

HESIOD AND THE DIVINE VOICE OF THE MUSES

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The Muses atop Mount Helikon (line 10) and atop Olympos (lines 43, 65, 67) are said in the *Theogony* to sing, emitting a beautiful ὄσσα (*ossa*) “voice.”¹ In 1915, T. L. Agar proposed that the term *ossa* used to describe the Muses’ voice in Hesiod was “an innovation and importation of later times” because its usage was inconsistent with that of the Homeric poems. In particular, Agar noted that *ossa* in the *Theogony* is used to denote the clash of heaven and earth (701) and also one of the sounds Typhoeus makes (a bull bellowing, 833), which, at first glance, appear to have nothing in common with the voice of the Muses. By contrast, in Homeric poetry, *ossa* means “rumor, report” rather than “voice” and can be personified as *Ossa*, the *Dios angelos*, “messenger of Zeus.” What Agar did not see is that the Hesiodic and Homeric *ossa* can be reconciled with one another at a deeper level of unity and that their convergence in meaning has important implications for Hesiod’s *Theogony*. Agar does not consider, for example, that *ossa* in Hesiod is specifically a divine voice suitable only for divine beings and that it is not equivalent to, say, the *audê*, “human voice” that Hesiod says the Muses breathed into him (31). Nor, as the scholiast to *Theogony* 10 would have it, is it the case that “Hesiod calls every kind of voice [*phônê*] *ossa*,”² otherwise Hesiod himself should have been given an *ossa* by the Muses. I submit that there is more rigor to Hesiod’s usage than

1 See West 1966.156. All text citations of Hesiod are taken from West 1966 and 1978. On the etymological connection between *ossa* and **ops*, which is attested only in the genitive, dative, and accusative singular, see Chantraine 1968, s.v. *ὄψ and Fournier 1946.4. On the formation of *ossa*, see Frisk 1960, s.v. ὄσσα.

2 Ἡσίοδος δὲ πᾶσαν φωνὴν ὄσσαν καλεῖ (Flach 1970).

Agar allows, and much more discrimination in the use of the term than the scholiast allows.

I propose to examine the attested usages of *ossa* in Hesiod, Homeric poetry including the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes*, and Pindar's *Olympian* 6 to show that archaic Greek poetry is consistent in its denotation of *ossa* and, further, that Hesiod's employment of *ossa* to describe the Muses conforms with their equivocal self-characterization in the *Theogony* at the famous couplet, lines 27–28, which scholars have discussed extensively.³ There has been at least one recent attempt to explain Hesiod's *ossa*,⁴ but no attempt has been made to connect it directly with the Muses' willingness to communicate “truth” or “lies” at *Theogony* 27–28. Yet precisely this equivocation is implied in the archaic Greek meaning of *ossa*.

It is well known that Hesiod's *Theogony*, and archaic Greek poetry in general, make the relationship between mortal poets and the divine Muses one of dependency and patronage.⁵ The poet (*aoidos*), like his counterpart the Muses, sings the songs of heroes and, most importantly, can be called the “servant” or “ritual substitute” (*therapôn*) for the Muses themselves.⁶ Muses and mortal poets may even be said to be two reflections in archaic Greek poetry, divine and human, of a single poetic function.⁷ The dependency of the mortal poet on the divine Muses can be expressed metaphorically in poetry by having the poet instructed by the Muses. So we learn from Hesiod, for example, that he was taught song by the Muses (*Theogony* 22): Αἶ νύ ποθ' Ἡσίοδον καλὴν ἐδίδασσαν ἀοιδήν, “[The Muses] who at one time taught Hesiod beautiful song.”⁸ The phrase pertaining to poets, *kalên edidaksan aoidên*, “taught beautiful song” recalls an earlier line where Hesiod says that the Muses pass the night emitting lovely *ossa*, which up to this point I have been translating as “voice” (*Theogony* 10): ἐννύχιαι στειῖχον περικαλλέα ὄσσαν ἰεῖσαι, “By night,

3 The literature on *Theogony* 26–29 is voluminous. For the sake of example, I cite Svenbro 1976.46–73, who summarizes the arguments of his predecessors on pp. 46–49, Pucci 1977.8–44, Stroh 1976.90–97, Krischer 1965.172–73, Thalmann 1984.146–49, Clay 1988.323–33, Nagy 1990a.43–47 and 1992.119–30, and Nagler 1992.81–83.

4 Ford 1992.175–76.

5 Commonly cited passages include *Iliad* 2.485–86, *Odyssey* 8.63–64 and 22.347–48, *Theogony* 33–34.

6 On the evolution of meaning of *therapôn* from “ritual substitute” to “attendant,” see Nagy 1979.292, following Van Brock 1959; cf. Lowenstam 1981.

7 For development of this point, see Detienne 1967.23; cf. Nagy 1990b.211.

8 All translations are my own.

they would proceed emitting a very beautiful *ossa*.” A certain parallelism of *Theogony* 10 and 22 would seem to lie in the notion that just as poets are taught *kalên aoidên*, “beautiful song” by the Muses, what the Muses themselves emit to the poet is a *perikallea ossan*, “very beautiful voice.” In fact, the relationship between beautiful song and a beautiful voice is even more direct in the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes* (442–43), which will be discussed later. However, as I shall argue in what follows, there is a sharp distinction to be made between the *ossa* of the Muses and the *aoidê* taught to Hesiod. The former is reserved for divinities alone, and should more appropriately be translated as “divine voice,”⁹ while the latter may be controlled by both gods and men. We may take the question a step further. Why does Hesiod, in lines that have been called “key to his authorship,”¹⁰ say that the Muses “breathed into him a (human) voice [*audê*]” at *Theogony* 31, instead of an *ossa*, which would appear to be the very voice of the Muses themselves?

In order to answer that question, we shall have to discover exactly what *ossa* is and why it cannot be transmitted directly to mortals. Let us begin by comparing the predominant uses to which the *Theogony* puts *ossa*. The term occurs six times, falling in all cases immediately after the bucolic diaeresis. The first four instances show marked similarity:

περικαλλ᾽ α ὄσσαν ἰεῖσαι
emitting a very beautiful *ossa* (10)

αἱ δ' ἄμβροτον ὄσσαν ἰεῖσαι
emitting a divine *ossa* (43)

ἐρατὴν δὲ διὰ στόμα ὄσσαν ἰεῖσαι
emitting through the mouth a lovely *ossa* (65)

ἐπήρατον ὄσσαν ἰεῖσαι
emitting a lovely *ossa* (67)

9 A distinction recognized by Fournier 1946.228.

10 Nagy 1992.119–20, for whom both the Muses' self-characterization at *Theogony* 27–28 and their gifts to Hesiod of a scepter (*skêptron*, 30) and a poetic voice (*audê*, 31) represent the dramatization of Hesiod's poetic authority; cf. *Works and Days* 662.

A comparison of the adjective + noun combinations reveals that *ossa* can be “beautiful,” “divine,” or “lovely,” as might be expected from Muses who create beautiful choruses (*Theogony* 7–8) and delight the mind of Zeus (37). Their singing and dancing is pleasurable. However, *ossa*, as elsewhere used in the *Theogony*, is not always pleasing to hear and can take on a distinctly unbearable and discordant quality as well.

The divine grandeur of *ossa*, indeed the overwhelming power implied in the word, already anticipated at line 43 by the adjective *ambrotos*, is best expressed when it is used as a comparandum to describe the sound that occurs after Zeus blasts the Titans (*Theogony* 700–03):

εἶσατο δ' ἅντα
ὀφθαλμοῖσιν ἰδεῖν ±δ' οὐάσιν ὄσσαν ἀκοῦσαι
αὐτῶς, ὥς ὅτε γαῖα καὶ οὐρανὸς εὐρύς ὑπερθε
πίλνατο· τοῖος γάρ κε μῶγας ὑπὸ δοῦπος ὀρεῖ

To see it face to face
with one's eyes, and to hear the *ossa* with one's ears,
it appeared just as when Earth and wide Heaven from
above
threatened to meet; for such a great thud would arise

I agree with West (1966.352) that it is difficult to translate *ossa* here as more than “sound.” Yet the point is not that the word means “sound” or, with imagination, “voice,” but rather that, for Hesiod, the divine collision would create an unimaginably harsh auditory impression. The *ossa*, for example, is compared to the imaginary *megas doupos*, “great thud,” that the falling earth would make (703).¹¹ This whole passage is hypothetical for Hesiod (note κε at line 703), and illustrates his inability to conceive of how such a collision would sound. Hence his usage of *ossa*, which conveys an auditory quality that mortals cannot comprehend.

The auditory nature of *ossa* is emphasized again when Hesiod uses the word to describe the sound made by the divine serpent Typhoeus. From its hundred heads, all manner of indescribable sounds are emitted, in a phrase strikingly parallel to the ones describing the voice of the Muses (*Theogony* 829–33):

¹¹ For the syntax of this passage and various interpretations of the collision, see West 1966.353.

φωναὶ δ' ἐν πάσῃσιν ἔσαν δεινῆς κεφαλῇσι,
 παντοίην ὅπ' ἰεῖσαι ἄθ' σφατον· ἄλλοτε μὲν γὰρ
 φθ' γγονθ' ὥς τε θεοῖσι συνι' μεν, ἄλλοτε δ' αὖτε
 τάυρου ἐριβρύχεω μ' οὐχ' ἀσχοῦ ὅσσ' ἀγάρου

There were voices [*phônai*] in all of the terrible heads
 sending forth all manner of limitless¹² sound [**ops*]; for
 at times
 they would make sounds for the gods to understand,
 and at another time again like a loud-bellowing bull,
 unchecked in strength, proud in *ossa*

What is interesting here for our purposes is that although we find three terms for voice or sound (*phônê*, **ops*, and *ossa*) used to describe the noises made by Typhoeus' heads, a more important distinction is made between sounds that are intelligible to gods (*theoisi suniemen*), which can be contrasted by inference with sounds that are intelligible to mortals. Presumably the *ossa* of the loud-bellowing bull would be familiar to Hesiod and his audience, but not necessarily intelligible to them. In any case, it appears that *ossa* is used where there is a discrepancy between what mortals and what divine beings can understand.

Typhoeus' sounds in general are also called *athesphatos*, "limitless," and we must consider what this word means in the context of another passage in the *Works and Days* where Hesiod describes again what he received from the Muses (662): Μοῦσαι γὰρ μ' ἐδίδαξαν ἄθ' σφατον ὕμνον ἀεῖδεν, "For the Muses taught me to sing a limitless hymn." I take the usage of *athesphatos* here to describe the kind of hymn that Hesiod was taught to be a conceit on the part of Hesiod the songmaker.¹³ But this is not a conceit in the sense that Hesiod claims to know innumerable songs. Rather, sounds that are unintelligible and reserved for the gods' understanding as they pertain to Typhoeus and the Muses are here rendered intelligible

12 I follow Benveniste 1969 II.141–42 in translating *athesphatos* as "limitless." In Homeric poetry, *athesphatos* can describe a thunderstorm (*Iliad* 3.4, 10.6), the sea (*Odyssey* 7.273), the night (*Odyssey* 11.373, 15.392), the earth (*Homeric Hymn* 15.4), wine (*Odyssey* 11.61), wheat (*Odyssey* 13.244), cattle (*Odyssey* 20.211), and *phylai* "political subdivisions" (*Homeric Hymn to Apollo* 298), and the implication seems to be that these things are literally or metaphorically innumerable or without limit.

13 Cf. Pucci 1977.34 n. 4 on the meaning of *athesphatos* and the further bibliography provided there. Also, see above, n. 12.

and communicable through the mediation of Hesiod the poet. The conceit lies in Hesiod's claim to be able to limit and, by implication, to make intelligible to his audience what the Muses have taught him. It is possible that his claim to be able to sing (*aeidô*) a limitless (*athesphatos*) hymn is meant as a direct identification of Hesiod with the Muses.¹⁴ It is more likely, however, that by this claim Hesiod represents himself as an intermediary between the divine and mortal worlds who was given the ability to translate a divine medium into a mortal one. I shall return to this point later.

From the beautiful and lovely *ossa* of the Muses, we have descended to the harsh clashing of Heaven and Earth and to the threatening sounds of Typhoeus. Moreover, we still have the question of intelligibility to consider, since restrictions are applied in the case of Typhoeus, and Hesiod was, by his own admission, not given *ossa* but *audê* and *aoidê* when the Muses personally instructed and inspired him. The *Theogony*, then, already presents us with a variety of contexts and usages to which *ossa* can be put and, as I will argue in what follows, these usages will in turn characterize the kind of information that *ossa* can convey. Before we turn to the content of *ossa*, however, let us take one more look at its multiform nature as we find it in the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes* (443).¹⁵

In this hymn, Apollo explicitly compares *ossa* to divine song, not merely to a divine sound, and speaks of it as "wondrous," *thaumasiê*. I refer to the passage where Hermes has just plucked his lyre and begun to sing for Apollo. Surprised at his new ability, Apollo asks (439–46):

νῦν δ' ἄγε μοι τόδε εἰπὲ πολύτροπε Μαιάδος υἱό
 Σοί γ' ἐκ γενετῆς τάδ' ἄμ' ἔσπετο θαυματὰ ἔργα
 Σοί τις ἀθανάτων ἐθνητῶν ἀνθρώπων
 δῶρον ἀγαθὸν ἔδωκε καὶ ἔφρασε θοσπιν ἀοιδήν;
 θαυμασίην γὰρ τήνδε νεήφατον ὅσσαν ἀκούω,
 δν οὐ ποτ' ὀφείμι δαήμεναι οὔτε τιν' ἀνδρῶν,
 οὔτε τιν' ἀθανάτων οἳ Ὀλύμπια δέματ' ἔχουσι,
 νόσφι σθέν, φηλεῖα, Διὸς καὶ Μαιάδος υἱό

14 As Nagy 1990a.47–48 suggests by arguing that the function of the Muses is embodied in the very name *Hēsiodos* (attested at *Theogony* 22), which he interprets to mean something like "he who emits the voice."

15 All text citations of the hymns are taken from Allen 1912.

But come now, tell me this, shifty son of Maia:
 did these wondrous deeds follow you indeed from birth
 or did one of the immortals or mortal men
 give you a noble gift and show you divine song
 [*aidê*]?
 For I hear this wondrous, new-uttered *ossa*,

which I think neither any man
 nor any of the immortals who dwell on Olympus has
 ever yet learned,
 apart from you, thief, son of Zeus and Maia

The first highlighted phrase, *ephrase thespin aidên*, “showed divine song” can be related to *Theogony* 22, where Hesiod says that he was “taught beautiful song” (*kalên edidaksan aidên*). We may infer from Apollo’s words that divine song could have been “shown” to Hermes just as it was “taught” to Hesiod. Whereas *aidê*, unqualified, may describe the song of mortals and sometimes of immortals (as at *Theogony* 48 and 60), *ossa* is limited to immortal beings alone, like Hermes and the Muses. *LSJ* (1940.1262) renders *ossa* in the *Hymn to Hermes* passage above as “sound,” but I do not think we need to be so vague here. Like Hesiod, Hermes begins his song (and lyre-playing) for Apollo (emitting an *ossa*, like the Muses) with a kind of theogony, beginning with the “immortal gods and black earth” and “how each came to receive his lot” (427–28). Thus the *thespis aidê*, “divine song” Hermes sings is a theogony comparable to the Muses’ *ossa*, which, in turn, can be paralleled to Hesiod’s entire *Theogony*.¹⁶ Hermes as a conveyor of poetry is thus, from a thematic and dictional standpoint, a reflection of both the Muses and of Hesiod. The *ossa* shared by Hermes and the Muses, and the parallelisms found between the “divine song” that Hermes was shown and the “beautiful song” that Hesiod was taught, suggest that *ossa* in the *Hymn to Hermes* is explicitly to be identified with divine song, and not merely with a sound or the lyre-playing, since it is Hermes’ singing to which Apollo refers.¹⁷ As to the question of the intelligibility of *ossa*, this is not an issue here because both Apollo and

16 For more on Hermes’ miniature theogony, see Nagy 1990a.53–61. As Clay 1988 has shown, Hesiod’s *Theogony* is similar to but not identical with the Muses’ theogony. For the moment, my emphasis is on the form rather than the content of what the Muses, Hermes, and Hesiod sing.

17 Cf. Ford 1992.175.

Hermes are divine beings. I am now in a position to turn to the nature of the information conveyed by *ossa*.

We learn from books 1 and 2 of the *Odyssey* that *ossa* can come from Zeus and that it brings *kleos*, “report, glory” to men.¹⁸ Athena tells Telemakhos that he should undertake a search for his father, Odysseus (1.281–83):

ἔρχεο πειυσόμενος πατρὸς δὴν οἰχομένοιο,
 ≥ν τίς τοι εἴησι βροτῶν, μ ὅσσαν ἀκούσης
ἐκ Διός, ἥ τε μάλιστα φῶρει κλῶς ἀνθρῶποισι

Go to learn by inquiry of your long-gone father;
 perhaps someone of men may speak to you, or you may
hear the *ossa*
from Zeus, which especially brings report to men

She tells him to do this on the chance that he may hear from some mortal (*brotos*) of his father’s whereabouts or that he may hear the *ossa* from Zeus, but whether Telemakhos is to hear Zeus speak directly or to hear Zeus’ message by way of other men through *kleos*, “report, glory” is unclear. The word *kleos* in this passage can mean merely a report, but in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* generally it more often means “famous reports, songs” of men.¹⁹ The idea that Telemakhos may hear the *ossa* directly from Zeus should give us pause because, based on what we have observed up to this point, it implies that Telemakhos must first be put in a privileged position of communication with the god. Yet, arguably, Telemakhos already enjoys this kind of relationship with the gods, since Athena is speaking to him directly. We may recall that, in the *Theogony*, Hesiod never claims actually to hear the *ossa* of the Muses; *ossa* is what he calls their voices, but he claims only to have been taught “song” (*aidê*, *Theogony* 22) and a “hymn” (*hymnos*, *Works and Days* 662) by them, in addition to having a “voice” (*audê*, *Theogony* 31) breathed into him. Apart from whatever Telemakhos’ special status may be *vis-à-vis* the divine world, it seems that there is also an implied “conversion” between *ossa* and *kleos* suggested in Athena’s words,

18 Cf. Detienne 1967.23 and n. 77.

19 See esp. Nagy 1974.244–55 and 1979.16. Examples include *Iliad* 5.3, 7.91, 9.418, etc. and *Odyssey* 1.95, 1.240, 2.125, etc.

when she says that the *ossa* from Zeus brings *kleos* to men (above, *Odyssey* 1.282–83). According to Athena, *ossa* is not communicated directly to men, but instead brings another medium, *kleos*, to them. There is apparently a fundamental distinction to be made here where *ossa*, as a divine medium, cannot be directly communicated to ordinary mortals, but must first become *kleos*, “report, glory,” which is a medium that they can receive.

A division between immortal *ossa* and mortal *kleos*, as well as the “conversion” of one into the other, is already reflected in the *Theogony*. We have seen how the Muses emit *perikallea* / *eratê* / *epêraton ossa* (*Theogony* 10, 65, 67, respectively), as Hesiod describes it, but he, in turn, says that he was taught *kalên aoidên* (*Theogony* 22) and *athesphaton hymnon* (*Works and Days* 662) by them. The *ossa* of the Muses is thus comparable to the poet’s *aoidê* or *hymnos*, and the latter can be broadened to include *kleos*. When Hesiod explains the poet’s task, he says explicitly that it is to handle *kleos* (*Theogony* 99–101):

ἀντὰρ ᾠοιδὸς
Μουσάων θεράπων κλειῖα προτέρων ἀνθρώπων
ὑμνήσει μάκαράς τε θεοὺς οἳ Ὀλύμπῳ ἔχουσιν

But when a poet,
attendant [*therapôn*] of the Muses, hymns the glories
[*kleos*, pl.]
of the men who came before and the blessed gods who
dwell on Olympos

The poet as attendant or substitute (*therapôn*) for the Muses deals only with *kleos*, but does not emit *ossa* like them. There are several other places in the *Theogony* (44, 67, 105) where the Muses themselves are also said to sing *kleos* (*kleiô*). It is worth noting that in these cases it is Hesiod who designates what the Muses sing as *kleos*,²⁰ which is part of the conceit of the poet: to identify what he sings with what the Muses sing.²¹ When Hesiod describes what they actually emit, however, especially by way of

20 Nagy 1974.248 concludes that “*kleos* was the formal word which the Singer himself (*aoidos*) used to designate the songs which he sang in praise of gods and men, or, by extension, the songs which people learned to sing from him.”

21 Song is the Muses’ “gift” to the poet, in Solmsen’s 1954.4 wording; cf. Sperduti 1950.229.

the formula *X + hiêmi*, he prefers the term *ossa*.²² This suggests that, implicit in the distinction between the *ossa* of the Muses and the *kleos* that men hear and relate, it is the role of the poet or of some intermediary to convert *ossa* into *kleos*. How the poet does this is only hinted at in the *Theogony*, but that he must do it we can infer from the fact that Hesiod never appropriates this powerful term for his own voice, which we would expect given his other attempts to identify himself and his poetic medium with the Muses. The only term for “voice” that Hesiod uses of both himself and the Muses is the *audê* that he says they breathed into him (*Theogony* 31).²³ Significantly, it is at this moment that Hesiod claims to have been empowered to sing *kleos* (*kleiô*, *Theogony* 32). I suggest that the Muses’ *audê*, as it is breathed into Hesiod,²⁴ represents on the level of diction the intermediate stage in the process of converting *ossa* into *kleos*. Short of an intermediary, namely a poet like Hesiod into whom the Muses can breathe, the gap between *ossa* and *kleos*, between divine and mortal communication, would remain unbridgeable.

If we return for a moment to the case of Telemakhos in the *Odyssey*—who, it is said, may hear the *ossa* from Zeus, which in turn brings *kleos* to men—we can detect the idea of a poet intermediary when he reports Athena’s message to Eurymakhos. Telemakhos addresses Eurymakhos and repeats, with one important difference, what Athena had told him earlier (2.214–17):

22 The expression *ossa + hiêmi*, “emit,” that Hesiod uses to describe the Muses (*Theogony* 10, 43, 65, 67) can be compared to **ops + hiêmi* used of Typhoeus (*Theogony* 830) and *audê + hiêmi* used of the choruses pictured on the shield of Herakles (*Shield* 278). The term **ops* (on which, see Fournier 1946.228) is used of the Muses in two places in the *Theogony*: at 42, it “scatters” (*skidnêmi*) and, at 68, the Muses are said to “glorify” (*agallomai*) by means of an *opi kalêi* “beautiful voice.” The semantics of *ossa*, as I will show in the discussion that follows, surely draws our attention as the most significant term that Hesiod uses to describe the Muses’ voice.

23 I caution that this is in part an argument *ex silentio*. However, Hesiod attempts so overtly to parallel himself and his poetic medium with the Muses that it is worth asking why he only uses *audê* and not *ossa* of himself. Nagy 1990a.47 argues that the *audê* that the Muses breathe into Hesiod at *Theogony* 31 resurfaces in the *-odos* component of his name, *Hêsiodos*. At *Theogony* 39, *audê* again describes the Muses and, at 97, it is used of any poet (*hontina*) whom the Muses love. Compare, in this context, the *audê* that Zeus orders Hephaistos to put into Pandora (*Works and Days* 61) and the *audê* emitted by the choruses pictured on Herakles’ shield (*Shield* 278). Of the other terms for “voice” used by Hesiod in the *Theogony*, including *phônê* (39, 685, 830, etc.), **ops* (41, 68, 830), and *glôssa* (83, 826), only *audê* is applied to both the Muses and Hesiod.

24 Cf. Pucci 1977.28 on the logic of the Muses breathing a voice into Hesiod.

εἶμι γὰρ ἐς Σπάρτην τε καὶ ἐς Πύλον ±μαθόεντα,
νόστον πρυσόμενος πατρός δὴν οἰχομ^ονοιο,
 ≥ν τίς μοι εἴπησι βροτῶν, μ ὅσσαν ἀκούσω
ἐκ Διός, ἥ τε μάλιστα φ^ορει κλ^οος ἀνθρ^οποισιν

For I shall go to Sparta and to sandy Pylos,
 to learn by inquiry of the return [*nostos*] of my
 long-gone father,
 perhaps someone of men may speak to me, or I may
hear the *ossa*
from Zeus, which especially brings report [*kleos*] to
men

Note that Telemakhos, in addition to repeating what Athena had told him, now makes reference to his father's "return," *nostos*. The term *nostos* in epic can mean both "return" and "song of return," as when Phemios in the *Odyssey* is said to "sing the *nostos* of the Achaeans" (1.326); we may also adduce the title of the Epic Cycle poem, *Nostoi*, as an example (Nagy 1979.97§6 n. 2). From this vantage point, Telemakhos implies either that he may hear reports (*kleos*) from men of his father's *nostos* or, taking the term in its second sense, that he may hear of Odysseus' *nostos* in song from men. The double meanings of both *kleos* "report, song of glory" and *nostos* "return, song of return" in this passage suggest that *ossa* is to the divine world and those privileged to participate in it what *kleos* and *nostos* are to the mortal world.

We are now in a position to examine the content of *ossa*. The fact that it is stated to come from Zeus in the passage just cited prepares us to consider the connection between *Ossa* personified, Zeus' messenger in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, and the other messenger of Zeus, the False Dream (*Oneiros*) that Zeus sends to Agamemnon in the *Iliad*. As the Achaeans gather together at the behest of Nestor, who has ordered them to do so after Agamemnon explains to everyone the False Dream of victory over the Trojans, we are told (*Iliad* 2.93–94): μετὰ δ^ο σφισιν Ὀσσα δεδήει / ὀτρύνουσ' ἰ^οναι, Διὸς ἄγγελος, "And *Ossa*, messenger of Zeus, / burns in their midst, rousing them to go." The accuracy of *Ossa*'s "information" is called into question when we remember why she is there. She is there because Zeus sent *Oneiros* to Agamemnon to tell him falsely that if he hastily armed his men, he could take Troy the following morning. During *Oneiros*' conversation with Agamemnon (*Iliad* 2.23–27), *Oneiros* calls

itself a *Dios angelos* “messenger of Zeus” (26), which is what *Ossa* is called in the passage above. I interpret this to mean that *Ossa* bears a capacity for deception, if only latently, which is to be inferred from her implicit identification with *Oneiros*, as both are messengers of Zeus. Here *Ossa* is rousing the Achaeans in accord with *Oneiros*’ own false mission, making both of them complicit in Zeus’ planned lie to test the Achaeans.

We see *Ossa* again at the end of the *Odyssey*, bringing throughout Ithaka the ill tidings of the death of Penelope’s suitors (24.412–14):

᾽Ως οἱ μὲν περὶ δείπνον ἐνὶ μεγάροισι πόνοντο,
 ᾽Οσσα δ’ ἄρ’ ἄγγελος ὦκα κατὰ πτόλιν ᾔχετο πάντη
 μνηστήρων στυγερὸν θάνατον καὶ κῆρ’ ἐνὸπουσα

So they toiled in the halls with the midday meal
 and *Ossa the messenger* quickly went all around
 throughout the city,
 relating the doom and hateful death of the suitors

Even though it is not clear here who sends *Ossa*, she is nevertheless the *angelos* (413), and this surely recalls her name *Dios angelos* and thus her association with Zeus in the *Iliad*. Curiously, although *Ossa* does not technically relay false information in this passage, the outcome of her efforts is dubious at best for her recipients. From the point of view of the relatives of the suitors, it is grievous news to have lost so many young men at the hands of Odysseus. So disturbing is this news that the relatives organize themselves to take revenge on Odysseus, and the bloodshed continues until Athena and Zeus intervene to end it. In the end, Zeus becomes responsible for ending the chain of violence that his own messenger *Ossa* was sent to rouse.

Unlike previous examples of *ossa* that we have seen, the actions of *Ossa* in her role as [*Dios*] *angelos* can lead, apparently, to ambivalent consequences. In the *Iliad*, *Ossa* conveys openly untruthful information, thus helping almost to abort the Achaean expedition, while, in the *Odyssey*, her influence leads to civil strife in Ithaka. What is important for my purposes is that in both cases mortals are in no position to resist *Ossa*’s information or influence—mortals have no choice but to accept her at face value—and it is to this impotence before divine communication that we must now turn.

The inability of mortals to discern critically the value or the intent

of divine communication actually takes us back to the *Theogony*, where the Muses represent their own communication as beyond the capacity of mortals to judge. In a passage that has caused much scholarly debate (see above, note 3), Hesiod reports that the Muses told him (27–28):

ἴδμεν ψεύδεα πολλὰ λᾴγειν ἐτύμοισιν ὁμοῖα,
ἴδμεν δ' ἐϋτ' ἐθ᾽λωμεν, ἀληθέα γηρύσασθαι

We know how to say many lies that are like [*homoios*]
genuine things [*etumoi*],
and we know, when we want, how to speak the truth
[*alêthea*]²⁵

A central difficulty raised by this statement concerns the nature of truth, and the capacity of the Muses to represent truth in language. Pietro Pucci (1977.9–13) has drawn attention to the notion of comparison and ineliminable difference in the word *homoios* (27) and suggested that a “theory of language” underlies what the Muses are saying that locates “truth” in the medium of *logos*, “speech, discourse” itself, not in ontological reality. Since the “truth” that the Muses can represent in language is utterly different from reality, it is incapable of presenting reality and is therefore always “false.”²⁶

There has been fierce criticism of Pucci’s arguments here in terms of his application of Derridean notions of language to archaic Greek poetry. For example, Ferrari (1988.58–63 and 69–70) argues on psychological grounds that there is no question in Hesiod of metaphysical truth or of the capacity of language to represent it, but rather only of whether the Muses *wish* to speak the truth or lies. Nagler (1992.82) suggests that the differences between lies that look like genuine things (*pseudea/etumoi*) and truth (*alêthea*) are two kinds of speech content, and two grades of performance, that pertain to two “levels of authoritative speech: the human

25 On the idea that what is “true,” *a-lêth-ês* is a double negative that means the expression of truth *qua* poetry, see Detienne 1967.9–27. Krischer 1965.167 argues that *alêthês* refers to what is “auf den Augenzeugenbericht beschränkt, also den Fall, in dem der Sprecher aus genauer Kenntnis spricht und nur darauf zu achten braucht, daß ihm kein Lapsus unterläuft.” Cf. the synthesis by Cole 1983.12.

26 For more on this question, see Pucci 1977.37 n. 17, with reference to Gorgias 82 B83 and B84 DK. Cf. Segal 1962.109.

and the divine.” I am very much inclined toward such a distinction, but disagree with Nagler that Hesiod can have access to the divine kind of performance or speech while in an “altered state of consciousness.” A different approach altogether is Nagy’s (1992.124–27), which is that Hesiod’s usage of the expression *alêthea gêrusasthai*, “to herald true things” (*Theogony* 28) is implicitly a bid for pan-Hellenic recognition for the *Theogony*, which would in turn trump any other theogonies, past or present. For Nagy, the *pseudea* referred to by the Muses slight the sum total of alternative ways of performing a theogony or previous theogonies. There is much to commend this view, but I cannot agree that the Muses actually impart their ability “to herald true things” to Hesiod by way of their gifts to him (Nagy 1992.121). We never learn exactly what they impart to Hesiod with regard to truth.

In contrast, I do think that Pucci has identified a feature of the relationship between the Muses and poet (or, if you like, between divine beings and mortal ones) that we may state another way. Divine speech and mortal speech represent two tangential but largely exclusive realms of communication. The divine medium is not fully translatable into the mortal one, even if some diminished form of communication can penetrate the barrier between the two. By “barrier” here I mean that between the physical state of mortality and the metaphysical state of immortality. This applies, in particular, with regard to the truth content of the communication. The dilemma is that divine beings like the Muses and Zeus make a choice to represent or not to represent something as true, while mortals can only accept the divine communication as true. Whether the Muses choose to make lies appear genuine or to speak the truth, what they convey, as Hesiod tells us, is *ossa*. Rather than simplifying the problem of communication, my analysis of *ossa* suggests that it is deepened even further. The Muses communicate in a medium (*ossa*) that is unintelligible to mortals and is accessible to them only after it has been converted into *audê* and then into a medium (e.g., *kleos*) that they can understand. The mortal intermediary, however, can never vouch for the truth content of the divine communication, only for the manner in which it was transmitted.

If Pucci is right about the “theory of language” embedded in *Theogony* 27–28, then we must distinguish two orders of problem here. The first concerns whether the Muses can communicate anything “true” to a privileged recipient, such as a poet. The second concerns whether such an intermediary can communicate that “truth” to a non-privileged audience, such as a community at large, apart from the question of whether the Muses

or the poet are deliberately lying.²⁷ The *Theogony* actually hints at a fundamental gap in the information transmitted between Muses, poet, and audience-at-large. Hesiod describes the Muses singing and giving pleasure to the mind of Zeus (38): εἰρουσαι τά τ' ἐόντα τά τ' ἐσσόμενα πρό τ' ἐόντα, “Saying what exists and what will come and what has come before.” A few lines earlier, however, Hesiod explains how the divine voice (*audê*) is breathed into him and what results (31–32): ἐν°πνευσαν δ° μοι αὐδὴν / θ°σπιν, ἵνα κλείοιμι τά τ' ἐσσόμενα πρό τ' ἐόντα, “And they breathed into me a divine voice [*audê*], / so that I might sing the *kleos* of what will come and what has come before.” The significant omission here is that Hesiod does not claim the power to sing the *kleos* of “what exists, being” (*ta t' eonta*) like the Muses, but only of “what will come” (*ta t' essomena*) and “what has come before” (*pro t' eonta*).²⁸ Not only is the information originally conveyed by the *ossa* of the Muses converted by way of *audê* into *kleos*, its content has now been reduced as well. The omission of “what exists, being” in Hesiod’s claim may be a brachylogy,²⁹ but what is interesting is that the two dimensions of time that are included (future and past) are precisely those dimensions which are inaccessible to Hesiod’s senses. As a way of praising his newly acquired *audê*, Hesiod seems to stress that the content of what he sings is not limited by his own experience. This stance would accord well, for example, with the detailed navigational information Hesiod relates in the *Works and Days* (648–85), even though, by his own admission, he has only sailed once before the short distance from Aulis to Euboea (651).³⁰ Hesiod can claim this knowledge because, as he says, he has been taught “limitless song,” *athesphaton hymnon*, by the Muses (*Works and Days* 662). Not to press the point too far, we might say that “what exists” (*ta onta*) is surely only one component of the truth (*alêthea*) that the Muses claim the capacity to speak, but whatever its value,

27 Cf. Ferrari 1988.70.

28 This has been noticed by both Pucci 1977.22 and 41 n. 39, and Clay 1988.330 n. 31.

29 For example, the *Iliad* says that the seer Kalkhas Thestorides “knew things present, future, and past” (ἤδη τά τ' ἐόντα τά τ' ἐσσόμενα πρό τ' ἐόντα, 1.70), which seems to be the regular pattern. I am suggesting that what is omitted at *Theogony* 31–32 is meant to draw attention to Hesiod’s new *audê*, rather than to mark him as different from seers.

30 For more on this passage, see West 1966 *ad loc.* and Martin 1992.15. For Martin 1992.14 and *passim*, Hesiod’s whole *persona* can be aligned with that of an outsider or immigrant (*metanastês*) whose poetic skill is a testament to his mastery of local, “insider” knowledge. While engaging, such an assumption is not necessary to the main lines of my argumentation.

Hesiod cannot give his audience the equivalent of the divine *ossa* of the Muses. Seen in this light, I suggest that Hesiod's "message" as it manifests itself in the *Theogony* is compromised and forever haunted by the impossibility of knowing whether its content is complete or true.

But a compromised or incomplete truth is not an overt lie, and Hesiod's inability to reproduce the identical *ossa* of the Muses testifies to the incommensurability of divine communication and human ability rather than to a conscious decision on his part to manipulate the truth.³¹ Hesiod does attempt to present the truth by modeling himself on the Muses in another way. For example, when he tells Perses in the *Works and Days* (10) that he wants to tell him "genuine things" (*etêtuma*), we cannot help but recall *Theogony* 27, where the Muses say that they can tell lies that look like "genuine things" (*etumoi*).³² Yet a paralleling of Hesiod with the Muses at this level simply magnifies the difference in communication between divine beings and mortal Hesiod, on the one hand, and between Hesiod and his brother on the other. Hesiod may claim to speak genuine things to Perses, but the Muses never make such a claim to Hesiod. They only claim the ability to do so when, or if, they choose.

Let us turn finally to a passage from Pindar's *Olympian* 6³³ in which we can observe once again the transmission of divine *ossa* to an intermediary who is this time a prophet. The passage in question concerns Apollo and Evadne's son Iamos. When Iamos comes of age, he calls upon Poseidon and his father (*Olympian* 6.57–63):

τερπνᾶς δ' ἐπεὶ χρυσοστεφάνοιο λάβεν
καρπὸν Ἥβας, Ἀλφεῶ μ' ὀσσῷ καταβαίς ἐκάλεσσε
Ποσειδᾶν' εὐρυβίαν,
ὄν πρόγονον, καὶ τοξοφόρον Δάλου θεοδμάτας
σκοπόν,

31 Svenbro 1976.54, citing Odysseus' words at *Odyssey* 7.215–17 in conjunction with *Theogony* 26–28, argues that hunger motivates the withholding of truth. Cf. Nagy 1990a.45. At *Odyssey* 14.124–25, Eumaios tells Odysseus that "there are vagrant men in need of care who lie, and do not want to tell the truth" (ἀλλ' ἄλλως κομιδᾶς κεχρημένοι ἄνδρες ἀλᾶται / ψεύδοντ', οὐδ' ἐθ' λουσιν ἀληθ' αὖ μυθήσασθαι), which, as others have noted, bears comparison with *Theogony* 27–28. However, I am more concerned with Hesiod's ability to present truth as it has been presented to him by the Muses, given the constraints of language in archaic Greek poetry, rather than with his willingness to present it.

32 Cf. Nagy 1990a.63–64.

33 Text citations taken from Snell and Maehler 1987.

αἰτῶν λαοτρόφον τιμάν τιν' ἔᾱ κεφαλᾷ,
 νυκτὸς ὑπαίθριος. ἀντεφθῶγξατο δ' ἄρτιεπῆς
 πατρία ὄσσα, μετάλλασ' οὖν τ' οὖν νιν· “Ὀρσο, τ' οὖν κνον,
 δεῦρο πάγκοινον ἐς χερσιν ἵμεν φάμας ὀπισθεν.”

And when he took the fruit of delightful, golden-
 crowned boyhood,
 going down midstream in Alpheos he called strong
 Poseidon
 who was his forefather, and the bow-bearer, protector
 of god-built Delos,
 demanding a people-nourishing office upon his head,
 in the open air of night. And the carefully-fitted
ossa of his father uttered back and sought him, “Arise,
 my son,
 come hither behind my voice [*phama*] to the place
 common to all.”

When Iamos makes his request to be made a seer, Apollo's *ossa* replies to him and we must assume that Iamos *hears* it. In the lines that follow those above, Pindar reports that Poseidon, Apollo, and Iamos ascend the Kronion hill and Iamos is given the gift of prophecy (*mantosuna*, 64–66), so there can be no doubt that Iamos hears Apollo's *ossa*. Unlike Hesiod, since Iamos is divine,³⁴ he is also capable of hearing an *ossa*. Recall that in the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes* Apollo hears Hermes' *ossa* (that is, *ossa qua* song, as at 443), which is to be expected. Apollo is the only figure we have seen up to this point who is said explicitly to hear (*akouô*) an *ossa*,³⁵ while now we see that his son can also hear it (note *akouô* at *Olympian* 6.66 with reference to Apollo's *phôna*). In addition to being divine, Apollo and Iamos share in a sphere of influence that incorporates divination and prophecy, and it is in this context that we should view Apollo's *ossa*.

34 According to Pindar, Iamos is the son of Apollo and Evadne (*Olympian* 6.35), who, in turn, is the daughter of Poseidon and the stream Eurotas (6.28–29).

35 At *Odyssey* 1.282–83 and 2.216–17, as discussed earlier, Athena appears to hold out the possibility that Telemakhos may hear the *ossa* from Zeus (perhaps based on the open line of communication that Athena and Telemakhos already enjoy), but this is immediately qualified by the idea that the *ossa* from Zeus brings *kleos* best. In other words, *ossa* will most likely have to be transformed into a medium that is accessible to mortals.

The *ossa* of Apollo is also described by the adjective *artiepês*, which I translate as “carefully-fitted,” and this brings him into parallel with the Muses, who themselves are called *artiepeiai* in the *Theogony* (29).³⁶ However, this time *ossa* does not describe song so much as a divine or prophetic utterance.³⁷ Similar to the *ossa* of the Muses and Hesiod, Apollo’s *ossa* also needs an intermediary in a privileged position of communication with him in order to make it intelligible to a larger community, and this intermediary will be his son Iamos. It is reminiscent of Hesiod’s situation in the *Theogony* that the exchange between Apollo and Iamos occurs just before Iamos’ elevation to the status of prophet for his community. We are in fact told a few lines later that Iamos is commanded by Apollo to establish an oracle upon the highest altar of Zeus in Pitane (70).

Iamos’ privileged role of communication with respect to Apollo is elaborated further in the description of his consecration as prophet (*Olympian* 6.64–67):

ἵκοντο δ’ ὑψηλοῖο πῶτραν ἀλίβατον Κρονίου·
 ἔνθα οἱ ὤπασε θησαυρὸν δίδυμον
 μαντοσύνας, τόκα μὲν φωνὰν ἀκούειν
ψεῦδ’ ὧν ἄγνωτον

And they reached the steep rock of the lofty Kronion
 hill:

36 Contra *LSJ* s.v., which views Pindar’s usage of *artiepês* in *Olympian* 6 “in a good sense.” I prefer the formulation of Calame 1955, who writes (with reference to Pindar, the *Theogony*, and *Iliad* 22.281) that “die schöne Fügung der Wörter täuscht über ihren Inhalt und erlaubt kein Unterscheiden zwischen Wahrheit und Lüge.” It is the fundamental ambiguity of *ossa* that is being stressed by *artiepês* in *Olympian* 6 and, by extension, *artiepeiai* at *Theogony* 29.

37 In this connection, it is important to note that the Attic form *otta* specifically means “omen, ominous sound” (e.g., Plato *Laws* 800c, Apollonius of Rhodes *Arg.* 1.1087, Aelian *De Nat. Anim.* 12.1, etc.). Cf. the related terms, *otteia*, “ominous sound, superstition” (e.g., Dionysius of Halicarnassus *Rom. Ant.* 8.37, 9.45, etc.), and *otteuomai*, “to divine from ominous sounds” (Aristophanes *Lys.* 597 and, especially, Aelian *De Nat. Anim.* 1.48 with reference to Apollo). The continuity in meaning already observable in Pindar suggests strongly that there remained something “hidden” or “indecipherable” in *otta* throughout the Classical period and beyond. I infer this to mean that *ossa/otta* has from the archaic period forward retained the idea of being a sound that is unintelligible to mortals, engendering the need for an interpreter—such as a poet or prophet—who stands in a privileged position of communication with the divine world.

there [Apollo] gave him a twin treasure
 of prophecy [*mantosuna*], there and then to hear a voice
 [*phôna*]
that is unaware of lies

This description bears direct comparison with Hesiod's report in the *Theogony* of what the Muses tell him before they breathe their divine voice (*audê*) into him, thereby giving him the power to sing *kleos* (27–32). Although the terms for voice are different,³⁸ for the moment I want to focus on the shared conceit of the Muses' *ossa/audê* and the *ossa/phama/phôna* of Apollo in the passages above. In particular, recall the Muses' statement that they know how to tell many lies, but that they can choose to speak the truth when they wish (*Theogony* 27–28). Hesiod does not suggest in the *Theogony* that what the Muses say is not true (which is, of course, not the same thing as declaring what they say to be true), despite the problems that we examined in the transmission of the Muses' voice to Hesiod, and notwithstanding their asserted ability to deceive. In the passage from *Olympian* 6 above, the voice (*phôna*) that Iamos shall hear as a result of being given mantic qualities is implied to be Apollo's voice of prophecy.³⁹ In contrast with what the Muses tell Hesiod, Pindar describes Apollo's voice as "unaware of lies" (*pseudeôn agnôton*),⁴⁰ and the point here is that between two divine beings engaged in the transmission of prophecy, Iamos and Apollo, there will be no lies. The implication is that a voice that travels

38 In *Olympian* 6, Pindar uses three terms for Apollo's voice: *ossa* (62), *phama* (63), and *phôna* (66). This multiplicity of terms for voice should recall the description of Typhoeus in the *Theogony*, where the various sounds of the monster are ascribed to a *glôssa* (826), *phônê* (829), **ops* (830), and where at least one of the sounds is in turn related to the *ossa* of a bull (832). Cf. also the use of *phthengomai*, "to utter" at *Theogony* 831 and (*anti*)*phthengomai*, "to utter back" at *Olympian* 6.61. In the Typhoeus description, as discussed earlier, the key point is that some of its voices are intelligible to the gods (831), which, by extension, means that they are not intelligible to mortals. I suggest that this same dichotomy is at work in the description of Apollo's voice(s) in *Olympian* 6. For the opinion that Typhoeus is an "infernal" counterpart to the Muses, see Ford 1992.190–91.

39 Kirkwood 1982 *ad loc.*

40 The phrase *pseudeôn agnôton* as applied to Apollo's voice (*phôna*) could also mean "unaware of its own lies," which would add another level of complexity to the problem of truth in a divine utterance. I infer that this restriction of being unaware of lies applies to the *phôna*, *phama*, and *ossa* of Apollo, from the point of view of two divine beings. From the point of view of Pindar, who characterizes the *phôna* as such, and from the point of view of mortals in general, all of Apollo's voices would still retain their opacity.

between divine and mortal beings is not similarly constrained, and may in fact presuppose lies and deception—or, at the very least, ambiguity.

The difference between mortal Hesiod and divine Iamos is significant here, and may explain the differences in their respective abilities to handle a divine *ossa*. Although Hesiod and Iamos can be compared as intermediaries between the divine and mortal worlds, their differences are equally revealing. Hesiod is a Boiotian farmer, suddenly elevated to the status of divinely inspired poet, while Iamos is the son of Apollo and destined to become a prophet (*Olympian* 6.50). We have seen how Hesiod describes his communication with the Muses, and how their *ossa*, which he cannot hear, is converted into *audê* and then into *kleos*. Iamos, by contrast, can hear his father's *ossa* (*patria ossa*) directly and will be given the permanent office of prophet for his community. The oracular voice (*phôna*) that is "unaware of lies" (*pseudea agnôton*) that Iamos will hear evidently is not even marred by the appearance of deception, while Hesiod must always contend with the uncertainty of whether the Muses have chosen to speak the truth (*alêthea*) to him, or "to tell many lies that look like genuine things" (*Theogony* 27).

In summary, I note that the inverse relationship between Hesiod and Iamos gives us good insight into Hesiod's stance with respect to the Muses in the *Theogony* and, in turn, with respect to his audience at large. Rather than being able fully to possess the powers of the Muses as their *therapôn* (*Theogony* 100), Hesiod must grapple with hindrances in the divine communication that he cannot overcome. Some of these hindrances are inherent in the conversion of the Muses' song medium (*ossa*) into the *kleos* that Hesiod, in turn, sings to his audience. Even though Hesiod refers both to what the Muses sing as *kleos* (*Theogony* 44, 67, 105; *Works and Days* 1) and to what he sings as *kleos* (*Theogony* 31), thereby positioning himself as their mouthpiece, nevertheless he draws attention to the fact that he has no direct experience of what he communicates. Unlike the divine Iamos, Hesiod cannot even hear the *ossa* of the Muses, let alone decipher it and reproduce it for his audience. In the end, neither Hesiod nor his audience can ever really know whether the Muses speak the truth. For Iamos, on the other hand, Apollo's voice speaks the truth because, if we are to believe Pindar, it is a voice that knows nothing of lies. All that we as audience can know for certain, as this examination of *ossa* throughout the archaic period demonstrates, is that there are insuperable constraints placed on divine communication as it is filtered into the mortal world. And because

of these constraints, the ultimate truth value of that communication lies permanently beyond our ability to know.⁴¹

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