This book offers a socio-political reading of the Hesiodic *Catalogue of Women*, according to which the lost epic presented a reactionary response to the ‘middling’ values that historians have identified as a key ideology to emerge within the new kinds of communities that were taking shape in Archaic Greece. The Introduction and longest chapter establishes the approaches and assumptions that inform the main argument. The *Catalogue* emerged in the context of an oral tradition that included the other epics attributed to Hesiod, who is understood here as a monumental composer-performer whose works were committed to writing in the 8th century BCE (and later than the Homeric epics: pp. 27, 119). At least three strata are detected within the *Catalogue*: one or more “‘authors’” (quotation marks in the original), “traditional material,” and a “final redactor,” and though the relative proportions of these elements are found to be indeterminate, responsibility for the narrative structure rests with the redactor (pp. 2, 8; cf. 119), invoked elsewhere with such periphrases as “Hesiodic poet” (65) and “*Catalogue* poet” (175). These issues, however, are to be of only limited significance for the present work, which “place[s] the *Catalogue* ideologically in the shifty historical context of the late Archaic period . . . specifically the mid-sixth century” (p. 2).

Following the lead of Jenny Clay’s *Hesiod’s Cosmos* (Cambridge, 2003), the *Catalogue* is further identified as a segment in the larger story that begins with the creation as told in the *Theogony* and ends with the “life today” (p. 7) of the *Works and Days*. The fit between the *Catalogue* and the canonical Hesiodic epics receives corroboration from the fact that the former avoids the narrative territory of the latter two in a manner that, although not mentioned here, would resemble the relationship between the *Odyssey* and *Iliad* as described by what is commonly known as “Monro’s Law” (for which see Rutherford, R.B. 1982. *From the Iliad to the Odyssey*, JHS 102, 145-160). Because the performance
context is similar to that in which the canonical Hesiodic and Homeric poems took shape, approaches to intertextuality that have been developed for texts that originated in an oral tradition will play an important role in this reconstruction of the Catalogue’s early reception.

The political approach taken here, informed by the work of Kurt Raaflaub, Leslie Kurke and Ian Morris, places the Catalogue in the context of a shift of power to the institutions of the polis at the expense of elites, and with it an “aesthetic that privileges measured and appropriate expenditure over one of conspicuous consumption” (p. 15). Criticism of this “middling ideology” concept, primarily that of Dean Hammer, is acknowledged but dismissed as obtuse (e.g., “Here, as elsewhere, Hammer seems to overlook…” , p. 24). In terms of Hesiodic epic writ large, the reasoning is that the Theogony “clearly belongs to an aristocratic discursive tradition”, while the Works and Days presents a narrator “who is the champion par excellence of the middling tradition” (pp. 36-37). The subject matter of the Catalogue, which was previously slotted in between the canonical epics, is by definition aristocratic (gods + royalty = ancestors of elite families), and from it “the aesthetic of the Works and Days is not just missing, but consciously and carefully excluded” (39). Therefore, since the act of exclusion presupposes familiarity with that which is excluded, the Catalogue qua reactionary discourse can thus be located in the middle of the Theogony’s aristocratic ethos, which it embraces, and the middling ideology of the Works and Days, about which it is conspicuously silent.

This approach is brought to bear first on the custom of bride-gifts, hedna, in the Catalogue, “the richest source of descriptions of hedna in all of Greek literature” (p. 53). That hedna in the Catalogue are in deployment and formulaic expression very like Homeric hedna is consistent with the aristocratic perspective assumed to be shared by these epic traditions. The analysis here brings out the ambiguous nature of hedna: sometimes they can be described by the more general term dora, ‘gifts’; sometimes they are refundable and sometimes not; they correlate with a bride’s physical beauty, but are actually a measure of the suitor’s status. Moreover, while the marriages that hedna attend are outwardly exogamous, they in fact take place within “a closed system… in which the elite define their circle specifically by their ability to marry in competition with other aristocrats” (p. 81), which system is taken here to reflect the concerns of elites in retreat before the advancing claims of the Archaic polis.

A close reading of the story of Mestra, the shape-shifting daughter of Erysichthon who engages in multiple, exogamous marriages, offers another perspective on aristocratic marriage. Comparison of Mestra with other shape-shifting females (Metis, Nemesis and Thetis) reveals a common desire among those who possess this ability to avoid wedlock. The social conditions that produced the story of Mestra are taken to be the same ones responsible for