

BOOK REVIEW

Playing Hesiod: The 'Myth of the Races' in Classical Antiquity. By HELEN VAN NOORDEN. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2015. Pp. x + 350. Hardcover, \$110.00. ISBN 978-0-521-76081-2.

In his 2010 book *Hesiod: the Other Poet*, Hugo Koning mapped the reception of Hesiod in literary sources over one millennium (from the seventh century BC to 300 AD), consulting works of 200 ancient writers as well as epigraphic material and papyri, and collating around 1200 references. This wide-ranging book opened the floodgates for a wave of interest in the ancient reception of Hesiodic poetry, and *Playing Hesiod* is one of a number of more targeted studies which flesh out the picture. George Boys-Stones and Johannes Haubold's 2010 *Plato and Hesiod* (featuring a chapter by Van Noorden) and Ioannis Ziogas' 2013 *Ovid and Hesiod* each focus on a particular author and his interaction with the Hesiodic corpus. Richard Hunter's 2014 *Hesiodic Voices* provides a number of case studies of ancient reception of the *Works and Days*, in an attempt "to build a more general picture of how the Hesiod of the *Works and Days* acted as a creative stimulus throughout the literature of antiquity" (Hunter 2014, 32). Van Noorden takes Hesiod's Myth of the Races, told at *Works and Days* 106–201, as a starting point, and traces later engagements with and appropriations of this myth.

In Chapters 1 and 2, Van Noorden focuses on Hesiod's *Works and Days* itself, on ways to approach the poem and on the Myth of the Races in its Hesiodic setting, considering "the plurality of interpretative possibilities opened up by the account in its original context" (40). Chapters 3 to 5 then present case studies of the Myth in later key authors: Plato, Aratus, Ovid, Seneca and Juvenal. The combination of approaches is a valuable one as it treats reception not as a phenomenon separate from the poem, but as the taking up of Hesiodic invitations.

The *Works and Days* is a poem that sows the seeds of its own reception, structured and formulated as the teachings are for reuse (see Canevaro's 2015 *Hesiod's Works and Days: How to Teach Self-Sufficiency*), and the progression of Van Noorden's book effectively shows both sowing and reaping. Nor, of course, does reception operate in only one direction, as the use of a source by a later author. Through a series of close readings, Van Noorden shows that Hesiod's successors do not respond mechanically to their model's invitations—they engage

with Hesiodic poetry, rewriting the source story, reconstructing the figure of 'Hesiod' and, importantly, relating to him.

The 'genre' of didactic poetry is something that has received much discussion (most recently, in a 2014 article by David Sider¹), and following this 'mode'—however nebulous—is one obvious way to track engagement with the *Works and Days* in antiquity. Interestingly, Van Noorden does not limit her analysis to the didactic tradition ("the bulk of this book seeks to demonstrate that the receptions of the races and of Hesiod intertwine in texts and traditions *other* than didactic poetry," 3; there is a preliminary discussion of Hesiodic didaxis at 16–23) – and yet in all of the case studies, Hesiod clearly features as a teacher: a predecessor, playing a role in the framing of disciplines from philosophy to satire. The choice of texts for discussion thus acts as a welcome reminder that didactic poetry has an impact that is far more comprehensive than the criteria we use to define it; and that Hesiod's influence in antiquity is something far more encompassing than any one 'genre' would allow.

One element of this influence, and a guarantor of its breadth, is the plurality of 'Hesiodic voices' (to use Hunter's title; see also Evina Sistikou's contribution to the 2009 *Brill Companion to Hesiod*) across the Hesiodic corpus. Van Noorden's book makes the compelling point that 'the tradition of rewriting the sequence of races provides a focus for considering afresh how the *Theogony* and *Catalogue* are fused with the *Works and Days* in their reception' (14–15). 'Hesiod's Cosmos', discussed by Jenny Strauss Clay (2003) largely through the poems themselves, is approached by Van Noorden through the authors who saw the wood before the trees. Chapter 4 of *Hesiod's Cosmos* is dedicated to "The origins and nature of mankind", and Van Noorden focuses in on this. In doing so, she provides the fullest treatment to date of a particular Hesiodic passage and its reception, but she also shows how the full range of Hesiodic voices can be explored *in nuce* through just one story from just one poem. One of the 'principles' of Van Noorden's book is to explore through case studies of reception 'the way in which ideas of Hesiod are recalled alongside close readings of his poetry' (38): and the book itself achieves the same dual purpose.

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¹ Sider, D. (2014) "Didactic poetry: the Hellenistic Invention of a Pre-existing Genre", in R. Hunter, A. Rengakos, E. Sistikou (eds.) *Hellenistic Studies at a Crossroads: Exploring Texts, Contexts and Metatexts*, Berlin and New York, 13-29.