

When Art Betrays Mythology: Acquitting Cronus (Κρόνος) in Goya's *Saturn*

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Abstract

Francisco José de Goya y Lucientes (1746-1828) was a famous Spanish painter who is credited with painting a work titled *Saturn Devouring One of His Sons*. This work was one of over ten others known as the “Black Paintings,” which were painted on the walls of his Quinta home in Spain. The painting’s contents have been widely accepted as depicting a deity named Saturn, whose Greek equivalent is Cronus (Κρόνος). It is widely believed that the painting depicts a passage from the Greek mythological story known as the *Theogony*, attributed to Hesiod (ca. 700 BCE). The title and attribution stated above were assigned posthumously, not by Goya himself. No other authorship sources seem to be available. Prior investigations have relied on psychological inferences about Goya. The present investigation conducted an exhaustive literature review and then compared the painting's contents to Greek and English versions of Hesiod's *Theogony*. All three posited hypotheses were supported: (a) prior investigators seemed to rely on psychological analyses concerned with Goya’s mental state, despite a lack of objective evidence from the time period in question; (b) textual evidence from Hesiod’s *Theogony* did not provide support for Cronus being the figure depicted in the *Saturn* painting, and; (c) Grendel’s depiction in *Beowulf* aligned with the *Saturn* painting’s contents, textually and graphically. Further probing was conducted with regard to whether Goya could have profited from the materials and concepts found in the manuscript during his lifetime. The *Beowulf* manuscript was available to an artist between 1820-1823, and the plot of *Beowulf* was written about in European publications. Finally, the *Beowulf* manuscript’s contents included the Biblical story of Judith and *Beowulf* in the same spine, which corresponds to the adjacent location of the Judith and *Saturn* paintings in Goya’s Quinta home. Implications and limitations are discussed.

Keywords: Francisco de Goya, *Saturn Devouring His Son*, mythology, Cronus, Hesiod’s *Theogony*, *Beowulf*, Grendel, Nowell Codex, Cotton Vitellius A XV