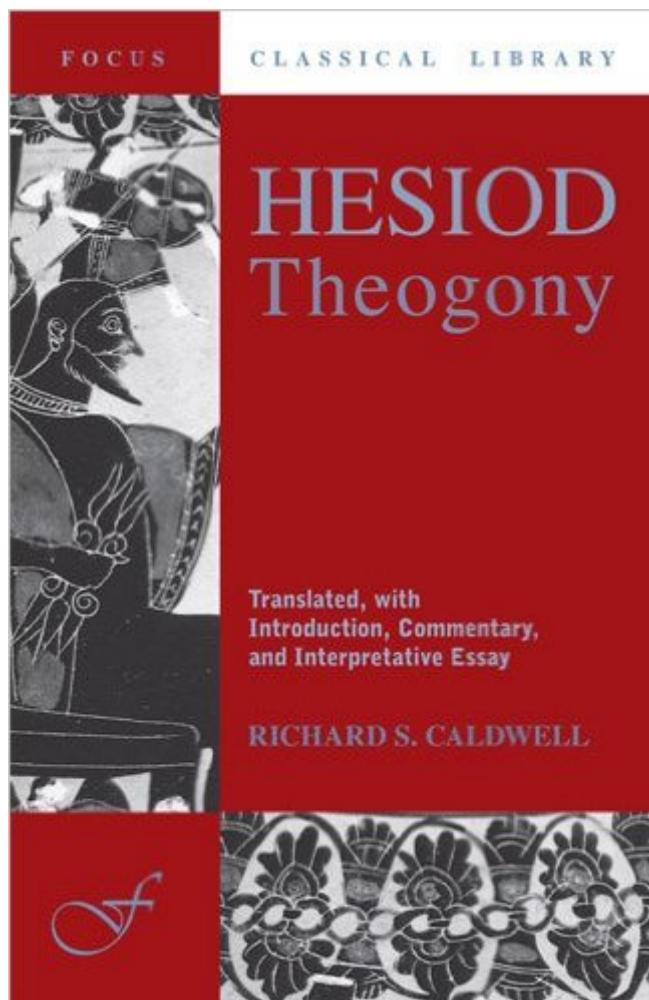


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Hesiod's Theogony (Focus Classical Library)



Synopsis

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.

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Customer Reviews

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 Theogony is undoubtedly a cornerstone in Classical Greek literature, and this work of Hesiod, unfortunately, does not have many great translations. However, Focus Classical Library has some of the best translations of classical works, most notably its editions of the Homeric Hymns, Metamorphoses, and Greek tragedians. Richard S. Caldwell, who also translated a prose version of the Aeneid for Focus Classical Library, has presented an unrivaled, strikingly original translation of the Theogony. The translation and explanatory notes are both top-notch quality materials. Because of its accurate, highly original language, copious explanatory introductions and footnotes, and extremely helpful family trees, I highly recommend buying this edition of the Theogony. I prefer this edition a lot much more than Oxford World Classic's Theogony, which does not have such an original or vivid translation, and does not also have as many explanatory notes, and Oxford does not have many explanatory notes which I feel are mandatory for modern Theogony Editions. Inside this book, all the lines are numbered, and footnotes often take up more than half of the pages. Because of its highly original translation, original proper names and often literal translations of Greek expressions have to be explained through footnotes. Also included is Appendix A, which contains Lines 1-201 of Hesiod's "Work and Days", describing Pandora and the five generations of giants before Modern Man. Appendix B consists of a portion of Apollodorus' Library of Greek Mythology, which is a late Hellenistic mini-Theogony. The index, though large and complete, is somewhat confusing to use.

This is a review of Richard S. Caldwell's translation of "Hesiod's Theogony". One of the other reviewers referred to this translation as being a verse translation as opposed to a prose translation. That does not imply the translation is made to rhyme! It means only the verse structure and numbering is maintained. I hope everyone knows that any poem that rhymes in the original language, very rarely rhymes when translated into English unless a lot of artistic license is used. (e.g. Alexander Pope's translation of the Iliad has more to say of Pope's skills as a poet than Homer's.) But, Caldwell does not use any artistic license (although sometimes I wished he had - Hesiod can be a bit cryptic at times). Instead, he has made a very assiduous and close translation,

which is extensively (and at times thankfully) annotated. In my reading I consider Hesiod, alongside Homer, to be a fountainhead from which all later Greek writers flow. It's not a Greek Bible, but it is the earliest full exposition of Greek creation mythology we have today. There are competing versions of some myths, but more often than not, this is the antecedent of many later Greek elaborations. It's certainly a great work to cut your teeth on because if you can master the full panoply of gods and the tangled network of their relationships as sketched out by Hesiod, then you can hold your own when reading almost any other ancient Greek text. To this end, Caldwell is a very generous guide for leading novices down all those tricky paths. His copious footnotes leave few stones unturned. Moreover, what I found to be a very gratifying addition to Hesiod was Caldwell's interpretive essay, "The Psychology of the Succession Myth". One reviewer referred to it as "rather simplistically Freudian, but interesting".

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