

The Work of Poetry in Hesiod's *Works and Days*

In the *Works and Days*, Hesiod stresses farm work as the key to prosperity: ἔργον ἐπ' ἔργῳ ἐργάζεσθαι (382). But he also emphasizes mental and emotional states that contribute to agricultural success. The picture of the industrious farmer (20-24), whose incessant work inspires the good Eris in his neighbor, offers a window onto a landscape of both detached thought and absorbent emotion, in which farming and poetry appear in analogous ways (see Marsilio 2000 for similar parallels). These analogies are accentuated by their link to cultivated and built nature within Hesiod's poetic farmland.

In the imagery of the ideal, industrious farmer (20-24), the cultivated state of nature evident in the plowing, sowing, and planting (22) is coupled with the built nature visible in the well-ordered οἶκος (23). These cultivated and built states of nature stir up the good Eris in the lazy neighbor's θυμός, or soul, in a manner that is analogous to the way in which Hesiod's poetry is meant to act upon Perses' θυμός to drive it toward ἔργον (20, 27-28). Nagy (1990, 64), indeed, notes the role of the poem in resolving the brothers' dispute. The farmer's work act parallels the poet's speech. A key difference in this analogy is that Perses and the others in Hesiod's audience emotionally absorb both Eris and its impetus, the work of the industrious farmer, but are exhorted to thoughtfully and objectively contemplate the poetry.

Hesiod uses the verbs ζηλοῖ, κοτέει, and φθονέει (23, 25, 26) to express the emotions of resentment and envy that drive one farmer to rival another and that impel potters, builders, beggars, and poets to a similar rivalry. He then crafts a tightly woven transition from this section into one in which he enjoins Perses to use his θυμός to assimilate the working farmer's ethos as it is expressed in the poetic medium. Perses' θυμός is one of the hinges for this transition:

καὶ πτωχὸς πτωχῷ φθονέει καὶ ἀοιδὸς ἀοιδῷ.

ὦ Πέρση, σὺ δὲ ταῦτα τεῶ̃ ἐνικάτθεο θυμῶ̃,
μηδέ σ' Ἔρις κακόχαρτος ἀπ' ἔργου θυμὸν ἐρύκοι

(WD 26-28)

Each of these three lines ends with similar sounding diphthongs, -ῶ̃/-οι. The end-rhymes suggest a special coordination that is reinforced by 1) the etymological relationship of ἀοιδός, “singer,” with the verb οἶδα, “I know”; 2) the meaning of θυμός as the vaporous breath that holds both thought and emotion; and 3) the placement of θυμὸν between ἔργου and ἐρύκοι.

Alex Hardie (2000, 163-165) makes a strong argument that Homer, at *Od.* 1.336-338, etymologizes ἀοιδόν, “singer,” as “one who knows,” through word play with οἶδας, “you know,” with the ἀ- of ἀοιδόν having intensive force. For the purpose of similar etymological word play in WD 26-28, θυμός, I would suggest, can function as οἶδα does because the θυμός is the breath with which a person “thinks and knows” (Onians 1951, 56). Since knowledge also rests in the singer, ἀοιδός (Hardie 2000, 165, citing Eustathius, on *Il.* 1.1, and *Theogony* 27-28), the double reference to θυμός, especially the first rhymed instance at v. 27, causes ἀοιδῶ̃ (intensive alpha) to resonate with the sense of the poet’s knowledge, which is precisely what Hesiod wants Perses to store in his θυμός in v. 27. Hesiod may also play on ἀοιδὸς ἀοιδῶ̃ of v. 26, whereby the alpha of ἀοιδὸς is privative (“not knowing”), while that of ἀοιδῶ̃ is intensive, which would mean that Hesiod plays on the ignorance of Perses. This ignorance causes Perses (ἀ-οιδὸς) to envy the knowledge of Hesiod (ἀ-οιδῶ̃). Hardie (2000, 168-169) discusses later examples of play on privative alpha, e.g., Soph. *OT* 36-37.

The third element of the coordination of these three verses consists of the placement of θυμὸν between ἔργου and ἐρύκοι. At v. 28, ἔργου scans as a spondee, which results in a stressed final syllable, -γου. Moreover, the -ρύ- of ἐρύκοι is long and therefore its metrical stress has the

effect of making the first two syllables, ἐρύ-, echo the sound of ἔργου. With the echoed sounds of ἔργου and ἐρύ- reverberating on either side of θυμὸν, we perceive that the θυμός is now enveloped by ἔργου. Such an effect is what Hesiod seeks in reality, not just poetically, because he wants Perses' θυμός to become infused with ἔργου, the work of the farm, and not the quarrels of the agora.

Works Cited

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