

The Making of Gods and People  
By Leon Garfield and Edward Blishen

In the beginning, there was only Gaia, the earth, mother of us all. In the perfect darkness, Uranus the sky raised himself from Gaia, and in darkness he rained down upon her. The rain quickened her and Gaia brought forth life.

The first children of Gaia and Uranus were monsters, the fifty-headed hundred-handed giants. Their aspect was terror, and their father pushed them back again into darkness, into Tartarus, the underworld of blackness beneath the spreading plains and stony mountains of our mother Gaia.

Again there were children, the huge Cyclopes, in human shape but of the size of mountains, with a single staring eye in their cliff-like foreheads. These were forced back into darkness also; and then were the Titans born.

Their name means "Lord," and the Titans were giants, giants in the same form we puny humans have today, giants in the image of the gods that followed them. These ones, at last, Uranus allowed to walk the earth. In the long darkness Gaia whispered to her children of her anguish, of her elder children forced back into the womb of night. The Titan Cronus, most devious of her children, heard her whispers, and from her he took the adamant sickle and unmaned his star-speckled father. Drops of blood fell onto the earth. Uranus shrank and drew himself up into the dome of sky, and his son Cronus ruled instead.

Cronus took his sister Rhea, the daughter of earth, for wife, and with her he had children. Yet Cronus feared a child would someday unthroned him, as he had unthroned his father; so as Rhea gave birth to children, he opened wide his mouth and swallowed them. Into his vast belly went divine baby after baby, while great Rhea hid the bitter anger in her heart and planned his overthrow.

Again she bore a son; but this time Rhea hid her baby, and gave Cronus a stone wrapped in swaddling clothes. He swallowed it, and groaning went to sleep, what sleep came to him from the Furies, the spirits of nightmare.

As Cronus slept uneasily, wracked by the Furies, his son grew up from babyhood: immortal Zeus, raised on Mount Ida by the timeless nymphs. When he had reached his power, the god and his Titan mother conspired against the monstrous father, giving him a purgative to drink when he cried out for wine . . .

Cronus called for a cupbearer to fetch his honied drink. But his thirst was not quenched. Indeed, it seemed to have been increased by drinking. So a second cup was fetched. He drained it and laughed uneasily. What was thirst after the nights of the Furies? He flung the engraved cup across the room, where it cracked and splintered against the wall. A third cup! The king was still thirsty. "Quickly! Quickly!" He cursed the cupbearer for a creeping fool. Then Rhea, smiling gently, rustled in to calm her lord. Behind her came another cupbearer, with another cup. "Here, Cronus, my lord! Drink! The king must not go thirsty! Drink to your heart's contend!"

So Cronus took the cup and drank.

He drank with barely a glance at the strange cupbearer, and the drink was rushing down his throat before an oddness struck him. Though he stood in Rhea's shadow, this cupbearer seemed to shine as if by the light of another, secret sun. And in that same instant he saw a look exchanged between Rhea and the stranger whose shining seemed

suddenly menacing. The drink tasted sharp, and his throat began to sting and burn. But it was too late, he had drained the cup. Rhea smiled, and the cupbearer smiled; and Cronus knew that they had poisoned him.

“Who-who are you?” he whispered. The stranger’s radiance seemed to increase till Cronus could not endure to look at him. “Who-are-you?”

“Ask of the Furies, Cronus.”

Cronus opened his mouth to scream for help-but no words came. His throat was on fire and needles of pain stabbed at his belly. He fell back as cramps seized him and he began to retch. Wider and wider stretched his gigantic mouth till he felt the tendons split and tear at their roots. There was a tumult in his head-a mighty uproar. The bones of his gaping mouth were cracking and splintering as they were forced apart. And all the while, in his dreadful agony, he saw Rhea, his wife, and Zeus, his son, staring down on him with implacable hate.

The Cronus began to vomit. Six times the poisoned Titan erupted and, like some shaking mountain, spewed out the fiery inhabitation of his belly. At last it was over; and Cronus stared in dread at what he’d brought forth. They rose up before him like columns of fire; the children he had consumed. In their midst, mockingly cradling the fatal stone with which he’d been deceived, was Rhea. “Behold your sons and daughters!” she shouted. “Behold the avenging gods!” Cronus shrieked and fled.

He fled high up among the granite mountains, stumbling and calling to the universe for help. At last he reached his fortress, and it was there that Atlas and all the Titans of the old order joined him in the war to destroy the gods.

Some say that this war raged for ten years; but there was no certain way of measuring it. Night and day were so obscured that time itself was blinded and could no more than mark the tempests, earthquakes, and scalding storms of the battles. Huge mountains were plucked from the earth and hurled like pebbles against the sky, where they made black holes in the milky fabric of the stars. Again and again the gods approached the fortress of Cronus, and again and again they were beaten back.

In angry despair, Zeus stared u at the mighty stronghold that seemed to have become a part of the very sky. Then he remembered something that the timeless nymphs of Mount Ida had told him-for they were not always singing. They had told him of certain ancient prisoners who still lingered in Tartarus-the Cyclopes and the hundred-handed giants, tremendous children of Mother Earth, who had been forgotten by Cronus in his madness and pride. Even now they raged and rotted in their chains. Even now they waited.

With his brothers Hades and Poseidon, Zeus went down into Tartarus. Through the groves of black poplars and across the wide dark river Styx the three Gods moved like flickering flames. Further and further into the dreadful region they voyaged, passing among screaming rocks and between tall cliffs of jet, Now the air grew foul and thick with fog, Briefly the three gods glinted in and among it. Groans and harsh weeping echoed all about them, together with the grinding of chains. Then the air rifted as if worn threadbare by agony and gloom, and through the holes and rifts the gods saw the gigantic prisoners, chained to the everlasting cliffs. There hung the unbelievable hundred-handed giants, enmeshed in irons; and beside them, so hung that they towered to the height of the cliffs, were chained the Cyclopes, in each of whose single eyes were such pain and despair that even the gods were appalled.

Swiftly the brother freed them and led them up out of Tartarus. They crossed the river Styx and passed through the groves of black poplars beside the ocean. So vast was the bulk of the creatures who had been freed that in the darkness the gods seemed like moving stars, followed by a second, blacker night. At last they came to the mountain of Cronus, and the three gods greeted their three sisters who had awaited them. Together the children of Cronus stared at their terrible allies.

The strange eyes of the Cyclopes, set in their heads like monstrous jewels, glinted faintly in the starlight. For the first time since the days of old Uranus they were smiling. They stared up at the fortress in the sky; then they nodded and gave the gods the weapons they would need. To Hades they gave the Helmet of Invisibility, to Poseidon they gave the Trident that shakes the earth, and to mighty Zeus they gave the Thunderbolt before which all must fall.

Hades put on the helmet. At once he faded so that where the grim god had once stood, was now no more than a shadow such as might have been fancied by a tired eye. Quietly this vague shadow began to drift up the mountain toward the lofty fortress, and the armed gods followed stealthily after.

With weapons forged by the Cyclopes, and the overwhelming fur of the hundred-handed giants, Zeus overturned the rule of Cronus, and banished the Titans. After that he ruled supreme.

Last of the great gods was Dionysus (Bacchus), a latecomer who was the son of Zeus and a mortal woman. The cult of Dionysus was spread through Greece by women who gained through it a chance to throw off, for a few days, the tedious restrictions of their lives. Dionysus represented wine, communal feeling, and delirious frenzy; mystic insight and powerful inspiration; fertility and life.

In addition to these gods and goddesses, there was a great host of local spirits and powers. Rivers, streams, trees, or any remarkable features often landscape were likely to have a resident spirit, worshipped by those who lived nearby. These were the nymphs and dryads, fauns and satyrs, and so on.

Although Zeus could rule much as he wished, there was limit to the things that he could will. There were mysterious older, impersonal powers that even he could not avoid. Such were the Fates.

The fates, the three sisters who determined the lives of people and the ending of the world, were a common concept in the myths of the European peoples. They represented the power of a primal mother goddess. In Greek myth, they were three blind women at a spinning wheel: Clotho spun the threads of life; Lachesis measured them out; and pitiless Atropos cut them off. The same three figures appear in Norse myth as the Norns, who lived by the Well of Truth at the roots of the world Tree. The Anglo-Saxons knew them as the Wyrds-The Wyrd is Old English for "Fate". The Fates show up in Shakespeare's *Macbeth* as the three witches-"the wierd sisters."