

## BOOK REVIEW

*Hesiodic Voices: Studies in the Ancient Reception of Hesiod's Works and Days*. By RICHARD HUNTER. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015. Pp. viii + 338. Hardcover, \$99.00. ISBN 978-1107046-900.

This book comes as a further contribution to the flourishing field of Hesiodic reception, shortly after Hugo Koning's *Hesiod, the other poet* (2010) and George Boys-Stones and Johannes Haubold's edited volume on *Plato and Hesiod* (2010). With usual learning and insight, Hunter browses through the classical tradition and discovers differently resounding 'Hesiodic voices' in authors ranging from Semonides to Zosimus of Ascalon and including such figures as Xenophon, Aratus, Dio Chrysostomus, Babrius, or Proclus. As the title of the book suggests, what is at stake is not so much the 'influence' of *Works and Days* (henceforth *WD*) as the innumerable ways in which Hesiod's so-called 'didactic' voice has been appropriated by later authors, more often than not in order to promote their own agendas.

Hunter illustrates the quotability and malleability of Hesiod's poem in an introductory chapter. Dio Chrysostomus, for one, is shown to make a particularly ambiguous, often sarcastic use of Hesiod's authority, while in Virgil's *Georgics* (not discussed in any systematic way in the book) the 'Hesiodic' agricultural *argumentum* is refracted by Aratus' and Nicander's earlier adaptations. This suggests the notion, programmatic for the book, that successive uses of a Hesiodic background may result in complex and multilayer edifices of citations and allusions.

The second (and longest) chapter tackles the crucial question of the poem's genre, conventionally tagged as 'didactic' poetry. Hunter persuasively shows that the didactic quality of an author is as much a function of reader reception as of his assumed knowledge and/or didactic intentions. Hesiod's authority does not depend on the variable comprehensiveness of his accounts, nor is it undermined by his (exceptional) statement on his inexperience of navigation; the latter rather validates the divine origin of his knowledge, and has 'some claim to be a foundational declaration for later didactic poetry' (54). Despite his use of prose and his much different audience, Xenophon in *On Hunting* and *Oeconomicus* follows Hes-

iod's path, both on the level of style (simple rather than sophisticated or 'sophistic') and of subject-matter (farming). The proverbial aspect of many verses in *WD* explains the pervading tendency to quote and anthologize them and has contributed to the fragmentary reading of a poem whose unity is by itself hardly discernible. At the macroscopic level, the poem's 'didactic plot' is encapsulated in its most famous passage, that of the two roads respectively leading to vice and virtue. The scholia to Aratus' *Phainomena*, the most obvious poetic heir to the *WD*, attest to the ancient struggle to account simultaneously for the 'mythical/poetical' and the 'didactic' character of both poems.

Hesiod's stature as a moral authority is the focus of chapter 3, which explores how some of the dicta of *WD*, although addressed to the working farmer, were revamped—often with ironical force—to fit the elitist context of sympotic literature. Some Hesiodic themes were more at home than others in this new setting, such as the use of wine, the desirability of peace, and "the pleasures and dangers of the other sex" (158).

In chapter 4 Hunter adopts a more narrowly philological approach and attempts to identify the respective contributions of Plutarch's and Proclus' commentaries on *WD* to a number of scholia to the poem, mostly of exegetical content. Some of the connections made here are rather speculative, but the chapter brings to light a fascinating and neglected chunk of ancient scholarship.

Chapter 5 outlines the relationship between *WD* and the fable tradition from Archilochus to Babrius. Apart for the obvious (but problematic) passage on the confrontation between the hawk and the nightingale, narrative elements common to this tradition and *WD* include fancies of a Golden Age, the triumph of justice, peasants, as well as various details of the Pandora myth. *WD* is also composed in a simple and natural style similar to the prosaic Aesopic fables, and of course it purports to teach moral lessons. But the connection between Hesiod and fable is complex, as the poet "has both exploited a popular mode of moralizing, but also himself fed back into that tradition" (246). Finally, the ancient *Life of Aesop* (or at least its oldest version) casts the famous fabulist as a wise storyteller whose biography evokes elements of Hesiod's own biography and poetic motifs.

The last chapter (a revised version of a previous article) considers the ancient evaluation of Hesiod's style. The evidence suggests that the relevant comments were usually uttered in a context of (implicit or explicit) comparison with Homer; such a comparative stance is notably found in the *Certamen* between Homer and Hesiod. Ancient stylistic comments on Hesiod, which cast him as the exponent of a smooth, pleasant 'middle style', were more often based on the *The-*

*ogony* than on the *WD*; yet it is from the *WD* that Hesiod selects his 'best verses' in the *Certamen*, perhaps because its simple style and peaceful ideology were more obviously opposed to Homer than anything in the *Theogony*.

This collection of essays, for all their diversity, still reads like a real book. It will be of great interest to students both of Hesiod and of ancient scholarship, who will find there a treasure of ideas generously dispensed, if not always in the neatest order. In his introductory chapter, Hunter makes a methodological point on the frequent diffuseness of the allusions to *WD*, a poem whose very canonicity makes it an almost universal subtext for the whole of the Greek tradition. Indeed the difficulty to disentangle genuine from illusory echoes of Hesiod is one that must await any such enterprise, but Hunter faces it with impressive persuasiveness and confidence. Let's hope that others will soon follow in his footsteps on that 'long and steep', but much rewarding, road.

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