That Other Crowd. Nethergods in the ancient Greek mythical imagination

An international conference at the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität (Munich, Germany), Distant Worlds Graduate School

**Date**: 4th - 7th September 2017

**Organisers**

Ellie Mackin (Leicester)

Maciej Paprocki (LMU Munich)

Gary Vos (Edinburgh)

**Confirmed speakers**:

 Jenny Strauss Clay (UVA)

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**Call for abstracts**:

Building on the remarks of Isocrates (5.117) and Plato (*Lg*. 4.717A, 8.828A-C), scholars of ancient Greek religion have traditionally distinguished between the so-called Olympian and chthonic deities, with the former considered principally benevolent and the latter malevolent. The division was blurred in ritual practice, as Olympian deities (such as Zeus Meilichios, Hermes and Demeter) often took on chthonic titles and functions (Mikalson 1983: 63-66, Parker 2011: 80-84).

Analogously to ancient Greek religion, the body of the ancient Greek myth seems to distinguish between two ranks of deities. The first rank comprises Olympians: Zeus’ extended family, prototypical gods, ageless and immortal, living in bliss on radiant Mt Olympus. By exclusion, the second, extremely heterogeneous group encompasses all the remaining deities, not necessarily anthropomorphic and often associated with darker and grimmer forces of the world. Coming from ‘peripheral’ branches of the divine family tree, these non-Olympian divinities inhabit liminal spaces far from Olympian gods and men, hidden at the margins of Olympus-centred mythologies, geographies and narratives. Cunning, uncanny, awesome and enchanting, they stand in contrast to Olympians and their ways, but nonetheless perform crucial—even if underappreciated—roles in upholding the regime of Zeus.

Interestingly, surviving works of ancient Greek literature often stress Olympian superiority: narrators or Olympian protagonists disparage non-Olympian deities, not without some backlash from them. In Archaic and Classical Greek texts, certain Olympians look down on ‘lesser’ gods, such as Apollo on Thetis (Hom. *Il*. 20.104-106), whereas non-Olympian deities appear to harbour deep-seated resentment against Zeus and his family over some ancient slights. Greek authors frequently allude to lines having been drawn between ‘younger’ and ‘older’ gods at some unspecified point, a sentiment that surfaces in the *Prometheus Bound* (955-960), *Eumenides* (162-164, 721-728, 778-779) and Thanatos’ first utterance in Euripidean *Alcestis*(24-37). A ‘lost’ piece of mythology, narratives focusing on and prioritizing non-Olympian deities could have been either submerged through accidents of transmission, deliberately suppressed, or—alternatively—have been something that is borne out by the surviving sources as a phenomenon that was obvious to the ancient Greeks yet largely invisible to modern scholarship.

We invite abstracts that explore the ancient Greek mythical imaginarium from the perspective of those divinities who do not fit the Olympian paradigm of godhood, whom we collectively call **nethergods** (‘beyond or below Olympian gods’). Nethergods are not simply ‘chthonic’, although these categories often overlap: we define ‘nethergods’ in a broad sense, to include non-Olympian descendants of Gaia, Tartaros, Chaos, Pontos and other Titanic powers (for example, *Hyperionides*, *Koionides*, *Krionides*, *Iapetionides*, *Okeanides*, *Styktides* and *Nereides*).

Questions that might be addressed include (but are not limited to) the following:

* What do Greek myths tell us about the nature and role of nethergods? What are their powers and relationships with other deities? Is there an established divine pecking order?
* How do nethergods express their dissatisfaction with the Olympian politics of Zeus and defend their rights and privileges? Can they successfully oppose Olympian deities?
* Are there nethergod-centred mythologies, in opposition to the Olympian one? Can we uncover their traces?
* Why is the Olympian godhood the ultimate measuring rod for divinity? Are nethergods objectively monstrous and unnatural?

We invite contributions that engage with some aspect of this topic in relation to archaic and classical Greek literature or material culture. Since we would like to investigate the Greek nethergod conceptual category *sensu lato*, we will also consider proposals involving both Greek and Roman literature.

Abstracts of around 250 words should be submitted via a registration form found on the Conference’s website ([**http://thatothercrowd.weebly.com**](http://thatothercrowd.weebly.com)): **the submission deadline is May 31, 2017**. Abstracts should be prepared for blind review, so please ensure that your abstract is free from any identifying personal details.

For more information please visit <http://thatothercrowd.weebly.com>

All speakers will be offered a single accommodation for three nights at a local hotel. Partial travel bursaries will also be available for participants whose institutions are not able to fully cover their travel expenses.

We plan to collect the papers together for publication in an edited collection; more details will follow.

We are committed to creating an accessible environment: the venue is accessible, and we are happy to confirm specific accessibility details closer to the date. Please contact the organisers on thatothercrowd@gmail.com if you require any specific facilities (including hearing aid loops or visual aids) to fully enjoy and engage in this conference.

Please note that presentations may need to conform to specific accessibility requirements, which will be circulated closer to the date.