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Hesiod's didactic poetry

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Abstract: This paper falls into two parts:

(i) The first part argues that *Works and Days* is more coherently organised, and displays greater coherence of thought, than many interpreters recognise. However, the last part of the poem (from 695), heterogeneous and loosely structured, poses severe problems.

(ii) The second part is concerned with the end(s) to which the Hesiodic poems were composed. It is argued that neither *Works and Days* (which is formally a didactic poem) nor *Theogony* (which is not) can be fully explained in didactic terms. The poetics of the *Theogony* poem emphasise beauty and pleasure, and take a cautious view of the truth of poetry; similar inferences can be drawn from Homer. However, this does not exclude the possibility that the poet's intentions were partially, but not solely, didactic. We should recognise the limits of what can be said with confidence.

'Follow, poet, follow right
To the bottom of the night,
With your unconstraining voice
Still persuade us to rejoice;

With the farming of a verse
Make a vineyard of the curse...'

(W. H. Auden)

In this paper I shall approach Hesiod's poetry from two, rather different, directions; consequently, the paper itself falls into two parts, the argument and conclusions of which are largely independent. In §1 offer some observations on the vexed question of the organisation of *Works and Days*; that is, my concern is with the coherence of the poem's form and content. In §2 my attention shifts to the function of this poem and of its companion, *Theogony*; given the form and content of these two poems, what can we plausibly conjecture about the end or ends to which they were composed? In particular, I shall consider whether, and in what sense, these poems may be regarded as didactic in intent. Much of what I have to say in §1 I say with a measure of confidence; in §2, by contrast, my primary aim is to undermine unwarranted confidence—although I do, even here, reach some positive conclusions.¹

¹ I am grateful to Hugh Lloyd-Jones and to Nicholas Richardson for commenting on a draft of this paper; the blame is, of course, still mine. The second part of the paper develops points made briefly in the first section of my *Poetics of Greek Tragedy* (London 1987).

1. The organisation of *Works and Days*

As transmitted to us, Hesiod's *Works and Days* falls into three distinct sections. An extended paraenesis on the two themes of work and justice² (1-381) is followed by a calendar of the farming year, with an appendix on the sea-faring calendar embodying some autobiographical material (382-694); I shall refer to these two sections as [A] and [B] respectively. The third section, [C], is more heterogeneous: a series of gnomic observations on a miscellany of themes (695-764) is followed by a survey of auspicious and inauspicious days of the month (765-824), which once in turn was followed by a study of bird omens (now lost). This summary does, it is true, make the poem look somewhat disjointed. But if for the present we leave [C], admittedly loose in both internal and external connectedness, out of account, it is not hard to discern an intelligible relationship between the two remaining sections. If I may put it so, [A] constitutes the theoretical prolegomena to [B]; in it Hesiod explains why Perses, the poem's ostensible addressee, should commit himself to the way of life for which practical advice is given in the latter section—and why, therefore, he should attend closely to that advice when it is given. I shall begin my discussion of the poem by examining these prolegomena in greater detail.

[A] To speak, as I have done, of this section having two themes is unhelpful: to do so can only raise questions about the relationship between those two themes and the logic of Hesiod's apparent wavering between them. It is more illuminating, and more strictly accurate, to say that they are for Hesiod interrelated aspects of a single theme. By this, I do not mean to imply that Hesiod failed to grasp the conceptual distinction between work and justice; but the two were in practice, for Hesiod, inevitably concomitant. He thinks throughout in terms of two mutually exclusive ways of life, in each of which three elements are bound tightly together by causal links. If the two were represented diagrammatically as triangles, the apex of the one would be 'prosperity', of the other 'poverty'. Below prosperity would be ranged work and justice: work, because it leads to prosperity by way of a flourishing farm; justice, because it leads to prosperity by way of divine favour. Below poverty are ranged idleness and injustice: idleness, because it leads to poverty by way of a neglected farm; injustice, because it leads to poverty by way of divine disfavour. In addition, idleness leads to injustice, since the man who does not earn his living must steal it, plundering his neighbours; conversely, the hard worker will not be able to afford the expenditure of time and resources on disputes with his neighbours, nor will he be willing to jeopardise the network of good relations with them on which he might wish to draw in an emergency: so

² This term is perhaps potentially misleading. M. Gagarin has pointed out that δίκη does not mean 'justice' in a broad sense in *WD*, but is restricted to "law", in the sense of a process for the peaceful settlement of disputes' (*CP* 68 [1973], 81). This is, I think, correct; but the conclusion which Gagarin draws ('*WD* is not a treatise about morality or justice, but rather about prosperity and the necessity of an effective legal process to help achieve it') is distorted, since Hesiod is clearly concerned with a much wider range of moral issues (fraternal loyalty, respect for parents, for ξένοι, etc; see 182-8, 327-35). I would prefer to say, therefore, that δίκη in its restricted sense is for Hesiod an exemplary case for right social behaviour in general. It is this general ethic, and not δίκη, to which I here apply the term 'justice'.

that work is causally related to justice, as idleness is to injustice. Thus the two ways of life are closed systems, internally coherent and mutually exclusive.

This antithesis provides the underlying system of thought in [A]; let us now observe how it is worked out. After the brief opening invocation, [A] can be divided into three formally marked subsections; for brevity I shall designate these subsections [A¹] (11-201), [A²] (202-85) and [A³] (286-382).

At the beginning of [A¹], Hesiod distinguishes between good and bad Eris. This distinction adumbrates the underlying antithesis: since the good Eris impels men to competitive effort (20-6), while the bad Eris embroils men in conflict (πόλεμόν τε κακὸν καὶ δῆριν ὀφέλλει 14), the contrast between them points to a contrast between two ways of life, marked respectively by work and by injustice. Of the two, it is the latter to which Perses has attached himself; he is a devotee of the bad Eris, acting both as an observer of legal disputes (28-9) and as an active litigant (33-9). West finds a difficulty here: between these two activities, he suggests, 'there is no logical connection, only a verbal one'.³ But this leaves a middle undistributed: there may have been a situational connection (that is, Perses may in fact have acted in both ways); and at the root of that there may have been a causal connection (for a prospective litigant might observe in order to prepare his tactics; and an observer might naturally be tempted to try his hand). Precisely the same kinds of connection may be supposed to exist between these two activities and Perses' neglect of his farm (28): an observer and litigant is likely to be, and as such Perses may in fact have been, distracted from his work. If that was the case, then the bad Eris would be said to cause Perses' idleness in an entirely natural sense;⁴ we observed above that in the underlying system of thought there are causal relations between the elements of each way of life which make them seem to Hesiod natural, and indeed inevitable, concomitants.

In his remarks on this passage and elsewhere West offers us a Hesiod who is constantly having to extricate himself from the tight corners in which he has trapped himself by failing to think more than a few lines ahead; the composition of the poem is thus portrayed as a series of cliff-hanging escapades. But we cannot exclude *a priori* the possibility that Hesiod, when he began to compose, had thought out what he wanted to say, and had set it into coherent order; nor is it inconceivable that in composing he should have contrived to address himself consistently both to that ordered theme and to a clearly conceived set of motivating circumstances (real or fictive).⁵ In the present passage, it seems that

³ M.L. West, *Hesiod, Works and Days* (Oxford 1978), 37. Is there actually a verbal connection? *νεῖκεα... ὀφέλλοις* would be an odd phrase to apply to mere observation. I do not think, therefore, that the words are meant to be, as West suggests, a transitional equivocation: rather, they convey obliquely a significant new piece of information (namely, that Perses is an active litigant as well as an observer).

⁴ West finds this 'artificial', and suggests that, had it been in his mind from the start, Hesiod would have 'described the bad Eris in 14ff. more in terms of Perses' way of life, in terms of *νεῖκεα* rather than *πόλεμος*' (36-7). But it is surely quite natural to introduce the bad Eris in general terms, indicating the full range of her activity before an application is made to the particular circumstances of the poem; and the common term (*δῆρις*) secures a measure of continuity.

⁵ West finds a number of difficulties in the presentation of Perses. (i) Those found in lines 11-41 I have discussed in the text. (ii) There is no demonstrable inconsistency between 35ff. and 394ff.

we need make only a few, rather plausible conjectures to remove any *prima facie* difficulty in the coherence of Hesiod's thought and expression. West has apparently not seen this possibility. Where, then, has he gone wrong? He rejects as 'a mistake' the working assumption that Hesiod did begin with a clear conception of what he wished to say, and in what order; and to justify this move he refers us to the techniques of oral composition.⁶ West is, of course, aware that careful premeditation is consistent with orality; his argument is not *a priori* ('because he was an oral poet Hesiod must have worked in a relatively unpremeditative way') but *a posteriori* ('because we have failed to discern tighter organisation in the poem Hesiod presumably did work in this way'); and the appeal to oral poetics is meant, I take it, only to render that last presumption less implausible than it might otherwise seem. It is doubtful, however, whether the appeal succeeds. West's account requires us to believe that Hesiod embarked on his poem with only the haziest notion of where it would lead him, and that he failed to amend the resulting confusions of thought and looseness of connection in successive performances and revisions; we are entitled to ask for empirical evidence for the credibility of this conception, and West offers us none.⁷ There is in fact no reason to doubt that Hesiod would have planned carefully, and could have organised successfully, a poem such as *Works and Days*. Certainly, we must on methodological grounds begin with the (defeasible) assumption that he has done so; and that requires us to search more carefully for order in the poem than West, with his too hasty resort to orality, appears to have done.

The poem's opening passage, then, offers us a Perses idle and predatory; against this adherence to the wrong way of life Hesiod will affirm the necessity of work and justice, and he will affirm this for the benefit both of Perses himself, and of the kings who, by their willingness to give judgements favourable to Perses' predatory activities (39), encourage his adherence to the wrong way of life. The

(West 35, 38); for example, Perses may have squandered his unjust gains, appealed to his brother for assistance, and threatened further litigation on being rebuffed. (iii) A number of West's remarks (36, 39-40) seem to presuppose that the protasis of a conditional must reflect the circumstances of that conditional's purported utterance; I find this very strange. The real difficulty, it seems to me, is precisely the opposite one to that which worries West: not in producing a coherent account of the circumstances consistent with all the data of the poem, but in selecting among the many mutually exclusive accounts which the data fail to exclude. That Hesiod gives the background in so cursory a manner might indicate that the situation is a real one, which Hesiod expected his audience to be familiar with; and/or that the question is not of great importance for understanding the poem (which few, I imagine, would deny).

⁶ West 42-6.

⁷ Lord quotes a Yugoslav bard who liked to think a new song over for a day before performing it, but implies that most would be able to sing it without such preparation (*The Singer of Tales* [Cambridge MA 1960], 26-7); but this is when they have heard the song from another singer, and so have assimilated prior to their own performance a clear conception of what has to be said and in what order. Lord does give an example of a song genuinely improvised in a stronger sense (286ff., n.3); but it is a miserable specimen, and produced in very exceptional circumstances. West's account of *Works and Days* seems to assume that a poem might be produced in much the same way under more normal conditions, and indeed that the poet would then willingly reproduce it and preserve it in writing; that is quite a different matter. (On the scope for premeditation in 'oral composition', see West's careful statement in *I Poemi Epici Rapsodici non-Omerici e la Tradizione Orale*, ed. C. Brillante, M. Cantilena and C.O. Pavese [Padua 1981], 62-3.)

first stage of this affirmation takes the form of two aetiological myths designed to explain why, given the present condition of the world, men must work. The first of these myths is the story of Pandora. It would have been possible, Hesiod says, for men to live at ease; but it is not, since the gods have hidden their βίος—that is, they have made livelihood difficult for them to attain (42-6). The gods made two attempts to achieve this. Their first attempt (in retaliation for Prometheus' trickery) was to withhold fire (47-50); but when that plan was thwarted by Prometheus' theft of fire they made a more radical assault on humanity, infiltrating Pandora so that she would release the ills previously stored (we are left to infer) in Epimetheus' πίθος.⁸ Before, men had no κακά, no πόννοι, no νοῦσοι (90-2): now they have them all; life is hard and men must toil to keep body and soul together. The second explanatory myth is that of the five 'Ages'. This, too, begins with an existence free from πόννος and pain (112-3); then, work was unnecessary (117-9). It is often claimed that this theme is left behind as the sequence of ages unfolds;⁹ but this is not strictly correct, for at the beginning of the fifth age Hesiod does make it clear that this primeval ease has been exactly reversed:

νῦν γὰρ δὴ γένος ἐστὶ σιδήρεον· οὐδέ ποτ' ἦμαρ
παύσσονται καμάτου καὶ οἰζύος οὐδέ τι νύκτωρ
φθειρόμενοι· χαλεπὰς δὲ θεοὶ δώσουσι μερίμνας. (176-8)

This statement, though brief, is emphatic; the more so because, in the passage immediately preceding, the heroes have been transferred to the Isles of the Blest, thus allowing Hesiod to recapitulate the initial motifs of the golden age immediately before he introduces the iron age (170-3): the contrast is stark.¹⁰ Nevertheless, the account of the iron γένος does develop the topic of justice at greater length than we might have anticipated. But this will appear less surprising when we recall the connection between work and justice in Hesiod's underlying system of thought. In a world in which men have to work to support themselves in the face of an adverse environment it is inevitable that some will fail to rise to the challenge; and these will necessarily fall into the opposite way of life. In a world which demands that men live in accordance with the right system, it is natural that the wrong system should also be exemplified. Thus the fifth γένος presents us with the antithesis of work and injustice to which the initial distinction of *erides* alludes; the end of [A¹] recurs, in a figure which will prove to be typical of the poem's construction, to its opening motifs.

⁸ For the narrative technique by which such details as the existence of the πίθος are withheld until they become essential, see E. Fraenkel, *Aeschylus, Agamemnon* (Oxford 1950), 805. The extreme compression of the narrative, which leaves the nature and provenance of the πίθος implicit, is presumably a generic feature of small-scale *epos* of this kind; the technique was admired and imitated by many Hellenistic poets.

⁹ E.g. West 49.

¹⁰ It is impossible to know whether it was Hesiod or a predecessor who interpolated the heroes into the sequence of metallic γένη. If it was Hesiod, it is unlikely to have been (as some suppose) because he felt obliged to reconcile the myth with the epic tradition; the syncretising urge was surely not so powerful in a poet content to juxtapose these two incompatible *aitia*. The insertion makes artistic sense in *WD*: the justice of the heroes throws the injustice of the iron men into relief, as the ease of their final state does the iron men's adversities. So, rightly, Verdenius in *Hésiode et son Influence (Entretiens sur l'Antiquité Classique 7, Geneva 1962)*, 130-2.

The new subsection, [A²], is marked by a change of address: Hesiod speaks to the kings, and offers them an *ainos*. This is at first sight a perplexing passage: either (so it might appear) the tale has been left uninterpreted, or else its interpretation is contained in the words of the hawk to its prey (210-11); but then the interpretation, affirming without a hint of protest the freedom of the strong to prey upon the weak, runs counter to Hesiod's argument.¹¹ Hesiod is surely setting his audience a deliberate puzzle: φρονέουσι καὶ αὐτοῖς (202) perhaps warns us of a covert subtlety in the offering,¹² and the conspicuous way in which the *ainos* is left hanging at the end, uninterpreted while the address is switched abruptly back to Perses, seems contrived to underline the unanswered question which it poses. Those who have seen in 276-80 the solution to this puzzle are surely right: the fable's apparent amoral application is reversed by the distinction that is subsequently drawn between the bestial and the human order; strength is not a sufficient justification among men, as it is among animals, since men are required by Zeus to conduct their relationships by δίκη, not by βίη.¹³ To be sure, the beast-fable traditionally assumes a parallelism between man and beast: the *ainos* as used here by Hesiod therefore overthrows the convention of the form; but it is precisely that element of the unexpected and paradoxical that makes the passage initially a puzzle, and so adds force to its message when the solution is perceived.

In the rest of [A²] Hesiod alternates his address between Perses and the kings, emphasising for both the consequences of a violation of δίκη. First, Perses: ὕβρις brings men to a bad end (214-16), while δίκη brings good fortune (216-18); Dike herself, and her vengeful associate Horkos (cf. *Th.* 231ff.), attend and punish offences against her (219-24)—a point developed in the extended contrast between the prosperous and peaceful city of men who respect δίκη (225-37) and the disasters which beset the city in which ὕβρις and σχέτλια ἔργα are practised (238-47). Next, to the kings: they are the ones who give judgement, and they therefore bear chief responsibility for the maintenance of δίκη in cities; so they in particular need to be reminded that the judgements they give are marked, not only by an intimidating host of subordinate deities responsible to Zeus (252-5), and by Dike, who reports to Zeus (256-66), but also by Zeus himself, who will not permit the just man to succumb to the unjust (267-73).¹⁴ Finally, a résumé addressed to

¹¹ 'The meaning is obvious: the weak are at the mercy of the strong. The common people already understand this, but Hesiod makes his fable simple and clear for the kings so that they too will understand' (Gagarin 92 n.58). I fail to see: (i) why the kings are supposed to be ignorant of this obvious truth; (ii) why, if they were, Hesiod should have thought it helpful to enlighten them; (iii) why the kings need telling 'clearly and simply'—are they so dim? Contrast *WD* 202.

¹² *Od.* 14.459-517 perhaps suggests the acuteness that could be required of the audience of an *ainos*; Odysseus does not even warn his hearers that a covert intention is involved.

¹³ Thus the interpreted *ainos* does not imply that the hawk was wrong: only that the kings would be wrong in acting like it, the principles of judgement applicable to hawks being inapplicable to men (or at any rate, to men who are not at war); this disarms the objections of C.B. Welles, *GRBS* 8 (1967), 17-19. I should add that I do not wish to read the *ainos* as an exact allegory of Hesiod's situation; it suffices that ἀοιδός (208) hints clearly to the kings that there are points of comparability such that the story has important implications for their own dealings with Hesiod.

¹⁴ I take the progression 'thirty thousand guardians—Dike—Zeus' to be a designed escalation; contrast West: after 264 Hesiod 'is unable to make a coherent continuation. There follows a mere dribble of additional thoughts...' (50).

Perses: he is reminded once more that it is necessary to respect *δίκη* (282-4). I have argued that this paragraph, with its statement of the distinction between men and beasts with respect to *δίκη*, is to be read as the resolution of the puzzle posed in the *ainos*; thus [A²] returns at the end to its initial themes, displaying the same kind of loose ring-like construction that we noted in [A¹]: a formal point which counts in favour of the close connection which we have supposed to exist between the *ainos* and its alleged exegesis here.¹⁵

In the underlying system of thought, the right way of life is based on work and justice, and crowned by prosperity. [A¹] expounded the necessity of work and indicated in addition at its end that the alternative to work is the injustice characteristic of the present era; [A²] expounded the prudential necessity of justice by emphasising the adverse consequences of injustice: that the alternative ways of life lead respectively to prosperity and to ruin has been particularly emphasised in this subsection. It is this antithesis between the ways to prosperity and ruin which Hesiod takes up at the beginning of [A³]. There are two paths open to us (287-90): one to *κακότης*, which is easy; one to *ἀρετή*, which demands effort.¹⁶ *κακότης* and *ἀρετή* are not “vice” and “virtue” but inferior and superior standing in society, determined principally by wealth;¹⁷ thus 289-90 formulate the causal link between work and prosperity in the right way of life. The momentous importance of this point is at once underlined by an arresting affirmation of the worthlessness of the man who does not listen to good advice (293-7): this reinforces the summons to Perses to pay attention to what Hesiod is saying (286, 298). What Hesiod is saying is in fact the most emphatic statement yet of the necessity of work, together with a reaffirmation of the causal link between work and prosperity, idleness and poverty (299-302).¹⁸ But there is one obvious objection to this: that labour is degrading. On the contrary, argues Hesiod, it is idleness that degrades (because it leads to poverty), while work, because it leads to wealth and so to high standing and respect, is the very opposite of a reproach (311-13, 317-19). Therefore, work is better: certainly, it is better than predatory injustice (we are again reminded that this for Hesiod is the only conceivable alternative to honest toil): for this incurs divine anger, and so does not bring real and lasting *ὄλβος* (314-16, 320-6). Such predatory behaviour, Hesiod goes on to suggest, is effectively equivalent to the violation of those who are for one reason or another inviolate: all these actions anger Zeus, and so bring their agents to a bad end (327-34). Therefore Perses should avoid such activities and should cultivate the opposite mode of behaviour: piety and justice. He should give the gods due honour (335-41); he should be on good terms with his neighbours,

¹⁵ The unusually elaborate address to Perses in 286 confirms that a major new subsection of the poem is opening.

¹⁶ Hesiod adds that it is easier when one has arrived (290-2); I take this to be a remark made in passing and designed to soften the deterrent impact of the difficulty of the right path. (It is not very convincing: Hesiod does not really envisage a point at which one could relax from the perpetual round of toil.)

¹⁷ West 229 (on 287-92).

¹⁸ Hesiod adds that idleness makes one unpopular with gods and men, as a factor accentuating the tendency of the idle to impoverishment (303-10). That the gods' disapproval is damaging to prosperity is obvious; that human disapproval is damaging may be less so: but see 342-55.

cultivating a web of reciprocal good-will from which he will benefit, rather than seeing in them an opportunity for easy (but fatal) gain through plunder (342-60); finally, he should organise his domestic affairs prudently (361-80). If he wants prosperity, *that* is the way to achieve and maintain it: and above all by hard work (381-2); thus [A³], too, ends with a return to its opening themes.¹⁹

In [A³] the themes of work and justice have been woven together with each other and with the prosperity to which they tend, and they have been set clearly against their antithesis; this completes the prolegomena. If we have been convinced by this *that* one ought to work, we shall now be well disposed to listen as Hesiod goes on to advise his brother on *how* one ought to work.

[B] Hesiod's account of the work that a farmer has to undertake is organised in the form of a calendar, and so poses fewer problems of overall coherence than does the formally less constrained argument of [A]; I therefore do not intend to dwell on it here, though I shall be returning to it in §2.2. I note in passing that the farming calendar, beginning and ending with the Pleiades, displays the ring-like form of the three major segments of [A] (383-4, 614-7); and the Pleiades are also the point of attachment for the appended maritime calendar (618-94). Farming and trading are, as West observes, 'complementary activities', so that the appendix is a 'natural supplement' to the farming calendar.²⁰ Also, and perhaps more important, it allows Hesiod to work in two sections of autobiographical material: one involving a final appeal to Perses (633-42), the other establishing Hesiod's credentials as a poet (646-62).

[C] We must now turn to the section of the poem which our initial description put to one side; and this is much more perplexing. First, there are difficulties in external connection, both local (the associative link between 694 and 695 is flimsy)²¹ and more general: we have found that [A] and [B] relate intelligibly to yield a satisfactory whole, but it is difficult to see how this extension could be integrated into the same account; and our problems are compounded when we note the internal disconnectedness of this notoriously rambling extension. In the face of these problems, one might feel that radical measures were in order; let us begin, therefore, by asking whether a case could be put together for a general athetesis of 695ff.²² In addition to the difficulty of bringing the continuation into a coherent structure, there are two points which we might note. First, the autobiographical passages put Hesiod's personal mark on the poem; this seems most apt, and most in accordance with the parallels, if it comes at or near the beginning of a poem or its end. *Theogony* is a good example of such a passage

¹⁹ Admittedly a less striking one. I take ᾠδ' ἔρδειν in 382 retrospectively.

²⁰ West 45 (although he is more grudging about it than these quotations suggest): West's discussion of [B] is as helpful as his comments on [A] were unhelpful.

²¹ That between 695 and 617 (see West 326. on 695) is scarcely less so: the 'season' for an annual operation like ploughing is not very like the 'season' for marriage.

²² To allay alarm, I had better say at once that I do not think it can. But some have entertained the possibility; e.g., Friedländer (in *Hesiod*, ed. E. Heitsch [*Wege der Forschung* 44, Darmstadt 1966], 237): 'Der "Schifferkalender" ist das letzte was man mit Gewißheit dem Hesiod zuschreiben darf... Von dem, was nun noch folgt, wüßte ich nicht, wie man den Beweis des hesiodischen Ursprungs erbringen wollte.'

being placed near the beginning of a poem: compare Theognis 19-23, Theocritus 1.65 (Thyrsis' song); for the end: *hAp.* 166-76 (assuming that the song as transmitted is a conflation);²³ Timotheus *Persae* 229ff.; Nicander *Th.* 977-8, *Al.* 629-30. But this is not an argument on which one would willingly place very much reliance; much more weighty is the disappearance of Perses. He is elaborately invoked in the first autobiographical inset (633, 641); and though he is not named in 687-8, the manner of address there is indistinguishable from that which Hesiod habitually adopts towards his brother earlier in the poem (cf. 367, 403-4). This manner of address, as well as the name, disappears thereafter. But *Works and Days* is not simply an encyclopaedia of generally useful advice: it is (or purports to be) advice offered to a particular person in particular—if not expressly particularised—circumstances. The disappearance of that person in [C], and the difficulty of tracing in it any notable relevance of the advice given to those circumstances, is surely perplexing.

What might we do by way of stylistic argument? A *prima facie* case could be made out against the authenticity of [C²] (= 765-828):²⁴ it would not, I think, be conclusive, but together with the section's strikingly muddy organisation it might enable us to acquiesce with a clear conscience in the widespread rejection of these lines. As for [C³] (the *Ornithomanteia*), we are obviously in no position to judge; if [C²] is rejected, it will follow (though West is right to urge caution in accepting Apollonius' judgement on faith). What, then, of [C¹] (= 695-764)? Wilamowitz deleted 724-59, retaining the rest (in substance); Solmsen follows him in the OCT. If [C¹] must be retained, this option will be tempting: it mitigates the monotonous sequence of precepts introduced by μήδε (strikingly unlike Hesiod's cultivation of variety in the poem's other lengthy gnomic section, [A³]); and there is certainly an abrupt change of topic at 724. But the case is inconclusive. The argument from the connection of 760 with 723 is not strong; Hesiod might well conclude: 'follow these religious instructions (ὦδ' ἔρδειν); and in addition avoid secular infamy'—thus recapitulating the first part of the subsection after rounding off its second part. (West's attractive transposition of 757-9 helps, leaving the concluding alternation: θεός 756, βροτῶν 60, θεός 764.) Nor would I wish, here or in connection with [C²], to rely on objections to the superstitious character of the advice; West's remarks on this point seem to me entirely fair.²⁵ So I would not feel confident in treating [C¹] as anything but a single unit; and the athetesis of this unit could not be justified on stylistic grounds. The lines contain no serious problems (except, perhaps, 726: but that might be interpolated on its own);

²³ See, most recently, R. Janko, *Homer, Hesiod and the Hymns* (Cambridge 1982), 99-100, with notes. On the 'sphragis' device in general, see W. Kranz, *Studien zur antiken Literatur* (Heidelberg 1967), 27-78; the reality of the device does not, of course, depend on the questionable derivation of the term from Theognis 19.

²⁴ See West 347. The difficulties which he notes there and in the subsequent commentary are perhaps as striking as the positively Hesiodic turns of phrase that he detects, some of which are paralleled as closely outside as within Hesiod: the best examples that he gives are ψεύδεά θ' αἰμυλίου τε λόγους (789; cf. 78) and ἐντροχάλω ἐν ἄλωῃ (806; cf. 599, and contrast the Homeric ἐκτιμένη); his reference to 817 neglects the anomalous addition of πολυκλήϊδα. See further F. Solmsen, *TAPA* 94 (1963), 293-320.

²⁵ West 333-4.

Wilamowitz pointed to the Hesiodic artistry of 760-4:²⁶ and there are some expressions which occur elsewhere only in Hesiod in extant early hexameter poetry.²⁷

It would be arbitrary, therefore, to deny Hesiodic authorship of [C¹]; but that does not help us to explain its coherence with the rest of the poem, even if we decide to follow Wilamowitz in deleting 724-59; and this leaves us in some perplexity. If one were in a speculative mood, one might ponder the fact that, if 695ff. connect well with anything in *Works and Days*, it is with the advice on domestic affairs in 373-80. Of course, one cannot athetise [B]. But one might imagine an early version of the poem consisting solely of [A], in which a more extended [*A³] included whatever of [C] one decides not to excise; [B] would on that view be a new idea which led Hesiod to refashion his poem, grafting the calendar on to that part of the domestic advice which offered the most natural point of attachment (children contribute to Zeus-given ὄλβος: this is an apt juncture at which to add a summarising couplet on the acquisition of prosperity to round off the curtailed [A³] and introduce the new material). It would be disappointing if the poet then simply tacked the residue of [*A³]—that is, [C¹]—onto the end of the additional material; that would simply raise once more our problems concerning its coherence (although it might be easier to account for the exploitation of a tenuous verbal connection in a remodelling of the poem). One might therefore wish to imagine the two versions co-existing as alternatives—although this is not a hypothesis which often tempts me to lend a sympathetic ear.²⁸ Naturally, I do not put forward these speculations for credence; they are more by way of diagnostic conjecture, and reflect my own uncertainty in the face of an unresolved, and severe, problem.

2. The purpose of Hesiod's poems

2.1 Introduction

In the first part of this paper, I have tried to trace the coherence of the form and content of *Works and Days*; it is now time to turn our attention to the question of that poem's function, and of the function of *Theogony*. As I indicated at the beginning of the paper, my particular concern here is with the application of the term 'didactic' to these two poems; and since that term is ambiguous, we must begin by attempting to clarify the sense of the question that we are asking.

²⁶ *Hesiodos Erga* (Berlin 1928), 129.

²⁷ Most striking is the genitive form of the formula in 718 (cf. *Th.* 33); but note also ὠραῖος (695; cf. 32, 307, 617, 630, 685), ἔνδοθι οἴκου (733; cf. 523, 601).

²⁸ For example, I find unconvincing Solmsen's theory (*HSCP* 86 [1982], 30-1) that 618-45 and 646-94 are alternatives; as I pointed out above, the functions of the two autobiographical insets are quite different (West's suggestion of authorial interpolation would be a more defensible way of accounting for the difficulties here). But for a minor concession to this way of thinking, see n.33. It might be worth adding that West has already argued that the poem's original 'prospect' did not extend beyond 381 (44-5): the speculation which I have aired here modifies this view by treating [B] not simply as an extension of [A], but as an authorial interpolation into (or possibly as a replacement for part of) an originally fuller version of [A]; unfortunately West's arguments for excluding [B] from the original prospect are not compelling.

'Didactic' might be used to mean no more than 'useful for instruction'; it might mean 'intended to instruct'; it might mean (what is not at all the same thing) 'purporting to be intended to instruct'. I shall not be concerned here with the first of these three senses—the 'instrumental' sense, as one might call it; but with the second (the 'final') and with the third (the 'formal') I am concerned.

Let us consider first the formal sense. In this sense, 'didactic poetry' is a covering term for those poetic genres (for example, the philosophical works of Empedocles or Lucretius, the paraenetic elegy of Theognis) which explicitly or implicitly claim to embody information or advice with a view to the instruction or edification of the audience of address. There is no such explicit claim in *Theogony*; the audience of that poem is never explicitly referred to at all. *Works and Days* does explicitly adopt an instructive stance towards Perses and the kings; but this does not answer to our present question, since it is clear that Perses and the kings are a literary device, characters within a poem that is really addressed to an unmentioned external audience (this, whether or not the figure of Perses is wholly or partly fictive). In both cases, then, the claim to be formally didactic would have to be implicit. But that presents us with a difficulty. What can be meant or conveyed by implication depends on shared presuppositions of the author and his audience; without access to that original *Erwartungshorizont*, any assessment of the implied content of a text must be highly speculative; and since Hesiod's poetry is for us isolated at the beginning of the extant Greek poetic tradition, where very little contextual evidence survives, our ability to reconstruct the appropriate horizon of expectation must be in doubt. If in these circumstances we were to risk the conjecture that Hesiod's poems were formally didactic (that is, that their audience of address would have understood them as claiming implicitly to be intended to instruct), we are likely to have been influenced unduly by later developments in the tradition. For it is true that in form and content the two poems do resemble later works that unquestionably were didactic (at least in the formal sense); and those later poets did look back to Hesiod's works as paradigms of the genre.²⁹ But that is not reliable evidence for a contemporary understanding of Hesiod's work; from that point of view, indeed, we cannot be sure even that the two poems are generically close: there are marked differences between them in form and content, and—together with the other remnants of early hexameter poetry—they arguably reflect a consistent generic distinction between theogonies and didactic poems of a technical or ethical character. Consequently, a conclusion reached about either poem could not be applied without further argument to the other.

The question of the formal classification of Hesiod's poetry is therefore problematic; and the problem may have to be left unresolved for want of evidence

²⁹ See Callimachus on Aratus (*Ep.* 27.1 Ἡσιόδου τὸ τ' ἄεισμα) and Vergil on himself (*G.* 2.176 *Ascraeumque cano... carmen*). A theoretical niche for didactic poetry is found in Diomedes (482.30-483.3 Keil), which Pohlmann (*ANRW* 1.3 [Berlin-New York 1973], 825-35) antedates to the early Hellenistic period—plausibly, in view of the resurgence of didactic poetry at this time among self-conscious and articulate poets. I should stress, however, that articulateness is not necessary; genres need not be explicitly distinguished in a culture: implicit recognition of the distinction, manifesting itself in different dispositions to respond, suffices.

concerning the system of genres in its context of origin. What, though, of its finality? For clearly a poem might be finally didactic without belonging to a formally didactic genre: for example, a poet might tacitly attempt to exploit tendentiously a narrative form that in itself had no conventional didactic commitment. Conversely, a poem belonging to a didactic genre need not in fact have the didactic purpose to which it explicitly or implicitly lays claim. Contrast, for example, the work of Lucretius and Ovid. Lucretius adopts the posture of one expounding and advocating the Epicurean philosophy;³⁰ and that is precisely what he intends to achieve: philosophical persuasion. Ovid, equally, adopts in the *Ars Amatoria* the posture of one expounding and inculcating the principles of the art of seduction; but no one supposes that Ovid really wrote his poem in order to instruct the youth of Rome in that art. Its real point lies wholly elsewhere: in the elegance, wit and sophistication with which the ostensible didactic programme is carried through. Both poems are formally didactic: but while Lucretius' poem is also finally didactic, the didactic status of the *Ars Amatoria* is purely formal.³¹

Hesiod is not a Hellenistic poet; we shall not expect to find in him the highly self-conscious and ironical relationship to the traditions and forms with which he is working that we find in Ovid. It does not follow, however, that the formal and final causes of his work may not, just as much as in Ovid, diverge. Consequently, even if we were to accept, for the sake of argument, a classification of Hesiod's poems as formally didactic, it would need further argument to warrant the inference that their didactic programme is more than purely formal. That inference would be widely conceded; in the rest of this paper, I shall attempt to show that there is reason to treat it with caution.

2.2 Purely formal elements

(a) *Works and Days*

The problems which we encountered in our discussion of [C] at the end of §1, and which we there failed to resolve, should not obscure the positive conclusions which we reached for the earlier parts of the poem. In [A+B] we did discern coherent thought coherently articulated; indeed, had we not done so the disintegration of the poem in 695ff. would not have been so perplexing a phenomenon. These positive conclusions might seem a propitious prelude to a final-didactic reading of the poem; we would have succeeded, on this view, in uncovering the content, moral and technical, which it was Hesiod's intent to

³⁰ He does so implicitly, Memmius being no more his sole audience of address than Perses in *WD*; but in Lucretius' case, a good deal of contextual information being available, we can be more confident in identifying the poem's implicit claims.

³¹ This subdivision of formal into final and purely formal didactic poetry is not meant to exclude more delicate discriminations. See, for example, B. Effe's useful study, *Dichtung und Lehre: Untersuchungen zur Typologie des antiken Lehrgedichts* (Zetemata 69, Munich 1977): my 'final' embraces his 'sachbezogen' and 'transparent' categories, my 'purely formal' his 'formal' and the 'spielerisch-parodistisch' class that he treats separately as a *Sonderform*. (The 'transparent' class is that in which the formal didactic programme—*Stof*—does not coincide with the final-didactic intent—*Thema*: e.g., Vergil's *Georgics*, to the extent that that poem is final-didactic at all; Effe places Aratus in this category—mistakenly, in my judgement.)

convey. But even a coherent didactic programme could be purely formal; and closer inspection will reveal difficulties in the final-didactic interpretation. Here I shall adduce some aspects of Hesiod's handling of his material which suggest that his didactic intentions in parts, at least, of *Works and Days* were not more than purely formal.

First of all, is [B] genuinely intended to instruct? Obviously not: the 'hard' information that it conveys is unbalanced and astonishingly lacunose, while far too much attention is given to the artistic elaboration of the material. Consider some examples:

(i) **414-47**: This passage begins with an elaborate specification of time; the elaboration does not add anything to its precision or practical usefulness, and from a severely didactic point of view is surely superfluous. This elaborate opening (414-9) is followed by an account of the preparations to be made in early autumn; the account is lengthy (420-47), but not because of the intrinsic importance of its detail (consider 441-2); rather, because it comes at the beginning of the cycle: as West observes, the calendar conforms to the tendency of catalogue-like material in Homer to begin elaborately and to become (as the audience tires, perhaps) progressively more cursory.³²

(ii) **448-92**: Here we have a more concise indication of the time for ploughing (the sign chosen is different from the one used in 383-4, for variety; so too in 571-2); the first paragraph merely reemphasises the importance of the preparations already described (448-57), but the space devoted to the ploughing itself is commensurate with that task's importance. The same cannot be said, however, for the content of the advice on ploughing; we are given only the thinnest spread of instruction: work hard, allow the land to lie fallow, say your prayers, cover your seed, beware of late sowing. Anyone who could organise his ploughing effectively after hearing this advice did not need to hear this advice to be able to do so.

(iii) **493-563**: We move on to early winter. Hesiod emphasises the importance of keeping busy; but he does not tell us what to do (493-503). Instead he develops a long and lovely description of the mid-winter cold and its effects (504-35), maintaining the didactic pose only in the vague advice to 'avoid' this period (505). This advice is subsequently expanded in the recommendation that we wrap up warm and stay indoors (536-63); the expansion is decorative but, from a strictly didactic point of view, superfluous, or at least over-long. Doubtless there is not much hard information that Hesiod could have given us here, there being little to do in winter; but in that case it is not easy to see why a poet genuinely set on instruction in arable farming would have lavished so much care and so many lines (almost a third of the whole farming calendar) on this season.

(iv) **564-70**: Next, the pruning of vines: six lines of elaborate time-specification introduce a single line of advice; the disproportion is revealing.

(v) **571-81**: The next time-specification is again briefer (as we have already observed, Hesiod is much concerned with variety in this section); this is for the

³² West 53.

harvest, about which we are told simply that we must work hard for long hours; the high point here is not the instructive content but the artistic epanalepsis with which it concludes (578-8 1).

(vi) **582-96**: There follows another long and embroidered time-specification (582-8): it introduces a picnic (588-96); comment is superfluous.

The conclusion is inevitable: there is no more hard information in the farming calendar than is necessary to sustain the formally didactic posture; Hesiod's real interests lie wholly elsewhere.

If we wish to maintain that *Works and Days* is finally didactic, therefore, we shall have to concentrate on [A]. This leaves us with the problem of accounting for the primarily decorative addition of [B]; but even in [A] the tendency to elaborate vignettes independently of their contribution to the didactic programme is in evidence. I would particularly emphasise here the treatment of Pandora. The account of her manufacture has been elaborated in this poem to a remarkable degree: in *Theogony* it is given once in a passage of not more than fifteen lines;³³ here Hesiod prefixes detailed instructions to the account of the manufacture itself, this reduplication serving to ornament the account by displaying different aspects of the process in the execution and in the instructions.³⁴ Such elaboration, however, is less to the point in *Works and Days* than it would have been in *Theogony*; for in the version of the myth told here it is not Pandora in person that is the κακόν, but the consequences of her foolish action. The elaborate attention given to the person of Pandora is therefore governed not by the contribution which the myth makes to the poem's didactic programme, so much as by Hesiod's eye for the story's point of greatest artistic potential.

(b) *Theogony*

If we turn now to look for evidence of purely formal didacticism in *Theogony*, we might begin by observing that the poet has a marked interest in monsters which cannot wholly be ascribed to any edifying purpose. To be sure, in the case of his best monster, Typhoeus, we cannot press this charge home: not so much because the authenticity of the episode is contested, as because the strongest argument in its defence shows that it plays a crucial role in the poem's argument. In the Titanomachy Zeus' intervention is decisive, but he had relied on the advice of Gaia and on the assistance of her sons; now he defeats by his own might another son of Gaia. 'The episode of Typhoeus is thus an integral part of the plot... It offers the necessary guarantee that Zeus' power shall not be overturned by force, just as the episode of the swallowing of Metis offers a similar guarantee that Zeus will not be overcome by a superior strategist.'³⁵ Thus Hesiod's dwelling

³³ Probably less: 576-7 and 578-84 look like alternative versions.

³⁴ Cf. C.J. Rowe, *JHS* 103 (1983), 128-9.

³⁵ M.C. Stokes, *Phronesis* 7 (1962), 4; cf. 33-7 and West, *Hesiod, Theogony* (Oxford 1966), 379-83. I do not wish to get drawn too far into the debate over the authenticity of this episode here, but I note three points. (i) The poet of *WD* evidently had no aversion to doublets (as his two aetiological *logoi* prove); so it would be no surprise if he took the opportunity which a reduplication of the theomachy-motif would provide for reworking some impressive material. (ii) In that case, we might expect a greater striving for effect in the second passage; whether we should

on the monstrosity of Zeus' opponent is entirely justified by the point which the episode makes. This can hardly be said, however, of the monstrous offspring of Ceto and Phorcys (270-336); though it must be conceded that some would expel the most monstrous of these from the text, as well as Typhoeus

A perhaps stronger case (since not subject to textual doubts) can be made for the catalogues of names. What kind of final-didactic intention, for example, will account for 336-45? This is hardly satisfactory as a geography lesson; nor is its theological content noteworthy. Its point lies, presumably, in the artistic virtuosity with which twenty-five names are fitted into eight lines of mellifluous verse. The artistic impulse shown here is even more clearly displayed in the catalogues of forty-one Oceanids (349-61) and fifty Nereids (243-62). In both cases most of the names are likely to have been invented for the context; the inclusion of some established individuals in each group and the coining of appropriate names for the rest impose loose constraints on the poet, but essentially he is free to indulge to the utmost in these passages his delight in the play of words and sounds, relatively unhindered by considerations of meaning. This kind of virtuoso play with words is, of course, a favourite feature of Hesiod's style, not confined to such catalogues: see, for example, *Th.* 603-7, *WD* 2-8, 352-8, 697-701; but here it is seen in its purest form.

In various respects, therefore, both *Works and Days* and *Theogony* show signs in their selection of material, and in their handling of the material selected, of being purely formal in their didactic intent. But there is one obvious objection to the direction which my argument in this section has been taking. Let it be conceded that there are substantial portions of the two poems in which any final-didactic intention retreats before purely artistic concerns; nevertheless, this retreat might only be temporary. After all, there remains in *Theogony* a good deal of material with significant theological implications; and in *Works and Days* there is still much moral exhortation of unquestioned validity. That none of this has a final-didactic intention has not been shown; why should the poems not be, at root, finally didactic, but embellished with passages of purely formal didactic status? This suggestion would be very difficult to disprove; but since Hesiod devotes a long passage at the beginning of *Theogony* to the Muses and their works, we could profitably consider whether his 'theoretical' pronouncements throw any light on his practical poetic intentions before we draw any conclusions.

say 'strain' rather than 'strive' is a matter of subjective judgement, and I do not think that we know enough about contemporary taste in such things to warrant athetesis on aesthetic grounds. (I do not, in any case, wholly share the widespread distaste for this episode. Typhoeus is a good monster: an anthropomorphic body sprouting a hundred serpentine heads is a formidable conception—far more so than the conventional representation of Typhoeus in visual art, for which see West's note on *Th.* 306; since the plethora of heads is his most remarkable feature, the anaphora of κεφαλή in 824-30 is not without point.) (iii) Those who, like West (in his note *ad loc.*) or Solmsen (*Gnomon* 40 [1968], 328), are willing to explain the difficulties in the context of *Th.* 139-53 by assuming a later addition by Hesiod himself cannot infer the inauthenticity of the Typhoeus episode from its neglect in 881, since the same explanation would be possible there. (West's own explanation of that neglect, on p.381, will not do if one stresses, as I have done, the climactic importance of the episode.)

2.3 Hesiod's poetics

(a) *Theogony* 27-8

These two lines have been much discussed and variously interpreted. In so far as there is a consensus, it would probably be held that they formulate some kind of *Wahrheitsanspruch*; and this (it might be felt) bears weightily upon our present question, supporting the assumption of some genuinely final-didactic intention in the poem. In fact, this reading of the lines is most uncertain; nor, were it accepted, would it really help us to resolve the issue.

Among the various interpretations of the two lines, two recurrent motifs stand out: first, that there is an implied contrast between Hesiod's poetry and some non-Hesiodic poetry—presumably Homeric in genre, although not necessarily 'Homer' as we know him today; second, that there is an implied rejection of the falsehoods of 27 in favour of the truths of 28. Perhaps so; but in both cases the word 'implied' must be emphasised. Neither point is explicitly formulated in the text, and our acceptance of their presence must be correspondingly guarded. Other readings are surely possible. What, after all, would we expect the Muses to talk about? Poetry: not necessarily this or that kind of poetry, but simply poetry in general. Perhaps, then, they are saying here only that poetry in general (Hesiod's poetry not excluded) is a mixture of truth and plausible falsehood. Hesiod would presumably not have wished to claim more than this about Homer, even if we accept a polemical reading of the lines; and it would also in fact be a true description of Hesiod's poems—although, to be sure, we should not simply assume that Hesiod would have agreed with us also on that point. Since the occasion on which the lines are uttered is Hesiod's initiation into poetic composition, it would make complete sense were his new patrons to instruct him (as this interpretation implies) in the full range of poetic content; nor is there any hint as they do so that the element of persuasive falsehood is to be deplored: to all appearances the Muses simply say, with some complacency, that this is what they do.³⁶

What objections could be urged against this reading? Verdenius points out that Hesiod elsewhere consistently and unreservedly condemns falsehood.³⁷ So, of course, do I; when I denounce deceit, however, I rarely bother to add a qualifying clause explicitly exempting poets, although I do nevertheless within limits exempt

³⁶ W. Stroh criticises more traditional readings of the passage and offers an interpretation similar to that outlined here ('Hesiods lügende Musen', *Studien zum antiken Epos*, ed. H. Görgemanns and E.A. Schmidt [Meisenheim am Glan 1976], 85-112); but I would not concur with all his arguments and conclusions. His paper is far more convincing, however, than the reply by H. Neitzel (*Hermes* 108 [1980], 387-401). Of Neitzel's argument against Stroh (389) I observe: (i) that it seems to turn on taking *Th.* 27 as if spoken by Hesiod *propria persona* while attributing *Th.* 28 to the Muses; (ii) that one of its premises is false (if I said, for example, of this article that it contains falsehoods which resemble truth, I would not necessarily mean that I had wittingly included falsehoods; I might mean only that I was sure to have made some errors, and that those errors must resemble the truth at least sufficiently for me to have mistaken them for the truth); and (iii) that there are in any case many conceivable reasons why one might include even witting untruths in one's utterances, to which Neitzel's few dismissive words ('ein rhetorisches Spiel') do little justice.

³⁷ *Mnemosyne* 25 (1975), 235: he refers to *Th.* 229, *WD* 78, 789.

them, without thereby in any serious sense contradicting myself. The difference of context is relevant, and means that no inconsistency can be proven. Verdenius also alleges that 'a positive appreciation of artistic fiction is not found before the Hellenistic period'. Quite apart from the question-begging formulation, this claim is simply not true: the idea that falsehood is consistent with poetic excellence is found in Gorgias (fr. 23), in the *Dissoi Logoi* (3.10-12, 17), and in Aristotle (*Poet.* 1460b21-61a1; cf. also 1460a18-19). These sources may, it is true, raise the suspicion that the view is distinctively sophistic; but since we are not abundantly supplied with pre-sophistic *literary* evaluations of poetic falsehood (one must be cautious about taking as typical the emergent *philosophical* critique found, for example, in Xenophanes) the suspicion is hardly verifiable. In fact, it is difficult to believe that no one in an earlier period had ever suspected a degree of exaggeration or invention in the feats attributed to, for example, Odysseus, or that those who did have such suspicions were unanimously outraged. Speculation of that nature is not sufficient to warrant the generous supplements to the explicit meaning of *Th.* 27-8 required to produce a *Wahrheitsanspruch*.

My argument has not been that it is demonstrably wrong to make those supplements: only that it has not, despite their wide acceptance, been demonstrated to be right to do so. But even if the speculative interpretation of these lines as including a claim to truth for Hesiod's own poetry is conceded, neither this nor the parallel truth-claim in the proem of *Works and Days* (10) would be sufficient to establish a final-didactic intention; for these claims might do no more than mark out the poems as didactic in genre, leaving open the possibility that their didacticism is purely formal. If so, then veracity might be a *constraint* on the poems' content (a constraint is not an unequivocal marker of purpose); for example, Aratus would presumably not willingly have included astronomical errors in the *Phaenomena*, even though the fact that his poem was not really meant as an astronomical text-book mitigates the adverse effect which the errors it does contain might otherwise have had on our evaluation of it. But even this cannot be regarded as certain. Hesiod might, after all, have agreed that there was a good deal about the gods that was obscure to mortals, so that actually to impose truth as a constraint upon a poet would be unreasonable. Men, he might have said, cannot reliably distinguish between truth and plausible falsehood, and since the Muses send both, the theogonic poet cannot in practice (whatever he might formally profess) undertake more than to provide a beautiful and pleasing song. Hesiod might not, of course, have expressed himself in quite those terms; but we can at least be sure that beauty and pleasure would have figured prominently in his answer, as we shall see if we widen our scope and consider the proem of *Theogony* in its entirety.

(b) *Theogony* 1-104

Discussions of Hesiod's poetics have tended to focus on the Muses' address to the poet. This is natural enough, for their words are enigmatic and fascinating: but for that very reason they are a treacherous foundation to build on. If we concentrate too much of our attention on them, our overall view will be distorted; for elsewhere in the proem Hesiod says important things, and says them with complete clarity: these things should not be neglected.

First, the nature of the Muses. The Graces and Desire deign to be their neighbours (64-5), so they must themselves be lovely. Indeed they are: their dancing is beautiful (χορούς ἐνεποιήσαντο, καλοὺς ἡμερόεντας 7-8); even the thud of their feet is charming (ἐρατὸς δὲ ποδῶν ὑπο δοῦπος ὀρώρει 70); and their voices are beautiful (περικαλλέα ὄσσαν 10; αὐδὴ... ἠδεῖα 39-40; ἐρατὴν... ὄσσαν 65; ἐπήρατον ὄσσαν 67; ὀπὶ καλῆ 68). So it is not surprising that their singing gives Zeus pleasure (ὕμνεῦσαι τέρπουσι Διὸς νόον 51; cf. 36-7) and fills his palace with laughter (γελᾶ δέ τε δώματα πατρὸς 40). But the Muses do not only sing themselves; they give song to men. Mortal poets share the sweet voice of their patrons (γλυκερὴ αὐδὴ 97), and so the songs they sing are beautiful and lovely (καλὴν ἀοιδίην 22: ἡμερόεσσαν ἀοιδίην 104).³⁸ Among men, as among gods, song gives pleasure; so powerful is its spell that even men stricken by recent grief are soothed and made to forget their sorrow (98-103). Thus indeed were the Muses born to be 'forgetfulness of ills and relief from cares' (λησμοσύνην τε κακῶν ἄμπαυμά τε μερμηράων 55); it is as if they enable men to share for a while in their own immunity to grief (ἐν στήθεσσι ἀκηδέα θυμὸν ἐχούσαις 61). Kings, too, when favoured by the Muses at birth, possess the charming powers of speech of the poet (τοῦ δ' ἔπε' ἐκ στόματος ῥεῖ μείλιχα 84); and so they too share the power to soothe disagreeable passions (87, 90).

The proem to *Theogony* thus gives the final-didactic interpretation of the poem at most only fleeting and equivocal support: and that it supports it at all is an uncertain inference from an uncertain interpretation. The emphasis on beauty, on the delightfulness and restfulness of poetry, is by contrast sustained and emphatic. We find no reason here, therefore, to believe that the didactic element in Hesiod's poetry is more than purely formal; if anything, the reverse.

(c) Homeric parallels

Outside the proem to Hesiod's *Theogony* we have very little evidence for contemporary attitudes to poetry: but there is some evidence in the Homeric corpus, and we ought to consider this briefly in comparison with our findings in Hesiod.

In the world portrayed in *Odyssey* the bard is an entertainer. He is retained chiefly to sing as an accompaniment to feasting (1.325ff.; 8.62ff., 99, 429; 9.5-11); his patrons require him to give pleasure (1.3467; 5.44-5, 90-1, 367-9, 429, 536-43; 17.385; note Phemius' patronymic Terpiades in 22.330; cf. *hAp.* 169-70); consequently the range of epithets applied to song is similar to that found in Hesiod (ἡμερόεσσαν ἀοιδίην 1.421 = 18.304; ἠδεῖαν ἀοιδίην 8.64; ἔπε' ἡμερόεντα 7. 519; ἀοιδίην... χαρίεσσαν 14.197-8; cf. καλῆ... ἀοιδίη *hAp.* 164). When a bard's performance succeeds in pleasing the audience they listen with silent, rapt attention (1.325-6); this effect is compared to an enchantment in 11.333-5 (= 13.1-3 κληθμῶ δ' ἔσχοντο)—this, to be sure, referring to Odysseus' story-telling, but the force of his narrative is clearly considered equivalent to that

³⁸ I assume that the beauty of the song consists in the attractiveness of its content no less than in its style or form: it sometimes seems to be forgotten in these discussions that veracity is not the sole excellence of content (cf. nn.36 and 43).

of professional bards; Alcinoos indeed explicitly pays his guest this compliment (1.1.368), as does Eumaeus (17.513-21), who also—but, as we shall see, more ambivalently—speaks of Odysseus' stories as enchantments (ἔθελγε 17.571: cf. also *hAp.* 160-1). Penelope, too, describes songs as magic charms (βροτῶν θελκτήρια 1.337), and does so in a significant context: she is complaining that *this* song, the tragic νόστοι of the Greeks, is *not* a charm, as song ought to be, because it reminds her of her own misfortunes and causes her grief (1.337-44). Thus she echoes the Hesiodic idea that song is properly 'forgetfulness of ills and relief from cares': when it touches on one's own sorrow and brings grief, the χάρις of the song is expelled (as Alcinoos observes when a similar situation arises at his own court: οὐ γάρ πως πάντεσσι χαριζόμενος τάδ' αἰεῖδει 18.538).

Thus far the Homeric evidence matches exactly with the poetics of pleasure and relief which we found in Hesiod; does it have anything to tell us about an expectation of veracity in poetry? We should be cautious here. We are dealing with a poet (or poets) who recount the deception of Zeus or Achilles' fight with a river, the adultery of Ares and Aphrodite³⁹ and an assortment of exotic monsters, as unblushingly as a catalogue of the contingents at the siege of Troy; to such a poet we ought not over-hastily to ascribe a *Wahrheitsanspruch*. That Homer invokes the Muses in the course of his narrative, and does so precisely as sources of trustworthy knowledge (see esp. *Il.* 2.484-93), should not coerce us. A narrator naturally adopts the pose of a purveyor of truth, so long as what he says is to be taken as true within the narrative itself (as, for example, Odysseus' lies are not true even within the narrative of the *Odyssey*, itself a fiction); what he would say of his narrative when free of the constraining role of narrator is necessarily a different question. These invocations need be no more than a narrative and structural device (a use with which we are entirely familiar from later poets, and which should not be excluded *a priori* in this case); if we bear this possibility in mind, then we shall have to conclude that the attitude which Homer adopts towards his own narrative while he is narrating it is likely to be less revealing than the attitudes he adopts, or portrays his characters as adopting, to narratives that he is not himself directly engaged in narrating. One function of epic narrative that is recognised both by the poet and by his characters is the transmission of the κλέα ἀνδρῶν (cf. *Il.* 6.358; 9.189, 526; *Od.* 3.203-4; 8.72-4, 580; 24.296-8). But an admixture of falsehood is not in the least inconsistent with this; on the contrary, poetic embellishment is likely to enhance a hero's κλέος.⁴⁰ Odysseus, after all, has a well-developed concern for his own fame (*Od.* 9.19-20), and a lively appreciation of the usefulness of falsehoods (*ibid.*; cf., for example, 19.203, a passage parallel to *Th.* 27 in phrasing); are we to suppose that he would object if

³⁹ This story is not told by Homer in his own persona, it is true: but it is attributed by him to a bard, so that its implications about what we can, in Homer's eyes, expect from poets must stand.

⁴⁰ As Pindar observes: *N.* 7.2-3 (cf. *O.* 1.27-32). He expresses disapproval here because he is committed in the context to magnifying Ajax's κλέος, and therefore to diminishing that of Odysseus, Ajax's chief rival; what he would say on the matter when not under such constraint is a matter for conjecture. (We should be wary of appeals to such passages as *O.* 1.35ff. in connection with Hesiod and Homer, since Pindar seems to have been influenced in them by post-Hesiodic and post-Homeric philosophical critiques, such as that found in Xenophanes fr. 10-12.)

he learnt that his posthumous fame would be secured by a poet's artistic exaggeration of his real exploits? That is hard to believe.⁴¹

We have referred already to the passage in *Od.* 11 in which Alcinous compliments Odysseus by comparing him to a professional singer. It has been argued that the point of the comparison lies in the truthfulness of Odysseus' narrative: 'the poet is distinguished from other raconteurs precisely by his veracity.'⁴² But that interpretation is not certainly correct; the guarantee of truthfulness may reside rather in the qualities of mind which Alcinous attributes to his guest than in his resemblance to a bard: that he tells his story ἐπιστομένως would then be an additional compliment, which need have no bearing on the truth of the tale. Note first that Alcinous' assumption of veracity seems to be based not so much on the manner of Odysseus' speech as on his physical appearance (εἰσορόωντες compare Arete in 336-7); Athene has altered his appearance just so that he will be well regarded by the Phaeacians (8.18-22). But Alcinous would not, in any case, wish to imply that the favourable impression given by a man's speech is in general a warranty of truth; were that so, he would have little reason to worry about deceivers, since they would generally betray their falsehoods by the failure to give the right impression (contrary to what Alcinous implies in 366: ψεύδεά τ' ἀρτύνοντας, ὅθεν κέ τις οὐδὲ ἴδοιτο [sc. that they are ψεύδεα]). Thus the passage must be read: 'there are many deceivers in the world, and they put their lies together so cunningly that it is impossible to recognise them as lies; you are not one of those; your speech is attractive, like theirs (σοὶ δ' ἔπι μὲν μορφή ἐπέων), but—to judge from your appearance—you are also a man of integrity, unlike them (ἔνι δὲ φρένες ἐσθλαί); in addition, you tell your story in a highly professional manner.'⁴³ Even if one were to suppose that Alcinous had rashly equated song with truth, that view could not be attributed without further ado to the poet himself: for not all his characters would agree. In the other passage in which Odysseus is compared to a bard, it is Eumaeus who makes the comparison (17.512-27); and he, of course, disbelieves crucial parts of the charming and, as it were, professionally skilled stories that he has heard from the stranger (14.166-9, 363-5, 378-89); and he would hardly wish Penelope to infer from his comparison that the stranger's tales were entirely trustworthy.⁴⁴ We must conclude, therefore, that the Homeric evidence, like that of the proem to *Theogony*, is consistent with a view of poetry as characteristically and legitimately a mixture of truth and plausible falsehood; nothing points to an expectation or to a requirement of consistent veracity.

⁴¹ See P. Walcot, *Ancient Society* 8 (1977), 1-19, on Odysseus and 'the art of lying'.

⁴² C. Macleod, *Collected Papers* (Oxford 1983), 4.

⁴³ Contrast (e.g.) W.J. Verdenius, in *The Sophists and their Legacy*, ed. G.B. Kerferd (*Hermes Einzelschriften* 44, Wiesbaden 1981), 122. I take it that μορφή ἐπέων covers attractiveness of content as well as of form: cf. *Od.* 8.166-77 (170-3 recall *Th.* 80-93), where I suspect that the lack of μορφή attributed to Euryalus' speech resides not so much in its untruth (although Odysseus counters the slur in the most effective way possible by showing it to be untrue) as in its personal offensiveness: true or false, that is not the kind of thing that one ought to say to guests.

⁴⁴ It may be relevant that the verb which Eumaeus uses (θέλγειν) so often connotes some kind of deception: e.g. *Il.* 14.21417; 21.276, 604; *Od.* 14.384; 16.1945. Songs are meant to be βροτῶν θελκτήρια: the lying tales of unscrupulous wanderers are another matter.

2.4 Conclusion

In the introduction to this part of my paper I asked whether there was any reason to suppose that Hesiod's poems were finally didactic in purpose; we have failed to discover reasons for supposing that they were. In §2.2 we saw that for a good deal of the poetry we could not plausibly suppose a genuinely instructive purpose; the purpose seemed rather to be artistic; and this would support the contrary view, that in so far as the poems are didactic at all, they are so in a purely formal sense. In §2.3 we concluded that nothing in the proem to *Theogony* could with confidence be alleged against that alternative view, while the strong emphasis on beauty and pleasure counted in its favour; and in addition we saw that the implicit poetics of the Homeric corpus was consistent with that conclusion.

Should we infer from this, therefore, that the didacticism of the Hesiodic poems is not more than purely formal? It will be objected that §2.3 offers no more than an argument from possible silence against the final-didactic interpretation, and so leaves open the possibility, raised at the end of §2.2, that Hesiod used purely formal elements to embellish poems that were also, in part, finally didactic. This objection is, of course, sound; although it should be added that a failure to prove that a thing is not so does not amount to proof that it is so, nor does it even suffice to render it probable that it is so. Perhaps, then, we must record an open verdict; a partly final-didactic reading of the poems cannot be excluded, but the positive case for assent to it has yet to be made compellingly. Some ground should be yielded at once. Hesiod was presumably conscious of the role poets played in transmitting traditions in early Greek society, and doubtless he would have been happy to think of his moral exhortations as having beneficial effects on his audiences; to this extent, there is no reason to doubt a final-didactic intention. But that is obviously a minimal extent; what has not been shown is that a final-didactic intention determined the composition of the poems (influencing the selection, organisation and treatment of material) to any *significant* degree; or, therefore, that the assumption of such an intention should significantly influence our interpretation and application of the poems. This is not to affirm categorically a negative answer to the question of final-didactic intention; on the contrary, my chief concern has been to point out the limits of what we can confidently say on this question. Within those limits, however, I have been arguing that two things can be said with some confidence. First, that the question of final-didactic intention is as yet unsettled; a negative answer is at least possible. Secondly, that although Hesiod's final-didactic intentions remain a matter for conjecture, there can be no doubt that one important general purpose—and in part, at least, the sole purpose—of Hesiod's poetry was to afford pleasure and delight, *λησμοσύνην τε κακῶν ἄμπαυμά τε μερμηράων*.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ The consequent question of the kinds of pleasure that an audience might expect to derive from Hesiodic poetry goes beyond the limited scope of this paper and requires a more comprehensive study of Greek attitudes to poetic ἡδονή.