

## They Who Must Not Be Named?: οὐκ ὀνομαστοί in the *Theogony*

In *Theogony* 148, Hesiod announces that the Hundred-handed brothers are οὐκ ὀνομαστοί, “not to be named.” In the next line, paradoxically, he names them. Hesiod’s apparently untroubled segue from “unnameable” into naming should give us at least a moment of pause. A case study of this unusual passage that sheds light on Hesiod’s understanding of the nature of a name and of the poet’s role in relation to his material. The fact that Hesiod first describes these monsters as unnameable and then goes on to name them shows the poet’s power over his material and enacts his Zeus-like imposition of order upon chaos, illustrating in microcosm a major theme of the *Theogony*.

Pierre Vernant argues that the names of the gods and their bodies are related, both of them serving as markers of divine individuality. Just as the Hundred-handers are not exactly gods—being a sort of monster, as Jenny Strauss Clay (1993: 106) argues, but a monster that fights on Zeus’s side—their names and bodies are both unfixed. They are anthropomorphic but misshapen, and it thus makes sense that they are also somehow both named and unnameable. Claude Calame argues that, when, as he often does, Hesiod uses meaningful names, he tends to “creat[e] a new ‘mythic’ statement based on what the name says” (Calame 178). Yet the Hundred-handers’ names, while they suggest meaningful descriptions, do not make clear statements the way the names of the sea-nymphs or the Cyclopes (another group of three monstrous brothers) do. It is as if Hesiod, although still sketching a picture of these characters using their names, deliberately blurs his picture. Once again, we see the aura of disorder that surrounds the Hundred-handers.

Later in the *Theogony*, Zeus frees the Hundred-handers from their prison and enlists their aid against the Titans, only to return them to prison—this time as guards—after the Titanomachy is over. Although their status is improved, they remain far from Olympus and from the earth where mortals dwell—a situation fitting for monstrous but helpful beings. Thus, even the ambiguity of status that surrounds the Hundred-handers from their first introduction can be fit into its proper place in Zeus’s new cosmic order.

As Thalmann (140), Ready (77), and Clay (2003: 73-75) have argued, the poet and the king have parallel and related functions for Hesiod. Like Zeus’s assignment of roles, the narrator’s assignment of names to the three brothers gives them identities, and in turn a place in the world. By posting them as the guards of Tartaros, Zeus acknowledges that the brothers have monstrous qualities, and therefore must be kept out of the “normal” world; likewise, the narrator admits that they are οὐκ ὀνομαστοί, itself a kind of monstrous characteristic. However, they are also powerful figures whom both Zeus and the poet need, as the one fights and the other narrates the poem’s climactic battle. Just as Zeus overcomes his aspect of the difficulty by finding and assigning the correct place for the Hundred-handers, so the poet overcomes his aspect by finding and declaring their correct names.

Both poets and kings, specifically the poet who creates this poem and the divine king who is celebrated in it, impose order upon chaos. This is the movement of the *Theogony* in general, and of the Hundred-handers’ story in particular, enacted in defiant miniature through the giving of ὀνόματα to the otherwise οὐκ ὀνομαστοί. The poet may seem to be contradicting the very statement he has just made, but an examination of Hesiod’s use of naming, other references to the Hundred-handers in the *Theogony*, and the status of the poet in Hesiod’s world reveals something much more complex. The poet, like the Zeus he celebrates, is exercising his quasi-

kingly function by declaratively imposing names, and thereby order and structure, on what without his intervention would have been sheer disordered monstrosity. The tiny paradox inherent in the single phrase οὐκ ὀνομαστοί, / Κόττος τε Βριάρεώς τε Γύγες θ' turns out to be a microcosmic window into the overarching movement of the *Theogony* itself.

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