

From Zeus to Q: Generational Conflict in a Theogonic Universe

As science fiction grew in popularity over the course of the 20th century, its practitioners routinely wrote essays trying to establish an ancient pedigree for their genre ranging back to ancient Greece (Aldiss 1973; Derleth 1950; Gunn 1977). The compilations they published almost always began with Plato's proto-utopia of Atlantis and Lucian's satirical *Icaromenippus* and/or *True History*, both of which feature interstellar travel. By including intermediary works echoing these themes, such editors have sought to establish a continuity of tradition that persists straight through to the present day. While this paper seeks neither to defend nor attack this position, it nevertheless acknowledges that themes from Greco-Roman antiquity are both intentionally and unintentionally co-opted in modern SF and that productive study can and should be made of such echoes.

In the vein of the essays in Rogers and Stevens' *Classical Traditions in Science Fiction* (2015), then, this paper will present evidence linking the immortal entities known in the *Star Trek* universe as Q to the gods of the Greek pantheon. More specifically, it will demonstrate that the Q continuum's anxiety in the *Star Trek: The Next Generation* episode *Hide and Q* that, given enough time, humankind will surpass even the Q's own omnipotence is rooted firmly in the Greeks' conception of their gods as having been themselves born into the universe rather than having created it, and thus always in danger of losing primacy. Greek myth is littered with such stories about the various generations of immortals, each being supplanted in turn by the next.

This paper will begin with a consideration of the Q in light of Hesiod's *Theogony* and *Works and Days*. Through the stories of Ouranos, Kronos, and Zeus, these works establish not only precedent for the temporary nature of divine primacy in the Greek pantheon, but also - and more importantly - each of these once-supreme powers' constant pre-occupation over losing

power in the same manner he himself usurped it. The story of Prometheus, in particular, and the threat that his technology, fire, could eventually present in the hands of humans, is central. Although presented in the form of a satire, Lucian's *Icaromenippus* portrays a Zeus likewise concerned at the threat represented by the title character's (pseudo-)scientific ascent to Olympus. Given the special status Lucian's work has been granted by SF anthologists working to establish an ancient pedigree for their genre, this latter bond, in particular, is most satisfying.

Presenting evidence from Hesiod and Lucian, then, this essay will acknowledge the debt the *Star Trek: The Next Generation* episode *Hide and Q* owes to the ancient Greek conception of a theogonic universe in which supreme power is ineluctably temporary.

Bibliography

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