

# SYNTHESIS

Synthesis

ISSN: 0328-1205

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Universidad Nacional de La Plata  
Argentina

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Hesiod and the didactic double

Synthesis, núm. 11, 2004, p. 0

Universidad Nacional de La Plata

La Plata, Argentina

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## HESIOD AND THE DIDACTIC DOUBLE

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### RESUMEN

Un rasgo inusual de la estrategia didáctica de Hesíodo en *Trabajos y Días* es la inclusión de su hermano Perses, como destinatario. Si existe o no una base histórica para la disputa financiera entre hermanos, tal como aparece representada en el poema, resulta menos interesante que la posición que tal situación (posiblemente ficcional) transmite. Por la figura del consejero, Hesíodo sostiene, naturalmente, una actitud diferente hacia un hermano, que la que quisiera si su aconsejado fuera un hijo, un futuro rey, o un estudiante—roles que son más típicos en las tradiciones didácticas de la literatura universal. Este artículo explora las tensiones, resonancias míticas y ambigüedades inherentes a la elección de la figura del hermano como beneficiario del consejo y concluye que esta particular configuración didáctica provee una más abierta-conclusiva y aceptable entrada a través de la cual cualquier audiencia puede interactuar con la tradición de sabiduría atesorada en el verso hesiódico.

### ABSTRACT

An unusual feature of Hesiod's didactic strategy in the *Works and Days* is the inclusion of his brother, Perses, as addressee. Whether or not there is an historical basis for the financial dispute between the brothers as represented in the poem is of less interest than the stance that such a (possibly fictional) situation entails. For the advisor-figure, Hesiod, naturally maintains a different attitude toward a brother than he would if his advisee were a son, a future king, or a student---all of which roles are more typical in the didactic traditions attested in world literature. This paper goes on to explore the tensions, mythic resonances, and ambiguities inherent in the choice of the brother-figure as recipient of advice, and concludes that this particular didactic configuration provides a more open-ended and acceptable entry through which any audience can interact with the wisdom traditions enshrined in Hesiodic verse.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Hesíodo, Poesía didáctica, *Trabajos y Días*.

KEY WORDS: Hesiod, Didactic Poetry, *Work and Days*.

*Tu le connais, lecteur, ce monstre délicat,  
Hypocrite lecteur--mon semblable--mon frère--*

That didactic poetry is as complex as other literary forms has become an acceptable proposition. Now it is time to explain how this complexity operates, how the pragmatics of the form entwine with the intricacies of cultural contexts, what this quintessentially "engaged" poetry aims at, how genre-mixing and tonal shifts can create as highly textured a surface as those of epic, dramatic, or lyric poetry. The *Works and Days* of Hesiod, the crystallization of an ancient Greek "advice" tradition, should give pause to those who like their Greek literature to evolve nicely out of the primitive.<sup>1</sup> Already at the head of the stream of didactic in European literature, Hesiodic poetry displays the high-style of epic, the stylized first-person of lyric, and--the focus of this paper--a dramatic structure enacted as a two-way conversation of which we are privileged to hear just half, but meant to know the rest.<sup>2</sup> Why not read it with at least the same attention one gives Baudelaire?<sup>3</sup>

Of course, the Eurocentric viewpoint is limiting. Long before Hesiod, didactic fictions figured in the verbal art of Sumerians, Akkadians, Egyptians.<sup>4</sup> As has been shown in the case of Hesiod's theogonic poetry, this flourishing Near Eastern art influenced Greek. There is, however, little point in tracing parallels unless they can tell us something further about the idiosyncratic inscapes of the works themselves. I shall make use of some parallels to highlight such differences further on. But to catch the distinctive quality of Greek didactic poetry we must first step back into the extra-literary, and step aside, for a

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<sup>1</sup> Primitivist assumptions about Hesiod's inability to be strictly logical underly Havelock (1966) and West, "Is the *Works and Days* an Oral Poem?" in Brillante (ed.) et al. (1981: 65ff). I hesitate to use the term "didactic" for several reasons: the other surviving poems closest to Hesiod are clearly more interested in giving moral and political advice rather than technical instruction (Theognis, Solon, Tyrtaeus); even closer are passages within Homeric "epic" (another problem term) in which *paraenesis* is represented. In short, we are dealing with a genre of discourse rather than an identifiable literary type: on this see Martin (1984: 29-48).

<sup>2</sup> For a careful analysis of the structural features of passages involving the addressee, see Schmidt (1986), who is, however, not interested in the literary pragmatics of the problem. For fuller comparison to lyric, see Arrighetti (1975: 5-36).

This is not the place to rehearse all the arguments in favor of Hesiod, his brother, and their proceedings as fictional constructs, on which see esp. Nagy "Hesiod and the Poetics of Pan-Hellenism," in *Greek Mythology and Poetics* --hereafter *GMP*. (1990: 36-82 ). Suffice it to say that whether or not the poem has an historical basis, while fascinating in itself, has no relevance for interpretation. All we have is the text.

<sup>3</sup> Perhaps we do not think of Baudelaire as "didactic"; yet the poem he chooses to introduce *Les Fleurs du Mal* is a catalogue, in excellent Cynic diatribe style, of *la ménagerie infâme de nos vices*.

<sup>4</sup> See, e.g. Longman (1991) and the survey of Near Eastern material in West, edit. *Hesiod: Works and Days* (1978: 3-15), hereafter "West".

comparative perspective.<sup>5</sup> From this angle, the complexity of didactic finds its closest analogue in the poetics of myth. Limited only by the previous experience of real audiences and the capability of performers, both didactic and myth make use of fictive audiences and tellers to explore the ethical alongside the metaphysical and cosmological, while locating all three in the ordinary. Perhaps this is not accidental; just as there appear to be no societies without some form of socially embedded narratives that we can identify, at some level, as stories of belief, none seems to lack didactic traditions. Often the two combine. Sometimes the didactic moment emerges in a fleeting line within a mythic poem:

The hummingbird is good and big.  
 So that's the way it is;  
 There were workers in hot country.  
 They were burning bean pods.  
 The fire could be seen well, it was so tall.  
 The hummingbird came,  
 It came out  
 It came flying in the sky.  
 Well, it saw the fire;  
 Its eyes were snuffed out by the smoke.  
 It came down  
 It came down  
 It came down, so that they saw it was big  
 Don't you believe that it is little, it is big.

This portion of a simple-sounding poem from Zinacantan (a *municipio* in the state of Chiapas, Mexico) opens with description: the hummingbird is good and big. This is "the way it is", a fact about the cosmos--albeit counterintuitive, we might think, to anyone who has seen hummingbirds. Following the fact, which is put in "constative" form comes a miniature story of the unspecified past that functions at the same time as an argument.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup>I am encouraged in taking this comparative approach since we have no evidence for an explicit native poetics for "didactic": see Schuler and Fitch (1983:1-43).

<sup>6</sup> I choose these speech-act terms in an attempt to bring more specificity to stylistic analysis. For further illustration, see Martin (1989); for an extension into social history, see Ober (1989). A minimal typology of

How do we know the bird's size? Once upon a time "they saw it was big." And then a "directive", the expected form of didactic utterance: "Don't you believe that it is little..." Belief, proof, teaching--all are so artfully blended that it is impossible to pin down the poem with a genre label.

One thing Mesoamerican anthropologists can relate about this composition is its symbiotic relation with myth.<sup>7</sup> The hummingbird is associated with the god Huitzilopochtli, who is in turn an image of the sun during spring and summer. Furthermore, hummingbirds are known for their fierce territoriality and thus in local belief represent warriors: a Zinacantan man is advised to eat the heart of the bird before fighting. But the sun god is also a warrior, whose iridescence--like the bird's coloring--changes under different conditions. And the hummingbird is "hot"; the gift of a dead bird, tied with green ribbon, can warm your lover's heart. And so on. The deeper one pursues this associative logic beneath the Zinacantan poem, the less surprising does it seem that the hummingbird is so emphatically "big." As Eva Hunt demonstrates in her monographic explication of this little composition, the line in the poem represents the enduring worldview of a prehispanic ritual and agricultural calendar that celebrates and observes the waxing of the sun/god/bird during a specific time of year.

How does this ethnographic perspective help us read Hesiod? Most importantly, it allows one to broaden the area of analysis: not just the overtly "directive" but the "constative" descriptive and narrative portions of poems like the *Works and Days*, and *Theogony* can be examined as didactic, because all the segments of these poems collaborate in the transmission of cultural norms: teaching is more than reeling off imperatives. We can go further: didactic becomes compelling precisely through its affiliation with an underlying contemporary narrative. If the narrative becomes part of the directive message of the poem, as happens with the *Works and Days*, then it has the same status as myth within its poem. It is, in effect, myth in the making, a conscious display of the themes and motifs one finds in stories about *illud tempus*, but crafted into the frame of the *hic et nunc*. These are not, in other words, narratives skewed in some way by their time difference, but beautifully complementary tellings of the same basic story, featuring variations in

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speech-acts can provide an anchor and organizing principle when exploring art-forms which make the variation of surface expression into an aesthetic ideal.

<sup>7</sup>See Hunt (1977: 52-111). The full text of the poem is pp.29-30.

addressee and deixis such as one can notice between epic and lyric expressions of the same story.<sup>8</sup>

It is the foundation narrative--or, in these terms, "myth"-- of the *Works and Days* which will be my focus: namely, the story, only partially explicit, of the poet's ongoing relationship with his brother Perses, the poem's addressee. Though often noticed, the unusual nature of this story remains unexplained. It is uniquely Hesiodic: when compared with other wisdom texts from traditional cultures the *Works and Days* frame narrative stands out because it does not represent the message of the poetry in the form of instructions by a father to a son, king to prince, or tutor to pupil.<sup>9</sup> The poem never envisions such asymmetrical, generational transmission. Jenny Strauss Clay approaches this interpretive question but leaves it open in a footnote to her recent study of the poem: "The more equal fraternal relationship between speaker and addressee (we do not even know whether Hesiod was older than Perses) may be significant: what is the basis for Hesiod's authority to instruct his brother?"<sup>10</sup> My answer, in brief, will be that the "myth" of Perses *is* the message. Vastly richer than the bumper-sticker message ("Question Authority"--to which one must instantly reply "Says who?"), the poem nevertheless empowers in the same way. By the conclusion of his performance, the speaker of the poem has not only constructed his authority as equal to that of Zeus, but also ironized it nearly out of existence. Consequently, the addressee can more realistically have the chance of becoming like his advisor, and does not have to wait for years to test his wisdom (the long-range assumption of the generational model). The poem's lyric technique, its dialogic format, require change and assent in the here-and-now.

The choice of "brother" to stand for the Other of the didactic addressee is thus far from arbitrary. Indeed, it would appear in the poem's terms to be inevitable; or, at least, the poet has structured this composition in such a way that the cosmos itself emerges as ineluctably double (with consequent dilemmas). After exploring this theme of doubles as

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<sup>8</sup>For the fundamental distinction between *mythopoia* (reshaping of received myths) and *mythoplasia* (invention of new poetic myth) I am indebted to the precise and illuminating work of Anastasia-Erasmia Peponi, particularly her study of Sappho 16 LP, "Lirikes tropes tis epikis Elenis," *EUXHN ODUSSEI* (1995: 315-328). On the lyric background of the *Works and Days*, see Martin (1992: 11-33).

<sup>9</sup> See West p.34.

<sup>10</sup> Clay, "The Education of Perses: From 'Mega Nepios' to 'Dion Genos' and Back, in Schiesaro, Mitsis, Clay (edit.) (1993: 23-33), =MD 31. Stein (=ScriptOralia 17 1990) 26 notes the oddity of the brother figure but takes it as confirmation that Hesiod really had a brother; it is not a persona.

it shapes the preliminary myths of the poem and affects some later portions, I shall address the dramatic function of the merging of pragmatic frame (an argument between brothers) with the poem's narratives about twosomes. Finally, I shall take up a few extra-dramatic questions about the further affiliations of Hesiodic verse, in order to speculate on Hesiod's *real* brothers.

### Trio for doubles

The poem proper begins with what sounds like a correction (11-12):

ῥῥῥ ῥῥῥ ῥῥῥῥῥ ῥῥῥ. ῥῥῥῥῥ ῥῥῥῥ. ῥῥῥ  
ῥῥῥῥῥῥ

So, there is not just a single race of Strifes: there are two on earth.

If we cared neither for voice nor subtlety, it would be enough to read this as a footnote to the *Theogony*, or a clumsy way of expressing what the poet *really* wanted to say.<sup>11</sup> More to the point is the tone created in the text at hand by the joining of particle and imperfect tense, a usage which Denniston describes as “denoting that something which has been, and still is, has only just been realized.”<sup>12</sup> This is, first of all, a conversation, and one that is on-going, with an edge to it. Homeric examples of the speech strategy occur, significantly, at tense moments when one speaker wants to vent his anger: Achilles replies to Odysseus (9.316) “So, there is no gratitude for fighting always;” Achilles in a troubled reply to the “great fool” Patroclus (*mega nēpios* 16.46 and *meg’ okhthēsas* 16.48) bitterly recalls Agamemnon’s theft but concedes “so, it’s not possible to be angry forever (16.60);” Glaucus berates Hector (17.141 *khalepōi ênipape muthōi*) “so, you fall far short of battle-power” (17.142). Thus Hesiod (as I shall call the speaker of the *Works and Days*) begins by bristling. “So (contrary to what I, or you, used to think) there is *not* just a single *genos* of Eris.” The undertone here: someone has made me realize differently and I do not like it. Hesiod’s response--I shall not call it “teaching”-- is to complicate: things are not as simple as they might have seemed. In fact, they are relentlessly duple, as the text proceeds to illustrate, and does so not just when it comes to Strife, but in a mythic sequence that is triple.

<sup>11</sup> West p. 142 says Hesiod had the idea of saying “There is such a goddess as Emulation” but then realized this was not the same as the Eris mentioned in *Theog.* 225ff, and so thinks aloud while correcting himself.

<sup>12</sup>Denniston, *The Greek Particles*,(1950<sup>2</sup>: 36).





good thing, for potters, craftsmen, beggars-- and poets (24-26). Given the last-named example of beneficial agonistics, an audience cannot help but identify Hesiod with good Eris. In this light it is significant that “good” Eris is rooted in the land and better (~~~~~) for mortals (19), characteristics that mark the speaker’s discourse (about land management *passim*, and what is better, ~~~~~ lines 314, 320, 776 e.g.). In sum, the talk of Eris which opens the poem is a rhetorically artful “indirect directive” that works by matching the feuding brothers of the moment with their mythic and theogonic template (given a change of gender). The implicit message is also good therapeutic discourse: these disputes have *always* happened in families. This strategy is part of Hesiod’s effective *pre*-didactic rhetoric, aimed at solving a would-be adviser’s first problem: getting the hearer to listen.<sup>16</sup>

Let us move now to the second and third set of doubles, which are embedded in the story of Pandora. Like the story of the dual Eris, this myth takes us back to the early constitution of the world. Humans labor to get a living because Prometheus once tricked Zeus (lines 42-48). But their ultimate punishment, in the form of pains, ills, and disease from Pandora’s jar, only spread through the world because Epimetheus failed to heed Prometheus’ warning about accepting a gift from Zeus (83-89). The audience is not told that Epimetheus is the brother of Prometheus. Then again, at this point we have not heard in so many words that Perses is Hesiod’s brother. The parallel omissions of this known detail of sibship function to draw the pairs closer in the composition. Again, the myth as presented does more than give us background for Hesiod’s gnomic utterances; it has a rhetorical function, too. If the Eris explanation worked to focus Perses’ attention on the present *neikos*, the tale of Prometheus takes the next step, warning of catastrophe if a brother’s word is not taken. This connection to the frame-narrative can explain why the role of Epimetheus is incorporated prominently in the telling of the Pandora story within the *Works and Days*, while in the *Theogony* it is restricted to an allusion within a genealogy (*Theog.* 511-512), although the creation of Pandora is told also in that poem (570-590).

Epimetheus thus enjoys a reputation as much as his brother, albeit the reverse. Neither is

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<sup>16</sup> Another double lurks here, inasmuch as this appeal to Perses is represented as the result of an apparently failed intervention by the “kings” whom Perses allegedly bribed by skimming something in addition to his take of an original division (lines 37-39). The legal status of the earlier proceeding is of less interest than its rhetorical role in this text, as a foil to focus attention on the absolute necessity for listening *now*.

found blameworthy. The rough equality between them characterizes the third set of doubles as well, Zeus and Prometheus. It is legitimate to fill out the myth with details from the *Theogony* as we can assume an audience for this poetry would draw on a similar knowledge of tradition. In this light, the further resemblances to the pairing of Perses and Hesiod become clearer. The original deception by Prometheus occurs at a division (*Theog.*537 *dassamenos*); the *Works and Days* dispute originates the same way (line 37 *edassameth*).<sup>17</sup> The elaborate competition carried out with gift and deceptive counter-gift finds a parallel in the "real" story's

detail about Perses' bribe, another flawed exchange (*WD* 38-39).<sup>18</sup> It would seem, then, that the passage presents a two-sided trickster: smarter than his brother (like Hesiod) but conniving to win (like Perses). Most important, however, is the broader picture of Zeus and Prometheus as co-equal creators, for this gives a glimpse of hierarchy subverted, then solidified, in mythic time. I stress their creating role because there is some reason to assume that yet another mythic detail of the Prometheus story, his shaping of mankind out of clay, underlies the text in lines 47-104. Specifically, the next segment of the text, the Myth of the Ages, begins "If you want, I shall sum up *the other* story" (106). In epic usage the adjective *heteros* can regularly have the full etymological meaning "the other of two," rather than simply "another," whether or not the demonstrative is present (cf. *Il.*4.502; 5.258). In this poem *heteros* (line 21) without article clearly refers to one other in the context of pairs (see 23, 25-26). If this strong reading of *heteros* is followed, the emphasis of the Myth of Ages on the divine creation of each race becomes understandable: the point is not that the Gold, Silver and other races came to be but that Zeus or other gods produced them: the first two are made by immortals (110) (cf. 127), the second two specifically by Zeus (143,158; perhaps also the last: 173d.) Stressing this feature of the Ages would then allow us to make better sense of line 108, as we can now see that the story is meant to illustrate "how gods and mortals are born from the same source". The usual force of the adverb is considerably watered down if we read with West "they started

<sup>17</sup> On the deeply traditional theme of strife over a division, see Nagy, *The Best of the Achaeans* (1979:127-39, 213-21, 314-16), hereafter *BA*.

<sup>18</sup> Note *Theog.* 548, Prometheus' address to Zeus as *kudiste megiste* and *WD* 38, Perses *kudainôn Basiléas*.

on the same terms".<sup>19</sup> In this *heteros logos*, gods produce people; in the Prometheus story, the son of a Titan makes them as his private amusement. Although the latter story is nowhere on the surface here, the frequent reference to the involvement of humans in the myth (49, 51, 56, 82, 88, 90, 100) makes it sound as if they were the stakes being contested. Furthermore, Zeus' design of Pandora from clay (60-61) would be most appropriate if she is meant to compete and consort with Promethean products of the same stuff. To sum up: this juxtaposition of stories, far from being random, can be read as a diptych about alternative models of creation. Nothing less than the Olympian order is brought into question thereby: whereas the Promethean creation is spoiled by a brother's one failure of foresight, the attempts by Olympians multiply, degenerate and end in entropy. If these two stories are united in an overall tale of competition between creator-craftsmen, we have yet another rendition attesting to the pervasiveness of strife.<sup>20</sup> But we have moved one further step in the implicit argument of the composition: the eventual loser, Prometheus-- like Perses, an addressee in this poem (lines 54-58) but never a speaker--is nevertheless given his due; so shall Perses, it is suggested. We are not far from the *Prometheus Bound* and its somewhat blunter equal-time anti-Olympian script: Question Authority.

### **Metals, Birds, and Maidens**

G. B. Conte, whose notion of the addressee as *prefigurazione di lettore* has influenced recent readings of Hesiod among other ancient poets, also works with the idea that didactic as a genre is "open", "un contenitore aperto a svariate possibilità".<sup>21</sup> Thus far, I have tried to show that the bewildering variety of material in the early portion of the *Works and Days* is united by the prominence given in each "myth" to differentiations of power between apparent equals--brothers, Strifes, creators. An inherent tension exists between, on one hand, the intentional surface variety, which gives an authentic sound of "talk" to this poetic monologue and, on the other, the practical message, constant in the *Works and Days*, that one should practice *dikê*. But the varied expressions are more than

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<sup>19</sup> West p. 178 notes that the word is used properly of blood-relationship; he has no parallels for the weaker meaning.

<sup>20</sup> Typological analogues for such competitive creation can be found in Native American Coyote tales: see "In the beginning of the world" in Shipley (edit. and trans) (1991: 18-43).

<sup>21</sup> Conte (1991). For the influence of these notions, see *Mega Nepios* (above, n.10 ) passim.

just an interesting cover for the unchanging precept. The “myths” proceed in fugue form, developing the theme while revealing new aspects of it. The addressee, this reader in the text, is educated by virtue of the effort he must make to follow the theme in its increasingly ornate and allusive mythopoeic forms. Most essential, the “doubles” that we have traced thus far serve to reinforce the instruction all along: this is not simply authoritative truth handed down, as in the generational transmission of wisdom; it is wisdom that invites debate, an “open” format that is stylized, in the *Works and Days*, as a continuing *neikos*.

In the open-ended nature of the composition’s form we can find a perfect match for the thematic concern with *dikê* that becomes so prominent in the Myth of the Ages. For dealing fairly, practicing justice, is as Hesiod sees it, a habit, not an acquisition. Humans like Perses are always poised between *hubris* and *dikê*; the choice is open. By the same token, the Iron Age in which we live is, in fact, a future state, as the tenses of lines 177-196 emphasize repeatedly. The time-frame and events of this mythic passage make a close fit with the earlier myths of Strife and Pandora. While the good Eris draws persons together in competitive effort, a feature iconically represented by the syntax at lines 25-26--

--unbridled hubris in the Iron Age will split them apart as a negative example of the same figure highlights at 182-184:

The implication of the narrator’s choice of tense must be that we can escape the nightmare future by preferring *dikê* in the present.<sup>22</sup> As we saw in the positioning of the *aoidos* --i.e. the speaker--in the Eris passage (26), here the role of brother--i.e. addressee--is saved for the key last mention. The future scenario is in one other way a rewrite of the Pandora myth’s message: if a brother does right, this time, all might go right. If *dikê* is not done, however, the beneficial women who inhabit earth now, *Aidôs* and *Nemesis*, clothed

<sup>22</sup> Vernant (1965) repr. in *Petite collection maspero* vol. 1 (1981: 13-41).

in white, will then return to the gods, a precise reversal of the original descent from Olympus of the tricked-out, harmful female, Pandora.

As Vernant showed in his explication of the Myth of the Ages, the five-part temporal progression in the story represents a simpler collocation of *dikê* vs. *hubris*, that in turn is relevant to the larger thematic structure of the poem.<sup>23</sup> In this way, the seemingly digressive myth becomes completely relevant to the plea made to Perses. But we might go further, as we trace the appearances of didactic doubles, to consider the relevance of particular details within the first contrasting pair, the Gold and Silver Ages. Clay suggests that Perses may be meant to see himself mirrored in the *mega nêpios* of the Silver race (131).<sup>24</sup> Certainly, the use of the phrase to address him elsewhere (e.g. line 633) points to this association. If we consider the context, the scene can also be read as a negative exemplum in relation to the outer frame of the *Works and Days*, a case of the implied failure of didactic. Not only do the Silver people fail to mature properly, staying home with mother for a century. When grown, they fail to sacrifice (135-36: *athanatous therapeuein*; *erdein*.) Yet this is exactly what defines the human condition, as we learn from the *Theogony*; moreover, the instruction to sacrifice was apparently the primary lesson presented by a didactic composition attributed to Hesiod. The opening lines of this poem, the *Kheirônios Hypothêkai*, as preserved in the scholia to Pindar, tell the addressee (perhaps Achilles) “first, when you reach home, sacrifice (*erdein*) fine offerings to the immortal gods” (fr. 283.2-3 MW). In other words, an audience familiar with such traditional instructional verse (similar to verses in the *Works and Days* itself: cf. 336) would see in the behavior of the hubristic Silver race a deviation from the model of properly matured heroic youth. If Perses is like the Silver men, it is because he is always in danger of ignoring instruction. The symmetry which we noted between the Strifes and the brothers is here repeated inasmuch as the poet himself has, by contrast, something in common with the Golden Age: both are connected with agricultural abundance, Hesiod through his knowledge of farm lore, the Golden Age by its characteristic automatic profusion (lines 116-117).

We have seen that Perses as brother duplicates the poet’s figure more closely than could an addressee from a younger generation. With the myth of the hawk and nightingale, we

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Clay (above, n.10) 27



he can be associated with it, as we shall see shortly. This interpretation goes counter to that of West, who says Hesiod fails to make effective rhetorical use of the story. It worries West that the fault of the hawk is not expressed directly: “The hawk’s *hubris* matches the king’s without putting it in a ridiculous light or showing it to be ill-advised”.

<sup>26</sup> But just as the Zinacantecan poem runs counter to our culture’s ideas about hummingbirds, the Hesiodic *ainos* demands more than European “common-sense” analysis. Aerodynamically, nightingales are no match for hawks; mythically, they can best them every time, though only a Greek audience, attuned to the mythopoeic convention, might know this. In other words, we do not need to be told that the nightingale is the good bird, or will win this match. On the level of poetic diction, we have a good example of how local knowledge influences interpretation. West notes *ad loc.* that the adjective *poikilodeiron*, “dapple-necked”, is inappropriate for the bird in question, and best suits the thrush. Good ornithology, but it ignores the far-reaching mythopoeic associations of *poikilos* in Greek. Chief among these is the connection between the “variegation” represented by *poikilos* and the realms of craft and song.<sup>27</sup> In view of the rich background of themes to which the word points, we know that the bird’s craft consists in the ability to change its song progressively; its endurance is marked by the ability to sing continuously; and its craftiness emerges from the combination of strength and changefulness. This is, in short, an Odyssean bird; it is not accidental that the epic hero is characterized as *poikilomêtês*, “with variegated cunning.”

Two more reasons that an audience would read this story as a victory of nightingale over hawk, even though this is never stated, become clear from the text. First, we can read this tale as being about communication. Here it is worthwhile noting a purely linguistic point, the force of *su d’* at line 213. This rare emphatic use makes the personal pronoun in the nominative a contrastive. What the hawk did not do is listen. *You*, Perses, should. The hawk does not understand because he and his victim speak different ways: she mourns pitifully (*eleon... mureto* 205-6) which he misinterprets as “you screeched” *lelêkas*.<sup>28</sup> In effect, the hawk cannot hear the nightingale; for the space of the story, the text uses the

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<sup>26</sup> West p.204.

<sup>27</sup> On the poetic themes associated with the nightingale and specifically with this adjective, see now the explication in Nagy (1996: 30-65).

<sup>28</sup> A sound better suited to hawks: West *ad loc.* cites *Il.*22.141

hawk as focalizer of the action, as we get his view. What he hears, the voice of the nightingale, is never enunciated and gets interpreted by him as something that we know it is not, because he cannot comprehend, knowing as he does only fear and not pity. His rational argument, masked as persuasion --“it’s madness to fight against the stronger”-- in fact is just as irrational as the nightingale’s lament. But lament in the realm of Greek poetry has the advantage of being a powerful shaper of individual reputation, and is thus placed in the mouths of the Muses themselves (e.g. *Od.* 24.60-62, Achilles’ funeral).

Second, as Puelma and others have pointed out, it matters that the bird is specifically called a singer (208), for this key word unites it with the poet performing the poem.<sup>29</sup> I would add that in the pragmatics of oral performance--the performance context which this poem at least mimics, whatever the circumstances of its composition-- the singer standing before an audience has unmistakable authority and power. He or she can curtail or expand performance, telling the story this way, now, whatever other versions an audience may have heard. The audience, for the duration of performance, is in the grip of the *aoidos*, as the descriptions of poetic performance in Homer tell us time and again. In purest form, song is overpowering desire, a Siren enchantment.<sup>30</sup> In sum, Hesiod *qua aoidos* does not need to make an overt assertion of his or the nightingale’s power: the hawk has already lost--no matter what the fate of the nightingale-- because the singer clearly survives in front of us, a sign that nightingales and what they say must be right. Ultimately, Hesiod’s refusal to make an explicit condemnation of the hawk’s *hubris* can be read as a magisterial dismissal of hawk and kings, a *damnatio*, from the standpoint of the more clever nightingale/singer.<sup>31</sup>

There is yet more to be found in the deployment of this artful *ainos* that can bring us closer to the distinctiveness of this poem. The detail just mentioned, that the hawk does not listen, is meant, as I said, to sway Perses. Behind this lies the threat of praise and blame, the traditional power of the poet: the *aoidos* will always be around to settle your reputation in the future, no matter what you do to him now. But the Hesiodic strategy is more subtle here, even as it depends on this authority to destroy the authorities. For

<sup>29</sup> Puelma (1972: 86-109); also, Nagy, *PH* 256 and *GMP* 66-67.

<sup>30</sup> This in turn is characterized in images suitable for bird-song: see, e.g. the iconographic tradition of bird-Sirens, on which see Neils, “Les Femmes Fatales: Skylla and the Sirens in Greek Art”, in Cohen, (edit.) (1995: 175-184).

<sup>31</sup> On this technique in Homeric exchanges, see Martin (above, n.6) 142-43.



Hesiod does not now say “listen to *me*” but “listen to *dike*”. It might seem like a sudden jolt to move from the bird’s lamenting voice in the *ainos* to some previously unheard and abstract *Dikê*, but the poem makes the metaphorical shift easier for us. *Dikê* is a victimized woman, as we begin to hear at lines 220 ff., and there is a “clamor” (~~~~~) when she is manhandled. The syntactical parallelism of 208/220 clarifies the bird/woman parallel:

~~~~~  
~~~~~

To summarize at this point: Hesiod has first used the *ainos* as a foil to separate one audience (Perses) from another (the kings) and encourage his primary addressee by means of the blame he attaches to the secondary group. Then, through the association of nightingale and *Dikê*, he turns his primary addressee into a listener with two functions. On one hand, the command “listen to Dike” means “pay attention to this composition”; as we have seen, the method of the poem has been to involve Perses in the message from the start, plunging him into a *neikos*. This equation of the poet’s talk with the voice of *Dikê* is made emphatic shortly after the description of the social and natural effects of *dikê* and *hubris* (lines 225-247). For we learn (lines 256-260) that *Dikê* is not only a woman but a *parthenos*, daughter of Zeus, who reports to him about human injustice. Furthermore, the verb used to describe her speech (~~~~~) is the same that characterizes the speech of the Muses themselves at *Theogony* 28 (~~~~~).<sup>32</sup> On the other hand, now “listen to *Dikê*” has an even more urgent sense, which we can paraphrase: “hear the cry of a woman (*Dikê*) being raped and do something about it.” How can Perses fail to respond? By doubling his role (poet/Dike) and that of Perses (listener/rescuer), the Hesiod empowers his, crediting him with the potential to become a heroic figure of just dealing, like the good king whose land flourishes. More than this, by imagining his addressee as the person who listens to Dike, Hesiod places him on a level with the king of the gods. For it is Zeus who ultimately hears out the complaints of his daughter. With this elevation, we come full circle to the proem, which I have delayed discussing

<sup>32</sup> Compare Hesiod’s intent in *WD* 10: ~~~~~~

until now. Again, a marked contrastive provides an entrance into the technique of doubling. Hesiod's hymnic praise of Zeus has concluded with the mention of the god's power to straighten what is crooked and wither up the arrogant. Then, in a shift to the imperative, this "constative" description becomes "directive" as Hesiod tells Zeus to fulfill the role he has just outlined:

~~~~~      ~~~~~      ~~~~~    ~.      ~~~~~    ~.      ~~~~~~ ~~~~~~  
~~~~~      ~.~ ~~~~~      ~~~~~~      ~~~~~~      ~~~~~~ ~~~~~~  
~~~~~ ~~~~~~

Heed, when you have seen and heard, by justice keep straight  
the ordinances,  
*You*, for your part. But *I* would like to tell Perses the truth."

If Perses, in the sequence that I have outlined, is gradually brought to the point where he can become like Zeus, it is only, at last, to become like his brother, who has already asserted from the start an authority on the level of the supreme arbiter.<sup>33</sup>

### **You, Too**

It is easier to be like a brother than like a father. One already is, genetically. Nothing should come closer, not even a *hetairos*, as Hesiod will say (*WD* 706-713):

~~~~~      ~~~~~~ ~~~~~      ~~~~~~      ~~~~~~  
.      ~.    ~.    ~.      ~~~~~~    ~.    ~.      ~~~~~~      ~~~~~~  
.      ~~~~~~      ~~~~~~      ~~~~~~      ~~~~~~    ~.    ~.    ~.    ~.  
.      ~.    ~.      ~~~~~~      ~~~~~~      ~~~~~~    ~.      ~.~      ~~~~~~  
.      ~~~~~~    ~~~~~~      ~~~~~~      ~~~~~~ ~~~~~~    ~.    ~.      ~.~  
.      ~~~~~~    ~.      ~~~~~~ ~~~~~~    ~~~~~~    ~.      ~~~~~~      ~~~~~~  
.      ~~~~~~

"We are no longer conscious of Perses as the recipient of this advice", notes West in his commentary (p.330). But why not? This brotherly wisdom, impersonally given, is an effective marker of the hard-won assent of the addressee to become a listener who can

<sup>33</sup> On the assertion of authority in this proem, see Nagy *PH* 256-58.

I have argued that the choice of the brother-figure enables the poet to approach as an equal and persuade his addressee in a way that the more familiar guise of tutor or father-figure prevents. We see the poet's persuasion as it succeeds within the poem because by line 298 it is obvious that he is able to move on to the specific precepts telling Perses *how* to work, instead of dwelling on the *need* to work rather than bribe kings or grab goods.<sup>34</sup> The break is signalled by a three-part coda that once more works as a pair of foils (lines 293-97):

Of the three characters--the man who thinks independently vs. one who obeys a good speaker vs. one who does neither--Perses can now be assumed to have chosen the middle role, encouraged by the ideal of the first and dissuaded by the last.

<sup>34</sup> Clay (above, n.10) 32-33 is less optimistic about the representation of a successful learning experience on the part of Perses.

“not a bit sophisticated when it comes to sailing and boats” (649-  
 ῥῥῥῥ ῥῥ ῥῥῥῥῥῥῥῥ) His only sea experience came  
 from crossing the 65-meter channel over to Euboea. One could interpret these as  
 testimonia to the power of inspiration, as Hesiod seems to indicate we should at 661-62:  
 despite his limited knowledge, the Muses’ teaching allows him to tell the mind of Zeus.  
 At the same time, there is some humor to the scenario of Perses being invited to learn  
 sailing from such a self-confessed landlubber. Whichever way we read these lines, their  
 effect depends on the *captatio* principle that has characterized the creation of personae all  
 along in this poem. If the adviser is to be trusted, it is because he, too, has been there, at  
 the low level of his advisee; starting from nothing, he can now tell all.

From a careful study of diction in this and related passages, Ralph Rosen has argued that  
 the sailing episode is nothing less than “an *ainigma* that compares the poetics of *Works  
 and Days* to the poetics of the Homeric epic”.<sup>35</sup>

In Rosen’s reading, the comparison situates the poetic medium of Hesiod at a level below  
 the Homeric, but the right level. Hesiod, in this version, acknowledges that epic poetry  
 can be dangerous, like spring sailing. It is better to be “seasonable” when launching onto  
 the poetic sea. Hesiod, as he represents his craft, has had some success (witness his  
 victory in the funeral games of Amphidamas) in his own small venture.

The strategy that I have been tracing--the self-deprecating, equalizing stance towards a  
 “brother”--may, however, help us read the metapoetic reference of the sailing passage in a  
 somewhat different manner. Note that Hesiod does not directly deprecate the contest  
 itself, only the size of his sea voyage in getting to the games, which is in explicit contrast  
 to the epic voyage of the Achaeans from Aulis (lines 651-53). Nor does he identify the  
 other contestants for the tripod that he brought back to Helicon. But another tradition,  
 which is attested in the *Contest of Homer and Hesiod*, makes it clear that the meeting at  
 Chalcis is a show-down between the exponents of epic and didactic.<sup>36</sup> We have seen  
 already, in the *ainos* of the hawk and nightingale, that certain facts do not require mention  
 in an attuned audience, and that refusal to mention someone, in this medium, can be a  
 powerful strategy for showing one’s superior power. In other words, we need not read

<sup>35</sup> Rosen (1990: 99-113), quote on p. 113; see also Nagy *GMP* 78-79.

<sup>36</sup> The composition is Hadrianic, but has an excellent claim to contain material from at least the 6th century  
 B.C.: see Richardson (1981: 1-10).

Hesiod's "autobiography" here as part of a humble concession that his poetry is second to the ambitious scope of epic. The *Certamen* shows us a performer who is every bit as good as Homer at extemporizing and capping lines. Interestingly, it is the content of Hesiod's song, rather than his versifying, that wins him the tripod, as the judge, King Paneides, decides to make the award to one who sang of peaceful agriculture rather than wars and slaughters (*Cert.* p.233 Allen). If this thematic division, war vs. peace, has any claim to antiquity (and the design of the shield of Achilles in *Iliad* 18 would suggest so), we are left with two related prospects. First, there is the possibility that the "myth" of Hesiod and his brother Perses, the structural and rhetorical principle for the first part of the *Works and Days*, may itself be a reflection of the traditions of rhapsodic competition that we find stylized in such representations as that in the *Certamen*.<sup>37</sup> It is noteworthy that the *Certamen* story is explicitly opposed to other configurations of literary history in which Homer was said to be younger or older than Hesiod (*Cert.* pp.226-227 Allen). If either were true, then one poet would inevitably have to be considered the pupil or imitator of the other, a relation congruent with the more familiar picture of didactic transmission. If the *Works and Days* was itself composed or at least re-performed in rhapsodic competitions (as appears from Plato's *Ion* 531-532), it would have been all the more powerful if presented as a direct address to a "Perses" who represented not only a "brother" and a general audience in need of instruction but also the "other" major mode of hexameter performance. This brings us to a concluding suggestion, again based on the realities of rhapsodic performance. Imagine the live presentation of character which rhapsodes like Ion, certainly (and I suspect composers like "Homer," probably) practiced. Whoever performed the *Odyssey* in something like the form that it now has must, for the space of four books, "become" the *persona* of Odysseus, the hero who sacked Troy. Perses .. "Wrecker" would be an appropriate nickname for this character; *ptoliporthos* was a generic epithet for *Iliadic* heroes as well as Odysseus.<sup>38</sup> Indeed, the entire genre of epic about Troy's fall may be represented metonymically as a tradition about a "sack" (cf *Iliou Persis*). The beauty of

<sup>37</sup> There may be a similar inscribing of performance traditions into the narrative of the *Iliad* in the mention of Thamyris in Book 2.594ff. as I have argued (Martin, above n. 6)229-30.

<sup>38</sup> Nagy, *GMP* 74-75, takes the connection to the destruction of cities in terms relevant to the internal themes of the *WD*, in particular the destructive power of *hubris* in the *polis*. I regard our readings as complementary.

the strategy of creating the brother- as- other is that, in the end, anyone can be adopted by Hesiod--perhaps even his epic-rhapsodic *semblable*.

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