done in verse as opposed to prose. The verse is not difficult to understand; the notes to the text are clear and good; the topic is made more interesting by way of the writing style. Overall, a very good piece of work.

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