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Erga Gynaikon: Female Supremacy in the Hesiodic Catalogue of Women

Abstract: The Hesiodic *Catalogue of Women* represents an interesting field of investigation to observe how and from which mythical background the female supremacy has been examined in the early Greek epic. The superiority of women is here related to the birth of a heroic race which in Hesiodic production appears as a recurrent literary motif. In this way the *Catalogue* fits itself into a consolidated poetic cycle between *Theogony* and *Erga*.

Keywords: Early Greek poetry; Hesiodic cycle; proem; narrative technique; epic stories.

Over the past twenty years, studies in the Hesiodic *Catalogue of Women* have enjoyed a remarkable and unexpected impulse.¹ This revival of interest in the poem would not have taken place, however, if M. L. West had not dedicated in 1985 to the *Ehoiai* a seminal and crucial monograph, *The Hesiodic Catalogue of Women. Its Nature, Structure, and Origins*, which continues to present itself as an essential support for those who want to investigate the development of a story that is densely articulated and, in most instances, elusive due to the fragmentary state in which it arrived.²

Today, therefore, thanks to a mature attitude and new hermeneutical approaches, it is possible to consider together the numerous problems that the *Catalogue of Women* offers and try to understand the reasons and forms of the storytelling that characterize a poem whose composition is uncertain on a chronological field, placed by critics from the 8th to the 6th century, albeit with the possibility of any subsequent insertions.³ At the same time, it is also possible

1 I read this paper in L'Aquila during a seminar which is organized by Laura Lulli, Andrea Ercolani and Livio Sbardella whom I thank for their valuable advices and φιλία. Giulia D'Alessandro, with patience and friendship, has corrected and improved this English version.

2 See West 1985, 3–4. “The *Catalog* was a poem of ambitious scope and length [...] which constructed a map of the Hellenic word in genealogical terms”: so Hunter 2005, 1. On the *Catalogue*’s papyrological tradition now see Casanova 2008.

3 According to Janko 1982, 86–87, numerous linguistic elements in the poem are coeval with the Hesiodic period. West 2008, 40–42, for the date of the *Catalogue* suggests a post-Stesichorean period, in which the conspicuous modernity of Empedocles is not yet present but a series of compound adjectives, a talisman of poetic emancipation, begins to emerge. See also Cassio 2009.

to reconsider, as I believe, with greater awareness the message that has been entrusted to the *Catalogue of Women*, as I would like to try to illustrate. Interpretations in this sense are not univocal. From a unitary reading that sees the *Ehoiai* as a necessary link between *Theogony* and *Erga*, or from the figure of the monumental Hesiodic poet, we have come to a recent political interpretation that in the *Catalogue of Women* identifies the echo and the result of the social tensions within the Greek aristocracy at the end of the 6th century towards the emergence of the so-called “middling ideology”.⁴ These different approaches are linked to the attribution or otherwise of the poem to Hesiod. Regardless of the authenticity of the *Catalogue of Women*, a long-standing and unsolvable problem, I think it is necessary to consider the terms of the question in this way: when it was composed and transmitted within an Hesiodic tradition, the *Catalogue* focuses a necessary moment of passage from the cosmogonic vision that emerges in the *Theogony* to the procretic conception that transpires in the *Erga* in an articulated *continuum*, a kind of cyclic tradition on the model exemplified by the epic one, conditioned by complex mechanisms of transmission.⁵

Genealogical production, such as that of the *Ehoiai*, certainly has genetic and compositional links with oral performance at several levels: the articulated structure, woven in precise and dense meshes, allows an arrangement of elements, narrative cards and formulas that find an accurate space in the hexameter. It is also true, at the same time, that complex poetic productions such as the *Catalogue* – as much as the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* – cannot be escaped *tout court* to the help of writing, as soon as this has offered itself as a mandatory support also for the performance.⁶ The help of writing has certainly facilitated both the organization and the development of an architecture that provides clear narrative structures as well as inevitable remote calls.⁷ Certainly, finally, it is undeniable that in every catalog structure by its very nature it is easy to

Lulli 2016, 207–213, with valid arguments, proposes a detailed linguistic research about the Hesiodic *corpus* influenced by rhapsodic performance.

⁴ On “middling ideology” see Ormand 2014, 1–51. The profile of monumental poet emerges from West 1985, 25–137. Arrighetti 1998, 445–447, underlines the substantial compactness of the poem, well inserted in the Hesiodic production. A recent exam of the Hesiodic *corpus* is in Cingano 2009, 91–98.

⁵ On this Hesiodic cycle “da intendersi appunto come possibilità di aggregazione variabile nei poemi nella prassi rapsodica”, see Ercolani/Sbardella 2016, 10–12. See also Solmsen 1982, 26–30, for the problem of textual consolidation of Hesiodic production, and Nobili 2009, 110–124.

⁶ This perspective is explained by Sbardella 2012, 38–50.

⁷ See Casanova 1967, 31–46, for the definition of “entry” and “genealogical return”. See also Cohen 1983, 81.

open the meshes that characterize it, and alter them, through insertions – or interpolations – which then enter in the text and fix themselves here to be transmitted later in other any performances or in the context of tradition.⁸ All the more so in a poem such as the *Catalogue*, whose “entries” could multiply thanks to the canonical formula ἡ’ οἴη / ἡ’ οἶαι, so peculiar as to become one of the poem’s titles in the tradition.⁹ But even in the face of these situation, it is perhaps possible to evoke an appropriate basic principle: to try to motivate a relevance in the context of narration, when it is possible, with a view to their fruition and their contextualization, once these insertions, transmitted with the poem, of the poem become an integral part.¹⁰

For all this, I would like to dwell on some aspects of the *Catalogue of Women*, observing them within a broad system which is the one which has *Theogony* and *Erga* as its extremes, and investigate the function to which these aspects are called to respond in the poem. In my exam I will analyze: 1. the *Catalogue’s* proem; 2. the profile of the heroines that Hesiod immediately observes in the *propositio thematis* such as γυναῖκες ἄρισται.

1 The Proem

The *Catalogue of Women* begins with an invocation to the Muses, in some codes transmitted after the last verse of *Theogony* (1021–1022) in a section particularly studied by critics in relation to its authenticity.¹¹ The unions between mortal women and male deities are now discussed (fr. 1, 1–22 M.–W. = fr. 1 H. = fr. 1 Most):

Nūn δὲ γυναικῶν ἑφύλον αἰείσατε, ἡδυέπειαι
 Μοῦσαι Ὀλυμπιάδεϛ, κοῦραι Διὸς αἰγιόχοιο,
 αἳ τότε ἄρισται ἔσαν [καὶ κάλλισται Διὸς αἰγιόχοιο
 μίτρας τ’ ἀλλύσαντο διὰ χρυσέην τ’ Ἀφροδίτην
 μιγόμεναι θεοῖσιν

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⁸ Ercolani 2016, 29–33, for example, starting from the study of fr. 343 M.–W. (= fr. 294 Most), with the birth of Athena from the head of Zeus (also proposed in *Theog.* 886–900) hypothesizes the existence of external alternative sections that run parallel in the the Hesiod corpus and influence each other advances during their transmission.

⁹ See Kyriakou 2017, 137–138.

¹⁰ As is well known, the problem of authenticity riddles the end of *Theogony* and the so-called *Days*. See West 1966, 397–399, and West 1978, 346–350. *Contra* Arrighetti 2007, 266–269.

¹¹ The verses are present in a part of the Medieval tradition of *Theogony* (Vat. Graec. 915, *Par. Graec.* 2763 and *Laur. Conv. Supp.* 158). See West 1966, 437.

ξυναι γὰρ τότε δαῖτες ἔσαν, ξυνοὶ δὲ θόωκοι
 ἀθανάτοισ τε θελοῖσι καταθητοῖς τ' ἀνθρώποις.
 οὐδ' ἄρα ἰσαίωνες οἱ
 ἀνέρες ἡδὲ γυναῖκες εἰ
 ὁσσόμεν[ο]ι φρ[ε]σί γῆρ[ας] 10
 οἱ μὲν δηρὸν ε.[...].κ[...]
 ἡ[ῖ]θ[ε]ροι, τοὺς δ' εἰθ[αρ] ε.[...]
 ἄ[θ]άνατοι [νε]ότητι
 τᾶων ἔσπετε μοι γενεήν τε καὶ ἀγλαὰ τέκνα
 ὅσσ[αι]ς δὲ παρέλ[ε]κτο πατήρ ἀνδρῶν τε θεῶν τε 15
 σ[περμ]αί[ων]ων τὰ πρῶτα γένος κυδρῶν βασιλῆων
 .]ς τε Π[ο]σειδάων
]ν τ' Ἄρης [
] .ημιντ[...]
 ὅσσαις θ' αὐθ' Ἐρμῆς .[...]
 ἡδ' ὅσσαισι βίη Ἡ[ρα]κλῆος

3 Merkelbach 4 West 5 θεοῖσ[ιν] West 10 Lobel 12–13 Lobel 14 Stiewe 15 Hirschberger 17 Merkelbach 18, 20–22 Stiewe

The opening νῦν inserts this invocation in the proemial model that characterizes the beginning of the *Catalogue of Ships* in a larger narrative context already in progress, in the II book of the *Iliad* (484–493), after the proem on the μῆνις (1, 1–9).¹² In the *propositio thematis* of the *Catalogue of Women* addressed to the Olympic Muses it is now, νῦν, required to sing a new topic: the γυναικῶν φύλον (1) and, more precisely, the ἄρισται women that once, τότε, after having loosened the virginal girdles mingled with the gods (3).¹³ The story, however, does not open immediately with the ἔργα of one of these women. The proem proposes a chronological contextualization as well as the reason why this loving unions between gods and women are made possible: at that time, in fact, both men and gods shared canteens and seats (6) and life for mortals did not have the same duration, οὐδ' ἄρα ἰσαίωνες (8).¹⁴ The δαῖτες and the θόωκοι recall the convivial dimension but they suggest also the idea that in the chronological phase in which the story of the *Catalogue* develops, there is a clear κοινωνία between the

¹² A discussion on this point is offered by de Jong 2004, 45–53. The adverb νῦν at the beginning of poem or in invocation, for example, in early Greek poetry is testified by Antimachus of Teos in *Epigoni*, νῦν αὐθ' ὀπλοπτεῖρων ἀνδρῶν ἀρχώμεθα, Μοῦσαι (fr. 1 Bernabé): Davies 2014, 107–112. See also Timon, fr. 1 Di Marco ἔσπετε νῦν μοι ὅσοι πολυπράγμονές ἐστε σοφισταί; Apoll. 1, 20 νῦν δ' ἄν ἐγὼ γενεήν τε καὶ οὖνομα μυθησαίμην.

¹³ See De Sanctis 2006, 12–16, and Strauss Clay 2005, 27–30.

¹⁴ According to Irwin 2005, 65–83, with τότε from proem emerges a chronological scenario perceived as polar respect to the Athenian socio-political context at the end of the 6th century.

human and the divine element that allows continuous interaction. In this way in the proem the detail of commonality, well-marked also on the phonic and rhythmic level, with the repetition of the adjective ξυνός, becomes a primary factor, on which the attention of the hearer is concentrated.¹⁵ Of course, in the light of Homeric production, the reader of the *Catalogue* is accustomed to knowing that gods and men benefit from reciprocal relationships but the type of interaction to which allusion is made in this *incipit*, appears different from that which Homer recalls or seems to presuppose in the *Iliad* and in the *Odyssey*. In the proem, in fact, as the τότε suggests, it is understood that the time of the story is earlier than that in which Achilles' anger in Troy develops or Odysseus's return to Ithaca occurs. In other words, in the *Catalogue of Women* the proem distances itself, so to speak, from Homer not only or not so much from a narrative point of view, going beyond the μῆνις οὐλομένη and the ἀνὴρ πολύτροπος, but also and above all from a chronological point.¹⁶

Moreover, both in the *Iliad* and in the *Odyssey* we have references to the same chronological dimension in which Hesiod observes the possibility of the κοινωνία of life between human and divine as in the *Catalogue*, but here we have the impression that this commonality is ending or is now gone because of the Trojan war.¹⁷ In only one case, in Homer, as far as I am aware, instead, with surprising clarity, is the κοινωνία between men and gods themed in relation to a special type of humanity that survives the Trojan war: the Phaeacians. In the VII book of the *Odyssey*, when Alcinous arranges the reception for the newly arrived guest and prepares the escort that can bring him back home, at the end of his speech, he adds an interesting observation (199–205):

εἰ δέ τις ἀθανάτων γε κατ' οὐρανοῦ εἰλήλουθεν,
 ἄλλο τι δὴ τόδ' ἔπειτα θεοὶ περιμηχανώνονται. 200
 αἰεὶ γὰρ τὸ πάρος γε θεοὶ φαίνονται ἑναργεῖς
 ἡμῖν, εὖθ' ἔρδωμεν ἀγκλειτὰς ἐκατόμβας,
 δαίνυνταί τε παρ' ἄμμι καθήμενοι ἔνθα περ ἡμεῖς.
 εἰ δ' ἄρα τις καὶ μούνος ἰὼν ξύμβληται ὁδίτης,

15 Repetition of ξυνός seems to have been programmatic in order to strengthen the idea of close commonality between men and gods. See Clauss 1990, 130: "one can safely assume that they (i.d. Hellenistic scholar-poets) had *Cat.* fr. 1, 6 in mind when they employed the ξυν- γάρ ... ξυν- δέ phrase".

16 See Graziosi/Haubold 2005, 36–38.

17 The account about Trojan war emerges from the *Catalogue* at the end of the so-called V book after the description of Helen's wedding (fr. 204, 96–104 M.–W. = fr. 110 H. = fr. 155 Most) and it is here attributed to a new Olympic ἔρις and an extraordinary plans of Zeus. See González 2010, 375–383. The rich analysis of Cingano 2005 is now essential for the section on Helen's wedding.

οὐ τι κατακρύπτουσιν, ἐπεὶ σφισιν ἐγγύθεν εἶμέν,
ὥς περ Κύκλωπες τε καὶ ἄγρια φῦλα Γιγάντων.

205

Alcinous assumes that the stranger who has come to his island may be a god. This thought agitates the king because, in this case, Alcinous does not understand the reason why an immortal must take human form and not present himself as usually happens to Scheria in his divine aspect.¹⁸ Alcinous, therefore, suspects that the gods are plotting something nefarious for the Phaeacians, because the gods, as the king remembers, usually appear in their splendor without any problem, when sacrifices are made, as much as they usually sit together and next to the Phaeacians.¹⁹ It is no coincidence that those who walk the island alone, it is not difficult to come across an immortal, given the proximity, or rather a direct συγγένεια, between the Phaeacians and the gods, the same proximity that the θεοί also have in common with the Cyclops and the Giants. The information that Alcinous offers in this speech is decisive for understanding the perspective of the κοινωνία in the *Catalogue*. The Phaeacian ancestry which, as is known, is destined to become extinct and which distinguishes itself as hyper-society compared to the mankind of the *Odyssey*, seems to maintain some characteristics recognizable in the breed that Hesiod refers to in the *Ehoiai* project: the closeness to the gods, also on the genetic level, as well as coexistence with the gods in particular moments of existence.²⁰ After all, the verse δαίνυνται τε παρ' ἄμμι καθήμενοι ἔνθα περ ἡμεῖς is very similar to the verse of the *Catalogue* ξυναὶ γὰρ τότε δαΐτες ἔσαν, ξυνοὶ δὲ θόωκοι, so as to evoke both in the *Catalogue* and in the *Odyssey* the resonance of a common and consolidated tradition that goes in this direction.²¹ The difference between *Catalogue* and *Odyssey*, on the other hand, lies in the fact that, while the κοινωνία to which Alcinous alludes, is an exceptional privilege of the Phaeacians alone with respect to the rest of the mankind in the *Odyssey*, for the *Catalogue* the κοινωνία referred to

¹⁸ See Hainsworth 1982, 245.

¹⁹ See de Jong 2001, 181.

²⁰ For the Pheacian-society as a kind of hyper-society with respect to the basic level represented by the Cyclops, see Dougherty 2001, 122–127.

²¹ On this parallelism between the *Catalogue* and Alcinoo's speech see Hirschberger 2004, 166. The recovery of this image in the Latin production is remarkable. As notes Pontani 2000, at the end of the *carmen* 64 Catullus (384–386), with the divinities that were once *praesentes*, develops this motif of κοινωνία between human and divine from Hesiod.

in the proem is normal and shareable by all men and women who live in the themed τότε.²²

But not only: about this τότε a very interesting problem arises, in my opinion, within the Hesiodic cycle. If we read these first verses of the *Catalogue*, we can ask ourselves in what terms the motif of the κοινωμία could be reconciled, for example, with the times and with the story of Mecone in the *Theogony* (535–569) as well as with the myth of the five races that, instead, we find in the *Erga* (156–173e), that is to say with other periods of primordial humanity in which a clear relationship between men and gods is made explicit or other primitive phases of humanity are outlined. In other words: is it possible to insert the τότε proposed in the *Catalogue* in Mecone or in the race of the heroes of the *Erga*? And if an affirmative answer is given this question, in which chronological relationships should we understand the story of the *Catalogue*?

About these questions, it is opportune to reconsider the verses that follow the description of the commonality between men and gods in the *Catalogue*'s proem (8–13):

οὐδ' ἄρα ἰσαίωνες οἱ
 ἄνδρες ἤδ' ἑ γυναῖκες εἰ
 ὁσσομέν[οι] φρ[εσὶ] γῆρ[ας]
 οἱ μὲν δηρὸν εἰ[...].κ[...]
 ἡ[γί]θ[ε]ροι, τοὺς δ' εἰθ[αρ] εἰ[...]
 ἄ[θ]λ[α]νατοι [νε]ότ[ε]ροι

Here, in a brief narrative expansion the vital faculties of mankind are recalled as new topic in the poem. The perspicuity of the verses greatly depends on integrations followed for their reconstruction. For example, Hesiod considers men ἰσαίωνες in relation to the gods, compared to women or with respect to contemporary humanity?²³ Beyond this problem, I believe, it is quite certain that in the τότε considered in the proem both men and women were not, through an instructive Hesiod *hapax*, ἰσαίωνες, that is to say they did not have the same course or standard of living, since some of them probably died as old men, others lived long as young people, still others were finally torn away from the sunlight by the will of the gods.²⁴ What is certain is that, in any way we evaluate all the lifetimes

²² On the transitory nature of Phaeacian world, ready to extinction according to an old prophecy, see de Roquin 2007, 247–253.

²³ Hirschberger 2004, 166–167, offers a reach *status quaestions* on this point.

²⁴ There are numerous translations for this epithet. See e.g. Colonna 1977, 125: “né invero la durata della vita era la stessa [...]”; Pérez Jiménez/Martínez Díez 1978, 223: “Tampoco de aquella (en la tierra), hombres y mujeres tenían una esperanza de vida (igual ala de los venturosos dio-

listed in the narrative digression of the proem, it is easy to think that the perspective in the light of which humanity is now observed as a whole is not analogous to that which transpires in Mecone or in the myth of the five races, even if there are many underlying analogies.²⁵ In the *Catalogue*, a broad moment of coexistence is immediately focused in which one can logically account for the unions between γυναῖκες ἄρισται and gods. In Mecone, however, the Hesiodic tradition places in a precise phase of human existence the origin of the separation between men and gods, as the verse καὶ γὰρ ὅτ' ἐκρίνοντο θεοὶ θνητοὶ τ' ἄνθρωποι (535) seems to reveal.²⁶ But above all in *Theogony*, the intent to show the impossibility of deceiving the mind of Zeus is connected to the story on Mecone. In the same way the story about the five races in the *Erga* presents clear convergences with the story that emerges from the *Catalogue*, if only because the heroes whose extinction takes place during the war fought in Troy because of Helen and in Thebes for the flocks of Oedipus (164–174).²⁷ But with the wide λόγος of the five races, in which the heroes are only one of the four pre-existing γένη compared to the time of the poet, the *Erga* want to explain the origin of evil in the world of contemporary men unlike what the *Ehoiai* seem to reveal. In other words, while examining similar moments in which the possibility is given for the human to have a direct relationship or a privileged contact with the divine, the *Theogony*, the *Catalogue* and the *Erga* decline this same motif autonomously and for etiological reasons. In this Hesiodic cycle there are some common and contiguous cards in the story's development, but their composition makes possible a different and ever new presentation of the problem investigated, in this case the humanity of the past, without risking sensational inconsistencies in front of their use.²⁸ After all, on closer inspection, this way of telling a fact or event does not arouse wonder nor appears isolated in the Hesiodic production but seems to reflect a basic principle that regulates the reflection available to the archaic poet: the possibility of focusing the reality in the light of multiple perspectives and, at the same time, analyzing it through approaches that, although sometimes antithetical, are not contradictory. An emblematic case, as

ses)”; Arrighetti 1998, 101: “ma la durata della vita non era uguale [...]”; Most 2007, 47 “and yet not equally long-lived [...]”; Cassanmagnago 2009, 267: “però non del medesimo tempo di vita alla pari con gli dei immortali [...]”.

²⁵ The commonplaces of the primeval age in Greek and Latin literary production are identified by Gatz 1967, 1–7.

²⁶ See Arrighetti 1998, 347–349, and recently Ricciardelli 2018, 153–156.

²⁷ On this point see De Sanctis 2012, 26–29.

²⁸ This possibility, explained by Rowe 1998 as a theory of multiple approaches, in archaic production acts both on the conceptual level and on the properly narrative level.

is known, in this direction is offered by the palynodic section that opens the *Erga* with the two Ἔριδες (11–26) with respect to the only dispute καρτερόθυμος and στυγερή which, instead, is a firm genealogical assumption in *Theogony* (225–226).²⁹

2 The Profile of the Heroines and Female Supremacy

Now, however, if for the *Theogony* and for the *Erga* the story about humanity prior to that of the poet responds to precise etiological and proterectic needs, what function is the one described in the *Catalogue* intended from the outset? I would like to approach this not simple question that brings us to the heart of the message that the *Catalogue* intends to convey by observing the characteristics and profiles of some γυναῖκες of which the ἔργα are told starting from the epithet that characterizes them in the poem: the *Ehoiai* celebrate the events of γυναῖκες ἄρισταί.³⁰

Already in itself the proemial definition of γυναῖκες ἄρισταί raises many problems. The women in this poem enjoy a cumbersome epithet in the epic tradition since the beginning of the poem and in this respect they constitute its *propositio thematis*. It would be spontaneous to think that this female supremacy is essentially motivated in the light of the absolute and unparalleled beauty of every single γυνή, a reason that would push the gods to have a strong erotic desire for her and to generate an offspring of κύδιμα τέκνα. It is not a case, for example, that Merkelbach makes up for the incomplete v. 3 with the integration [καὶ κάλλισται κατὰ γαῖαν].³¹ Yet the motif of the κάλλος which is central to the *Catalogue* does not seem to satisfy in its entirety the polysemy which assumes the ἄριστος-character of the γυναῖκες. In other words: it is certain that all the γυναῖκες ἄρισταί are also γυναῖκες κάλλισται, but their charm does not summarize or exhaust all the qualities that distinguish them individually. It would seem that the charm unites all the women of which the *Catalogue* speaks but, at the same time, this gift is too generic to motivate an absolute supremacy, because in fact the women of the poem are mostly involved in actions and facts of

²⁹ A lucid study is devoted to the problem of palinody in the *Erga* by Arrighetti 1998, XXXIV–XXXVII.

³⁰ See Arrighetti 2008, 20.

³¹ On the beauty-ideology in Hesiod, see Konstan 2014, 43–44.

wider scope that transcend beauty.³² Indeed, sometimes the intellectual aspect seems to be considered on the same level as the aesthetic one: for example often many women are experts in beautiful works, οἵ[αί τε θεαί, περικαλλέα [ἔργ’ εἰδυῖα], as goddess (fr. 23a, 4 = 15 H. = 19 Most, for the daughters of Thestios, fr. 26, 6 = fr. 17 H. = fr. 23 Most for the daughters of Porthaon, fr. 129, 23 = fr. 46 H. = fr. 77 Most for the daughters of Proitos); the Deucalionid Mestra is πολυίδρις (43a, 57 = fr. 37 H. = fr. 69 Most); Eurydice daughter of Lacedaemon, is καλλιπάρηος ἐὺ πραπίδεσσ’ ἀραρυῖα (fr. 129, 13 M.–W. = fr. 46 H. = fr. 77 Most). An eloquent case is constituted by the story about Alcmena, which became the *incipit* of the *Shield* (fr. 195 M. – W. = *Asp.* 1–54). Here the daughter of Electryon exceeds the φύλον of contemporary women for beauty and physical qualities but the most decisive characteristic consists in the fact that none of the women that the mortals generated to the gods can match Alcmena on an intellectual level, νόον γε μὲν οὐ τις ἔριξε / τάων ἅς θνηταὶ θνητοῖς τέκον εὐνηθεῖσαι (4–5).³³ In addition to these elements, another decisive fact should not be forgotten: the *Catalogue* does not always describe the union of a god with one of the γυναῖκες ἄρισται. Indeed, in the genealogical links of the poem there are much more beautiful women who join heroes than equally beautiful women who enjoy the love of a god. The κάλλος, therefore, is not a unique key to solve the profile of these γυναῖκες or, at least, it does not completely satisfy the reasons for their supremacy. The excellence of the protagonists of the *Catalogue*, for all this, I believe, must be identified in another direction and in contact with their procreation function. The women are ἄρισται because they are capable of generating, regardless of a direct union with the gods in that τότε, a race of ἄριστοι not surprisingly in the account of the five races of the *Erga* considered as γένος ἄρειον and θεῖον or ἡμίθεοι (159–160). The supremacy of the poem’s γυναῖκες, in this way, can be understood as implicit in the function of giving life to an excellent pedigree, as if the epithet ἄριστος had, so to speak, a proleptic function with respect to the main characteristic of the generation that it comes from women.³⁴

³² See, in this regard, Kyriakou 2017, 139–142. The events of Mestra (fr. 43a M.–W. = fr. 37 = fr. 69 Most) and Atalanta (fr. 73–76 M.–W. = fr. *2-*3-*4 H. = fr. 47–50–48 Most), for example, assume considerable importance in this sense. See also Casanova 1977 and Ziogas 2013, 148–164.

³³ The praise towards Electryon’s daughter seems to be based on the words that Antinoos addresses Telemachus in the book II of *Odyssey* on the heroines of the past, Tyre, Alkmena and Mycene, to whom Penelope is equated for her νοήματα (119–122). For this speech see West 1981, 255–256. Recent analysis of the female epithets in the Hesiodic *Catalogue* proposes Mu-reddu 2008.

³⁴ On the narrative prolepsis in the Hesiodic *corpus*, see Lauriola 1999.

But this supremacy also seems to ignore respect or adherence to a codified ethical system of values. The women of the *Catalogue* do not always pursue a particular form of κλέος nor are they always interested in this in a main way. To my knowledge, although the term κλέος is used three times in the poem (fr. 37, 1, fr. 70, 5, fr. 199, 9 M.-W.), only in one case is it directly related to a It is not surprising that this woman is Helen: her κλέος is μέγα so much that Protesilaos and Podarces ask her to wife with rich gifts (fr. 199, 5–11 M. – W. = fr. 108 H. = fr. 154d Most).³⁵ On the contrary, it must be said that in the fluid and not yet stabilized world such as that of the *Ehoiai*, there are various types of men and women diversified on the behavior side and often the γυναῖκες ἄρισται with their spouses and individually are stained with faults, intrigues, ethical deviations that lead to serious consequences and punishments by the gods. With this in mind, the *Catalogue* proposes, gradually, a real decline of the heroes.³⁶ Think, for example, of the illicit behavior of Alcyone with Ceyx, to which I will return shortly to the Aeolian-pedegree that appear as new Zeus and Era (fr. 10a, 83–98 M.–W. = fr. 5 H. = fr. 10 Most). The same sacrilegious attitude towards the divine world is also repeated by sacrilegious Salmoneus (fr. 30, 16 M.–W. = fr. 20 H. = fr. 27 Most), punished with segregation in the Tartarus, together with his wife, children and his unfair πόλις, a segregation from which it is spared only the daughter, the pure Tyro εὐπλόκαμος, who opposes herself to the father's ὕβρις (fr. 30, 24–35 = fr. 20 H. = fr. 27 Most).³⁷ After the long *aristia* in which Periclymenus imposes himself as the only defender of Pylos against the sack of Heracles, the wrath of Athena against the son of Neleus is enough, because the fate of this hero ὄλβιος as a valiant soldier, gifted with ability metamorphic, reveal his statute of νήπιος (fr. 33a, 13–29 M.–W. = fr. 25 H. = fr. 31 Most).³⁸ The brazen behavior of deceiving Sisyphus who does not accept the decisions that Zeus has established against his γένος both with Mestra and with Eurynome (fr. 43a M.–W. = fr. *4 H. = fr. 48 Most) can also be assumed in this direction.³⁹ The madness of Athamas, deprived of his mind by the father of the gods (fr. 69*M.–W. = fr. 29 H. = fr. 39 Most), does not escape this perspective. A case of arrogance and failure to respect divinity characterizes the story about the daughters of Proitos, that from Era were punished with the infamous mark

35 Arrighetti 2008, 23–26, at the end of the poem, identifies in Helen an ideological cap with respect to the various ἄρισται women who make up the foils of an extensive *Priamel*.

36 For the “hybristic humanity”, outlined in the *Catalogue*, see Strauss Clay 2003, 169–174.

37 On events connoting the story of Salmoneus θεομάχος and Tyro, see Dräger 1993, 54–60.

38 See De Sanctis 2006, 27–33 and Nobili 2009, 105–110.

39 See Brillante 1983, 15–30. The story of Mestra according to Rutherford 2005, 114–117, testifies that “the *Catalog* sets out a link between Attica and the genealogies of the rest of Greece”.

of lust, the ἡλοσύνη, which disfigures their virginal beauty (fr. 133 M.–W. = fr. 49 H. = fr. 82 Most).⁴⁰ And a fate similar to that of the daughters of Proitos falls to the daughters of Tyndareus (fr. 176 M.–W. = fr. *8 H. = fr. 247 Most) on which Aphrodite pours a κακὴ φήμη of bigamy.⁴¹ These events to which other examples could be added lead to an inevitable conclusion: the heroic world described in the *Catalogue* is much less tetragon, so to speak, than that of the ἡμίθεοι that we find as strenuous fighters in the fourth races of the *Erga*. It has fragility, shows defects, reveals myopias that still place it in a stage of imperfection and which justify its inexorable extinction.⁴² This situation is well exemplified by the eccentric behavior of Alcýone and Ceyx.

In the final part of the proem, through a connection joined to the *propositio thematis*, the relative pivot τῶν, the *Catalogue* returns to the topic explained in the invocation to the Muses: of all the excelled women of the past the proem asks to sing with how many joined Zeus, Ares, Poseidon and the other gods. Yet, as I said, the *Catalogue* does not offer its numerous sections or narrative entries – followed by a genealogical return – in a repetitive and standardized way always starting from the union between a woman and a god. This is demonstrated, for example, immediately by the Aeolian stemma which was to unfold in the first book of the poem. In fact, together with Xouthos, Aeolus is the son of Hellen, born of Zeus and Pyrrha (fr. 1–9).⁴³ Offspring of κύδιμα τέκνα are generated from Aeolus and his wife Aenarete. It is, however, proposed a clear differentiation in the *Catalogue* between the male children of the couple who are listed in a short catalog and here characterized as θεμιστοπόλοι and the female descent of the couple which, in turn, is included in a shorter subsequent catalog (fr. 10a, 25–34 M.–W. = fr. 5 H. = fr. 10 Most):

⁴⁰ Costanza 2009, 12–14, distinguishes the version of the story between *Catalogue* (punishment of Era) and that of *Melampodia* with the wrath of Dionysus. The story about the Proitos' daughters in the *Catalogue* is part of a common narrative pattern in which a group of girls – as much as a single heroine – is punished by the divinity for incorrect behavior or vain speech. In this case, the Proitos' daughters are stained with arrogance towards Era, who spoils its beauty through the infamous ἡλοσύνη. The story is offered also, with exemplary function, in the XI *Ode* of Bacchylides (26–36 Irigoin). See Sevieri 2007, 219–220. For the relationship between the narrative of the *Catalogue* and the choral lyric see D'Alessio 2005b, 235–236.

⁴¹ See Finglass/Davies 2014, 308–317.

⁴² See Most 2008, 59–64, for the allusive terms in the light of which the *Catalogue* illustrates the end of the heroic world before the development of a new humanity. On the end of the *Catalogue* with the degeneration of the heroes, see now Scodel 1982, 37–40, De Sanctis 2012, 29–33, and Koning 2017, 101–103.

⁴³ For the reconstruction of this first section of the *Catalogue*, linked to the genealogy of Pyrrha and Pandora, see Casanova 1979, 136–187.

Αἰολί_δαι δ' ἐγ_ένοντο θεμιστ_οπόλοι βασιλῆες 25
 Κρηθ_εύς τ' ἡδ' Ἰ_Αθάμας καὶ Σίσυφ_ος αἰολομήτης
 Σαλμ_ωνεύς τ' ἄδικος καὶ ὑπ_έρθυμος Περιήρης
 Δηϊών] τε μέγ[ας.....] τ' ἀριδείκετος ἀνδρῶν
 [ἐν δώμ]ασιν ἡβώσontes
 [τ]έκοντό τε κύδιμα τέκνα·
 αὔτις δ' Αἰναρέτη τέκεν Αἰόλῳ]ι εὐνη[θ]εῖσ[α] 30
 ἡϋκόμους κούρας πολυήρ]ατον εἶδος ἐχούσας,
 Πεισιδίκην τε καὶ Ἀλκυόνη]ν Ἥ[αρ]ι τέσσιν ὁμοίας
 καὶ Καλύκην Κανάκην τε καὶ εὐ]πειδέ[α] Περσμήδην·

29 ἐν δώμ]ασιν Parsons-Sijpesteijn-Worp, *cetera* Mette 30 – 34 Parsons-Sijpesteijn-Worp.

While the events related to the male offspring of Aeolus and Aenarete, the set of children θεμιστοπόλοι, are entrusted to long sections of the first book, immediately after the list of the female daughters, Peisidike, Alcyone, Calyx, Canaces and Perimedes, in the genealogical return is dedicated to each of these heroines a section starting Perimedes. The poem remembers the union of Perimedes with Acheloos and perhaps her marriage with a mortal. Of course, mention is made of Hyppodamans, son of Perimedes and Acheloos according to the testimony of the *Library* of Pseudo-Apollodorus (1, 52). Hyppodamans marries a girl with an appearance equal to that of the Graces that generates Antimachus and Eurytes. In turn, Eurytes marries Porthaon and Oeneus, Alcatheos, Agrius and Pylos are born from them. They were killed by Tydeus, an illustrious knight, who in this way avenged the death of his father Oeneus. In just a few verses, the *Catalogue* therefore reaches Perimedes' great-grandchildren. At this point instead of D) Canaces the γένος of C) Calyx is described as married to Aethlius and mother of Endymion, loved by Zeus and recipient of extraordinary gifts, including immortality. Endymion in turn becomes the father of Aethol who generates Calydon and Pleuron. Agenores was born from Pleuron, while Polycaste was born from Calone. If this reconstruction is plausible, in parental and genealogical terms, in this case too we reach the great-grandchildren of the Calyx. After Calyx's γένος, the section dedicated to B) Alcyone (83–98) begins:

[]....παυσ[α]
 []χαλκον ἐνέι..[
 []ηισιν ἀγαλλόμενος ..[
 [] ἀνὰ δώματα ἡχέεντ[α]
 []μεγοὶ καὶ μαψιδίηι φιλότῃ[τι
 []..νόου βεβλαμμέν[οι ἐσθλοῦ.
 Ζεὺς δὲ ἰδὼν νεμ]έσησεν ἀπ' αἰγλήεντος Ὀλύμπ[ου,
 καὶ τήν μὲν ποί]ησε πατὴρ ἀνδρῶν τε θεῶν τε
 ἀλκυόν', ἣ τ[

ἀνθρώπων [
 ναίει καὶ ῥ' ἅλίοι[
 Κήϋξ δ' οὔτε π[
 παύεται αἴσσω[ν
 ἔεται Ἀλκυόνη[ς
 ἀλλὰ Διὸς κρυπ[τὸς πέλεται νόος, οὐδέ τις ἀνδρῶν
 φράζεσθαι δύ[ναται

89 νεμ]έθησεν Parsons-Sijpesteijn-Worp, *cetera* West.

First of all, it is the only nucleus in the context of the Aeolian story that does not have a genealogical approach. Alcyone, in fact, after her marriage to Ceyx, begins to feed crazy thoughts of arrogance and pride against Zeus together with her husband to whom we can trace the participle ἀγαλλόμενος which underlines for man the sign of excessive pride.⁴⁴ The two sovereigns seem to be characterized by a rational clouding, perhaps affected in their noble mind by a sacrilegious pride, as evidenced by the expression νόου βεβλαμμέν[οι ἐσθλοῦ. Above all, their union is useless, vain, a μασιδίη φιλότης, because it does not give rise to a descent. Also in this case it is possible to better understand the illegitimate actions carried out by the couple in the light of the Pseudo-Apollodorus (I 53) which follows, as has been demonstrated, in the first book sometimes the story of the *Catalogue* very closely: Alcyone claims to be Era, while Ceyx claims to be Zeus. For this reason, the father of the gods transforms the woman into a kingfisher and Ceyx into a sea swallow, as emerges from the remains of the P. Oxy. 2075 which reports the story narrated in the *Ehoiai*, revealing not only the tragic end of the spouses but also their drama that still persists today, νῦν, after the metamorphosis into birds with almost obsessive attitudes, intent on a desperate attempt to reunite.⁴⁵ The final comment proposed in the poem seems a significant warning that has universal validity: if it is impossible to know the decisions of Zeus, it is better that man and always stick to a righteous act so as not to incur divine punishment, according to a lapidary morality which the *Catalogue*, however, tends to repeat with frequency.⁴⁶ Moreover, the Aeolian section also reveals the benefit that derives from the re-

⁴⁴ See Sammons 2017, 169–174.

⁴⁵ On the metamorphosis that distinguishes numerous and salient moments of *Catalogue*, see Hirschberger 2008, 126–127: “così nelle storie di metamorfosi eziologiche, animali e piante, fonti e stelle, diventano reminiscenze degli incontri con il divino nella preistoria mitica”.

⁴⁶ A similar judgment is also present in Sisyphus' story (fr. 43a, 76–77 M.–W. = fr. *4 H. = fr. 48 Most). The background of archaic wisdom, through kenning, *gnomai*, portions with particular rhetorical and/or rhythmical elaboration that emerge from the Hesiodic *corpus*, is investigated by Ercolani 2017.

spect and love of the gods through a relative of Alcyone: Endymion, in hindsight his nephew as the son of his sister Calyx and Aethlios, who enjoys the περισσὰ δῶρα arrived from Olympus for being φίλος μακάρεσσι θεοῖσι (60–62).⁴⁷

At the end of this analysis on the *Catalogue of Women*, I hope it is evident that the tradition in which this poem is inserted appears to be well considered within the early Greek epic. The *Catalogue* reveals important and heterogeneous aspects of this tradition from the numerous ideological points of view: the *hybristic* and fluid condition of the heroes, together with their ethic decadence, and the female supremacy of women on the genetic and intellectual field. The poem, therefore, serves also as a phase of reconciliation between two reflections into the Hesiod cycle from *Theogony* to *Erga*. Beyond the author or authors of this monumental poem, the *Catalogue of Women* remains a starting point for the subsequent literary reflection of the Greeks.

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⁴⁷ See Cohen 1986, 135–137. D'Alessio 2005a, 180f., discerns a contradiction between the events that have Endymion as protagonist in the Hesiodic corpus.

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