At first glance, the *Works and Days* offers a bewildering farrago of materials: mythological narratives, fables, allegories, a calendar of agricultural chores, proverbial adages, some apparently autobiographical tidbits about Hesiod, his brother, and father, religious prohibitions, and finally a list of lucky and unlucky days. Certain passages, especially the story of Prometheus and Pandora and the Myth of the Races, are justly famous and widely studied—often without attention to their contexts—but others like the “Days” and the religious prohibitions have been either ignored or athetized. How—or whether—these disparate materials fit together and whether there is any rime or reason to their ordering has been the central focus of scholarly debate.¹ A second area of discussion has centered on the question of genre: what is the relation of the *Works and Days* to other kinds of early Greek hexameter *epos*, especially the heroic epics of Homer,² as well as to Hesiod’s own *Theogony*?

The *Erga* becomes the model for subsequent didactic poetry, and many scholars have considered it a Hesiodic innovation, a personal statement occasioned by his quarrel with his brother Perses and his passionate commitment to preach the gospel of work and justice.³ Its disjointed presentation is thus ascribed to Hesiod’s wrestling—with limited success—with novel and intractable material. But some recent critics have argued for the traditional character of the *Works and Days*, citing parallels from the “Wisdom Literature” found in many ancient societies and even within the Greek poetic tradition in the *Theognidea* and the paraenetic speeches of Homeric epic.⁴ Some sections of the poem, like the agricultural calen-

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¹ This chapter constitutes an updated synthesis of Clay (2003), which contains a fuller discussion and bibliography, and (2007). Its somewhat dogmatic character is due to limitations of space. I have also not dealt with the social and economic implications of the *Erga*, for which see Tandy and Neale (1996) and Edwards (2004); also Millet (1984).
² For a recent and very thorough overview of Hesiodic scholarship, see Manakidou (2006) 257–279; also Blümer (2001) 7–22.
dar and the strings of *gnomai* and even elements of the poem’s dramatic occasion and certain facets of Hesiod’s self-representation, may indeed be traditional features of a pre-existent genre of advice poetry.\(^5\)

Unlike the *Theogony* where Hesiod depended on the Muses for his knowledge of matters divine, remote from the ken of ordinary mortals, in the *Works and Days* Hesiod’s theme focuses on the human sphere: how human beings should live and behave toward each other and the gods, and how they can prosper within the limits established by the laws of Zeus.\(^6\) In the *Theogony* Hesiod traced his authority to speak from the Muses, but finessed the issue of their truthfulness; in the *Works and Days*, however, he asserts not only his personal authority to hold forth on matters of concern to mankind, but he also affirms the validity of his assertions. With his authoritative voice he alternately threatens and cajoles, promises and instructs, commands and exhorts not only Perses, but also the kings.\(^7\) Moreover, he deploys a vast panoply of rhetorical tropes and strategies—fables, allegories, myths, and proverbs—as he develops his case for work and justice and also reveals the way the world works, the *etetuma*, “things as they are”.

The *Works and Days* falls roughly into nine sections: invocation (1–10); the two Erides (11–41); Prometheus, Pandora, and her jar (47–105); the five races (106–201); justice (202–285); precepts, maxims, and proverbs (286–380); work on land and sea (381–693); precepts and prohibitions (694–764); and the Days (765–828). Whether this ordering should be construed as a number of fairly independent blocks loosely linked through an association of ideas or arranged in a scheme of ring composition or organized according to some overarching architecture has occupied generations of scholars.\(^8\) The puzzling design of the *Works and Days* can, I believe, best be understood as a dramatic monologue by following the course of Hesiod’s argument in a linear fashion as it unfolds and is absorbed by Perses and, to a lesser extent, the kings. In addition, the changing faces of Zeus must be mapped over the course of the poem; for the role that Hesiod ascribes to Zeus modulates from the watchful guardian of justice invoked in the proem to a more distant and

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\(^6\) See Clay (2003) for a detailed comparison of the two poems and an argument for their complementarity; also Masaracchia (1961).

\(^7\) I translate *basileis* throughout as “kings,” although their role in Hesiod corresponds more closely to judges or arbitrators.

\(^8\) See for example Hamilton (1989) 47–87; Bona Quaglia (1973); Beye (1972); Nicolai (1964); Verdenius (1962); Kerschensteiner (1944) 149–191; and Fuss (1910).