

NOTES AND DISCUSSIONS

THE DRAMA OF HESIOD'S FARM

The section of the *Works and Days* that deals with farming has traditionally been taken as practical instruction in agriculture.¹ It is a rather poor job.² Hesiod's selection of tasks is spotty, omitting many of the most important tasks on the farm, while emphasizing tasks and seasons of relatively little importance. The advice he does give is often elementary, and his organization is erratic. A fairly simple explanation is available. Hesiod's section on farming may fail as agricultural instruction simply because this is not what it is intended to do. The anomalies that crowd the section appear to be infelicities only if we assume that Hesiod's aim is instruction. If we approach the section with no such preconception, it gradually becomes apparent that Hesiod's anomalies serve a distinct end, each contributing in its own way to a dramatic reenactment of the farmer's year. Examined in this way, the aberrations of Hesiod's account of farming lend Hesiod more, rather than less, credit as a poet.

Scholars, having assumed that the purpose of the farming section is instruction, have not paid it the attention it deserves.³ As a result, many of the anomalies of the section have gone unnoticed. The first such anomaly is Hesiod's total unconcern with the importance of any given task. A work intended to teach farming would, presumably, pay more or less attention to particular tasks according to their relative

1. This tendency begins with Aristophanes' *Frogs* 1030–36, which, given the portrayal of Orpheus, Musaeus, and Homer in the same didactic terms, may well be tongue in cheek. The view that Homer provided practical instruction is ridiculed by Plato in the *Ion*. Among more modern scholars, M. L. West, *Hesiod: Works and Days* (Oxford, 1978), 59, refers to this section as "technical instruction on agriculture"; Bernard Knox, "Work and Justice in Archaic Greece: Hesiod's *Works and Days*," in *Essays: Ancient and Modern* (Baltimore, 1989), 7, as "some instruction which will help to avoid the irremediable disaster of a crop failure" while Mark Griffith, "Personality in Hesiod," *CA* 2 (1983): 89, says: "[Hesiod] is now speaking as technical expert . . ." T. P. Howe ("Linear B and Hesiod's Breadwinners," *TAPA* 89 [1958]: 44–65) takes this view to an unfortunate extreme. For a refutation of her view see Peter Walcot, *Greek Peasants Ancient and Modern: A Comparison of Social and Moral Values* (Manchester, 1970), 20–23. Although the view that the purpose of the section is not simply instruction has gained favor among recent scholars, little attention has been paid its positive purpose.

2. As pointed out, for example, by Kasimierz Kumaniecki, "The Structure of Hesiod's *Works and Days*," *London University Institute of Classical Studies Bulletin* 10 (1963): 88–90; Malcolm Heath, "Hesiod's Didactic Poetry," *CQ* 35 (1983): 255–56; Alison Burford, *Land and Labor in the Greek World* (Baltimore, 1993), 103–105. See West, *Works*, 53–54 for an amusing list of Hesiod's aberrations, which he attributes to Hesiod's tendency to get side-tracked. West, *Works*, 52, notices that "[Hesiod] assumes a pupil initially unequipped for anything, without household, oxen, plough, wagon, or even winter clothing. On the other hand, he assumes a general understanding of the purpose and method of ploughing, reaping, threshing, and so forth."

3. For example, W. J. Verdenius, *A Commentary on Hesiod: Works and Days*, vv. 1–382, Supplements to *Mnemosyne*, 86 (Leiden, 1985) and C. J. Rowe, *Essential Hesiod: Theogony 1–232, 453–733, Works and Days 1–307* (Bristol, 1978) have done commentaries on the first half of the poem. For the lack of attention paid to this section see also Richard Hamilton, *The Architecture of Hesiodic Poetry*, *AJP Monographs* in Classical Philology, ed. Diskin Clay (Baltimore, 1989), 47.

importance on the farm. Hesiod makes no attempt to correlate the importance of the task described to the amount of time spent on it. Thirty-three lines, ranging from making a mortar and pestle to the size of the plowman's lunch, describe preparations for the fall plowing and sowing (414–47). Six describe the sowing itself (465–71). Hesiod's longest description, of winter, surveys the reactions of cattle, sheep, deer, the young girl inside the house, and even an octopus, to the cold North wind. The only advice it contains is to feed the oxen on half rations and avoid getting wet (557, 560–61). Fifteen lines describe a summer picnic (582–96), five more than are given to describing the harvest (571–81). A mere six lines describe the vintage (609–14), while Hesiod dedicates an entire seventy-seven line section of the poem to trading by sea—an occupation that he himself has never bothered to engage in, and one that he is rather inclined to advise against. He never mentions what, or where, one is supposed to be trading.

Nor is Hesiod's description of a farmer's work all-inclusive. The tools that Hesiod's farmer prepares, a mortar, pestle, mallet, wagon, and plow, are all for the grain crop. No tools for the vineyard are mentioned.⁴ Hesiod refers, in the course of his description, to sheep, goats and cattle.⁵ They presumably tend to themselves, for he never mentions any tasks that concern them. The vines are mentioned twice, at pruning time and at the vintage. These vines, unlike most, do not require digging, cultivating, or staking.⁶ The olive, a staple of Greek agriculture and a third of what has been called the "Mediterranean triad" of olives, vines, and grain, is never mentioned.⁷ Hesiod's focus is on the crops, and yet he mentions the most important part of growing grain, preparing the ground for sowing, only in passing. Although his preliminary injunctions begin with something as basic as the need for a house, an ox, and a woman, the necessity of letting the land lie fallow, the basis of his system of farming, is never mentioned. Nor does he ever describe the grain. A farmer decides whether the grain is ready for harvesting (as 473, where the grain is "bowing to the ground in fullness," ὅδε κεν ἄροσύνῃ στάχυες νέουσιεν ἔραζε) by looking at the grain.⁸ The *Works and Days* describes the more picturesque behavior of a snail (571–72).

As to his organization, Hesiod creates the impression that he is following the course of the farmer's year, describing the farmer's tasks one by one, as each follows in its season.⁹ The impression is illusory. As Hesiod's description of a farmer's work is, in fact, highly selective, so also is his chronology. To begin with, Hesiod starts his description not at the year's beginning but *in medias res*, in good epic style. As

4. Cato has six chapters (10–15) on tools, listing eighty different items for the vineyard alone (chap. 11).

5. E.g., *Op.* 515–18, 585–92 and throughout the section on lucky and unlucky days. For animals in ancient agriculture see Signe Isager and Jens Erik Skydsgaard, *Ancient Greek Agriculture: an introduction* (London and New York, 1992), 83–107; Robin Osborne, *Classical Landscape with Figures: the Ancient Greek City and its Countryside* (London, 1987), 47–52; Stephen Hodkinson, "Animal Husbandry in the Greek Polis," in *Pastoral Economies in Classical Antiquity*, ed. C. R. Whittaker (Cambridge, 1988), 35–74.

6. K. D. White, *Roman Farming* (Ithaca, 1970), 229, sees vines as the most labor intensive product of the farm. See also Isager, *Agriculture*, 26–33. Both Vergil (*G.* 2.397–419) and Columella (5.7.1), adopting the style at least of a didactic work, treat viniculture as laborious.

7. For the importance of the olive see Isager, *Agriculture*, 20, 23; Marie-Claire Amouretti, *Le Pain et l'huile dans la Grèce antique* (Paris, 1986), 41–45; V. D. Hanson, *The Other Greeks* (New York, 1995), 95–96.

8. Text cited is from West; translations are my own.

9. West, *Works*, 52 "... we are taken methodically through the year to the time of the next ploughing ..."; B. A. van Groningen, *La Composition littéraire archaïque grecque* (Amsterdam, 1958), 347.

Hesiod twice tells, the farmer's year begins and ends in the spring.¹⁰ This is natural since, in a Mediterranean climate, both the harvest from the previous fall's sowing, and the breaking of new fallow land, occur in springtime. The farming section of the *Works and Days*, however, begins and ends in the fall, well after the harvest but before the fall sowing. This is one of the few times when there is nothing terribly urgent to do on the farm, so much so that Hesiod tells us in the appendix—the seasons for sailing and trade—that this is a good time to sail, if one feels driven to do so. Hesiod underlines the fact that we are being introduced to the year in mid-course by fixing as his key word λήγει (“leaves off” 414, 421), describing what has just ended, the heat of the summer and the sprouting of the trees, rather than what is now beginning.¹¹

This is only the first chronological anomaly. Hesiod's description of fall includes both the breaking of fallow and (three times) the harvest (462–64, 473–92). As Hesiod's “grey spring” of harvest-time (491–92) and the dramatic ἔαρι πολεῖν (“Plow in spring” 462) remind us, both these tasks occur not in the fall but in the spring. Hesiod again breaks chronology, now almost wantonly, in the next section. Here his description of what to do at the opening of winter ends with the advice (502–3):

δείκνυε δὲ δμῶεσσι θέρεος ἔτι μέσσου ἑόντος·
 “οὐκ αἰεὶ θέρος ἐσσεῖται· ποιεῖσθε καλιάς.”

Tell your slaves while it is still middle summer:
 “It will not be summer forever; make yourself huts.”¹²

When winter is past Hesiod describes another, now chronologically correct, harvest. It should, of course, be followed by the threshing, a task which requires some haste, as the harvested grain, until it has been safely threshed, carried inside, and stored, lies continually under the threat of both weather and pests.¹³ But Hesiod interrupts the natural sequence of harvest and threshing by introducing a gratuitous summer picnic.

As Hesiod's year draws to its close we may feel some surprise at reencountering the fall plowing. We have been given no warning. Hesiod's overlapped description, beginning in September and ending in the November of the following year, describes one task, wood-cutting, for the first fall and another, the vintage, for the second. Hesiod, understandably, would not want to repeat himself. Nonetheless, assuming that he felt the need to choose between two tasks appropriate to the fall, it is surprising that he chose the making of a wagon, which does not need to be done annually, over

10. *Op.* 475–77 and 561–63. Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff (*Hesiodos' Erga* [Berlin, 1928]) notes the contradiction, answered by West, *Works*, 289, and “Miscellaneous Notes on the *Works and Days*,” *Philologus* 108 (1964): 167–68. Hesiod would have broken fallow land in the spring, replowed and sown in fall, and, as the growth of crops depends on the winter's rainfall, harvested the following spring. See West, *Works*, 274; White, *Farming*, 173, 176–89; Amouretti, *Le Pain*, 51–75; Osborne, *Landscape*, 40–47; Isager, *Agriculture*, 19–26. West's assumption that the fall sowing is the “beginning of the cereal cycle” (*Works*, 52) ignores the breaking of fallow land in spring.

11. The hysteron proteron of 421 and 422 also serves to emphasize what has just ended. As West, *Works*, 263, points out, “these visible signs might more naturally have been mentioned before τῆμος ἀόκη(τ)οτάτη πέλεται.”

12. West, *Works*, 284, sees this as a “detached thought.”

13. White, *Farming*, 185–88, notes the difficulty and the crucial, although undramatic, importance of threshing, cleaning, sorting, and storing the grain. Although the danger of summer storms is less significant in Greece than in Italy, a picnic could hardly claim priority over threshing even there.

the vintage, which is an annual task of critical importance. As the *coup de grace*, Hesiod sabotages his apparently complete account of the farmer's year with an appendix on sailing, adding to a year that already appeared to be full two more seasons, the seasons for trade.¹⁴

Far from being a useful, if dull, handbook for farmers, Hesiod's description of the farmer's year is neither complete nor chronological—so much so that it is only barely accurate. It is certainly not dull. This is, in fact, our clue to what has determined Hesiod's selection of tasks, the time spent on them, and the arrangement of the section. The aim of Hesiod's section on farming is not to teach, but to describe farming. The description is a dramatic one, that is, it is intended to capture not how farming looks, but how it feels. The anomalies of the description serve this end. A brief overview should be enough to indicate how.

Hesiod's opening description of wood-cutting and the making of tools, tasks which are necessary but not urgent, is long, detailed, and leisurely. The time of the year seems to have been picked nearly at random. We are set at our ease. Gradually, however, Hesiod's usual way of progressing by association of ideas—here mortar, wagon, plow, oxen, plowman—reveals the direction in which Hesiod has been leading us, towards the plowing and sowing of late fall, the paradigmatic moment of Hesiod's year.¹⁵ Hesiod's next two sections essentially repeat what he has just told us, only in more hurried tones. We are told not to build a wagon, but that it is too late for that (455–57), not that a nine-year-old ox is best, but that one should be glad to have an ox at all (451–54), not to worry about how old the plowman is, but to get him out into the field as quickly as possible (458–61). The moment of urgency has stolen upon us. We have not been shown how to prepare the land for the sowing. We have been shown, or rather led through, the experience of the farmer, as he moves from leisurely contemplation of the sowing, to watchful anticipation, to a worried tension, to the moment when, with his hand on the plow-tail, and the oxen straining at the straps, he utters his prayer to Demeter and Zeus of the Earth.

Hesiod's description of sowing gives us a vivid sense of the feel of the oxen in harness as the farmer takes hold of the plow. Scholars have wondered what happened to the forty-year-old plowman.¹⁶ He has, in the urgency of the task, given way to our sense that this is a job for the farmer himself. Hesiod will employ this device, of underlining the urgency of the task by moving from servants to the farmer himself, addressed in the second person singular, again in the harvest. In the threshing it is

14. West, *Works*, 45, pointing out that the section arrives "unheralded" concludes that it is a later addition. Hence the belief that Hesiod's account of sailing is independent of the farming section, as Pierre Waltz, *Hésiode et son poème moral*, Bibliothèque des Universités du Midi, Fascicule 12 (Bordeaux, 1906), 67; Hamilton, *Architecture*, 65; van Groningen, *Composition*, 351; and Peter Walcott, "The Composition of the *Works and Days*," *Revue des Études Grecques* 74 (1971): 11. All these fail to notice that Hesiod's seasons for sailing are precisely the times when the farmer can afford to be away from the farm. Hesiod's sailor spends his winter plowing (*Op.* 623). As West, *Works*, 313, puts it: "For Hesiod [sailing] is not an alternative way of life to farming but an optional supplement to it."

15. For association of ideas as a standard Hesiodic device see Walcott, "Composition," 16; W. J. Verdenius, "Aufbau und Absicht der *Erga*," in *Hésiode et son influence*, Entretiens sur l'antiquité classique vii. (Geneva, 1962), 111–59 and "L'Association des idées comme principe de composition dans Homère, Hésiode, Théognis," *Revue des Études Grecques* 73 (1960): 345–61. These lines indicate that Hesiod is able to use this device to serve rather sophisticated ends.

16. For example, West, *Works*, 273; Friedrich Solmsen, Review of *Hesiod: Works and Days* by M. L. West, in *Gnomon* 52 (1980): 217.

employed conversely, the task is downplayed by being left to the servants.¹⁷ Here it shows us that the critical moment of the year has arrived.

But perhaps the most memorable detail of this scene is a minor one (469–71):

ὁ δὲ τυτθὸς ὀπισθε
 δμῶος ἔχων μακέλην πόνον ὀρνίθεσσι τιθείη
 σπέρμα κατακρύπτων·

Let the small slave boy behind,
 Holding his mallet, make work for the birds,
 Covering over the seed.

It is somewhat surprising that Hesiod should pay so much attention to the little slave boy when the man central to the task, the one scattering the seed (445–46), is not even mentioned. The slave boy himself is surprising, and has, quite reasonably, given rise to emendations. It is absurd to think that this job must be done by a child, or to think that every farmer has just such a small slave boy at his disposal.¹⁸ But then neither is it necessary to have Bibline wine at a summer picnic. The detail does much, in both cases, to bring the picture to life. Hesiod's specification of a small slave boy would be absurd in general instruction. In a dramatic picture of the fall sowing, it is the detail that rivets the imagination.

It is at this point that Hesiod introduces the two most violent displacements in his chronological order. As the farmer hurries onto the field in late autumn Hesiod suddenly interrupts his progress by pointing out, very abruptly, the importance of having plowed the land, when fallow, in spring and summer. Then, as the farmer moves off with his oxen, Hesiod leads us into three descriptions of next spring's harvest, a description of a good harvest, of a bad harvest, and of a harvest saved from disaster at the last minute. There is only one way to understand these displacements. It is by doing what the displacements themselves force us to do, putting ourselves in the place of the farmer. The success or failure of the sowing will depend largely on how well the farmer has already prepared the ground. As the farmer enters the field that he is about to sow he looks around him, and, if he is human, wonders if the land has been sufficiently prepared.¹⁹ It is a momentary, if jarring, stop. He must go ahead in either case. As, after his prayer, he falls into the familiar rhythm of plowing, his

17. In fall Hesiod moves from the hired plowman (441) to slaves (459): δὴ τότε ἐφορμηθῆναι, ὁμῶς δμῶες τε καὶ αὐτός "then drive on your servants and yourself, all of you" to (461): προῖ μάλα σπεύδων "you [singular] must hurry, to be very early" to the farmer at the plow. In spring he moves from (573): ἀλλ' ἄρπας τε χαρασσέμεναι καὶ δμῶας ἐγείρειν "sharpen your blades, and waken your work-people" to (576–77): τημοῦτος σπεύδειν καὶ οἴκαδε καρπὸν ἀγινεῖν / ὀρθρου ἀνιστάμενος "this is the hour of haste and gather your harvest homewards, / though you [singular] rise before dawn to do it." See West, *Works*, 54, 308–9 and below, pp. 52–53, for the audience as Hesiod's "you."

18. I follow the manuscript's τυτθός rather than West's τυτθόν. See West, *Works*, 278, and Solmsen, *Review*, 218, where he describes the change as "gratuitous." West's points, that "there is no earthly reason why Hesiod should specify a child for the job," nor any guarantee that "the farmer will have exactly one such person at his disposal" are certainly valid, especially given Hesiod's own advice against hiring (603) "a servant with a calf underneath her." West himself points out at 277: "The statement of when to pray develops into a general picture of the scene." Isager, *Agriculture*, 52, observes that the "mattock" involved here would not be the one used to break the fallow ("This would be a waste of effort") but a light hoe, such as a boy could wield.

19. West, *Works*, 274, thinks πολεῖν is technical for the breaking of fallow land, as νεομένη. He explains the chronological jump: "What Hesiod *wants* to say now is 'the land you sow should be fallow land which you have ploughed up in the spring and preferably again in the summer . . .'" (italics mine). Mazon, *Les travaux et les jours*, *Le Bouclier* (Paris, 1928), 110, inverts 462 and 463, which does not help much.

thoughts begin to move ahead, with confidence to a successful harvest, with anxiety to a poor harvest, and from there to the possibility of a poor harvest rescued. The farmer has good reason to doubt. He knows whether he is sowing early or late, and (deep down) how well the land has been prepared. But this is not the only factor. There is also the weather, and (483–84):

ἄλλοτε δ' ἄλλοιός Ζηνὸς νόος αἰγιόχοιο,
ἀργαλέος δ' ἄνδρεσσι καταθνητοῖσι νοῆσαι.

One way at one time and another at another is the mind of Zeus
who holds the aegis.

It is a hard thing for mortal men to understand.

Hesiod has not told us how to sow, but he has made us feel the sowing as the farmer feels it. His next, lengthy, description of winter, when the farmer can do nothing but try to avoid the cold and hope that the stores last and that the harvest will be good, does much the same. The length of the section reflects not how long the month of January is, but how long it seems to be. There is no task. Its absence reflects the ἀμηχανίη, the helplessness, of winter (496). And as Hesiod's anomalous advice to plow in spring, given in the fall, reflected the worries of sowing time, so Hesiod's winter advice, to bid the slaves prepare while it is still mid-summer, reflects the farmer's worries as, unable to do any more about the crops, he watches the winter come in, and wonders about the adequacy of his provisions.

In contrast to the long cold wait of winter, the spring, when the vines must be pruned, the fallow plowed, and finally the harvest taken, is a time of great activity. Hesiod reflects the hurry through compression. In contrast to the sixty lines (504–63) that described the single month of January, less than ten lines (564–73) move us through the three months from mid-February to mid-May.²⁰ Seven lines describing the signs of the season culminate in the arrival of the swallow, and all the agricultural advice we are given: τὴν φθάμενος οἶνας περιταμνέμεν ("Before she comes, prune the vines" 570). As Hesiod has led us (in particular with the crane and the cuckoo, 448, 486) to expect a signal for beginning, not ending our job, the advice reminds one of the bus passengers told to "watch where I get off, and get off at the stop before." It creates a sense of haste. It is also a rather abrupt way to introduce the vineyard.

But we have barely been told about the vines before, in the next line, Hesiod is scolding us for wasting too much time on them (571–72):

ἄλλ' ὁπότε ἄν φερέοικος ἀπὸ χθονὸς ἄμ φυτὰ βαίνειν
Πληιάδας φεύγων, τότε δὴ σκάφος οὐκέτι οἰνέων

But when the Carry-house climbs up from the earth to the plants,
Fleeing the Pleiades, then no more time for digging the vineyard . . .

The hurry of Hesiod's advice also indicates why, here and at the end of the year, the vines are introduced at all. Like Edgar's battle with Edmund in *King Lear*, the vines serve to distract our attention from the hero of the piece, the grain. The importance

20. West, *Works*, 302. See Pierre Bourdieu, "The Attitude of the Algerian Peasant toward Time," in *Mediterranean Countrymen*, ed. Julian Pitt-Rivers (Paris, 1963), 59–69 and J. K. Campbell, *Honour, Family, and Patronage, A Study of Institutions and Moral Values in a Greek Mountain Community* (Oxford, 1964), 34, on modern peasants' tendency to measure time in terms of their tasks.

of the harvest is underlined by the attention we have, inadvertently, directed elsewhere. We reproach ourselves, as we hurry into the field.

Hesiod's harvest is a time of haste, conveying a sense of urgency parallel to that of the fall plowing. Hesiod's summer picnic, placed after his description of the harvest, is, in contrast, full of the relaxation and relief of finally knowing the outcome of the sowing. It also emphasizes the cycle of Hesiod's year, as the lazy ease of the picnic provides a precise and opposite counterpoint to the long cold uncomfortable wait of winter.²¹ To gain this effect Hesiod sacrifices the necessity of threshing. Rather than the urgent counterpart to the harvest, threshing becomes an addendum, left to the servants treated alongside storage and the watchdog. The year is winding down. With 607–608, αὐτὰρ ἔπειτα / δμῶας ἀναψῦξαι φίλα γούνατα καὶ βόε λῦσαι (“But then / Let your men rest their poor knees, and unyoke the oxen”), it seems to end.

Hesiod has one more task to add—a new one—the vintage. The time for this is when Orion and Sirius are central in the sky. The vintage is new, Sirius is not. It was with Sirius' departure from the sky that we began the farmer's year, and this should be a warning to us that the Pleiades, who accompany Orion, are near their setting. As we were told in the strong lines that introduced farming altogether, it is time for the fall sowing (383–84):

Πληιάδων Ἀτλαγενέων ἐπιτελλομένων
ἀρχεσθ' ἀμήτου, ἀρότου δὲ δυσσομένων

At the Pleiades', children of Atlas, rising,
Start to harvest, and plow as they set.

Hesiod's year has returned on itself. But while the stars, the marks of the seasons, indicate that it is time for the sowing, Hesiod has distracted our attention, once more, with the vines. There is never quite enough time. Just when the year is finally over we find that it is only just beginning.

Hesiod's section on sailing contributes to our sense of the farmer's year in much the same way as the unexpected second sowing. Once more our sense of completion is broken in upon. Just as we thought we had learned the cycle of the year there turn out to be two additional possibilities. They are only possibilities. One can sail in both the fall and the spring, only in the fall, or at neither time. To trade in both seasons is most profitable—and most dangerous. To trade in neither is safest—and least profitable. Hesiod recommends (at most) the middle course. He does so because trade is, it turns out, the final twist in Zeus' great game of snakes and ladders. Trade can provide the final completion of both the seasons and the profit of the farm. But trading may also mean, if one is delayed, that one sows, or harvests, too late. Or it could mean the loss of one's goods, or one's life, at sea. Trade can complete the seasonableness and the profit of the farm, or destroy it. Zeus allows nothing in human life to come easily. Hesiod's section on trade destroys our simple sense of seasonableness, of the precise fitness of one task for one season. It also deepens it. In so doing it has reinforced the complexity inherent in a process that, from the outside, might seem simple: the simple process of living in accordance with Zeus' seasons or, in modern terms, the simple task of living with nature.

21. As the Persians said to Cyrus, then we had everything bad, now we have everything good (Hdt. 1.126). For these oppositions informing a modern peasant calendar, Bourdieu, *Time*, 56.

As soon as we abandon the presupposition that this is a farmer's manual it becomes clear that it is Hesiod's detailed account of how to make a wagon, not his vivid description of winter, that is anomalous.²² Hesiod's section on farming is two hundred and three lines long. Nearly half of it, ninety-five lines, describes not a task, but the conditions of the season, the conditions the farmer works under, or how the farmer feels.²³ There are two detailed accounts of how a farmer's tasks are to be performed—the introductory section on tools and the final section on the vintage. Aside from the weather signs, there is nothing else in the section that a reader from modern Chicago, let alone a Boeotian peasant, would not have known perfectly well.²⁴

However, if Hesiod's purpose has been misunderstood, it is himself who is to blame. The impression that the farming section is didactic is one that Hesiod has deliberately created. If the argument that the *Works and Days* is modeled on Near Eastern wisdom literature is correct, such a model could only raise expectations of instruction in Hesiod's audience.²⁵ In addition, Hesiod's proverbial opening with the Pleiades, along with the direct injunctions of 405–10, can only be taken as didactic. The two detailed descriptions of a farmer's work occur at the opening and at the close of the section. The fact that the first season we encounter provides such a detailed description cannot but create the impression that what is to follow is instruction. Hesiod's usual pattern of temporal adverbs furthers the illusion by subsuming the eight lines that vividly describe how the season feels into the didactic appearance created by his wagon.²⁶ The remainder of the section describes, rather than teaches, farming. But as Hesiod ends the year he revives our impression that what we have just received is instruction. He does this, first, through another detailed account of the farmer's work, the vintage, and secondly by reintroducing Perses.

Perses appears by name only on the outskirts of the farmer's year. Although the "you" of the farming section is technically not ourselves, the audience, but Hesiod's errant brother, as Hesiod moves from admonition to description, and from cheating to the feel of the autumn cool and the summer breeze, we begin to slip into Perses' role. At the heart of the section Hesiod's "you" seems to be addressed to ourselves, putting us, the audience, in the place of Hesiod's farmer. But Hesiod has taken care

22. It is perhaps significant that no one has ever been able to figure out the dimensions of Hesiod's wagon. For attempts, see West, *Works*, 264, N. J. Richardson, Review of *Hesiod: Works and Days*, by M. L. West, *JHS* 99 (1979): 170, and N. J. Richardson and S. Piggott, "Hesiod's wagon, text and technology," *JHS* 102 (1982): 225–29.

23. Hesiod's introduction to the section stretches from 383–413; the farmer's year from 414–617. The sections I have counted as "descriptive" are on fall, 414–21; on the crane, 448–52; on sowing, 467–69; on the harvests, 475–90; on poverty, 496–99; on winter, 504–35 and 547–56; on the swallow, 564–69; on the snail, 571–72; on the dawn, 578–81; on the picnic, 582–96. As Peter Walcot, "Hesiod and the Law," *SO* 38 (1963): 6, points out: "To call the poem a handbook on farming or a farmer's calendar is to consider only a small part of the complete text. Such a description applies to verses 383–614 alone, a mere 235 out of more than 750 lines, and even from these we must deduct the poet's digressions and particularly his sketches of winter (verses 504–63) and the height of summer (verses 582–96)."

24. It is, for example, fairly common knowledge that one must plow land before sowing it, and harvest the crops later. Nor is the concept of threshing a particularly technical one. For anyone living in a Mediterranean climate the knowledge that one sows in the fall and harvests in the spring would be as common as our understanding that one sows in the spring and harvests in the fall.

25. See, primarily, West, *Works*, 3–25 and Peter Walcot, *Hesiod and the Near East* (Cardiff, 1966), as well as Griffith, "Personality," 37–63 (n. 1 above); and G. S. Kirk, *Myth: Its Meaning and Function in Ancient and Other Cultures*, (Berkeley, 1970).

26. Here ἤμος δὲ . . . τήμος . . . τήμος ἄρ' ("but when . . . then . . . that is the time" 414, 420, 422). Hesiod also uses ἤμος δὲ . . . τήμος . . . ἀλλὰ τὸτ' ἦδη ("but when . . . then . . . but at that time" 582, 585, 588), ἤμος δὲ . . . δὴ γὰρ τότε . . . τήμος . . . τήμος ἄρ' ("but when . . . for then it is . . . then . . . that is the time" 414, 417, 420, 422) and (paradoxically) ὅπότε . . . τότε δὲ . . . ("When . . . then . . . 571, 573) to the same purpose.

to disguise the switch. Perses, and with him Hesiod's didactic persona, is brought vividly to our attention at both the section's opening and at its close. The tidbits of information that Hesiod doles out about Perses, the surprising news that he is now reduced to begging for a living (393–400) and the account of Perses' and Hesiod's father that occurs early in the sailing section (633–40) are strategically placed. Like Hesiod's two sections of detailed instruction, the first deliberately creates the presupposition that we, along with Perses, are about to be instructed, while the second leaves us with the impression that we have been. Once this impression has been created neither Perses, nor instruction, is necessary. Hesiod can turn to his main purpose, conveying a sense of what it is like to live with Zeus' seasons.

A description of farming does not need to masquerade as a manual. We may appreciate the simple joys of the countryside, the pastures and hills, the ripening corn and lowing oxen, without any pretense that we are learning to farm. And so we do in the bucolic poetry of nineteenth-century England. We behold the farmer at his plow; we do not need to grasp it ourselves. It is precisely this that Hesiod's didactic stance avoids, and that it is designed to avoid. In the first place instruction has no place for the fuzzy edges of bucolic poetry. By presenting itself as a farmer's handbook Hesiod's description of farming makes an implicit claim to be merely dealing with the facts. Secondly, and more importantly, a farmer's manual must be addressed to, not merely written about, farmers, and this is precisely the position in which Hesiod wishes to place us. We are to experience farming from inside. It is only thus, to Hesiod's mind, that he is able to reveal the inner truths that farming holds for man. It is in this way that he shows us the true depth of his injunction: ἐργάζεο . . . ἔργα, τὰ τ' ἀνθρώποισι θεοὶ διετεκμήραντο ("Work . . . the works that the gods have marked out for men" 397–98).

Hesiod's account of farming is selective and distorted in its sense of what most matters on the farm. It is so for the same reason that a novelist may spend chapters on a child's tea-party, and entirely neglect the important business of insuring the home. It is not how to farm, but what the cycle of the year, with its balance of good and evil, profit and risk, anxiety and relaxation, implies about the will of Zeus that Hesiod is teaching. It is a fact about farming as important to the gift-gobbling kings as it is to the farmers. If we accept that this is what Hesiod intended, the aberrations and anomalies of his account fall into place, serving the ends not of a ham-fisted attempt at a farmer's manual, but of a skillful recreation of a farmer's life, mental as well as physical, lived, as are all human lives, as much in the past and future as in the present. Hesiod's is a realistic account of farming, but its realism is dramatic, not factual.²⁷ It is designed not to convey an accurate picture of farming as seen from outside the farm, but to create a sense of immediate identification with the farmer himself, allowing the audience to experience the life that is determined by Zeus' seasons. This is the purpose towards which the distortions and anomalies of Hesiod's description of farming are directed. They succeed admirably.

STEPHANIE NELSON
Boston University

27. For the impressionistic tone of Hesiod's account of farming, see van Groningen, *Composition*, 291 (n. 9 above); Werner Jaeger, *Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture*,¹² (New York, 1945), 1:72; Kumaniecki, "Structure," 89 (n. 2 above); and West, *Works*, 252: "A pictorial quality invests even his most technical precepts: by the end, while we may not be much better equipped to run a farm than before, we have a real sense of how it looked and felt at different stages of the year."