

Peter Fallon

**DEEDS AND
THEIR DAYS**

after Hesiod



Gallery Books

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Come. Come sing, O Muses
from Pieria, your songs
 are passageways to glory.
Sing to proclaim your father's
praise, Zeus, the great,
 by whose resolve the story

of a man endures in mouths
of many, exalted,
 or withers in oblivion.
No bother to him to proffer power,
to quash the powerful
 or to make the meek live on

while he brings down the high
and mighty. Zeus, it's true,
 who thunders from sheer
heights puts wrongs to right and —
no bother either — quells those
 who are impertinent. Hear,

Zeus, my plea, look down on me
and answer. What you decide
 I'll know is true.
And so I'll tell the truth
to Perses, the whole and nothing but.
 There are in fact, *two*

5

10

Strifes on earth. For Strife
is not an only child. One
 wins praise, the other blame.
They're chalk and cheese.
One's bent on discord; battles
 and a war her aim.

15 No man can tolerate her ways,
but her divine connections
 guarantee a share for her
of honour due. The other one's
the child of Night,
 dark Night's elder daughter.

The son of Cronos, he whose abode
is indeed a lofty mansion,
 set her with the seeds
of earth. And so she grew
20 to advance the lot of man. A better bet
 by far, she proceeds

to roust the indolent to industry.
He who sees another's means accrued
 through the prod
to plow and plant and puts in order
his whole house
 hungers for the same. The roughshod

rush to riches engenders grudges
in the mind of neighbours. This Strife
 does good in mortal men.
25 The man who fashions pots and craftsmen
who turn bowls throw envious eyes
 on the accomplishments of others. Then

one pauper vies with another,
as poet does with poet.
 Mind my words well,
Perses, and don't allow that Strife
who revels in adversities
 of those same others quell

a zeal for work or you'll
end hanging with the rabble
 in the market place.
How little they mean to him,
30 the madding crowd, who has not
 heaped his storage space

with the season's gift, the grain
of Demeter, stuff from open fields.
 Gather your plants, then relax
and observe as men begin to mill
and dissent over the assets
 in a neighbour's stacks.

Waste no time. Seize this chance,
35 the only one, for the principle
 of law — Zeus
at his most fair — to settle
our score. They split our legacy
 between us for our use

to pay off those rapacious
Powers-that-Be, fools
 on the backhand made to rule
in our dispute. You snatched
the bigger half and slinked
 away with it. Each is a fool
40

who'd not hear or heed
that one good half is better than
any one bad whole, or learn
the worth of poor soil's pickings,
asphodel and mallow.

Gods keep the way to earn

a living concealed from men
for if they didn't a single day's
exertions could keep
a man for one long year,
no more to do. He'd hang his rudder up
above his hearth, sleep

and turn no thought to work
with teams of oxen and unflagging mules.
Zeus burned
with rage and obscured the ways
to live once Prometheus
outwitted him and turned

the tables on him. That's the why Zeus
devised men's woes
and worries. His gambit
was to conceal fire. In turn,
Prometheus, the princely son
of Iapetus, reclaimed it

for the benefit of man from Zeus,
giver of good advice. In the tiny
tunnel of a fennel stalk
he stole off with it unseen by him,
whom thunder thrills, which made
the cloud collector's talk

a loud eruption. 'Son of Iapetus,
ace of trickery and so delighted
with yourself and your chicanery,
the theft of fire will weigh on you
and all of men to come. The price
you'll pay will be ubiquity

of evil, a hex attending men
which they'll cling to
as they embrace their destinies.'
And having so pronounced
he laughed out loud, the father
both of gods and mortal entities.

Then he commanded that Hephaestus
hurry to compound water and earth
and the renowned smith
infused them, as decreed —
the face such as a goddess's,
the form a maiden's — both allied with

a human force and voice.
He had Athena school her
in the arts, such as embroidery,
and Aphrodite endow her head
with grace and with a love
that could be

said to eat one up. Then he instructed
Hermes, the herald Argos' killer,
to make her a right bitch
and instil in her a knavish
personality. So said Zeus,
their lord, son of Cronos. Which