

# **Semiotics of mimesis and communicative relationship among texts: Ekphrasis and replication between Hesiod and Homer**

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**Abstract.** *The Shield of Heracles* by Hesiod and Homer's *Iliad*, XVIII show how mimesis should be considered: it is a process that should be seen different according to the levels that it refers to. There is one object constructed by a craftsman (first level of representation), after that a poet may write about this object and its construction (second level of representation). Then yet another poet could write, on the model of the previous text, his poem with his personal idea.

Explaining first, the meaning of representation, arts and mimesis in Plato (*Ion*, *Phaedrus*, *Cratylus*, *Sophist*, *Laws*, *Republic-Book X*) and in Aristotle (*Poetics*, *Nichomachean Ethics*), I would like to explain how mimesis was considered according to the terms of form and representation. After that I would carry out a textual analysis of *The Shield of Heracles* and *Iliad*, to demonstrate that even if Hesiod's text is quite similar to Homer's, the context, the meaning, the background of the authors and the narrative structures are different. The different levels of pertinence and the different points of view demonstrate that mimesis is not a process that produces hierarchy in retrospect, but it is something heading to the direction of what "it is not created yet".

## 1. Introduction

The concept “mimesis” has always been in the centre of many debates side by side with other terms such as “representation”, “ekphrasis” (Wulf 1996), “replication” (Eco 1975: 240–255; 2003: 315–344; Dusi, Spaziante 2003: 9–61), “reproducibility”<sup>1</sup> and “form”. This proximity increases the difficulty to find an explanation and a definition. A possible solution could be to consider mimesis a *process* composed of different moments or stages where any object could be seen from different perspectives and ways. The idea of process is extremely useful because it allows considering on one hand a set of phenomena that are connected, and on the other hand, the progress or the path to achieving a given purpose. Therefore the thesis of this essay is to demonstrate that mimesis is primarily a process that in its development has certain characteristics and can be analyzed semiotically.

In Greek philosophy, the first advice towards the definition of “mimesis” comes from Plato, who, in *Book X* of the *Republic* (Platone 2009: *La Repubblica* 595a–608b), has used Socrates’ three beds metaphor:

- One bed as the natural *form* made by God;
- One bed as the object made by any man, for example, a craftsman;
- One bed as the object seen by another man (an artist) in imitation of the one made by the craftsman (the second point of this list).

Some initial observations:

1. It seems that Plato does not talk about a bed, but its form (*Eidos*; in this case, bedness). *Eidos* connotes something that has been “seen” by the intellect. The word “form” is most commonly used to translate the term *eidōs* in Plato’s theory. It may help to say that the form is the intelligible structure of a thing, so long as we remember that many

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<sup>1</sup> Technical reproducibility (Benjamin 1966) with hybridization of different media (Bolter, Grusin 2002).

forms are simple and as such lack structure. Sometimes the English word “form” is used to refer to the visible shape of a thing, but this is not Plato’s meaning. The word “idea” is also sometimes used, but it is important to remember that a form is not merely an item in someone’s stream of consciousness<sup>2</sup>;

2. From the original form of a bed (archetype), there derive all the other forms that can be compared to the first. This idea of comparison of different forms of beds helps to understand the nature of mimesis and its stages because the first form may be compared to the others that follow and are constructed on the basis of it.

According to Plato’s subdivision, it is possible to find three levels in the mimetic process, corresponding to the perspectives from which any object can be seen:

- As physical entity, a mere form (archetype, the original form);
- From any perspective (from the top or from a corner) and made by someone (craftsman);
- Represented in another art form (described in a poem, depicted in a painting, adapted in a movie).

In this last case, the rhetorical device in which one medium of art tries to relate to another medium is called *ekphrasis*. Bedness after bedness, form after form, interpretation after interpretation<sup>3</sup>, it is possible to consider the mimetic process as an open course where each form or bedness shares something with the ideal form with which the craftsmen, the artists and everybody can make comparisons<sup>4</sup>. Each

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.personal.kent.edu/~jwattles/forms.htm>

<sup>3</sup> Every form of adaptation or translation is an interpretation (Eco 2003). Eco repeats the thesis of Peirce about the process of semiosis as an interpretative mechanism and therefore he asserts that any process of communication through signs is an ongoing mechanism for subsequent translations from one sign to another, a sequence of unlimited interpretation of signs by other signs (unlimited semiosis).

<sup>4</sup> It is important to underline that “comparison” is not the only operation that a man can carry out, but in this case it is very important according to the platonic

bedness is associated with another and this list of bednesses is called infinite regress of forms (Platone 2009: *Parmenide*, 132b).

## 2. An example of mimesis: ekphrasis

### 2.1. Plato and Aristotle

Plato continually rethought the concept of mimesis, for example, in *Ion* (Platone 2009: *Ione* 533d, 534a) where he has linked it to the Dionysus cult (Franzini, Mazzocut-Mis 2000: 248) and to his arts (music, dance and the ritual activities of priests):

- Art was seen as noble delirium;
- Artist as agitated by corybantic fury;
- Writing poetry as a divine power inspired by the Muses.

This positive conceptualisation of the relationship between art and mimesis is also detectable in *Phaedrus* (Platone 2009: *Fedro XII*, 244a–245a), one of the most beautiful and important dialogues, where Plato has illustrated the beneficial effects of madness inspired by gods. The role of divine inspiration leads the philosophers and their beloved towards the good, but only when tempered with self-control.

Stopping at this point, the term “mimesis” refers to the inspiration of the cult mysteries of Dionysus, but there is another part in the written works of Plato (especially in the *Laws*), where mimesis is linked to the demiurgic activity of adapting to a form (to a representation) more or less faithful to the Ideas. In fact, something has changed in the dialogic production of the Greek philosopher<sup>5</sup> and the relationship between art and mimesis will not refer anymore to the

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idea of knowledge as an act of remembering and because of the relations between the Ideas and real things (*mimesis, metessi, parusia*).

<sup>5</sup> It is important to remember that *Ion* is the dialogue of the “youth”, *Phaedrus* and *Republic* are the dialogues of the “maturity” and the *Laws* the dialogue of the “old age”.

meaning of a *model*, but to that of *untruthful copy* (Platone 2009: *Laws I*, 652a–655a, *II*, 654a–655d):

— Artist is defined as an imitator;

— Art as a passive imitation of the Real, two degrees away from the Truth and the World of the Ideas.

The idea of distance from the truth appears also in the *Republic*: the artist's bed (the third point in the list in the first paragraph) is twice removed from the truth. The copiers (craftsman and artist) only touch a small part of what things really are: a bed may appear differently from various points of view, looked at obliquely or directly, or different again in a mirror. According to Plato, painters and poets may think they are painting or describing the maker of the object, but do they really know something about it? Have they obtained the real essence of the object (objectness)? Painters and poets may think they would be better off if they were more faithful to the reality of the carpenter making a bed, but finally the imitators (as he called them) still cannot attain the truth.

The motives behind this descendent parable concerning art seem to be the ethical-political preoccupation of Plato to exclude those arts classified as immoral because of uncontrollable passions. Art and copies are false and untruthful because they are linked to non-cognitive impulses and they cannot lead to the truth. What is important to understand, is that Plato has not neglected all types of art<sup>6</sup>, but only *tragic art* because in front of tragedy the spectator is led to empathize with characters driven by dark forces contradicting the principle of individual responsibility that a good citizen must look for.

In that way, the opposition that is underlined is not between art and reality, but between two kinds of knowledge: on one hand the *philosophical knowledge* and on the other the *tragic* one. The first leads to its unique and stable foundation (the Good) and is reflected in

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<sup>6</sup> In fact, in *Phaedrus*, Plato has acknowledged the art to be a level closer to the divine just because it has been inspired by the beauty.

beauty; the second shows reality in its disturbing ambiguity to the point that beauty has a dual deceptive nature (Givone 2009: 14).

With Aristotle (Aristotele 1999: *Poetics* 48b, 5–15; 51a, 36–38; 51b; 49b, 24–29), the question is a bit different because he has interpreted mimesis as an activity that re-creates things in a new way and dimension. In other words, the poet is able to create something new and poetry does not depend exclusively on the Truth (historical truth), but it can also represent something that has not really happened. It becomes art only if it can add a certain “*quid*”: detaching from reality, it can present facts and characters as they should be truly but also as they should not, on the condition that it makes the impossible and the irrational *plausible*.

Mimesis is not only duplication, an expressive medium, but also the purpose of the art and especially of tragedy. In fact, Aristotle has regarded the drama as “the imitation of action” and distinguished three forms of imitation:

1. The way things are;
2. How they are described;
3. How they should be.

To him the characters of tragedy are better than average human beings and those of the comedy the worst. Going on to the poetic, Aristotle delimits the tragedy’s characteristics with its six elements: story, character, thought, language, melodies and show. The first three are the goals of mimesis, the fourth and fifth means and the last is its way.

There is an important change with Aristotle: we do not find any kind of naturalism and we are thrown into the world of the plausible, of what can happen according to verisimilitude.

If Plato refers to the imitative characteristic of tragic art, dangerous for citizens, Aristotle, in fact, has written that imitation, and thus art, can give some *knowledge* and *pleasure* (Franzini, Mazzocut-Mis 2000: 250; Barthes 1973). Knowledge because it responds to a natural instinct and to imitate is innate to men since childhood (man differs

from animals in being the most inclined to imitate and learn the basics through imitation). Pleasure because of pattern recognition through the copy: while the child learns by imitating, the adult feels pleasure in recognition, which is an intellectual and theoretical act capable of relating the copy with the model.

Finally, why has Aristotle talked about tragedy and theatre? He has chosen tragedy because (Franzini, Mazzocut-Mis 2000: 251):

— According to the importance given to imitation, in tragedy there is an important character, the mime, whose purpose is to mimic the gestures and actions that take place off stage;

— Tragedy is the imitation of a serious action that through pity and fear leads to the purification of such emotions. The tragedy must capture and engage the spectator and it must do so through narration.

Plato and Aristotle are the most important thinkers in Greek world that have argued the problem of mimesis. Their theories were the first and organic answers to the problem of representation and nature, whose relationship is not simple and directly understandable. There are not many other theories of mimesis in the Greek world that would depart from the epistemological point of view like the theories of Plato and Aristotle, and would not confine their treatment of the problem of creation to one single concept, be it a cosmological view (like Anaximander), numeric justification (like Pythagoras) or immutable law of becoming (like Heraclitus).

What I would like to give credit to Plato for (and next to him, naturally also to Socrates) and Aristotle, without underestimating the other philosophers mentioned above, is that he has argued the problem of knowledge and mimesis from an epistemological point of view, building the foundations of the main problems in philosophy.

## 2.2. Ekphrasis: first model to analyse texts

According to the observations made above, it is possible to build a three-dimensional model formed by:

1. The referent. The extra-linguistic entity that linguistic sign refers to or the situation that a given linguistic communication refers to. In other words, it is the content of what is represented and reflected in the text (for example the bed made by craftsman). The concept “referent” is linked to the definition of sign relation. Peirce defines three roles encompassing the sign: the sign’s subject matter — called its object — and the sign’s meaning or ramification as formed into a kind of effect called its interpretant (a further sign, for example, a translation). In particular, the object is the referent to which the sign refers and it can be a thing, a person, a state of the world, something that can become a cultural unity and can be nominated (Volli 2000: 27);

2. The writer or the poet (the author) present in the text<sup>7</sup> through his/her simulacrum. He<sup>8</sup> has two different communication strategies (Becker 1995: 23–41): on one hand he can use a language which is clear (*sapeneia*) and vivid (*enargeia*) in order to create an *illusion*; on

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<sup>7</sup> The text is the locus of interpretative cooperation where the Author gives some clues to his Lector who tries to find out what the text does not say (Eco 2002: 5–11). In other words, it is the place of negotiation between the sender and the receiver where many textual conventions (for example, the formula used for fairy tales “Once upon a time...”) influence the cultural and social fruition.

<sup>8</sup> It is important to emphasize the distinction between author and narrator: the author is physically the person who writes a text and the narrator, according to Genette, is the voice (who speaks) in a narrative text. Therefore it has a level inside the text and has a relationship with the story (inside or outside of the story). The narrator can be extradiegetic when it is placed outside the first level story (diegesis) and at the same level with the empirical author; intradiegetic when the narrator is inside the story, but telling a second level story; heterodiegetic when it is absent from the narrated story; homodiegetic when the narrator is present in the story as an actor (Volli 2000: 90–93).

the other hand, the writer can communicate *marvel (thauma)*, wonder, astonishment or amazement in order to remind the audience of his presence. With the first strategy, the medium becomes a *window* from which the audience can see the images directly as if they could see these right in front of them; with the second, the situation is a bit different because the language is used in order to create a relation between the writer, the referent and the audience. The focus is not anymore only on the content or referent, but also on the writer (what he may think) and on the context (space and time) of his situation;

3. The audience. The public, that is the audience, attends the singing of the poem and can directly look from the window (accepting the illusion) or becomes a participant in the scene by interpreting the text, feeling the presence of the writer (starting to interpret).

The referent is the element between the author and the audience. It can be described according to its form, the materials and the colours used for creating it (in that way, the author, for example, presents only the surface of an artistic work) or focussing on the performance of the author or the experience of the representation (the creation of the object).

### 3. The analysis of texts

Let us have a look at two examples of a mimetic process (*ekphrasis*) by using and identifying these three components (referent, author and spectator) in two texts: *The Shield of Heracles* written by Hesiod and the excerpt on the shield of Achilles in Homer's *Iliad*.

It is useful to remember that the tripartite division shown above represents an empirical advice for exploring texts. It should not be considered as univocal or fixed, but as a model that can be improved.

### 3.1. Hesiod and the *Shield of Heracles*

The *Shield of Heracles* (Esiodo 2006) is a poem of 480 hexameters recounting the battle between Heracles and Cycnus. The poem begins with the figure of Alcmene<sup>9</sup> and continues by explaining the motivations for the combat where Cycnus is the bloody child of Ares<sup>10</sup> that scatters terror, killing and robbing the pilgrims on their way to the oracle at Delphi, jumping out of the forest of Thessaly that was a sacred forest of the god Apollo.

Having briefly described some weapons (greaves, cuirass, quiver, arrows, spear and helmet), Hesiod, in the second part of the poem (Esiodo: 2006: 180–191, vv. 139–324), leads the reader to the description of the shield of the Greek hero that represents the central and fundamental part of the text.

#### 3.1.1. The referent

The object described is the shield, one of the most used weapons. Shield was not only used for fighting, but also as a medium for depicting war moments and everyday life scenes and given as a gift (similarly to paintings, tapestries and vases). The description of the referent can be divided into the following sequences:

1. Description of materials used in its manufacture, such as chalk, ivory, gold (Esiodo 2006: 180–181, vv. 139–143);
2. Description of the central part of the shield with the image of Phobos (deification of fear) and Eris (personification of discord) with

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<sup>9</sup> According to Hesiod, Zeus felt in love with Alcmene, not only for her virtues, but also for her fidelity to her husband. In fact, to seduce her, Zeus had to turn into the man she loved, her husband Amphitryon.

<sup>10</sup> After Cycnus' death by Heracles, Ares will try to avenge him, but will be defeated by the demigod.

a terminology that refers to the horrendous and macabre.<sup>11</sup> It is followed by the movements of fighting men (tracking, encounter, noise, killing and destruction which are reported with the first letter capitalized and personified as semi-divinities) with images of death and blood (black and red are the predominant colours) and clamouring sounds and chilling (teeth that grind). The idea that the poet wants to transmit is that anyone who dares to bring open war to the son of Zeus (Heracles) would end in the kingdom of Hades. In this scene, there is also space for animals characterized by anger and fight (lions and wild boars), Centauri and Ares (always accompanied by Deimo and Fobo) (Esiodo 2006: 181–183, vv. 144–200);

3. Description of the contrast between serenity and darkness. On one hand, there are images of happiness and pleasant moments (lovely chorus with gold harps and an undulating sea with dolphins), on the other hand, talking about the armour of Perseus (son of Zeus and Danae), the horrible figures of the Gorgons. These creatures become the pretext<sup>12</sup> to describe their shapes (arched heads and vibrated tongues) and their armours (belt from which snakes were thrown out, shield made by pale steel). Next to them, there is the continuous presence of Hades and the Fates, personifications of the inescapable destiny (Esiodo 2006: 184–189, vv. 201–270);

4. Description of a city: choirs, music, dances, but also images of countryside with farmers, pastures and harvests. As in the point before, this pleasant moment is opposed to the war and its pains (Esiodo 2006: 188–191, vv. 272–312);

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<sup>11</sup> “eyes that glowed with fire [...] in a white row, fearful and daunting [...] their bones, when the skin is rotted about them, crumble away on the dark earth” (Esiodo 2006: 181, vv. 145–153).

<sup>12</sup> In the shield, the figure of Perseus is spatially next to those of the Gorgons. From the mythological point of view, the proximity is justified because the story of Perseus is closely linked to that of the three Gorgons and the deadly Medusa whom Perseus killed.

5. Final description of the edge of the shield with the Ocean and fish (Esiodo 2006: 190–191, vv. 313–324).

### 3.1.2. The author

Hesiod shows two communicative strategies in the text.

On one hand, his language is used exclusively for the description of the elements present on the surface of the shield by a writing that:

1. Becomes a *transparent* interface;
2. Brings the object described directly *in front* of the viewer. This happens for example when the materials and components of the shield are detailed: the physicality of the surface, together with the indication of the spatial distribution of some elements<sup>13</sup> directs the attention to the referent and the world pictured (deities and their armour, fighting, city and its citizens, dead people and animals). Guiding the attention through the description, the arrangement of the narrated elements reflects the arrangement of what is depicted: this is the relationship between what the images depict and what they represent. In other words, a faithful description of the different elements forged by Hephaestus takes the viewer to a level of mimesis characterized by the *illusion* that we are looking at it as directly as if we had the referent in front of us.

On the other hand, the author can use the poetic language differently, for example locating himself inside the text (as a narrator) and re-positioning the viewer. In this occasion, the poet used two techniques:

1. Representing a certain element of the shield and insinuating that it is not only a piece of ivory or plaster, but it seems to be alive and

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<sup>13</sup> For example, the position of Phobos is indicated as “in the middle” (Esiodo 2006: 180–181, v. 144).

real: “they were rushing together as though they were alive”<sup>14</sup> (Esiodo 2006: 182–183, v. 189); “he was red with blood as if he were slaying living men” (Esiodo 2006: 182–183, v. 194). Paying attention to the physical characteristics or elements of the shield and imagining that they were alive, could remind the viewer of the presence of the poet;

2. Giving personal opinions of admiration about Hephaestus’ work: “A wonderful thing the great strong shield was to see — even for Zeus the loud-thunderer” (Esiodo 2006: 190–191, v. 318); “There, too, was the son of rich-haired Danae, the horseman Perseus” (Esiodo 2006: 184–185, v. 216); “The head of a dreadful monster, the Gorgon, covered the broad of his back, and a bag of silver — a marvel to see — contained it” (Esiodo 2006: 184–185, vv. 225–226).

Employing these two different techniques, the illusion previously created is broken by the admiration of the poet, reminding the reader that *there is a person* (the author) with his *particular opinion* of the object being described.

These two strategies<sup>15</sup> are semiotically interesting.

In the first case, the illusion is created by erasing from the statement the elements that refer to the “I am here now”<sup>16</sup> of the enunciation. This operation implies the negation of the instance of enunciation and the presentation of a statement without any references to a place, to a time or to the subject of the enunciation: in other words, a statement defined by “I’m not here, not now”.

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<sup>14</sup> The English translations of Hesiod come from Perseus Digital library; translated by Hugh G. Evelyn-White and accessible at <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0128>.

<sup>15</sup> One that creates illusion and the other that reminds of the presence of the poet and his work of creating illusion.

<sup>16</sup> In the text, there are many deictic elements such as pronouns (this, that, I, you, us), adverbs of time (hour, when) and of place (here, there) referring to the moment of the enunciation (for example “The train to Milan will depart from platform 12 at 2:30 p.m.”).

Semiotically, this is a disengagement (Greimas: *debrayage*) in which the subject of the enunciation is hidden.

Instead, in the second case there is the inverse operation, the engagement (*embrayage*). In case of disengagement deictic elements of the enunciation disappear from the statement, whereas in case of engagement, on the contrary, they return there.<sup>17</sup> The elements of the moment of the enunciation (subject, space and time) are now present in the text (statement). And what kind of enunciation they refer to? Naturally to the moment Hesiod wrote or sung his poem.

In this specific case, what emerges is the simulacrum of the subject of the enunciation through his declarations about the object described (admiration). All this draws the readers/listeners' attention on a past situation of enunciation (irretrievably lost<sup>18</sup>) that now can only be imagined. In other words, the engagement creates an illusion of a contemporary enunciation that the reader/listener can no longer grasp but can in a certain way participate in with his imagination.

### 3.1.3. The spectator

The alternation of these two strategies allows the reader/listener to be both the *observer* of the work — accepting the illusion that the shield is being constructed in front of him — and *aware* that the poet is building this illusion. If in the first case there is a connection between the represented (object — the shield) and the representation (the work of Hephaestus), in the second there is a connection between the spectator, the poet and the representation. In other words, in the first case we can find the construction of the referent without any mediation (apparently), while in the second there is mediation and it can be seen through the simulacrum of the poet. It is possible for the

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<sup>17</sup> An example of engagement: "I'm taking this train for Milan at the station of Turin".

<sup>18</sup> The moment of writing the poem or singing it at the Hesiod's period.

spectator to accept the illusion and enter into the shield or to remain aware that this is a construction. In the second case we deal with an experience of representation.

### 3.2. Homer and the *Shield of Achilles*

The text of Hesiod is interesting also for another aspect. Describing the shield of Heracles, Hesiod stands in “competition” with another poet, Homer and his way of describing a shield. The term “competition” is inappropriate because historically it is not so simple to define the text of Homer as the “first” and that of Hesiod as the “second”. It is impossible to define the text describing the shield of Heracles as a *copy* or a *replica* of the text about the shield of Achilles (*Iliad* XVIII). But beyond this uncertainty, it is important to try to apply the three categories (referent, author and spectator) to the text, and if possible, to analyze the communicative strategies used by Homer.

Before starting, there is just one additional observation we have to make about the new narrative background: we are in the book XVIII of *Iliad* and through Antilochus, Achilles becomes aware of the fate of Patroclus. His desperation immediately reaches the ears of Thetis who runs to cheer up his son and goes to Hephaestus to ask him to forge for her son weapons which Homer promptly describes (Omero 1957: 504–510, vv. 649–854).

#### 3.2.1. The referent

1. Description of the material used to forge the shield — gold and tin (Omero 1957: 504, vv. 649–670);

2. Description of the elements that are on the surface of the shield. Homer starts with the natural ones (earth, sea, sky, moon and all stars

known), followed by terrestrial<sup>19</sup> (two beautiful populated towns, the first marked by a wedding and a civil dispute, while the second by a siege) and divine elements (the figures of Ares and Athena with their armour). As in Hesiod, there is an alternation between elements belonging to the sphere of serenity (pasture, songs and parties, the work of farmers) and those of the sphere of war, without falling into the horrid and putrefaction. If Hesiod has used red and black chromatic effects and the sound of shouting and crying, Homer, instead, has paid less attention to them and he only has shown the contraposition between good and evil. For example, he later has put some images of vineyards and carefree girls opposed to those of two lions tearing a huge ox (Omero 1957: 504–510, vv. 671–841);

3. Final description of the edge of the shield with the mighty stream of the river Ocean (Omero 1957: 510, vv. 842–854).

### 3.2.2. The author

Firstly, the strategy of the *illusion* that the shield is actually made in front of the reader/listener is very similar to the illusion in Hesiod's text, even if there are some changes in the narrative elements chosen. In Homer there is no part of the battle between the gods and the semi-divine, whereas the contrast between the two spheres of values of good and evil, war and peace, gentleness and violence, pleasant and restlessness, is retained. This contraposition is also visible inside Achilles' soul when he arrives to feel pain and humanity from a strong anger.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> The description of Homer starts from the outside (sky) and follows into the inside (what happens on the Earth).

<sup>20</sup> The fact that Homer usually talks about heroes and divinities is the first point of difference from Hesiod who, instead, is considered "the poet of the humble" and the subjects of his poetry are people who belong to the lower class of society.

Secondly, the presence of the poet is reflected in the same two techniques seen before in Hesiod's text<sup>21</sup>: "and there the women stood each before her door and marveled" (Omero 1957: 505, vv. 688–689); "And the field grew black behind and seemed verily as it had been ploughed, for all that it was of gold; herein was the great marvel of the work" (Omero 1957: 507, vv. 763–764); "Therein he set also the great might of the river Oceanus, around the uttermost rim of the strongly-wrought shield" (Omero 1956: 510, vv. 842–843).

If Hesiod has placed himself inside the text paying the attention to the physical characteristics of the shield and expressing his personal admiration for Hephaestus' work, then in the *Iliad* we can only see the second technique. As we have seen before, the text emphasises the strategy of reminding the reader of the presence of the author as a narrator who remains extradiegetic and heterodiegetic, but sometimes can appear with his comments as if he was winking at his reader.

### 3.2.3. The spectator

Also in this case, we have the recalling of the spectator when Homer locates himself inside the text.

It is important to underline, however, that the subjectivity of Hesiod is more visible even if the text of Homer is much longer. First of all, if we count the number of times that Hesiod manifests himself, the occurrences are more numerous than those of Homer. Second, *Iliad* is an enormous text that contains much more than the *Shield of Achilles* and Homer has many other opportunities to express himself.

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<sup>21</sup> English translation by A. T. Murray, available at Perseus Digital library at <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0134>. The verse numbers for the *Shield of Herakles* in the English translation are 18.478–608.

## 4. Homer and Hesiod

Has Hesiod wished to rival Homer? Answering this question may be useless, because in any case the two texts are different, even if they actually manifest the same combinatorial units or isotopic structures:

1. Describing the activity, the skill and the art of Hephaestus (god of technology, blacksmiths, craftsmen, artisans, sculptors, metals, metallurgy, fire and volcanoes);
2. Giving a base to the narrative description. The shield becomes a white paper for depicting scenes of war and everyday life;
3. Confining the narration within precise limits, which, in both cases, represent the geographical and astronomical knowledge at the time of the Greeks (sky at the beginning and the Ocean at the end).

They differ for the poetic instance of the two authors.

Homer is a great storyteller and reading carefully, the structures of the text look brilliant. Homer does not merely describe how the shield was physically forged by Hephaestus, but through a series of narrative grafts, describes the eternal conflict between life and death. A story inside the story, a statement inside a statement, a proposition inside a proposition through a process that starts from the outside of the shield and reaches inside.

First there are the sky, the sea and the constellations, then the reader's eye is led to observe two human cities: the first appears in agitation for the wedding feast that all citizens are ready to celebrate, the second besieged and ravaged by violence. Each narrative element engages the others: the wedding gives the opportunity to show how Greeks used to celebrate weddings (the town's transformation, the decoration of houses, the stirring of the family), and the siege becomes the occasion to see how a town can be fortified and the tragic consequences of war.

At the end, to make sense of roundness, he has used his knowledge of geography: along the path backwards from the inner frame to the

outer, he concludes the description bringing us on the edge of the shield and the end of the story with the river Ocean.

It is a painting of the Greek world that displays several frames from the outermost to the innermost.

Hesiod, instead, concentrates more on the tragic side of life reworking it with a taste for macabre and horror. The first image is a dragon (Phobos), that is followed by the images of gods (Ares, Fate) and animals (lions, dogs, wild boar) that invade, with their brutality and violence, the pleasant landscape (vineyards, pastures) bringing shades of red and black.

What Hesiod and Homer have built is what is called the game of Chinese Boxes or *mise en abyme* where a story is inside another story and the story narrated can be used to show other meanings than those that belong to the story-framework (Fig. 1).

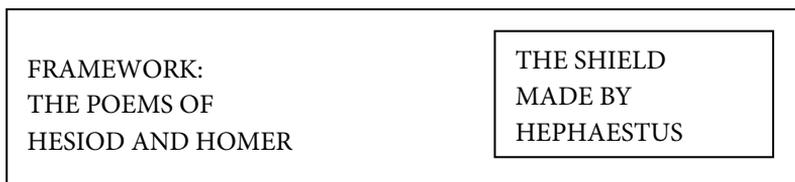


Figure 1. The game of Chinese boxes in the poems of Hesiod and Homer.

In that case we have two frameworks (and that is why we have two different texts): on one hand, we can find Homer with the description of the values of heroes and deities, on the other Hesiod and the values of workers (as farmers).

The difference comes from:

— What both authors have decided to describe about the depicted shield. Hesiod has focused more on cruel images where wild animals and terrible deities invade moments of serenity in the lives of farmers; Homer has paid attention less on the consequences of the invasion in

farmers' lives and more on the behaviour of the heroes and their strength showing the eternal conflict between good and evil;

— Structural properties of the texts. In particular:

1. The action level: according to Greimas' canonical narrative sequence<sup>22</sup>, Hesiod's narration reveals only the sanction step where farmers and lower class people had to suffer, being punished for some unknown faults. In the *Iliad*, instead, it seems that the competence step is more pronounced: even if this part of the text represents the description of a shield, it is always clear that it is a weapon that is going to be used for fighting;

2. The actant system: if in the Hesiod's text there is no clear actant opposition between the Subject and the Opponent<sup>23</sup>, in the Homer's text there is a moment, at the beginning of the Book, where the reader understands that the action level is the fight between Achilles and Cycnus, the Subject is Achilles, the Opponent Cycnus, the Adjutant Thetis, the Opponent Ares and the Object is the revenge for Patroclus' death;

3. The path of the passions: in the Hesiod's narration the macabre and horror narration shows a negative axiological investment (fear, terror) without the possibility to find a way out because all pleasant situations are touched by violence; in Homer's narration, the conflict between good and evil shows a balance between the negative axiological investment and the positive one.

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<sup>22</sup> Contract (a mandate where someone states what must be done within the episode and indicates the reward for action), Competence (acquisition of conceptual and material tools for someone in order to carry out the action), Performance (the action) and Sanction (when the action is completed, it is recognized and rewarded).

<sup>23</sup> There are many animals and divinities on one side (Gorgons, lions, etc.) and undefined people on the other.

## 5. Conclusion

At this point, let us return to the concept of mimesis. After the analysis of texts, it is possible to define four levels of mimesis:

1. The shield as a platonic idea or a cognitive type (Eco 1997: 109–114);
2. The work of Hephaestus appearing directly to the spectator using the illusion that makes writing a transparent medium (focus on the referent);
3. The work of the author revealing the experience of a representation (a double representation or *ekphrasis*);
4. The work of another poet or artist that departs from the text of a previous poet, re-writing and re-interpreting it into a new one.

Looking at this last point, now we can answer to the question we raised before: is it really correct to say that Hesiod replicated Homer?

If we consider Homer biographically born before Hesiod, it is clear and obvious that *Iliad* is the reference point. However, *Iliad* cannot be considered as *the zero point* (Wulf 1995: 11–12), the point of origin of the mimetic process, because it is almost impossible to trace and find it. We should remember that what we see now in many ancient books, are not the (real) original texts. Countless rhapsodies, “political” and “personal” editorial writings preceded everything and were the first historical sources. Only later, with the help of philology, we can find transcriptions, interpretations and translations of those texts. Thus, a zero point of this process is not easily detectable, although it does exist in a certain space and at a certain time.

However, what we have today are texts that continue to talk to each other through the simulacra of their authors and readers. And it is owing to this continuous revision that the mimetic process does not turn back, but points forward in the direction of the not-yet-said or written (Wulf 1995: 11–12).

And if we consider the text of Hesiod as a *replica* of Homer’s text, then the term must be reconsidered. A replica must be understood not

only as a re-petition and re-presentation, but also as a communicative relationship in which a text (the author) responds to another text according to its (his) ideas and its (his) knowledge. This “tit for tat” of objections and confirmation, of similarities and differences, creates archives of textual practices that incorporate the production and use of texts whose horizon is always open (Eco 1962: 11–21), fluid and mediated.

In such a space (semiosphere), it is up to a person’s capacity not only to understand and interpret the texts, but also to know where to look for them, as if we were archaeologists or librarians.

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### **Семиотика мимезиса и коммуникативные отношения между текстами: экфразис и репликация между Гесиодом и Гомером**

В поэме «Щит Геракла», приписывавшейся в древности Гесиоду, и в «Илиаде» Гомера (песнь XVIII) показывается, в чем состоит мимезис: это процесс, который следует рассматривать в соответствии с тем уровнем, на который он указывает. Сначала мы имеем объект, приготовленный ремесленником (первый уровень репрезентации), потом поэт описывает этот объект и его строение (второй уровень репрезентации). После этого другой поэт может на примере предыдущего текста создать стихотворение, которое выражает его личную идею.

Выясняя значения репрезентации, искусства и мимезиса в произведениях Платона (Ион, Федр, Кратил, Софист, Законы, Государство) и Аристотеля (Поэтика, Никомахова этика), я хочу понять, как рассматривали мимезис, исходя из понятий формы и репрезентации. В частности, посредством анализа произведений Гесиода и Гомера я показываю, что несмотря на их определенное сходство, контекст, значение и нарративные структуры текстов у этих авторов разные. Разная степень связности текстов и разные точки зрения на мимезис показывают, что это не такой процесс, который создает иерархию ретроспективно, но нечто, направленное в сторону «еще несозданного».

### **Mimeesi semiootika ja kommunikatiivsed suhted tekstide vahel: ekfraas ja kopeerimine Hesiodose ja Homerose vahel**

Hesiodose tekst „Heraklese kilp” ja XVIII laul Homerose eeposes „Ilias” on heaks näiteks sellest, kuidas mimeesi käsitleda: mimees on protsess, mida tuleks vaadelda erinevalt vastavalt tasanditele, millele see viitab. Kõigepealt on käsitöölise poolt valmistatud objekt (representatsiooni esimene tasand), seejärel kirjeldab poet seda objekti ning selle ehitust (representatsiooni teine tasand). Seejärel võib teine poet, eelmise teksti eeskujul, luua luuletuse, mis väljendab tema enda isiklikku ideed.

Esmalt selgitan ma põgusalt representatsiooni, kunsti ja mimeesi tähendust Platoni (*Ion, Phaidros, Kratylos, Sofist, Seadused, Riik* (10. raamat)) ja Aristotelese (*Poeetika, Nicomachose eetika*) teostes, näidates, kuidas mimeesi on käsitletud vormi ja representatsiooni mõistetest lähtuvalt. Täpsemalt näitan ma Hesiodose ja Homerose tekstide analüüsi kaudu, et kuigi need on võrdlemisi sarnased, on nende autorite kontekst, taust ja tähendus ning tekstide narratiivsed struktuurid erinevad. Tekstide erinev kohasus ja erinevad jutustaja/autori vaatepunktid näitavad, et mimees ei ole protsess, mis loob hierarhiat tagantjärele, vaid on miski, mis on suunatud tulevikku, „veel mitte loodu” poole.