

HESIOD

Works and Days  
and  
Theogony

Translated by  
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Introduction and Notes by  
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## WORKS & DAYS

- Muses of the sacred spring Pieria  
Who give glory in song,  
Come sing Zeus' praises, hymn your great Father  
Through whom mortals are either  
Renowned or unknown, famous or unfamed 5  
As goes the will of great Zeus.  
Easy for Him to build up the strong  
And tear the strong down.  
Easy for Him to diminish the mighty 10  
And magnify the obscure.  
Easy for Him to straighten the crooked  
And wither the proud,*
- Zeus the Thunderer  
Whose house is most high.*
- Bend hither your mind, 15  
Hand down just judgments,  
O Thou!*
- And as for me,  
Well, brother Perses,  
I'd like to state a few facts. 20*

### Two Kinds of Strife

It looks like there's not just one kind of Strife—  
That's Eris—after all, but two on the Earth.  
You'd praise one of them once you got to know her,  
But the other's plain blameworthy. They've just got  
Completely opposite temperaments. 25  
One of them favors war and fighting. She's a mean cuss  
And nobody likes her, but everybody honors her,  
This ornery Eris. They have to: it's the gods' will.

The other was born first though. Ebony Night  
 30 Bore her, and Kronos' son who sits high in thin air  
 Set her in Earth's roots, and she's a lot better for humans.  
 Even shiftless folks she gets stirred up to work.

When a person's lazing about and sees his neighbor  
 Getting rich, because he hurries to plow and plant  
 35 And put his homestead in order, he tends to compete  
 With that neighbor in a race to get rich.

Strife like this does people good.

So potter feuds with potter  
 And carpenter with carpenter,  
 40 Beggar is jealous of beggar  
 And poet of poet.

Now, Perses, you lay these things up in your heart  
 And don't let the mischief-loving Eris keep you from work,  
 Spending all your time in the market eyeballing quarrels  
 45 And listening to lawsuits. A person hasn't any business  
 Wasting time at the market unless he's got a year's supply  
 Of food put by, grain from Demeter out of the ground.  
 When you've got plenty of that, you can start squabbling  
 Over other people's money.

50 Not that you're going to get  
 Another chance with me. Let's settle this feud right now  
With the best kind of judgment, a straight one from Zeus.  
 We had our inheritance all divided up, then you  
 Made off with most of it, playing up to those  
 55 Bribe-eating lords who love cases like this.  
 Damn fools. Don't know the half from the whole,  
 Or the real goodness in mallows and asphodel.

### Why Life Is Hard

You know, the gods never have let on  
 How humans might make a living. Else,  
 60 You might get enough done in one day  
 To keep you fixed for a year without working.

You might just hang your plowshare up in the smoke,  
 And all the fieldwork done by your oxen  
 And hard-working mules would soon run to ruin.  
 But Zeus got his spleen up, and went and hid  
 65 How to make a living, all because shifty Prometheus  
 Tricked him. That's why Zeus made life hard for humans.  
 He hid fire. But that fine son of Iapetos stole it  
 Right back out from under Zeus' nose, hiding  
 The flame in a fennel stalk. And thundering Zeus  
 70 Who rides herd on the clouds got angry and said:

"Iapetos' boy, if you're not the smartest of them all!  
 I bet you're glad you stole fire and outfoxed me.  
 But things will go hard for you and for humans after this.  
 I'm going to give them Evil in exchange for fire,  
 75 Their very own Evil to love and embrace."

That's what he said, the Father of gods and men,  
 And he laughed out loud. Then he called Hephaistos  
 And told him to hurry and knead some earth and water  
 And put a human voice in it, and some strength,  
 80 And to make the face like an immortal goddess' face  
 And the figure like a beautiful, desirable virgin's.  
 Then he told Athene to teach her embroidery & weaving,  
 And Aphrodite golden to spill grace on her head  
 And painful desire and knee-weakening anguish. 85  
 And he ordered the quicksilver messenger, Hermes,  
 To give her a bitchy mind and a cheating heart.  
 That's what he told them, and they listened to Lord Zeus,  
 Kronos' son. And right away famous old Gimpy  
 Plastered up some clay to look like a shy virgin 90  
 Just like Zeus wanted, and the Owl-Eyed Goddess  
 Got her all dressed up, and the Graces divine  
 And Lady Persuasion put some gold necklaces  
 On her skin, and the Seasons (with their long, fine hair)  
 Put on her head a crown of springtime flowers. 95  
 Pallas Athena put on the finishing touches,  
 And the quicksilver messenger put in her breast  
 Lies and wheedling words and a cheating heart,  
 Just like rumbling Zeus wanted. And the gods' own herald

100 Put a voice in her, and he named that woman  
Pandora, because all the Olympians donated something,  
And she was a real pain for human beings.

When this piece of irresistible bait was finished,  
Zeus sent Hermes to take her to Epimetheus

105 As a present, and the speedy messenger-god did it.  
Epimetheus didn't think on what Prometheus had told him,  
Not to accept presents from Olympian Zeus but to send any  
Right back, in case trouble should come of it to mortals.  
No, Epimetheus took it, and after he had the trouble  
110 Then he thought on it.

Because before that the human race  
Had lived off the land without any trouble, no hard work,  
No sickness or pain that the Fates give to men  
(And when men are in misery they show their age quickly).

115 But the woman took the lid off the big jar with her hands  
And scattered all the miseries that spell sorrow for men.  
Only Hope was left there in the unbreakable container,  
Stuck under the lip of the jar, and couldn't fly out:  
The woman clamped the lid back on the jar first,  
120 All by the plan of the Aegisholder, cloud-herding Zeus.  
But ten thousand or so other horrors spread out among men,  
The earth is full of evil things, and so's the sea.  
Diseases wander around just as they please, by day and by night,  
Soundlessly, since Zeus in his wisdom deprived them of voice.  
125 There's just no way you can get around the mind of Zeus.

If you want, I can sum up another tale for you,  
Neat as you please. The main point to remember  
Is that gods and humans go back a long way together.

### The Five Ages

**Golden** was the first race of articulate folk  
130 Created by the immortals who live on Olympos.  
They actually lived when Kronos was king of the sky,  
And they lived like gods, not a care in their hearts,  
Nothing to do with hard work or grief,  
And miserable old age didn't exist for them.

From fingers to toes they never grew old, 135  
And the good times rolled. And when they died  
It was like sleep just ravelled them up.  
They had everything good. The land bore them fruit  
All on its own, and plenty of it too. Cheerful folk,  
They did their work peaceably and in prosperity, 140  
With plenty of flocks, and they were dear to the gods.  
And sure when Earth covered over that generation  
They turned into holy spirits, powers above ground,  
Invisible wardens for the whole human race.  
They roam all over the land, shrouded in mist, 145  
Tending to justice, repaying criminal acts  
And dispensing wealth. This is their royal honor.

Later, the Olympians made a second generation,  
**Silver** this time, not nearly so fine as the first,  
Not at all like the gold in either body or mind. 150  
A child would be reared at his mother's side  
A hundred years, just a big baby, playing at home.  
And when they finally did grow up and come of age  
They didn't live very long, and in pain at that,  
Because of their lack of wits. They just could not stop 155  
Hurting each other and could not bring themselves  
To serve the Immortals, nor sacrifice at their altars  
The way men ought to, wherever and whenever. So Zeus,  
Kronos' son, got angry and did away with them  
Because they weren't giving the Blessed Gods their honors. 160

And when Earth had covered over that generation—  
Blessed underground mortals is what they are called,  
Second in status, but still they have their honor—  
Father Zeus created a third generation  
Of articulate folk, **Bronze** this time, not like 165  
The silver at all, made them out of ash trees,  
Kind of monstrous and heavy, and all they cared about  
Was fighting and war. They didn't eat any food at all.  
They had this kind of hard, untameable spirit.  
Shapeless hulks. Terrifically strong. Grapplehook hands 170  
Grew out of their shoulders on thick stumps of arms,  
And they had bronze weapons, bronze houses,

And their tools were bronze. No black iron back then.  
 Finally they killed each other off with their own hands  
 175 And went down into the bone-chilling halls of Hades  
 And left no names behind. Astounding as they were,  
 Black Death took them anyway, and they left the sun's light.

So Earth buried that generation too,  
 And Zeus fashioned a fourth race  
 180 To live off the land, juster and nobler,  
 The divine race of **Heroes**, also called  
 Demigods, the race before the present one.  
 They all died fighting in the great wars,  
 Some at seven-gated Thebes, Kadmos' land,  
 185 In the struggle for Oidipous' cattle,  
 And some, crossing the water in ships,  
 Died at Troy, for the sake of beautiful Helen.  
 And when Death's veil had covered them over  
 Zeus granted them a life apart from other men,  
 190 Settling them at the ends of the Earth.  
 And there they live, free from all care,  
 In the Isles of the Blest, by Ocean's deep stream,  
 Blessed heroes for whom the life-giving Earth  
 Bears sweet fruit ripening three times a year.

195 [Far from the Immortals, and Kronos is their king,  
 For the Father of gods and men has released him  
 And he still has among them the honor he deserves.  
 Then the fifth generation: Broad-browed Zeus  
 Made still another race of articulate folk  
 200 To people the plentiful Earth.]

I wish

I had nothing to do with this fifth generation,  
 Wish I had died before or been born after,

Because this is the **Iron Age**.

205 Not a day goes by  
 A man doesn't have some kind of trouble.  
 Nights too, just wearing him down. I mean  
 The gods send us terrible pain and vexation.  
 Still, there'll be some good mixed in with the evil,

And then Zeus will destroy this generation too,  
 210 Soon as they start being born grey around the temples.  
 (Then fathers won't get along with their kids anymore,  
 Nor guests with hosts, nor partner with partner,  
 And brothers won't be friends, the way they used to be.  
 Nobody'll honor their parents when they get old  
 215 But they'll curse them and give them a hard time,  
 Godless rascals, and never think about paying them back  
 For all the trouble it was to raise them.  
 They'll start taking justice into their own hands,  
 Sacking each other's cities, no respect at all  
 220 For the man who keeps his oaths, the good man,  
 The just man. No, they'll keep all their praise  
 For the wrongdoer, the man who is violence incarnate,  
 And shame and justice will lie in their hands.  
 Some good-for-nothing will hurt a decent man  
 225 Slander him, and swear an oath on top of it.  
 Envy will be everybody's constant companion,  
 With her foul mouth and hateful face, relishing evil.  
 And then

up to Olympos from the wide-pathed Earth,  
 230 lovely apparitions wrapped in white veils,  
 off to join the Immortals, abandoning humans  
 There go **Shame** and **Nemesis**. And horrible suffering  
 Will be left for mortal men, and no defense against evil.

And here's a fable for kings, who'll not need it explained: 235

It's what the hawk said high in the clouds  
 As he carried off a speckle-throated nightingale  
 Skewered on his talons. She complained something pitiful,  
 And he made this high and mighty speech to her:  
 "No sense in your crying. You're in the grip of real strength now,  
 240 And you'll go where I take you, songbird or not.  
 I'll make a meal of you if I want, or I might let you go.  
 Only a fool struggles against his superiors.  
 He not only gets beat, but humiliated as well."

Thus spoke the hawk, the windlord, his long wings beating. 245

STOP HERE

I won in the songfest and took home an eared tripod.  
 Dedicated it to the Helikonian Muses, on the very spot  
 730 Where they first set me on the road to clear song.

That's the sum of my experience with pegged & dowelled ships.  
 Still, I can teach you the mind of Zeus the Storm King,  
 Since the Muses have taught me ineffable song.

Fifty days after the solstice, toward the end  
 735 Of summer, the season of scorching heat,  
 Comes the sailing season. You won't wreck  
 Your ship then, nor the sea drown your men,  
 Unless Poseidon Earthshaker has a mind otherwise,  
 Or the Lord of Immortals *wants* to destroy them.  
 740 These two set the terms of good and evil alike.  
 But the winds are easy to judge then  
 And the sea's gentle. You can trust  
 That swift ship of yours to the breeze  
 Without a care, haul her down to the sea  
 745 And load on all your cargo.  
 But go as fast as you can, and hurry  
 Back home. Don't wait for the new wine  
 Or the autumn rains, or the stormy season coming on  
 With high winds from the South that stir up the sea  
 750 And make sailing grim business under a wet autumn sky.

There's another season for sailing, in the spring:  
 When new fig-leaves at the tip of the branch  
 Open up to the size of a crow's footprint,  
 You can get on the sea. That's the spring sailing season,  
 755 Not that I like it. It just doesn't sit well with me.  
 It's borrowed time, and you'll find it hard  
 To get away with. Still, men are foolish  
 And ignorant enough to try even *that*.  
 Money's life. That's the human condition.  
 760 But it's a terrible thing, to die in the waves.

Well, as I say, think all these things over,  
 And don't put all you have in the hold of a ship.  
 Leave the better part behind, load the lesser aboard.

Read  
 this

~~It's disastrous to run into trouble at sea,  
 Just as it's disastrous to load a wagon too full,  
 Break the axle, and have the whole load ruined.  
 So mind your measures, and remember:~~

765

~~*Everything you do is best done in season.*~~

### Marrying

Marry at the right age. Bring home a wife  
 When you're just about thirty, give or take  
 A few years. That's marrying in season.

770

A woman ought to wed when she's five years a woman.  
 Marry her virgin so you can teach her prudent ways.  
 The best girl to marry is the girl next door,  
 But have a good look around and make sure first  
 775 That marrying her won't make you a joke to your neighbors.

775

A man couldn't steal anything better than a good wife,  
 Just as nothing is more horrible than a bad one,  
 Some freeloader who roasts her man without a fire  
 And serves him up to a raw old age.

780

### A List of Don'ts to Avoid the Gods' Anger

Don't make a friend equal to a brother.  
 But if you do, don't start any trouble,  
 And don't say anything you don't really mean.  
 But if he starts it, and says something  
 Or does something you don't like, remember  
 785 To pay him back double. Then if he makes up  
 With you and wants to set things to rights,  
 Take him up on it. It's a sorry man  
 Makes one friend then another. But you,  
 Make sure your face matches your mind.

785

790

Don't get yourself a name for taking in  
 Too many guests or none at all, nor for being  
 Either a friend of louts or a mocker of lords.