

## Works, Days, and Divine Influence in Hesiod's Story World

In the *Works and Days*, I argue, Hesiod aims to convince his audiences that the gods did and still do affect the affairs of mortal men. In this paper, I explore the rhetorical maneuvers the poet uses to strengthen his audiences' belief in the gods' influence over both the "deep past"—the time of myth—and the poet's own period.

To this end, I outline four techniques that Hesiod uses to accomplish this goal: (1) building personal authority; (2) constructing a familiar story world; (3) remaining non-committal on the issue of the supernatural; and (4) "normalizing" divine intervention.

Hesiod primes his audiences to believe what he has to say about the gods' intervention in both the deep past—specifically, in the stories of the Races of Humanity and of Pandora—and in the contemporary world by establishing himself as an authoritative speaker (strategy (1)) (e.g. Clay 2003.140, West 1978.272).

I demonstrate that strategy (1) provides the foundation from which Hesiod deploys strategies (2-4). Hesiod, I recognize, must use different strategies when narrating the present than he does in recounting the deep past. Whereas the divine were expected to act boldly in the deep past (a cursory read of Homer confirms this expectation), the gods' influence on the contemporary world was less obvious. Thus, while Hesiod employs (2-4) in his narration of the present, he only employs (2) for the tales of Pandora and the Races.

I next turn to strategy (2), the construction of a familiar story world, a technique shared by Hesiod's narration of both the deep past and the present. Here, I draw on scholars of modern folklore, Bennett and Hänninen, in whose estimation, the more familiar the story world constructed by an author, the more credible any supernatural events embedded in that world

become (Bennett 1999.132-36). I argue that the story world in which Hesiod's tales of Pandora and the Races take place would seem familiar to Hesiod's audiences in part because that story world explains and reflects the conditions of their contemporary period. Here, I follow Johnston and Calame, each of whom argue for the continuity between the worlds of myth and the everyday (Calame 2011, Johnston 2018.79-80). For example, Hesiod's description of Pandora makes clear that the first woman is deceitful; Hesiod then goes on to depict modern women as being, like Pandora, tricky (372-377). Thus, the story of the deep past is rendered familiar by the all too similar contemporary state of humanity—and vice versa.

Hesiod employs strategy (3) to insulate himself further from audience disbelief by remaining non-committal in his descriptions of the gods' influence in the modern period, employing hypothetical language when singing of instances of divine action in the present. For instance, Hesiod says, "if someone were to get great wealth by force with his hands, or were to steal it with his tongue, ... easily the immortals obscure him ..." (320-325). Who, where, and when? This statement promises the gods' intervention in the contemporary world, yet their hypothetical nature leaves a wide margin of error.

Finally, Hesiod "normalizes" divine influence over his contemporary world, writing it into nature and pointing to the power of abstract concepts such as Hunger as analogous to that of the gods. To illustrate this latter strategy: Hunger, although invisible, has an undeniable effect on the lives of modern humans. Thus, whether Hesiod means for "well-crowned Demeter" to fill Perseus' barn metaphorically or literally, the Hunger that he will suffer if she does not will be very literal indeed (298-302). Further, in contrast to several scholars, I argue that the gods' contemporary nature-based role serves to bolster audiences' belief in their efficacy rather than diminish it (e.g. Beall 2004.179). Hence, to equate Zeus to a passing rain shower confirms the

audience members' belief that they have experienced Zeus—sometimes several times in one day, weather permitting (414-419, 488, 626, 676).

Perhaps the final, calendrical portion of *WD* speaks best to Hesiod's stance on the reality of divine power. Its profusion of religious prohibitions only make sense if the poet believes that the gods did and still do have influence and is intent on convincing his audiences of this fact.

#### Bibliography

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