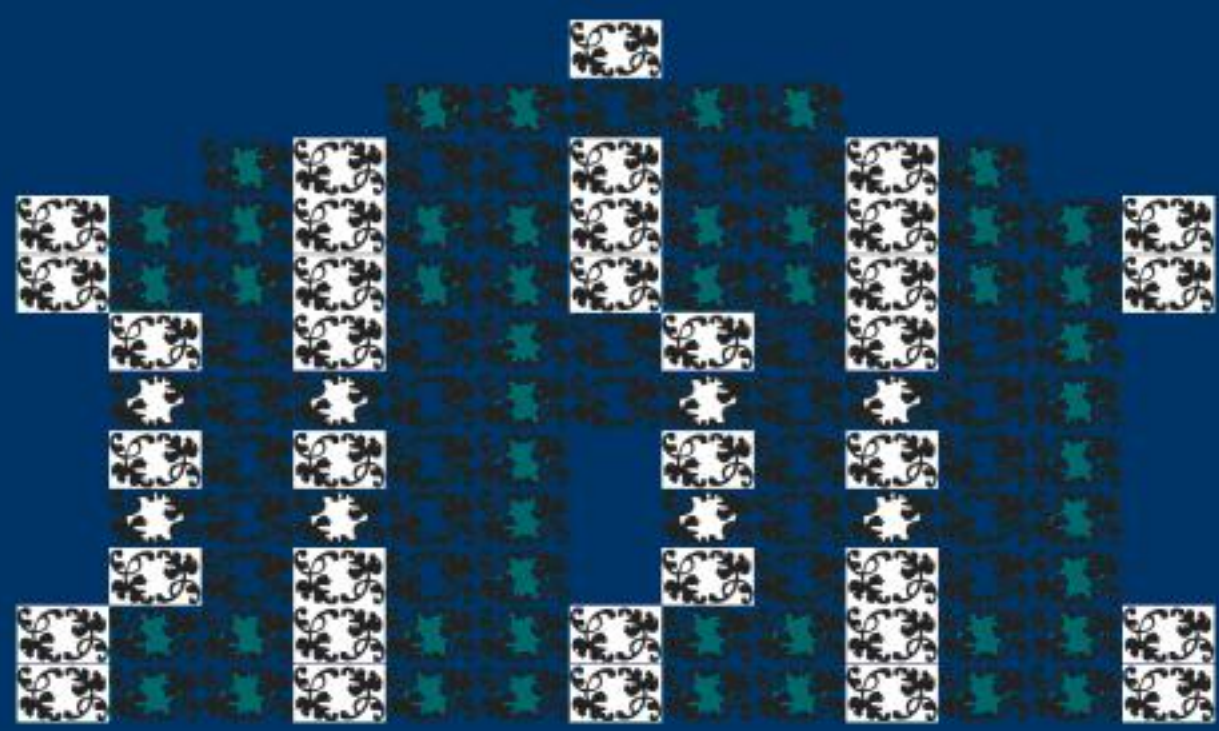

The Narrative Voice in the *Theogony* of Hesiod

BY

KATHRYN STODDARD

BRILL MNEMOSYNE · SUPPLEMENTA

This book is printed on acid-free paper.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Stoddard, Kathryn.
The narrative voice in the Theogony of Hesiod / by Kathryn Stoddard.
p. cm. — (Mnemosyne, bibliotheca classica Batava. Supplementum,
ISSN 0169-8958 ; 255)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 90-04-14002-6 (hc.)
1. Hesiod. Theogony. 2. Religious poetry, Greek—History and criticism. 3. Gods, Greek, in literature. 4. Hesiod—Technique. 5. Narration (Rhetoric) 6. Voice in literature. 7. Rhetoric, Ancient. I. Title. II. Series.

PA4009.T5S76 2004
881'.01—dc22

2004049681

ISSN 0169-8958
ISBN 90 04 14002 6

PRINTED IN THE NETHERLANDS

refers to Hesiod as "a sturdy peasant" whose poetry is designed to give practical advice to his fellow peasants.[6] West adds his influential name to the list of traditionalists, despite the fact that the format of the *Works and Days*, by his own admission, has much in common with the literary conventions of Near Eastern wisdom poetry. West finds the details of the personal situation described between Hesiod and Perses too peculiar to be merely a literary convention, an opinion in which he is joined either implicitly or explicitly by a host of other scholars.[7]

Another aspect of the traditional view of Hesiod is the widespread assumption that his self-referential statements reflect an evolution in self-awareness from the impersonality of the Homeric epics. Hesiod's apparent willingness to discuss his personal life is taken as a sign of the development of a sense of individuality in the Greek mind that was not yet present in Homeric poetry. Jaeger and Snell endorse this view, which stipulates a diachronic development of Greek literature from Homeric epic, to Hesiodic epic, to lyric, to drama.[8] This theory has found broad support among those who believe that Hesiod's self-references indicate a significant break from earlier tradition.[9] The diachronic evolution theory, however, requires that Homer precede Hesiod in time, an assumption that not all scholars—even those who support the autobiographical reading of Hesiod—are willing to entertain. West, for example, argues strongly for Hesiod's precedence, although he remains one of the few scholars not convinced by I. Sellschop's authoritative dissertation arguing that Homer came first.[10] G. Most also finds fault with this interpretation of the Hesiodic first person, noting that the view of Hesiod as the first self-conscious voice of Greek literature "makes problematic presuppositions about both subjectivity and discourse." "A safer approach," he continues,

> would emphasize the constraints of production and reception in an oral poetic context: for the audience of an orally composed and delivered

---

[6] Fränkel 1975: 112, 113 n. 1.

[7] For example, Evelyn-White 1914; von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff 1928, (repr. 1962); Snell 1953; van Groningen 1958. littéraire archaïque grecque. (Amsterdam 1958).

[8] Jaeger 1945: 72-73, 112-113; Snell 1953: 43.

[9] See, for instance, Kerschensteiner 1944: 149-91; Woodbury 1952: 20-41; G. Misch 1907 (Eng. ed. 1950); Versenyi 1974; Østerud 1976: 13-28; Barron/Easterling1985: 92-105.

[10] West 1966: 40; Sellschop 1934 (repr. in Heistch 1966).

instructions; 2. the epiphany occurs on a mountain; 3. the recipient of the god's words is a shepherd; 4. the god addresses him in insulting terms; 5. the god bestows a staff or some other physical object on the human; 6. the human, who was lacking in eloquence before, suddenly acquires skill in speaking.[24] Dornseiff's view is held also by Trencsényi-Waldapfel, who draws further parallels between Hesiod's epiphany and those of Near Eastern literature.[25] West ad 22-34 disagrees, however, stating that "there are fashion in religious experience, and any vision that he [sc. Hesiod] had would naturally assemble itself in accordance with his subconscious expectations and ambitions." Here again, as occurs throughout the scholarship on Hesiod, we are faced with the conflict between two mutually exclusive poles of thought: is Hesiod writing about himself or simply creating art?

Another passage in the *Theogony* in which the personality of Hesiod is traditionally believed to play a role is the 'Hymn to Hecate' (411-52). Although not formally a hymn, this passage contains several hymnic elements: superlatives, repetitions, a description of the god's τιμή, etc.[26] The encomiastic tone and hymnic qualities of this lengthy digression, the remarkable singling-out of a relatively minor deity for praise, and the fact that it occurs in the middle of a straightforward genealogical catalogue have led many critics to doubt the authenticity of the Hecate passage. Some declare that the passage is unhesiodic because it contains words or phrases that differ from Hesiod's usual diction. Sellschop, for example, argues that the Hecate section is an interpolation on the basis of two occurrences (in lines 414 and 418) of the word τιμή to mean "nicht wie sonst bei Hesiod den Rang der Göttin, sondern die Vorzugsstellung der von ihr begünstigen Menschen."[27] Beyond merely linguistic arguments, all of which West (ad loc.) dismisses out of hand, these and other scholars have also suspected the passage on the basis of its overall tone and style. Göttling (ad loc.) believes that the excessive and exclusive praise of a single goddess violates the extreme simplicity of the style of the *Theogony* and that it is suspect for that reason. A. Fick thinks that he could detect elements in the Hecate passage that pointed to its inter-

---

[24] West 1966 ad 22-34; Dornseiff, 1934: 397-415; repr. in Heitsch 1966.

[25] Trencsényi-Waldapfel 1955: 45-76.

[26] Griffith 1983: 52. For more on hymnic style see Norden 1929; R. Wünsch 1914: 140-183; Friedländer 1914: 1-16; Solmsen 1982: 8-9.

[27] Sellschop 1934: 52 n. 83.

the Hesiodic poems, the speculations it engenders at least can claim to be rooted in the text itself.

The 'Works and Days'

The single most widely debated issue in Hesiodic scholarship, and the one with which the biographical reading of the *Works and Days* is most inseparably bound up, is that of the quarrel between the two brothers, Hesiod and Perses. The scholarly debate, which concerns the particulars of the dispute over the patrimony and the financial situation of Perses, has been the almost exclusive domain of the biographists. They take the view that the quarrel (or lawsuit, as most of them term it) was unquestionably an actual event in Hesiod's life and the main motivating force behind his composition of the *Works and Days*. Hence, based on the vague and incomplete information that Hesiod provides in lines 27-41, these critics have concentrated on reconstructing the trial process and the events leading up to it. The contrary view, that the quarrel is merely a dramatic construct that enables Hesiod to assume the role of paraenetic wisdom poet, has been advanced by a small yet persistent minority from the very beginnings of the debate.

Among the earliest Classicists to express the view that Hesiod was using the quarrel merely as a literary theme was P. Welcker in 1826. Comparing Hesiod's addresses to Perses to those of Theognis to Cyrnus, Welcker argues that it was conventional for ancient poets to address didactic material to a named individual. In this way the poet is able to present himself as a wise and sympathetic person concerned for the welfare of his friend, rather than a lecturing old curmudgeon, haranguing the general public.[61] Welcker's radical ideas were echoed some seventy years later by Murray, who dismisses the autobiographical material contained in the *Works and Days* as "what purport to be personal reminiscences."[62]

---

[61] Welcker 1826: 77-78. Welcker also doubted the historical reality of 'Hesiod' himself, being among the first to note that this name is derived from the Greek for 'he who sends forth song' (Welcker 1865: 5). One may add the observation, recently made by Rousseau 1993: 41 that the poet of the *Works and Days* never names himself as he does in the *Theogony*. Hence nothing exists within the poem that implies that Hesiod is even pretending to speak in his own person—except his use of the lyric first person singular.

[62] Murray 1966: 53.

An eloquent exponent of the 'literary convenience' theory is Dornseiff, who was the first to develop extensively the argument that the *Works and Days* is akin to Near Eastern wisdom literature. In an extensive comparison with the Proverbs of Solomon and other wisdom poetry, Dornseiff concludes that Hesiod is just as capable of creating a literary fiction as any other poet of any other age:

> . . . Dinge wie der Persesprozeß, die Berufungsvision in der *Theogonie* sind alle viel literarischer als es der hier heute noch herrschende naive Realismus der Erklärung wahr haben will. . . . Die bei Properz, Tibull, Ovid, Horaz vorkommenden Liebeserlebnisse nimmt man nicht mehr als reale Vorkomisse. In der älteren griechischen Lyrik und Elegie, bei Sappho, Theognis usw. muß alles real sein.[63]

Dornseiff's bold assertion that Hesiod and Sappho were every bit as steeped in poetic convention and the rules of genre as the Augustan love poets is recalled in the work of Rand, who finds an 'Horatian urbanity' pervasive in the *Works and Days*. By the term 'urbanity' Rand means no more than that Hesiod forbears to denounce his errant brother outright, but instead "point[s] out the folly of wrongdoing and shame[s] him by ridicule" in the manner of Horace in his *Satires*.[64] In all other respects, however, Rand's thought is diametrically opposed to Dornseiff's, since Rand believes that the biographical material in the poem reflects Hesiod's actual experience. Dornseiff's lead is followed more faithfully by Kranz,[65] who argues that the personal references are included only for the sake of dramatic vividness, and to some extent by Welles, who observes that the picture Hesiod draws of himself and his family is "too symbolically appropriate" to be true.[66]

The symbolism inherent in the first part of the poem forms the basis for the interpretation of Rousseau as well. Remarking on the fact that the name 'Perses' means 'destroyer [of a city],' Rousseau argues that Hesiod has created the character of Perses to represent epic poetry (in which the heroes are occasionally given the epithet 'destroyers of cities') so that he can then challenge the warlike values of epic and replace them with the more peaceful and

---

[63] Dornseiff 1934: 144. Among the few supporters that Dornseiff's theory has attracted is W. Kranz 1961: 3-46, 97-124), who thirty years later agreed that the quarrel and all the other 'personal' details of Hesiod's life found in the *Works and Days* were nothing more than literary conveniences.

[64] Rand 1911: 146.

[65] Kranz 1961: 3-46, 97-124.

[66] Welles 1967: 5-23.

productive values of hard work. Rousseau's theory is especially interesting because it draws a thematic link among the proem, the ἔρις section, and the admonishment to Perses and mention of νεῖκος which comprise the first three sections of the *Works and Days*. By invoking the Muses in the proem Hesiod is mimicking (and thus calling to the reader's mind) the idea of heroic poetry.

The next section, which discusses the two types of ἔρις, was not inserted in order to 'correct' the *Theogony*, as is commonly believed, for why, Rousseau asks, would Hesiod begin a section admonishing Perses with a correction of the *Theogony*? In fact the bad ἔρις represents the warlike behavior of epic poetry, which Perses is anachronistically using as a model for his own behavior: he is "un homme qui tend à choisir, pour regler sa conduite, les modèles de vie héroïque qu'il trouve dans les récits des aèdes . . . il incarne le point de vue d'une écoute non critique de l'épopée."[67] Thus in attacking the bad ἔρις Hesiod is attacking that which is faulty in Perses, and so the ἔρις section is connected to the section of instruction to Perses. The fact that Hesiod pointedly mentions that the good ἔρις pits 'singer against singer,' Rousseau believes, shows that the question with which Hesiod is dealing in this section is actually one of poetic genres.[68] The reason why Hesiod begins his poem with a description of the νεῖκος between himself and Perses is because heroic epic always starts with a νεῖκος, such as that between Achilles and Agamemnon. The strife between Hesiod and Perses thus has an allegorical and dramatic purpose but is not a true piece of autobiography: "Le conflit est bien donné comme 'réel,' mais cette réalité n'est pas extérieure à la fiction qui organise la présentation du poème."[69]

Despite the limited support of the scholars mentioned above, Dornseiff's radical views have engendered a great deal more opposition than endorsement. West, in his commentary on the *Works and Days,* challenges Dornseiff's approach. Although admitting that "a personal setting, often fictitious, is characteristic of didactic literature," and that Hesiod is clearly adopting a "traditional literary form," West argues that the quarrel with Perses is inconsistent with the traditional patterns of wisdom literature.[70] The usual dramatic setting for wisdom poetry, he

---

[67] Rousseau 1996: 49.
[68] Rousseau 1996: 53-54.
[69] Rousseau 1996: 62.
[70] West 1978: 34.

ality of Perses is thus a good example of the deadlock between these opposing points of view.

Taking up where West leaves off, Schmidt declares forcefully that there is no justification for the view that Perses is a literary device. His reasons for believing this center upon his finding that the level of individualization in the *Works and Days* is far greater than that found in any of the comparable examples of wisdom literature and that Hesiod is therefore the more unlikely to have fabricated these details in response to the norms of wisdom poetry.[74] Like West's argument, though, Schmidt's theory (however convincingly stated) ultimately rests on his opinion alone, and offers no evidence of any kind. If one decides beforehand that Hesiod is a relatively simple poet who lacks artistic sophistication, one will incline toward the view that the biographical material in his poems is an honest representation of the poet's experiences.

It is possible, however, to take the view that Hesiod deliberately established a detailed dramatic setting in which to frame his didactic poem. Neither view can be definitely proven, but merely argued. In a cynical response to this unfortunate fact, Welles claims that it does not matter whether what Hesiod says about himself and his family is true or not; the only thing that matters is what he says in his poetry.[75] But Welles' suggestion that the question can simply be ignored is incorrect. It is impossible to read the Hesiodic poems, especially the *Works and Days*, without addressing and answering for oneself the question of the biographical statements they contain, because one's understanding of the poem and the poet who composed it is inevitably shaped by whether one approaches the work as an autobiographical or a literary creation.

Another major question that tends to divide Hesiodic scholars is that of the portrayal of Perses himself in the *Works and Days.* Is Perses a consistent figure over the course of the poem, or does Hesiod represent him differently according to the point he is making in any one passage? This question generally splits Hesiodists into the broad categories of Analysts and Unitarians. The Analysts believe that the poem is a conglomeration either of poems by different authors or of different Hesiodic poems that were composed separately, whereas the Unitarians hold that the poem

---

[74] Schmidt 1986: 20.
[75] Welles 1967: 7-9.

was composed more or less in the form in which we now possess it, with the possible exception of the controversial 'Days' section at the end of the poem. The Analysts, consisting mainly of scholars who wrote in the 19th and early 20th centuries, regard the figure of Perses as inconsistently presented in the poem—a view that naturally stems from their position that the *Works and Days* was composed in unconnected stages or by different authors. The Unitarians, on the other hand, consist mainly of those writing in the late 20th century and are led by their belief that the *Works and Days* stands as Hesiod wrote it to seek for a common thread that unifies the figure of Perses and explains why he appears to change over the course of the poem.

The problem surrounding the figure of Perses is that he is first represented as having swindled Hesiod out of property or chattels (lines 37-41) and is then urged not to employ arrogant violence against those weaker than he (213). He is called νήπιος in line 286 but then δῖον γένος in line 298, and it is unclear whether Perses is to be regarded as a hubristic robber or a lazy beggar. As one scholar concisely puts it,

> An initial difficulty . . . arises concerning the portrait of Perses, who, on the one hand, it would appear, is exhorted to avoid the dangers of poverty, and on the other is accused of excessive acquisition. This inconsistency tends to support those who have argued that Perses, though he may have been a real brother, is used as a lay figure in this poem.[76]

Faced with such a many-sided Perses, scholars of Analytical tendencies have explained his apparent inconsistency as being the result of a combination of several different poems in which Perses plays a role. Following in the footsteps of earlier scholar Schoemann,[77] Kirchhoff expanded upon the theory that the *Works and Days* is the conglomeration of eight separate 'advice poems' (*Mahnlieder*) arranged in chronological sequence. Kirchhoff believes that Hesiod's *Mahnlieder* were transmitted orally until they were pieced together by an anonymous redactor. These *Mahnlieder,* he argues, interrupt the logical sequence of Hesiod's didactic argument and therefore must represent foreign material that was inserted into the *Works and Days* by someone other than the poet.[78] Kirchhoff's theory thus requires that a distinction be made within the *Works and Days* between material that 'belongs there'

[76] Howe 1958: 44-65, 63.
[77] Schoemann 1868.
[78] Kirchhoff 1889.

and that which has been interpolated into the poem. The subjectivity inherent in this type of analysis, which relies totally on the individual critic's sense of Hesiodic style and in which for that reason no two Classicists can ever be found to agree, ultimately caused the majority of Hesiodists to abandon it.

Another great German scholar, von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, also holds the view that Perses is presented inconsistently in the poem. Wilamowitz explains this phenomenon as a result of Hesiod's composing the *Works and Days* in two parts, one before and one after the lawsuit with Perses had taken place. He argues that the first part of the poem (lines 11-382), in which Hesiod urges Perses to settle the dispute fairly and forsake his idle ways, was written before the poet knew what the outcome of the trial would be.[79]

The second part of the poem (lines 1-10, 383 ff.) was written after Hesiod had been victorious in the dispute; he is now dealing with a Perses who has given up hopes of gaining wealth through lawsuits and is ready to receive instruction on how to be a diligent farmer. Wilamowitz believes that he can detect in this second part a pervasive self-confidence, which is especially evident in the proem and in other sections of the work in which Zeus is praised as the god of justice. Accordingly, Hesiod could not have assumed this tone of confidence until after he had defeated Perses in court: "Allein ist es denkbar, daß der Dichter, wenn er nicht des Erfolges sicher war, in diesen hohen Tönen den Gott priese?"[80] The bipartite nature of the poem's composition renders the shift that occurs in the characterization of Perses unavoidable. Wilamowitz concludes that Hesiod designed the poem for recitation in public for the purposes of instructing his fellow citizens, using the trial (now over and done) as a didactic tool.[81]

---

[79] von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff 1928: 132-34.

[80] von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff 1928: 134.

[81] von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff 1928: 133-35. Wilamowitz's theory complements that of Hays 1918, who also believes that the poem was composed in two distinct time periods with a lapse of time between them. Hays argues that the first part of the poem (written, as Wilamowitz also believed, before the trial was completed) is characterized by a strong feeling of anxiety, which is absent in the second part of the poem (written after Hesiod's victory). Hesiod "feels himself in the talons of the hawk" in the first part of the poem, and this results in his portraying Perses in a much harsher light than he does later on (Hays 1918: 19-20). For Hays, as for Wilamowitz, the lapse of time between the two periods of composition and the change of circumstances that it brings are responsible for the inconsistency of the representation of Perses.

With his insistence upon the point that the trial was over before the *Works and Days* was completed, Wilamowitz is responding to theories like that of Wade-Gery that the poem was composed as a series of 'agitation speeches' designed to influence the outcome of the case. "What I conceive happened," writes Wade-Gery, "is that when the case was pending Hesiod stumped the country, round Ascra and Thespia, making agitation: and these are his agitation poems, and the agitation was successful."[82] Solmsen entertains this theory as well, noting that the *Works and Days*' "public and extraordinarily eloquent appeal to the kings may have kept them from disgracing themselves by another 'crooked judgment'."[83] If the *Works and Days* be understood as a series of 'agitation speeches,' the inconsistency of Perses is perhaps readily explained by the poet's need to customize the depiction of his errant brother for each particular audience being addressed. In effect, this theory explains the supposed lack of coherence in Perses' character portrait by denying that coherence was ever an objective of Hesiod's in the first place; the speeches were composed separately and only later combined into one.

West's approach to the question of Perses' inconsistency is to reject Kirchhoff's *Mahnlieder* theory as 'over sharp' and to develop the ideas of Wilamowitz further.[84] West believes that not only does the progress of the poem's argument require that Perses be shown in different circumstances, but that his very failings "are determined by the requirements of the context in each place, and in some cases apparently invented only after the context had been composed."[85] One of the examples West gives of a fault in Perses that Hesiod seems to add at the last minute occurs in lines 396-97, in which we unexpectedly learn that Perses has come to Hesiod asking for aid. West regards the passage with suspicion:

> It is hard to resist the impression that Perses' current appeal to his brother—something of which we have heard nothing till now, and which sits strangely with some of the things we have heard—is not a fixed datum that Hesiod is working towards in 394-5, but something that he only thinks of after 395.[86]

---

[82] Wade-Gery 1949: 84-90, 90.
[83] Solmsen 1949: 213 n.8.
[84] West 1978: 35 makes this assessment of Kirchhoff's idea.
[85] West 1978: 36.
[86] West 1978: 39-40.

According to West, then, Perses is inconsistent because Hesiod has composed the poem as an unreflective stream-of-consciousness, without attempting to make each new statement about Perses consistent with the last.

West, who believes that the biographical material in this poem is factual, distinguishes between those self-referential statements of Hesiod's that are true and those that must have been last-minute additions, and hence false. If one accept the story line of the poem as truly recounting the story of a dispute between two brothers, however, there are no reliable criteria that can separate the 'true' autobiographical data from the false ones. In effect, West blames the inconsistency of Perses on the inadequacy of Hesiod, who is unable to formulate a logical or coherent argument and plan it out in advance, but must blurt out each new thought as he stumbles across it.

It is partly in reaction to this remarkable contempt for Hesiod's skill as a poet that the Unitarians have sought to explain the changing representation of Perses as a deliberate element of Hesiod's artistic plan for the *Works and Days*. Arguing specifically against West and his view of an inconsistent Perses, Schmidt puts forward the idea that the figure of Perses does not change back and forth in the poem, but evolves. Perses heeds the warnings of his brother and, by the time Hesiod begins to give concrete agricultural advice, he has been convinced and is ready to work.[87] Clay also believes that Perses undergoes a transformation over the course of the poem, and she joins Schmidt in opposition to West's view of a 'changeable' Perses: "Perses does indeed change in the course of the poem as he absorbs Hesiod's teaching, but those changes represent the dynamic linear development of Perses' education."[88]

Hesiod has, according to Clay, deliberately obscured the facts of the case so that the didactic message of the poem, how a person should live his life, can reach a far wider audience than the material specifically concerned with the trial.[89] Each stage of the poem has a different lesson for Perses (and the rest of the audience), "first turning Perses onto the path of justice, then to work as the sole legitimate means of gaining a livelihood, and, finally, to a comprehension of the ἐτήτυμα promised by Hesiod in the

---

[87] Schmidt 1986: 52.
[88] J. S. Clay 1993: 25.
[89] J. S. Clay, 1993: 26.

prologue."[90] Hesiod, then, is not merely fashioning a new Perses to fit every new piece of ammunition that can be aimed against him, but carefully guiding him and us through the steps of a lesson that he wishes us to learn. Nagy expresses a similar view of the evolution of Perses, noting that the outrage of the poet against his brother begins to die down by line 286, and Hesiod begins to direct his didactic efforts towards a 'generalized second person singular,' rather than to Perses as an object of wrath: "it is as if Perses were now ready to accept the teachings of his righteous brother."[91]

The middle position between the radical view that coherence was impossible (due to multiple authorship, a compiling of separate poems, two-stage composition, or the poet's ineptitude) and the equally radical view that the consistency in the character of Perses must be perceived as tied to the ongoing, linear process of his education is an attempt to interpret the words of Hesiod in such a way that all the representations of Perses make sense in their contexts. Lattimer, for instance, asserts that the question of Perses' change from wealth to poverty has been over stressed by critics. Perses is not absolutely destitute in the second half of the poem; Hesiod merely warns him that he is headed that way.[92] Lattimer argues against the theories of Wilamowitz and Hays that the two different representations of Perses are due to the poem's being composed in two separate stages. Instead, he believes that Hesiod wrote the poem after all threat of a lawsuit had passed and merely uses the quarrel as a particular example from which he proceeds to draw general applications concerning the state of justice in his times.[93] Gagarin bases his argument for a consistently-presented Perses on his own interpretation of the events surrounding the case. Building on the theory put forward by van Groningen, Gagarin asserts that the *Works and Days* does not depict Perses as now rich, now poor; instead Perses must be understood to have lost his first attempt to get more than his share of the patrimony. He has used up whatever wealth he received from the inheritance, partly in court fees to the 'gift-eating kings,' and is now poor.[94]

Gagarin supports his argument for Perses' consistent state of poverty by reinterpreting the lines in which Hesiod seems to

---

[90] J. S. Clay 1993: 24.
[91] Nagy 1982: 59.
[92] Lattimer 1930: 76.
[93] *Ibid.*
[94] Gagarin 1973: 106.

accuse his brother of stealing wealth from him. In ἄλλα τε πολλά / ἁρπάζων ἐφόρεις (37-38), the imperfect ἐφόρεις should not be treated as an aorist but be translated with conative force, "you kept trying to carry goods off, but failed." Thus Perses is indeed consistent throughout the poem—consistently destitute and in need of some good advice on how to turn his life around.[95] In his interpretation of the *Works and Days* Jones claims that the whole story of the trial should not be taken out of its context in the poem.[96] Jones argues that Hesiod's main goal is to urge Perses to resume the *timely* (i.e. properly scheduled) working of the land and to abandon his efforts in the law courts, which waste both time and resources. The only reason why the bad ἔρις is bad is because it keeps a farmer from his work, and so Hesiod wrote the poem in order to bring Perses back to his duties. He argues that the figure of Perses is consistently presented in that he exhibits "not different failings but sequential stages of the same failing": Hesiod shows how Perses advances from merely observing the quarrels of other litigants, to engaging in quarrels of his own against others' property, to "the dramatic revelation that his opponent is none other than Hesiod himself."[97]

Jones explains the statement that Perses has come begging to Hesiod (ὡς καὶ νῦν ἐπ' ἐμ' ἦλθες, 396) as an event that actually occurred in the past, hence the aorist tense of ἦλθες rather than a present perfect, contrasting it with the preceding hypothetical future case (πτώσσῃς ἀλλοτρίους οἴκους καὶ μηδὲν ἀνύσσῃς,

---

[95] Gagarin 1973: 110-11. Gagarin 1973 and van Groningen 1953 both deny that the epithet 'gift-eating' implies that the kings (i.e. judges) have been bribed by Perses. They argue that the 'gifts' in question were merely the usual court fees that were paid by both parties in a lawsuit. If the kings were willing to sit on many cases for the sake of collecting as many fees as possible, this would account for Hesiod's indignation at their greed (Gagarin 1973: 111). In asserting that Perses has not bribed the judges, however, van Groningen and Gagarin challenge the nearly universal opinion of other Hesiodic scholars who regard the lawsuit as real. Munding 1959, for example, bases his entire interpretation of the poem on what he takes to be Hesiod's accusation of bribery. Munding understands the phrase οἳ τήνδε δίκην ἐθέλουσι δικάσσαι (39) to refer to judges "who are willing to judge this kind of justice" (i.e. one tainted by bribery). Hesiod then goes on, he argues, to describe the real kind of justice in the rest of the poem. Thus, just as there are two kinds of ἔρις and two kinds of αἰδώς in the *Works and Days* so there are two kinds of δίκη. Other critics base their assumption of bribery simply on the epithet δωροφάγους and on the indignant tone in which it seems to be applied.

[96] Jones1984: 307-323.

[97] Jones 1984: 317.

395).[98] The reason why there is confusion about the events surrounding Perses is because Hesiod has combined general statements about the right way to behave (almost all of which are in the third person singular) with statements made to Perses in particular (in the second singular). Once the material relating to Perses is sifted out from the statements made to mankind, Jones believes, it becomes clear that Perses is a consistent figure in this poem.

Scholars have thus opted for one of three possible ways of dealing with the apparent changeability of Perses in the *Works and Days*. They have either decided that the representation of Perses as we have it is illogical and therefore cannot have been produced in that form by Hesiod (e.g. Kirchhoff, Wilamowitz);[99] or they have sought to reinterpret his words in such a way that the figure of Perses becomes consistent (Jones, Gagarin); or they have viewed the portrait of Perses as a dynamic element within the poem, changing and evolving as he accepts the didactic messages that Hesiod imparts, and that Perses, though purposely different at the end of the poem from what he was at the beginning, is yet always consistent as a character (e.g. Clay, Schmidt).

The first two of these positions are designed in response to the assumption that Perses is a real person whose actions and circumstances Hesiod attempts to relate in this poem. The last position takes the radically different approach that Perses is treated in the *Works and Days* as a character in an unfolding drama who exists for the purpose of receiving and incorporating the didactic message of the poem. This interpretation does not insist that Perses is only a literary construct with no historical reality, it merely treats him as a character in the poem and seeks to explain his role in context. Whether Hesiod's brother really existed cannot be determined, and so this factor is wisely left out of consideration. The approach represented by Clay and Schmidt is valuable because it attempts to operate outside the sphere of pre-formed opinion and draws its conclusions from the text alone. The other two approaches are weak insofar as they build upon the unsubstantiated and unprovable assumption that Hesiod's purpose in writing the *Works and Days* was to give an account of his personal experiences.

---

[98] Jones 1984: 319.

[99] West however, is perfectly willing to attribute illogical thought-patterns to Hesiod; cf. West 1978: 37.

The 'Works and Days': An Agricultural Manual?

One of the questions arising from an autobiographical reading of the *Works and Days* concerns the nature of the agricultural advice that the poem imparts and its relation to the overall purpose of the work. For the past thirty years the question has been debated whether Hesiod, in making his prescriptions for the farmer's tasks and the proper times at which to perform them, actually intends to instruct his audience on these matters. That he is adopting a didactic tone is not in question, but what critics have begun to inquire is whether the advice that Hesiod gives on farming would actually benefit an aspiring farmer. Could a man who knew little or nothing about farming, as many suppose was the case with Perses, learn from the *Works and Days* as if it were an agricultural manual?

The traditional approach to this issue is not to regard it as an issue at all. Scholars who adopt the biographical reading of Hesiod have no reservations about the poet's intentions to provide useful information in these passages. Jaeger, who believes that Hesiod was primarily a peasant writing for peasants, regards the *Works and Days* as a compendium of peasant wisdom that is presented by the poet in a series of easily-remembered maxims for the purpose of instruction.[100] The question of the didactic nature of this section is not, however, treated by Jaeger in detail. Fränkel, whose conservative views on Hesiod are similar to Jaeger's, also takes for granted the serious instructional nature of the 'Works' section (roughly lines 286 ff.). Without questioning the value of the agricultural advice that Hesiod offers, Fränkel broadly states that the poet of the *Works and Days* "sketches a general picture of the daily life of the peasant and gives practical prescriptions for the 'works' (387) which must be performed."[101]

West delves further into the subject of Hesiod's didactic intentions, analyzing the 'systematic programme' with which Hesiod takes us 'methodically through the year' of the Greek farmer.[102] By taking this section as instructional, however, West does not imply that he has unqualified confidence in Hesiod's personal knowledge of every aspect of the agricultural subjects that he treats: "On the subject of woodcutting the poet has some quite technical knowledge to impart; one might almost think that he was

---

[100] Jaeger 1945: 61.
[101] Fränkel 1975: 112.
[102] West 1978: 52.

more of an expert on this than on anything else he deals with." Furthermore, West notes that some of the agricultural instructions imparted by Hesiod here, especially the later ones, are covered less fully than others. West attributes this fact to the tendency for poets who are listing a series of items to become increasingly more cursory towards the end of the list.[103] This view fits well with West's argument that the entire 'Works' section was an afterthought that was only later appended to the poem's original plan; thus an unplanned addition the agricultural advice can be excused for treating its several subjects with inconsistent thoroughness. Griffith, whose views on Hesiod are far from West's traditional standpoint, nevertheless embraces without reservation the traditional position that Hesiod wrote the 'Works' section for the purpose of serious agricultural instruction. "He is now speaking as a technical expert," Griffith declares of Hesiod in lines 286 onward.[104]

Another staunchly conservative student of Hesiod, Lesky, shares West's opinion that the 'Works' section is not the real and original subject of the *Works and Days,* "since all this section can be taken as an elaboration and amplification of the injunction to Perses to work hard."[105] In contrast to what West would later opine, however, Lesky declares that this section is "not a systematic instruction in husbandry, but a mixture of practical advice and hints from general experience."[106] Indeed, this view of the unsystematic nature of Hesiod's instruction is by far the most widely held; West has been among the very few scholars to argue that Hesiod follows a logical order in the progression of his pieces of advice on farming.

In an interesting variation on the traditional standpoint, N. Jones argues that Hesiod does indeed intend to teach Perses and his wider audience in the 'works' section, but that the main essence of his teaching is the timing of the specified tasks. Perses must learn not only how to be a farmer but how to farm 'in season' so as not to suffer catastrophe when his poorly-timed efforts yield no fruit. Knox also emphasizes the preventative nature of Hesiod's agri-

---

[103] West 1978: 53.
[104] Griffith 1983: 60.
[105] Lesky 1966: 103.
[106] Lesky 1966: 100.

cultural instruction by identifying it as "instruction which will help to avoid the irremediable disaster of a crop failure."[107]

These exponents of the traditional way of reading the *Works and Days* all agree in accepting the poet's didactic statements as genuine attempts at instruction, but they do not question whether those statements actually have anything of value to impart. It is unclear whether this silence on their part results from their belief that the instruction is sound or their conviction that Hesiod was unable to express himself any more coherently than he does in giving it. Most of them prefer to regard the 'works' section as a series of instructional maxims that makes no pretence at being a thorough or sufficient 'farmer's manual'. The problem that this position then raises, however, is why Hesiod would choose to jumble together a series of maxims that are themselves insufficient for the instruction of Perses in the art of agriculture. Since they all agree that Hesiod is attempting to instruct but that his instruction is not thorough enough, it follows that these scholars either do not regard the didactic section as possessing primary importance for Hesiod (and so not needing to be complete), or that they assume that Hesiod has tried his best to give sufficient instruction but has failed.

Howe strongly believes in the instructional purpose of the *Works and Days* but dismisses the problems with the meagreness of that instruction. Using evidence from Linear B records from Mycenean palaces, Howe constructs the theory that the Mycenean Greeks subsisted primarily upon meat and barley groat porridge, but that, after the Dorian invasions, the sudden influx of new mouths to feed forced the inhabitants of Greece to switch to land cultivation and the baking of bread to survive. Since there could never be adequate grazing land in Greece to feed everyone on their wonted diet of meat, the Greeks either had to colonize elsewhere or switch to bread as the staple of their diet. Land cultivation in Greece was of course an exhausting and never-ending task, and it was to get his countrymen used to this dreadful new state of affairs that Hesiod wrote the *Works and Days*. Howe's point is that Hesiod's audience needs to be instructed and exhorted in the adoption of a new and demanding way of life, and the novelty of the situation explains why some of Hesiod's instructions are so

---

[107] Knox 1989: 7.

obvious.[108] As to Hesiod's deficiencies and omissions, Howe protests that the *Works and Days* "represents a *working hypothesis* which needs only practical, immediate application to demonstrate its pertinence," and that Hesiod was no 'Dean of Agriculture.'[109] These somewhat evasive answers fail to explain why, if Hesiod was writing an agricultural manual, he would write one that was incomplete and thus leave Howe's argument open to inevitable attack.

Walcot takes issue with Howe's position. He does not object to her theory about the Mycenean diet or the change they made to being an agriculture-based society, but with her assertion that Hesiod wrote the *Works and Days* as an agricultural manual. Howe's thesis, he argues, puts too much emphasis on the 235 lines devoted to agricultural matters and ignores the remaining 500+ lines that deal with other subjects. Furthermore, he contends that if the poem were intended as a manual for inexperienced farmers, Hesiod would not have made them "sit through half the poem before hearing the part that caters to them."[110] Walcot's objection, which largely echoes the earlier ideas of Sinclair, thus centers upon the relative insignificance of the 'works' section with regard to the 'range of subject matter' and 'prophetic fervor' displayed in the other parts of the poem.[111] Drawing his conclusion from sociological studies he made on Greek 'peasants' of our own time, Walcot argues elsewhere that Howe is wrong to analyze Hesiod's advice on farming logically. Based on this evidence, Walcot opines: "To offer advice, even pitiably obvious advice, is characteristic of the Greek, who adores talking and hates silence."[112] Doubtless the race of Greeks is exceedingly grateful to Prof. Walcot for his perspicacity in characterizing them, but his theory that Hesiod in the *Works and Days* gives advice merely for the love of hearing himself speak reduces the poem to the level of a peasant's pointless ramblings. Walcot's arguments against Howe's thesis, however, have convinced the majority of subsequent Hesiodic scholars, none of whom has attempted to resuscitate Howe's intriguing yet far-fetched interpretation.

---

[108] Howe 1958: 56-59.
[109] Howe 1958: 45.
[110] Walcot 1963: 5-21.
[111] Walcot 1963: 5.
[112] Walcot 1970: 21.

those of Nelson, Clay, and others help to liberate Hesiodic scholarship from the sterile bonds into which the biographists have led it by showing that the poem itself provides the clues required to understand it. There is no need (and no justification) for extrapolating personal details about the poet's life from his poetry, and then in turn using those details to interpret the poem from which they were extracted. Critics like Jaeger, Fränkel, and West, who have convinced themselves of Hesiod's peasant status and correspondingly simple mental processes, trap themselves by their own unfounded presuppositions into being unable to perceive any evidence of a more profound artistic purpose behind the *Works and Days* than as a platform for a cantankerous peasant berating his greedy brother.

Those who can abandon the biographical reading of the Hesiodic poems, on the other hand, are free to observe the subtleties of thought and structural exposition that pervade the *Theogony* and the *Works and Days*, just as they do the work of Homer, Archilochus, and the other great archaic poets. Traditionalists will argue that the tone of the *Works and Days,* of the proem to the *Theogony,* and of the Hecate episode is too vivid and personal to have been created as a literary fiction. Yet few poems could rival the Neobule fragment from the Cologne papyrus of Archilochus in vividness and passionate intensity, and many scholars, most notably West, now believe that this poem and the others dealing with 'Lycambes' were composed on stock iambic themes.[121]

Archilochus, too, had a Hesiodic meeting with his (iambic) Muses, as we know from Mnesiepes' inscription, which suggests that to the ancients the poetry of Archilochus was not considered to be so very far removed from that of Hesiod. I join Griffith, Nagy, and the other exponents of the theory that Hesiod adopts a literary persona when he makes reference to 'himself' in their belief that an archaic first person singular is too dubious a construct to justify the biographical interpretation of the Hesiodic poems.

---

[121] West 1974: 28.

CHAPTER TWO

THE IMPLIED AUTHOR OF THE *THEOGONY*

The argument that Hesiod has composed his poems in an autobiographical framework is still widely endorsed by scholars, although with a new twist.[1] In her 1989 dissertation Elizabeth Stein argues that it was the invention and dissemination of writing that allowed Hesiod to assert his individuality in his works.[2] In the *Theogony* Stein sees examples of Hesiod's self-references in the '*Dichterweihe*' episode (22–34) and in the 'Hymn to Hecate' (411–52). In these passages she finds that ". . . Spüren einer individuellen Dichterpersönlichkeit nachzuweisen sind." Stein continues:

> The individual, who comes before his public with the speaking of his own name, expresses himself as proud of his creation, places himself on a par with the βασιλῆες, professes an entirely personal relationship with a goddess [*sc.* Hecate], possesses a pronounced consciousness of himself. He does not remain in the darkness of anonymity, nay, he ventures as an individual person into the light of publicity, albeit still unsure and at times rather hesitant. Yet his pride in his calling, in his performance, brings the Boeotian shepherd even to this, to speak of himself, of his faith, of his conception of poetry. That which in Homer remains unsaid and must remain so, becomes in Hesiod a revelation of a new attitude, which came about in conjunction with the establishment of writing.[3]

More recently, Stephanie Nelson argues that "there appears to be no particular reason for the poet of the *Theogony* or the *Works and Days* to choose the persona of a small but far from destitute farmer, unless he was just that."[4] Although she claims that "it does

---

[1] Cf. Most 1991.

[2] Stein 1990.

[3] "Das Individuum, das mit Namensnennung vor sein Publikum tritt, sich stolz über sein Schaffen äußert, sich auf eine Stufe mit den βασιλῆες stellt, ein ganz persönliches Verhältnis zu einer Göttin [*sc.* Hecate] bekennt, besitzt ein ausgeprägtes Bewußtsein seiner selbst. Es bleibt nicht im Dunkel der Anonymität, nein, es wagt sich als einzigartige Person ins Licht der Öffentlichkeit, zwar noch unsicher und bisweilen etwas stockend. Doch der Stolz auf der Berufung, auf das Geleistete bringt den böotischen Hirten dazu, von sich selbst, seinem Glauben und seiner Dichtungsauffassung zu reden. Was bei Homer ungesagt blieb und bleiben mußte, wurde bei Hesiod zum Aufweis einer neuen Geisteshaltung, die im Zusammenhang mit der einsetzenden Schriftlichkeit aufkam." Stein 1990:23–24.

[4] Nelson 1998: 38.

not ultimately matter whether Hesiod was a farmer or not," Nelson's stated opinion is that he *was,* and in fact her entire thesis is based on her assumption that the views expressed by Hesiod in his poems are characteristic of farmers everywhere (an highly suspect assertion in itself), and that these views can explain difficulties in the poems.[5]

Hesiod is thus still perceived as the Boeotian shepherd, 'unsure' and 'hesitant' as to whether he ought to defy tradition and compose poetry in his own name—but the changing times and the availability of writing give him the courage to do so. While it is helpful and even necessary to compare Hesiod's style of composition with Homer's, the view that Hesiod is a peasant, albeit an enlightened one, who proudly asserts his individuality in his poems can tell us nothing about either himself or his poetry. Unfounded in itself, this claim even hinders further study of the Hesiodic poems by suggesting that this author, a peasant and thus (presumably) a mere novice in the art of composing poetry, has little artistic control over his poetic medium.

If, however, one entertain the possibility that the poems of Hesiod do not reflect the author's 'individuality' but are presented by a narrator who is himself a fictional character created by the author—i.e. that they are 'mimetic,' as Aristotle claims for the *Iliad*—new avenues open up for the understanding of Hesiod's artistic style and goals.[6] I believe that the methods of narratology, specifically as employed by Irene de Jong in her study of the *Iliad,* provide a much deeper understanding of how Hesiod manipulates his material to produce specific poetic effects in his works than the traditional autobiographical approach. If we permit ourselves to regard Hesiod's 'autobiographical' remarks as consciously included for a poetic purpose, we avoid running into the kind of baseless speculation that, in my opinion, inevitably leads scholars like Stein to a dead end. As de Jong puts it, "Narratology may prove capable of showing the complexities of a text reputed simple."[7] For Hesiod scholars narratology offers a systematic means by which the internal complexities of Hesiod's work can be revealed and

---

[5] Nelson 1998: 37.

[6] Aristotle calls the *Iliad* "mimetic" in *Poetics* 1460a 5–11; see below for a discussion of Irene de Jong's interpretation of Aristotle's claim, and how it relates to Hesiod.

[7] de Jong 1987a: xi. Her most recent book (de Jong 2001), offers a detailed narratological analysis of the *Odyssey*.

analyzed, and by which the conception of these poems as simple or even naive in execution can be corrected.

Narratology is a way of speaking about and analyzing a text. Its primary virtue is that it is functional, i.e. it focuses on how a text 'works' without relying on an assessment of the author's personality. The field of narratology contains nothing that is in essence unfamiliar to the philologist accustomed to analyzing texts closely. As de Jong succinctly explains, "Narratologists are concerned with such issues as characterization, chronology, suspense, plot-structure, point of view and the role of the narrator."[8] None of these categories is intrinsically foreign to the Classicist, although perhaps the exclusive focus on these issues, which tend to be submerged beneath (or subtly intertwined with) the main events of a story's plot, would be new to some. The only difficulty lies in the somewhat convoluted terminology that narratologists have developed for the expression of their ideas, and in the regrettable fact that they persist in devising ever new terms and categories for narratological analysis, and rejecting those of one another. The result is that what Wayne Booth calls 'authoritative telling', de Jong calls 'γάρ-clauses', and Richardson calls 'commentary', and so on, with slight differences in meaning for each category but with the same basic concept in mind.[9]

In this book I do not concern myself with the different terminologies employed by each narratologist or invent new terms for narratological phenomena that have been defined very thoroughly already, but choose the methods that are best adapted for the study of Hesiod. The narratological model that is relevant to this study is that of Mieke Bal and Gérard Genette, as interpreted by Irene de Jong, and most of the terminology employed will be hers.[10] The work of other narratologists, such as Wayne Booth, Seymour Chatman, Scott Richardson, and Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan will also be cited where appropriate, but for the most part the methods of de Jong, who has made a thorough analysis of both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey,* are best suited to the study of the Hesiodic poems.[11]

---

[8] de Jong 1987a: x.

[9] Booth 1966: 4; de Jong1987: 91–92; Richardson 1990: 140.

[10] Bal 1980 (trans. 1985); Genette 1980.

[11] Chatman 1978; Richardson 1990; Rimmon-Kenan 1983. The main point of divergence between the narratological model of de Jong and that adopted in this book occurs in Chapter 7, where I employ Richardson's term "Commentary" to refer to passages in which the narrator explains, judges, or otherwise

Narratological Model of de Jong[12]

The narratological method employed by de Jong in analyzing the Homeric poems are useful to the Hesiodist for many reasons, not the least of which being that, since she has developed it for the specific purpose of analyzing the formulaic language of archaic Greek epic, her method is already adapted to the poetic style of the *Theogony*. The narratological concepts of most importance for the *Theogony* are the same as those explored by de Jong in the *Iliad*: 1) The actual presentation of the events: In narratological terms this element is divided into the three layers of 'fabula' (the 'raw data' of who said or did what), 'story' (the raw data arranged in logical and chronological sequence), and 'text' (the finished product that we read). 2) The way in which the events are told, or 'narration': Narration is always accompanied by an emotional coloration given to the fabula by the narrator, which is called the narrator's 'focalization', and the intended recipients of both the narration and focalization are termed 'narratees' and 'focalizees'. 3) The concept of 'embedding', in which a narrator can present the emotional reaction (focalization) of another character as if it were his own.[13]

These three main categories are the analytical tools that allow de Jong to examine the text of the *Iliad,* which is presented in three types of narrative situation: simple narrator-text, complex narrator-text (in which the embedding of focalization, narration, or both occurs), and character-text. 1) Simple narrator-text. In this situation the primary narrator-focalizer (Hesiod) relates the story to the primary narratee-focalizee (the audience). Thus simple narrator-text occurs in the *Theogony* when Hesiod relates information to his audience in the character of external narrator, without embedding direct or indirect speeches of characters or embedding their focalizations. 2) Complex narrator-text, in which the primary narrator-focalizer embeds the focalization of another character. This other character, whose point of view is embedded, then becomes an internal secondary focalizer, i.e. a character in the story who has an emotional reaction to a situation but who

comments on his text.

[12] de Jong 1987a describes her narratological model in Chapter 2 of *Narrators and Focalizers.*

[13] de Jong 2001: xiii, offers a succinct definition of embedded focalization as "the representation by the narrator in narrator-text of a character's focalization, i.e. perceptions, thoughts, emotions, or words (indirect speech)."

does not himself express the reaction in that instance (hence he is not a narrator). 3) Character-text, or speeches. In this situation the primary narrator-focalizer, Hesiod, embeds the speech and focalization of a character in his narration, thus turning that character into a secondary internal narrator-focalizer.[14] That is to say, Hesiod steps aside and allows a character to speak and focalize for himself. Of the concepts listed above (presentation of events, narration, embedding, simple narrator-text, complex narrator-text, and character-text), the first three can be considered the rudimentary concepts, while the second three are the ways in which these building blocks are used in the narratological method of de Jong,

While de Jong, in honing her method of analysis for the study the Homeric poems, has created a useful tool for a similar study of the *Theogony,* the Hesiodist attempting to use this model cannot but be aware of the differences in the narrative styles of these two poets. As de Jong observes, nearly half of the total text of the *Iliad* consists of character-text, the direct speeches of characters.[15] When these statistics are compared to the mere 34 lines of direct speech out of the 1022 lines of the *Theogony* (assuming that lines 963-1022 actually belong to this poem, which appears doubtful), and 12 out of the 825 lines of the *Works and Days,* it is clear that the narrative structure of the Hesiodic poems differs significantly from those of Homer, and requires the narratologist to approach them from a slightly different angle.

For example, one important divergence between the narrative styles of Homer and Hesiod that is linked to their respective uses of character-text is the amount of embedded focalization that can be detected in their poems. In keeping with his general desire to let his characters 'speak for themselves' and not to intrude his own emotional reaction to the events he narrates, Homer employs embedded focalization to a much larger extent than Hesiod. Embedded focalization allows the primary narrator-focalizer to present the emotional impact of a given situation on a character without having the character speak, as in *Il.* 10.463-64, where Andromache sees Hector's body being dragged 'ruthlessly' (ἀκηδέστως) towards the ships of the Achaeans.[16] It is clear that ἀκηδέστως represents Andromache's reaction to the sight, rather

[14] de Jong, 1987: 37.
[15] de Jong 1987a: x. She gauges the exact amount at 45% of the whole poem.
[16] de Jong's example, from de Jong 1997: 296.