

HESIOD'S HOLISTIC AUTHORITY IN NEOPLATONIST EXEGESIS

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The Neoplatonist scholar Proclus defined three categories of poetry: inspired, 'middle' and mimetic. Traditionally it has been thought that he considered only Homer to have excelled in all three, while other poets could fulfil one or at most two functions. It will be shown that Proclus also conceived of Hesiod as excelling in all three types and thereby assimilated Hesiodic authority to Homeric. He also considered Orpheus but assigned his poetry to just one category, not all three. In doing this, he increased his own authority as a teacher-hierophant, contributing to the dialogue between pagan Platonism and Christianity over the inspiration of texts.

In most contexts and most times, Hesiod stands as second-best: second in esteem among epic poets, second in the quantity of papyri produced and preserved, often even second in age, a younger epigone to Homer. Yet there are two kinds of second-best. There is first the perpetual loser, the untalented copycat forever in the shadow of a superior competitor. But there is also the respected runner-up, skilled in the same kind of way as his better, by whom he is just outshone.

Hesiod frequently occupies the former position with respect to Homer, especially in their reception in Alexandria, whose scholars cavil at Hesiod's misunderstandings and 'wanderings' from a truth to which Homer is more closely attuned.¹ By the time of the late Neoplatonists, however, exegesis had shifted from being a purely scholarly practice to primarily a religious one. Antiquarian and grammatical interests were underplayed in favour of an increasing identification of poetry with godly wisdom. By channelling poetry in a process similar to theurgy, exegetes could ascend to levels of reality closer to the divine. Furthermore, exegesis represents to Neoplatonists of Proclus' school a process of recovering salvific knowledge, whose teachers are portrayed as hierophants and founding sources as gods.² In this idiosyncratic intellectual culture, Hesiod came to occupy the latter position as a less-cited poet than Homer, but one standing alongside him,

1 See Montana (2015) 134 on the *συνήθεια* ('an author's distinctive literary usus') that the Alexandrian critics sought, and Schironi (2018) 700, 708 for examples of the *πλάγη* ('wandering, going astray') to which, according to the Alexandrians, Hesiod and the post-Homeric poets were susceptible. Translations from modern authors and from Greek works not covered in n. 9 are my own unless otherwise noted.

2 Tornau (2021) 209, 214.

outclassing all others. In this study I will demonstrate that Proclus' commentary on the *Works and days* and his literary-theoretical essays assimilate Hesiodic authority to Homeric. Proclus thereby raises Hesiod's prestige as a source of divine truth and enforces his own authority as a teacher by defining Hesiod within the bounds of his own critical framework.

The status of Hesiodic authority among the Neoplatonists matters greatly, just as their view of Homeric authority does. For as Lambertson observes, it was the Neoplatonists' Homer that was transmitted to medieval posterity;³ the same must be true of their Hesiod.⁴ The poets that reached the Christian Eastern Empire and later filtered west were not the long-forgotten oral bards, nor even the erudites mined by Alexandrian antiquarians. They were the seers whose poetry enabled the human soul to contemplate successively higher levels of reality and even achieve unity with the One. The ritual basis of this contemplation was established by Iamblichus, who was concerned to defend (what he saw as) the old ways, instituted by the gods, against recent human innovations. He hoped thereby to restore human contact with a fundamentally good divine order via theurgy in traditional civic and private rituals.⁵ Proclus' works represent a logical extension of this idea. By defending Homer and Hesiod in the same terms as Plato, he could establish another line of contact to the divine tradition.⁶

However, we possess a different quantity and quality of material from Proclus with respect to the two poets. To Proclus, Homer is the poet *par excellence*, so Homer supplies the great majority of poetic texts discussed in his literary-critical essays. Though the *Suda* (s.v. Πρόκλος) tells us he composed a 'commentary (ὑπόμνημα) on the whole of Homer', we have nothing of it.⁷ In contrast, Hesiod is less frequently cited in the essays, but we have a fair portion of Proclus' ὑπόμνημα on the *Works and days*—though only such parts of it as were suitable to be adapted to the format of scholia.⁸ So we have little extended theoretical discussion of Hesiod, but

3 Lambertson (1986) x.

4 The Proclean scholia were copied alongside the later comments of Tzetztes, Moschopolus and Planudes, who borrow from them, such that the Byzantine exegetical tradition is inextricable from that of the pagan Neoplatonists: see Marzillo (2010) lvii–lviii. Neoplatonist frameworks seep into Christian scholarship on Hesiod: John Tzetztes, that 'most learned grammarian', reacts angrily to Proclus by name – showing the enduring importance of his Hesiodic interpretations into the twelfth century – in the introduction to his lectures on *Op.* (see the prolegomena in Gaisford (1823), the only edition of this commentary), while John the Deacon, commenting on the *Theogony* around the same time, commends an allegorical reading of Hesiod that 'does not stay only at the level of the hearing, but goes inward to the intellectual soul that yearns for true γνῶσις', like that of Plotinus, 'even though he is one of those outside', i.e. a pagan (*Allegories on the Theogony* in Flach (1876) 295, 6–15). See Faraggiana di Sarzana (1987) 24–6 on an early and odd Christian reception of Proclus' Hesiod in the seventh-century Byzantine historiographer Theophylact Simocatta, as well as Lambertson's discussion of 'Philip the Philosopher' below.

5 Shaw (1995) 3–5, 9–12.

6 Marzillo (2010) xxxii.

7 The possibility has been raised (e.g. by some cited in Mansfeld (1994) 55) that the *Suda* misattributed several works by Proclus' teacher Syrianus to Proclus himself, including the 'commentary on the whole of Homer'. But the arguments against it are satisfactory, including that we know Proclus' commentary on the Orphica was written in the margins of that of Syrianus.

8 Faraggiana di Sarzana (1987) 21–2 posits that Proclus' commentary was merely a series of marginal notations in Plutarch's. But the philosophical concerns and diction of much of the surviving commentary match Proclus'

much more granular commentary. Furthermore, the secondary literature on Proclus' Hesiod specifically, as opposed to his Homer, is quite limited. Homer, as usual, gets most of the attention, while Hesiod is constrained to an excursus here, an article there. Marzillo's 2010 edition of the scholia represents the only book-length treatment of the subject.

But a closer synthesis of Proclus' Hesiodic scholia with his literary opinions than has heretofore been performed will clarify both Hesiodic authority and Neoplatonist critical practice. Homer remains Proclus' paragon as he does in most places, times and authors. But Proclus' Hesiod comes up alongside his old rival, portrayed as the same kind of poet in the breadth of his authority. Most earlier commentators, in contrast, might occasionally privilege Hesiod as the source of specific kinds of information but almost never as an ethical and mantic competitor to Homer. Proclus also veers from earlier Platonist attitudes towards Homeric and Hesiodic poetry, both in the Platonic dialogues themselves as deceptive arts to be expelled from the ideal state, and in Middle Platonists who privileged such poetry epistemically but did not speak of it in such divine or holistic terms.

Seeking to rehabilitate Homeric poetry from Plato's criticisms, Proclus divides poetry into three kinds: inspired, 'middle' and mimetic. Homer's excellence consists in handling all three kinds of poetry adroitly, even if inspired poetry is his primary mode. Scholars have heretofore attempted to place Hesiodic poetry in the first or second categories. However, Proclus' detailed treatment of Hesiod in all three categories shows that he considered Hesiod a poet of the same order as Homer. In this regard, Homer and Hesiod stand alone among all named poets in Proclus' theories.

I will clarify the boundaries of Proclus' poetic categories by adducing Hesiodic evidence. The middle category will be rechristened in terms that better suit its relationship to the others. It will be shown that Hesiod, no longer a mere runner-up, is defined as capable and versatile in the same way as Homer. Then a discussion of Orpheus will demonstrate how such versatility is not ascribed to any others. This assimilated Hesiod, standing at the gates of the Middle Ages shoulder-to-shoulder with Homer, represents the poet's last substantial and detailed pagan reception. Soon afterwards, the old theologian is handed over to the Christians.⁹

Preliminaries: poetic and interpretive authorities

The appellation of Plato among his successors and admirers as 'divine' has provoked debate over the extent to which Plato's authority was treated as supernatural. Boys-Stones sees the

intellectual context better than Plutarch's, and Proclus would surely be likelier to substantially revise a centuries-old commentary than one by his own teacher. The question is irrelevant here, since whatever document was the source of the scholia we now have, late antique scholars received and used them as a unity.

9 Proclus' comments on the *Works and days* are cited by their capital Roman numerals in Marzillo (2010). Greek passages of Proclus' other works are cited by page and line in the following editions: *In Rempublicam*, Kroll (1896) vol. 1, Leipzig; *In Cratylum*, Pasquali (1908), Leipzig; *In Timaeum*, Diehl (1903) vol. 1, (1904) vol. 2 and (1906) vol. 3, Leipzig; *In primum Euclidis Elementorum librum*, Friedlein (1873), Leipzig; and *Theologia Platonica*, Saffrey and Westerink (1968) vol. 1 and (1987) vol. 5, Paris. Translations from *In Remp.* are quoted from Baltzly, Finamore and Miles (2018); those from *In Cratylum* are quoted from Duvick (2007); and those from *In Op.* are my own.

absoluteness of his authority as ‘less a credo than a credible working hypothesis’, in that Plato is the linchpin in philosophical history but not inspired in a way inaccessible to others.¹⁰ In fact, most Platonists took Pythagoras as equally authoritative, or even considered Plato authoritative in part because he accurately conveyed Pythagoras’ ideas. Similarly, some of Plato’s wisdom consists in his accurate use of Hesiod’s authoritative *Theogony*.¹¹ So as much as the language of ‘inspiration’ tinges Platonists’ praise of the philosophers, their view of authority is typically *epistemic* and *non-exclusive*. Therefore, especially given the overlap between Proclus’ philosophical and poetic frameworks, it is conceivable that another poet could stand alongside Homer as well. Homer’s overriding importance in the Greek canon probably required treating him as the supreme poet. Nonetheless (as will be discussed in the section on mimesis), Homer fails to match Proclus’ understanding of Plato’s own criteria for the ideal poet. Homer’s kind of authority is the best that can be achieved under working conditions, leaving room for him to be joined by another. Hesiod is the only candidate to fill this role.

The later Neoplatonists insisted that epic allegories were deliberately constructed by their authors, not invented by later interpreters.¹² In this way their reading of epic parallels their reading of Plato: just as Plato must have been correct in everything – and so Platonic doctrine is all there in the original texts, not a novel interpretive excrescence – so too the epic poets already contain the stories necessary for inspiration and *paideusis*. This interpretive framework is aided by the device of the *symbolon*, a Neoplatonic concept to which the English derivative ‘symbol’ fails to do justice. A *symbolon*, whether a physical object or a literary representation, does not merely bring to mind a related concept on a higher level of reality; it is also fundamentally linked to it on the chain of being, such that intellectual activity relative to the *symbolon* also occurs relative to its referent (Proclus *In Cra.* 31.18–28). In the context of theurgy, a *symbolon* might be a material with magical connections to the sun or moon and their corresponding spiritual realms; in literature, a *symbolon* is a myth capable of conveying truths about the divine world through allegory.¹³ Since the connections are essential, there can be only one correct interpretation of what a *symbolon* represents.¹⁴ Therefore, Proclus claims to be giving the sole authoritative reading of epic allegory.¹⁵

10 Boys-Stones (2018) 30–3.

11 Faraggiana di Sarzana (1987) 21.

12 Lambertson (1986) 21–2.

13 This ritual-symbolic strand of Neoplatonism was articulated by Iamblichus, who wrote, ‘The Egyptians, imitating the nature of the universe and the creative energy of the gods, themselves produce images of mystical insights – hidden and invisible – by means of symbols, just as nature symbolically reveals invisible measures through visible shapes’ (*De mysteriis* 185.16–22 Saffrey-Segonds, trans. Shaw (1995)).

14 Sheppard (1980) 155.

15 In his sixth essay on the *Republic*, Proclus portrays himself as a hierophant initiating his audience into the mysteries of Syrianus and Plato before him. Tornau (2021) 220–2 writes that if the students were to ‘[attempt] to communicate these matters verbally in their turn, they would inevitably fail’; they require Proclus to mediate the original inspired knowledge.

In contrast, Proclus' intellectual predecessor by about two centuries, Plotinus, allows for some hesitation about his own interpretation of Hesiod.¹⁶ Using the Hesiodic succession myth to explain the emanations of the three highest principles, Plotinus marks his account with expressions of possibility and doubt, as 'this is probably/seemingly what the myth hints at' (οἶον εἰκὸς καὶ τὸν μῦθον αἰνίττεσθαι, Enn. 4.3.14.5) and 'whatever one may think concerning this' (ταῦτα μὲν οὖν ὅπη τις δοξάζει, Enn. 4.3.14.17). The myth itself is not called a *symbolon* of higher things; rather it 'harmonises with what I have said' (προσάδει τοῖς λεγομένοις, Enn. 4.3.14.19), leaving room for the possibility that there are other accounts or that the myth contains other truths which Plotinus does not illuminate.¹⁷ Plotinus' student Porphyry, also an exponent of the strand of Platonism sceptical of ritual, similarly offered numerous different meanings for features of the Homeric cave of the nymphs, not one authoritative interpretation.¹⁸

For this reason we should not speak of Neoplatonism as a monolith, but rather of different traditions of late antique Platonist thought. Within Proclus' strand, Plotinian hedging and variety are impossible. Proclus cannot permit any qualification of his interpretive authority both as the Successor to the leadership of the Platonic school and as a pagan expounder of Platonic truths amid pressure from Christianity.¹⁹ As Proclus' authority as the illuminator of the poets' doctrine is increased, so too is Hesiod's authority as the inspired source of that doctrine.²⁰ A roughly contemporaneous (albeit 'undateable') testament to Hesiod's authority in this intellectual environment comes from a commentary on Heliodorus' third- or fourth-century romance the *Ethiopia* by one 'Philip the Philosopher', otherwise unknown.²¹ Philip extraordinarily uses the verb *πληρώω*, unexampled in typical pagan philosophy but resonant of the New Testament, to describe the 'fulfilment' of a saying by Hesiod. The commentary appears to come from a time in which Neoplatonism and Christianity coexisted in dialogue, resulting in the application of biblical prophetic language to a stalwart of pagan poetry.

16 Lamberton (1986) 104.

17 Marzillo (2010) xxxvii concurs that compared to Proclus, Plotinus' allegorical approach to this Hesiodic theme is loose and 'nirgends im engeren Sinn systematisch'. Perhaps Plotinus rejected more systematic approaches because he was more suspicious of the cosmic value of traditional rituals than the theurgic school represented by Iamblichus and Proclus: cf. Shaw (1995) 11–12.

18 Lamberton (1992) 124.

19 A Neoplatonist philosopher's ability to communicate truths to his students and assist their ascent is proof of his own ascension: otherwise, Tornau (2021) 207 writes, he 'cannot have attained a particularly deep insight into the intelligible'.

20 Marinus (*Vita Procli* 22, trans. Edwards (2000)) presents Proclus' interpretive acumen as the visible indication of his achieving the highest level of initiation. Once he was purified, 'no longer gaining knowledge [of the world beyond] by discursive and demonstrative reasonings, but as if by vision beholding the paradigms in the divine mind,' he 'easily penetrated the whole theology of Greeks and barbarians, clouded as it was by mythical fictions, and brought it to light [...] expounding everything in an inspired manner'. Marinus goes on to discuss Proclus' editions and seminars in similar terms.

21 Lamberton (1986) 156 n. 37.

Proclus' three kinds of poetry

But back to Proclus. He exercises his interpretive authority through a framework that divides poetry into three categories.²² The first, called 'inspired', corresponds to the highest form of life, seeking *epistrophe* towards its divine source via a kind of possession or mania that transcends rational knowledge (Proclus *In Remp.* 177.15–23). Inspired poetry, by accordance with divine proportion, connects the better parts of the soul with their origin in higher realms of being (178.10–30). Second, corresponding to the life of inward contemplation (177.24–178.2), is poetry based on rational knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) that I shall call epistemic:²³ it straightforwardly conveys rational truths about the world, likewise to assist the soul in seeking its source by moderating and organising the passions (179.2–15). In other words, it conveys the 'political virtues' (πολιτικά ἀρετά) that Iamblichus, by placing the *Gorgias* at the beginning of the Neoplatonist curriculum, intended to teach.²⁴ Its method is described as ἀποδεικτικός ('demonstrative'), and poets using it possess γνῶσις ('knowledge') of divine and human affairs.²⁵ Third and lowest is mimetic poetry, based on representing (μίμησις) mere opinions about the world (179.16–29): this poetry is eicastic if those opinions are at least correct, or phantastic if based only in appearances. The kinds of opinion in question vary. At best they may show a poet's skill in conveying socio-ethical truths, which prepare the soul to receive more complicated revelations, or in accurately portraying men's actions according to character, even if the men portrayed are imperfect. At worst, they may unsettle the reason and subjugate the soul to its irrational parts.

Now, Proclus characterises Homer as the supreme poet because he displays excellence in all three kinds of poetry, and indeed is aware of the divisions (*In Remp.* 192.4–21).²⁶ Even mimetic poetry, which Proclus elsewhere derides as unsettling the soul, is one of Homer's talents.²⁷ However, Homer's poetry is predominantly inspired (195.13–18): the best kind of poetry for the best poet. We may compare Proclus' definition of four categories of theological discourse, in which, though Plato is most associated with one in particular, the dialectical, his excellence as a philosopher consists in his ability to use all four.²⁸

22 See the schema in Sheppard (1980) 162–3.

23 Or 'didactic', though the term is contentious – whence the scare quotes in van den Berg (2014) 394, who himself calls it 'paideutic'. The term 'epistemic' will be justified below.

24 Van den Berg (2014) 390. These virtues' purpose is 'giving bounds and measure to [their possessors'] temper and appetites, and completely annihilating their passions and false opinions' (Marinus *Vita Prodi* 18, trans. Edwards (2000)).

25 As when Proclus says that Plato's account of the soul is established τοῖς λόγοις ἀποδεικτικοῖς ('through demonstrative arguments') (*In Remp.* 172.9) that originate in Homer, then calls PheMIus a poet of the middle category because he possesses 'most of all the γνῶσις of divine and mortal matters' (194.12).

26 Sheppard (1980) 163–4. Compare how Plato demonstrates his supremacy by communicating in all four discursive modes that Proclus describes in *Theol. Plat.* 1.4 (myths, inspiration, images and scientific dialectic), even if Plato is primarily characterised by dialectic (Brisson (1987) 46).

27 Cf. *Resp.* 595b–c, which calls Homer the 'first teacher and leader' (πρῶτος διδάσκαλός τε καὶ ἡγεμών) of the tragedians.

28 Sheppard (2014) 62. And the systems' consequences are parallel: Sheppard (2014) 67 writes that he can rescue both Homer and Plato from their critics with an interpretive framework 'in which contradictions can be reconciled by appealing to different levels within his system'.

Characterising Hesiod is more difficult. Because of the patchy quality of the evidence discussed above, scholars disagree over how to place Hesiod in Proclus' framework. Marzillo writes that Proclus' approach to the *Works and days* is 'Mythen, die als entheastisch erkannt sind, methodisch wie Theurgie und Mysterien zu deuten'.²⁹ As she sees it, 'seine pädagogische und philosophisch-propagandistische Zielsetzung eng miteinander verbunden waren', justifying an understanding of Hesiod as primarily an inspired poet.³⁰ Van den Berg disagrees, citing the παιδευτικός σκοπός ('educational aim') in Proclus' prolegomena and the didactic spin given even to allegorical interpretations.³¹ Thus, by his lights, Hesiod should be considered a poet of the second category (in his term, 'paideutic'), at least with respect to the *Works and days*, even if the *Theogony* is more symbolical and therefore inspired. In this he draws on Sheppard's foundational work, which sees Hesiod as an inspired poet in so far as he is called a θεόλογος as author of the *Theogony*,³² while in a later work, she believes Proclus would apply the same allegorical methods to the *Theogony* as to inspired Homeric poetry, but that he 'regarded the *Works and Days* not as inspired poetry but as belonging to the second of the three kinds'.³³

However, pinning a particular category on Hesiod or on either of his poems misses the most salient aspect of their role in Proclus' theories.³⁴ Proclus presents Hesiod as capable of creating all three categories of poetry – uniquely of any poet besides Homer. In other words, Hesiod is the same kind of poet as Homer, and the only one capable, alongside him, of articulating the same kind of truths, guiding the soul upwards along multiple paths. In this way, after centuries of distinction between the two poets in critical responses, Hesiodic authority is assimilated to Homeric. This justified Hesiod's position within the Neoplatonist curriculum.³⁵ Hesiod and Homer were the only poets who received anything

29 Marzillo (2010) xxxii: 'systematically to interpret as theurgy and mysteries those myths that are recognised as inspired.'

30 Marzillo (2010) 307: 'his pedagogical and philosophical-propagandistic goals were closely bound together'.

31 Van den Berg (2014) 392.

32 Sheppard (1980) 186.

33 Sheppard (2014) 71.

34 We should be suspicious of interpreting the σκοπός ('aim, goal') in the *Prolegomena* as referring exclusively to one category of poetry. Lamberton (1992) 116–17 observes that the Iamblican practice of assigning a single σκοπός to each Platonic dialogue was not necessarily extended to other corpora: 'Proclus in hundreds of pages of discussion of the *Iliad* is not concerned with depicting a single focus for the epic'. Although, as Mansfeld (1994) 37–9 writes, Proclus discusses σκοπός in his *Commentary on Euclid's Elements*, for this text he divides it into the aims with respect to 'the matters that the inquiries concern' and 'the learner' – aims which 'must be distinguished' (70.19–22) – and for book 1 the σκοπός is merely 'the study of the simplest rectilinear figures' (432.5–7), not a broader, schematised category of knowledge.

35 The curriculum of Platonic dialogues placed texts concerning rational, political virtues (like the *Gorgias*) at the beginning and texts containing supreme doctrines both physical (*Timaeus*) and spiritual (*Parmenides*) at the end. Commentaries made extensive use of Homer and Hesiod to harmonise and clarify these doctrines. Van den Berg (2014) 390–1 argues that in this curriculum, the *Theogony* served as a supplement to the *Timaeus'* physical revelations, while the *Works and days* had preparatory matter parallel to that of the *Gorgias* and other introductory dialogues, and (at 396) that this preparation was like that provided by the Pythagorean Golden verses, another educational text.

like the volume of attention that Proclus lavished on them, a change from the earlier habit of writing *hypomnemata* about minor authors in need of scholarly comment.³⁶

The connection between poetic and exegetical authorities is clarified by the parallel framework that Proclus provides for classifying names in his *Commentary on the Cratylus* (29.21–35.15). There are two sorts of names, he says: those used among the gods and those known among men. The latter occur in three kinds: they may be known by divine inspiration, by rational or technical knowledge or by ‘sense-perception and opinion’. Knowledge of the names has a ritual aspect: through ‘something luminous in them’, they ‘lead to human understanding’, in that these are the names ‘through which we call upon the gods and by which they are praised’. By interpreting the names and understanding their intellectual genealogy, humans can ascend towards the divine. Poets and exegetes alike share in this activity. In fact, in Proclean thought, textual exegesis performs an analogous function to metaphysical procession: it ‘brings into existence alternate levels of reality that otherwise would remain hidden in their transcendent source’.³⁷

Hesiod as an inspired poet

Hesiod’s claim that the Muses ‘taught him a beautiful song’ while he tended his flocks on Mount Helicon (*Theog.* 22) provides an obvious basis for the tradition that he was divinely inspired. But precisely what it meant for a poet to be inspired changed over time. In the earliest reception of Hesiod, his claim was generally taken to affirm his ability to communicate ‘truths’ as opposed to ‘lies’ – and typically the ‘liar’ against whom he was contrasted was Homer.³⁸ Plato revised the terms of debate when he recategorised inspiration as frenzied divine *mania*, appealing to the irrational nature through artistic effects – Homer’s dramatic poetry fit here, but not Hesiod’s.³⁹ But the notion of the inspired Hesiod remained: Lucian’s imaginary interlocutor with Hesiod could still call his work *ἐνθέα* (*Hes.* 1).

The dichotomy between the *Theogony* and the *Works and days* that Proclus draws in his *Prolegomena* suggests that we will find less inspiration than *episteme* in the latter. But Proclus’ acceptance of some Hesiodic poetry as inspired is clear when he classes him together with Homer and Orpheus and ‘anyone else who with inspired lips (*ἐνθέω στόματι*) expounded things eternally and invariably the same’ (*In Remp.* 72.2–5). As an epistemological category, inspired poetry concerns eternal truths about the gods and the universe, disguised in allegories for the teacher-hierophant to interpret. Though Proclus’ commentary on the *Works and days* mainly concerns other kinds of knowledge, several examples of this kind stand out. Disagreeing with predecessors who suspect the proem because it refers to the Muses as Pierian, unlike the *Theogony* in which they dwell on Helicon, he offers an allegorical reading of their locations (*In Op.* I.27–35). Hesiod shows

36 Netz (2020) 91.

37 Tornau (2021) 212; compare the anecdote below on the source of the Styx.

38 Koning (2010) 318–19.

39 Koning (2010) 324–8.

how being is arranged in the universe: Pieria represents τὴν ὑπὲρ τὸν κόσμον αὐτῶν τάξιν ('their arrangement above the cosmos'), while Helicon is home to the Muses' ἐγκόσμιον aspect ('within the cosmos'), where they dance upon the nine spheres.

Later, Proclus offers an extensive symbolical discussion of the Prometheus episode. The cow bones with which Prometheus covers the fat represent τὸ τῆς ἀληθείας ἐπικάλυμμα ('the veil over the truth') (In Op. LVI.9–10), while 'Zeus is understood as Providence both in this poet and elsewhere' (LVI.10), an obvious reference to the same allegorisation of Homer. Zeus' being deceived, as here by Prometheus, is in fact one of the paradigmatic examples of an inspired symbolon for Proclus, in whose system the higher truths can be symbolised by their opposites and by seemingly shameful things.⁴⁰ In the same episode, Hesiod's likening of Pandora's appearance to that of goddesses is said to be εἰς ἐπικάλυψιν τῆς ἀληθείας ('for the veiling of the truth'). This recalls his common use of the words παραπέτασμα and παρακάλυμμα ('curtain, screen') to describe the visible or audible experience of an allegory that hides deeper truths.⁴¹ Other occurrences of 'hidden' truths recall the importance of allegorical exegesis to Neoplatonist theurgy. On the final line of the poem, with its enigmatic reference to 'distinguishing the birds' (Op. 828), Proclus comments that Hesiod means that a man justified before the gods will take care 'to perceive things hidden to human reason through the mantic art' (In Op. CCLXXXIII.6). In other words, Hesiod recommends the kind of ritual that provides salvific wisdom via *epistrophe* to higher levels of reality.⁴²

Plato's Socrates had criticised theomachies – depictions of dissension and combat among the gods, who should be impassible and serene – as unsuitable for poets to produce and audiences to hear. Proclus (In Remp. 87.29–89.9) responds with a highly abstract interpretive τρόπος that reads theomachies as allegories for the mixing in ontologically inferior things of the qualities of Limit and Unlimited: a transcendent origin of contradiction and conflict.⁴³ Homer can construct this kind of allegory (92.28–93.24). But Proclus ascribes this ability to 'the other inspired (ἐνθεάζοντα) poets' (89.28–9) as well. His paradigmatic examples of other poets' stories that correspond to Homer's theomachies are the (Orphic) *sparagmos* of Zagreus/Dionysus at the hands of the Titans and the combat of Zeus with the Giants (90.7–13). The latter myth relies on a Hesiodic conception of the Giants as being of primordial origin (*Theog.* 182–5) and bound inextricably with mortal men in defining Zeus' sovereignty (*Theog.* 50).⁴⁴ Proclus also

40 Lamberton (1986) 190. Proclus exclaims that the deception of Zeus at Il. 14.153–351 is composed 'clearly in a state of divine inspiration and through possession by the Muses' (In Remp. 193.14–15).

41 Lamberton (1986) 185–6.

42 One wonders what place the Hesiodic *Ornithomanteia*, a guide to augury and rituals, might have had in Proclus' reception of him, had it survived to his time. Apollonius of Rhodes atheised it from the *Works and days* (Σ vet. in Op. 828 Pertusi), and though Hesiodic μαντικά survived for Pausanias (9.31.5) to read, they cannot have been long for the world: none survives in papyri or MSS.

43 Sheppard (1980) 49.

44 See the discussion in Clay (2003) 96–7. This is opposed to the Homeric conception of the Giants, in which, albeit they are relatives of the gods in the same way as the Cyclopes (Od. 7.206), they are otherwise just another tribe, destroyed by Eurymedon, not Zeus (Od. 7.59–60).

approaches Zeus' overthrow of Cronus and defeat of Typhoeus with this same hermeneutic, citing their brief appearances in Homer while discussing him specifically (*In Remp.* 93.13–24). But there can be no doubt that Proclus classed Hesiod's famous portrayal of the same myths in the *Theogony* as similarly inspired – the kind of myth for whose sake he defined the *Theogony* as transmitting 'the origins of divine providence' (τῶν θεῶν προνοίας τὰς ἀρχάς, *In Op.* I.1–2).

Inspired poetry shores up the Neoplatonist exegete's authority, because he shares in the inspiration of the poet whom he interprets. Proclus' teacher Syrianus taught ἐνθεαστικώτατα when he allegorised Homer's story of Zeus and Hera on Mount Ida (*Proclus In Remp.* 133.5–18), and Proclus himself lectured on theology ἐνθουσιαστικώτερον (*Marinus Vita Procli* 22). A vivid account preserved in Photius' *Bibliotheca* shows the practical result of Neoplatonist poetic exegesis. Fragments of Damascius' biography of Isidore recount the journey of both men to the inward part of Roman Syria, not far from the border with the Sassanids. Here, at the interstices of empire, Christian influence was weak enough that pagan sites and rites remained out in the countryside. This enabled intrepid philosophers to continue Iamblichus' project of seeking out the old ways in order to commune with the divine, albeit under straitened circumstances.⁴⁵ Isidore, a student of Proclus, and Damascius went in search of natural marvels and traditional cultic sites that could replace the major urban temples no longer available to them.⁴⁶ In the course of this, they identified the springs about 50 kilometres east of Lake Tiberias as the source of the River Styx. As Tardieu demonstrates, the account of their voyage is elaborately worked with poetic references, to the point that their identification of the site rests on their knowledge of inspired poetry, primarily Hesiod.⁴⁷ The result of this poetic knowledge is that Isidore and Damascius can feel the holy reverence (σέβας) associated with religious sites, interpreting (and presumably participating in) the local rituals that connect men with the gods (*Philosophical history* 135A–B Athanassiadi), revealing the holy hidden among the ordinary.⁴⁸ Tardieu says of this attitude to sites and texts that 'La chose vue n'a de sens et finalement n'existe que si d'abord elle a été lue.'⁴⁹

Hesiod as an epistemic poet

Before considering Hesiod's activity in this second category of poetry, a few words are necessary to clarify the category itself. Now, the unnecessary multiplication of technical terms is a grievous sin. Every adjective invented vainly to replace existing terms will be

45 Tardieu (1990) 11–15. Iamblichus himself ritually evoked the genius loci of two springs in the region to demonstrate his authority to doubtful students (*Eunapius VS* 5.2.2–4).

46 Tardieu (1990) 24–5.

47 Tardieu (1990) 45–68.

48 Tardieu (1990) 65.

49 Tardieu (1990) 47: 'What is seen makes no sense and ultimately does not exist unless it has previously been read of'.

repaid with another roll of the boulder in Tartarus. But the epithet for Proclus' middle category requires revision. Proclus never actually names his own category, so several terms have sprung up. Existing terms differ from the basis of the descriptions for the other categories, and the words themselves can mislead as to the category's purpose. The middle category is typically described as either 'didactic' in most scholarship, e.g. Sheppard (1980), or 'paideutic' in van den Berg (2014)'s important revision. But those are poor choices alongside 'inspired', 'eicastic', and 'phantastic', because these terms are *epistemological* – they describe what kind of knowledge is acquired by the poet and only then conveyed to his audience.⁵⁰ 'Didactic' and 'paideutic', on the other hand, decentre the information content and instead focus on its delivery. The audience is in both cases supposedly one of persons to be educated.⁵¹ But the presence of Theognis, an elegiac poet, among Proclus' examples of the middle category shows that these categories are not primarily aimed at creating sub-genres of epic poetry as perceived by an audience. Nor is education the exclusive province of the middle category: certain kinds of mimetic poetry can also take an educative aspect in limited circumstances. For this reason, we should prefer to call the middle category of poetry by the kind of knowledge it concerns: epistemic, that is to say, rational-technical.⁵² Proclus himself prefers this term when he refers to the middle category, as when he laments how tragedians have perverted both Homer's poetry in the third category, by degrading it from eicastic to phantastic, and his poetry in the middle category, τὰ δὲ ἐπιστημόνως συντεθέντα ταῖς τῶν πολλῶν ἀκοαῖς προσαρμόσαντες ('by adapting that which was composed with *episteme* for the hearing of the common people') (In Remp. 196.8–9).

Scholarship tends to conflate the middle category's transmission of a certain kind of knowledge with a notion that it is the only kind of poetry suited for education. Perhaps this originates in the loose use of the term 'didactic'. Proclus considered the σκοπός of the *Works and days* to be παιδευτικός, in so far as the poem prepared the listener's soul to receive the cosmic revelations in the *Theogony*.⁵³ Proclus here rescues the poets from

50 Albeit the term 'mimetic' is ontological, the category exists as a basket for two epistemological kinds. In any case, the terms for the first and third categories concern a fundamental characteristic of their poetics, while the existing terms for the middle category are merely functional, and incorrectly so.

51 Calling only the middle kind of poetry 'paideutic' is also inappropriate considering the history of Platonic criticism. Plato himself says that poetry inspired by mania from the Muses (presumably heroic epic, since it concerns τῶν παλαιῶν ἔργα) τοὺς ἐπιγιγνομένους παιδεύει ('educates those yet to come', my translation) (Phdr. 245a). Hermias, a fellow-student of Syrianus alongside Proclus, comments on this passage that inspired poetry παιδεύει τὸν βίον ('educates the life') (In Phdr. 103.3 Lucarini-Moreschini, my translation).

52 Compare Proclus' threefold framework for the names used among mortals: the first is based on divine inspiration, the third is based on opinion and appearances, but the second kind of names is created with 'the rational power of speech. For it is thus that artisans such as geometers, doctors, and orators put names to the various aspects of their art, the aspects whose properties they thoroughly knew' (In Cra. 34.6–9).

53 ὁ μὲν οὖν σκοπὸς τοῦ βιβλίου [sc. of the *Works and days*] παιδευτικός (In Op. 1.13), that is, 'so that in this way we may set our lives in order and come to understand divine matters' (ἵνα τὸν ἴδιον βίον κοσμήσαντες οὕτω καὶ τῆς περὶ τῶν θεῶν γνώσεως ἐπιβολοὶ γενώμεθα, 1.9–10). Hesiod wrote the *Theogony*, on the other hand, 'desiring to transmit the origins of the gods' entire providence concerning the cosmos' (πάσης τῆς περὶ τὸν κόσμον τῶν θεῶν προνοίας τὰς ἀρχὰς ἐθέλησας παραδοῦναι, 1.1–2).

Plato's criticism.⁵⁴ Plato had blasted their mythmaking as a corrupting influence on the soul; Proclus recasts his attack by allowing for inspired myths whose allegorical interpretations could lead to divine truth, albeit only to the prepared few, and educational myths meant to prepare the character of a wider audience to receive more complicated, allegorical wisdom (In Remp. 81.11–21).

But παιδευτικός material is not necessarily epistemic. In his discussion of mimetic poetry, Proclus explicitly defines as (the better kind of) mimetic 'this kind of poetry [...] associated with music that educates character' (τῇ παιδευτικῇ τῶν ἡθῶν, In Remp. 190.20–2) via the accuracy of its representations. So van den Berg rather begs the question when he asserts that 'Proclus uses the term παιδευτικός to characterize the *Works and days*, a poem that he would probably consider as an example of the middle category of poetry', and then renames the middle category 'paideutic' because of this.⁵⁵ Unlike the *Theogony*, full of mystical allegories suited for an advanced audience, the *Works and days* contains much that aims at preparatory education. In this I do not disagree with van den Berg, whose main hypothesis is that the Neoplatonists used the *Works and days* as preparation for the inspired *Theogony*.⁵⁶ But we must distinguish the two fundamental, not functional, bases of such education: descriptions of technical knowledge and the life of reason will count by Proclus' lights as the middle category of poetry, while representations, especially those of moral-social truths, will fit in the third category, mimesis.

At Op. 24, Hesiod announces the better Strife as one of his primary themes. Proclus identifies this Strife with the 'intense struggle of the rational part of the soul' that 'gazes toward the good' (In Op. XIX); the taxonomy of the soul is one of the constituents of the middle category in the Proclean framework.⁵⁷ Similarly, Proclus comments on the spiritual and intellectual necessities for *paideusis* in his interpretation of the Muses' parentage at Op. 2.⁵⁸ Proclus claims that some of Hesiod's pronouncements, and especially his aphorisms, are delivered παιδευτικῶς ('for the purpose of *paideusis*'), but to place them firmly in the middle category, we need them to be rooted in demonstrative knowledge. This seems to occur in Proclus' comment on Op. 126 (LXXVI), in which he provides a political-scientific reading of the 'gift-giving' Golden Race as advice to kings that they live and rule 'according to the designs of the gods'.

Proclus also contends that the narrative structure of the *Works and days* reflects categories of advice.⁵⁹ In his comment on lines 381–2 (In Op. CLXI), Proclus says that what preceded them was 'lessons that form character by means of certain maxims/opinions' (παιδεύματα [...] τυποῦντα γνώμαις τισὶ τὸ ἥθος). These correspond to the kind of

54 Van den Berg (2014) 387–9.

55 Van den Berg (2014) 394.

56 Van den Berg (2014) 389.

57 Lamberton (1992) 121.

58 Zeus as their father and Mnemosyne as their mother show that 'anyone who is going to be educated must have capacity for thought and memory' (νοητικὸν εἶναι δεῖ καὶ μνημονευτικὸν τὸν παιδευθησόμενον, In Op. III).

59 Van den Berg (2014) 391.

education provided by mimesis. But what follows these lines, he says, ‘deals with the farmer’s life and the righteous path [that leads] from it’ by communicating the ‘appropriate times and methods for ploughing, reaping, planting, harvesting, and all such things.’ In other words, the remainder of the poem teaches the way to the just life by means of technical knowledge: the notorious farming and sailing advice so little loved by undergraduates.

In defending Hesiod as an epistemic poet, Proclus justifies one of the roles that Hesiodic poetry *in fact* had in Greek society across many centuries, rather than inventing a new way to frame it as, perhaps, he was required to do for Homer’s supposed allegoresis. An ‘encyclopedic’ knowledge of technical subjects as disparate as agriculture, astronomy, ethnography, geography and history was ascribed to Hesiod from an early period.⁶⁰

Hesiod as a mimetic poet

The category least explored in existing scholarship on Proclus on Hesiod is the lowest: mimetic. In parts of his theoretical structure, Proclus speaks ill of mimetic poetry: it ‘magnifies inconsequential passions’ (In Remp. 179.20–1) and takes as its goal mere ‘entertainment’ (ψυχαγωγία, 179.27). Worst of all, the practitioner of its phantastic kind ‘will neither know nor have correct opinion, regarding the things which he imitates, with respect to its beauty or its worthlessness’ (191.29–192.3). Yet not only Homer the supreme poet, but also Plato the supreme philosopher, makes use of mimesis in his writings. How is Proclus to reconcile this? After all, Plato’s representation of ‘every kind of form of life’ both just and unjust in his numerous interlocutors – of whom ‘those defending positions opposed to the truth are sometimes more persuasive than those arguing for the truth’ (160.25–161.7) – literally is mimesis!

Proclus is aware that reducing Socrates’ argument against mimesis to absurdity would require expelling not just Homer, but Plato with him (In Remp. 161.9–14). As usual, he saves his beloved texts from Socrates’ attacks by redefining their terms and circumstances. In the ideal city – one based on the highest form of life and admitting no variation from the Good either in its constitution or in its citizens’ behaviour – no representations of anything not perfectly just and good would be admitted. But in this vale of tears, not yet in full harmony with the good, we may reasonably make reforms along the lines of what is possible. Here, variation and therefore representation can be admitted. ‘So,’ then,

why should one be astonished if the dialogues of Plato holding out to us “unstinting meadows” (Soph. 222a) of all beautiful things, and the works of the poets possessed by the Muses should be out of keeping with the very first of societies? (In Remp. 161.30–162.2)

⁶⁰ See Koning (2010) 110 n. 16.

Let us not entirely banish this *mimesis*, on the grounds that it is unfitting for those educated in that society. For what is not at all suitable for the very first class of good things is not withheld from the second and third classes. (In *Remp.* 163.5–9)

So *mimesis*, properly understood, is rehabilitated, and Proclus is freed to attribute it to his poets. Homer, as usual, gets the most systematic analysis. Proclus cites, with Gradgrindesque realism, Homer's depiction of the sun seeming to rise from a lake (*Od.* 3.1) as an example of his facility with the phantastic poetry of illusions (In *Remp.* 192.21–8).⁶¹ Similarly, Homer's accurate depictions of heroes' behaviour in taking counsel or speaking according to character shows his ability with eicastic poetry (192.28–193.4). Indeed, Proclus asserts that this kind of *mimesis* was what Plato objected to in Homer, being supposedly *ἀνόμοιος* (44.7); with great charity towards Plato, he demonstrates how Homer's *mimesis*, properly understood, is in fact *ὁμοιος*.⁶²

Hesiod, too, appears in some places as a mimetic poet. We must remember the distinction between epistemic poetry and the other two kinds: epistemic poetry straightforwardly tells, while both the higher inspired and the lower mimetic poetries represent.⁶³ Proclus presents Hesiod as the author of sententious sayings that represent correct opinions about social-moral truths. We might say that these representations are 'allegories' in the loose modern English sense of the word, not the stricter Neoplatonist inspired sense. His comments on *Op.* 744–5 (CCLII) are of this nature: Hesiod's instruction 'not to place the ladle atop the wine-jug' is, he says, a *συμβολικὸν παιδεύμα* that we 'not conduct private business in public'. The appearance of roots (*συμβολ-*, *παιδευ-*) that we typically associate with the first and second types of poetry might give us pause, but Proclus is evidently using these terms in their generalised, non-technical senses, as the connection he makes from Hesiod's text to the (supposed) meaning is obviously neither a divine revelation about the cosmos nor a straightforward communication of rational *episteme*. Instead, it is a social truth, of the kind practiced by the Pythagoreans whom Proclus cites in the same scholium.⁶⁴ He claims that the Pythagoreans said 'many such things' *συμβολικῶς παραινοῦντα* ('giving advice symbolically'), like 'don't poke the fire with a knife', meaning 'don't irritate an angry person with bitter words'. These are not *symbola* in the allegorical sense of the inspired myths; they are aphorisms of the kind that are passed down to youths of all places and

61 Incidentally, this demonstrates that Homer fails to live up to Proclus' own conception of the strictly ideal poet, the ποιητῆς ἄριστος (In *Remp.* 65.17). Just as such a poet (as supposedly defined by Plato) must not make myths that 'disguise [his underlying subjects] through the use of what is dissimilar' (65.30), so too, 'if it is somehow necessary for there to be *mimesis*', 'the *mimesis* must not share in variety, but must instead be *mimesis* simply of good people' (66.21–4). Homer is disqualified from being the ideal poet of the Kallipolis, even if he is the best that can be had so far.

62 Sheppard (1980) 165.

63 Sheppard (1980) 182.

64 In this I differ from Marzillo (2010) xlvi, who reads *συμβολικῶς* as 'allegorisch' in the strict Neoplatonist sense. The content of the so-called allegory and the context to which it is compared make this reading untenable.

times. Proclus' reference to the Pythagorean sayings is crucial here, because external evidence shows that Neoplatonic philosophers considered such sayings to be mimetic, not some other kind of poetry.⁶⁵ Indeed they were seen as specifically based on ὀρθὴ δόξα ('correct opinion'), the grounds for Proclus' eicastic subcategory. Simplicius, who studied in Athens under Proclus' immediate successors, exhorts us to seek basic moral knowledge οὐκ ἀποδεικτικῶς, ἀλλ' ὀρθοδοξαστικῶς ('not demonstratively, but according to correct opinion')⁶⁶ of the sort preserved in the sayings of the Pythagoreans (In Cat. 5.21–3) before proceeding to the demonstrative, rational knowledge of works like Aristotle's *Ethics*. The commentary on the *Golden verses* by Hierocles of Alexandria, who studied alongside Proclus under Plutarch of Athens at the Neoplatonic Academy, claims that the σκοπός of the *Verses* is to 'produce a philosophical character in the pupils before the other readings' (6.26–7.1).⁶⁷

These simple lessons were the sort of exhortation contained in another Hesiodic work, the *Precepts of Chiron*. Though they were long lost by Proclus' time, the Hesiodic *Precepts* resemble the mimetic poetry of the *Golden verses*, since they both circulated among Hellenistic readers and informed later critics' conceptions of this kind of verse. We only have three lines of the *Precepts*, the poem's incipit: they exhort us to 'first perform the sacred rites for the gods who exist forever' (πρῶτον μὲν [...] ἔρδειν ἱερὰ καλὰ θεοῖς αἰετιγενέτησιν, [Hes.] fr. 283.2–3 Merkelbach-West). The *Golden verses* have a similar injunction in their opening lines to 'first honour the immortal gods' (Ἀθανάτους μὲν πρῶτα θεοῦς [...] τίμα: *Carm. aur.* 1–2 Thom). They likewise contain unprefaced, sententious commands of little more than a hexameter each. Piety is commonly the first topic in gnomic texts such as these.⁶⁸ More importantly, we have evidence from Quintilian (*Inst.* 1.1.15) that the aphoristic *Precepts* were used for primary education specifically – for children in their earliest years of moral and intellectual responsibility. This is exactly the function of (the better kind of) mimetic poetry in Proclus' schema. Furthermore, the narrative and therefore mimetic similarities between the *Golden verses* and the *Works and days* are obvious, from the format of the advice to the personifications of Ἔρις (*Carm. aur.* 59, cf. *Op.* 11–26) and the path of Ἀρετή (*Carm. aur.* 46, cf. *Op.* 287–92) even to the content of some of the aphorisms.⁶⁹ So, although the text of the *Precepts* had been lost by Proclus' time, its memory remained as part of the cultural conception of Hesiod, reinforced by clear similarities with the surviving *Works and days*. Proclus' repeated comparisons of the *Golden verses*' advice to Hesiod's show that the connection was to him a living one.⁷⁰

65 Van den Berg (2014) 396–7.

66 Contrast, above, the ἀποδεικτικός knowledge conveyed by epistemic poetry.

67 Mansfeld (1994) 27.

68 Thom (1995) 104 n. 7.

69 For which see Thom (1995) 161–2.

70 He cites the *Golden verses* on the treatment of friends (CCXXXVII.16–19) and anger control (CCLII.1–6) and adopts some of the terminology used by Hierocles in his commentary on them. See Marzillo (2010) 323.

Hesiod's simple moral advice – mimesis of correct opinion – is taken up in several scholia. The lengthy comment on *Op.* 591–6 (CCXVII), concerning Hesiod's advice on what kinds of wine, milk and water to drink in the summer heat, notes several contemporary opinions on how to test the goodness or badness of water. But the scholium says these elaborate tests are not εὐπόριστον ('feasible' or 'realistic') in ordinary circumstances. Hesiod, in contrast, offers advice that is ἀπλούστερον 'simpler' for the farmer's sake, and here, 'simplicity and moral wholeness go together'.⁷¹ Elsewhere, Hesiod accurately portrays the actions of people according to character even if such people are irrational or uneducated, the same grounds on which Proclus praises Homer as an eicastic poet. The scholium to *Op.* 757–9 (CCLVIII) cites Plutarch's rejection of these lines on the grounds that they are 'trivial and unworthy of the παιδευτική Muse', being an injunction against pissing into running water. Proclus, however, restores them, since they accurately depict the behaviour of the uneducated people who might do such a thing.⁷² Proclus' marking of his interpretation with ἴσως ('perhaps') shows that this is not an inspired allegory with only one authoritative understanding. Instead, this is the mimetic poetry that prepares the soul with basic moral and social truths.⁷³ Similarly, Hesiod depicts the actions of an unwise man, 'rich only in his mind; a fool' (*Op.* 455–6), who will fail to prepare the materials to build a cart in the winter. Proclus argues (*In Op.* CLXXX) that this is a successful representation of one who, deluded by 'his empty fantasies' (ταῖς ἐάντου φαντασίας ταῖς κενῶς), 'wastes his entire life [by living it] as one without nous' (ἀνοήτων).

Proclus' Hesiod creates phantastic poetry as well, since some of his allegories, as Proclus would have it, concern the irrational part of the soul and the world of mere perceptions. In his comment on Pandora's χάρις ('comeliness') (*Op.* 65), Proclus approvingly cites Hesiod's skill at depicting the seductiveness of our irrational fantasies 'to those who cannot judge correctly' (*In Op.* LVIII). Yet he can also show the positive side of these inventions, such that he can even call them a 'teaching of Athena' (57). An apparent reference to the purpose of this kind of mimetic poetry occurs in Proclus' introductory matter to his commentary. In composing the *Works and days*, Hesiod was 'not only paying attention to the pleasure (ἡδονή) of his future readers' (1.6–7). Though he 'considered this a subordinate concern' (πάρεργον θέμενος) to 'usefulness for the character', nonetheless pleasure had a place, too. Proclus similarly qualifies his assessment of the poem's simple and archaic style, which contributes to its paideutic character. Since 'the simple and the natural befits discourses of an ethical character', the poetic form is 'purified of ornaments and epithets and metaphors in general' (ὡς τὰ πολλὰ, 1.16–18). But the qualification points out that there are artistic and ornamental effects in the *Works and days*,

71 Hunter (2014) 173.

72 Hesiod offered this advice 'aiming at the vulgarity of the *hoi polloi*, since not everybody has sense (*voûn*). Proclus cites Homer's accurate depiction of heroes' behaviour according to their characters, even if it is unseemly, to show his ability as an eicastic poet (*In Remp.* 192.28–193.4); compare his account of Plato's dialogic characters (160.25–161.7), who display all kinds of habits and opinions, not just correct and virtuous ones.

73 Plutarch's epithet for the παιδευτική Muse should not dissuade us from putting this passage in Proclus' mimetic category: Plutarch was of course writing centuries before Proclus' framework existed. Hunter's (2014) 182–6 discussion of these lines collapses the distinction between Proclus' second and third categories of poetry.

just as the verse form serves as 'a sort of sweetener' (ἡδυσμά τι) that 'charms the soul' (θέλγον τὰς ψυχάς, I.14).

Proclus analyses *Op.* 507–18, a portrait of the boreal frost and the creatures and people it blows over, as straightforward mimetic poetry (*In Op.* CXCVII). Hesiod's poetry ἐκτρογωδεῖ ('depicts dramatically' or even 'in the manner of a tragedy') its subject; the comparison to the dramatic art makes clear that Proclus has mimesis in mind.⁷⁴ He praises Hesiod's usage διὸ Θρήκης (*Op.* 507) above the Homeric ἐκ Θρήκης (*Il.* 10.5), seemingly because Homer's phrase conveys how the frost merely seems to blow 'from' the direction of Thrace, but Hesiod's more accurately shows that it comes from northward of Thrace and passes 'through' on its way.⁷⁵ The notion that Hesiod has more knowledge of such facts than Homer is a very old one. It appears in Eratosthenes and the *scholia vetera* and probably comes from the common assumption that Hesiod was younger than Homer.⁷⁶ Here, though, Proclean exegesis pours the old wine into a new bottle, proving Hesiod's ability to make accurate mimetic representations of the world within the novel threefold framework.

As the epistemic category corresponds to the use of Hesiodic poetry as a kind of encyclopaedia, so the mimetic category, and particularly its eicastic subcategory, corresponds to its longstanding use in Greek elementary education. Gnomonic poetry in the elementary curriculum went back as far as the classical period at least.⁷⁷ Indeed, the legend XIPONEIA on the schoolwork of a young student depicted on an early fifth century BC vase (*ARV*² 329.134) implies that specifically Hesiodic poetry (the *Precepts of Chiron*) was used in this way. Later on, Hesiodic verses appear in school exercises, albeit at a much lower rate than Homeric lines.⁷⁸

Orpheus versus Hesiod and Homer

To heighten the contrast between Homeric-Hesiodic authority and that of all other poets, we can consider Proclus' presentation of Orpheus. Homer, Hesiod and Orpheus are the only individual poets whom Proclus mentions by name in his sixth essay on the *Republic*, except for his brief excursus on Stesichorus. Proclus only mentions Stesichorus to attack his authority to Homer's benefit (*In Remp.* 173.1–177.3),⁷⁹ so we may reasonably omit him from further discussion.

74 Plato considered Homer the 'leader and teacher of the tragedians' because of his mimetic ability (*Resp.* 595c). Proclus cites this opinion approvingly (*In Remp.* 158.12–17).

75 Compare Proclus' critique of the Homeric sun's seeming to rise from the lake, cited above: the poet's problem is that he presents the world as it appears, not as it fundamentally is.

76 Koning (2010) 42–3.

77 Ford (2010) 146.

78 Criboire's census of schoolroom documents, cited by Netz (2020) 42, finds four Hesiodic papyri over against 129 Homeric ones.

79 Stesichorus, he says, was blinded because of his immoderate affection for sensual appearances. Homer only seemed to suffer the same fate, but his was due to his turning away from mere appearances to inwardly contemplate the divine.

The association of Orpheus' name with Homer's and Hesiod's has an important Platonist pedigree. At *Apology* 41A, Socrates asks the jury how much they would give if in death they could 'be with Orpheus and Musaeus and Hesiod and Homer'; he is willing to die many times over if this is true. Proclus cites this very passage at *In Remp.* 157.8–11 but omits the original's Musaeus, who has no place in Proclus' poetic framework despite his earlier importance in theology.⁸⁰ Orpheus' authority is substantial: Proclus cites Orphic poems for mythographic points (e.g. *In Remp.* 102.11–12, 125.1–2, 138.25–6) and a biographical detail concerning his dismemberment relating to the Dionysian mysteries (174.21–175.7). On the one hand, Proclus plainly thought of Orpheus as an inspired poet (καὶ [...] Ὀρφεὺς καὶ εἰ δὴ τις ἄλλος ἐνθέῳ στόματι γέγονεν, 72.3–4) capable of being classed alongside Hesiod and Homer as a θεόλογος.⁸¹ On the other, Orpheus' presence both in Proclus' works and in the reception of Greek poetry in general is quite different. The *Suda*'s record (s.v. Πρόκλος) that Proclus wrote 'on the theology of Orpheus' and Συμφωνίαν Ὀρφέως, Πυθαγόρου, Πλάτωνος περὶ τὰ Λόγια βιβλία 1' shows that Proclus approached Orpheus primarily or exclusively as a source of theological doctrine, following a trend in earlier Platonists.⁸² Indeed, he claims that 'the whole of the Greeks' theology descends from Orphic mystagogy' (*Theol. Plat.* 1.25.26–7) and constructs a fourfold classification of theological modes in which Orpheus represents one mode alongside Pythagoras, the Chaldaeans and Plato (*Theol. Plat.* 1.20.6–25). A structural throughline in the fifth volume of the same work is the harmonisation of Orpheus' doctrine with that of Plato.⁸³ Homer is strikingly absent from this volume, while Hesiod's account is directly quoted just once⁸⁴ and called one of οἱ τραγικώτεροι τῶν μύθων 'the most tragic of myths' (*Theol. Plat.* 5.138.24–5), recalling his mimetic ability. Likewise, concerning the *Timaeus*, Proclus uses Orphic poetry to clarify Plato's (supposed) positions on difficult questions of the organisation of the divine and material realms: for example, the categories of health which the Demiurge contains (*In Tim.* 2.63.29–64.13) and the relationship between the Demiurge and the sphericity of the universe (*In Tim.* 2.70.9 and 13, the former harmonised with the *Chaldaean oracles* as well), both obviously the domain of the inspired poetry of which the Orphica were an example.

80 Ford (2010) 153 asserts that in Plato's time, Musaeus' (supposed) poetry formed, along with Homer, Hesiod and the Orphica, 'a sort of summa of ancient wisdom'.

81 Grouped in this way, the 'theologians' are used as sources of ancient authority to dispel the false myths of later, uneducated people, as at *In Tim.* 1.142.14–20 concerning Hephaestus: 'What is said about him by ordinary people belongs to the totally discredited kind of story [...]. So let us start from the beginning with the theologians and apply our proofs about him to the tradition we have received' (trans. Tarrant (2007)).

82 Compare Celsus in the late second century: in a catalogue of learned men, he included Orpheus alongside Linus, Musaeus, Pherecydes, Zoroaster and Pythagoras (Origen *C. Cels.* 16.30). In contrast, Celsus engages directly with Homeric text as a cultural, polemical tool to convince educated people that Christians were foolish and unstylish, on which see Hunter (2021) 215–16. The source is fragmentary, but it seems the Orphica were here categorised among wisdom literature – not, apparently, alongside Homer and Hesiod.

83 Cf. Sheppard (2014) 72 and see e.g. *Theol. Plat.* 5.33.22–34.2 on Cronus' agelessness and 5.16.24–17.7 and 128.5–129.16 on the Curetes. Brisson (1987) 44 writes that in Proclus' view, Plato, Orpheus and the Chaldaeans alike produced 'une écriture sainte'.

84 *Theol. Plat.* 5.138.25 καταπίνοσα ~ Hesiod *Theog.* 459 κατέπινε.

The *Chaldaean oracles* play a similar role in this commentary by resolving many an *aporia* about Plato's doctrines and their taxonomy, like the order in which Plato presents the spheres (In Tim. 2.57.10–58.12), or, in explicit concert with Orphic wisdom, the function of the Sun in the genesis of visible time (In Tim. 3.80.31–83.17).

Proclus apparently left no *ὑπόμνημα* on the Orphic corpus, as he did for Homer and the *Works and days*.⁸⁵ Moreover, his surviving works evince no discussion of either the poetic qualities of the Orphica or their function beyond communicating divine revelations – no small purpose, but not the holistic poetry of Homer or Hesiod. Damascius, Proclus' successor by two generations, discussed three distinct Orphic theogonies, again for their value as accounts of the divine.⁸⁶ As for their broader reception, Orphic myths had a 'marginal status and erudite character' with diffuse effects in poetry and ritual.⁸⁷ Their diffusion was matched by the flexibility of their canon, which saw numerous major and minor poems newly ascribed to Orpheus' name at least as late as the Orphic *Argonautica* of no earlier than the fourth century AD.⁸⁸ In contrast, the Hesiodic canon was closed roughly in the time of the Alexandrian grammarians, and even those minor poems which survived their obeli were mostly lost by the turn of the first millennium, leaving only the *Theogony*, *Works and days*, *Catalogue* and *Shield*.

Conclusion

The Neoplatonists have undergone a burst of scholarly interest in the past forty years after many more decades of neglect and calumny. Most of this activity concerns their metaphysical and religious beliefs, and rightly so. But their literary theory, typically ignored except in the few works cited here, illuminates not just their own idiosyncratic philosophy but the whole religious and intellectual context of late antiquity. Proclus' commentary on Hesiod did not represent some last stand against the encroachment of Christian doctrine. Instead, it was one more argument in a dialogue that extended back through Alexandria and Athens to the earliest recorded stages of Greek poetry and its reception. For centuries in this contest, Hesiod rarely gains the upper hand over Homer – but the late Platonist attitude towards teacherly authority, the impulse towards categorisation and canonisation, and the exclusion of competitors like Orpheus all conspired to stand Hesiod face-to-face with his old rival. Through holistic excellence in all three kinds of poetry, Hesiod masters all three kinds of authority which they concern: a guide to social norms, teacher of rational knowledge, unveiler of divine mysteries. Would that the bored undergraduate, struggling over his farming advice, could read him like this!

85 In fact, he specifically declined – out of reverence – to comment fully on the Orphic poems, restricting himself to illuminating a few of Syrianus' comments in the margins (Marinus *Vita Procli* 27).

86 West (1983) 68–9.

87 Herrero de Jáuregui (2010) 41.

88 West (1983) 37.

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