Bruno Currie
University of Oxford
and Oriel College

Hesiod's Fable of The Hawk and the Nightingale (*Op*. 202–212)

Keywords:
Hesiod, hawk and nightingale, Euripides, Hekabe, fable in tragedy, might is right, Phaedrus, Ademar, Aesop, narrative ellipse, imagery, embedded fable

Abstract
This paper investigates the dynamics involved in the embedding of the fable of "The Hawk and the Nightingale" in Hesiod's Works and Days. *This was evidently a traditional fable, very selectively treated by Hesiod (section 1). The hawk should not be regarded as articulating the moral of the traditional fable ("might is right"), tralatitiously handled by Hesiod (section 2): more probably, Hesiod suppresses a 'second act', in which the rapacious hawk got his just deserts. This two-act version is attested in the medieval Ademar-codex of Phaedrus (section 3), and perhaps already presupposed in Euripides'* Hecuba *(section 4). Section 5 speculates about the various adaptations undergone by a presumptively original fable both within the fabular tradition itself (Aesop. 4 P. [=Hsr.; 8 Ch.]; Ad. 39 [=567 P.]) and when embedded in* Works and Days *and* Hecuba. *Section 6 aims to reveal the sophistication and complexity of the interaction between Hesiod's fabular narrative and his wider paraenetic poem.*

1 Introduction

Hesiod's fable of "The Hawk and the Nightingale" (*Op*. 202–212) is the earliest attested fable in Greek literature. Like the next earliest attested fable, Archilochus' fable of "The Fox and the Eagle" (*fr*. 172–181 Swift), it is an embedded fable. It offers an excellent opportunity to investigate the interactions that are possible between an embedded fable and its embedding narrative.

The fable in question is as follows:

> Νῦν δ' αἶνον βασιλεῦσιν ἐρέω φρονέουσι[1] καὶ αὐτοῖς·
> ὧδ' ἴρηξ προσέειπεν ἀηδόνα ποικιλόδειρον
> ὕψι μάλ' ἐν νεφέεσσι φέρων ὀνύχεσσι μεμαρπώς·
> ἣ δ' ἐλεόν, γναμπτοῖσι πεπαρμένη ἀμφ' ὀνύχεσσι,
> μύρετο· τὴν ὅ γ' ἐπικρατέως πρὸς μῦθον ἔειπεν·
> "δαιμονίη, τί λέληκας; ἔχει νύ σε πολλὸν ἀρείων·
> τῇ δ' εἶς ἦ σ' ἂν ἐγώ περ ἄγω καὶ ἀοιδὸν ἐοῦσαν·
> δεῖπνον δ', αἴ κ' ἐθέλω, ποιήσομαι ἠὲ μεθήσω.
> ἄφρων δ', ὅς κ' ἐθέλῃ πρὸς κρείσσονας ἀντιφερίζειν·
> νίκης τε στέρεται πρός τ' αἴσχεσιν ἄλγεα πάσχει."
> ὣς ἔφατ' ὠκυπέτης ἴρηξ, τανυσίπτερος ὄρνις.
> (Hes. *Op*. 202–212)

> Now I will tell a cautionary tale to the lords, though they know it themselves.
> This is how the hawk addressed the dapple-necked nightingale
> as he bore her high in the clouds after seizing her up in his talons
> – she was lamenting piteously as she was pierced by his curved talons –
> he addressed her roughly as follows:
> "Wretch, why are you screeching? One who is far stronger has you in his grasp.
> You will go wherever I lead you, minstrel though you are.

[1] A variant reading νοέουσι is attested, but has no interpretative consequences.

I shall make you my supper if I want or I shall let you go.
He is witless who tries to struggle against his superiors.
Not only does he miss out on the victory, he suffers pains in addition to humiliation."
Thus spoke the swift-flying hawk, long-winged bird.
(Transl. B.C.)

Though the earliest attested fable in Greek tradition, this already has the appearance of being a traditional fable. In the first place, this seems to be implied by νῦν δ' αἶνον βασιλεῦσιν ἐρέω φρονέουσι καὶ αὐτοῖς ("though they know it themselves"; 202), a standard type of expression, whose gist is: "what I am going to say is something you already know".[2] The likely implication of this phrase is that the fable itself is known, that is, the specific fabular narrative of the hawk and the nightingale. Also possible, but less likely, is that Hesiod's phrase αἶνον βασιλεῦσιν ἐρέω φρονέουσι καὶ αὐτοῖς intends that the αἶνος is known (or at least will be intelligible) to the barons only in respect of the lesson it imparts, in terms of its exhortation to them to comport themselves in a particular way, as if the speaker/fabulist wishes to be understood to be "preaching to the converted".[3]

Second, the narratee is plunged into this fabular narrative *in medias res*.[4] What setting of the stage there is transpires only incidentally to the narrative and analeptically.[5] The narrative focusses immediately on the hawk's address to the nightingale, only subsequently adding the details that he had snatched her up in his claws and that she was lamenting. Hesiod's narration thus evidently corresponds not to the opening of a fabular narrative (e.g. '*A* hawk addressed *a* nightingale as follows […]'), but to the middle of such a narrative ('*The* hawk addressed *the* nightingale as follows […]'; 203). The absence of the definite article (functioning as a demonstrative) makes the use of the nouns ἴρηξ and ἀηδόνα in 203 unlike *Il*. 20.147 τὸ κῆτος, ("the [*sc*. well-known] monster"), where the inclusion of the definite article clearly signals that reference is made to the monstrous protagonist of a well-known mythological episode.[6] Equally, however, Hesiod's use of these nouns is crucially unlike what we find in a typical Aesopic narrative beginning with an article-less noun, e.g. the Aesopic fable of "The Hawk and the Nightingale" (Aesop. 4 P. [=Hsr.; 8 Ch.], quoted in full below), which begins: ἀηδών […], ("*A* nightingale […]"). The *in medias res* narration and the casual introduction of its animal protagonists (the hawk, the nightingale) indicates that we are dealing with a familiar fabular narrative, one that has been shorn of its opening.[7]

There is also some reason to think that it has been shorn of its ending, too. In fables where a character delivers the 'closing statement' (e.g. the *skolion* 892 *PMG*), no speech-capping formula follows the direct speech.[8] The inclusion here of a speech-capping formula at the end of the narrative (ὣς ἔφατ' ὠκυπέτης ἴρηξ; 212; mirroring ὧδ' ἴρηξ προσέειπεν; 202) creates an expectation that the narrative has a continuation, here suppressed, in which the hawk

2 Braswell 1988, 227. See also Dalfen 1994/1995, 162–163.

3 Cf. Lefkowitz 2014, 8: "who'll not need it explained"; West 1984, 107: "an αἶνος which will not be lost on them"; Ford 2002, 74: "ainos that kings will understand"; Macleod 1982, 47: "a polite convention which veils the often distasteful business of giving advice", with parallels in n. 2; cf. West 1978, 205–206.

4 Daly 1961, 47; Lonsdale 1989, 405; Zanker 2009, 17; Hunter 2014, 242.

5 Daly 1961, 47, 50.

6 See already schol. A *Il*. 20.147a1: ὅτι οὕτως εἴρηκε σὺν τῷ ἄρθρῳ «τὸ κῆτος», ὡς παραδεδομένης τῆς ἱστορίας τῆς περὶ τοῦ κήτους ("he [*sc*. Homer] expressed it thus with the article, τὸ κῆτος, because the story concerning the monster was a traditional one"); Edwards 1991, 307, glossing τὸ κῆτος as "the sea-monster <we all know about>".

7 Dalfen 1994/1995, 172–173; Hunter 2014, 242–243: "This fable, then, is not complete in itself, as fables in literature usually are".

8 Cf. Holzberg 2002, 24.

is to receive an answer of some sort.[9] Not only, therefore, would the narratee be plunged into this narrative *in medias res*, they would also be hauled out of it, as it were, *ex mediis rebus*. The narrative is presented as an excerpt from a substantially larger narrative context, knowledge of which is explicitly presupposed on the part of the internal narratees (the barons), and implicitly on the part of the external narratee. The declared intention to "tell a fable to the barons" (202) materializes as a quotation just of "What the Hawk Said to the Nightingale".[10] All preceding and succeeding action falls away.[11]

2 Does the hawk deliver the moral (viz. 'Might is right')?

In addition to or in lieu of the epimythium given in narrator-text at the end of the narrative, it is a common convention of fables that one of the characters may deliver the moral (γνώμη) in direct speech. The hawk, on the assumption (which was challenged in the previous section) that he has the last word in Hesiod's fable, has often been held to deliver the moral: "he is witless who tries to struggle against his superiors".[12] In the Aesopic fable of "The Hawk and the Nightingale" (Aesop. 4 P. [=Hsr.; 8 Ch.]), the hawk does deliver the moral in character text at the end of the narrative, which gets subsequently rephrased in narrator text as the epimythium.

The traditional fable assumed by Hesiod, on this view, would have had the moral: "don't fight with those who are stronger". It is sometimes supposed that in the traditional fable the nightingale had previously pitted herself against the hawk, and is being (justly) punished for so doing;[13] various Aesopic fables have such a moral.[14] However, there is nothing in Hesiod's narrative to suggest that the nightingale has previously foolishly provoked her misfortune, and the presentation in Hesiod's narrative of the nightingale is surely sympathetic, that of the hawk unsympathetic.[15] The nightingale of Hesiod's fable appears to be suffering her fate not because she has foolishly provoked one who is stronger, but just because she cannot defend herself against one who is stronger. Accordingly, other scholars have made the hawk into an advocate of the principle "might is right".[16] This is essentially the position ("justice is the will of the stronger") to which, two centuries later, the sophist Thrasymachus of Chalcedon would attempt to give philosophical respectability in the first book of Plato's *Republic*.[17] A Sumerian 'parable' (or 'Wellerism'), featuring a pork-butcher and a pig, with a similar moral, is sometimes cited in support of this interpretation:[18]

---

9 Führer 1967, 55–56. This implication of the attributive discourse is not always noted (e.g. by Koning 2022, 70). Thus *Op.* 210–211 is formally *un*like those fables where the moral is put in the mouth of the last speaker (*pace* e.g. Dalfen 1994/1995, 172–173; Holzberg 2002, 21; Finglass 2011, 463).

10 Bona Quaglia 1973, 132.

11 Cf. Bona Quaglia 1973, 134–135.

12 West 1978, 298; Nelson 1997, 236; Adrados 1999, 154, cf. 374; Zafiropoulos 2001, 13-14; Zanker 2009, 11–12; Ercolani 2010, 205.

13 Theon *Progymnasmata* II 74.18–21 Spengel. Daly 1961, 47–48; Dalfen 1994/1995, 170–171, 173; Ercolani 2010, 205–206; Steiner 2012, 9; Hunter 2014, 242 n. 38.

14 Aesop. 2 P. (=2 Hsr.; 5 Ch.); 70 P. (=71 Hsr.; 62 Ch.); 104 P. (=106 Hsr.; 122 Ch.); 125 P. (=128 Hsr.; 136 Ch.). Dalfen 1994/1995, 169–170.

15 The hawk hardly lends itself for use as a positive example; at Pl. *Phdr*. 82a3–5, Socrates suggests those who in their lifetimes favoured injustices, tyrannies, and depredations (ἁρπαγάς; cf. μεμαρπώς, *Op.* 204), get reborn as wolves or hawks (ἱεράκων) or kites.

16 Van Dijk 1997, 129: "it illustrates the might of right […] prevailing in the Iron Age". Cf. Kurke 2011, 403: "might-makes-right". Adrados 1999, 181: an example of a fable "in which the strong summarily imposes force, rejecting the pleas of the weak". Pucci 1977, 61: "Its general meaning is that it is foolish for the weak to bewail or protest against the violence of the powerful". Zafiropoulos 2001, 13-14.

17 The comparison with Thrasymachus is already made by schol. *Op.* 207–212 Pertusi.

18 Walcot 1966, 90; Bradford Welles 1967, 19; West 1997, 320; Woodard 2007, 108.

> A pig which was being slaughtered by the pig-butcher screamed. "Along the road your ancestors and your uncles walked, you too are walking, <so why do you> scream?"[19]

As there is no point in the pig complaining to the butcher, so too there is none in the nightingale complaining to the hawk, if the hawk wishes to make the nightingale its dinner.

We have then, on the face of it, an odd mismatch between the moral which Hesiod requires in the context of his poem and the moral which the fable actually delivers.[20] One approach assumes that Hesiod has retold the traditional fable in essentially the form he has heard it, without adapting it to his own narrative requirements.[21] Hesiod, on this view, can only use this fable by gainsaying its moral.[22] The barons' morality (for which we may compare 38–39: βασιλῆας | δωροφάγους, οἳ τήνδε δίκην ἐθέλουσι δικάσσαι) appears to have put him in mind of the hawk of the traditional fable. However, whereas the fable employs the hawk as a positive example (on this interpretation), the mouthpiece of the assumed γνώμη of the fable, Hesiod needs him to function as a negative example, an illustration of how *not* to behave. Hesiod has been argued to deal with this mismatch between the moral required by the embedding narrative and the actual moral of the embedded traditional fable some sixty lines later on, when he adds:[23]

> τόνδε γὰρ ἀνθρώποισι νόμον διέταξε Κρονίων,
> ἰχθύσι μὲν καὶ θηρσὶ καὶ οἰωνοῖς πετεηνοῖς
> ἔσθειν ἀλλήλους, ἐπεὶ οὐ δίκη ἐστὶ μετ' αὐτοῖς·
> ἀνθρώποισι δ' ἔδωκε δίκην, ἣ πολλὸν ἀρίστη
> γίνεται [...] 280
> (Hes. *Op*. 276–280)
>
> The son of Kronos assigned this law to men:
> to fish and beasts and feathered birds,
> to eat one another, since there is no justice among them;
> but to men he has given justice, which is by far the best […]
> (Transl. B.C.)

In this passage Hesiod concedes that fish, beasts, and birds may eat each other with impunity. The mention of birds, in emphatic position, seems designed to recall the fable.[24] Hesiod has therefore often been argued here to make a crucial qualification to (or retraction of) the message of the fable: the law of "might is right" may hold good for the animal kingdom, but it does not in the world of humans.[25]

However, such shifting of position flies in the face of the rationale of the animal fable.[26] It is here beside the point to cite the normality of violence of one animal against another in the

---

19 For the Sumerian fable, see Alster 1997, I 166. For Sumerian 'Wellerisms', see Alster 1997, I xv-xvi. The squealing pig, conscious of being destined for slaughter, is also found in Aesopic tradition: Aesop. 85 P. (=87 Hsr.; 94 Ch.), cf. *Vit. Aesop*. 48.

20 Noted by Daly 1961, 46; Bradford Welles 1967, 17; West 1978, 49; Zanker 2009, 11.

21 Daly 1961, 50–51; Lasserre 1984, 82.

22 Zafiropoulos 2001, 14 "Hesiod… uses his fable as a negative illustration of his argument. He opposes the fable's message to what he sees as the right course of action in interpersonal relationships".

23 Führer 1967, 56, argues that the postponement of Hesiod's answer to the hawk's speech until *Op.* 276–280 is "naïve-artful" ("mit naiv-kunstvoller Verzögerung"). Cf. Clay 2003, 42: "Now at long last we get an explication of the fable with which Hesiod began his discourse on justice."

24 Daly 1961, 49; Lonsdale 1989, 409.

25 Schol. *Op*. 213a Pertusi; West 1978, 204–205; Adrados 1999, 158, 267; van Dijk 1997, 130–131; Kurke 2011, 403–404.

26 Nelson 1997, 237: "*WD* 276–80, read as a correction of the fable, denies the basic presupposition of a fable, that a parallel can be drawn between human and animal behavior. To 'correct' a fable by pointing

natural world.[27] It is irrelevant that the animal kingdom is occasionally, in non-fabular contexts, taken as being normative for human ethics.[28] In animal fable, it is universally the case that human ethics are made normative for animals. Animal fable takes speaking animals as its subjects so that they may articulate truths which are relevant to the human world. In Archilochus' fable of "The Fox and the Eagle", Zeus is invoked by the fox as being explicitly concerned with the "violence and justice of beasts" ([ὦ Ζεῦ,] σοὶ δὲ θηρίων | ὕβρις καὶ δίκη μέλει; *fr*. 177.3–4 Swift). This is in direct contradiction to Hesiod's ἐπεὶ οὐ δίκη ἐστὶ μετ' αὐτοῖς, ("since there is no justice among them"; *sc*. the fish, beasts, and birds; *Op*. 278).[29] It has therefore been suggested that Hesiod is self-consciously overthrowing the conventions of the fabular form,[30] and also that Archilochus, no less self-consciously, is reinstating them.[31] The latter suggestion is made somewhat problematic by the fact that Archilochus' fable of "The Fox and the Eagle" is a close reception of the fable of "The Serpent and the Eagle" in *Etana*: specifically, Archilochus' fox's prayer to Zeus to uphold justice and punish the eagle (*fr*. 177.3–4 Swift) corresponds very closely to the serpent's prayer to Shamash to uphold justice and punish the eagle (*SB Etana* II 59–71).[32] In animal fable, animals' participation in the same ethical and religious system as humans is a fundamental given of the genre, in both Mesopotamia and Greece, as well as elsewhere.

On this interpretation, Hesiod both repudiates the conventions of the genre of the animal fable and rejects the specific moral of the traditional fable that he decides to remind the barons of (202). He enlists the support of a traditional fable for his argument, but he is obliged to reject the traditional wisdom that it proclaims and replace it with one of his own. It is extraordinary too that it takes Hesiod more than sixty lines to get round to countering the damage done to his cause by citing an animal fable whose "might is right".[33] It is hard to see how this position could be maintained by any but those whose vision of Hesiod is that of a poet barely in control of his material, constantly struggling to accommodate traditional tales to his own narrative requirements.[34]

There is another objection to the notion that Hesiod's narrative relies on the idea that birds and beasts behave one way, but that humans (should) behave another. The hawk of Hesiod's fable develops the imagery of the lawless men of the iron race in the closing section of the myth of the five human races that has immediately preceded. Characteristic of these latter is that they take "justice in their own hands" (χειροδίκαι; 189; δίκη δ' ἐν χερσί; 192) and

---

out that animals and men behave differently is like correcting it by pointing out that birds do not in fact speak in Greek hexameter verse. Animals of fable can, and often do, have δίκη, just as they can and do speak Greek". Zanker 2009, 12: "the usual purpose of *ainoi* is to build a comparison between human and animal kingdoms, not to do the reverse".

27 *Pace* Bradford Welles 1967, 18: "Greek literature, and Latin too, is full of references to hawks and eagles capturing and devouring their prey […] I do not know of any instance where it is implied that the predators are wrong to eat their natural food […]".

28 *Il*. 22.262 (cited by Lonsdale 1989, 409); Ar. Nub. 1427–1431; Hdt. 2.64.

29 West 1978, 227.

30 Heath 1985, 249: "Hesiod […] overthrows the convention of the form"; Kurke 2011, 403–404: "undermining or deconstructing the basic premise of fable"; Swift 2014, 72: "Hesiod's use of the *ainos* is itself a twist on the conventions of the animal fable"; Swift 2019, 336; Hunter 2014, 243: "If the *Works and Days* were a later text, then we would certainly see in Hesiod's use of the fable form a sophisticated variation away from a standard model".

31 Irwin 1998, 181–182; Swift 2014, 50, 72, 73.

32 Currie 2021, 129.

33 Cf. Dalfen 1994/1995, 167.

34 Cf. on Hesiod's myth of the races, Barron/Easterling 1985, 56–57: "we have an evidently traditional tale, somewhat crudely adapted"; Griffin 1986, 96: "[the story of the ages] is another eastern idea: Hesiod has rudely adapted it to Greek notions […] Hesiod, we feel, finds it hard to force his thoughts into shape, and he has to accept such inconcinnities".

disregard the claims of morality with an assumption of impunity (οὐδὲ θεῶν ὅπιν εἰδότες; 187). This immoral philosophy and this violent imagery are both shared with the hawk of the fable, who clutches the nightingale in his "talons" (ὀνύχεσσι μεμαρπώς; 204; ἀμφ' ὀνύχεσσι; 205), and insists on his entitlement to use her as he pleases, evidently without fear of consequences. In the figure of the nightingale, a "minstrel" (ἀοιδόν; 208), it is also possible to glimpse the singer-figure Hesiod, victim of Perseus' and the lords' rapacity (compare, of Perseus: ἀλλά τε πολλὰ | ἁρπάζων ἐφόρεις ["but[35] snatching many things, you carried them off"]; 37–38).[36] Thus not only does Hesiod employ a literary form, the animal fable, in which animals are conventionally endowed with human speech and human ethics, but also his own narrative develops multiple significant analogies between the animals of the fable and human characters precisely as moral agents. This makes it extremely difficult to think that Hesiod wished to insist that the animals of his fable (as opposed to the animals of real life; *Op.* 278) are answerable to different moral standards from humans.

3 A two-act fable, elliptically told?

An alternative approach to the mismatch between what the hawk says in the embedded fabular narrative and the moral message that is required for the embedding non-fabular narrative is available: this approach assumes that Hesiod has told the fable elliptically and that the traditional ending of the fable has been suppressed. Many animal fables comprise two acts, in the first of which, one animal perpetrates an outrage against another and in the second gets his just deserts.[37] Other fables embedded in early Greek poetry are two-act fables, for instance, Archilochus' fable of "The Fox and the Eagle": in the first act, the eagle, disregarding its friendship with the fox, eats the fox's cubs; in the second act, the fox eats the eagle's nestlings, after the eagle snatched up some smouldering meat from an altar, which set her nest alight. Two-act fables are attested in Mesopotamia (e.g. "The Serpent and the Eagle", in *Etana*) and in Egypt.[38]

What about "The Hawk and the Nightingale"? In the later collection of Greek fables attributed to Aesop, two fables are transmitted about a hawk and a nightingale. The first fable (Aesop. 4 P. [=Hsr.; 8 Ch.]) is preserved in the second-third century CE *Collectio Augustana* (=*Codex Monacensis gr. 564*). It is a single-act fable: the hawk eats the nightingale with impunity, and enunciates the moral of the fable.

> ΑΗΔΩΝ ΚΑΙ ΙΕΡΑΞ
> ἀηδὼν ἐπί τινος ὑψηλῆς δρυὸς καθημένη κατὰ τὸ σύνηθες ᾖδεν. ἱέραξ δὲ αὐτὴν θεασάμενος, ὡς ἠπόρει τροφῆς, ἐπιπτὰς συνέλαβεν. ἡ δὲ μέλλουσα ἀναιρεῖσθαι ἐδέετο αὐτοῦ μεθεῖναι λέγουσα, ὡς οὐχ ἱκανή ἐστιν ἱέρακος γαστέρα αὐτὴ πληρῶσαι, δεῖ δὲ αὐτόν, εἰ τροφῆς ἀπορεῖ, ἐπὶ τὰ μείζονα τῶν ὀρνέων τρέπεσθαι. καὶ ὃς ὑποτυχὼν εἶπεν· "ἀλλ' ἔγωγε ἀπόπληκτος ἂν εἴην, εἰ τὴν ἐν χερσὶν ἑτοίμην βορὰν παρεὶς τὰ μηδέπω φαινόμενα διώκοιμι."
> ὁ λόγος δηλοῖ ὅτι οὕτω καὶ τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἀλόγιστοί εἰσιν, οἳ δι' ἐλπίδα μειζόνων τὰ ἐν χερσὶν ὄντα προίενται.
> (Aesop. 4 P. [=Hsr.; 8 Ch.])
>
> The Nightingale and the Hawk.
> A nightingale sat on a tall oak tree and sang as was her wont. A hawk saw her and, since he was at a loss for food, flew at her and captured her. As she was about to be killed, she asked him to let her

35 For ἀλλά τε, see *Theog*. 797; Denniston 1959, 530. Inferior, in my view, is ἄλλα τε or ἄλλά τε, as usually printed.

36 Schol. *Op.* 202a Pertusi; West 1978, 208; Bradford Welles 1967, 18 and n. 41; Bona Quaglia 1973, 132; Pucci 1977, 62; Mordine 2006, 364 n. 4; Zanker 2009, 13; Steiner 2012, 8; Canevaro 2015, 55–56.

37 Adrados 1999, 35: "The *agon* may consist of two acts, sometimes with a reversal of the victory".

38 Cf. on the Egyptian fables, Oettinger 1992, 17.

> go, saying that she was not enough to fill the hawk's belly, and that he should, if he were at a loss for food, turn to the larger ones among the birds. And he said in reply, "But I would be witless if I passed up the food ready in my hands in pursuit of things not yet in sight."
> The fable shows that likewise among men those people are very foolish who in the hope of greater things let slip what is in their hands.
> (Transl. B.C.)

Op. 202–212 has sometimes been considered to be a version of this fable.[39] However, this fable, with its moral, "the bird in the hand […]", seems to shed little light on the interpretation of Hesiod's fable.[40]

The other fable (Ad. 39 [=Aesop. 567 P.]) is preserved in a medieval prose paraphrase of Phaedrus, the eleventh-century 'Ademar codex' (Leiden *Cod. Voss. lat. 8º no. 15*).[41] It is a two-act fable, in the first of which the hawk eats (or at least, begins to eat) a nightingale chick, and in the second he is himself killed by a bird-catcher.

> *LUSCINIA ET ACCIPITER*[42]
> *In nidum lusciniae cum sederet accipiter,*[43] *paruos in illo inuenit pullos. superuenit luscinia et rogabat illum parcere pullis. ait accipiter, "Faciam quod uis, si mihi b<e>ne cantaueris." et quamuis se† praecederet animo,*[44] *tamen metu pauebat; denique coacta et dolore plena cantauit. acceptor,*[45] *qui praedam captauerat, ait, "Non bene cantasti;" apprehenditque unum de pullis eius et deuorare coepit. ex diuerso uenit auceps et, calamo silenter leuato, acceptore<m>, contracto uisco, in terram deiecit.*
> *Qui aliis insidiantur, timere debent ne capiantur.*
> (Ad. 39 [=Aesop. 567 P.)
>
> The Nightingale and the Hawk.
> When a hawk was alighting on a nightingale's nest, he found small chicks in it. The nightingale came and asked him to spare her chicks. The hawk said, "I will do what you wish, if first you sing for me well." Although she †surpassed herself in talent†, nevertheless she was stricken with fear. Finally, under duress and full of grief, she sang. The hawk, who already possessed his prey, said, "You didn't sing well", and seized one of her chicks and began to devour it. From the other direction came a bird catcher, and raising his rod silently, he gathered his birdlime and cast the hawk down to the ground.
> Those who trick others should fear to be caught out themselves.
> (Transl. B.C.)

This two-act fable, with its moral of retribution for unjust action, holds more interest and promise for the interpreter of Hesiod's fable. However, if we hope to reconstruct from this medieval version something like the traditional fable that may have been known to Hesiod and the barons (see above), then we would need to feel tolerably confident about retracing a process of translation, paraphrase, literary reception (involving an indeterminable amount of creative reworking), and written and oral transmission, that would take us back from the eleventh-century CE Ademar to the first-century CE Phaedrus; from him via, probably, some Hellenistic

---

39 Aly 1921, 26; Perry 1952, 323; Lasserre 1984, 61; Zafiropoulos 2001, 14, 58.

40 Daly 1961, 46: "This fable […] has little in common with that of Hesiod. The animal persons are the same, the one carries the other off, and they speak to each other. What they say, however, is different, and the point of the Aesopic fable is the same as that of the proverb 'a bird in the hand.' It does not seem to offer any help toward an understanding of Hesiod". Dalfen 1994/1995, 164.

41 See Zago 2020, XXVI, XXXVI. Cf. Henderson 1999, 312 n. 14.

42 The text presented here is that of Perry 1952, 612.

43 The text of Hervieux 1893/1899 here includes the clause *ut specularetur auritum* (sc. *leporem*) ("to look out for a hare"); the reading *auras* ("to survey the air") is preferable (Zander 1921, 26).

44 The *Romulus uulgaris* reads: *quamuis animus excederet* ("although her courage was leaving her"); Zander 1921, 25–26, reconstructs: *quamuis excideret metu* ("although she was faint with fear").

45 On the text of the paraphrase as transmitted, the form *accipiter* is used on the first occurrence, *acceptor* on the second; Phaedrus himself would have used the form *accipiter* (Zander 1921, 26).

fable collection to the sixth-century BCE Aesop or to some other non-Aesopic Archaic or Classical Greek source; and finally thence to a late-eighth- or early-seventh-century BCE fable that could be known to Hesiod and his public. Some of these steps may be plausible enough in themselves. Thus, it is, for instance, very conceivable that the fable 39 of the Ademar codex (=Aesop. 567 P.) uniquely preserves a genuine fable of Phaedrus.[46] Yet the route in its entirety involves a disconcerting number of uncertainties. In particular, the question of how Phaedrus' fables may (or may not) relate to putative Greek 'originals' is highly unclear.[47]

4 Euripides' *Hecuba*

Help may come from an unexpected quarter. We have an arguable reflection of a fable of "The Hawk and the Nightingale" – or at least, of a fable in which a nightingale was obliged to sing for its own and/or for its chick's life – in a well-known (but in this context hitherto ignored) text of the fifth century BCE: Euripides' *Hecuba*:

> {Εκ.} ὦ θύγατερ, οὐμοὶ μὲν λόγοι πρὸς αἰθέρα
> φροῦδοι μάτην ῥιφθέντες ἀμφὶ σοῦ φόνου·
> σὺ δ', εἴ τι μείζω δύναμιν ἢ μήτηρ ἔχεις,
> σπούδαζε πάσας ὥστ' ἀηδόνος στόμα
> φθογγὰς ἰεῖσα, μὴ στερηθῆναι βίου.
> (Eur. *Hec*. 334–338)
>
> [Hekabe:] Daughter, my own speeches concerning the killing of you vanish into thin air, cast fruitlessly towards the sky; do you, if you have by any chance greater power than your mother, strive, sending forth all your utterances, like the mouth of the nightingale, not to be deprived of your life.
> (Transl. B.C.)

We have here again the problem of ascertaining the implications of the use of ἀηδόνος without an article: it seems clear that it does not mean "*a* nightingale", nor "*the* nightingale" in a generic sense (i.e. collective singular), but rather "*the* nightingale", in a particularizing sense. That is, reference is made to a particular nightingale known from a traditional story, an animal fable, or, failing that, from a traditional proverb (such as at Archil. *fr*. 196a.41: ὥσπερ ἡ κ[ύων). It is clear also that the phrase ὥστ' ἀηδόνος στόμα does not introduce a simple natural world comparison, as e.g. ὥστ' ὄρνιν ("like a bird"; *Hec*. 178), but rather makes an allusion to a nightingale who was known from some traditional story in which she sung (implied by στόμα, "mouth"). Insofar as commentators have sought to identify any mythological allusion here, they have looked to the myths of Prokne or of her doublet, Aëdon ("Nightingale", personified).[48] These, however, provide very obscure analogues to the situation of Euripides' play. In these myths, the nightingale (the metamorphosed Prokne or Aëdon) sings in grief for the child whom she has herself killed.[49] The difference between such a situation and that of Hekabe and Polyxena is glaring. On the one hand, Hekabe is not Polyxena's killer, and it would make no sense for her to court a comparison between herself and the filicides Prokne or Aëdon. An equivalence of Polyxena with Prokne or Aëdon can only be made sense of if we jettison any detailed correspondence and suppose that the nightingale-Prokne is invoked simply as

---

46 For the Ademar codex in general as preserving fables of Phaedrus lost to the direct tradition, see e.g. Gatti 1979, 250 and n. 9. For Ademar 39 (=567 P.) in particular as Phaedran, cf. Zander 1921, 24–29; Henderson 1999, 329.

47 On the question of Phaedrus' relationship with his Aesopic / Greek sources, see Henderson 1999, 317–321; Holzberg 2002, 44–45; Gärtner 2015, 41–42.

48 E.g. Battezzato 2018, 120.

49 Gantz 1993, I 239–241; Hansen 2002, 303.

being proverbial for mourning. This involves a particular understanding of the scope of the comparison that is expressed by ὥστ' ἀηδόνος στόμα: what Polyxena and the nightingale have in common will be confined to just the notion contained in the participial phrase πάσας […] φθογγὰς ἱεῖσα, so that Polyxena is urged to pull out all the stops in her pleading, just as the nightingale Prokne / Aëdon pulled out all the stops in her grieving.[50] All the same, the asymmetry between the two situations remains stronger than any symmetry, since Polyxena is crucially being urged, not to grieve, but to plead for her own life (337–338); the only point they have in common is the trivial-seeming one of each of them performing at full throttle, whether a lament or a plea. Hekabe, as a grieving mother, would have something more substantial in common with Prokne / Aëdon. Yet she is not (in *this* passage; contrast later, at 434) interested in mourning the still-living Polyxena, but in making pleas to save her life, while acknowledging these to be futile (334–335). The situation of Hekabe and Polyxena, then, is overwhelmingly asymmetrical with that of Prokne and Itys.

It is, however, strikingly symmetrical with the first of the first act of "The Hawk and the Nightingale" fable Ad. 39 (=Aesop. 567 P.), where the nightingale-mother sings desperately and in vain to prevent the killing of her chick. The scope of the comparison expressed by ὥστ' ἀηδόνος στόμα can now be more plausibly understood. The extent of comparison between Polyxena and the nightingale, rather than being confined to the participial clause, extends also to the infinitival phrase: σπούδαζε πάσας […] | φθογγὰς ἱεῖσα **μὴ στερηθῆναι βίου**. Thus, Polyxena will be being urged to resemble the nightingale who pulled out all the stops in her singing in order *not to be deprived of her life*. This motif takes us away from the myths of Prokne or Aëdon, but takes us close, very close, to the nightingale of our fable, whether in either its Hesiodic or its putatively Phaedrian variant.

The correspondence of the situation of Hekabe and Polyxena and that of the nightingale and her chicks in fable Ad. 39 (=Aesop. 567 P.) is complex. Hekabe first alludes to a situation in which the mother fails to save her progeny with her singing (334–335), as in the putatively Phaedrian fable Ad. 39 (=Aesop. 567 P.). Secondly, she introduces the idea, foreign to Ad. 39 (=Aesop. 567 P.), that the imperilled offspring should try to save *herself* with her own pleading/singing (336–338), which is closer to the situation of Hesiod's fable. We will consider presently (see below) what version of a Hawk and Nightingale fable Euripides may presuppose and also what innovation he might be capable of introducing into the fabular scenario.

We must consider how plausible it is that Euripides alludes to an animal fable. The use of a fable would be unparalleled in extant Euripides. However, it would not be exceptional for other fifth-century BCE tragedy. Tragic use of a fable is most explicitly signalled in Aeschylus' *Myrmidons* (*fr*. 139 *TGF*), where the fable known as "The Eagle and the Arrow" (Aesop. 276 P. [=273 Hsr.; 7 Ch.]) is summarized and its fabular status explicitly recognized: μύθων τῶν Λιβυστικῶν.[51] In Sophocles' *Ajax*, the altercation between Menelaos and Teukros incorporates a fable (1142–1146) that is unattested elsewhere, but which in modern discussions rejoices in the title "The Braggart".[52] Sophocles also employed the fable of "The Ass and the Snake" in the satyr play *Dumb Ones* (*fr*. 362 *TGF*).[53] In the *Agamemnon*, lines 717–736, Aeschylus makes

---

50 πάσας […] φθογγάς (Eur. *Hec*. 337–338) has frequently been compared with πολυηχέα φωνήν (*Od*. 19.521; of the nightingale's song): Battezzato 2018, 120; Gregory 1999, 86; Tierney 1946, 65; cf. Mossman 1995, 117 and n. 66.

51 Adrados 2003, 339–341; van Dijk 1997, 169–171. Cf. Rutherford 2012, 350.

52 I do not follow Holzberg 2002, 12, in listing Soph. *Aj*. 1150–1158 as an example of a tragic allusion to an independent pre-existing fable ("The Malicious Gloater", Holzberg), since it seems to be just an *ad hoc* parody by Teukros of Menelaos' immediately preceding fable.

53 Adrados 2003, 522.

use of the fable of "The Man and the Lion Cub",[54] whose imagery and themes are of fundamental importance for the *Oresteia* trilogy as a whole.[55] The usage of a fable by Euripides thus does not seem unthinkable.

Moreover, a reference to the fable of "The Hawk and the Nightingale" would make good sense thematically in the wider context of Euripides' play. *Hecuba* is a play that holds up to scrutiny from various angles the principle that "might is right", or, to put it more Hesiodically, that of taking "justice into one's own hands" (δίκη δ' ἐν χερσί; *Op.* 192). The principle is evident in both in the Greeks' killing of Polyxena and in Polymestor's killing of Polydoros, both abhorrent acts of violence perpetrated against a defenceless victim in the assumption of complete impunity on the part of the vastly stronger aggressor. Especially noteworthy are Odysseus' words to Hekabe:

> οἶσθ' οὖν ὃ δρᾶσον· μήτ' ἀποσπαθῆις βίαι
> μήτ' ἐς χερῶν ἅμιλλαν ἐξέλθηις ἐμοί,
> γίγνωσκε δ' ἀλκὴν καὶ παρουσίαν κακῶν
> τῶν σῶν· σοφόν τοι κἀν κακοῖς ἃ δεῖ φρονεῖν.
> (Eur. *Hec.* 225–228)

> You know what you have to do; don't get dragged away by force,
> and don't enter into a contest of physical strength with me,
> but acknowledge <*sc.* your opponent's> might and the presence of misfortunes
> on your side; it's a mark of wisdom even among misfortunes to have the attitude that is necessary.
> (Transl. B.C.)

This reads like a paraphrase of the words of Hesiod's hawk to the nightingale: note ἔχει νύ σε πολλὸν ἀρείων ("one who is far stronger has you in his grasp"; *Op.* 207); ἄφρων δ', ὅς κ' ἐθέλῃ πρὸς κρείσσονας ἀντιφερίζειν ("he is witless who tries to struggle against his superiors"; *Op.* 210). Moreover, the subsequent remark of the Trojan women τολμᾶι θ' ἃ μὴ χρή, τῆι βίαι νικώμενον ("[a slave] endures what he should not, being mastered by force"; *Hec.* 333) describes the situation of Hesiod's nightingale as aptly as they do that of Hekabe in Euripides' play.

The Thracian king Polymestor, who murders Polydoros for his gold and supposes himself secure from reprisals given the assumed ignorance and impotence of his victims, also appears in a decidedly hawkish light. He blatantly contravenes the Hesiodic maxim, χρήματα δ' οὐχ ἁρπακτά ("money is not for snatching"; *Op.* 320). That adage appears in a passage in *Works and Days* that features thematic echoes of the rapacity of the hawk in the fable (φέρων ὀνύχεσσι μεμαρπώς; 204; a phrase which in turn echoes ἁρπάζων ἐφόρεις; 38; of Perses). Finally, Euripides' tragedy at its end resembles a two-act fable in a particularly gruesome and unsettling form: a violent justice is unexpectedly visited on the perpetrator by the powerless-seeming mother, who ultimately herself also takes justice-cum-retribution very literally "into her own hands" (*Hec.* 1252–1253; cf. δίκη δ' ἐν χερσί; *Op.* 192).

If Euripides is indeed alluding to a fable in which a nightingale sang for the preservation of her own or of her chicks' life (or in which a chick also sang for her own life), then Euripides hardly derived this detail from Hesiod, in whose truncated and elliptical narrative the motif of the nightingale singing to save her life, let alone that of her chicks, is not clearly in evidence. Therefore, one inference is that something resembling the first act of our fable Ad. 39 (=Aesop.

---

54 For this as a fable, see Adrados 2003, 827, cf. 287; van Dijk 1997, 171–617. Cf. Pl. 483e5–6, with Dodds 1959, 268. On Aesch. *Ag.* 717 ἔθρεψεν, see Raeburn/Thomas 2011, 142: "Greek fables characteristically begin with a verb". On Aesch. *Ag.* 719 ἀνήρ, see Fraenkel 1950, II 339: "the unqualified ἀνήρ, with which a character of the story is introduced, is a typical feature of the terse style of the old αἶνος", 342; cf. van Dijk 1997, 173. On Aesch. *Ag.* 739, see Holzberg 2002, 20.

55 See esp. Knox 1952.

567 P.) was already current and familiar in the later fifth century BCE (at which time it could already have been known as a fable of "Aesop").[56] Euripides, like Hesiod, seems to presuppose his audience's familiarity with it as a traditional fable. Thus, while we started by considering the interactions between one embedded fable and its embedding poetic context (in Hesiod's Works and Days), we have ended up by considering another (in Euripides' Hecuba).

5 A quandary regarding the identification of source-texts and target-texts

The aim of the preceding was to try to recover the outlines of a traditional fable of "The Hawk and the Nightingale" as this might have been known to Hesiod and his public in the seventh century BCE. The undertaking is severely problematized by the uncertainty whether the later-attested fables of the Aesopic corpus can be taken as indirect sources of Hesiod or whether conversely Hesiod is to considered the source for these.[57] A number of "Aesopic" fables are apparently inspired by Hesiod (as also by other poets).[58] However, there is also the possibility that fables found in the late collection(s) ascribed to "Aesop" may reflect much older traditions. This possibility is suggested by "The Eagle and Fox", where the "Aesopic" version is clearly very similar to the version told by Archilochus, yet exhibits a notable detail that is found also in the ancient Mesopotamian fable which it evidently did not derive from Archilochus.[59] It is conceivable that some very early (pre-Hesiodic) oral fabular traditions found their way into the later "Aesopic" corpus.[60]

We might summarize the four different versions of a fable of "The Hawk and the Nightingale" as follows (for the time being, no inferences are being drawn about their relative chronology):

(a) (Aesop. 4 P. [=Hsr.; 8 Ch.]) The nightingale fails to convince the hawk by rational argument not to eat her. However, her argument, "I would not fill your belly" is countered by his: "The bird in the hand (talons) […]".

(b) (Ad. 39 [=Aesop. 567 P.]) The nightingale fails to persuade the hawk by the beauty of her singing not to eat her chicks. His retort is: "You did not sing beautifully enough".

(c) (Hes. *Op.* 202–212) The nightingale fails to move the hawk to pity so as not to use her however he wishes. His retort: "It is futile to strive against those who are stronger".

---

56 For knowledge of Aesop in the fifth century BCE, see Ar. *Av.* 471; Ar. *Pax* 129; Hdt. 2.134.3. Pl. *Phd.* 60d1, 61b2–7.

57 Cf. Aly 1921, 26 and n. 2; Lefkowitz 2014, 8: "no doubt influenced by Hesiod"; see further van Dijk 1997, 128 n. 40, 132: "One might conjecture that Hesiod presupposes acquaintance of his audience with some (lost) version of the corresponding Aesopic fable [*sc.* Aesop. 4 P.] […] However, it seems more probable to assume that, conversely, the Aesopic fable 'normalizes' Hesiod's fable". Hunter 2014, 246: "the relationship between Hesiod and the fable tradition is much less clear and clean. On any view of the 'origin' of fables in Greek tradition, Hesiod has both exploited a popular mode of moralizing, but also fed back into that tradition".

58 Adrados 1999, 267: "Some of these myths of Hesiod have ended up definitively in the collections of fables, such as that of the jar of Pandora, that of the two roads, that of Prometheus".

59 Currie 2021, 131 and n. 30.

60 Lefkowitz 2014, 1–2: "despite the exclusively textual nature of our evidence for the ancient fable, it is generally assumed that written fables bear traces of an oral tradition that stretches back to the very dawn of history. Before the occurrence of the earliest Greek animal fables in the poems of Hesiod (*Works and Days* 202–12) and Archilochus (frs. 172–81 West), and long before the earliest reference to the legendary fabulist Aesop in the fifth century BC (Herodotus, *Histories* 2.134), the genre had already enjoyed a long history in the Near East, from where, most scholars agree, the fable migrated to Greece during the orientalizing revolution' of the archaic period". Cf. Duchemin 1995, 72–73; Holzberg 2002, 15.

(d) (Eur. *Hec*.) In Euripides' play, the daughter, Polyxena, is urged to do all she can to move the Greeks to pity so as not to kill her ("like the nightingale"); she will do so in vain. The mother, Hekabe, has already tried in vain to move the Greeks to pity so as not to kill her daughter; she is subsequently told by Odysseus, "it is futile to strive against those who are stronger". Behind this may glimmer a fable in which the nightingale failed to persuade (by whatever rational argument, emotive appeal, or beautiful singing) the hawk not to eat her chick(s), and was told by him that it is futile to strive against those who are stronger.

It is questionable whether it is viable (both from a methodological and a practical point of view) to try to construct here an "original" scheme. The enterprise is somewhat comparable to trying to draw a "line of best fit" but with only a tiny number of points. Nor is it clear that all points should carry the same weight in the reconstruction; and it is entirely unclear how they should be differentially weighted. Furthermore, it involves an assumption that these four versions are all inflections of the same basic uniform (rather than multiform) narrative, which has been variously received in different literary contexts; instead, it is entirely possible that they are all mutually independent realizations of a 'hawk versus nightingale' scenario.

On the other hand, *Op.* 202–213 evidently presupposes the existence of a traditional fable of "The Hawk and Nightingale" that is familiar to its public (see above). And so too, apparently, does *Hecuba* 337–338. It thus seems reasonable to attempt what can be done to reconstruct the version that each of these presupposes. We have four putative 'witnesses' to our presumptive original, traditional version(s); yet we must also reckon with the near certainty that each one has taken liberties and worked innovations on any presumptively inherited story. The best we can do is to explore hypothetical possibilities.

We might, for instance, posit an 'original scheme' in which the nightingale pleaded with the hawk on behalf of her chicks, rather than herself. The motif of one animal (bird) eating the young of another is also attested in Archilochus' fable of the Fox and Eagle. Hesiod would then have innovated by eliding this detail. It is possible that Hesiod airbrushed out the chicks that we see in the version of Ad. 39 (=Aesop. 567 P.) in order to give a starker focus on the hawk and nightingale: a single aggressor and a single victim. In addition, offspring do not play a role in Hesiod's depiction of his own maltreatment at the hands of Perses and the barons; imperilled offspring would also be a distracting irrelevance for the parallel Hesiod is clearly interested in creating between the nightingale and Dike in 220–221 (unjust men do violence to Justice / Dike, and she laments the violence done to her). In this eventuality, the embedding poetic narrative would have exerted its influence on the embedded fable. This kind of scenario, of Hesiod adapting the fabular paradigm to the paraenetic context of his poem, would be comparable with what we find Homeric epic, where there is frequently innovation and invention in the narration of mythological paradigms (by secondary narrators) in the interests of bringing these into greater accord with the narrative situation in which characters find themselves. (The *locus classicus* is Achilleus, speaking to Priam, inventing the detail that Niobe refused to eat after losing her twelve children.) Hesiod, on this scenario, only includes the snapshot of the fabular narrative that is relevant to him, viz. the hawk's mindset: that, as the stronger, he can do what he likes to the weaker with impunity. Inclusion of the detail of the hawk actually eating the nightingale or her chicks (if it had featured in the presumptively traditional fable) would not only reduce comparability with the image of Dike at 220–221, it would also involve an awkward acknowledgement that the victims of injustice may themselves suffer unredressable harm before their aggressors are punished: a bigger concession to reality than it would suit the narrator of *Works and Days* to make. Euripides features the motif of the mother pleading in vain for the life of her daughter (*Hec*. 334–335): on this scenario, we would

have intensified the pathos of the situation by having the daughter Polyxena (corresponding to the nightingale's chick) also *plead for herself*, following the failure of the mother's plea (cf. εἴ τι μείζω δύναμιν ἢ μήτηρ ἔχεις ["if you have by any chance greater power than your mother"]; *Hec*. 336).

Alternatively, we could posit an 'original scheme' in which no chick is featured and the captured nightingale pleaded with the hawk purely on her behalf. This motif would be quite faithfully reflected in Hesiod's version and in Euripides', though in the latter case this involves taking Polyxena's pleas, rather than Hekabe's, to correspond to those of the nightingale, and hence taking Polyxena to equate to the nightingale, not the chick (her status as Hekabe's daughter then being irrelevant to the nightingale-comparison).

In this minefield of uncertainties, it would be tempting to make the following tentative inferences about a putatively original version. First, that the hawk threatened the nightingale's chick, and that the nightingale pleaded with the hawk to save it (Ad. 39 [=Aesop. 567 P.].; indirectly reflected in Euripides; perhaps elided by Hesiod). Second, that the nightingale's skill as a singer failed to avert the threat (Ad. 39 [=Aesop. 567 P.]; καὶ ἀοιδὸν ἐοῦσαν, Hes. *Op.* 208; probably implied by Euripides). Third, that the hawk is an advocate of the principle "might is right" (cf. Ad. 39 [=Aesop. 567 P.]); Hesiod; indirectly reflected in Euripides). Fourth, that the hawk's aggression gets subsequently punished, and his flawed philosophy of "might is right" is overwritten with the principle "injustice will be punished in the end" (cf. Ad. 39 [=Aesop. 567 P.]; reflected, more or less indirectly, in each of Hesiod and Euripides).

On such a scenario, Aesop. 4 P. (=Hsr.; 8 Ch.) would be shown to be an outlier in every respect. It exhibits various "blind motifs": the nightingale's status as a songbird is irrelevant to the action and to its moral, "the bird in the hand" (any small bird would have done equally well, a renowned songbird is not required). The initial mention of nightingale's singing (κατὰ τὸ σύνηθες ᾖδεν ["she was singing, as was her wont"]) appears as another blind motif. Moreover, the hawk, counterintuitively, is not a paragon of immoral violence, but of rational good sense; he is not an advocate of the principle "might is right", but of sound home economics ("the bird in the hand"). He not only goes unpunished, but his act is tacitly approved, his philosophy commended. If this is a version of the same fable as that apparently presupposed by the other three putative "witnesses", then it should presumably be seen as a bold and provocative rewriting. Alternatively, it could be viewed as a creative (deliberately reductive) reception of Hesiod's fable, read simplistically as a one-act fable, in which the hawk delivers the moral.

6 The question of Hesiodic adaptation – and Hesiodic sophistication

On the interpretation of the Hesiodic fable advocated here, the hawk does not speak the moral, and Hesiod's narration involves an ellipse of the second act of the putatively traditional fable, in which the hawk got his come-uppance, and the moral was stated ("justice comes in the end to the unjust", or similar).[61] Not all critics are happy to ascribe to Hesiod such an ellipse. Thus, West writes: "Hesiod seems not to have known of such an ending [*sc*. as found in Ad. 39 (=Aesop. 567 P.)], or he would certainly have used it".[62] More recently, but in a similar vein, Ercolani writes: "we are thus required to reject all hypotheses advanced about the 'lack of a moral' or about an 'implicit moral' opposed to the tale".[63]

---

61 Cf. Bona Quaglia 1973, 132–133.

62 West 1978, 205.

63 Ercolani 2010, 205 "si impone pertanto di rigettare tutte le ipotesi avanzate sulla 'mancanza di una morale' o su una 'morale implicita' opposta al racconto".

Yet grounds for thinking that Hesiod does presuppose some kind of second act in which the hawk got its just deserts are to be found in the section of generalized *gnomai* which immediately follows the fable:[64]

> […] δίκη δ’ ὑπὲρ ὕβριος ἴσχει
> ἐς τέλος ἐξελθοῦσα· παθὼν δέ τε νήπιος ἔγνω.
> αὐτίκα γὰρ τρέχει Ὅρκος ἅμα σκολιῇσι δίκῃσιν·
> τῆς δὲ Δίκης ῥόθος ἑλκομένης ᾗ κ’ ἄνδρες ἄγωσι 220
> δωροφάγοι, σκολιῇς δὲ δίκῃς κρίνωσι θέμιστας·
> ἣ δ’ ἕπεται κλαίουσα πόλιν καὶ ἤθεα λαῶν,
> ἠέρα ἑσσαμένη, κακὸν ἀνθρώποισι φέρουσα,
> οἵ τέ μιν ἐξελάσωσι καὶ οὐκ ἰθεῖαν ἔνειμαν.
> (Hes. *Op*. 217–224)
>
> […] in the end justice always prevails over violence.
> Only a fool learns by suffering. Oath runs off as soon as judgements become crooked
> and there is the din of Justice being dragged wherever men lead her,
> men who devour bribes and who judge cases with crooked judgements.
> She [Justice] follows behind, bewailing the city and the people’s morals,
> cloaked in mist, bearing woe to men who have driven her out and not dealt her <*sc*. Justice>. straight.
> (Transl. B.C.)

There are striking similarities in theme and diction between this passage and the fable which precedes it. The hawk’s words to the nightingale: ᾗ σ’ ἂν ἐγώ περ ἄγω (“you will go wherever I lead you”; 208) are echoed in the description of Δίκη (Justice, personified) dragged ᾗ κ’ ἄνδρες ἄγωσι (“wherever men lead her”; 220).[65] The nightingale was described as “lamenting piteously” and “screeching”; this is echoed in the subsequent passage by the ῥόθος (“din”) that is made by Justice as she is dragged, and in Justice’s κλαίουσα (“bewailing”) the city and its inhabitants’ morals.[66] The hawk tells the nightingale δεῖπνον […] ποιήσομαι (“I will make a *meal* of you, if I want to”; 209); similarly, the men who abuse Justice are called δωροφάγοι (“bribe-*devouring*”; 221). The verbal and conceptual echoes show that the fable segues and meshes with the following passage. The moral of the fable is contained not in the narrative of the fable, but rather in the following section, even though this is marked as being narratologically distinct from it. Despite their narratological distinctness, therefore, the fable and the immediately following narrative passage should be recognized as comprising a single discursive entity; the boundary between embedded fable and embedding narrative is permeable to a high degree.[67]

The suppressed two-act structure of the embedded fable is confirmed by the explicit presence of a two-act structure in the embedding narrative. The image of Justice, manhandled by wicked men in 217–224, is developed further in 258–262, where it is said of Justice (personified) that “whenever someone harms her by abusing her crookedly, straightaway she takes her seat by father Zeus, son of Kronos, and speaks of the mind of unjust men, so that the people may pay for the recklessness of their kings […]”. Here, a two-act structure is clear: in

---

64 Cf. Bonaffé 1983, 263; Pucci 1977, 65.

65 Bonaffé 1983, 263.

66 Bonaffé 1983, 263. Cf. Hamilton 1989, 63.

67 Cf. in general, Gagné 2010, 4: “The *Works and Days*, especially the Myth of Races, have often been read as a series of self-contained, discrete passages entirely autonomous from each other”; 5: “That reading strategy of episodic dislocation reproduces the logic of circumscribed reception we have just followed. I believe it misses the core importance of the poetic architecture which structures the *Works and Days*, the embedded resonance of passage commenting on passage as the verses are sung”. Cf. Friedländer 1966, 223–224 = 1913, 558–559.

the first act, crooked men ride rough-shod over Justice; in the second, Justice ensures that punishment is meted out to crooked men.

Here we must confront the question why an author should ever wish to suppress the moral that is being relied on (compare West, cited above). One easy answer is that well-known fables, like proverbs, simply invite truncation.[68] Thus, Hamlet can say: "'While the grass grows' – the proverb is something musty" (Shakespeare, *Hamlet* III.ii.334–335). (The conclusion of the proverb was: "[…] the steed starves".) In Anthony Trollope's novel *Barchester Towers* (Chapter 1), the narrator states simply: "There is a proverb with reference to the killing of cats […]". (The proverb in full ran: "There are more ways of killing a cat than choking it with cream".) No very sophisticated interpretative effects need be in play here, though the suppression of the conclusion to the proverb clearly serves to establish a complicity between author and reader / audience.

Sometimes, however, more complex effects are achieved. This is the case in the Meleagros-paradigm employed by Phoinix in his speech in the Iliadic Embassy. (Phoinix' paraenetic speech to Achilleus is, incidentally, already suggestively analogous to the narrative situation presented by Hesiod's paraenetic address to Perseus in *Works and Days*.)[69] Phoinix does not narrate the death of Meleagros, but the paradigm has an obvious frisson for the audience member who recalls it (whether the secondary narrator and secondary narratee, Phoinix and Achilleus respectively, are themselves conscious of this ellipse is another question).[70] Bacchylides does similar, though even more complex, things with the same Meleagros paradigm in his fifth ode. This time, Meleagros himself, as a shade in the underworld, narrates his own untimely death to Herakles; yet eerie resemblances between Meleagros' embedded story of his own death and the known mythological tradition of Herakles' death intimate the latter's death, even though this is not narrated in the ode.[71] Moreover, although neither the death nor the subsequent immortalization of Herakles are narrated, it is possible that both the death and the subsequent immortalization are meant to be understood as being paradigmatic for the addressee of the ode, Hieron (as Meleagros' death was paradigmatic for Herakles').[72] Such examples show that the most significant implications of a paradigm may perfectly well be left unsaid, and it is not an unreasonable excess of interpretative charity that extends to Hesiod the possibility of the same with his embedded fable of "The Hawk and the Nightingale".

6 Conclusion

It was stated at the outset of this paper that Hesiod's fable of "The Hawk and the Nightingale" offered an excellent opportunity to investigate the kind of interactions that may be found between an embedded fable and its embedding narrative. In the course of our discussion, we also considered a second arguable embedding of the same fable, in Euripides' Hecuba. This conclusion will reflect briefly on both.

The first and obvious thing to say is that the fable, when embedded in each of these particular poetic texts, does not remain inert: there is vigorous and reciprocal interaction between the embedded fable and the embedding text. The embedding text variously acts on the fable, inflicting on it *truncation* in the form of ellipse of certain details (in both Hesiod and Euripides, the beginning and the end of the narrative; in Hesiod, arguably, the presence of a

68 Including the earliest attested proverbs in Sumerian: Alster 1997, I xv; 2007, 5–6.
69 Walcot 1966, 97.
70 See Alden 2000, 179–290.
71 Cairns 2010, 89; Currie 2016, 129.
72 Cairns 2010, 91–92.

nightingale chick); *spotlighting* of other details (in Hesiod, the nightingale is gripped in the hawk's talons); and the likely *innovation* of other details again (in Euripides, the nightingale chick is to plead on her own account, after the failure of her mother's efforts). In turn, the fable affects the embedding text, drawing the language, imagery, and themes of the latter into the gravitational pull of its own semantic field (in Hesiod, 'bribe-*devouring*' men dragging a vociferously lamenting Justice in the passage immediately following the fable, and men taking justice 'into their own hands', in the passage immediately preceding it; in Euripides, a 'might is right' ideology problematically suffusing the whole play). The embedded fable, in other words, though of modest compass itself in relation to the whole work, is not quickly done with, its message rapidly dispensed once and for all; rather, it evolves and continues to play out a ramifying significance, developing a shifting meaning as the embedding text unfolds.

The other obvious point to be made is that the different embedding poetic texts handle the fable differently, in ways that can fairly be related to their respective generic concerns. We may say that, embedded in *Works and Days* and in *Hecuba*, the same fable undergoes specifically 'didactic' or 'instructional' transformation and 'tragic' transformation respectively. One convenient way of illustrating this is by focussing on the differential treatment of knowledge in both texts.

Knowledge is fundamental to Hesiod's poem of instruction: wisdom is imparted throughout the poem by a knowledgeable praeceptor (Hesiod) to a less knowledgeable or ignorant praeceptee: (μέγα) νήπιε Πέρση (286, 397, 633); νήπιοι, οὐδὲ ἴσασιν…, "fools; nor do they know…" (40); παῦροι δ' αὖτε ἴσασι…, "few know…" (814); παῦροι δὲ ἴσασι…, "few know…" (824); τάων εὐδαίμων τε καὶ ὄλβιος, ὃς τάδε πάντα | εἰδὼς κτλ., "fortunate and blessed is he who, knowledgeable of all things about these [days]…" (826–827). It is, naturally, taken for granted that the narrator (Hesiod) himself knows the wisdom message of the fable. The barons are also said 'know it themselves' (202) – thought it seems they could benefit from a "refresher course". The external audience are evidently also expected to know it. Within the fabular narrative, the hawk assumes superior knowledge vis-à-vis the nightingale: '"He is witless (ἄφρων) who tries to struggle against his superiors"' (210). The hawk would be in control of wisdom, dispensing *a* moral – not, as we know, *the* moral. The embedding text insists: 'justice prevails in the end over violence' (217–218) – *that*, not 'justice is the interest of the stronger' (aka 'might is right'), is the true moral of the embedding poem and, we may assume, was approximately the moral of the traditional fable known to Hesiod and his audience. The embedding text continues: 'only a fool (νήπιος) learns (ἔγνω) through suffering' (218). The hawk of the fable, it turns out, is just such a fool: one who must learn his lesson through suffering. There is much explicit and direct instruction in *Works and Days*, but there is also much significant ethical and poetical communication by implication and indirection; the embedded fable, in its interaction with the embedding narrative, is a salient example of this.

Knowledge is also fundamental, though in a different way, to tragedy. Recognition (ἀναγνώρισις), for Aristotle a key component of tragedy, involves 'a change from ignorance (ἄγνοια) to knowledge (γνῶσις)' (*Poetics* 1452a29–31). 'Tragic irony' is the situation, also characteristic of tragedy, where different levels of knowledge are possessed by different characters relative to one another or by characters relative to the audience.[73] In the fable's first activation in the play by Hekabe, she intends the identification of the animal characters of the fable with the characters of the play in a controlled and pellucid way: the nightingale chick is Polyxena, her mother is Hekabe, the hawk represents the Greeks. The roles are subsequently taken up, with greater or lesser awareness, by the characters of the play. Odysseus unwittingly (we may assume) channels the unattractive hawk of the fable when he speaks lines 225–228;

[73] Rutherford 2012: 324-325.

like Hesiod's hawk, he freely dispenses wisdom: 'it's a mark of wisdom (σοφόν τοι) even among misfortunes to have the attitude that is necessary', viz. submitting to the interest of the stronger party. Again, this should not be taken to be the playwright's, or the audience's, 'wisdom'. A twist comes when Hekabe takes 'justice' (read: vengeance) into her own hands at the end: is Hekabe by the end more a passive victim of unjust male violence or more an active female perpetrator of a counter-violence that is shocking and distasteful in its own right? Is she more aligned with the nightingale or with the hawk of the fable? Neither she nor the other characters have the leisure to pose the question in these terms, but we do, and should. In *Hecuba*, the embedded fable is at the centre of both tragic irony and recognition (the latter chiefly Polymnestor's), following a situational reversal (περιπέτεια). Moral complexity, ambiguity, and, perhaps, insecurity all come with a decided lability in the application of the fable. Odysseus taught the 'wisdom' of 'might is right'; Hekabe learnt that wisdom and enacted it in turn on Polymnestor. This kind of uncomfortable uncertainty of tragic right and wrong contrasts with the comfortable certainty of Hesiodic instructional morality. Although in the tragedy the fable is first introduced knowingly by a character, none of characters retain control over its polyvalence, and character knowledge and sensibilities do not keep in step with audience knowledge and sensibilities.

Bibliography

Adrados, F. R. (1999), *History of the Graeco-Latin Fable. Vol. I. Introduction and from the Origins to the Hellenistic Age*, Leiden/Boston/Köln.

Adrados, F. R. (2003), *History of the Graeco-Latin Fable. Vol. III. Inventory and Documentation of the Graeco-Latin Fable. Indices by G.-J. van Dijk*, Leiden/Boston/Köln.

Alden, M. (2000), *Homer Beside Himself. Para-Narratives in the Iliad*, Oxford.

Alster, B. (1997), *Proverbs of Ancient Sumer. Vols. I–II*, Bethesda, MD.

Alster, B. (2007), *Sumerian Proverbs in the Schøyen Collection*, Bethesda, MD.

Aly, W. (1921), *Volksmärchen, Sage und Novelle bei Herodot und seinen Zeitgenossen*, Göttingen.

Barron, J. P./Easterling, P. E. (1985), "Hesiod", in: P. E. Easterling/E. J. Kenney (eds), *The Cambridge History of Classical Literature. Vol. 1. Greek literature*, Cambridge, 51–64.

Battezzato, L. (2018), *Euripides Hecuba*, Cambridge.

Bona Quaglia, L. (1973), *Gli Erga di Esiodo*, Turin.

Bonaffé, A. (1983), "Le rossignol et la justice en pleurs (Hésiode, 'Travaux', 203–212)", in: *BAGB* 3, 260–264.

Bradford Welles, C. (1967), "Hesiod's Attitude to Labor", in: *GRBS* 8, 5–23.

Braswell, B. K. (1988), *A Commentary on the Fourth Pythian Ode of Pindar*, Berlin/New York.

Cairns, D. L. (2010), *Bacchylides. Five Epinician Odes (3, 5, 9, 11, 13)*, Cambridge.

Canevaro, L. G. (2015), *Hesiod's Works and Days. How To Teach Self-Sufficiency*, Oxford.

Clay, J. S. (2003), *Hesiod's Cosmos*, Cambridge.

Currie, B. G. F. (2016), *Homer's Allusive Art*, Oxford.

Currie, B. G. F. (2021), "Etana in Greece", in: C. Metcalf/A. Kelly (eds), *Gods and Mortals in Early Greek and Near Eastern Mythology*, Cambridge, 126–144.

Dalfen, J. (1994/1995), "Die ὕβρις der Nachtigall. Zu der Fabel bei Hesiod (Erga 202–218) und zur griechischen Fabel im allgemeinen", in: *WS* 107/108, 157–177.

Daly, L. W. (1961), "Hesiod's Fable", in: *TAPhA* 62, 45–51.

Denniston, J. D. (^{2}1959), *The Greek Particles*, Oxford.

Dodds, E. R. (1959), *Plato Gorgias*, Oxford.

Duchemin, J. (1995), “Mythes grecs et sources orientales”, in J. Duchemin (ed.), *Mythes grecs et sources orientales*, Paris, 69–88. First published: *Euphrosynè* 7 (1975/1976), 29–48.
Edwards, M. W. (1991), *The Iliad. A Commentary. Vol. V. Books 7–20*, Cambridge.
Ercolani, A. (2010), *Esiodo. Opere e Giorni*, Rome.
Finglass, P. J. (2011), *Sophocles’ Ajax*, Cambridge.
Ford, A. (2002), *The Origins of Criticism. Literary Culture and Poetic Theory in Classical Greece*, Princeton.
Fraenkel, E. (1950), *Aeschylus Agamemnon. Vols. I–III*, Oxford.
Friedländer, P. (1966), “Hesiods Ὑποθῆκαι”, in: E. Heitsch (ed.), *Hesiod*, Darmstadt, 223–238. Reprinted from *Hermes* 48 (1913), 558–572.
Führer, R. (1967), *Formproblem-Untersuchungen zu den Reden in der frühgriechischen Lyrik*, Munich.
Gagné, R. (2010), “Invisible Kin. Works and Days 280–285”, in: *Hermes* 138, 1–21.
Gantz, T. (1993), *Early Greek Myth. A Guide to Literary and Artistic Sources*, Baltimore/London.
Gärtner, U. (2015), *Phaedrus. Ein Interpretationskommentar zum ersten Buch der Fabeln*, München.
Gatti, P. (1979), “Le favole del monaco Ademaro e la tradizione manoscritto de corpus fedriano”, in: *Sandalion* 2, 247–256.
Gregory, J. (1999), *Euripides Hecuba. Introduction, Text, and Commentary*, Atlanta, GA.
Griffin, J. (1986), “Greek Myth and Hesiod”, in: J. Boardman/J. Griffin/O. Murray (eds), *The Oxford History of the Classical World*, Oxford, 78–98.
Hamilton, R. (1989), *The Architecture of Hesiodic Poetry*, Baltimore/London.
Hansen, W. (2002), *Ariadne’s Thread. A Guide to International Tales Found in Classical Literature*, Ithaca/London.
Heath, M. (1985), “Hesiod’s Didactic Poetry”, in: *CQ* 35, 245–263.
Henderson, J. (1999), “Phaedrus’ Fables. The Original Corpus”, in: *Mnemosyne* 52, 308–329.
Hervieux, L. (1893/1899), *Les fabulistes latins depuis le siècle d’Auguste jusqu’à la fin du Moyen-Age. Vols. I–V*, Paris.
Holzberg, N. (2002), *The Ancient Fable. An Introduction*, Bloomington, IN.
Hunter, R. L. (2014), *Hesiodic Voices. Studies in the Ancient Reception of Hesiod’s Works and Days*, Cambridge.
Irwin, E. (1998), “Biography, Fiction, and the Archilochean ainos”, in: *JHS* 118, 177–183.
Knox, B. M. W. (1952), “The Lion in the House (Agamemnon 717–36 [Murray])”, in: *CPh* 47, 17–25.
Koning, H. (2022), “Hesiod”, in: M. de Bakker/I. J. F. de Jong (eds), *Speech in Ancient Greek Literature*, Leiden/Boston, 56–76.
Kurke, L. (2011), *Aesopic Conversations. Popular Tradition, Cultural Dialogue, and the Invention of Greek Prose*, Princeton.
Lasserre, F. (1984), “La fable en Grèce dans la poésie archaïque”, in: *Entretiens Hardt* 30, 61–96.
Lefkowitz, J. B. (2014), “Aesop and Animal Fable”, in: G. L. Campbell (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Animals in Classical Thought and Life*, Oxford, 1–23.
Lonsdale, S. H. (1989), “Hesiod’s Hawk and Nightingale (Op. 202–12). Fable or Omen?”, in: *Hermes* 117, 403–412.
Macleod, C. W. (1982), *Homer. Iliad, Book XXIV*, Cambridge.
Mordine, M. J. (2006), “Speaking to Kings. Hesiod’s αἶνος and the Rhetoric of Allusion in the Works and Days”, in: *CQ* 56, 363–373.
Mossman, J. (1995), *Wild Justice. A Study of Euripides’ Hecuba*, Oxford.

Nelson, S. (1997), “The Justice of Zeus in Hesiod’s Fable of the Hawk and the Nightingale”, in: *CJ* 92, 235–247.
Oettinger, N. (1992), “Achikars Weisheitssprüche im Licht älterer Fabeldichtung”, in: N. Holzberg (ed.), *Der Äsop-Roman*, Tübingen, 3–22.
Perry, B. E. (1952), *Aesopica. A series of texts relating to Aesop or ascribed to him or closely connected with the literary tradition that bears his name. Collected and critically edited, in part translated from oriental languages, with a commentary and historical essay. Vol. I. Greek and Latin Texts*, Urbana. [=P.]
Pucci, P. (1977), *Hesiod and the Language of Poetry*, Baltimore, MD/London.
Raeburn, D./Thomas, O. (2011), *The Agamemnon of Aeschylus. A Commentary for Students*, Oxford.
Rutherford, R. B. (2012), *Greek Tragic Style. Form, Language and Interpretation*, Cambridge.
Steiner, D. (2012), “Fables and Frames. The Poetics and Politics of Animal Fables in Hesiod, Archilochus, and the Aesopica”, in: *Arethusa* 45, 1–41.
Swift, L. (2014), “The Animal Fable and Greek Iambus. Ainoi and Half-Ainoi in Archilochus”, in: C. Werner/B. Sebastini (eds), *Gêneros poéticos na Grécia antiga. Confluências e fronteiras*, São Paulo, 49–77.
Swift, L. (2019), *Archilochus: The Poems: Introduction, Text, Translation, and Commentary*, Oxford.
Tierney, M. (1946), *Euripides Hecuba*, Dublin.
van Dijk, G.-J., (1997), *Ainoi, logoi, mythoi. Fables in Archaic, Classical, and Hellenistic Greek Literature*, Leiden.
Walcot, P. (1966), *Hesiod and the Near East*, Cardiff.
West, M. L. (1978), *Hesiod Works and Days*, Oxford.
West, M. L. (1984), “The Ascription of Fables to Aesop in Archaic and Classical Greece”, in: *Entretiens Hardt* 30, 105–136.
West, M. L. (1997), *The East Face of Helicon. West Asiatic Elements in Greek Poetry and Myth*, Oxford.
Woodard, R. D. (2007), “Hesiod and Greek Myth”, in: R. D. Woodard (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Mythology*, Cambridge, 83–165.
Zafiropoulos, C. A. (2001), *Ethics in Aesop’s Fables: The Augustana Collection* (Leiden).
Zago, G. (2020), *Phaedrus. Fabulae Aesopiae*, Berlin/Boston.
Zander, C. (1921), *Phaedrus solutus vel Phaedri fabulae novae XXX*, Lund.
Zanker, A. (2009), “A Dove and a Nightingale Mahābhārata 3.130.18 – 3.131.32 and Hesiod, Works and Days 202–213”, in: *Philologus* 153, 10–25.