



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

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## Abstract

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

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

DOMINVM SAPIENTIAE SOLVM LAVDABO

## List of Abbreviated Terms, Works, and Concepts

Goya	Francisco José de Goya y Lucientes: Famous Spanish painter attributed with creating the <i>Saturn</i> painting between 1820-1823.
<i>Quinta</i>	<i>Quinta del Sordo</i> : Name of Goya's countryside home on the outskirts of Madrid, Spain, where he allegedly painted the Black Paintings on the walls.
GW (1971)	Pierre Gassier and Juliet Wilson (1971): <i>A magnus opus</i> publication concerning the life and works of Goya.
BPs	Black Paintings: The name given to the fourteen paintings attributed to Goya while he held residency at the <i>Quinta del Sordo</i> in Madrid, Spain (between 1819-1823).
PM	Prado Museum: The Museo Nacional del Prado is the national museum of Spain—and the present location of the <i>Saturn</i> painting, among many other Goya works.
Cronus	The Greek deity generally regarded as the equivalent of the Roman deity named Saturn, and the alleged figure depicted in the <i>Saturn</i> painting.
<i>Theogony</i>	A Greek cosmogonic myth attributed to Hesiod that explains the origins of the world and many deities.

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

Francisco José de Goya y Lucientes (Goya), 1746-1828, was a famous Spanish painter who produced almost two thousand works of art over the course of his lifetime (Gassier & Wilson [GW], 1971, p. 372). Of his attributed works, fourteen items called the Black Paintings (BPs),<sup>1</sup> have drawn immense attention over the last two hundred years. As of April 1, 2023, the BPs are on display in Room 067 at the Prado Museum (PM) in Madrid, Spain. One of these works, now called the *Saturn*,<sup>2</sup> features a large monstrous figure tightly holding a victimized body at the waist (Goya, 1820-1823b). In the painting (see Figure 1), the victim is decapitated and missing its right upper extremity (arm), as evidenced by the red streaks (presumably of blood). The beast's knees are bent and its eyes wide as it appears to continue feeding on the left upper extremity. The painting has been characterized among scholars and laymen as gruesomely dark and disturbing.

According to the title and scholarship of the *Saturn*, the painting depicts the Roman deity Saturn devouring his son. Saturn is a Latinized deity name of Cronus (Κρόνος), the Greek mythological equivalent (Graves, 2001, p. 38).<sup>3</sup> The associated mythological story is Hesiod's *Theogony* (Θεογονία),<sup>4</sup> an eighth or seventh century BCE poem that consists of 1,022 lines (Evelyn-White, 1914, pp. 78-155).<sup>5</sup> *Theogony* outlines the origin of the Greek pantheon of deities, particularly how Zeus came to be the dominant figure. The accepted interpretation among Goya scholars is that Cronus chose to devour his children out of fear of being usurped. After all, Cronus usurped his own father, Uranus (Οὐρανός), by cutting off his virile member. Many interpretations have been offered to reconcile the *Saturn* painting in relation to the *Theogony* myth. An example of a consistently representative viewpoint may be that of Janis Tomlinson (1994), who explained that Cronus devoured his children due to his own fear, paranoia, and crazed rage (p. 245). Despite the consistent interpretation concerning the painting's mythological background, the artist's intended meaning remains a mystery.

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<sup>1</sup> The documented inventories range from 12-16 paintings, none of which impact the *Saturn*. The validity of these concerns is not treated in this essay, albeit without prejudice. See Müller (1984, pp. 67-72) for a summary and thoughtful discussion.

<sup>2</sup> As of April 2023, the PM's English website listed the title of the painting as *Saturn*, despite listing it in its description as *Saturn devouring one of his sons*. The Spanish version of the website titles it as *Saturno* (Goya, 1820-1823b); A separate website owned by the PM and dedicated to Goya lists the painting's title as *Saturno devorando a un hijo* [Saturn devouring a son], see Goya (1820-1823c). Both *Saturno* and the longer title are reported to be shown in the caption at the museum display as of this writing.

<sup>3</sup> To avoid confusion between *Saturn* (the painting) and Saturn (the deity), Saturn (the deity) will hereafter solely be referred to as the Greek equivalent—Cronus.

<sup>4</sup> Hesiod will be referred to as the author of the *Theogony*, albeit without prejudice to considerations of single or multiple authorship, or the nature of oral poetry; see Athanassakis (2004, pp. xii et seq.) for a helpful discussion.

<sup>5</sup> Both Graves (2001, pp. 38-39) and Burkert (1995, p. 5) agree that while the myth came to be written down in this period, its oral history dates back as far as 1300 BCE.



*Figure 1.* Saturn devouring his son (Goya, 1820-1823)

*Note:* Goya, F. (1820-1823). *Saturn* [Mixed method on mural transferred to canvas]. Museo Nacional del Prado, Saturn Collection, Madrid, Spain. In the public domain.



The problem with the *Saturn* is that the scholars who ultimately defined it relied on secondary sources—not what Goya himself had to say. It is widely accepted that Goya did not give the painting its title—and he left no formal documentation about it (e.g., letters and notes). Indeed, Goya allegedly painted them on the walls of his countryside home—the *Quinta del Sordo (Quinta)*—sometime between 1820-1823. At present, the years of interest are a biographical vacuum whereby almost no firsthand information about the artist is available. Goya died in 1828, and the painting's title was therefore attributed posthumously. The *Saturn*'s strange scholarship chronology began thereafter. The absence of primary source data between 1820-1823, however, did not stop Goya's scholars (and critics) from drawing a wide array of interpretations about the artist's intentions, mental state of mind, reasons for producing the work, and even his specific thoughts. The *post factum* conclusions reached by Goya's scholars are what constitute currently accepted attitudes in popular culture and the painting's caption at the PM.

The gap between primary source data from the author himself and currently accepted scholarship on *Saturn* is the basis of this essay. This gap may have resulted in improper attribution of the painting's depicted contents to the deity named Cronus. The evidence for such misinterpretation is thematically twofold: (a) past scholars' tendency to rely on psychological interpretations of the artist's intentions, and; (b) inadequate treatment of the *Saturn*'s mythological relevance to Cronus in Hesiod's *Theogony*.

The introduction (Pars I) will summarize existing scholarship on Goya and *Saturn*. Second, prior approaches (Pars II) will be reviewed. Third, the methodology (Pars III) utilized in the present essay will be outlined, which mainly includes a mythological perspective. The main body, the assessment (Pars IV), will then textually evaluate Cronus' depiction in *Theogony* with respect to the *Saturn*. Fifth, an alternative mythological interpretation of the *Saturn* will be provided (Pars V), which focuses on an Anglo-Saxon epic poem named *Beowulf*. Finally, the conclusion (Pars VI) will discuss implications, limitations, and recommendations for future inquiry.

Upon review of the evidence, the reader may reconsider whether Hesiod's Cronus is a proper foundational figure for Goya's *Saturn* and whether Grendel from *Beowulf* is a more appropriate attribution.

### Pars I: Introduction

The full history of Goya and the *Saturn* painting is complex, varied among scholars, and at important points, contradictory. However, a chronological review of events and opposing viewpoints from 1819-2020 is necessary. The trade-offs between thoroughness and brevity thus present a challenge. To balance these opposing humors, the summary is purposefully limited to key milestones related to the *Saturn* painting, whilst reserving the more exhaustive chronology for Table 1. Relevant matters of dispute among Goya scholars are cited and discussed in the main text; all others are in the notes of Table 1.

## Chronological Background

### *Goya—Illness to Death (1792-1828)*

At age 46 (1792), Goya reportedly became deathly ill and barely recovered. Thereafter, he became deaf and struggled with varied and disputed health problems for the remainder of his life (Mackowiak, 2013, pp. 82-96). At age 73 (1819), Goya relocated to the secluded outskirts of Madrid—the *Quinta del Sordo*, or ‘Country-home of the Deaf Man.’ Between 1820-1823, Goya was allegedly still suffering from severe health problems (Mackowiak, 2013, p. 86). During this time, it is widely held that he painted the fourteen BPs on the walls of his two-story home. Goya left for France in 1824, but not before gifting the *Quinta* to his grandson, Pío Mariano de Goya y Goicoechea, in 1823 (Glendinning & Kentish, 1986, p. 106). In 1828, Goya died in France without providing titles, descriptions, or any other documented mention of the BPs.

### *Saturn's Witnesses at the Quinta (1828-1872)*

Antonio de Brugada (1828), Goya's longtime friend, initially documented the paintings and gave them their original titles—titles which have been generally honored through today.<sup>6</sup> Several BPs were thematically renamed, but not the *Saturn* (Müller, 1984, pp. 67-70). A Spanish painter named Valentín Carderera (1838, pp. 631-633) referenced the paintings in an article for *Semanario pintoresco* (English translation in Glendinning, 1977, pp. 291-294). In 1850, a fine arts professor named José Peláez saw the paintings when he appraised the *Quinta* (Müller, 1984, p. 67). Inventories by Charles Yriarte (1867) and P. L. Imbert (1875) also documented the BPs, listing the painting as *Saturne dévorant ses enfants* [Saturn devouring his children]. Between 1853-1872, the *Quinta* was home to various strangers before being sold the following year.

### *Exhibition, Restoration, and Transfer to the Prado Museum (1873-1888)*

In 1873, Goya's *Quinta* home was purchased by Baron Frederic Emile d'Erlanger. The Baron authorized moving the paintings from the walls to individual canvases. The public first saw these fierce works in 1878, mainly at the *Exposition Universelle* (World's Fair) in Paris, France (Müller, 1984, p. 11).<sup>7</sup> In 1881, the Baron donated the works to the Spanish government who, in turn, assigned them to the PM in Madrid, Spain. During the ownership transition, the paintings were restored by Salvador Martínez Cubells, who would later be criticized for his “far stronger outlines” (Tomlinson, 1994, p. 239). Glendinning (1975) noted the removal of *Saturn's* “partially erect phallus” (p. 473), as did Müller (1984). The impact of these restoration efforts on the original work were regarded as significant. In 1888, the PM first catalogued the BPs and utilized the title *Saturno*.

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<sup>6</sup> The exact inventory dates are disputed, cf. Table 1.

<sup>7</sup> The BPs were exhibited earlier in 1878 as well, cf. Table 1.

Table 1

*Chronology of Events Concerning Goya and the "Saturn" Painting (1819-1928)*

Date	Event	Source <sup>a</sup>
1819	Goya purchases the <i>Quinta</i> (27 Feb.)	Glendinning (1986, p. 102) <sup>b</sup>
-	Goya contracts serious illness (Oct. – Dec. [?])	Mackowiak (2013, pp. 82-96) <sup>c</sup>
1821	Goya allegedly begins work on the BPs	GW (1971, p. 300)
1823	Goya allegedly finishes work on the BPs	GW (1971, p. 300ff.)
-	Goya gifts the <i>Quinta</i> to his grandson, Pío Mariano (17 Sep.)	Glendinning (1986, p. 106) <sup>d</sup>
1824	Goya leaves for France (Jun.)	Müller (1984, p. 41)
1828	Goya dies in France (16 Apr.)	Müller (1984, p. 41)
1828*	<b>Inventory No. 1 [15 BPs]</b> Brugada conducts inventory of <i>Quinta</i> home Brugada assigns the name <i>Saturno</i> [ <i>Saturn</i> ] to the painting	Brugada (1828), in GW (1971, pp. 384-385) <sup>e</sup>
1830	Goya's son, Javier, assumes responsibility of the <i>Quinta</i>	Müller (1984, p. 52)
1832	Mariano cedes ownership of the <i>Quinta</i> to his father, Javier <i>Quinta</i> is mortgaged by Javier	Junquera (2003b, p. 29) Glendinning (1986, p. 106) <sup>f</sup>
1838	Valentín Carderera writes an article which references the BPs	Carderera (1838, pp. 631-633) <sup>g</sup>
1850	<b>Appraisal [14 BPs]</b> <i>Quinta</i> appraised by José Peláez, as requested by Mariano	Müller (1984, p. 67)
1852	<i>Quinta</i> is rented	Müller (1984, p. 52) <sup>h</sup>
1854	Javier Goya passes away	Müller (1984, p. 52)
-	Mariano regains possession of <i>Quinta</i> via Javier's estate	Glendinning (1986, p. 106) <sup>i</sup>
-	<b>Appraisal(s) [No. of BPs not documented]</b> <i>Quinta</i> appraised by Don Juan de Rivera (Dec.) Another appraisal by Eugenio Lucas (early 1855 [?])	Müller (1984, p. 52) <sup>j</sup>
1857	<b>Inventory No. 2</b> <i>Quinta</i> is rented to Francisca Vildósola (Apr.) <sup>k</sup>	Glendinning (1986, p. 105) <sup>l</sup>
1859	<i>Quinta</i> acquired by Segundo de Colmenares, a local developer (Jun.)	Glendinning (1986, p. 106) <sup>m</sup>
1863	<i>Quinta</i> sold to Louis-Rodolphe Coumont, a Belgian financier (Nov.)	Glendinning (1986, p. 108) <sup>n</sup>
-*	Photographer Jean Laurent visits the <i>Quinta</i> Laurent creates a photographic plate of <i>Saturn</i> (ca. 1863-1866)	Glendinning (1986, p. 106) <sup>o</sup>

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1867	<b>Inventory No. 3 [13-14 BPs]</b> Charles Yriarte inventories the <i>Quinta</i> and publishes <i>Goya</i> , assigns the name <i>Saturne dévorant ses enfants</i> [Saturn devouring his children]	Yriarte (1867, pp. 140-141) <sup>p</sup>
1873*	<b>Inventory No. 4 [12 BPs]<sup>q</sup></b> <i>Quinta</i> inventory by Frenchman P. L. Imbert (Jan. – Feb. [?]) <sup>r</sup>	Imbert (1875, p. 325 [?]) <sup>s</sup>
-	<i>Quinta</i> occupied by retired journalist named Baron Saulnier	Glendinning (1975, p. 466, n. 6)
-	<i>Quinta</i> sold to Baron Frederic Emile d'Erlanger	Glendinning (1986, p. 108) <sup>t</sup>
1874	<b>Transfer to canvas</b> Black Paintings are transferred to canvas and restored by Salvador Martínez Cubells (through 1878)	Glendinning (1975)
1875	Imbert publishes the account of his 1873 <i>Quinta</i> visit, assigns the name <i>Saturne dévorant ses enfants</i> [Saturn devouring his children]	Imbert (1875, pp. 325-331)
1878	<b>Public exhibitions [14 BPs]</b> Madrid Fine Arts Exhibition (28 Jan.) <i>Exposition Universelle</i> (World's Fair) in Paris, France (May)	Müller (1984, p. 11) Glendinning (1977, p. 112)
1879	P. G. Hamerton writes scathing review of the BPs, citing that “of all these things the most horrible is the <i>Saturn</i> ” (italics by the present author)	Hamerton (1879) <sup>u</sup>
1881	<b>Ownership transfer</b> Baron d'Erlanger formally donates the BPs to the Prado Museum	Goya (1820-1823b) <sup>v</sup>
1884	Restoration of BPs ends	
1909*	<i>Quinta</i> home is demolished, likely between 1910-1928 <sup>w</sup>	Glendinning (1986, p. 102) <sup>x</sup>
1928	The name “Black Paintings” comes into general usage	Junquera (2003b, p. 41)

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Note: \* = Disputed or unverified date, cf. notes.

<sup>a</sup> Unless stated otherwise, nearly all prominent Goya scholars expressed agreement with the listed dates and events. Table versus footnote listing priority was determined by means of proximity to firsthand accounts or primary sources (e.g., if the source was the concerned party of the Goya event, it was preferred). Secondary priority was given to the source's training, background, and specialty (e.g., if the Goya event related to a medical condition, the preferred source was a licensed medical practitioner). Finally, tertiary priority was applied based on the source's documentation and its quality.

<sup>b</sup> Agreed by Junquera (2003b, p. 18), GW (1971, p. 300), and most others; for brevity, Glendinning and Kentish (1986) is hereafter referred to as just Glendinning (1986).

<sup>c</sup> Goya's medical conditions are still subject to dispute, see also Felisati and Sperati (2010) and Morant (2018); Carderera (1838, p. 633), as translated in Glendinning (1977, p. 293), wrote that “from 1822 his health got visibly worse”; Glendinning (1977, pp. 165-174) and his advisor surveyed Goya's illnesses (diagnoses were put forth), although the author himself was not a doctor.

<sup>d</sup> Agreed by Junquera (2003b, p. 21), GW (1971, p. 38), and Müller (1984, p. 41).

<sup>e</sup> Brugada's inventory was first released to the public in 1928; Junquera (2003b, p. 40ff.) argued that the 1828 inventory was conducted in the early 1830s.

<sup>f</sup> Agreed by Müller (1984, p. 52).

<sup>g</sup> English translation in Glendinning (1977, pp. 291-294).

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<sup>h</sup> See also Junquera (2003b, p. 29).

<sup>i</sup> Albeit as a legatee.

<sup>j</sup> Several other appraisal events took place, see Müller (1984) and Junquera (2003b, p. 47).

<sup>k</sup> Various sources list the surname as Vildósola or Bildósola. *V* and *B* are pronounced similarly in Spanish.

<sup>l</sup> Cf. Junquera (2003b, p. 33).

<sup>m</sup> See also Junquera (2003b, p. 31) and Tomlinson (1994, p. 239).

<sup>n</sup> See also Junquera (2003b, p. 31).

<sup>o</sup> Other sources indicate 1874, cf. Glendinning (1975) for a discussion of these plates *in extenso*.

<sup>p</sup> In the text, Yriarte lists thirteen paintings (pp. 92-94), while listing fourteen in the catalogue (pp. 140-141). See Müller (1984, p. 64) for a well-documented chronology, concise review of facts, and an excellent discussion.

<sup>q</sup> Cf. Müller (1984, p. 66).

<sup>r</sup> Glendinning (1975, p. 466, n. 6) dates the inventory as happening before the sale to Baron d'Erlanger.

<sup>s</sup> The page number in the book oddly reads p. 19, but is organized sequentially as p. 325; n. 1 indicates that Imbert visited the *Quinta* in 1873; Cf. Glendinning (1975, p. 466) and Tomlinson (1994, p. 239).

<sup>t</sup> Cf. Junquera (2003b, p. 38) and Müller (1984, p. 66).

<sup>u</sup> As cited in in Glendinning (1977, pp. 296-297).

<sup>v</sup> See also Tomlinson (1994, p. 239).

<sup>w</sup> Based on earlier reports from publications and locals, cf. Glendinning (1986, p. 108, n. 2).

<sup>x</sup> See also Junquera (2003b, p. 31).

### ***Quinta's Demolition and Saturn's Renaming (1889-2020)***

The *Quinta* home was likely destroyed between 1910-1928 (Glendinning & Kentish, 1986, p. 102, n. 2). By 1928, the term 'Black Paintings' (BPs) came into popular usage. Through the twentieth century, the catalog name of the *Saturn* painting was slightly modified. Francisco Javier Sánchez Cantón, the museum's former director, published various catalogues of the PM inventory as well as monographs on Goya. A 1949 museum catalog listed the title as *Saturn devouring his children* (Sánchez Cantón, 1949, p. cxvii). By 1971, Sanchez Cantón adopted the title as *Saturn devouring one of his sons* (Sánchez Cantón, 1971, p. 245). In 2015, the PM launched a separate website for Goya's works, wherein the title of the painting was *Saturno devorando a un hijo* (Goya, 1820-1823c). In the 1990s and 2000s, the PM began adopting the shortened name *Saturn*, which remains the current name listed on the museum's main website as of April 2023.

### **Basis for Drastic Reinterpretation**

A drastic reinterpretation of the *Saturn*'s depicted contents seems warranted because of significant historical revision to Goya's works in recent years. The present inquiry calls for an assessment that departs massively from the current consensus among scholars regarding the *Saturn*. While such a departure may seem drastic, it is indicative of the ubiquitous historical revision of Goya's work in the last thirty years. That is, many conclusions formerly accepted as facts are now subject to 180-degree reversals, with the opposing viewpoints coming from Goya experts themselves. While many examples illustrate this, the most profound instances may suffice.

### ***Re-evaluated Attributions***

Many works formerly attributed to Goya have been retracted. For example, Wilson-Bareau (1996) documented the relevant inventory issues and concluded that the *Majas on a Balcony* painting was likely completed by another artist (p. 161). The Metropolitan Museum applied a retraction to the painting's description as well. *The Greasy Pole* and *Procession* are two more works, among many others (Wilson-Bareau, 1996, p. 163). Glendinning (1994) also concurred with Wilson-Bareau in many of these instances. Almost all of the disputed works have scholars divided in various camps because of insufficient documentation.

### ***Disputed Authorship of the Black Paintings (BPs)***

Several scholars have also posited that the BPs (including the *Saturn*) may have been created by an artist other than Goya himself. The most radical assertion was put forth by Junquera (2003b), who researched Spanish archival records and argued that Goya's *Quinta* home did not even have a second floor at the time he was living there. Junquera (2003a) later clarified

his position that Goya did not paint the BPs.<sup>8</sup> While Junquera's hypothesis is not widely supported, Müller (1984) posited that *Quinta* inventory discrepancies may be owed to Goya's son, Javier, who could have painted at least one of the BPs (pp. 67-70). Junquera (2003b) supported this claim, citing the financial incentive of Javier to include the paintings as part of the home's sale value (p. 45f.). A lack of documentation (again) seems to be the focal point of debate.

Nevertheless, the consensus among scholars suggests that Goya did paint the *Saturn*. The main lines of evidence may be repeated: (a) *Saturn* was included in the earliest inventory by Brugada (1828); (b) *Saturn* was located on the first floor of the *Quinta*, making the nonexistent second floor argument by Junquera (2003b) inconsequential to the present essay (albeit without prejudice), and; (c) among the inventories conducted, the *Saturn* was never cited as an omission or discrepancy.

### ***A 'Colossal' Change of Mind at the Prado Museum (PM)***

In 2008, the PM issued a press release that indicated it had revised its position on the attribution of Goya as the artist for a painting named *The Colossus* (Mena Marqués, 2008, p. 34f.). The Museum asserted that Goya's apprentice, Asensio Juliá, painted this work instead.

While the attribution debates stated above do not impact the *Saturn*, they highlight an important consideration—many facets of Goya's works formerly accepted as true are being reversed. Such revisions highlight that skepticism is warranted, and perhaps necessary, when evaluating Goya's works during the 1800s. Finally, it may be iterated that these reinterpretations are not by fringe theorists, but by prominent Goya experts themselves. Such efforts have resulted in museums changing their narratives too, coming at odds with scholars in some instances.

### **Debates Surrounding Goya's *Saturn***

#### ***Prior and Inspired Works***

Prior works by Goya have been said to resemble the *Saturn*. For example, Goya (ca. 1797-1798) composed an earlier sketch with red chalk that also featured a long-haired figure seemingly eating two smaller ones, although it only includes a profile view of the main figure's head and upper torso (Figure 2).

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<sup>8</sup> Glendinning (2004) vehemently refuted this claim, to which Junquera would later reply. The feud even became public in news outlets, see A. Lubow (2003, July 27), *The Secret of the Black Paintings*, *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2003/07/27/magazine/the-secret-of-the-black-paintings.html>





*Figure 2. Saturn devouring his sons (Goya, 1797-1798)*

*Note:* Goya, F. (ca. 1797-1798). *Saturn devouring his sons* [Red chalk on laid paper]. Museo Nacional del Prado, Saturn Collection, Madrid, Spain. In the public domain.



However, GW (1971) indicated that this work was originally untitled, not signed by Goya, and not included in Goya's famous *Caprichos* album publication in 1799 (p. 186). Additionally, the PM website noted that this drawing seems to depict naked men, weapons on the floor, and has a posthumous title attribution that is speculative. Müller (1984) remarked how the Flemish painter, Peter P. Rubens (1636), composed a work that resembled Goya's sketch, asserting that it may have been an inspiration for *Saturn*.

### ***Depicted Contents***

***Saturn Lacks Features Specific to Cronus.*** Many scholars have noted that the *Saturn* lacks qualifying aesthetic features that are archetypal of the Greek deity named Cronus. Olszewski (2008, p. 132) and Licht (2001) remarked that Cronus belonged to a race of Cyclopes, even though most artists ignored this quality. Müller (1984) further assessed that Goya's Cronus included the "omission of any Saturn attribute" (p. 172).

***Saturn Depicts Something Else.*** Goya scholars have also argued that the *Saturn* depicts another figure entirely. Müller (1984) identified the figure in the painting as Satan himself (p. 172), likely from Canto XXXIV of *Inferno* from Dante's *The Divine Comedy* (Anderson, 1922, pp. 143-144).<sup>9</sup> Ciofalo (2001) was exuberant in outlining how the curvaceous buttocks, legs, and overall adult form of the victim most likely depicts a woman, not a man (pp. 157-159). The less conservative Connell (2004) went as far as to say that the painting's victim depicts "female legs and a rump," among other unusual assessments (p. 210).

***Saturn as Goya's Self-Portrait.*** It has also been suggested, albeit to varying degrees, that the work was a self-portrait of Goya with respect to the impact of time and deteriorating health (Ciofalo, 2001, pp. 159-160; Licht, 2001, p. 221; Sanchez Cantón, 1971, p. 245ff.; Tomlinson, 1994, pp. 248-252).

### **Present Investigation**

In general, it seems as though Cronus is the *prima facie* interpretation in the absence of compelling evidence for an alternate figure. That is, while scholars have offered tertiary speculations, there is little doubt that most scholars either believe, explain, or otherwise rely on the understanding that the figure in *Saturn* depicts Cronus.

Despite scholarship efforts, the *Saturn* is characterized by intense disagreement and unsatisfactory conclusions. To be sure, what Müller (1984) wrote in her era still holds true for 2023: "Yet despite the fascination the 'black' paintings arouse, no satisfactory understanding of their nature has been developed" (p. 11). The disagreements can be categorized as disputed authorship claims, depicted contents, the artist's motives for creating the work, and the painting's meaning. The present essay will focus solely on the *Saturn* painting's depicted contents while addressing a seemingly overlooked area of concerned inquiry—the mythological accuracy of

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<sup>9</sup> In this Canto, Satan is depicted as being in the lowest circle of hell, frozen in the ground, whilst feeding on Biblical Judas and the Romans Brutus and Cassius, who are being tormented for the sin of betrayal.

*Saturn* depicting Cronus in Hesiod's *Theogony*. That is, while some scholars have suggested that the painting lacks Cronus' features, this important consideration has not been given treatment *in extenso*; it is therefore necessary to conduct concerned inquiry by means of a mythological analysis, as outlined in the method.

The present program will evaluate the textual evidence from *Theogony* in order to assess whether Cronus and the *Theogony* myth are an appropriate foundational narrative for the *Saturn* painting. In doing so, three mutually exclusive hypotheses are posited.

**Hypothesis 1:** Scholarly interpretations of the *Saturn* have relied on subjective inferences by means of Freudian psychoanalysis—mainly focusing on the artist and his intentions, despite a lack of objective evidence;

**Hypothesis 2:** Mythologically, *Saturn*'s contents do not textually reconcile with the description and conduct of Cronus in Hesiod's *Theogony*, a Greek poem, and;

**Hypothesis 3:** Mythologically, *Saturn*'s contents align more closely with the description and conduct of Grendel from *Beowulf*, an Anglo-Saxon epic poem.

Concerned inquiry unto these hypotheses will show that even if the artist intended for the painting to depict Cronus devouring his son, the depiction betrays the mythology—almost entirely. Finally, several peculiar findings will be presented that suggest the likelihood of *Saturn* mythologically representing Grendel from *Beowulf*, an Anglo-Saxon poem.

## Pars II: Prior Approaches

Previous scholarship on the *Saturn* painting seems to fit into four primary methods of analyses: artistic, sociohistorical, biographical, and psychological. Artistic analyses, concerning brush strokes, materials, etc., have sufficiently covered the work and Goya's style. Sociohistorical analyses of Goya's broader culture, with respect to Spain's politically tumultuous period in the 1800s, have also been evaluated. Biographical analyses of Goya's life between 1820-1823, while endlessly recited, have been insufficient in providing concrete answers pertaining to the *Saturn* painting. Finally, psychological analyses of the artist and his work have dominated the discussion concerning the meaning of the painting. Such psychological analyses have permeated into the other modes of analysis listed, ultimately domineering them. The psychological component merits a careful review.

Presented hereafter is a brief survey of interpretations by Goya scholars with respect to psychological assumptions, inferences, and conclusions. The method invoked for this survey draws heavily on the methodological considerations of Vygotsky's (1971) foundational work—*The Psychology of Art*—which I am following closely. The outcome of this survey intends to highlight two key concerns: (a) prior scholarship on the *Saturn* painting has been domineered by means of psychoanalytic methods—whether intentional or not, and; (b) the evidence available concerning Goya's life between 1820-1823 warrants limited to no use of this approach. These

concerns are presented in addition to a brief review of the history of using psychology to analyze art.

### **The *Psychologism of Goya*<sup>10</sup>**

#### ***Pierre Gassier and Juliet Wilson***

GW (1971) described the BPs as being “carefully worked out,” or meticulously planned by Goya, with the sole theme of descending into hell (pp. 315-318). Accordingly, *Saturn* was the “symbol both of time and death which devour us all” (p. 318). The reader is made privy to Goya’s motivations, thematic choices, and his thoughts.

#### ***Priscilla Müller***

Müller (1984) thoroughly addressed prior interpretations of the painting before ultimately asserting that *Saturn* did not represent father time devouring the artist in old age (pp. 171-175). Instead, the author made a case for Satan eating the Spanish state in lieu of the political issues of the time period (p. 175). Here, too, the author explained why Goya selected the painting’s contents and what they meant for him. Finally, Müller directly cited one of the bases of her interpretations via reliance on a prominent scholar trained in psychoanalysis (p. 57).<sup>11</sup>

#### ***Nigel Glendinning***

Glendinning (1977) devoted an entire chapter to Goya’s psychology, titling it “Psychological and Pathological Interpretations” (pp. 165-174). It seemed to Glendinning—an art historian—and his advisor that Goya suffered from schizophrenia, a serious mental disorder (p. 169). Moreover, many medical assessments were made available pertaining to what Goya was thinking, his attitude toward exile, and the impact Spain’s political situation had on his life. In Glendinning and Kentish (1986), the authors assigned the meaning of the *Saturn* painting to be “Time the destroyer,” along with the artist’s intention to portray the irony and symbolism of old age (p. 106). It seemed to Glendinning and Kentish (1986) that *Saturn* was the dénouement of the entire BPs collection: “It was inevitable that he [Goya] should paint the attributes of the House of Saturn in the Quinta del Sordo, over which melancholy must rule” (p. 108).

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<sup>10</sup> **N.b.** It may be considered uncouth and indecorous to criticize selected passages by current and prior Goya experts. Such impropriety is neither my object nor my desired mode of discourse. Ideally, the authors would not be named explicitly. However, the present essay’s assertions rely on [and are owed to] the work of a few distinguished scholars who have devoted their lives—and collective strength—to studying Goya and the *Saturn*. Also, not doing so would be injurious to the arguments presented in this essay. Consequently, naming some of these scholars cannot be avoided. Given this, it must be stated plainly that the sections hereafter seek only to advance a methodology and approach, not criticize individual persons. These world-class scholars sought to foster progress in understanding Goya and the *Saturn*. Progress which, to be sure, has been served. Nevertheless, any thoughts or reactions—scrutiny or otherwise—concerning this difficult choice and its consequents may be directed solely to the author of the present essay.

<sup>11</sup> For the referenced work, see E. Neumann, *Art and the Creative Unconscious* (1975, p. 186). Princeton University Press.

**Janis Tomlinson**

In addressing the shortcomings of previous interpretations, Tomlinson (1994) argued that in painting the mythological Cronus, “he [Goya] rethought its essential theme and motivation, and presented it as an act of unbounded paranoia” (p. 247). Here, the evidence heavily relied on an argument based on theatre trends in Madrid, whereby new stage effects and innovations fostered larger than life spectacles that the general crowd was privy to.

**Fred Licht**

Licht (2001) remarked that “Goya, in this picture, was concerned with more than the telling of a cruel Greek legend or the barbarity of blood-libel imagery,” before positing that Goya likely meant to portray “a pictorial metaphor of blind fear...” (p. 213).

**John J. Ciofalo**

Ciofalo (2001) addressed various interpretations of Goya's *Saturn* as being rooted in self-loathing and overt sexuality before ultimately suggesting that it is a self-portrait (and that the victim is a woman) (p. 159f.). Again, the author explained what Goya's state of mind was in concrete terms, along with reference to Goya's sexual desires and attitudes.

**Philip G. Hamerton**

Hamerton (1879), as cited in Glendinning (1977, p. 296f.), was a known Goya critic who disliked Goya to a superlative degree. Upon viewing the BPs, he asserted that they were the “vilest abortions that ever came from the brain of a sinner,” a product of Goya's “motives, in almost every instance, [that are] horrible,” of which the *Saturn* was the worst (p. 296). The entirety of the extract is a clear character assassination of Goya, highlighting how the works reflected Goya's personal character: “his mind did not rise to any pure or elevating thought” (p. 297). Finally, Hamerton noted that the credibility of his assessment was based on the fact that “when an artist decorates his own house it may be safely presumed that he expresses his inmost self, since he is working for his own gratification” (pp. 296-297).

**Francisco Javier Sánchez Cantón et al.**

Francisco Javier Sánchez Cantón (1971), a prolific Goya biographer and former director of the PM, has also echoed prior viewpoints: “The artist, then in his seventies, was a prey to the ‘dreams’ he had illustrated forty years previously in the *Caprichos*” (p. 245f.). Similar psychological analyses may be observed in Robert Hughes (2003, p. 383), Patricia Wright (1993, p. 50-51), Thomas Craven (1931), Jay Scott Morgan (1991),<sup>12</sup> and even a foreword by Aldous Huxley and Francisco Goya (1943) in *The Complete Etchings of Goya*.

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<sup>12</sup> To be sure, Morgan quoted the *Theogony* and included relevant lines as part of his discussion: “As each child issued from the holy womb / And lay upon its mother's knees, each one / Was seized by mighty Kronos, and gulped down” (p. 40; underlined emphasis *mine*). He utilized D. Wender, *Hesiod and Theognis (Penguin Classics): Theogony, Works and Days, and Elegies* (1973). Penguin. It seems to be the only source cited in the entire article. Vexingly, whilst Morgan cited the relevant data, he ultimately reached an entirely different conclusion. It seemed to

While endless examples may further substantiate the point, the underlying concern is clear—these interpretations are within the domain of psychology. Some of the cited authors presented their interpretations in a conservative tone, noting the impossibility of verifying such claims. Additionally, some have spent their entire careers studying Goya, possibly making them the most qualified individuals to make such assessments. Notwithstanding, the concerns regarding overuse of psychology have been addressed by Goya scholars on prior occasions (e.g., Junquera, 2003b, p. 56; Salas, 1958; Salas, 1981).

### **Results for Hypothesis 1**

In light of these examples, Hypothesis 1 seems to be supported: that is, prior interpretations of the *Saturn* painting have relied heavily on psychological analyses, despite a lack of available evidence.

From the brief, albeit representative, examples surveyed above, the next item that deserves consideration is thus: is an emphasis on the psychological profile of the artist necessary for understanding the contents and meaning of the painting?

### **The Methodological Problem of Art and Psychology**

Psychology and art are undoubtedly related, as evidenced by both the psychological assessments stated above as well as the layman experience of reacting to art. This raises an important methodological question: what is a robust methodology for psychologically analyzing how an artist came to produce a work of art on an objective and scientific basis? The literature pertaining to this subject matter presents challenges which may be summarized threefold: (a) juxtaposing psychology and art requires encompassing additional disciplines that deal with perception, which extends beyond psychology and into biology; (b) psychology still lacks an accepted grand unifying theory,<sup>13</sup> which limits its ability to generalize and accurately predict phenomena, and; (c) art and affect deal with subjective interpretation, which is at present undefined, generally unempirical, and poorly understood. Together, these challenges do not seem to allow for initial conditions that are conducive for a robust methodology for psychologically analyzing art.

### ***Origins of Art Psychology (1800—1950)***

Art psychology seems to be a tricky sub-discipline that is underdeveloped and heavily overlapped with other disciplines (e.g., cognitive psychology, gestalt psychology, art history, art appreciation, etc.). Its formal history may be traced back to a few hundred years. A noteworthy contribution was made by a German philosopher named Theodor Lipps (1903), who published *Empathy* (German: *Einfühlung*). Here, Lipps asserted the notion of perceiving art as *feeling into*

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him that gulp[ing] down was akin to “devouring” and “tearing apart” (p. 39). (There will be a careful discussion of the context and meaning of each of these words shortly.)

<sup>13</sup> For instance, biology has Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution and physics has Albert Einstein’s work on gravitational forces.

it through projection of one's own reaction. The next thirty years featured the work of Sigmund Freud (1913; 1923), whereby art was a "symptom" of a "neurosis" that could be treated through psychoanalysis. Carl Jung (1933) contributed to his own subdomain of analytical psychology (a.k.a. Jungian Analysis) by recognizing that art and the artist are two separate entities (p. 175). An influential scholar, Lev Vygotsky (1925), noted the extensive difficulties with which psychologists can analyze art, ultimately beginning his posthumously published dissertation by addressing the methodological problem of the field (including many of the same problems mentioned in the present essay). It must be addressed that these titles reflect dated literature (and concepts in some cases); however, it is the methodology cited in dated literature that has dominated the style of analysis conducted by Goya scholars.<sup>14</sup> More precisely, most Goya scholars, whether knowing it or not, have relied on some form of psychoanalysis (e.g., explaining behavior via sexual drives, life stage considerations, or other neuroses using *post factum* explanatory models).

### ***Current (1950—Present)***

The psychology of art does not seem to have matured much, methodologically speaking, since the middle of the twentieth century (Amheim, 1966; Munro, 1948; Munro, 1963; Smith, 2012). In many cases, the latter authors reviewed the work and literature of older investigators. Almost all of these scholars have agreed that most artistic criticism has been loaded with psychological presuppositions. Consequently, such findings are subject to an excessive practice of *casually psychologizing* artists and why they created their works.<sup>15</sup> In the absence of a clear and agreed upon methodology, there is thus little evidence to suggest that psychology has the tools to reliably analyze how an artist came to produce a given work.

### **Correlational Implications**

The evidence related to Goya's scholars analyzing the *Saturn* through psychology seems to be clear—the practice is ubiquitous, the methods are not adequate, and the impact is profound. However, the ubiquity of psychological analyses amongst the most esteemed Goya scholars prompts a brief, albeit necessary, digression into *why* this is the present state of affairs. The present essay's hypotheses are not impacted by leaving this issue untreated; however, its elucidation may benefit the inquiries of future investigators.

Previous Goya scholars may have overly relied on psychological interpretations for reasons threefold: (a) collectively honored convention; (b) academia's emphasis on prior knowledge, and; (c) initial conditions. First, the case may be that psychological inferences are an art criticism convention, as Munro (1948; 1963) suggested—a convention that has not been scrutinized as a detriment to the quality of the discipline. Second, academia places an importance on citing prior literature, whereby scholars are generally required to recognize time-honored

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<sup>14</sup> Other contributions to the psychology of art that have been excluded on account of topical relevance.

<sup>15</sup> Amheim (1966) outlined the extensiveness of these issues with respect to psychoanalysis and reliance on subjective interpretation (pp. 218, 302, respectively).

works. In Goya's case, if prior literature utilized a given method, it may have been considered appropriate by future investigators. Finally, initial conditions may be a related factor. That is, opinions or attitudes by initial investigators may have impacted future researchers. This phenomenon is well understood in fields like physics, whereby initial conditions of a system not only impact, but define, its trajectory.

The reasons stated above may help explain why *Saturn* is named *Saturn*, why the artist and his painting are treated with psychological emphases, and why notable scholars of the present have echoed these opinions (despite evidence to the contrary). As mentioned, Brugada (1828) first assigned the name *Saturn* and Yriarte (1867) expanded it to *Saturn devouring his son*. Carderera (1838) and Yriarte (1867) also initially wrote reports embedded with psychological assessments of Goya, much like the ones read previously. Consequently, it appears that investigators like Glendinning, Müller, Sanchez Cantón, et al., having reviewed the only available evidence, thereby stuck to the initial interpretation. That is, they adopted the former investigators' assessments and psychological methods of analysis. Verily, their analyses of the *Saturn* deviated marginally from Brugada's and Yriarte's, such that the initial conditions may be regarded as an *anchor* of sorts.

The empirical findings of social psychology researchers Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman (1974) in *Judgment Under Uncertainty: Heuristics and Biases* may offer insight. Per their findings, an affinity toward initial interpretations may suggest that this phenomenon is an example of *anchor bias*. Anchor bias is an analytical tendency to assign importance to information initially procured (i.e., the anchor). In such instances, future assessments are likely to be minor deviations from the initial anchor, despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary. In any case, while these observations are not critical to the present essay, they do seem to explain why the mythological aspects of the *Saturn* painting remained largely unchallenged.

### **Methodological Implications**

To summarize, prior scholars have seemingly relied on psychological interpretations in order to explain Goya's *Saturn*. The psychology of art is a relatively new field of study. There is no concrete psychological method of determining why an artist painted something, especially when the artist did not leave any written records about it, and the analyses are being done *post mortem*.

Because of this, the visual works Goya produced are the only data available to analyze. It would seem that not only is there no objective psychological method of analyzing art, but there is no patient in *Saturn's* case—this is to say, the lack of historical evidence forces any inquiry into the no man's land of speculation. Any concerned analysis of a psychological nature, therefore, must be predicated by an understanding that it is ultimately speculative, unverifiable, detective work—work ideally conducted by trained individuals who have direct access to the patient.

The aforementioned limitations prompt utmost caution and moderation with respect to making any inferences about Goya and his attributed *Saturn* painting. Insofar as the evidence is concerned, it seems difficult to justify the use of psychology to such a superlative degree.

### Pars III: Present Methodology

#### A Mythological Analysis

The present essay will attempt to utilize mythological analyses via literary descriptions and motifs in lieu of explicit or proximal psychological methods. Within the field of mythology, there exists a rich corpus of findings from which the painting and its contents may be analyzed. As noted, the painting's contents are widely accepted as a depiction of a passage in Hesiod's *Theogony*. This myth has been translated by several prominent scholars, and the translation accuracy is robust (Evelyn-White, 1914; Athanassakis, 2004).<sup>16</sup>

Before proceeding, it is necessary to explain why mythology is a worthwhile approach. After all, the word *myth* (n.) has two contradictory definitions: “an unfounded or false notion” and “a usually traditional story of ostensibly historical events that serves to unfold part of the world view of a people or explain a practice, belief, or natural phenomenon.”<sup>17</sup> The first definition is clear enough—something not true. The second definition, however, suggests that myths can express something important, if not profound, about the world. The rational observer may cringe at the thought of using the latter definition as a basis of concerned inquiry, citing mythology's penchant for describing fantastical events that break natural laws. ‘A pack of lies,’ a scientist may cry, and perhaps rightfully so. Nevertheless, mythological narratives are some of the first written records of humanity, and thus (a) the bases for initial conditions of literacy as well as (b) the only data available (Dedović, 2019, p. 2).<sup>18</sup> Mythology's ubiquity, moreover, may be observed as a reason why it is overlooked.

#### Mythology as Overlooked Discipline

The field of mythology is unique in that there are few disciplines whose contents are so culturally ubiquitous yet simultaneously neglected from rigorous study. It appears that ever since the scientific revolution of the nineteenth century, epitomized by Nietzsche's (1882) proclamation that “God is dead,” Western thought has intellectually forsaken mythology's practical value (Sec. 108). Such hubris neglects the reality that mythology adorns a significant portion of one's daily experience. While endless examples from consumerism, linguistics, and

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<sup>16</sup> The 1914 version by Evelyn-White is a time-honored translation, while the 2004 version by Athanassakis is contemporary. These two were judiciously selected for their translation differences in order to provide the reader with different perspectives in key passages of *Theogony*.

<sup>17</sup> Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Myth. In *Merriam-Webster.com dictionary*. Retrieved April 5, 2020, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/myth>

<sup>18</sup> For more information about mythology's modern ubiquity with respect to the world's oldest attested literature, see Dedović (2019, pp. 1-16).



popular culture substantiate this claim,<sup>19</sup> two prominent examples wherein the mythological component is completely overlooked may suffice.

### *Law*

In considering the historical origin of laws and justice,<sup>20</sup> many astute individuals may recall the basalt stele at the Louvre (Paris, France) known as the “Law Code of Hammurabi,<sup>21</sup> King of Babylon.” While this artifact, dated to 1780 BCE,<sup>22</sup> is most commonly known for its 282 ancient laws, few will likely recall its prologue and epilogue, which contain abundant references to the mythology of the Babylonians: “When the lofty Anu, King of the Anunnaki, and Bel, lord of heaven and earth, he who determines the destiny of the land...” reads the opening line in Akkadian (Harper, 1904, p. 4). The start and finish of the translation includes references to Mesopotamian deities, and the laws therein are written for the purpose of exercising the justice exclaimed by the supposed deities through the ruler, Hammurabi of Babylonia. If the relevance of this example is lost on the reader, this is precisely the point. That is, the work is generally remembered for the laws it lists, not the mythology, thereby affirming its overlooked nature.

### *Medicine*

In medicine, too, mythology is perhaps overlooked. Many medical doctors, upon being crowned a title and white coat, must allegedly declare the Hippocratic oath—an oath which many believe begins with ‘first do no harm’; however, the oldest attested manuscript of the *Hippocratic Corpus* translates as opening with “I swear by Apollo Physician, by Asclepius, by Health, by Panacea and by all the gods and goddesses, making them my witnesses, that I will carry out, according to my ability and judgment, this oath and this indenture.”<sup>23</sup> Again, the mythological substrates are often tucked away from focus in popular culture, despite being primary in the source itself.

<sup>19</sup> E.g., the Nike brand name (alleged Greek deity), Starbucks logo (the siren from Homer’s *Odyssey*), the Achilles heel (Homer’s *Iliad*), Hydra and Thanatos in Marvel movies (Hesiod’s *Theogony*), etc.

<sup>20</sup> The topical discontinuity between art, mythology, and law is acknowledged. However, this example was judiciously selected because law itself is in theory grounded in objectivity, thereby representing an edge case where mythology may appear to have a minimal amount of influence.

<sup>21</sup> Most scholars concur that Hammurabi better transliterates as Hammurapi, a good Amorite name. See D. R. Frayne, *The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia / Early Periods: Old Babylonian Period (2003-1595 B.C.)* (Vol. 4, 1990). University of Toronto Press.

<sup>22</sup> See T. Bryant, *The Life & Times of Hammurabi* (2005). Mitchell Lane Publishers.

<sup>23</sup> The authorship of the *Hippocratic Oath* is attributed to the Greek physician named Hippocrates II of Kos (Greek: Ἱπποκράτης ὁ Κῶς), ca. 460–370 BCE. However, medical historians assert that the *Hippocratic Corpus* was created by the physician’s disciples, see P. Mackowiak, *Patients as Art, Forty Thousand Years of Medical History in Drawings, Paintings, and Sculpture* (2018, p. 27f.). Oxford University Press. For the translation, see W.H.S. Jones, The Oath. In *Hippocrates / Volume I: Ancient Medicine. Airs, Waters, Places. Epidemics 1 and 3. The Oath. Precepts. Nutriment* ([LOEB Classics] no. 147, 1923, pp. 298-301). Harvard University Press. For the manuscript, see Hippocrates, *Byzantine Codex / URB.GRECO.64* [Manuscript] (ca. 1100-1199 CE). Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Greek Manuscripts Collection, Vatican City, Vatican. [https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS\\_Urb.gr.64](https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Urb.gr.64)

In sum, the *ad hoc* examples from law and medicine, as stated above, illustrate that mythological substrates are oftentimes overlooked, despite being not only present, but focal in the textual records themselves. These examples serve the purpose of aligning the present essay's methodology on the mythology itself. The mythological focus also creates methodological constraints, which are taken up next.

### **Methodological Constraints**

Despite mythology's tendency to be unscientific, the present essay will focus strictly on *Saturn*'s contents, its alleged mythology, and their coherence. In attempting to contribute scholarship of a novel and underrepresented nature, it is therefore necessary to depart massively from the methodology of prior investigators. Consequently, leaning on a psychological analysis of the artist will be avoided. A mythological lens of analysis will thus require careful observation of three general maxims: (1) the irrelevance of *Saturn*'s creator; (2) the avoidance of proximal psychological interpretations of the creator's intentions, and; (3) a disinterested view of the painting, deity, and myth in question.

First, the *Saturn*'s creator will only be referred to as the "artist." In this regard, the artist's background, health, and personal circumstances are devoid of relevance. Second, proximal psychological interpretations of the artist will be avoided by means of avoiding the use of specific language. That is, certain phrases indicative of psychological interpretations shall be avoided. Excellent indicators of these kinds of statements include: "what the author meant was...", "Goya's [mental state or selected circumstance] suggested that...", "Goya felt X, he therefore meant Y," "Goya previously expressed X in his artwork, so he is expressing Y now," and "painter X completed work Y, which Goya saw, thus Goya's painting also meant Z." Third, the painting (*Saturn*), myth (*Theogony*), and deity (Cronus) must be approached from the standpoint of an uninformed, disengaged, disinterested, and unbiased agent—that is, prior assumptions must be discarded.

To summarize, mythology's utility and presence is often overlooked because it is so omnipresent in popular culture, consumerism, and other facets of daily life. So much so, in fact, with the result that it is often assumed to be well understood, whereby careful textual reconciliation is not necessary. Casual albeit important examples from law and medicine highlight this underrepresentation. A mythological analysis requires adherence to three maxims: disregarding the painting's creator, the avoidance of proximal psychological interpretations of the artist via cue phrases, and a disinterested approach towards the painting, the deity, and the myth in question. Now, therefore, the question to consider is thus: to what degree do the *Saturn* painting's contents align with the mythological depiction of Cronus in Hesiod's *Theogony*?

## Pars IV: Assessment

**The Problem of 'Devouring'**

*Saturn devouring one of his sons*, an earlier title of the *Saturn* painting that the PM adapted, introduces the lexical problem associated with deciphering the painting's contents. Words like *devour*, *dismember*, *eat*, *cannibalism*, *infanticide*, and *swallow*, within the context of this painting, are oftentimes used interchangeably—when really, they should not be. A few of these terms are taken up.

Devour is a transitive verb defined as “to eat up greedily or ravenously” or “to use up or destroy as if by eating.”<sup>24</sup> Devour is derived from the present active infinitive form of the Latin verb *dēvorāre*, a combination of the prefix *de*, meaning down, around, or away from, and *vorāre*, literally “to swallow” or figuratively “to destroy.”<sup>25</sup> Together, *dēvorāre* and its English counterpart have come to mean “gulp down,” “engulf,” or “swallow”—clear enough in terms of the relationship to eating. However, the latter translation of “to destroy” is a figurative usage. Alternatively, the transitive verb “dismember” is defined as “to cut off or disjoin the limbs, members, or parts of” and “to break up or tear into pieces.”<sup>26</sup> To swallow, simply enough, is merely the act of ingesting something through the mouth, having it traverse down the esophagus, and land in the stomach. These words have distinct meanings, both literally and figuratively, but are used interchangeably by many scholars who commented on *Saturn*.

Marina Warner (1998), in summarizing Hesiod's *Theogony*, for example, described the crucial lines concerning Cronus' action as cannibalism, then devouring, then swallowing, all within the span of a single paragraph (p. 168). Jay Scott Morgan (2001), also, used words like “cannibal,” “devour,” and “tear apart” to describe the painting, despite citing *Theogony* in the following sentence by way of “gulped down” (pp. 39-40). Longstanding Goya scholars like Müller (1984), Tomlinson (1994), and Glendinning (1975) engaged in similar wordplay;<sup>27</sup> others, like the more cavalier Evan Connell (2004), went as far as to label the scene as “Saturn's lunch” (p. 208). The ubiquity of such word usage among scholars and commentators is clear. According to Evelyn-White (1914), the relevant lines concerning Cronus in *Theogony* may now be consulted for reconciliation with Hesiod's account.

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<sup>24</sup> Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Devour. In *Merriam-Webster.com dictionary*. Retrieved April 5, 2020, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/devour>

<sup>25</sup> All Latin to English translations are my own. An obliged reader may cf. P.G.W. Glare (Ed.), *Oxford Latin Dictionary* (1982). Oxford University Press.

<sup>26</sup> Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Dismember. In *Merriam-Webster.com dictionary*. Retrieved April 5, 2020, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/dismember>

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Pars II.

### “Devouring” Scene in *Theogony*

The textual evidence within *Theogony*, lines 453-493, provides no such basis for “devouring” as an idiom for bodily destruction. Lines 459-461 and 466-467 introduce the first mention of Cronus swallowing Rhea’s offspring:<sup>28</sup>

**Evelyn-White (pp. 112-113)**

καὶ τοὺς μὲν κατέπινε μέγας Κρόνος, ὥς τις ἕκαστος νηδύος ἐξ ἱερῆς μητρὸς πρὸς γούναθ' ἵκοιτο, τὰ φρονέων . . . (459-461)

τῷ ὃ γ' ἄρ' οὐκ ἀλαδὸς σκοπιὴν ἔχεν, ἀλλὰ δοκεύων, παῖδας ἐοὺς κατέπινε . . . (466-467)

These great Cronus swallowed as each came forth from the womb to his mother’s knees with this intent . . . Therefore he kept no blind outlook, but watched and swallowed down his children . . .

**Athanassakis (2004, p. 22)**

But majestic Kronos swallowed each child as it moved from the holy womb toward the knees . . .

Therefore, he kept no blind watch, but ever wary he gulped down his own children . . .

In 459-461, the verb καταπίνω is invoked, which translates as “to gulp down, swallow,” among other uses (LSJ, 1940, p. 905). The children came from νηδύς, which translates as “stomach, belly,” or any inner cavities of the body (LSJ, 1940, p. 1173). Both translators rendered swallowing action as the activity. Thereafter, Rhea saved the life of Zeus by swapping the newborn with a stone. Here, too, there is textual evidence of swallowing action:

**Evelyn-White (pp. 114-115)**

τῷ δὲ σπαργανίσασα μέγαν λίθον ἐγγυάλιζεν / Οὐρανίδη μέγ' ἄνακτι, θεῶν προτέρω βασιλῆι. Τὸν τόθ' ἐλὼν χεῖρεσσιν ἐὶν ἐσκάτθετο νηδὺν σκέτλιος (485-488).

She gave a great stone wrapped in swaddling clothes. Then he took it in his hands and thrust it down into his belly: wretch!

**Athanassakis (2004, p. 23)**

. . . she handed a huge stone wrapped in swaddling clothes. He took it in his hands and stuffed it into his belly—the great fool!

In this instance, the verb κατατίθημι is invoked, which translates as “to put, place, lay down, store, deposit,” among others (LSJ, 1940, p. 917). The putting action was done into the belly, invoking the same term from the last passage.

It may be observed that these lines are decisively clear in describing what happened to the children: swallowing action into the belly. There is no mention of limbs or dismemberment—that is, the children are not ripped apart and certainly not decapitated. Following 490, the single stone and deities are vomited out of Cronus:

**Evelyn-White (pp. 115-118)**

. . . ηὔξετο τοῖο ἄνακτος: ἐπιπλομένων δ' ἐνιαυτῶν

<sup>28</sup> **N.b.** Unless noted otherwise, the referenced translation belongs to Evelyn-White (1914). The Greek is provided in cases where important translation differences occur amongst translators.

Γαίης ἐννεσίησι πολυφραδέεσσι δολωθεῖς  
 ὄν γόνον ἄψ ἀνέηκε μέγας Κρόνος ἀγκυλομήτης  
 νικηθεῖς τέχνησι βίηφι τε παιδὸς ἐοῖο.  
 πρῶτον δ' ἐξέμεσεν λίθον, ὄν πύματον κατέπινεν: (493-497)

. . . Cronos the wily was beguiled by the deep suggestions of Earth and brought up again his offspring,  
 vanquished by the arts and might of his own son, and he vomited up first the stone which he had swallowed  
 last

**Athanassakis (2004, p. 23)**

. . . sinuous-minded Kronos was deceived by Gaia's  
 cunning suggestions to disgorge his own offspring—  
 overpowered also by the craft and brawn of his son.  
 The stone last swallowed was first to come out (494-497)

In 495, the release of the children is confirmed. In 497, the prior swallowing action is confirmed. According to this reading, and that of most other translators, the swallowed contents, deities, and stone are unharmed—so unharmed, in fact, with the result that Zeus appointed the recovered stone as a monument for mortals to worship in lines 498f. (Graves, 2001, p. 41). Insofar as may be reasonably understood, Cronus swallowed his children whole, then vomited them up whole, without injury or death. There was no evidence of dismemberment, tearing of limbs, or decapitation.

Conversely, critical reexamination of the visual depiction in the *Saturn* painting shows an entirely different scene altogether. In the painting, the beast is not swallowing the main figure whole, but is instead dismembering it in small chunks. This comparison thus compels the reader to observe that the verbs of action in *Theogony* concern swallowing, gulping down, and storing deities into a belly container, such that they are unharmed, alive, and released thereafter. This passive transmission may be contrasted with the *Saturn* painting's contents, wherein the verbs of action portray dismemberment, devourment, and implied bloody death. To be sure, dismemberment would more readily indicate death, unlike what was observed in *Theogony*.

***Notable Rebuttals and Replies***

**Rebuttal: Hesiod's Language as Figurative.** A concerned rebuttal may be that Hesiod's writing ought to be interpreted as figurative language, whereby dismemberment may be inferred via contemporary metaphorical interpretations of swallowing. This reasoning, however, would not be consistent with Hesiod's other depictions of deities being destroyed. It may be observed that in lines 178-182, Hesiod described how Cronus usurped his father via castration by means of a sickle (pp. 90-93):

Then the son [Cronus] from his ambush stretched forth his left hand and in his right took the great long sickle with jagged teeth, and swiftly lopped off his own father's members and cast them away to fall behind him. And not vainly did they fall from his hand; for all the bloody drops that gushed forth Earth received (178-182)

Through his act of castrating his father, Cronus claimed the prime rulership and Uranus was seemingly subdued from the plot in a bodily capacity. While it does not appear that Uranus perished, the language invoked in the scene is the important part. Hesiod was capable of vividly describing such gruesome violence.<sup>29</sup> He even described the shape and contour of the sickle that Cronus used, in addition to the play-by-play of what happened to the organ itself thereafter. Such detailed language is largely absent from Hesiod's description of Cronus devouring his children. That is, contextually, the mythology does not support the rebuttal that swallowing action was used as a metaphor for dismemberment or the tearing of limbs away from a deity.

In other words, the mythological scene of Cronus dismembering his father in Hesiod's *Theogony* was procedurally precise and consistent in objectively describing an act of dismemberment, as opposed to swallowing action. To be sure, Hesiod was textually capable of describing more macabre action in other scenes. Capability notwithstanding, this ability was not exercised in describing how Cronus swallowed his children, as opposed to allegedly devouring them. Any consideration for an argument of swallowing action being figurative for dismemberment must therefore be either expunged or treated by specialists in ancient Greek.

Having examined the appropriate contextual evidence, it is necessary to begin using the word "devour" with caution and moderation, and hence in quotations in order to emphasize its distinct nature from other relevant verbs.

**Rebuttal: *Ad Hoc* Line Selection.** Another concrete objection may concern the narrow focus on select lines and words of *Theogony*. Selections which, perhaps, may be neglecting the word usage trends in the other 950 lines not yet held to scrutiny.

However, there is support that the interpretation of swallowing, distinct from "devouring," is consistent with Hesiod's word usage in the entire narrative. Zeus, too, carried out his father's strategy verbatim by swallowing deities that threatened his own power (pp. 140-145):

Ζεὺς δὲ θεῶν βασιλεὺς πρώτην ἄλοχον θέτο Μῆτιν  
 πλεῖστα τε ἰδυῖαν ἰδὲ θνητῶν ἀνθρώπων.  
 ἀλλ' ὅτε δὴ ἄρ' ἔμελλε θεὰν γλαυκῶπιν Ἀθήνην  
 τέξεσθαι, τότε ἔπειτα δόλω φρένας ἐξαπατήσας  
 αἰμυλίοισι λόγοισιν ἔην ἐσκάτθετο νηδύν. . . (886-890)

But when she was about to bring forth the goddess bright-eyed Athena, Zeus craftily deceived her with cunning words and put her in his own belly . . .

In line 899, the same wording, ἐσκάτθετο νηδύν, is used to describe another deity being put into Zeus' own belly (p. 145). Just thirty lines later, Hesiod recalled the strange birth of Athena, as translated in different versions (indicated by the letter suffix of the line number; pp. 146-147):

[e] But Zeus lay with the fair-cheeked daughter of Ocean and Tethys apart from Hera . . . deceiving Metis (Thought) although she was full wise. But he seized her with his hands and put her in his belly, for fear that

<sup>29</sup> Hesiod, that is, without prejudice for single or multiple authorship of the original work.

she might bring forth something stronger than his thunderbolt: [j] therefore did Zeus, who sits on high and dwells in the aether, swallow her down suddenly. But she straightway conceived Pallas Athena: and the father of men and gods gave her birth by way of his head on the banks of the river Triton. And she remained hidden beneath the inward parts of Zeus. (929e-j)

Here, swallowing action is observed consistently, albeit with slightly different words. The deities across *Theogony* are swallowed whole and described as if being held in some sort of container space within the stomach of the deity. As line 929j read, Athena “remained hidden beneath the inward parts of Zeus,” alluding to the container space of a stomach. The main takeaway from these examples is that swallowing action and dismemberment are not used interchangeably, and Hesiod was capable of describing these distinct actions within the *Theogony* narrative.

### ***Summary***

In sum, Hesiod's *Theogony* did not textually depict the graphical representation of dismemberment and death in the *Saturn* painting. That is, there is no doubt whatever as to the serious discrepancy between the mythology and artwork in question. Textual evidence from *Theogony* supported the assertion that swallowing action, in whole and without injury, was the means by which Cronus “devoured” his children. Despite Hesiod's capability and usage of describing dismemberment, such as with Uranus, these elements were absent from the passages of concern. In addition, Zeus' own actions of “devouring” his wives and children, which used the same language as the key passages concerning Cronus, were consistent with this interpretation.

Upon analysis, the *Saturn* painting's overall graphic depiction of Cronus is not textually accurate with respect to the foundational mythological scene in question.

### ***Cronus, Behavioral Profile***

It remains to be discussed whether the behavior depicted in the *Saturn* painting can be textually reconciled with Hesiod's descriptions of Cronus in *Theogony*. Upon perceiving the *Saturn*, viewers are immediately arrested by the monster's eye contact. Such a gaze has been widely cited as indicative of intense emotional affect: rage, anger, madness, fear, wrath, desperation, etc. The graphic arm clenching action, when coupled with the gaze, conservatively indicates that the painting portrays strong affect and violence. Now, therefore, another mythological question may be confronted: can such a behavioral profile depicted in *Saturn* be reconciled with textual evidence of Hesiod's Cronus?

*Theogony* provides little to no evidence of Cronus' wrath, rage, or loss of control. Conversely, there is textual evidence to support the notion that Hesiod's Cronus is brave, cunning, and, perhaps, virtuous. Such a claim may seem preposterous, given that Cronus has undoubtedly practiced a cruel rite by castrating his father and “devouring” his children. If this painting were a piece of evidence in a legal proceeding that concerned a crime depicted, Hesiod's Cronus would be an indicted criminal on death row, not a defendant. Such a prejudgment must therefore be discarded if the desired object is to impress justice upon the profile of Cronus' behavioral tendencies in *Theogony*. That is, the spirit of objective due process

necessitates the relaxation of the inclination toward a biased reading of Cronus' conduct in *Theogony*.

### ***Cronus' General Depiction in Theogony***

The few instances where Cronus is mentioned in *Theogony* yield a depiction most contradictory to the *Saturn* painting's beast. The birth of Cronus reveals thus:

**Evelyn-White (pp. 88-89)**

τοὺς δὲ μέθ' ὀπλότατος γένετο Κρόνος ἀγκυλομήτης,  
δεινότατος παίδων· θαλερὸν δ' ἤχθηρε τοκῆα. (137-138)

After them was born Cronus the wily,  
youngest and most terrible of her children, and he hated his lusty sire.

**Athanassakis (2004, p. 14)**

Kronus, the sinuous-minded, was her last-born,  
a most fearful child who hated his mighty father.

The language describing Cronus merits scrutiny. Wily (adj.) is defined as being “crafty,” synonymous with sly, cunning, foxy, and artful.<sup>30</sup> Athanassakis (2004) read sinuous-minded, meaning one who twists and turns. Hence it follows that wily can mean intelligent, and not purely in a pejorative context. Evelyn-White's use of the word “terrible,” too, is contrasted with Athanassakis' preference of “fearful.” Finally, lusty sire, or mighty authority figure (like a father), is in close agreement. These examples showcase that Cronus' mythological depiction is not solely pejorative, suggesting another interpretation of the deity being more intelligent than his brothers, in addition to being fearful.

The castration of Uranus by Cronus also deserves a fresh behavioral look. According to Hesiod, the entire premise of Uranus' castration was based on the evil deeds of Uranus himself. The weapon, motive, and design were produced by Cronus' mother—Gaia; the swift execution by Cronus was cited as an act of obedience toward his mother. Admittedly, Cronus may be described as terrible, but so are all his relatives (pp. 90-91):

For of all the children that were born of Earth and Heaven, these were the most terrible, and they were hated by their own father from the first. And he used to hide them all away in a secret place of Earth so soon as each was born, and would not suffer them to come up into the light: and Heaven rejoiced in his evil doing. (154-158)

During the castration scene, there is little support for Cronus being violently impulsive:

But vast Earth [Gaia, Cronus' mother] groaned within, being straitened, and she thought a crafty and an evil wile. Forthwith she made the element of grey flint and shaped a great sickle, and told her plan to her dear sons. And she spoke, cheering them, while she was vexed in her dear heart: “My children, gotten of a sinful father, if you will obey me, we should punish the vile outrage of your father; for he first thought of

<sup>30</sup> Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Wily. In *Merriam-Webster.com dictionary*. Retrieved April 5, 2020, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/wily>



doing shameful things." So she said; but fear seized them all, and none of them uttered a word . . . (159-168)

Cronus' mother, Gaia, was thus dissatisfied with Uranus, designed the plan to punish him, and created the weapon. For Cronus, his mother's request for obedience is the defining point of consideration (p. 90f.):

But great Cronus the wily took courage and answered his dear mother: "Mother, I will undertake to do this deed, for I reverence not our father of evil name, for he first thought of doing shameful things. (167 et seq.)

A few lines later (177-181), the castration was carried out, as stated before (pp. 90-93). Cronus' obedience toward his mother's request, agreement of the severity of the situation, and execution of the deed is described by Hesiod in relatively monotone fashion. Moreover, Cronus followed orders that were intended to address a problem shared by his own brothers and sisters. Cronus alone was willing to address the evils of the father. Again, there is little emotional affect. Hesiod's depiction of this furious scene lacked colorful language to describe Cronus' behavioral profile in detail, let alone anything that can compare to the wrath depicted in the *Saturn* painting.

The picture, then, is Cronus' father birthing children he hated and hiding them away in evil fashion. Cronus, in hearing his mother's plea for help and sharing in the dissidence of his relatives, accepted the duty through cold affirmation, and did the deed he promised to do. Here, Cronus' behavioral profile ought to be considered based on the textual evidence provided: (a) Cronus was said to hate his father; (b) he did volunteer to do a vile deed that his brothers would not, and; (c) he did castrate his father in cold blood. In accepting these characterizations, it must also be accepted that Cronus' father was evil. Moreover, both Gaia and every relative hated Uranus on this account. These actions may posit that Cronus was brave and volunteered at the behest of his mother. Finally, it may be observed that the castration of Uranus by Cronus was sparse in textual details for a reader to render any sort of definitive judgment concerning wrath and rage—that is, the wording of the castration scene was so devoid of emotional language that any associations of wrath or rage would be subjective, personal interpretations.

The delicate points asserted above are threefold. First, this is not to say that Cronus' actions were justified or that he represented a well-intentioned deity. Instead, the second assertion is that in what is (textually) one of the most gruesome scenes of *Theogony*, Cronus' apparent behavioral profile seems robotic, subdued, and certainly devoid of impulsive wrath and rage. The third assertion is that Gaia's role was causative with respect to Uranus' death. This is to say, it is textually apparent that Cronus was not the cause of this act, but Gaia. To recall, she was the one who "groaned within" and conjured the plan, despite being "vexed in her dear heart," and consequently "cheered" one of them toward obeying her design. Finally, the castration of Uranus was done by means of a weapon Gaia fashioned—what could the great Cronus do? For Mother Earth (Gaia) always has her way.<sup>31</sup> This critical scene, and the

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<sup>31</sup> See Athanassakis (2004, p. 5f.): "For most of the poem, it is the mother who matters."

interpretation of it, is important because it establishes a baseline from which one can judge the much less complicated and textually barren scene of Cronus allegedly “devouring” his children.

Verily, the aforementioned textual references to Cronus swallowing his children do not deviate from the contents of line 465:

Therefore he [Cronus] kept no blind outlook, but watched and swallowed down his children: and unceasing grief seized Rhea (465)

The other textual references in *Theogony* closely align with the same colorless behavioral description of Cronus swallowing the children and storing them, whole and intact, within a container metaphor of a stomach, only for them to be freed at a later point. Even whilst indulging in the presupposition that Cronus is a true monster, behaviorally speaking, then it may be observed that he is an uncolorful and emotionally mute one, and certainly not indicative of the *Saturn* painting's demeanor. In reconciling Cronus and *Saturn*, any forced notion of Cronus' personified rage, anger, paranoia, and emotional affect must therefore be textually discredited. In other words, Hesiod's Cronus does not align with the *Saturn* painting's depiction, behaviorally speaking. Even if the *Saturn* artist intended for the monstrous figure to be Cronus, the artist surely betrayed the mythology itself.

### **Results for Hypothesis 2**

In light of these examples, Hypothesis 2 seems to be supported: that is, the *Saturn* painting's contents do not textually reconcile with the alleged mythological depiction of Cronus in Hesiod's *Theogony*—contextually or behaviorally.

#### Pars V: Alternative

### **The Carnage of Grendel**

Having objectively scrutinized and defined the depicted features of *Saturn*, a different deity and myth may be a more appropriate match—Grendel from *Beowulf*. There is one mythological figure historically available to an artist between 1800-1823 that seems to fit the tight parameters of *Saturn* in both the painting and all textual references: Grendel, the monster depicted in the Anglo-Saxon poem named *Beowulf*. *Beowulf* is a complex epic poem, written around 900-1015 CE in Old English (Anglo-Saxon), which tells the heroic tale of Beowulf and his deeds in what scholars agree is a geographically Scandinavian context. The entire 3,182-line poem deals with the hero, Beowulf, who ultimately slayed Grendel and his mother in order to become a king.

Of particular interest are Grendel's physical qualities, which are described with detail sufficient for concerned textual inquiry. Astonishingly, Grendel seems to match the physical description of *Saturn*'s monster in every respect, as described in John L. Hall's (1892) glossary of proper names:

“Grendel—A monster of the race of Cain. Dwells in the fens and moors. Is furiously envious when he hears sounds of joy in Hrothgar’s palace. Causes the king untold agony for years. Is finally conquered by Beowulf, and dies of his wound. His hand and arm are hung up in Hrothgar’s hall Heorot. His head is cut off by Beowulf when he goes down to fight with Grendel’s mother.” (p. xiv)

Grendel is physically described as being a monster from “the land of the giants,” inferring his large size (II.53). Time and again, the beast is described as a monster, creature, and giant in the make of a humanoid, albeit one that lives in the ocean (II.60). While a plethora of lines can be cited to indicate Grendel’s size, there is clear textual reinforcement of this assertion in chapter XXIV: Grendel’s head is cut off by Beowulf and carried back to the hall by four men, only to be hung by his hair (p. 56):

Four of them had to carry with labor the head of Grendel to the high towering gold-hall upstuck on the spear, till fourteen most-valiant (XXIV.78-80)

Then hung by the hair, the head of Grendel. (XXIV.87)

In addition, Grendel’s posture is in the shape of a “mere-wolf,” or “sea-wolf,” according to Hall (p. 55, XXIV.41).<sup>32</sup> Next, Grendel’s eyes are depicted in XII.17-18: “Strode he angrily; from the eyes of him glimmered / A lustre unlovely likest to fire” (p. 26). The eyes also shine with ferocity in a demeanor that is indicative of rage.

At this juncture, it should become immediately apparent that Grendel embodies the physical description that one witnesses in the *Saturn* painting. Some prior scholars referenced *Saturn* as an illustration of Grendel (without making the complete assertion that is presented here). Marcus D. Hensel’s (2012) monograph treatment of Grendel’s physical depiction aligns with the findings presented (p. 69); moreover, Hensel even included a light reference to Goya’s *Saturn* in his discussion about the general nature of monsters (p. 109). Robert DiNapoli (2016), in describing Grendel, maintained that “the famous Goya painting, *Saturn Devouring His Son*, offers an exact analogue for Grendel’s reduction of human will and appetite to its most mindless, bestial dimensions” (p. 50). These examples suggest that other scholars have perceived the similarities between the *Saturn* painting and Grendel. Physically, then, Grendel is a robust match in terms of textual evidence. The behavioral tendencies of Grendel may be taken up next.

### **Grendel, Behavioral Profile**

In considering the behavioral profile of *Beowulf’s* Grendel, there exists a unique pattern in that every reference seems to match precisely with the *Saturn* painting.<sup>33</sup> The disturbing scene in III.1-15 illustrates this point: Grendel attacks thirty men in their sleep and proceeds to devour them—devour, here, as cited by the translator’s translation and summary, which includes dismembering and eating the victims (p. 5f.):

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<sup>32</sup> Disputed, see p. 55, n. 2.

<sup>33</sup> Grendel is mentioned in Hall (1892) in chapters and line numbers: II.50; III.1; III.13; VIII.19; XI.17; XII.2; XIII.27; XV.3.

**Trans.**

Asleep after supper; sorrow the heroes, misery knew not. The monster of evil  
Greedy and cruel tarried but little, he drags off thirty of them, and devours them  
Fell and frantic, and forced from their slumbers  
Thirty of thanemen; thence he departed. Leaping and laughing, his lair to return to,  
With surfeit of slaughter sallying homeward. (III.5-11)<sup>34</sup>

**Summary**

“He drags off thirty of them, and devours them” (p. 5)

In chapter VIII, King Hrothgar recounted the terror of Grendel to Beowulf by noting that his soldiers cannot kill the beast: “[22] Weird hath offcast them to the clutches of Grendel” and “[27] A grapple with Grendel, with grimmest of edges” (p. 18). The strong King, in lament, further described the graphic outcome of the carnage of Grendel thrust upon his hall in a single night (p. 18):

Then this mead-hall at morning with murder was reeking, The building was bloody at breaking of daylight,  
The bench-deals all flooded, dripping and bloodied, The folk-hall was gory: I had fewer retainers, Dear-  
beloved warriors, whom death had laid hold of. (VIII.28-32)

Hrothgar described how, by morning, the defiled hall was gory and dripping with blood. In chapters XII-XIII, Grendel attacks the hall, kills a man by tearing his limbs and eating them, only to be met with Beowulf, who overpowers the beast and cuts off his arm, thereby putting Grendel to flight (p. 26f):

Higelac's kinsman great sorrow endured how the dire-mooded creature in unlooked-for assaults were likely to bear him. No thought had the monster of deferring the matter, Grendel immediately seizes a sleeping warrior, and devours him. But on earliest occasion he quickly laid hold of a soldier asleep, suddenly tore him, bit his bone-prison, the blood drank in currents, swallowed in mouthfuls: he soon had the dead man's feet and hands, too, eaten entirely. Nearer he strode then, the stout-hearted warrior snatched as he slumbered, seizing with hand-grip (XII.27-37)

The lines above echo a behavioral profile indicative of rage, as the action is described as devouring, tearing, swallowing limbs, etc. When Beowulf confronted the beast himself, he dismembered Grendel's arm and shoulder, and thereafter hung it in the hall's roof as a trophy (p. 29):

Beowulf suspends Grendel's hand and arm in Heorot. When the hero-in-battle the hand suspended, the arm and the shoulder (there was all of the claw / of Grendel together) 'neath great-stretching hall-roof (XIII.43-45)

Beowulf followed up his minor victory by swimming into the depths of Grendel's lair and facing off with the mother. In what may be considered the dénouement of this half of the furious poem, Beowulf was in perilous danger before he used a large sword to decapitate the mother: “That the fiend-woman's neck firmly it grappled” (XXIV.10), following by finding Grendel's corpse to “... cut off his head then” (XXIV.33). In this critical scene, the struggle is

<sup>34</sup> Underlined emphases added by the present author.

consistently depicted as gripping of the hands, much like the earlier depiction of Grendel fighting Beowulf in the great hall. Indeed, Beowulf's own camp left him for dead until the great hero emerged from the water. Like Lazarus emerging from the cave, Beowulf proved his might and humiliated the monster Grendel by affixing his head to a spear, like a trophy, in addition to the recovered shoulder. Although redundant, the anatomical specificity of death by means of decapitation and dismemberment of the upper extremities must be noted, as supported by the text.

Behaviorally, the textual evidence within *Beowulf* went above and beyond toward aligning the mythology to the artwork of *Saturn*. Anger, rage, wrath, murder, fury, and dismemberment—vividly described in detail through every reference to Grendel in *Beowulf*. This may be compared, equivocally, to the textual analysis of Cronus aforementioned. With Grendel, the behavioral profile is outlined via unmistakable indicators, as evidenced by the fight scenes. Mythologically speaking, therefore, there is sufficient evidence to acquit Cronus of the cruel rites depicted in *Saturn*, thereby implicating Grendel instead. Grendel may not have been the artist's inspiration for the painting, but this beast surely looks and acts like him, as supported textually.

### Results for Hypothesis 3

In sum, Hypothesis 3 seems to be supported: that is, the textual evidence found in *Beowulf* seems satisfactory enough, such that the monster Grendel is a more robust mythological analog to the figure depicted in the *Saturn* painting.

Having addressed all three initial hypotheses, the evidence warrants further probing into whether the creator of the *Saturn* drew inspiration from *Beowulf*. It is also necessary to depart from some of the methodology's strict constraints—albeit with caution and moderation.

### The *Beowulf* Manuscript

The *Beowulf* poem is included in what is known as the *Nowell Codex*, a tenth or eleventh century CE manuscript that is currently held by the British Library. This artifact is bounded as a book known as *Cotton MS Vitellius A XV*. The *Nowell Codex* is comprised of over 200 vellum leaved pages. The other half of the *MS Vitellius* is the *Southwick Codex*. Notably, the *Nowell Codex* includes five works, which range widely in terms of content, religious affiliation, and chronology. A reason for this awkward contextual grouping (see Table 2) may be due to the manuscript's convoluted ownership history and its subsequent modifications—including a 1731 fire that burned the edges off of most of the pages (Altick, 1950, p. 211).

Table 2

*Cotton MS Vitellius A.XV (Manuscript): Table of Contents*

Section and title	Folio(s) <sup>a</sup>
Cover and introduction	Cover – 3v
<i>Southwick Codex</i>	
Soliloquies of St. Augustine	4r – 59v
Gospel of Nicodemus (fragment)	60r – 86v
Debate of Solomon and Saturn	86v – 93v
St. Quintin Homily (fragment)	93v
<i>Nowell Codex</i>	
Life of St. Christopher (fragment)	94r – 98r
Wonders of the East (illustrated)	98v – 106v
Alexander's Letter to Aristotle	107r – 131v
Beowulf	132r – 201v
Judith	202r – 209v

*Note.* Cotton, R. [Previous owner]. (ca. 975-1550 CE). *Cotton MS Vitellius A XV* [Vellum bound book]. British Library, Cotton Collection, London. [http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Cotton\\_MS\\_vitellius\\_a\\_xv](http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Cotton_MS_vitellius_a_xv)

<sup>a</sup> The numbering system of the folios is slightly different in the British Library listing (three folios).

While the *Beowulf* manuscript has a convoluted ownership history, it was discovered and documented within a timeframe that would make it possible for an artist to have seen its contents between 1820-1823. Because this assertion relates to a specific document at a specific time, necessity compels further constraints to the scope of question. For that reason, access to the *Beowulf* manuscript by Goya himself is considered. This requires answering three questions: (a) was it possible for Goya to have seen the manuscript or the contents of *Beowulf*; (b) would he have been able to read it in a language he was familiar with, and; (c) why would Goya use *Beowulf* as an inspiration for his *Saturn* painting? Each is taken up in turn.

Full translations of *Beowulf* were popularized and disseminated through Europe in 1815 as a result of the work of Grímur Jónsson Thorkelin (1752-1829),<sup>35</sup> an Icelandic-Danish scholar (Fjalldal, 2008, p. 322). While acting as Keeper of the Royal Privy Archives, the government of Denmark funded Thorkelin's 1786 trip to Great Britain. There, Thorkelin discovered the *Beowulf* manuscript while in the British Museum and subsequently copied its contents (Fjalldal, 2008). Thorkelin (1815) published a Latin translation of *Beowulf* in 1815, which was followed by a Danish translation by the likes of Nicolai F. S. Grundtvig (1820) and John M. Kemble's (1837) literal English translation. It should be noted, however, that other scholars published snippets of the poem in or before 1815: Sharon Turner (1805), John J. Conybeare (1814), and Peter E. Müller (1815). Manuel Vallvé (1934) released the first Spanish version of the poem, albeit in the format of a children's picture book.<sup>36</sup> While many more partial and full translation publications of *Beowulf* took place,<sup>37</sup> the brief list will suffice as it pertains to Goya's lifetime through 1828.

From a historical perspective, it is thus *feasible* that Goya could have known about *Beowulf* and its parent manuscript's contents. However, the lack of a Spanish translation during the time period in question casts a shadow of doubt over this hypothesis. For Goya to have read the work, he would have to have been semi-proficient in either Latin, Danish, or English (Goya lived in Italy and was likely exposed to the Latin language). This would rely on Goya, or his housemate, having acquired the manuscript through a purchase or gift, which may have contained illustrations. Alternatively, records of play showings from local theatres in Madrid may have shown *Beowulf* as an adaptation for a Spanish audience. These are undoubtedly murky historical waters and are unfit for further speculation. Notwithstanding, it may be established that it was chronologically possible for Goya to have access to *Beowulf* and its contents and for him to see it in a language—Latin—that he was exposed to.

It remains to address the most staggering question presented: why would Goya have used *Beowulf* as an inspiration for *Saturn*, and what evidence is there for this, other than the present author's own speculations? Given Goya's withdrawal from society during the alleged period of the painting of *Saturn*, it would be highly speculative to make any assertion *ex nihilo*. In this regard, any objection concerning why Goya would have used *Beowulf* as an inspiration may be logically sustained, as there is no concrete interpretation other than by saying the manuscript may have been at his home. In this hypothetical regard, it would have been only one of finite potential sources of artistic inspiration.

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<sup>35</sup> Thorkelin's work was heavily disputed and criticized by various scholars (too many to list) on account of apparent miscopies and translational shortcomings, among other issues. See Fjalldal (2008) for a scathing survey and analysis of Thorkelin's life and works.

<sup>36</sup> See E. M. Olivares Merino (2009) for a comprehensive discussion of Spanish translations of *Beowulf*.

<sup>37</sup> See Osborn (2014) for a detailed (albeit incomplete) list of *Beowulf* publications.

### Location of the *Saturn* Compared with the *Beowulf* Manuscript's Contents

To recall the contents of the *Beowulf* manuscript (Table 2), immediately following the leaves containing the *Beowulf* poem are the pages of a poem named *Judith*. Upon inspection, this title and its subsequent contents allude to Judith beheading Holofernes, a Biblical story excluded from the canon in some languages and traditions. Judith was a fictional Jewish woman who beheaded an Assyrian general while he was drunk. Artists during Goya's period have been gracious in their penchant toward depicting this iconic act of homicide. Moreover, Müller (1984) remarked that Judith "enjoyed considerable popularity in the Spanish theater during Goya's time" (p. 179). These artistic depictions of Judith have been agreed as having clear, consistent, and defining characteristics: woman, basket, and blade. In short, the pages immediately following the *Beowulf* poem in the *Nowell Codex* are the undisputed story of Judith and Holofernes. Now, this is seemingly quite peculiar. Mythologically, *Judith* and *Beowulf* reflect different traditional bases. That is, these stories are seemingly unrelated. After all, the various owners of the manuscript may have organized the works in that order for no reason.

In the case of Goya and *Saturn*, however, this minor observation seems to be relevant when considering the location of the BPs in Goya's home. The locations of these paintings were documented and reconstructed by prior scholars who consistently agreed that the first floor contained *Saturn* directly across the entry way. The adjacent painting on the same wall, just feet away, depicts a woman holding a knife and a male figure on his knees, seemingly in prayer. This painting is named *Judith and Holofernes* (Goya, 1820-1823a).<sup>38</sup> Scholars have confidently asserted that the scenic attribution to Biblical Judith is the most accurate interpretation of all the BPs (Müller, 1984, p. 177). Of all the uncertainties and discrepancies regarding the locations of the paintings, there is little doubt that *Saturn* was originally situated next to *Judith*, as shown in Figure 3 (Brugada, 1828; Glendinning & Kentish, 1986, pp. 106-107; Müller, 1984, pp. 62-64, 142-143, 177; Sanchez Cantón, 1964, pp. 65-68, 81; Tomlinson, 1994, p. 245; Yriarte, 1867, pp. 93-94).<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> For brevity, this work will be referred to as *Judith* hereafter.

<sup>39</sup> Müller (1984) noted that there was some confusion concerning whether *Two Women* and *Judith* were a duplication (p. 68); Brugada (1828) and Yriarte (1867) were seemingly the first two to document the works in detail; See also, GW (1971, pp. 384-385).



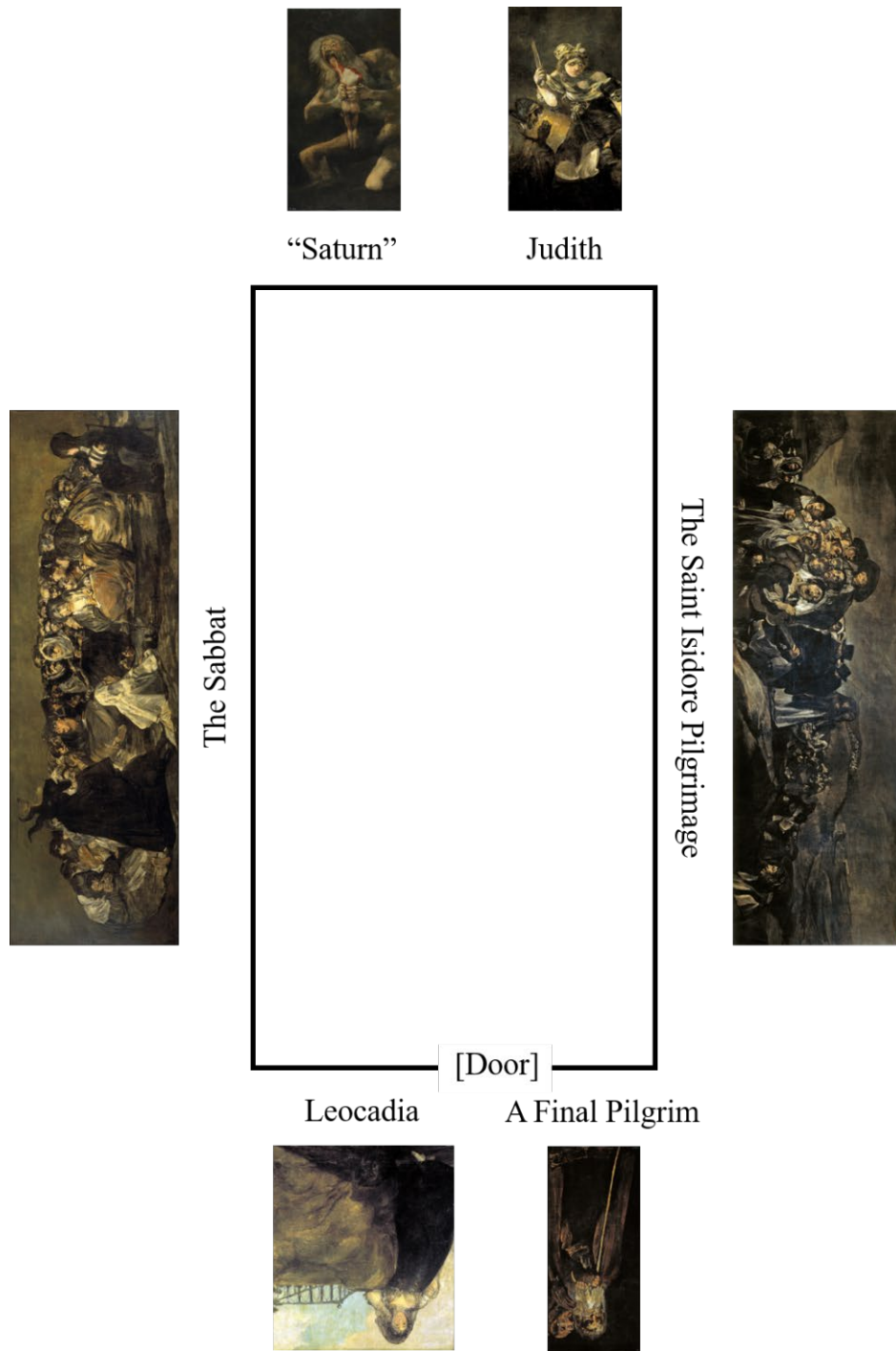
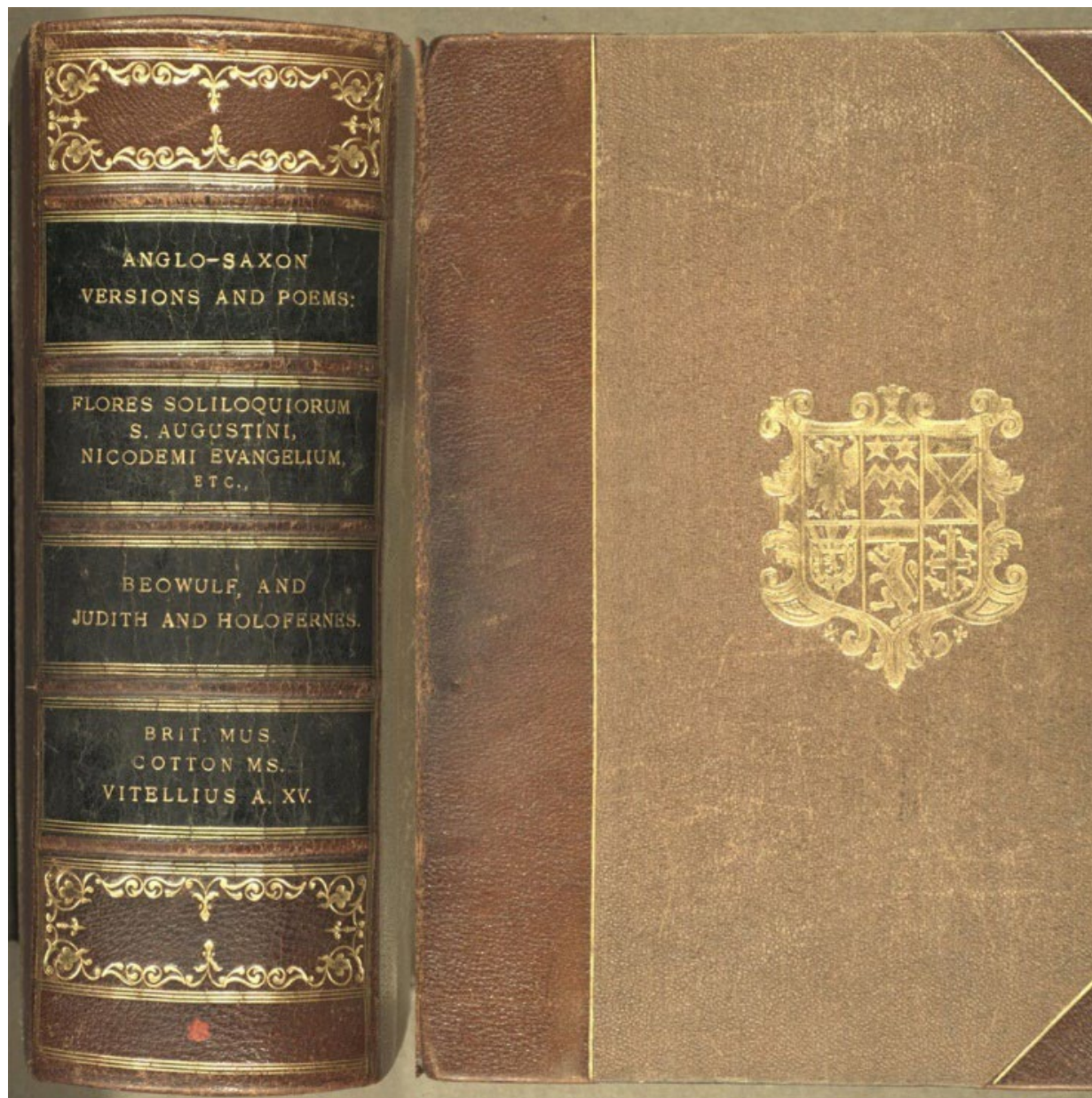


Figure 3. Arrangement of Black Paintings on the first floor of Goya's Quinta home

Note: Composite image by Boban Dedović. Layout order derived from Müller (1984, pp. 142-143, pl. 2). All works in the public domain.



*Figure 4.* Spine and cover of Cotton MS Vitellius A XV

*Note:* Composite image by Boban Dedović. Images from British Library website, see Cotton (ca. 975-1550). All works in the public domain.

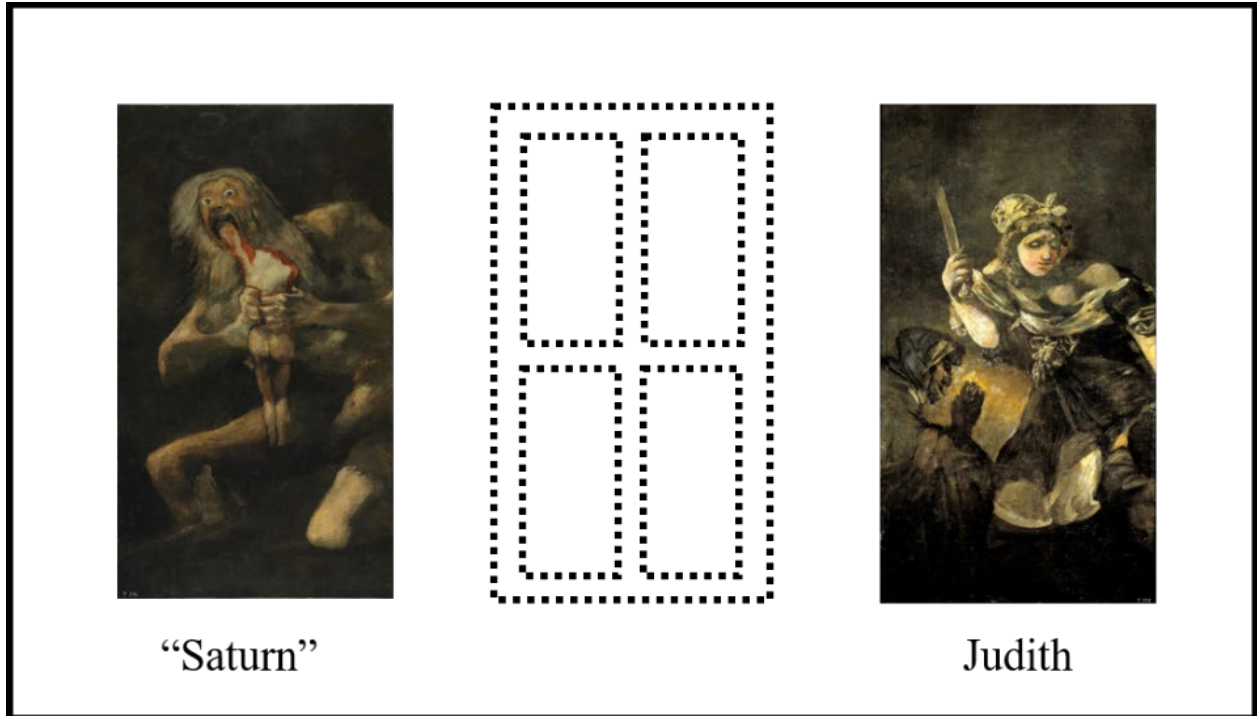


Figure 5. Painting arrangement of far wall (first floor) of Goya's Quinta home—Saturn and Judith

Note. Composite image by Boban Dedović. *Saturn* (left; Goya, 1820-1823b) and *Judith* (right; Goya, 1820-1823a). All works in the public domain.

The floor layout of Goya's home thus shows the *Saturn* and *Judith* affixed side-by-side (Figure 5). Just like the *Beowulf* manuscript (Figure 4), these two works are drastically unrelated in their mythological and chronological origins.

From this, an interesting question arises: did the *Nowell Codex*, the *Beowulf* manuscript in question, play a role in this arrangement? Such an assertion seems to be the only concrete and evidentially supported hypothesis that explains why these two paintings were next to each other. As thinly veiled as this assertion may be, it is rooted in textual evidence within mythology and does not rely on psychological speculation. Furthermore, if *Saturn* does not depict Grendel from *Beowulf*, it necessarily follows that this arrangement is a highly improbable statistical anomaly. In sum, a case may be made that the *Saturn* painting could depict Grendel from *Beowulf*, as it accounts for the thematic association and the mythological evidence reviewed.

## Pars VI: Conclusion

**Summary*****Support for Initial Hypotheses***

The *Saturn* painting has been formally attributed to Goya, and its contents have been widely accepted as depicting Cronus, a Greek deity. Goya did not give the painting this title, nor did he leave other evidence to explain its contents (as far as this essay's sources recounted). Prior investigations have generally agreed to the mythological depiction of Cronus, despite relying heavily on psychological analyses. The present essay adopted a mythological mode of analysis, wherein the contents of Hesiod's *Theogony* and the *Saturn* painting were compared. All three posited hypotheses were supported: (a) prior investigators seemed to rely on psychological analyses concerned with Goya, despite a lack of objective evidence to draw from; (b) textual evidence did not provide support for Cronus being the figure depicted in the *Saturn*, and; (c) Grendel's depiction in *Beowulf* did align with the *Saturn* painting's contents, textually and graphically.

***Additional Probing***

Further probing was conducted with regard to whether Goya could have profited from the materials and concepts found in the manuscript during his lifetime. The *Beowulf* manuscript was available to the artist between 1820-1823, and the plot of *Beowulf* was written about in European publications. Finally, the *Beowulf* manuscript's contents included the stories of *Judith* and *Beowulf* in the same spine, which corresponds to the adjacent location of the *Judith* and *Saturn* paintings in Goya's *Quinta* home.

**Implications**

If the *Saturn* painting depicts Grendel from *Beowulf*, the implications of this essay are threefold. First, the title ought to be reconsidered.<sup>40</sup> Second, the time-honored approach of using psychological methods in evaluating how an author came to produce a given work ought to be held to account. Third, it would be therefore necessary to acquit Cronus in the matter.

**Limitations and Future Directions**

The limitations of this essay are manifold because the evidences provided are correlational or observational in nature; nevertheless, they provide a clear path for other investigators to critically examine the assertions and their validity. For that reason, the present essay's limitations may guide future concerned inquiry. Space permits only four to be listed. First, the inventory from Goya's home may provide evidence about what kinds of artistic materials the artist had at his disposal. Second, Goya's own background with respect to interest in Latin, theatre, and mythology may provide further clues. Third, and with respect to Goya's biographers, it may be useful to assess whether Goya could have encountered *Beowulf*—in writ or other form factors—whilst he was traveling through Europe, particularly in Rome and Madrid, in addition to letters he wrote to friends. Finally, the gravity of the assertions put forth warrants

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<sup>40</sup> E.g., "The Carnage of Grendel" [?].

that other classicists review Cronus' depictions and behavioral profiles within the broader corpus of Greek mythology in addition to the *Theogony* itself.

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