JAPAN AND THE ANCIENT WESTERN CLASSICS: THE ROLE OF DIVINE INVENTION IN GREEK, ROMAN, AND JAPANESE LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis explores the reasons for divine intervention in Greek, Roman, and Japanese literature and how it impacts the cultures and traditions of ancient Greece, Rome, and Japan. In the first chapter, I discuss the main motivations of divine intervention in human affairs in Homer's *Iliad.* In the second chapter, I examine the lack of divine intervention in Lucan's *Bellum Civile* and the changing attitudes toward the role of divinities. In the third chapter, I examine divine intervention in both the ancient mythology and contemporary folklore of Japan, and ask whether or not we can find its impact on traditional values incorporated in the country's culture.

I selected these three areas because divinities play a crucial role in the literature of all three civilizations. For ancient Greece and Rome, the epic genre taught values and traditions that many took seriously. For Japan, its mythology is considered history and important to the nation's identity. I conclude this thesis with a comparison of all three civilizations and the meaning of divine intervention in literature as a general concept.

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INTRODUCTION

*"*The gods do not always act in the interest of humans" is a notion that few people consider when thinking about deities. Instead, they believe in gods acting morally and deciding what is "good" and what is "bad." While there is no way to decipher whether or not all deities act in the moral interests of humans, there is a great deal of evidence in ancient literature to suggest that the gods have their own agenda and personal standards when deciding to intervene in the interests and affairs of humans. To address this theme, this paper examines both ancient western civilizations of ancient Greece and Rome and the modern civilization of Japan in order to determine the reasons for divine intervention and how such interventions impact tradition and culture more generally.

In ancient Greece, one of the most famous epics that was told and eventually written down was Homer's *Iliad.* This war poem, in existence since around the 8th century B.C., was at first orally handed down and eventually written down by ancient scholars.[1] There is much debate about whether the poet, Homer, was actually one person or multiple people, and there is not much biographical information about the poet. Despite this, the *Iliad* stands as one of the greatest war stories ever told. It follows the warrior Achilles, among other warriors, during the tenth year of the Trojan War. The gods on Olympus are important to the plot in that they serve as the highest powers over mankind. Some of the books within

[1] *The Homer Encyclopedia* s.v. "Iliad."

the poem are solely about the gods, either staying completely on Olympus, or going down to the human world.

Centuries after the *Iliad*, Lucan wrote the *Bellum Civile* (*Civil War*), another war epic describing Julius Caesar's exploits in one of Rome's civil wars. Lucan's poem is categorized as historical epic. This epic is more focused on the events that actually happened and Lucan changes the tendencies of the epic genre to fit his own ideas. For example, many epics involve the description of troops and ships, the existence of gods and goddesses, and a central heroic figure. Lucan decides to go against the typical conventions of the genre by "relinquishing the 'machinery' of the gods."[2] Unlike the *Iliad*, the gods are not characters in the plot, and while many of the characters in the poem reference the gods, they do not actually appear anywhere in the poem.

As ancient Greece and Rome were classical civilizations, Japan has a civilization that has lasted into the present. Chapter 3 explores the myth of the *Kusanagi Sword* and its role in both literature and Japan's imperial politics. The sword has served as one of Japan's imperial regalia since its creation, and although the sword has mythological roots, it is crucial to Japan's ideology and tradition. Today, there are other superstitions that exists in folklore that extend to modern-day traditions and culture for Japan. The fictional monsters termed *yōkai* are well-known in Japan, and many Japanese people act with these particular monsters in mind.

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[2] *Brill's New Pauly* s.v. "Lucanus."

Through the examination of the *Iliad, Bellum Civile*, the history of the *Kusanagi Sword*, and of *yōkai*, it is evident that divine intervention in mythology and folklore has more purpose than establishing codes of morality for the world. All four of these topics have established roots in their respective cultures. These roots are symbols and provide guidance and identity for people as a whole, thus proving the importance and legitimacy of mythology and folklore in the world's cultures and civilizations.

HONOR IN HOMER'S *ILIAD*

When it comes to deities, the *Iliad* mainly follows the Δωδεκάθεοι, the twelve gods and goddesses who live on Olympus. This includes Zeus, Hera, Athena, Aphrodite, Ares, and Apollo, who all to some degree interfere in human affairs to either help them or hinder them. In the poem, these gods and goddess live on Olympus, a place above the clouds, invisible to the human eye and are often called Olympians. Usually, as it pertains to the ancient gods, people worshipped the gods depending on their individual power or as a collective group. In many areas of the ancient world, these Olympians were worshipped in different forms, yet Homer wrote them as a collective whole, that everyone recognizes and prays to.[3]

The Olympians are immortal and cannot be killed by the likes of mortals, and thus are constantly involved in human affairs over the course of the events in Homer's *Iliad.* They nourish themselves on their own divine food, and tend to their responsibilities as deities of the human world. Since they can exist separately from humans, it is fair to question their motives for helping mortals in the first place. Are they moral gods that seek good and justice? Or are they simply bored and have no specific agenda? On one hand, it is easy to point to their sense of morality and justice. On the other hand, their feelings and the standards they set for humans play a far greater role in their decision to intervene in mortal affairs.

[3] *Brill's New Pauly* s.v. "Twelve Olympian Gods, Δωδεκάθεοι."

In this chapter, we will examine the reasons for divine intervention in Homer's *Iliad,* and how their involvement is crucial to ancient Greek standard and tradition.

Honor for the Ancient Greeks and Warriors in the Iliad

A major theme in the *Iliad* that appears throughout the poem is the concept of *honor* for the ancient Greeks. There are repeated references to acquiring as much *honor* as possible in order to be respected as the greatest of warriors, but it may be very difficult to understand the exact definition of the word, as per the opinions of the ancient Greeks. According to the *Encyclopedia of Homer*, *honor* is the stock translation of the Greek word τῑμή (*timê*).[4] The idea of τῑμή "denotes both one's 'value' in one's own and others' eyes and the esteem conferred by others."[5] These values include, battle prowess, rank, or wealth and Cairns especially notes that, "one can increase one's prestige without depriving another."[6] From this, it is a standard that promotes a seemingly fair competition among the ancient Greeks. Anyone can have the goal of accumulating as much honor as possible through various means and even if you take measures to dishonor someone, it is all to solidify one's legacy.

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[4] *The Homer Encyclopedia* s.v. "Twelve Olympian Gods, Δωδεκάθεοι."

[5] *The Homer Encyclopedia* s.v. "Honor."

[6] *The Homer Encyclopedia* s.v. "Honor."

Thus, throughout the poem, there is much argument and conflict whenever someone is dishonoring another, trying to defend the honor they have, or trying to reason whether an action will result in the positive acquisition of honor. This promotes a very strong sense of individualism among the ancient Greeks as "the craving for recognition itself presupposes a highly developed sense of one's own worth."[7] This conception prove key to the overall examination of honor as a driving force of divine intervention in the *Iliad*.

The Importance of Honor on Olympus

The gods and goddesses in the *Iliad* display very humanlike traits and one reason for their intervention in human affairs is that they actually care about certain humans in the poem. Humanlike traits can consist of having sadness, fear, love, etc. While watching from above, the Olympians constantly worry about those people they are connected to, often doing whatever they can to help them. Hera and Athena are often the usual suspects as they are heavily biased in favor of the Greeks and adore certain men. For example, Hera will never let those whom she loves fight each other:

ἦλθε δ᾽ Ἀθήνη
οὐρανόθεν: πρὸ γὰρ ἦκε θεὰ λευκώλενος Ἥρη
ἄμφω ὁμῶς θυμῷ φιλέουσά τε κηδομένη τε[8]

[7] *The Homer Encyclopedia* s.v. "Honor."

[8] *Iliad* 1.193-196. All translations derive from Murray, A.T. and Wyatt, W.F.

> The white-armed goddess Hera had sent her forth,
> for in her heart she loved and cared for both men alike.

While Homer makes it clear that Hera cares about Achilles, among other men, there are keywords that Homer repeats to indicate actual *concern* for mortals. In this passage, the word κηδομένη can be translated as the act of "being concerned."[9] It is here that Homer gives a human trait to Hera, even though she is a goddess.

Another word that appears quite often when discussing concern is θύμος. While the word does have a meaning of "soul,"[10] it is possible that this is how Homer gives human qualities to the different Olympians. In Book 5, Hera protects Diomedes and tells him to not fear the other gods, for she will protect him:

> ‘Τυδεΐδη Διόμηδες ἐμῷ κεχαρισμένε θυμῷ
> μήτε σύ γ᾽ Ἄρηα τό γε δείδιθι μήτε τιν᾽ ἄλλον
> ἀθανάτων, τοίη τοι ἐγὼν ἐπιτάρροθός εἰμι’[11]
>
> ‘Son of Tydeus, Diomedes, dear to my soul,
> fear thou not Ares for that, neither any other of the
> immortals; so present a helper am I to thee.’

θυμῷ demonstrates how much Hera cares about Diomedes and therefore, she offers him protection. He is, ἐμῷ κεχαρισμένε θυμῷ (dear to [her] soul) which spurs her to take action when Diomedes needs her. In fact, she cares about Diomedes so much that she even opposes other Olympians, in order to prevent

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[9] Liddell and Scott s.v. κήδω.

[10] Liddell and Scot s.v. θύμος.

[11] *Iliad* 5.826-834.

them from killing him. This affection present in Hera tells us that some gods place human beings above other gods, which can cause strife and conflict between the Olympians.

However, it is far more interesting to ask *why* Hera is so connected to people like Achilles and Diomedes and *why* they are so dear to her heart. It is very likely that it is the concept of "honor" that is most important to the gods as a redeemable human trait. Mary Lefkowitz argues that "what moves them more than anything is honor: what they want from mortals is respect, shown by acts of piety, such as the offering of sacrifices and the building of temples."[12] Therefore, the more "honor" someone acquires, the more value they represent to the Olympians. This honor can even apply to how loyal one is to the Olympians as evident at the end of the poem after Hector dies. It is clear that it is this same honor that motivates Apollo to help mortals and he has a much different mindset than other Olympians such as Hera. Apollo makes a strong push to protect Hector's dead body and accuses the gods for their lack of concern:

> σχέτλιοί ἐστε θεοί, δηλήμονες: οὔ νύ ποθ' ὑμῖν
> Ἕκτωρ μηρί' ἔκηε βοῶν αἰγῶν τε τελείων;[13]
>
> 'Cruel are you, O gods, and workers of bane.
> Has Hector then never burned for you thighs
> of bulls and goats without blemish?'

[12] Lefkowitz, 61.

[13] *Iliad* 24.33-34.

Here, it is clear that Apollo is motivated by Hector's honor and disgusted by Achilles' supposed honor. William Allan argues that Apollo's sense of justice comes from Achilles' lack "of pity and human respect and on the futility and excessiveness of his conduct."[14] This explains how much Apollo actually cares about Hector because of his past actions. Therefore, Apollo wishes to protect him from any more intentional harm, especially from Achilles, who mercilessly kills the warrior at the end of the poem.

In the poem, the most visible support that the Olympians provide is to Diomedes, who went on a rampage on the battlefield with the help of Athena and Hera. While Athena actually gives Diomedes some of her power of μένος καὶ θάρσος (might and courage),[15] Diomedes' honor is justified toward the end of the battle when he retreats due to Ares' presence on the battlefield. He says:

> τώ τοι προφρονέως ἐρέω ἔπος οὐδ᾽ ἐπικεύσω.
> οὔτέ τί με δέος ἴσχει ἀκήριον οὔτέ τις ὄκνος,
> ἀλλ᾽ ἔτι σέων μέμνημαι ἐφετμέων ἃς ἐπέτειλας:
> οὔ μ᾽ εἴας μακάρεσσι θεοῖς ἀντικρὺ μάχεσθαι
> τοῖς ἄλλοις: ἀτὰρ εἴ κε Διὸς θυγάτηρ Ἀφροδίτη
> ἔλθῃσ᾽ ἐς πόλεμον, τήν γ᾽ οὐτάμεν ὀξέϊ χαλκῷ.
> τοὔνεκα νῦν αὐτός τ᾽ ἀναχάζομαι ἠδὲ καὶ ἄλλους
> Ἀργείους ἐκέλευσα ἀλήμεναι ἐνθάδε πάντας:
> γιγνώσκω γὰρ Ἄρηα μάχην ἀνὰ κοιρανέοντα.[16]
>
> 'I know you, daughter of Zeus that holds the aegis;
> therefore with a ready heart will I tell you my thought
> and hide it not. In no wise does spiritless terror possess

[14] Allan, 13.

[15] *Iliad* 5.32-33.

[16] *Iliad* 5.816-825.

> me nor any slackness, but I am still mindful of
> your orders which you gave me. You would not
> suffer me to fight face to face with the other
> blessed gods, but if Aphrodite the daughter of Zeus
> should enter the battle, her you commanded me smite
> with the sharp bronze. Therefore it is that I now
> give ground myself and have given command to
> all the rest of the Argives to be gathered here
> likewise; for I discern Ares lording it over the battlefield.'

Diomedes is clearly demonstrating respect for the Olympians. He does not want to fight any gods, especially since Athena gave him strength on the condition that he did not attack any of them except Aphrodite. Furthermore, the sight of Ares causes Diomedes to hesitate, which shows his respect and fear of the god of war. This is indeed honorable as Diomedes, although very confident in his battle skills, respects and fears the Olympians. It is not something he keeps to himself either, as he warns his fellow soldiers to retreat and respect the force that is on the battlefield. This justifies Athena's decision to reward Diomedes, as he demonstrates the same honor warriors like Hector do.

Honor and its Relationship to Familial Affection

A reasonable assumption for the motivations of human intervention of the Olympians is to protect their own children. Ares, Aphrodite, and even Zeus all experience inner struggles to either protect their children or even attempt to get revenge for the their deaths. Actual *love* is what moves them to take action in the war, for better or for worse. Aphrodite is the first to show her affection by risking

her own life to save Aeneas. Aphrodite, not apt for war, thrusts herself into the midst of battle:

> καί νύ κεν ἔνθ᾽ ἀπόλοιτο ἄναξ ἀνδρῶν Αἰνείας,
> εἰ μὴ ἄρ᾽ ὀξὺ νόησε Διὸς θυγάτηρ Ἀφροδίτη
> μήτηρ, ἥ μιν ὑπ᾽ Ἀγχίσῃ τέκε βουκολέοντι:
> ἀμφὶ δ᾽ ἑὸν φίλον υἱὸν ἐχεύατο πήχεε λευκώ,
> πρόσθε δέ οἱ πέπλοιο φαεινοῦ πτύγμα κάλυψεν
> ἔρκος ἔμεν βελέων, μή τις Δαναῶν ταχυπώλων
> χαλκὸν ἐνὶ στήθεσσι βαλὼν ἐκ θυμὸν ἕλοιτο.[17]
>
> And now would the king of men, Aeneas, have perished, had not the daughter of Zeus, Aphrodite, been quick to mark, even his mother, that conceived him to Anchises as he tended his kin. About her dear son she flung her white arms, and before him she spread a fold of her bright garment to be a shelter against missiles, lest any of the Danaans with swift horses might hurl a spear of bronze into his breast and take away his life.

Aphrodite's willingness to die for her son despite her abilities is enough to demonstrate her love for her son and just as any parent would, she put her life on the line if it meant saving him.

On the other side of the spectrum, Ares willingly risks Zeus' wrath when he plots revenge for his own son's death. He proclaims:

> μὴ νῦν μοι νεμεσήσετ᾽ Ὀλύμπια δώματ᾽ ἔχοντες
> τίσασθαι φόνον υἷος ἰόντ᾽ ἐπὶ νῆας Ἀχαιῶν,
> εἴ πέρ μοι καὶ μοῖρα Διὸς πληγέντι κεραυνῷ
> κεῖσθαι ὁμοῦ νεκύεσσι μεθ᾽ αἵματι καὶ κονίῃσιν.[18]
>
> 'Do not blame me, you gods that dwell in heaven, if I go to the ships of the Achaeans and avenge the death of my son, even if it end in my being struck

[17] *Iliad* 5.311.

[18] *Iliad* 15.115-118.

by Zeus' lightning and lying in blood and dust among the corpses.'

While Ares is clearly risking his existence for his son, the phrase, μὴ νῦν μοι νεμεσήσετ᾽ Ὀλύμπια is quite notable. Ares tells his fellow Olympians to not "blame" him, precisely for the reason that he is acting in interest of his son and nothing else. "Blame" implies that other Olympians would do the same as seen with Aphrodite and Aeneas. Ares is devastated and he feels the only way to justify his son's death is strike down as many Achaeans as possible. This is the only instance when Ares shows partiality toward humans, as his participation in the war is only the result of human conflicts and not of personal feelings. Ares, as the god of war, normally would not involve his own feelings into which side he is either assisting or destroying in war. However, as the death of his son dawns on him, the grief and rage that might arise in any parent who lost a child consumes him.

Even Zeus falls victim to the same influence of affection when he watches his son, Sarpedon, die before his very eyes. Zeus contemplates saving his son despite what the fates have designed for him:

διχθὰ δέ μοι κραδίη μέμονε φρεσὶν ὁρμαίνοντι,
ἤ μιν ζωὸν ἐόντα μάχης ἄπο δακρυοέσσης
θείω ἀναρπάξας Λυκίης ἐν πίονι δήμῳ,
ἦ ἤδη ὑπὸ χερσὶ Μενοιτιάδαο δαμάσσω.[19]

'And my heart is divided in counsel as I ponder
in my thought whether I shall snatch him up while

[19] *Iliad* 16.433-438.

> yet he lives and set him afar from the tearful war in
> the rich land of Lycia, or whether I shall let him be
> vanquished now at the hands of the son of Menoetius.'

This is very interesting as Zeus usually remains impartial when helping human beings. While this is the only time Zeus actively shows humanlike qualities, some scholars interpret this as a measure of Zeus' power. William Allan claims that this is critical because, "these scenes are no less striking for the way they raise the possibility that Zeus could bring about a radically different outcome, yet chooses not to because it would destroy an order of which it not only approves, but of which he is both the ultimate guarantor and main beneficiary."[20] This definitely brings up the question of the extent of Zeus' power and how his intervention in human affairs is drastically different from any other Olympian. While Zeus will be individually examined later, it is important to discuss whether Zeus can control the fates and how this affects the other Olympians in the poem.

Interestingly, many of the characters who are related to the gods also have a great amount of honor. One method Homer uses to emphasize this is indirectly stating that they have honor by giving these men titles and high praise with words. For example, Aeneas' honor, though subtle, is shown through the description that he is ἄναξ ἀνδρῶν or *lord of men*. Aeneas is a vital character for Rome in Vergil's *Aeneid*, but Homer maintains Aeneas' integrity by incorporating his title as *lord of men* whenever Aeneas is around. Sarpedon, Zeus' son, is described

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[20] Allan, 9.

with words such as ἀντίθεος (godlike*)* and his honor is expressly shown by his dedication to his father:

> οἳ μὲν ἄρ᾽ ἀντίθεον Σαρπηδόνα δῖοι ἑταῖροι
> εἶσαν ὑπ᾽ αἰγιόχοιο Διὸς περικαλλέϊ φηγῷ[21]
>
> Then his noble comrades had godlike Sarpedon
> sit beneath a beautiful oak of Zeus who bears the aegis.

These warriors do not just get special treatment because they are children of offspring, but because they have a lot of honor. While familial ties are crucial for intervention in mortal affairs, the fact these warriors still have honor demonstrates the gods have sincere concern for those that are respected by both mortal men and immortal gods.

However, despite evidence in the case of Diomedes, Aeneas and Sarpedon, Ares's son, Ascalaphus, is one exception to the idea that children of the Olympians are also honorable. Ascalaphus is a warrior devoid of any explicit epithets. In fact, Hera tries to calm Ares down by downplaying Ascalaphus' strength and says:

> ἤδη γάρ τις τοῦ γε βίην καὶ χεῖρας ἀμείνων
> ἢ πέφατ᾽[22]
>
> 'For already now many a one more excellent
> than he in might and strength of hand has been slain.'

This is very important because Ascalaphus is not regarded as remarkable as the other warriors that the Olympians care about and even though Ares cares about

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[21] *Iliad* 5.692-693.

[22] *Iliad* 15.139-140.

his son, Hera attempts to persuade him that Ascalaphus was not a special warrior except that he is the offspring of Ares. Ares ignores Hera's plea because filial relations are still important to him but it proves that honor trumps familial relations when it comes to divine interference among the Olympians as a whole.

Honor is important to the gods, especially in the case of respecting them and making offerings to them. The *Iliad* shows us that mortals can earn the respect, attention, and care from the Olympians by demonstrating honor and by doing so, they will assist you from the midst of battle all the way to the preservation of your body after death. It is important to note that in these situations, morality is not a primary motivation of the Olympians to help humans. Justice or morality barely come into the picture because helping only the most honorable warriors or mortals proves that these Olympians value the needs of the few over the needs of the many. While the general conception may be that the Olympians look out for the general welfare of mankind, their actions throughout Homer's poem leaves us questioning the Olympians' moral standards if they have them at all.

Elitist Attitudes on Olympus

Even as the Olympians worry about honor, the question of the morality of those on Olympus is critical in understanding their motivations toward intervention in human affairs. While the gods certainly have set their own standards in deciding whether or not a particular human or group of humans are worthy of their attention, William Allan suggests that the Olympians' justice is, "simultane-

ously cosmic and personal: cosmic in that it embraces divine as well as human society and is connected to the maintenance of order on both levels; personal (and therefore volatile) in that it is intended to control individual conduct and self-interest (whether of gods or humans)."[23] The key here is that the gods have personal motives that may directly affect humans or cause their destruction. These personal motives include the negative dispositions toward mortals, interpersonal conflicts, and most importantly, the fear of almighty Zeus. It is from these factors that the gods are not a force of justice for mortals, but a force that once again acts in the best interests of the most powerful beings in the universe.

While mortals must show honor first and foremost to get the attention of the gods, Homer shows us that the general disposition of the Olympians towards humanity is in fact very low. One recurring phrase that Homer constantly repeats is βροτῶν ἕνεκα (on account of mortals). He repeats the phrases,"on account of mortals" as if to suggest that mortals are petty and unworthy of the gods' attention. For example, in Apollo's plea to Poseidon for a ceasefire in giving aid to humans, Apollo uses this phrase as the main point of his argument:

> 'ἐννοσίγαι' οὐκ ἄν με σαόφρονα μυθήσαιο
> ἔμμεναι, εἰ δὴ σοί γε βροτῶν ἕνεκα πτολεμίξω
> δειλῶν, οἳ φύλλοισιν ἐοικότες ἄλλοτε μέν τε
> ζαφλεγέες τελέθουσιν ἀρούρης καρπὸν ἔδοντες,
> ἄλλοτε δὲ φθινύθουσιν ἀκήριοι. ἀλλὰ τάχιστα
> παυώμεσθα μάχης: οἳ δ' αὐτοὶ δηριαάσθων[24]

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[23] Allan, 3.

[24] *Iliad* 21.461-467.

> ‘Shaker of Earth, you would not call me sounds of
> mind if I war with you for the sake of mortals, pitiful
> creatures, who like leaves are now full of flaming life, eating
> the fruit of the field, and now again waste away and perish.
> But quickly let us cease from strife, and let them do battle on
> their own.’

Apollo mentions that he will not fight Poseidon just to save mortals because that would be ridiculous, especially since he continues to belittle them after βροτῶν ἕνεκα. This shows Apollo drawing a line in the sand and would not fight anyone for the sake of mortals, let alone Posiedon. In fact, there are multiple occasions in which Olympians refuse to fight each other. When Hepheastus attempts to kill the River god for attacking Achilles, Hera stops him because: οὐ γὰρ ἔοικεν / ἀθάνατον θεὸν ὧδε βροτῶν ἕνεκα στυφελίζειν (‘we ought not to use such violence against a god for the sake of mortals’). [25] Once again, βροτῶν ἕνεκα shows that Hera will not act rashly even against a non-Olympian. These examples show us that the gods do not act in the interest of mortals on the basis of morality. They act to avoid of their own dissension among themselves. If the Olympians begin to fight each other, it is likely that utter chaos and turmoil will result. For example, Ares stresses that mortals turn the gods against each other when he says, αἰεί τοι ῥίγιστα θεοὶ τετληότες εἰμὲν / ἀλλήλων ἰότητι, χάριν ἄνδρεσσι φέροντες (‘Ever do we gods continually suffer most cruelly by one another's devices, when as we show favor to men’).[26] This is important because Homer sug-

[25] *Iliad* 21.379-380.

[26] *Iliad* 5.871-887.

gests that the gods precisely try *not* to show favor to mortals because it causes strife between them. Instead, the gods seem to blame mortals for their personal conflicts, which further demonstrates that their personal justice overpowers moral justice. Thus, when they *do* interfere in mortal affairs, it is for a personal grudge that is between certain gods when they have differing opinions on a mortal matter. Lefkowitz suggests that this in turn can hurt humanity as, "dissension among the gods can have lasting consequences for mortals, but no disagreement can alter for long the lives of the immortals."[27] This is especially true for Ares as he shows that the gods often act in their own interest and are not acting as a force of moral justice. This presents a no-win situation for mortals since they essentially do not benefit when gods interfere in their affairs for this reason.

Zeus' Justice

Homer's *Iliad* presents many different reasons for divine intervention in the human world, but Zeus tends to bend these rules when it comes to providing aid or destroying mortals as he sees fit. As Homer points out multiple times, Zeus, as "father of the gods," does not have to abide by the standards of the other Olympians. In fact, he can command them as he pleases, and as one saw previously, may have a hand in Fate's power itself. In this context, one observes that Zeus' power is a crucial in the Olympians' decisions to offer aid to humans.

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[27] Lefkowitz, 58.

Throughout the poem, Homer does not stray from continually mentioning how powerful Zeus really is. This reminder can come from Zeus himself, other Olympians, or even mortals who decide to directly appeal to them instead of their respective patrons. From the beginning of the poem, as Hera pleads with Zeus to protect her beloved Achaeans, Zeus sends her away in annoyance with:

> ἀλλ᾽ ἀκέουσα κάθησο, ἐμῷ δ᾽ ἐπιπείθεο μύθῳ,
> μή νύ τοι οὐ χραίσμωσιν ὅσοι θεοί εἰσ᾽ ἐν Ὀλύμπῳ
> ἆσσον ἰόντ᾽, ὅτε κέν τοι ἀάπτους χεῖρας ἐφείω.[28]
>
> 'But sit down and be quiet, and obey my words, lest
> all the gods who are in Olympus be unable to protect you
> against my coming when I lay irresistible hands on you.'

Here, Zeus emphasizes that even if all the Olympians unite together, they could not defeat him. The way he threatens Hera shows how his own power makes the Olympians' seem miniscule. This idea is consistent when Zeus makes the final ultimatum of forbidding the Olympians to even attempt to help the Danaans or the Trojans at the beginning of Book 8:

> "μήτέ τις οὖν θήλεια θεὸς τό γε μήτέ τις ἄρσην
> πειράτω διακέρσαι ἐμὸν ἔπος, ἀλλ᾽ ἅμα πάντες
> αἰνεῖτ᾽, ὄφρα τάχιστα τελευτήσω τάδε ἔργα.
> ὃν δ᾽ ἂν ἐγὼν ἀπάνευθε θεῶν ἐθέλοντα νοήσω
> ἐλθόντ᾽ ἢ Τρώεσσιν ἀρηγέμεν ἢ Δαναοῖσι
> πληγεὶς οὐ κατὰ κόσμον ἐλεύσεται Οὔλυμπον δέ:
> ἤ μιν ἑλὼν ῥίψω ἐς Τάρταρον ἠερόεντα
> τῆλε μάλ᾽, ἦχι βάθιστον ὑπὸ χθονός ἐστι βέρεθρον,
> ἔνθα σιδήρειαί τε πύλαι καὶ χάλκεος οὐδός,
> τόσσον ἔνερθ᾽ Ἄΐδεω ὅσον οὐρανός ἐστ᾽ ἀπὸ γαίης:
> γνώσετ᾽ ἔπειθ᾽ ὅσον εἰμὶ θεῶν κάρτιστος ἁπάντων.[29]

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[28] *Iliad* 1.565-567.

[29] *Iliad* 8.7-15.

> ‘Let not any goddess nor any god try this, to thwart
> my word, but all alike assent to it, so that I may quickly
> bring these deeds to pass. Whomever I notice minded,
> apart from the gods, to go and assist either Trojans
> or Danaans, struck by lightning and in a bad way will
> he come back to Olympus; or I shall take and hurl
> him into murky Tartarus, far, far away, where the deepest
> gulf beneath the earth, where the gates are of iron and the
> threshold of bronze, as far beneath Hades as heaven
> is above earth: then you will recognize how far the
> mightiest as I of all gods.’

In this passage, there are many phrases that exemplify Zeus’ power, and his confidence makes his case even stronger. His command that the other Olympians assent (αἰνεῖτ’) to his word is more of a threat than anything else. He backs up his claim by describing a gruesome punishment that involves being thrown far beneath (ἔνερθ) what is believed to be the lowest point of the world. It is very akin to the fatherly “I brought you into this world and I can take you out of it” mentality. Both illustrate an overwhelming possession of power, which is important for an Olympian such as Zeus.

Even when it comes to disciplining other Olympians, Zeus has a fearsome presence. When Ares blames Athena for giving Diomedes too much power in Book 5, Zeus immediately puts an end to the god of war’s complaints. Zeus expresses his contempt clearly when he says:

> ἐκ γὰρ ἐμεῦ γένος ἐσσί, ἐμοὶ δέ σε γείνατο μήτηρ:
> εἰ δέ τευ ἐξ ἄλλου γε θεῶν γένευ ὧδ’ ἀΐδηλος
> καί κεν δὴ πάλαι ἦσθα ἐνέρτερος Οὐρανιώνων.[30]

[30] *Iliad* 5.896 -898.

> ‘It was to me that your mother bore you; but were
> you born of any other god, thus pestilent as you are,
> then long ago would you have been lower than the
> sons of heaven.’

This reaction is notable because it shows that Zeus can apply his anger to situations that do not even directly apply mortals. Here, he is clearly angry with Ares making the situation worse and his complaints more than anything. He tells Ares that he is only still around because he is also Hera’s son, whom she adores very much. Thus, Zeus’ anger is real and further solidifies his role as father of the world and the gods.

Just as Zeus gives varying versions of this speech to the Olympians multiple times in this poem, it is worth noting their actual reactions to the all-potent father of the gods. Homer writes that, ὣς ἔφαθ’, οἱ δ’ ἄρα πάντες ἀκὴν ἐγένοντο σιωπῇ / μῦθον ἀγασσάμενοι: μάλα γὰρ κρατερῶς ἀγόρευσεν (So he spoke, and they all became hushed in silence, marveling at his words; for very strongly had he addressed their assembly).[31] As it is evident from their silence and the gracefulness of Zeus’ words, the Olympians decide to heed Zeus’ words and desist from intervening in the war. Homer writes their response as succinctly as possible, almost as if one could hear their silence through reading the statement itself. This is a great example of how Homer’s writing style is an effective element in his storytelling and it gives an idea of Zeus’ will and effect on them through Homer’s words.

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[31] *Iliad* 8.28-29.

In regards to the extent of his power, many people may argue that while Zeus is the most powerful Olympian, his power is equal to gods such as Poseidon. However, Homer defends Zeus' power by explicitly comparing both of their powers:

> ἦ μὰν ἀμφοτέροισιν ὁμὸν γένος ἠδ᾽ ἴα πάτρη,
> ἀλλὰ Ζεὺς πρότερος γεγόνει καὶ πλείονα ἴδῃ.
> τώ ῥα καὶ ἀμφαδίην μὲν ἀλεξέμεναι ἀλέεινε,
> λάθρῃ δ᾽ αἰὲν ἔγειρε κατὰ στρατὸν ἀνδρὶ ἐοικώς.[32]
>
> The two of them were to be sure of one stock and of one parentage, but Zeus was the elder born and the wise. Thus it was that Poseidon avoided giving open aid, but secretly sought ever to rouse the Argives throughout the army, in the likeness of man.

Here, Homer makes a clear defense of Zeus, stating that while they came from the same parents, Zeus being older and wiser gave him an upper hand. Although Poseidon expressed earlier in the poem that he was not afraid of Zeus' power if he felt that certain mortals needed aid, this passage is key in more accurately describing Poseidon's state of mind.[33] Homer's statement of Poseidon's actions is an indirect way of stating that he wanted to avoid Zeus' wrath and power. If Poseidon truly believed that he was equal in power and sapience, he would not hesitate in giving open aid to the Achaeans.

Even though Zeus is a huge factor in the other Olympians' decisions to aid mortals, he still has his own standards when it comes to making those decisions

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[32] *Iliad* 13.354-357.

[33] *Iliad* 13.10-16.

for himself. Zeus seems to be consistent with the other Olympians by granting aid to those with a lot of honor and glory. Hector speaks kindly of Zeus when he says:

> ῥεῖα δ᾽ ἀρίγνωτος Διὸς ἀνδράσι γίγνεται ἀλκή,
> ἠμὲν ὀτέοισιν κῦδος ὑπέρτερον ἐγγυαλίξῃ,
> ἠδ᾽ ὅτινας μινύθῃ τε καὶ οὐκ ἐθέλῃσιν ἀμύνειν,
> ὡς νῦν Ἀργείων μινύθει μένος, ἄμμι δ᾽ ἀρήγει.[34]
>
> 'Easy to discern is the aid Zeus gives to men, both
> those to whom he grants the greater glory, and those
> against whom he diminishes and is not minded to aid,
> just as now he diminishes the might of the Argives
> and assists us.'

Hector tries to explain that it is easy to tell (ἀρίγνωτος) how Zeus decides to give aid to mortals, citing greater glory as the main element. Hector admitting that it is fairly easy to see which side Zeus takes proves that Zeus' aid and his sense of justice is consistent. Zeus does not exactly play favorites as much as the other Olympians and if Zeus did not believe there was enough worth in those that needed aid, he would not help them.

In order to maintain consistency when giving aid, Zeus usually resorts to the same method to settle his mind: his infamous golden scales. There are multiple instances where Zeus balances golden scales in order to determine which one of two factions he is going to aid. Zeus' scales of justice is seemingly the only consistent reason for an Olympian to intervene in human affairs. For example, when

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[34] *Iliad* 15.490-493.

Zeus uses the scales to decide whether to help the Achaeans or the Trojans, he uses his golden scales to make core decisions of the fate of mortals:

> ἐν δ᾽ ἐτίθει δύο κῆρε τανηλεγέος θανάτοιο
> Τρώων θ᾽ ἱπποδάμων καὶ Ἀχαιῶν χαλκοχιτώνων,
> ἕλκε δὲ μέσσα λαβών: ῥέπε δ᾽ αἴσιμον ἦμαρ Ἀχαιῶν.
> αἳ μὲν Ἀχαιῶν κῆρες ἐπὶ χθονὶ πουλυβοτείρῃ
> ἑζέσθην, Τρώων δὲ πρὸς οὐρανὸν εὐρὺν ἄερθεν:
> αὐτὸς δ᾽ ἐξ Ἴδης μεγάλ᾽ ἔκτυπε, δαιόμενον δὲ
> ἧκε σέλας μετὰ λαὸν Ἀχαιῶν: οἳ δὲ ἰδόντες
> θάμβησαν, καὶ πάντας ὑπὸ χλωρὸν δέος εἷλεν. [35]
>
> But when the sun had reached mid heaven, then
> verily the Father lifted on high his golden
> scales, and set therein two fates of grievous death,
> one for the horse-taming Trojans, and one for the
> brazen-coated Achaeans; then he grasped the balance
> by the midst and raised it, and down sank the day
> of doom of the Achaeans. So the Achaeans' fates
> settled down upon the bounteous earth and
> those of the Trojans were raised aloft toward
> wide heaven. Then himself he thundered aloud
> from Ida, and sent a blazing flash amid the host of the
> Achaeans; and at sight thereof they were seized with
> wonder, and pale fear get hold of all.

Homer tells us that Zeus puts the fates of two people/groups of people he is considering helping and whichever one's balance rose, is the one who he would aid. This is probably the fairest way that Zeus decides to intervene as the father of the gods. It seems that only he can use this method and stay impartial towards one side. As father of the gods, Zeus is responsible for keeping both Olympus and the human world in check, making sure that Fate's desire is fulfilled for each and every being.

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[35] *Iliad* 8.68-77.

While this proves that Zeus is on a different level from the other Olympians, there are still instances where Zeus is not completely loyal to the scales as a way to help mortals. For example, when Achilles prays to Zeus, Zeus does not consult the scales at all:

> ὣς ἔφατ᾽ εὐχόμενος, τοῦ δ᾽ ἔκλυε μητίετα Ζεύς.
> τῷ δ᾽ ἕτερον μὲν ἔδωκε πατήρ, ἕτερον δ᾽ ἀνένευσε:
> νηῶν μέν οἱ ἀπώσασθαι πόλεμόν τε μάχην τε
> δῶκε, σόον δ᾽ ἀνένευσε μάχης ἐξαπονέεσθαι.[36]
>
> Thus did he pray, and all-counseling Zeus heard his prayer. Part of it he did indeed grant him—but not the whole. He granted that Patroklos should thrust back war and battle from the ships, but refused to let him come safely out of the fight.

Here, Achilles prays for a best-case scenario, hoping that nothing bad comes out of sending Patroclus into war. While there is not a reason given for Zeus' decision to only allow Patroclus to win the battle at the cost of his life, it is clear Zeus only consults the scales when he struggles to make decisions on his own. This makes sense because Zeus logically cannot choose between the Achaeans and Trojans (especially with the dissension between the Olympians), and thus consults the scales.

Of course, a similar critical decision comes at the end of the poem, when Zeus must decide whom the Olympians will side with when it comes to Hector battling Achilles:

> καὶ τότε δὴ χρύσεια πατὴρ ἐτίταινε τάλαντα,
> ἐν δ᾽ ἐτίθει δύο κῆρε τανηλεγέος θανάτοιο,

[36] *Iliad* 16.249-252.

> τὴν μὲν Ἀχιλλῆος, τὴν δ᾽ Ἕκτορος ἱπποδάμοιο,
> ἕλκε δὲ μέσσα λαβών: ῥέπε δ᾽ Ἕκτορος αἴσιμον ἦμαρ,
> ᾤχετο δ᾽ εἰς Ἄΐδαο, λίπεν δέ ἑ Φοῖβος Ἀπόλλων.[37]
>
> But when for the fourth time they were come to the springs, then the Father lifted on high his golden scales, and set therein two fates of grievous death, one for Achilles, and one for horse-taming Hector; then he grasped the balance by the midst and raised it; and down sank the day of doom of Hector, and departed unto Hades; and Phoebus Apollo left him.

Both Achilles and Hector are extremely honorable warriors, loved and watched over by many Olympians. Since this is the case, Zeus immediately uses his scales to decide whom he should help, and the scales indicated that it is Hector who should fall in this battle. One notable fact is that it seems that these scales are absolute, as Apollo left Hector as soon as they indicated his fate.

Zeus has a set manner to provide aid to mortals, one that does not contradict the motives of the Olympians discussed earlier. In fact, everyone must respect Zeus as the father of the gods and his power. Yet, the use of the golden scales and Zeus' seeming impartiality does not mean that Zeus does not have feelings. This is exhibited when Zeus demonstrates feelings for Sarpedon[38] and more specifically when Zeus decides on Troy's eventual downfall. Allan suggests that these feelings are supposed to be completely irrelevant, as Zeus has far more responsibility to the universe than any of the Olympians. He argues that Zeus "can love Troy and still think it right that the Trojans be punished. It is therefore irrelevant

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[37] *Iliad* 22.209-213.

[38] See Footnote 11.

that Zeus does not express any happiness at Troy's fall, since his approval is not only implicit in the narrative itself but also integral to the large cosmic order of which Zeus himself is the anthropomorphic manifestation and ultimate enforcer."[39] Allan makes a very important reference to the fact that even through all of this, Zeus does have feelings. However, as a being who works hand in hand with fate, his duty as father of the gods trumps all, regardless of how he feels within himself.

As a whole, Zeus has an important role when discussing motivations for the Olympians to help human beings. This can be especially crucial as Zeus can be the sole motivation for an Olympian deciding *not* to provide aid. The fear he strikes within them is serious, and they cannot ignore the strength of Zeus' words as Homer writes them. The father of the gods has his own hand in providing aid, either through the golden scales or his own decisions. Therefore, Zeus himself is an important factor in determining the motivations for the Olympians in the poem.

Concluding Thoughts on the *Iliad*

The *Iliad* is a war poem that involves both humans and gods alike, and though the grand conflict between the Trojans and the Achaeans exists, there are many inner conflicts between the gods and how they decide to either provide aid

[39] Allan, 7.

to mortals, or ignore them. Honor is one of the most important factors in determining who is worthy of they gods' power. This theme recurs as Hera, Apollo, and even Ares lend their power to mortals for being honorable. On the other hand, familial affection is just as important as the gods demonstrate humanlike traits of parental love. Multiple times do the Olympians offer their children aid, which is seemingly unfair to those mortals who are completely human. However, even though the Olympians love their children more than anything, after Zeus moves to change his sons' fate, they decide that they must let their children fend for themselves in the human world. Both honor and parental affection are connected in each other, because the poem often describes humans that are both honorable and have a god/goddess as a parent. These factors aside, Zeus has the grandest hand in moving the world and its people toward their fate. He is after all, the father of the gods, whom the gods fear greatly and cannot disobey. Sometimes they may decide to ignore Zeus' wrath but does not take a long time to understand the repercussions that would occur if they helped mortals without Zeus' permission. Instead, Zeus often takes matters into his own hands with his golden scales, as he makes the toughest decisions for the world despite his personal feelings.

What does this tell us about Homer, the importance of the Olympians, and the ancient world as a whole? Homer's inclusion of the Olympians as a driving force in this poem shows us that the ancient world revered them. Honor should be sought in order to be rewarded by the gods. As Homer emphasized this con-

cept, it is evident that the ancient Greeks regarded this view as a crucial part of their culture and values.

DIVINE ABSENCE IN LUCAN'S *BELLUM CIVILE*

Around 61 A.D., Lucan wrote a war epic in Latin, describing one of Rome's Civil Wars. Lucan's *Bellum Civile*, is defined as a historical epic, that tells the story of Julius Caesar's conflict with Pompey around 48 B.C. In the poem, the Olympians do not talk to mortals or assist them. Nevertheless, Lucan is able to give the Olympian gods a role in the poem. As defined by the characters in the poem and thus by Lucan himself, the Olympians are supernatural beings who simply create human life and decide their fate, while taking care of their own agenda.

Religion and the Olympians during Lucan's Life in Rome

Before examining Lucan's epic, it would help to discuss the role of religion in Rome at the time of the epic's creation. While the original Olympians still existed in Roman lore, the historical periods between Homer and Lucan had changed the way Roman's perceived the gods. This was due to a variety of factors, one of which certainly starts with the social class struggles in early Rome.

Early Rome had two distinct social classes: the patricians and the plebeians. While there is much to discuss in regards to defining how the classes interacted with each other, one of the most distinctive characteristics of the plebeians is that they, "were a despised and abject class, beyond the pale of religion, law, society, and the family."[40] The plebeians were not able to participate in the traditional

[40] Fustel De Coulanges, 232.

religion that Rome practiced, and they did not worship the Olympians that are famous in Greek mythology. The gods in Homer's *Iliad* were not the same gods that Rome worshipped. Even so, Romans did have knowledge of their power and strength and believed that they existed somewhere, and they identified the Greek Olympians with their native pantheon (e.g. Zeus/Jupiter, Hera/Juno/ etc.).

It is even more critical to note the transformation of religion in early Rome in comparison to the beliefs of the ancient Greeks. Religion was centered around a sacred hearth that was inherited through one family. Each family had the rights to their own sacred hearths and people who were not part of the family could not worship at a foreign hearth.[41] Outside of the sacred hearths, there were individual places that Romans would go to worship both greater and lesser gods such as the Aventine Hill. These places, however, were in control of the head of the political structure in Rome, the consuls. The consuls were responsible for making general sacrifices to certain gods and always tried to simply maintain peace with them, avoiding their wrath.[42] Such details help explain how the conception of the gods had changed for Rome and Lucan as a poet. While the gods had existed as mighty powers, there was a shift from appeasing them from individual personalities to appeasing them as a general group. This demonstrates a crucial point about the evolution of religion and mythology for Rome. The Olympians were—for the Romans—impersonal and distant.

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[41] Fustel de Coulanges, 275.

[42] Fustel de Coulanges, 303.

Historical Epic as a Factor for the Lack of Divine Intervention

Although scholars have criticized Lucan's poem because he does not include the anthropomorphized Olympian gods, there may have been a method to his madness. The most logical reason would be that since this is an account of history, the gods would not contribute to the credibility of the account. D.C. Feeney in *The Gods in Epic: Poets and Critics of Classical Tradition*, writes that if the "historical nature" of the poem is not an acceptable reason, "it is sometimes claimed that Lucan dispensed with the gods as characters because belief in their participation was not (or, was no longer) sustainable."[43] Feeney suggests that if this poem is a record of history, the idea of Olympians physically involved in human affairs, might not have been very convincing to the Romans during that time. This moves away from conventional epic, however, as "it is specifically the mimesis of divine characters in action which is missing, thus amputating one half of the pair desiderated by tradition and the critics."[44] Epics traditionally have divine characters as a driving force in the plot of many original epics as we saw in the *Iliad*. They can influence the fate of certain characters in the poem, the decisions certain characters make in and out of battle, etc. The absence of the gods is noticeable in Lucan's epic but the fact that he undeniably references the gods frequently in the poem, demonstrates that they must serve some function.

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[43] Feeney, 274.

[44] Feeney, 270.

Descriptions of the Olympians through Indirect References

When Lucan mentions the gods, it is often through indirect means in his writing. For example, the description of Caesar's felling of a sacred oak mentions the power of those in heaven with *imperiis non sublato secura pauore / turba, sed expensa superorum et Caesaris ira.* After Caesar cuts down the sacred tree, the soldiers "weighed Caesar's wrath against the wrath of heaven."[45] While the comparison between Caesar's power and the gods' wrath is an entirely different topic, the fact that the gods' wrath is defined as something to fear reinforces the idea that the Roman gods and their predecessors, the Olympians, are all-powerful beings in heaven.

Whenever characters in the poem look to the gods, they usually do so when in desperate need for help. *'reddite, di,' clamant 'miseris quae fugimus arma,/ reddite Thessaliam* (Gods, restore to us wretches the battle from which we fled: give us back Pharsalia).[46] Here, the characters in the poem understand that they should acknowledge the gods' existence and even though they do not necessarily expect direct assistance or personal conversation, they are still hopeful the gods will help them in some capacity. It is also notable that the characters only appeal to the gods whenever they feel that the situation requires a much greater power than what is around them at that time. This idea also works for Lucan himself, whenever he discusses the gods as the narrator of the poem. In the beginning of

[45] Lucan, 3.437-440. All translations derived from J.D. Duff

[46] Lucan, 9.848-49.

the poem, he writes, *sed mihi iam numen; nec, si te pectore hates accipio…ut satis ad uires Romana in carmina dandas* (I would not care to trouble the god….you alone are sufficient to give strength to a Roman bard).[47] Lucan praises Nero to the point where he suggests that Nero's exploits alone will allow a Roman bard to sing of them without the assistance of a god to tell him to do so.

The Gods as an Almighty but Non-Intervening Force

As Lucan describes what impact the gods have on the characters of the poem, the characters themselves help define the Olympians exact roles. One of the most prominent instances where the role of the gods is discussed in the poem is in the exchange of Cato and Labienus in Book 9. Labienus tries to direct Cato to consult a god as to what action he should take but Cato refuses and says,

> *haeremus cuncti superis, temploque tacente*
> *nil facimus non sponte dei; nec uocibus ullis*
> *numen eget, dixitque semel nascentibus auctor*
> *quidquid scire licet.*[48]
>
> We men are all inseparable from the gods, and even if the oracle be dumb, all our actions are predetermined by Heaven. The gods have no need to speak; for the Creator told us once for all at our birth whatever we are permitted to know.

[47] Lucan, 1.63-66.

[48] Lucan, 9.573-76.

Cato stresses here that the gods do not have a role in human affairs and instead only decide fate. He especially emphasizes that if they had an important message for a mortal, that message would be relayed upon birth. If what Cato says is what was a common way of thinking for Romans, the role of the gods are defined as an almighty force that creates life, furnishes life, and stays out of contact with mortal beings. They have a greater purpose than to constantly interfere in human affairs, and thus the Romans do not expect them to always provide assistance.

While the characters can tell us a lot about what role the gods play, Lucan himself still proves the most valuable asset in trying to understand it in his role as narrator. The poet addresses the gods numerous times in the poem and helps define their role in one way or another. In Book 5, he spends a lot of time describing what kind of beings the gods are by explaining how much power they have:

> *quis terram caeli patitur deus, omnia cursus aeterni*
> *secreta tenens mundoque futuri conscius, ac populis*
> *sese proferre paratus contactumque ferens hominis,*
> *magnusque potensque siue canit fatum seu, quod iubet*
> *ille canendo fit fatum?*[49]
>
> What god of heaven endures the weight of earth,
> knowing every secret of the eternal process of events,
> sharing with the sky the knowledge of the future, ready
> to reveal himself to the nations, and patient of contact
> with mankind?

More importantly, just like Cato, Lucan understands that the gods know everything about everyone and it is their duty to ensure the fates of mortals come to

[49] Lucan, 5.87-91.

pass. The phrase *contactumque ferens hominis* (patient of contact with mankind) is evidence that the gods refrain from contact with humans, as that is not their purpose. The poet goes on to say that this can be detrimental to the world in Book 7, when he directly addresses the gods as the narrator. He writes, *hoc placet, o superi, cum uobis uertere cuncta / propositum, nostris erroribus addere crimen?* (Oh gods, when it is your set purpose to ruin all things, does it please you to add guilt on our part to mere mistakes?)[50] Lucan accuses the gods of inaction thus causing mankind to run into destruction. This is important because Lucan acknowledges the power of the gods, and he directly asks them for their help. The key here is the phrase "set purpose," as if to say that the role of the gods is to share the turn of events in the world, whether they are good or bad. The fact that Lucan appeals to the gods as if to say, "why do you only make bad things happen?" implies that the poet believes, as does Cato, that it is their main duty to decide the fates. Interestingly, Lucan does not ask them to come down and help which tells a lot about the expectations of what the gods should be doing in this epic.

Julius Caesar as a Living God

With the absence of the Olympians from the poem, Lucan does not shy away from the opportunity to praise Julius Caesar as a god himself. Because the poem

[50] Lucan, 7.57-61.

is mainly about Caesar's efforts in the war, it is not surprising that Lucan puts him on a high pedestal. The poet almost always describes Caesar as equal to the gods and Caesar serves as a substitute for their lack of appearance within the poem. When Caesar gives a speech, he often notes how the divine forces seem to always be on his side. He strongly believes the gods are with him when he says:

> *ueniam date bella trahenti:*
> *spe trepido; haud umquam uidi tam*
> *magna daturos tam prope me superos;*
> *camporum limite paruo absumus a uotis.*[51]
>
> Pardon me for putting off the battle; my hopes
> unsettle me, never have I seen the gods so near
> me and ready to give so much; only a little strip
> of land divides us from all we pray for.

Here, while there is definitely not a god standing across from him, the fact that Caesar feels their presence shows that he believes in their existence and their purpose. In this particular instance, it is clear that Caesar believes in the fate that gods have set for him. He often makes sure his soldiers know his power as well, especially when he tells them, *uectorem non / nosse tuum, quem numina numquam / destituunt* (You know not whom you carry. He is a man the gods will never desert).[52] Caesar believes that gods are on his side for a reason and because of that, his soldiers should trust him above anyone else.

Even as Caesar proclaims himself as someone who is perpetually in the gods' favor, there is still evidence to remind us that he is still human. During an

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[6] Lucan, 7.295-299.

[52] Lucan, 5.581-582.

episode where Caesar attempts to cross a stormy sea, Caesar maintains that being favored by the gods will allow him to cross it unharmed. However, the storm forces Caesar to retreat and wait for the storm to pass.[53] Although it would have been beneficial for Caesar, the fact that he was unable to cross the river demonstrates that he is not quite the god that he believes he is. The idea of Caesar being a divine presence among humans is the closest idea to divine intervention within Lucan's poem. Lucan portrays Caesar as a godly figure and portrays him as a potential substitute for the gods' seeming lack of intervention but Lucan makes sure that Caesar isn't the perfect substitute.

Theories of Indifferent Olympians in Lucan's Bellum Civile

Elaine Fantham's article, "The Angry Poet and the Angry Gods: Problems of Theodicy in Lucan's Epic of Defeat," addresses the idea that the gods in Lucan's poem, although existent, are instead *indifferent* about human affairs. Fantham says that Lucan "seems only to blame them for inertia or indifference."[54] Fantham may be correct as there are many instances such as *sunt nobis nulla profecto / numina* (they do not exist—or least not for us)[55] or *mortalia nulli / sint curata deo (*"[gods] do not care about mankind).[56] Fantham proposes that the gods

[53] Lucan, 5.654-71.

[54] Fantham, 229.

[55] Lucan, 7.445-6. This particular passage derives from Fantham.

[56] Lucan, 7.454-5. This particular passage derives from Fantham.

have a different agenda, one that is far more important than the affairs of humans. While she does not necessarily give them a role, Fantham explains that the gods may simply have more important things to do. In the poem, even Caesar agrees with this idea when he says, *numquam sic cura deorum se premit, ut vestra morti vestraeque saluti Fata vacant* (Providence will never stoop so low that fate can attend to the life and death of such as you).[57] From this evidence, it is understandable that Fantham believes that the gods simply do not care and have their own elitist principles up on Olympus.

Although this aligns somewhat with my theory of elitist attitudes on Olympus as I discussed in Chapter 1, Fantham's argument is nevertheless slightly flawed. Although many characters in the poem accuse the gods of inaction and indifference, there is no evidence from the Olympians themselves. The gods nowhere confess that they do not care for human affairs. These are only the complaints of human characters. Had they had a small part in the poem stating their lack of desire to help humankind, then Fantham's argument would be stronger. However, it seems that by keeping the gods directly out of the poem, Lucan is trying to point out that the Romans no longer have a great dependency on divine assistance. Instead, he is trying to emphasize that humans can solve their own conflicts and disputes without direct assistance from them. The gods instead have the role of predetermining mankind's fate, theirs is a higher and uncontrollable force that mankind cannot fully understand. This is not to

[57] Lucan, 5.341-342.

completely discount Fantham's theory of divine indifference, but without a confession from the mouth of an Olympian, there is no way to prove that her theory is correct.

Fortune as the Main Force of Divine Interference

One problem that may conflict with defining what role the gods play, is the inclusion of *Fortuna* in the poem. Many times, the characters in the poem address this goddess rather than the gods as the main culprit in a turn of events. Fantham argues that Lucan, "does not see Fortuna as a causality distinct from the gods" and therefore, is very inconsistent in his approach to them in the poem.[58] Using examples such as, *Fortunae, pudor, crimen que deorum* (You, the shame of fortune, a reproach against the gods")[59] as "proof that *Fortuna* and the gods, together provide the portents for the battle,"[60] she accuses Lucan of inconsistency in his inclusion of gods. Since they are mentioned together and not separately, Lucan is not consistent regarding the idea that the gods are indifferent beings.

Even if this were true, there are some flaws with this argument. While there are indeed examples in which *Fortuna* is categorized among the gods, there are examples where both parties are clearly distinguished. When discussing Pompey's legacy, Lucan writes, *Pompeiusque fuit qui numquam mixta uideret / laeta*

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[58] Fantham, 245.

[59] Lucan, 5.57-9.

[60] Fantham, 245.

malis, felix nullo turbante deorum / et nullo parcente miser; semel inpulit illum dilata Fortuna manu (And Pompey was the only man who never experienced good and evil together: his prosperity no god disturbed. Fortune held her hand for long and then overthrew him with one blow).[61] Here, Lucan is making a clear distinction as he describes *Fortuna* as a fickle force that does what she wants when she wants to outside of the Olympians' actions. If *Fortuna* were truly in the same category as the other gods, why would Lucan mention them in a separate clause? When Afranius talks to Caesar he explains, *Si me degeneri stravissent fata sub hoste, / non derat fortis rapiendo dextera leto* (Had Fortune laid me low beneath an unworthy foeman, my own strong arm would not have failed to snatch death by violence).[62] Here, Afranius is attributing his demise to *Fortuna* rather than the gods in general who oversee a person's fate. It does not seem plausible to believe that Lucan purposely left the gods out of his poem except *Fortuna* herself. Instead, it might be more believable that Lucan wanted to separate her from the normal gods on Olympus that usually appear in epics.

With this in mind, it is much easier to define what role the gods play. By seeing *Fortuna* enter or being specifically referred to in certain circumstances, it is possible that *Fortuna* may be an entirely different force from the Olympian gods themselves. While *Fortuna* may be directly responsible for influencing fate, she is not the one that sees it come to pass. *That* role is what the gods on Olym-

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[61] Lucan, 8.705-708.

[62] Lucan, 4.344-5.

pus are supposed to do, and that much is clear based on what Lucan writes and what different characters say. *Fortuna*'s fickleness gives us a reason to doubt whether she is truly in the same category as the Olympians. It almost seems as if Lucan went out of his way to distinguish *Fortuna* from the gods by making constant references to her involvement in certain affairs. Therefore, Fantham's accusation of Lucan's inconsistency can be equally correct or incorrect.

Concluding Thoughts on Divine Interference in Lucan's *Bellum Civile*

Putting it all together, the gods or Olympians play a significant role for Lucan and the characters in the poem even though they do not directly appear in anthropomorphized characters themselves. Indeed, they appear to be indifferent and therefore do not interfere, but Lucan makes them out to be more than that. As the characters and Lucan believe that the gods have a purpose far greater than to tend to mortal affairs, it is appropriate that they do not appear in person to provide assistance. This is evidence of a changing perspective in Rome's tradition and value system, and we may again put this in the context of Rome's ancient tradition of passing. Romans had diverse personal gods. The Olympians, on the other hand, were distant and impersonal.

Nevertheless, the roots of Homer's mythology were still very much present at the time of Lucan's publication. Lucan strayed away from the conventional traditions of epic by only describing the gods indirectly, but the fact that they are still mentioned means that they are still important. In the poem, the characters,

especially the lesser soldiers, address the gods as the powers who decide fate. There are not any direct prayers to certain gods as in the *Iliad* and the fact that the gods are always addressed as a group certainly cannot be ignored. If we pay close attention to Lucan's strategic narrative style, we find these subtle details about Rome's transformed attitudes toward the gods, and this shows that ancient mythology still lies at the roots of Rome's theology. While belief in the gods' individual anthropomorphized personality is no longer sustainable, the gods are still important to Rome's idea of religion, even though Lucan's readers knew that Homer's tale was simply epic and not credible history.

THE KUSANAGI SWORD AND *YŌKAI* IN MODERN JAPAN

In Japan, mythology, folklore, and religious beliefs have similarly had an impact on the formation of its society's tradition and values, just as in ancient Greece and Rome. This chapter will examine the significance of two subjects: the *Kusanagi Sword*, one of Japan's three imperial regalia, and Japanese demons known as 妖怪 (*yōkai)*. Both play a huge role in different areas of Japanese culture, namely popular culture, politics, and even in everyday life.

As it pertains the overall point of this essay, the existence of *Kusanagi Sword* and the lore of *yōkai* is very pertinent to divine intervention in mythology. In fact, these instances of interference are critical across Japan's culture. The sword, as an imperial regalia, is a symbol of heaven's approval of the emperor. Meanwhile, the *yōkai* create superstition, and influences the way certain people act, especially, in how they understanding culture in a modern society.

The Background of the 古事記 (Kojiki)

Before beginning the full analysis it will be helpful to provide a short background on the 草薙の剣 (*Kusanagi no Tsurugi*) based on the original myth from the ancient Japanese text of the 古事記 (*Kojiki)*. The *Kojiki* (Record of ancient Matters) is Japan's oldest book under the imperial court and addresses the

state of Japan from its earliest time period.[63] Motoori Nobinaga, a famous Japanese scholar, has noted that "the reason for giving the title of Kojiki (古事記) to this text is because it is a text which has recorded the things (事) *Koto* of antiquity (古へ)."[64]

It details Japan's creation by the gods until 712 A.D., after which it was completed.[65] As it is the oldest piece of literature Japan has produced, it is fitting to use it as the primary source for the myth of the 草薙の剣 (*Kusanagi no Tsurugi*) or *Kusanagi Sword*. Even though the myth first appears in the *Kojiki*, it is important to note that there are many variants of the *Kusanagi no Tsurugi's* myth from other ancient pieces of literature. These variant interpretations, however, should not impact the overall analysis of this essay.

The 草薙の剣 (*Kusanagi no Tsurugi*) and its Impact on Japanese Culture

The legend of the 草薙の剣 (*Kusanagi no Tsurugi*) originates with the god 須佐之男 (*Susanoo*). As *Susanoo* was traveling in the world below the heavens, he encountered a family whose daughters were being devoured by a serpent. In an effort to save their last daughter, they appealed to *Susanoo* to defeat the ser-

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[63] Philippi, 3.

[64] Norinaga, 65.

[65] Phillipi, 3.

pent. After he defeats the serpent that *Susanoo* finds a sword inside of the beast. The sword is then named as the *Sword of the Gathering Clouds of Heaven* and is given to the goddess *Amaterasu* as a gift.[66] It is from there, that the sword eventually enters the human world.

From its creation, the story of the sword involves a god interfering in mortal affairs for a few different reasons. As the *Kojiki* states, *Susanoo* seems to only help the mortals for one reason: to have the daughter that he rescues for himself.[67] This is interesting because it seems that *Susanoo* does not really care for the people he is helping. The fact that the serpent devours young girls every year has no effect on *Susanoo's* morals or personal beliefs. Instead, this must be what he deems equitable compensation for his efforts, as denoted by the text itself.

Yamatotakeru and the *Kusanagi Sword*

Yamatotakeru is the first known human warrior to come into possession of the *Kusanagi Sword*. Many scholars believe that after *Susanoo* gave away the sword as a gift, it was sent to the shrine of Ise for protection because the sword's power was terrifyingly large.[68] According to the *Kojiki,* Yamatotakeru's father, the emperor, fearing his son's power, sent him to pacify the lands and bring them

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[66] *Kojiki*, Ch. 19.

[67] *Kojiki*, 19:12.

[68] Isomae, 362.

under the emperor's control. Yamatotakeru did not necessarily wish to go on this mission. His hesitation is apparent since he asked his aunt, "Is it because the emperor wishes me to die soon?"[69] The *Kojiki* does not mention Yamatotakeru's character and because of the variant versions of this myth in different books, it is difficult to pinpoint exactly what kind of person he is. While some depict his character as an innocent loyal retainer, others see him as bloodthirsty and war-loving. Instead, of being a devoted retainer, he is willing to follow his father's orders no matter how ridiculous they may have sounded.

Yamatotakeru's aunt, a priestess at the shrine of Ise, eventually comes to Yamatotakeru's aid and gifts the *Kusanagi Sword* to Yamatotakeru. As Yamatotakeru goes to pray at the shrine of Ise, it seems that the goddess hears his prayers and decides to send him the sword to use, so that he may survive any dangerous encounters. The sword proves very useful as it not only can cut even the smallest blades of grass (with the sword gaining the nickname *grasscutter*), but can also be used to hurt deities themselves.[70] Despite the sword obviously being the most powerful weapon in the world, Yamatotakeru leaves the sword with his wife before he continues on his mission. While there is no reason given for Yamatotakeru not bringing the sword with him, it is very likely that he either forgot to bring it or felt that he did not need it.[71] Because he lacks the assistance

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[69] *Kojiki,* 79, 82:4.

[70] *Kojiki*, 83.

[71] Isomae, 364.

of the sword, a deity eventually dazes the unarmed warrior who subsequently dies of an illness.[72]

The *Kusanagi Sword* and its Impact on Japanese Politics

Although the *Kusanagi Sword* is something that seems only to exist in myth, Japanese people generally believe that the sword actually still exists in Japan today. Nelly Naumann, a scholar of Japanese mythology has written extensively about the meaning of the *Kusanagi* in Japan's imperial court. She states that, "the 'original' sword is supposed to be treasured in the Atsuta shrine."[73] No one really knows whether the real sword is enshrined in Atsuta, as no one, not even the emperor is allowed to view or touch the sword (except for the monks and priests at the shrine). While some may question the legitimacy of the sword's actual existence, Naumann does clarify that a "'copy' was kept and handed down by the emperors" through each accession ceremony.[74] However, even this "copy" of the sword never reaches outside light, thus bringing up more questions about the sword's existence.

Even if the existence of the sword is questionable, Naumann suggests the sword is integral to Japan's imperial court. As the sword was truly powerful ac-

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[72] *Kojiki,* 85-87.

[73] Naumann, 158.

[74] Naumann, 158.

cording to ancient texts like the *Kojiki,* it "in itself is a symbol of power. It is with the help of the sword that a reign is established; it is with the help of the sword that a reign is maintained."[75] The sword is one of Japan's imperial regalia and thus, without it, Japan feels that the imperial court has no place in the country. As Naumann points out, the sword is a symbol of Japan's progress as a country and Japan takes a lot of pride in the sword as a representation of Japan's political structure with regards to the imperial court.

The *Kusanagi Sword* has an equally critical role in the imperial court as the sword itself does. Naumann states that as the sword changed hands from the goddess Amaterasu to Yamatotakeru, so did power from the gods to mortals. She suggests that the story of the myth was fashioned as a way to explain the political structure of ancient Japan, especially when *Susanoo* gives the sword to Amaterasu after finding it. She writes, "there is no reason for such an act except the wish of the compilers or manufacturers of the *political* myth to ensure this important symbol of sovereignty a place within their own mythical scheme from the beginning."[76] In this way, the writers of the *Kojiki* knew that if the myth of the sword was written into mythology, it would be a staple of tradition in culture and in the country itself. While today the imperial court does not play as large a role in the politics of Japan, the continued existence of an emperor is proof that Japan still holds on to the traditions they originally established. Naumann argues that, "sto-

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[75] Naumann, 158.

[76] Naumann, 162.

ries involving Yamatotakeru and the Ise shrine only look like another stratagem to corroborate the connection between the imperial family and this sword, and to provide a likely reason for its being enshrine in Atsuta."[77] This is a logical attempt to lessen any doubts about how the sword was transferred from Ise to the human world. It lends some kind of legitimacy to the idea of the sword's existence. Once again, even though many people have no reason to believe the sword is still enshrined in Atsuta, the use of mythology to explain history shows that mythology remains important to Japan's identity.

Usagi Yojimbo*:* The *Kusanagi Sword* in Popular Culture

Outside politics, the *Kusanagi Sword* is present in various modes of popular culture throughout Japan. Most of the different pieces of literature, manga, and anime all portray the sword as a symbol of power in the imperial court (as discussed above). One manga that is particularly famous is Stan Sakai's *Usagi Yojimbo: Grasscutter*. Sakai is a manga author who is famous for his series of manga about the adventures of a rabbit samurai. The samurai, Usagi Yojimbo, often goes on adventures in his own historical timeline, as is the case in *Grasscutter*. Even within the context of this manga, which is fiction, the sword's symbolization and integrity is protected: an item that represents true power of the gods and legitimacy to rule the land.

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[77] Naumann, 168.

Before describing Usagi Yojimbo's encounter with the *Kusanagi Sword*, the manga details the sword's history, with *Susanoo* acquiring the sword, and the sword's first appearance in the human hands of Yamatotakeru, exactly as the *Kojiki* described.[78] The retelling of the sword's history without any alterations demonstrates how important mythology and history is for Japan. The recreation of the sword's creation in a comic form lends legitimacy to the belief in the importance of the sword for Japan's identity even if it no longer is critical for politics. It also shows a new way in which history and tradition are told in popular culture. Even though the *Kojiki* exists as the oldest existing record of history, it is possible that many people may not know all that is told within this book. However, as manga and anime are integral to popular culture, it seems that Japanese people may retell history through means easily accessed by the general public.

As for Usagi Yojimbo, he later finds the sword washed up on the ocean shore, despite many factions trying to discover the sword's location and acquire it. However, the manga does not stray from the idea of the sword as a symbol of power and thus a highly desired item. The author repeatedly describes the sword's symbolization of power, especially through his main character, as if to reinforce the meaning of the sword to all of his readers. For example, as Usagi Yojimbo looks for the sword, he says, "When the sword, grass-cutter, was lost, so too, did the emperor lose his power…I wonder if the sword is recovered, will

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[78] Eisner and Sakai, 23-30.

the emperor regain his power?"[79] Aside from the main character, the author himself also offers insight into the minds of different warring factions with many believing that "when the emperor once more has possession of all three of the divine treasures, the people will look upon it as a sign that the gods wish the return of the emperor to power."[80] This idea of the sword as a legitimate representation of power is referenced in both history and comics in popular culture.

As this is consistent throughout the whole comic, Sakai offers a solution to the dispute over the sword and who should maintain power as ruler of Japan. As Usagi Yojimbo tries to keep the sword away from different groups trying to establish power in Japan, the samurai decides that, "this artifact belongs to the *people*" and that the people "would not use it as a political weapon."[81] In order to achieve that goal, Usagi Yojimbo allows for a copy of the sword to be made, and the real sword to be placed in the Atsuta Shrine so that "it will be in safekeeping, but those in power, will not use [the actual sword] for political gain."[82] This is a very powerful statement from Sakai, with the message being that the symbolic integrity of the sword must always be remembered in accordance with Japan's history. The actual sword, however, need not be fought over, as that was not the purpose of the sword to begin with. Thus, the *Kusanagi Sword* is a symbol of

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[79] Eisner and Sakai, 70.

[80] Eisner and Sakai, 77.

[81] Eisner and Sakai, 144.

[82] Eisner and Sakai, 242.

power and according to scholars, the details of the actual sword are not as important as its place in Japan's history.

From Mythology to Folkore: The Role of *Yōkai* in Japanese Culture

Moving away from mythology and into folklore, Japanese folklore scholars have increasingly portrayed Japanese demons known as 妖怪 (*yōkai).* The *yōkai* can have many different forms. There are hundreds of *yōkai* that are thought to exist within Japan. Sometimes, they are animals, spirits, or objects that bring either good fortune or bad fortune. While it may help to give a concrete definition of what a *yōkai* exactly is, many scholars disagree with how to define it. Michael Dylan Foster, explains that even though the term literally means "demon" or "ghost," the essence of *yōkai* should be captured in the idea of a mysterious "changing thing."[83] This denotes that *yōkai* tend to have abilities that have an "emphasis on transformation [that] denotes powers traditionally attributed to such creature as foxes, for example, which could take on different forms at will."[84] While these spirits may physically change, this definition is critical for how Japanese people perceive *yōkai*. Foster believes that the idea of *yōkai,*"necessarily changes as human knowledge and experience also change."[85] This defi-

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[83] Foster, 5.

[84] Foster, 6.

[85] Foster, 82.

nition explains the varying theories on what *yōkai* are. However, this purpose of this paper is not to explore exactly what people believe they are, and we only need to look as far as their impact on Japan's traditions.

History of the *Yōkai* Since the Medieval Period

Before examining some of the more popular *yōkai* in Japanese folklore, it will help to trace to progression of understanding of *yōkai* in Japan, especially before Toriyama Sekien published his artbook. A type of *yōkai* that quickly became well known in the 14th century were called 付喪神 *Tsukumogami* (transfigured objects). *Tsukumogami* were tools that held spirits within them and after being dispensed of or ignored, the spirits would haunt the original owner by coming to life as vengeful spirits.[86] This idea is explained through the relationship medieval Japanese people had with the tools that they used. As they used the same tool over and over again, whether for cooking or blacksmithing, Lillehoj believes that "the protracted use of such objects led people to consider the objects as extensions of their loan life or their own soul."[87] As this belief was sustainable, the belief of actual spirits within the tools became sustainable as well. However, as industry developed and evolved, many people began moving away from using the very tools they put so much value in. In turn, many people began

[86] Lillehoj, 7.

[87] Lillehoj, 27.

believing that ignored and neglected tools, would become violent creatures, bent on revenge.[88]

The idea of *yōkai* in *tsukumogami* paved the way for many painters to test their creative minds and try to imagine what each and every *yōkai* might look like. They decided to paint them in 絵巻 *emaki* (illustrated hand scrolls) as transfigured objects with individual characteristics.[89] It was after the production of various *emaki* that Toriyama Sekien decided to create his own art book of *yōkai*.

Toriyama Sekien: A revolutionary of *Yōkai* Studies

Toriyama Sekien revolutionized the study of *yōkai* in the 18th century with the *Illustrated Hyakkiyagyo*, which is an illustrated volume of over 200 different *yōkai*.[90] The concept of the book lies within the idea of all of these *yōkai* marching through the human world in a night parade. While no one knows how or why *yōkai* were portrayed in a night parade, Sekien was the scholar who solidified the legitimacy of that idea.[91] According to Foster, "Sekien's texts represent a watershed in the history of discourse and exerted an influence that reached beyond their own moment of production and continues to resonate in present-day con-

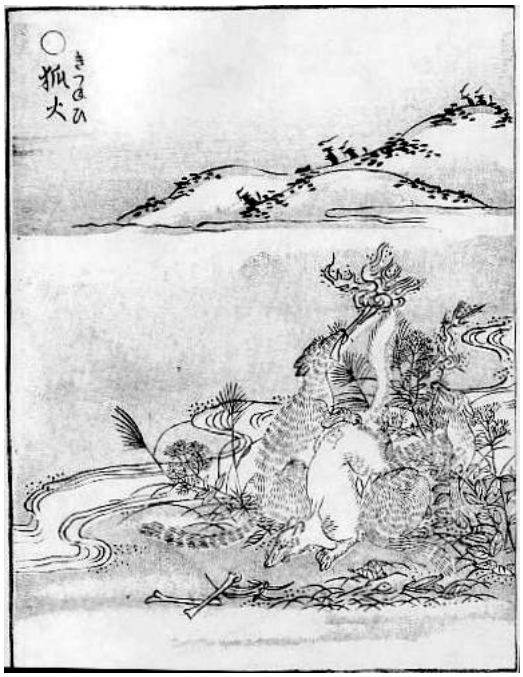
[88] Lillehoj, 18.

[89] Lillehoj, 8.

[90] Foster, 31.

[91] Lillehoj, 7.

ceptions and images of *yōkai*. Sekien's art book ranges from simple drawings of certain *yōkai* and full descriptions of others. While it is not clear why Sekien decided to describe certain *yōkai* and not others, it might be fair to say that Sekien writes a description for the ones that are truly vivid in his own imagination. While there is no evidence to suggest this, it would explain why some *yōkai* have personal stories, while others simply are named.For example, the 狐火(*fire fox)* is simply a a picture of the *yōkai* in its natural form:[92]



Since not all of Sekien's drawings explain what the abilities of each individual *yōkai* are, there is a general consensus about what kind of beings they are. Many scholars agree that almost all *yōkai* are skilled in deception, often, "impersonat[ing] human beings…us[ing] this ability to trick humans or to add

[92] Sekien, 21.

weight to an important request."[93] Not all *yōkai* are malicious however, as sometimes transformations are meant with the best intentions toward human beings, especially in the case of the *tanuki* (as we will examine later).

Because the existence of *yōkai* is a central part of Japanese folklore, it will be impossible to examine all of them within the scope of this paper. Instead, we will focus on two *yōkai* that particularly stand out among other *yōkai* in Japanese culture: 狐 *kitsune* (the fox) and the 狸 *tanuki* (raccoon dog). There are many variations of both creatures, especially with the fox as seen within Sekien's work.[94] However, even as both exist in folklore, they play an important part in both popular culture and social aspects of Japanese society today.

***Yōkai*: The *Kitsune* 狐**

The Kitsune, otherwise known as the fox, is a very well-known *yōkai* in Japanese folklore and in Japan today. Although there is a general conception about what a *kitsune* is, there are many different variants of its form, abilities, and behaviors toward human beings. Foster seems to believe that a *kitsune* may "take the shape of a woman, seducing a man away from his wife and dangerously disrupting family or village life."[95] At the same time, however, Foster also of-

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[93] Ortabasi, 254.

[94] See Note 70.

[95] Foster, 2012, 7.

fers another form the *kitsune* can take. In addition to the description of the tendency to transform into women, Foster tries to generalize the fox as, "a sharp and deviously deceptive shapeshifter…" and characterizes it as a generally malicious spirit.[96] While it might be helpful to examine what Sekien drew as the *kitsune*, the lack of any description (as we saw with the foxfire) means that we can only speculate based on what folklore describes it as.

This idea of the *kitsune* stays true to its own Japanese characteristics. There are many variants of similar foxes in Western folklore, such as "The Fox and the Grapes" by Aesop. In this tale, a fox finds grapes hanging from a tree. After numerous failed attempts to acquire the grapes, the fox decides he is too good for the grapes, calling them sour. The fox then walks away without a care about the grapes ever again. The fable portrays the fox as believing that he is witty and most clever. While the fable ultimately sought to teach a lesson for readers and listeners alike, this portrayal of a fox is very different from those in Japan. The main distinction is, "where the East differs from the West is in the wonderful transformations that are ascribed to the fox in China and Japan and the power to bewitch people said to be possessed by it."[97] There are no transformations of foxes in Western literature, as they are portrayed as more clever and haughty.

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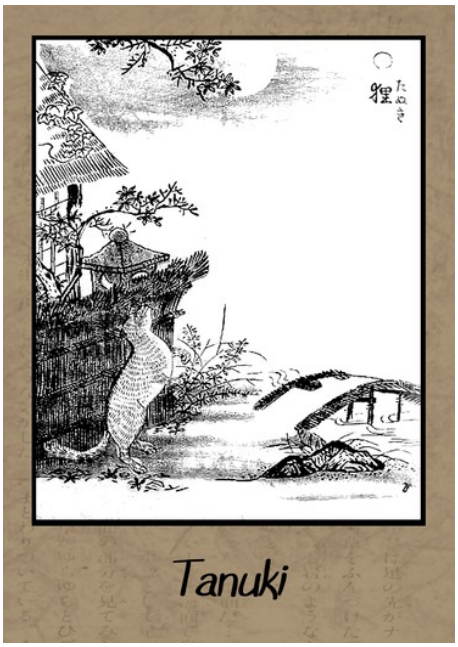
[96] Foster, 2012, 7.

[97] "Fox Possession in Japan", 224.

Y*ōkai*: The *Tanuki*

As the *kitsune* has a distinct role in Japanese language and mythology, the 狸 (*tanuki)* plays an equally crucial role in popular culture and society on its own. Toriyama Sekien provides a description of the *tanuki,* especially when it takes on its different forms. His original drawing is very similar to the *kitsune* in that it has no definite description to it:[98]



The *tanuki*'s legend differs from that of the *kitsune* because this particular *yōkai* is not necessarily a malicious one. The *tanuki* can be translated as a raccoon-dog or sometimes even a badger. While these are interchangeable translations of the word, these varying translations in English may imply that English-speaking people have tried to paint a more accurate picture of the animal by using differ-

[98] Sekien, *Tanuki*.

ent words. A “raccoon-dog” could be implying a hybrid of a raccoon and a dog, while a badger is a real animal that is familiar to most people. It is sometimes a vengeful transformer and often, “the badger comes seeking revenge for some wrong committed against it…”[99] While such stories are common with many *yōkai*, the *tanuki* tends to be more of a prankster than a spirit that seeks revenge though. These “practical jokes range form harmless to tragic” and there is not much evidence to suggest that there are always ulterior motives to hurt humans, as the *kitsune* usually does.[100] Foster suggests that an example of this would be *tanuki* changing the landscape of the world around certain humans after drinking heavily, in order to prevent them from getting home. The *tanuki* usually do this by beating their stomachs, (腹鼓「はらつづみ」), which in turn create mirages.[101]

This idea of deception extends all the way back to Sekien’s art book itself. There is another depiction of the *tanuki* under a different name, *mujina*, as seen below:

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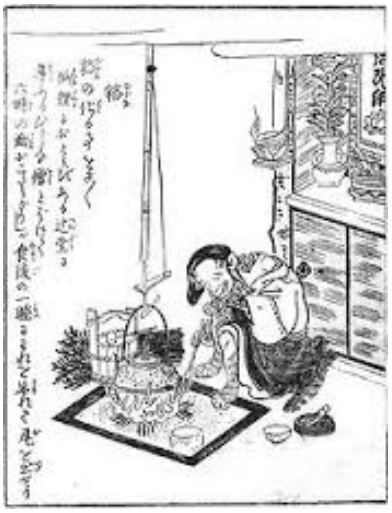
[99] Harada, 2.

[100]Harada, 6.

[101] Foster, “Haunting Modernity”, 7.



The transformation of *mujina* is not inferior to *kitsune* or *tanuki.* At this point, the elderly *mujina* transformed himself into a monk and performed his 6 o'clock duty but after eating breakfast, he unconsciously showed his tail.[102]

For the *tanuki* as a *mujina,* Sekien suggests that it is possible for yōkai to accidentally have incomplete transformations. Ortabasi suggests that this depiction is "oddly voyeuristic and vaguely unsettling," commenting that while those looking at the painting can see through the *yōkai*'s deception, the people actually in the painting cannot.[103] Nonetheless, it lends credence to the belief that the *tanuki* in general is able to transform for its own purposes and not necessarily for the purpose of hurting humans.

Despite the varying conceptions of a *tanuki's* behavior and personality, it is actually a great symbol of fertility and success in Japan. The most common perception of the *tanuki* is that it can be a very good friend to people, and, "on the streets of a modern city, the *tanuki* radiates a sense of good natured camaraderie

[102] Sekien, *Mujina.*

[103] Ortabasi, 258-259.

and traditional welcome."[104] Foster argues that the *tanuki* is in fact a significant symbol of prosperity, especially in the business sector. Often, in front of restaurants and shops, there is a statue of a *tanuki* in order to promote and bring forth as much good fortune as possible. The reason for this is that many Japanese people characterize the *tanuki* with huge scrotums, which in turn signify fertility.[105] Therefore, it is fair to conclude that the *tanuki* provides its own meaning of explanation of the the forces that exist on Earth. As a symbol, it promotes a positive perspective for contemporary Japanese society and culture.

***Yōkai* in Japanese Language**

Despite what the various myths and legends say about the actions of the *kitsune*, the concept of the fox itself as a *yōkai* plays an especially important role in the Japanese language itself. For example, 狐や (*kitsuneya*) is a term used to describe an arrow that clearly misses the object as it is shot through the air.[106] Similarly, 狐の嫁入り (*kitsune no home iri*) describes a weather that is half-sunshine and half-rain, otherwise known as "fox weather."[107] The indecisive weather, can be testament to the fox's tendency for deception and thus the term is consistent with its mythology.

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[104] Foster, 2012, 7.

[105] Foster, 2012, 7.

[106] "Fox Possession in Japan," 224.

[107] "Fox Possession in Japan," 224.

The same applies for the *tsukumogami*, and the beliefs about possession in Japan. There is an expression that many Japanese people use termed, *mottainai* 勿体無い. It is most commonly defined as, "What a waste!" or "Do not be wasteful!"[108] and many Japanese people use it in everyday conversation. As Japanese people came to believe that neglecting items that are still usable would cause ill-natured *yōkai* to appear, this term was often used to express attitudes to those who lost interest in those items. Yuko Kawanishi is famous for her efforts to save energy and for using *mottainai* as the slogan for her projects. Her theory behind the expression explains, "The whole idea that we are part of the nature, and should be in a very harmonious relationship with nature is very much a deep part of Japanese psychology. [sic]"[109] She points out that the expression explains a lot about Japanese attitudes toward wasting items that are still usable. While this expression did not originate with the idea of *tsukumogami, mottainai* would explain the reasons for belief in these supernatural items.

The distinctions show us that Japan's mythology of the *kitsune* and the lore of the *tsukumogami* are part of Japan's identity. Their integrations of the mythology into their language demonstrates that *yōkai* are a means of explaining the way things work in the world, and are not simply mythical beasts that are fictional.

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[108] Kestenbaum.

[109] Kestenbaum.

Usagi Yojimbo: *Yōkai* in Popular Culture

Similar to Stan Sakai's *Grasscutter, Usagi Yojimbo: Yōkai* is loyal to the widespread opinions of *Yokai* in Japan. In this particular comic, Usagi Yojimbo gets lost in a forest during the night, only to run into a fire fox. The fire fox temporarily dazes Usagi Yojimbo who then blindly wanders deeper into the forest. Then, he encounters a crying woman, who tells Usagi Yojimbo that a "wily fox lured [her] out [there]."[110] What unfolds afterward is Usagi Yojimbo's experience with the "Night Parade of Demons". Usagi Yojimbo's encounter with the *kitsune* is consistent with the mythology discussed earlier as the fox both exhibits power of fire and deception. Beyond the fox however, Sakai admits in a later interview that there were many reasons for writing a new adventure about *yōkai*. Sakai admits to taking "a lot of liberties….and some of the creatures are made up."[111] His reasoning for creating his own conceptions of *yōkai* were numerous, but especially because he "loves drawing monsters and this time [he] was able to let [his] imagination go wild."[112] An interesting note about this comment is that Sakai was interested in testing his imagination by designing his own *yōkai*. This confirms the concept of *yōkai* is constantly changing, even in popular culture. As a thing that has perpetually transformed since its creation, many authors and artists have taken their own liberties in describing any *yōkai* that comes into their

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[110] Sakai, 2009, 7.

[111] Sakai, 2009, 60.

[112] Sakai, 2009, 60.

imagination. What are consistent though, are the incredibly well-known *kitsune* and *tanuki* and that traits that are most commonly attributed to them throughout Japanese folklore.

Concluding Thoughts on Japanese Mythology and Culture

If one continues to dig deeper into the various symbols that exist in Japan's mythology, they will see that this chapter does not even scratch the surface of how mythology and folklore impact Japan's traditions. There are hundreds of *yōkai* that were not covered in this chapter that equally participate in Japan's various traditions today. As for the *Kusanagi Sword*, it is only one of Japan's three imperial regalia, all of which have the same richness in history that the sword brings to the table. What this all means is the idea that Japan has not forgotten its roots and foundations and is constantly adapting its ancient literature to remain relevant to society today. It appears in manga, anime, and everyday life and allows Japan to maintain its identity as a country and culture.

CONCLUSION

Komatsu Katsuhiko, a Japanese scholar, once wrote, "'The gods do not always act in the interest of humans, and occasionally they bring bad fortune."[113] As these three chapters have demonstrated, gods or supernatural beings often interfere in human affairs, whether they have their own agenda or whether they act according to the standards they set for society to fulfill. In the *Iliad,* honor is one of the most important factors for a god in deciding whether to help humans. If humans have acquired honor by their own means or because of filial relations, the Olympians frequently decided to help humans beings. With Lucan, the absence of divine intervention demonstrated the changing attitudes toward the necessity and the sustainability of belief in the gods. For Japan, the myth of the *Kusanagi Sword* was purposely written to explain the legitimacy of "power" in Japan's imperial court. From a more contemporary perspective, certain *yōkai* enter the human world with their own agenda. From all of this, the question arises: what does this mean for the cultures and traditions of the world's civilizations? Because Japan and the ancient Western World exist in completely different eras, it might be tough to accurately compare the views and traditions that stem from their mythology and folklore. Despite this difficulty, it is feasible to compare the *impact* mythology has on culture in general.

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[113] Lillehoj, 24.

For ancient Japan and ancient Greece, it is easy to understand how mythology can strongly impact the foundations of a culture's values and traditions. The *Iliad*'s emphasis on *honor* explains what an acceptable goal in life was for the ancient Greeks. Those who have earned glory either through lineage, participation in warfare, or have received other distinctions that other Olympians or humans have bestowed upon them, decidedly have better fates. On the other hand, those, such as Ares' son, who do not have honor will not be rewarded. The ancient Greeks conducted themselves in real life, outside of epic stories, longing for statuses more worthy and respected than those of political office. Ancient Japan provides similar roots for the foundations of its culture through the *Kusanagi no Tsurugi*. While the sword is an important part of the Japanese lore *and* history, it is already possible that the true myth was slightly altered in an effort to explain the transition of power in Japan from gods to humans. Before humans were in true power, gods like *Susanoo* traversed the land with their own agenda. The sword, however, reached human hands according to mythology provided in the *Kojiki*, which was crucial in creating a political structure for Japan as a nation. Whoever was in possession of the sword was worthy of being emperor and ruling Japan through the imperial court. This idea still exists in Japan today as a way of *explaining* why Japan developed as a nation. The sword became a symbol for structure and tradition despite mythology being fiction.

These ideas demonstrate that while these stories are not real, they still hold a lot of value for the civilization. They provide legitimacy and understanding for

the way a country/civilization was formed, whether or not these beliefs are sustainable for the general public. For example, the ceremonies held for the emperor with the *Kusanagi Sword* represent a key sign that Japan strongly values its mythology, even considering it history. For ancient Greece, many epics following the *Iliad* such as Vergil's *Aeneid* set the tone for epic as a genre and as a way of explaining the past. This is what allows mythology to preserve as a critical factor of a culture and what allows it to remain important in people's lives.

For changing attitudes toward mythology in society, there is no need to look further than Lucan's *Bellum Civile.* As discussed earlier, Lucan used his historical epic to describe not only the Civil War in Rome, but the Roman people's state of mind. The ancient Greeks had already established a basic belief in the Olympians as part of their religion and the Romans adapted and incorporated these ideas into their own religion. They conceived of the Olympians as having a power of greater purpose in deciding fate and the world's machinations. This would not have been possible without the stories that the *Iliad* tells us about the gods and the Romans may not have had a solid idea of what the higher powers deemed acceptable.

For the present day, these ideas are remain prevalent in countries like Japan. While today, no one really believes in actual *yōkai* roaming the earth in one night or the tricks of a *tanuki* or *kitsune*, their existence in folklore provides roots for many different superstitions. Because restaurants place *tanuki* statues in front of their property, there is evidence that Japanese people believe in the good fortune

that supernatural creatures can bring. The incorporation of *yōkai* into their daily lives indicates their commitment to folklore as a cornerstone of their culture and tradition. These monsters add to Japan's identity, even if they are fictional and only exist in myth and legend.

It is in this context that divine intervention in the human world in folklore and mythology takes on a far greater purpose than exploring the concept of morality. Although many people may believe that instances of supernatural beings helping humans is a sign of morality, it seems that the message is far more than that. With regards to the ancient Western World and Japan as a country today, the identity of the people as a whole has been formed from the supposed actions of the gods that rule over them. This belief resonates today throughout various parts of Japan and will continue to do so as long as people remember their country's roots and foundation.

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