

Swimming Against the Tide: Aquatic Nethergods and Their Mythology of Resistance

In ancient Greek mythology, the children of Okeanos display a pattern of resistance to the dominance of the Olympian gods. As water deities, Okeanos' offspring are physical boundaries, which pervade the world and the Underworld as fixtures of the cosmic landscape, filling out and separating the spaces inhabited by mortals and immortals. These aquatic nethergods not only rule their own local territories but also define the larger spheres of influence assigned to both gods and humans in Zeus' Olympian order. When they do assert themselves as sentient, individual agents, the Okeanids and their brothers make their own demands and force concessions from the Olympian gods, which both challenge and, in some cases, threaten to undermine Zeus' reign. From Styx's alliance with Zeus in Hesiod's *Theogony* (*Th.* 383-403, 775-806) to Scamander's battle with Achilles (*Il.* 21.1-380) and Calypso's angry response to Zeus' edict to release Odysseus (*Od.* 5.116-144), the aquatic nethergods present themselves as a force that must be appeased and respected by the Olympians. Episodes such as these remind the characters who encounter them as well as the audience that the Olympians' dominance is not a given but is both constructed and contingent on the expediency and participation of these "lesser" gods. Their separate treatment by the Olympian gods and humans as deities who must be separately propitiated is further confirmed in later representations, such as in Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound* and in Apollonius Rhodius' *Argonautika*. In examining their appearances in Greek epic and some later responses to them, I demonstrate that the aquatic nethergods represent a mythology of resistance, which counterbalances the dominant Olympian power structure.