

# Brill's

*The Reception of Myth and Mythology*

# New Pauly

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BRILL

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Clytaemnestra *see* → Agamemnon and Clytaemnestra

### Cronus

(Κρόνος [Krónos]; Latin Saturnus)

#### A. MYTH

C., the most terrifying of the Titans, castrates his father Uranus at the behest of his mother Gaia, in order to free Gaia's children, the Cyclopes, whom Uranus has banished to Tartarus (Hes. Theog. 453-505). As the new ruler of the cosmos, C. then takes humanity into an unprecedented and never-repeated "golden age" ("*aurea* [...] *aetas*": Ov. Met. 1,89-113) of peace and prosperity. However, to secure his position of power, C. devours his children (fathered on his sister-consort Rhea), the Olympian deities Hestia, → Hera, Hades and → Poseidon. Only → Zeus, in whose place Rhea feeds C. a stone wrapped in cloth, is able to escape. Grown to adulthood, Zeus overpowers his father and forces him to vomit up the swallowed children. C. must then withdraw to rule over "the nethermost bounds of earth and sea" (Hom. Il. 8,478f.), or, after his fall into Tartarus, remain "bound" there (Aesch.

Eum. 640f.; Macrob. Sat. 1,8,5), until he is pardoned by Zeus and made ruler of the Isles of the Blessed (Pind. Ol. 2,70-75).

### B. RECEPTION

#### B.I. KINGSHIP BETWEEN VIOLENCE AND IDYLL

Configurations and implications of power and rulership can be negotiated through the dialectics of the possession and loss of power central to the myth of C. Fundamental to the entire reception, then, is firstly C.' ideal, pacific rule, a lost utopia predating the role of → Zeus: C. here becomes not only the patron of the 'idyllic', but also the representative of a first phase of human culture, or the mythical symbol of a political situation in which peace, justice and prosperity are brought about by categorically superior beings or principles (law, reason) (Pl. Leg. 713c-714a; cf. Pl. Resp. 271c-272d). Virgil, importantly, shifted this timeless state into a historical context (Verg. Aen. 8,314-358): Saturn (S.) becomes an exile driven from his rightful throne by Jupiter (→ Zeus). It was S. who civilized the population of Latium, which had been devoid of culture and institutions. In this role of the 'first king', conceived as a real figure, the transfer of power exiled from Troy fuses with Augustan 'peace propaganda' to form a genealogical foundation myth for Rome [8]. Later historians factified and rationalized this invention of a tradition [8,77-114], and many patristic authors then took this as their point of departure for a critique of S. in which they confronted (sometimes with relish) his role as (putative) father of the eternal gods with his real existence, his amoral traits and his nature as 'time' (see below; overview in [5,246-253]).

The other C. – the violent, murderous, endangered, castrating and 'castrated' C. – meanwhile represented bad kingship and the paranoia of the mighty, but also came to be seen as a symbol of the inevitability of destruction. Justus Lipsius, in *De Constantia* (1584) 2,4, thus evokes "Father S.", who goes down with his sickle "to the overcrowded field and scythes down an immeasurable surfeit through plague and war", to illustrate a principle inspired by Stoicism according to which continuous destruction guarantees the equilibrium of the cosmos. C. also allowed reflexive discourses on the causes and consequences of the loss of power, e.g. in John Keats' *Hyperion. A Fragment* (published 1820): "I have left/my strong identity, my real self" (1,113f.). But it is above all C.' violence against his children, often seen as deranged, that has made him a fascinating aesthetic challenge. While Sir Peter Paul Rubens strikes a balance between S.'s jealousy or fear and the terror of the dying child in his



Fig. 1: Francisco de Goya, *Saturn Devouring his Son*, oil on plaster/canvas, 1820-1822, Madrid, Prado.

S. (1636; Madrid, Prado), the grey-haired S. in Francisco Goya's *S. devouring his son* (cf. fig. 1) [6], his head almost grotesquely distorted and a crazed look in his eyes, has already bitten off his child's arm and head. With his other 'Black Paintings', this work reflects Goya's increasingly isolated "personal life of sickness, encroaching age and political terror" [6.221] in its depiction of pessimism, madness and cruelty.

Equally, however, the dynamics of the C. scenario allow it to become an occasion for aesthetic reflection: Joachim von Sandrart (the Elder), for example, portrays a S. who is in principle as benevolent as he is capable of destruction as protector against the envy and lies that threaten art, in his painting *Minerva and S. protecting the arts* (1644, Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum); he thereby makes the god the patron of his attempt to institutionalize the arts as an academic field. Friedrich Hölderlin, meanwhile, updated the father-son conflict in poetological terms in his ode *Natur und Kunst oder Saturn und Jupiter* (1801, publ. 1826). The fall of the "guiltless" (*schuldlos*) S., who represents

immediacy, timelessness, animation, feeling and the unconscious, is staged as an injustice of Jupiter, standing for consciousness, design and language, and associated with the demand "to recognize that art is fundamentally conditioned by nature as its creative and legitimizing domain of origin" ("*die fundamentale Bedingtheit der 'Kunst' durch die Natur als ihren schöpferischen und [...] legitimierenden Ursprungsbereich anzuerkennen*"; [Schmidt in: 9.755]). Hölderlin also here translates one of the most important philosophical intellectualizations of the myth into aesthetic terms: Plotinus (e.g. Plot. 5,1,4) and Proclus (Procl. *Theologia Platonica* 5,27) read C. as the supremely perfect mind in its creative intellectual plenitude, because he also bears what he has created (Zeus) within himself (as the devoured Zeus).

#### B.2. FATHER TIME

The interpretation of C. as 'Time' consuming its children, already current among the Stoics and based on the similarity of the name *Kronos* to the Greek word *chronos* (the argument e.g. in Cic. Nat. D. 2,64), or as 'the power of Time', not only percolated through the entire mythographic tradition (e.g. Fulg. Myth. 1,2), but also came to affect the iconography of C., who is usually shown as an old man with a hat, hourglass and scythe (Death!), riding in a chariot [7]. How this dimension manifests itself in literature and art depends particularly on how time was experienced and thought of in a particular period. For instance, in early modern emblemata, C. becomes a mythical symbol of "sweeping transience and death, but also of a time (or future) that relentlessly brings the truth to light" ("*reisende Vergänglichkeit und Tod, aber auch für eine unerbittlich die Wahrheit ans Licht befördernde Zeit/Zukunft*": [3.1813-1816]). In Christian Friedrich Daniel Schubart's poem *An Chronos/Der Gott der Zeit* (1744), the elapsing of time (memorably drawn in the images of the "rattling and thundering" ("*Rasseln und Donnern*": v. 4) of the chariot of C. and the "stormwind" ("*Sturmwind*": v. 9) in his cloak) is politicized and associated with the disappearance of the "tyrant's mountain fortress" ("*Felsenhaus des Tyrannen*": v. 12) and the opposing mentality of the dutiful citizen, who "lost not a day" ("*keinen Tag verlor*": v. 40) in his "virtue and duty" ("*Tugend und Pflicht*"). Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, meanwhile, in his poem *An Schwager Kronos (To Brother Time, the Coachman, 1774)* portrays a coach ride, presented as a 'real' experience, a journey with "Prince" ("*Fürst*") C. as a daredevil coachman, while also staging this journey as the span of transient life, ending with death. Here, the raging transience and finality to the point of death traditionally associated with C. are



Fig. 2: Maarten van Heemskerck, *The Melancholic Temperament (Children of Saturn)*, etching no. 3 from: *The Four Temperaments*, 1566.

reinterpreted as an opportunity of energetic, self-empowering subjectivization, and of staving off death in the hurtling sensation of time. Around 1900, C. would represent the acceleration inherent in modern technology, and provide it with a mythical foundation [4].

Finally, Giuseppe Ungaretti's poem *Fine di Crono* (*End of C.*, 1925), from the section of the same title in his *Sentimento del Tempo* (*Feeling of Time*), in apparent paradox deals not with an end *through* C. (i.e. time), but *of* C., conceived as an eschatological, apocalyptic 'end of the world'. With the fall of C., intensely present in structure although restrained in imagery, conceived as an "hour of fear" (*ora impaurita*) in the sight of "numberless stars" (*innumeri, astri*) and resulting in a "final cry [...] ah, blindness! nights' caving in" (*"ultimo grido/[...] Ah, cecità, / frana delle notti..."*), there emerges "Olympus, eternal flower of sleep" (*Olimpo/Fiore eterno di sonno*). The mythical figure of C., with his intrinsic association of temporality and finality/fall/dissolution, thus comprehends that multi-layered interrelation of time and eternity that was vital to Ungaretti and which he explored in poetry on many occasions.

### B.3. PLANETARY GOD AND MELANCHOLY

Reception of C./S. after antiquity [5.204–315] was determined far more than that of other ancient deities by his complex role and influence as a 'planetary god'. Ancient astrology already imagined him as a maleficent and sly old man,

spinning his intrigue from "the opposite end of the world-axis" (Manil. 929, cf. 929–938). The *Cosmographia* of Bernardus Silvestris (1148), for example, gives a striking reformulation of the myth: the planet S. is an all-destroying Reaper which destroys all that blooms and abhors all that is created. Arabic sources [5.204–211] report S.'s association with the effects of 'black bile' (*melancholia*), turning the 'Children of S.' born under its sign into gloomy, morbid brooders and outsiders, who thus become suicides, outlaws, paupers and criminals – but also profound thinkers. Maarten van Heemskerck provided an illustration of this effect that is as exemplary as it is harrowing (cf. fig. 2). As melancholy underwent rehabilitation to the wistful state of mind that marks out all creative spirits, S. became from the Renaissance a symbol and patron of artists and scholars, and of their creativity, imagination and aptitude for the *vita speculativa* as well as for the gloom that could always disable them. "As the highest god", states Marsilio Ficino's particularly important treatise *De vita* (= *De vita triplici*, publ. 1489), "who promotes scholars... he brings forth those unique philosophers whose minds are quite abstracted from external stimuli and their own bodies and are so attuned to the transcendental that they finally become instruments of the Divine" (quoted in [5.374]). S.'s attributes in particular (hourglass, planetary rings, propped head) subsequently became an omnipresent subtext in the depiction of melancholy

(sometimes mocked as a habit) and of scholarship and artistry – not just in Albrecht Dürer's influential etching *Melencolia I* (1514) [5], but long into the modern period, in works by Eduard Mörike [1], Georg Trakl (*Trübsinn*, 'Melancholy', 1912, vv. 9–12), W. G. Sebald (*Die Ringe des S.*, *The Rings of S.*, 1995) and Lioba Happel (*Ein Hut wie S.*, 1991). Although in modern times too, S. has sometimes been made a clichéd symbol of the intellectual and artistic mentality (e.g. Susan Sontag, *Under the Sign of S.*, 1972/80), the more specific reception of the S. figure in modern poetry does show the problem addressed whereby melancholy is no longer glorified as an unqualifiedly creative state, but also explored as a potentially fatal depression. In Paul Celan's poem *Unter der Flut* ('Under the Flood', in: *Lichtzwang*, 1970), for example, "melancholy" ("*Schwermut*") in the "approaching shadow of S." ("*genahnten Schatten/Saturn*": v. 20 f.) no longer leads as in Ficino to heaven, but is associated with the fall (!) of an aircraft into the abyss (!), and it is "infinitely grounded melancholy" ("*unendlich geerdete Schwermut*": v. 5). Consequently, when the poetic narrator of Günter Grass' *S.* (in: *Gleisdreieck*, publ. 1960) notes an increasing, disabling alienation from himself through his ever more distanced experience and perception of everyday routines, S.'s nocturnal visit becomes a symbol of impending suicide: "*mit meiner Aschel putzt seine Zähne Saturn/In seinen Rachen/werden wir steigen*"

("with my ashes S. cleans his teeth; into his maw we shall ascend"). Finally, melancholic longing is perverted in one of Hans Carl Artmann's *Treuherzige Kirchhoflieder* (1954/55) by the destructive subjection of the poetic narrator to a "*saturnius*" who kills, cuts up and poisons plants, animals and the beloved with his sickle and scythe: "*zerschneid Saturn mein fleischern herzlund richt mein Sehnsucht himmelwärts/all lust ist mir verstorben*" ("lacerate S. my heart of flesh and turn my longing heavenwards all desire is dead in me.")

→ Zeus

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