

Hermetically Unsealed: Lyric Genres in the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes*

Most of the other chapters in this book centre on lyric texts; Spelman's explores parallelisms between the address to the Deliades in the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* and passages from lyric on issues such as the presentation of authorship and of textual fixity across multiple performance events. I too will discuss a Homeric hymn, namely the *Hymn to Hermes*, but what this hymn offers is, by contrast, a late archaic or early classical Greek viewpoint on lyric 'from the outside'.

The *Homeric Hymn to Hermes* is not 'lyric' in either of the word's normal senses within classics, but it does describe in detail how to make a lyre, the first two performances on the instrument, and how the instrument's creator gave its later patron, Apollo, an introductory guide to the range of its performance contexts.¹ The *Hymn's* engagement with these contexts involves an act of self-definition which is paradoxical, and my main focus here will be on what intuitions about lyric genre(s) that paradox works against, in particular regarding how porous the boundaries were between different types of lyric song. This study has a secondary relevance to this volume too, in that as in many lyric texts scholars have tended to assimilate the performance-contexts imagined within the hymn to the context of its actual performance: I believe the *Hymn* provides a clear example of this procedure being an oversimplification.

I shall first briefly outline how the question of generic boundaries is rooted, in this text, in features of Hermes' character. Then I shall lay out how the *Hymn* relates different subgenres of lyric, and interpret the specific significance of these connections for the poem. I shall end by arguing that the *Hymn* prompts us not to think that these issues are *only* related to the specific circumstances of Hermes' early use of the lyre: Apollo's first brush with the lyre seems to change him, and to shape his outlook on the instrument he takes away from the poem. We may therefore legitimately integrate the *Hymn* into readings of lyric (exemplified elsewhere in this volume) as implicitly reflecting on its power to reshape the audience's outlook on music.

Hermes and Boundaries

Hermetic seals are 'hermetic' in that they originate in alchemy, which was Hermes' science: by pouring liquid glass around a leaky seal and waiting for it to set, the alchemist rendered his apparatus airtight and watertight. This chapter, despite the wordplay in its title, is not about alchemy. However, the phrase 'hermetic seal' encapsulates a pertinent and important characteristic of Hermes – his control of passage, and by the same token lack of passage, at borders. He allowed souls to pass into the underworld, heralds to cross the patrolled border into enemy territory; more generally, he helped any interstate traveller to traverse the uncivilized and dangerous wilderness in the borderlands between Greek states. Hermes both helped and hindered (depending on who was praying) thieves' attempts to bore holes through the mud-brick walls of Greek houses. As the god of mercantile exchange, Hermes oversaw the fair pairing as one item passed from A to B while another passed from B to A.²

¹ Senses of 'lyric': e.g. Budelmann (2009) 2-5.

² See also Vernant's contrast (1966, 97-143) between herms controlling the dynamics in and out of a house and Hestia as the embodiment of a house's stability. Thucydides 6.27 might suggest that herms

Laurence Kahn emphasized this unifying strand in Hermes' range of functions in her monograph *Hermès passe*, and showed that it is a major theme of the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes*; Kahn drew particular attention to verbs of piercing – a mode of allowing passage at a boundary while leaving it broadly intact.³ Hermes finds a tortoise as he is crossing the threshold of his mother's cave-precinct (23); he pierces the plastron and shell of the tortoise in order to construct a lyre (42, 48). When he kills two of Apollo's cows he 'bores out their life-marrow' as an alternative to the throat-slitting of normal sacrificial procedure (119). He gets home from his cattle-rustling by entering 'through the keyhole, like wind or mist', leaving the door intact (146-7). He threatens to bore into the temple at Delphi (178), and Apollo foresees that he is liable to bore into the houses of herdsmen (283). Eventually Hermes manages to reach the divine threshold (322) and metaphorically 'break into' Olympian society.

These acts of crossing and piercing physical boundaries are bound up with the paired transit of exchange, and with the broader connections in Greek thought between borders and cunning (μῆτις).⁴ Hermes is explicitly assigned exchanges as a prerogative (516); his trick of making Apollo's cattle walk backwards is described as an exchange of front hooves for rear (76-8); he aims for and gets to resolve the dispute with arbitration – in Greek terms, the 'give and take' of justice (312); in the latter part of the hymn he causes an exchange even in something as essential as Apollo's divine prerogatives. Detienne and Vernant (n.4) showed that Greek ideas of cunning relate not only to crossing borders but also to constructing (e.g. weaving) and manipulating them. Hermes indeed weaves and ties on sandals, binds himself in his own swaddling, and metaphorically binds himself with two oath-offers – in all three cases binding himself in such a way as to preserve his liberty by deceiving Apollo (79-86; 151 and 237; 274-6 and 383-4); later Apollo tries to bind him with *agnus castus*, but Hermes makes the binding magically fall apart and regrow in the soil (409-13).⁵

This brief survey of Hermes' control over literal boundaries, and over related concepts such as binding and exchanging, gives the background against which his blurring of conceptual (including generic) boundaries in the *Hymn to Hermes* is set, namely as thematic material which characterizes Hermes. It is to the generic boundaries which we now turn.

Hymnic Banter

The clearest case of bridging mismatched genres in the *Hymn to Hermes* is Apollo's response to Hermes' second song. The song is described in the terms of a theogony with a proem and a starring role for (hence, probably, a proemic hymn to) Mnemosyne (425-33):

...τάχα δὲ λιγέως κιθαρίζων	425
γηρύετ' ἀμβολάδην, ἐρατὴ δέ οἱ ἔσπετο φωνή,	
κραίνων ἀθανάτους τε θεοὺς καὶ Γαῖαν ἐρεμνήν	
ὡς τὰ πρῶτα γέγοντο καὶ ὡς λάχε μοῖραν ἕκαστος.	
Μνημοσύνην μὲν πρῶτα θεῶν ἐγέραιρεν ἀοιδῆι	
μητέρα Μουσάων· ἦ γὰρ λάχε Μαιάδος υἱόν·	430

were still particularly frequent in Athens, though cf. *LIMC* V(1) 295-9, 301-6 for early findspots and further bibliography. For Hermes' roles in general see Herter (1976).

³ Kahn (1978). See now Ropars (2016), which I was unable to read before submitting this chapter for publication.

⁴ For these see Detienne and Vernant (1974), especially the final chapter.

⁵ For oaths being 'binding' in Greek see e.g. E. *Med.* 161-3 ὄρκοις ἐνδησαμένα τὸν... πόσιν.

τοὺς δὲ κατὰ πρέσβιν τε καὶ ὡς γεγάασιν ἕκαστος
ἀθανάτους ἐγέραιρε θεοὺς Διὸς ἀγλαὸς υἱός
πάντ' ἐνέπων κατὰ κόσμον, ὑπὸ λένιον κιθαρίζων.

Shortly, as he played clearly, he began to sing as for a proem, and lovely was the voice which accompanied him. He declared both the immortal gods and dark Earth, how they were born originally, and how each was allotted their portion. First of the gods he honoured Mnemosyne in his song, the mother of the Muses – for she had been allotted the son of Maia. Then the treasured son of Zeus honoured the other immortal gods according to both seniority and each one's nature, uttering everything in due order as he played the lyre which hung from his forearm.

I will return to some features of this song later, but of primary interest to us is that the performance elicits a comparison from Apollo (453-4):

ἀλλ' οὐ πῶ τί μοι ὄδε μετὰ φρεσὶν ἄλλο μέλησεν
οἷα νέων θαλίησ' ἐνδέξια ἔργα πέλονται·

However, up to now my senses never got interested in anything like this – things like the actions of young men which move to the right at festivities.

Apollo is asking Hermes to pass the lyre on to him from left to right (verse 424 specifies that Hermes is standing on Apollo's left), from one young male – a baby, in fact, though a precocious one – to another. He compares the situation to young men's ἐνδέξια ἔργα at festivities, by which he must intend pre-lyric activities – perhaps unaccompanied, perhaps accompanied by the *auloi* with which Apollo has just declared his familiarity (452).⁶ However, the comparison cues the audience's knowledge that since Apollo's comment these left-to-right activities had indeed come to include lyre-music. Eupolis describes Socrates singing Stesichorus to a lyre which is being passed ἐπιδέξια (*PCG* fr. 395). Hesychius refers to the same procedure, with the lyre later replaced by a myrtle branch, using ἐπιδέξια as an adjective (τ.796). This is probably the implication of other references to guests performing in a cycle or 'each' performing, whether to *auloi* or a lyre.⁷ Such a setup imposes a practical limit on the size of gathering that we imagine, so that θαλίαι here may be understood as indoor symposia of, say, around a dozen guests.⁸ A wider array of sources point to guests responding to each other in a series of short performances, without specifying whether these happen in a cycle or not. In Aristophanes' *Wasps*, where Bdelycleon is trying to train Philocleon to behave at an elite symposium, he assumes that the snatches of song performed by each guest should follow

⁶ Moving to the right was an organizational principle of parties in other respects: pouring of wine (*Il.* 1.597), making toasts (in Chios, Thasos, Attica, Lydia: Critias fr. 1.7, 6.6, 33 D-K; Eupolis *PCG* fr. 354; for elegiac toasts cf. Dionysius of Chalcis fr. 1), trying a contest (*Od.* 21.141-2), begging (*Od.* 17.365), and performing speeches of praise (Pl. *Smp.* 177d, cf. Anaxandrides fr. 1).

⁷ Cf. Artemon of Cas(s)andrea quoted in Ath. 15.694a-b on performances where every guest sang κατὰ τινα περίοδον ἐξ ὑποδοχῆς ('taking over from each other in a cycle') rather than in unison. Similarly Dicaearchus fr. 88 which may have been Artemon's source. Also Plb. 4.20.10 'ordering each other to sing in turn' (ἀνὰ μέρος), of an archaic practice in Arcadian symposia.

⁸ For the sense of θαλία cf. *Lfgre* s.v. θαλίη, Schmitt Pantel (1992) 39-40. See Eitrem (1906, 252) for a suggestive though needlessly precise comparison of such festivities to the Tetrastai who met in Athens to celebrate Hermes' birthday.

extended relationship (7-8).¹³ In any case, the hymn is incomplete: Hermes' mind turns out to be on other things (62), and he never reaches a concluding request. We are not even told that Maia and her attendants are listening. Hermes hides the lyre in his cot and turns to stealing Apollo's cows.

Again the short description of Hermes' song allows us to identify several important generic clues. Content and purpose betray an unfinished hymn; mode of performance is a solo improvisation to the lyre; audience is either female and domestic or non-existent. Out of all this, the narrator selects improvisation to ground a comparison whose vehicle again is radically dissimilar to the tenor in other respects. The content and purpose in the vehicle are comprised by potentially insulting banter (*kertomia*), more or less an opposite to hymnic praise whose purpose is to induce *charis*; multiple performers again take turns, rather than a soloist being alone; they are again young men in a festive setting.¹⁴ It is not clear whether 'making trial of the lyre' is part of the grounds for comparison, so the young men's verbal performance may not be lyric at all – though that is certainly one possible interpretation, reinforced subsequently by Apollo's comparison to ἐνδέξια ἔργα.¹⁵ The very ordering of the sentence shows that the paradox is deliberate: the vehicle's *kertomia* and the tenor's hymnic start are juxtaposed in such a way that one can read or hear the young men riskily 'performing insults about Zeus'. (Indeed, the text was punctuated like that for 250 years of printed editions; the comma after κερτομέουσιν is due to Clarke (1740).)

Given that both the comparisons we have examined involve young men, festivities (θαλίαι), and performance-in-series, an audience should understand them as a pair; whether an audience would have taken them to refer to a single performance type – combining scoptic content and left-to-right ordering – is less clear. Either way, the *Hymn to Hermes* offers a pair of generically paradoxical comparisons, both made by figures with authority to talk about music – the primary narrator and Apollo.

Imagined Settings

Some scholars of the *Hymn to Hermes* have made an interpretative move at this point which readers of this volume will recognize: the 'imagined occasions' of Hermes' songs – here, given their originary nature, the settings for future lyre-music which his songs evoke proleptically –

¹³ Vergados (2013, 4) emphasizes the mise-en-abyme effect, but infers that the song is an incipient hymn to Hermes himself. The usage of ἀμφί tells against this.

¹⁴ Like many words in the *Hymn*, the adjective παραιβόλα (56) has been chosen to contain multiple suggestions, and it would be reductive to pick between the possible interpretations 'in rejoinder' (about performance practice), 'risky', 'indirect' (about content). For *kertomia* see Clarke (2001), Gottesman (2008), both of whom aim for a slightly more unified 'meaning' than the set of family resemblances I would see in its early uses.

¹⁵ Apollonius perhaps took the passage as referring to spoken banter, given 1.457-8 ἀμοιβαδὶς ἀλλήλοισιν μυθεῖνθ', οἷά τε πολλὰ νέοι... as the Argonauts dine together; the speech we hear is Idas riling Jason. For allusion to *H.Herm.* here and elsewhere in A.R. 1 see now Clauss (2016). There is little direct evidence of scoptic lyre-music, but Philocleon's improvised insults in the *Wasps* (n.9) are widely taken to imply that the lyre did actually accompany such banter. Rotstein 2010: 233-9 gives the sparse evidence for iambus performed to the lyre. For exchange of apparently spoken insults cf. Xenophon *Cyropedia* 5.2.18 and Plutarch *Lycurgus* 12.4 (both probably idealizations fashioned on the basis of Greek practice), and Alexis *PCG* fr. 160. The banter in adesp. eleg. 27 συμπόται ἄνδρες ὁμήλικες]... χρῆ... σκώπτειν τοιαῦθ' οἷα γέλωτα φέρειν ('Fellow-drinkers, men of one age, ... we must make such jibes as bring laughter') could be spoken or sung.

are seized on as a possible hint at the original performance context of the *Hymn* itself, by whose sociological complex its meaning would be shaped. This approach is suggested both in the single best starting-point for analysis of the *Homeric Hymns*, Jenny Strauss Clay's *Politics of Olympus*, and in the recent commentary by Vergados. I cite Clay:

We must finally admit that we have very little firm knowledge about the circumstances surrounding the composition and performance of these major hymns. I would nevertheless venture to suggest that, like the account by Demodocus of Hephaestus's successful ruse against Ares and Aphrodite, they were presented at the conclusion of a feast (*dais*), or what was later called a *symposion*. Several passages in the *Hymn to Hermes*, to be discussed, corroborate this suggestion, although they may well be archaizing.

While improvisation forms the immediate *tertium comparationis* [at 55], the simile extends beyond it to draw a comparison between two different genres of music, on the level of form or performance and on the level of content. At first glance, the parallel seems unsuitable on both counts. Yet later on, when he first hears the lyre, Apollo similarly likens Hermes' playing to the 'skillful [sic] deeds of young men at feasts' (454). Evidently, the closest available analogy to Hermes' new mode of making music is improvisational verse accompanying symposiastic occasions.¹⁶

I cannot prove that the *Hymn* was not performed at symposia, and indeed there is a potential piece of evidence after the world of Demodocus for hexameter hymns being performed at symposia, namely the prayer in a *Homeric Hymn to Hestia* (24.4) to visit 'this household'.¹⁷ However, what is relevant in this context is to observe Clay acknowledging the paradoxical nature of the two comparisons, and yet simultaneously assuming ('evidently') that the poet's aim was to produce 'the closest available analogy'. But, as the settings constructed by lyric poems are often on close inspection not quite compatible with any plausible circumstances of performance, let alone reperformance, and as that disjunction – as other essays in this volume argue – is suggestive for (e.g.) lyric's play with the notion of representing unmediated emotional experience, so a more profitable approach in this case is not to collapse the terms of the paradox.

We have already seen the thematic and characterising relevance of crossing categories in the *Hymn to Hermes*. In the immediate build-up to his first song, Hermes 'found a tortoise and obtained immeasurable wealth' (24); he saw in the tortoise's swaying gait a seductive strut (28 σαῦλα) and lively dance-move (31 χοροῖτύπε); he transports the tortoise from living to dead, but also thereby from mute to vocal (38).¹⁸ All these paradoxes rest on attributing the tortoise to categories from which it is normally excluded, and those attributions rest on Hermes' instant imaginative leap from tortoise to lyre to lyre-playing *hetaira*. He calls the tortoise a σύμβολον

¹⁶ Clay (1989) 7, 108. Clay's inference is casually repeated by Depew (2000) 63-4, and with some caution at e.g. Nobili (2011) 205, Vergados (2013) 272.

¹⁷ This is not the place to rehearse in detail other evidence about the performance-context of hexameter hymns. Briefly, cf. Faulkner (2011) 16-19. The hymns' traditional background was proemic to epic, as demonstrated by (e.g.) their endings and the structure of Hesiod's *Theogony*. How readily the *Hymns* could be decoupled from that traditional context is a matter of speculation. Richardson (1974, 12) mentioned the Eleusinian Games as the primary context for the *Hymn to Demeter*, Burkert (1979) Polycrates' Pythodelia festival on Delos for the *Hymn to Apollo*; I argue that *H.Herm.* was primarily for Olympia in Thomas (2017a); Faulkner (2012) countenances a court-performance of *H.Aphr.*

¹⁸ On the connotations of σαῦλα see Thomas (2015).

(30), not least in the sense that Hermes' merchants used *symbola* – pairs of tallies whose tessellation is a matter of private knowledge, but which can form a continuum and allow trade.¹⁹ The tortoise and the *hetaira* are such a pair, brought together under the private code of Hermes' imagination.

All this, in Hermes' emblematic first actions, primes an audience for the possibility that Hermes, if anyone, could make a hymn resemble festive banter, without us having to suppose a rather unsuccessful attempt at illustrative comparison, or having to forget that we are dealing with a paradox. Furthermore, Hermes' ability to see a courtesan in a tortoise reflects the 'spirit' of the music the tortoiseshell lyre can produce under Hermes' patronage – a matter of laughter (29), playfulness (32, 40 ἄθυρμα), sexual allure (31 ἐρώεσσα), dancing and feasting. These qualities suit the imagined setting of a party where young men take turns at bantering, or at singing snatches of lyric poetry.²⁰ And these connotations continue in Apollo's heavily eroticized response to the instrument, and in Hermes' instructions about how to play: Apollo should 'hold the clear-voiced *hetaira* in his hands' (478); this *hetaira* is personified as able to talk (479) and even to teach the answer to questions (483-4); she is 'easily toyed with in delicate intimacy' (485 ῥεῖα συνηθείησιν ἄθυρομένη μαλακῆσιν).²¹

Granted, Hermes' lyre belongs with festivities and courtesans, and he passes on to it his own propensity for *kertomia* (cf. 338): these connections do not explain why Hermes' solo songs are compared to responses passing between multiple performers. However, even single songs do respond, intertextually. I have argued elsewhere that in the case of Hermes' first song the paradoxical comparison draws attention to the relation of *kertomia* between the *Hymn to Hermes* and the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*. To summarize: the younger 'sibling' text cheekily steals ideas from the older with ulterior motives, and manipulates what it does steal; initially the theft is quite polemical, as the *Hymn to Hermes* reworks all Apollo's signs of precocity to his disadvantage, but eventually there is a willingness to reach peaceful and friendly coexistence. This is very much like the relationship of the brothers – a pair of young males competing over social influence – in whose honour each hymn was composed, and explains how the *Hymn to Hermes* can say that a hymn is like the bantering response in a capping contest, which leads beneath the surface of antagonism to a firmer social bond.²²

Hermes' second song is also responding intertextually, to Hesiod's *Theogony*. The description at lines 427-8 (θεοὺς καὶ Γαῖαν ἐρεμνήν | ὡς τὰ πρῶτα γέγοντο καὶ ὡς λάχε μοῖραν ἕκαστος; already quoted with translation in the section 'Hymnic Banter') recalls the phrasing of *Theogony* 108-12, which also contains ὡς τὰ πρῶτα... γέγοντο, the unusual collocation θεοὶ καὶ γαῖα, and reference to division of honours; this allusion makes particular sense given the soothing effect of Hermes' song on Apollo's angst – a power whose classic statement comes

¹⁹ For *symbola* in this sense see Gauthier (1972) 62-89.

²⁰ For 'play' in the symposium see Ferrari (1988) 221, Collins (2004) 63-83. Hermes strictly invents only the tortoiseshell lyre, but foresees that it can be used in choral contexts (31, 481) where one would expect the louder wooden *kithara*. I therefore take it to be emblematic of all lyres, within the terms of the *Hymn*.

²¹ Apollo's response: 420-2 γέλασσε, γηθήσας, ἐρατή, ἴμερος; 434 ἔρος, 449 ἔρωτα, 455 ἐρατόν. I have assumed the emendation ἐπισταμένην in 479.

²² There are also parallels of phrasing, especially in the sections of the two hymns which are about Onchestos (*H.Ap.* 223-38, *H.Herm.* 87-93, 185-211) – itself a very remarkable coincidence which needs explaining. See further Thomas (2017), where it is the treatment of sympotic bantering and ἐνδέξια ἔργα which is done all too briefly: that essay and this are (partly) complementary.

just before at *Theogony* 98-103.²³ A more playful connection is that Hermes' choice of Mnemosyne for first place constructs a 'future reflexive' allusion to Hesiod's choice of the Muses: the hymnist alludes to an earlier work, while symbolically suggesting that his own work is a sort of 'parent', set well before Hesiod's day.²⁴ Hermes orders his theogony κατὰ πρέσβιν – by 'seniority' (431): this is not how Hesiod proceeded through the family tree, and draws attention to Hermes' own negotiation of his position within the Olympian family, with references to the gods' innate characters and set prerogatives (431, 428) which, one can imagine, papered over the fact that he was in the process of changing Apollo's prerogatives. Thus both intertextually and in its own right Hermes' song has a deeper analogy to games of self-assertion in a sympotic context, while remaining at first glance paradoxically different to them.

Configuring the Erotic and the Laudatory

So far I have examined two passages, which make a pair of related cross-generic connections – from hymn to sympotic flyting, and from theogony to lyric *skolia* of the capping kind. Both forge a link between praise of the gods and humorous antagonism. A related link arises after this, in Hermes' list of possible settings for lyre-music when he is advising Apollo on how to use the instrument (480-2):

εὐκηλος μὲν ἔπειτα φέρειν ἐς δαῖτα θάλειαν
καὶ χορὸν ἱμερόεντα καὶ ἐς φιλοκυδέα κῶμον,
εὐφροσύνην νυκτός τε καὶ ἡματος.

Hereafter, free from all care, take her to the rich banquet and gorgeous dance, and to the celebratory revel – she will bring good cheer by both day and night.

Hermes advertises the instrument's versatility – day and night, *dais* and chorus and *komos*. The three occasions mentioned are all underspecified as generic markers: *dais* covers a notoriously wide range of contexts for sharing food, from small gatherings to state festivals; 'choral lyric' comes in a bewildering number of forms; and *komos*, on which I shall focus, refers to various celebratory contexts for male singing, principally an advanced stage in/after a symposium, and the celebration – not necessarily drunken – of an athletic victory.²⁵ Here the surrounding personification of the lyre as courtesan (see text at n.21) ensures that the late-sympotic *komos* comes to mind, so that Hermes casts a future Apollo as inebriated and undignified, rather like the satyrs outside Althaea's house with *barbitoi* at Euripides *Cyclops* 40.²⁶ However φιλοκυδέος simultaneously connects the *komos* to *kudos*, a word whose semantic hubs are success and the pride it induces. The adjective therefore activates the epinician sense of *komos*, which Apollo regularly oversaw at or after the Pythia. Hermes thus poises the *komos* between its two main meanings, which are again typical contexts for banter and for praise-poetry.

Compared to the preceding similes, this ambivalence about *komos* is not so idiosyncratic. Pindar too plays with the two senses of the word in manifold ways.²⁷ The two contexts for lyre-

²³ The allusion to *Th.* 108-12 is noted in e.g. West (1966) 190. For 98-103 see Richardson (2010) 206.

²⁴ For the concept of 'future reflexive' allusions see Barchiesi (1993).

²⁵ For *dais* see e.g. Budelmann (2012), *LfgRE* s.v. For *komos* see Budelmann (2012) and Agócs (2012) with further bibliography.

²⁶ For lyres at late-sympotic *komoi* see also Lissarrague (1990) figs. 2, 104.

²⁷ See Agócs (2012): at times, the epinician performance is a *komos*; at times it is presented metaphorically in terms of a late-sympotic *komos*; at times it is contrasted with such a *komos*, and so

music have a linguistic bridge, and we do not need Hermes specifically to make the connection work. Similarly, Hermes applies to choral lyric the formulaic epithet ἡμερόεντα ('gorgeous'), which has full semantic weight in all six of its early epic uses.²⁸ Hence the arena of choral lyric, in which a dominant role was played by hymns at public festivals, is imbued with eroticism. The connection this time is a standard one, though given a particular colour in *this* context thanks to the recurrent figuration of Hermes' lyre as providing the soundtrack of courtesans.

These lines are, as it were, Hermes' own brief 'Companion to Greek Lyric'. He does not separate the erotic focus of sympotic or post-sympotic song from the laudatory functions of epinicia and choral hymns, nor even present them as distant points on a continuum in one or more dimensions, but presents them as fused together. The hymnist has prepared us for this with two passages which related sympotic and laudatory forms in a paradoxical and 'Hermetic' way; now Hermes normalizes that interpenetration, by revealing through a formula and through a calculated ambiguity with parallels elsewhere (in Pindar) that we already knew something of how the lyre's characteristics cross contexts.

Under Which Lyre?

The *Hymn to Hermes* was an inspiration for W. H. Auden's 1946 poem 'Under Which Lyre', which casts Hermes and Apollo as opposing forces in post-war Harvard. 'Pompous Apollo' governs the bureaucrats and oh-so-practical social scientists, and favours 'over-Whitmanated' lyrics about mundane, feel-good topics ('extol the doughnut...'); meanwhile 'precocious Hermes' leads the way for the wits and individualists.

Related by antithesis,
A compromise between us is
Impossible;
Respect perhaps but friendship never:
Falstaff the fool confronts forever
The prig Prince Hal.²⁹

I mention Auden's reimagination of the myth, where Hermes' lyre and Apollo's have irreconcilable traits, to focus our attention on whether the *Hymn to Hermes* prompts an audience to circumscribe Hermes' attitude to lyric genre as a thing of the past, now superseded under Apollo's very different governance. Or is the *Hymn* a 'textual event' in the sense that it invites an audience to reshape their perceptions of lyric categories? In my view, the *Hymn* does imply, in contrast to Auden, that Hermes is too good a negotiator for his thumbprints not to stay on the lyre long after he has handed it to Apollo.

Again I shall be brief since I have argued this point more extensively, though not with the present focus on lyric genres, in Thomas (2017) 75-81. The key evidence is a game that

on. *Pythian* 5.22-3 τόνδε κῶμον ἀνέρων, Ἀπολλώνιον ἄθυρμα ('this *komos* of men, an Apollonian toy') adds to this play on *komos* a reference to ἄθυρμα, as Hermes adds that one should ἀθύρειν the lyre gently. See also Carey (2009) 31-2 on the two ancient senses of ἐγκώμιον, 'encomium' and 'drinking-song'.

²⁸ At *Il.* 18.603 the dancers are mixed youths and girls, at *Od.* 18.194 the Graces, at *H.Hom.* 6.13 the gods including the bejewelled Horai, at *Sc.* 280 a girls' hymenaeal chorus; at *Hes. Th.* 7-8, where the formula is modified, it applies to the Muses' dance (accompanied at 63 by Himeros and the Graces). In every case, the adjective ἡμερόεις picks out the ἡμερος generated by desirable performers.

²⁹ Auden (1976) 178-83. I thank Robin Lane Fox for introducing me to this poem.

develops from when Apollo first hears the lyre until the end of the *Hymn*, i.e. beyond the moment where Hermes hands the lyre over. Apollo opens the game by hearing the lyre's sound as an ὄσσα (443), a prophetic voice. Hermes picks up on this idea and runs with it: in 482-6 the lyre is a not only a girl to stroke, but also a female who can answer questions – a hybrid of courtesan and Pythia. Apollo responds by echoing Hermes' phrasing when he later describes Delphic prophecy at 541-9.³⁰ Apollo's injection of the prophetic into Hermes' lyre might look like a takeover bid by the god of prophecy. But the game conversely drags Delphi towards Hermes. Apollo describes the oracle there as 'herding' humans (542 περιτροπέων) and even as open to deceiving them for profit (549). This constitutes an admission – however facetious – to a Hermetic side, given Hermes' deceptions, profiteering, and new role as a herdsman at this point in the poem. This is a remarkable change of emphasis from the unerring though uninterpretable Delphi of so many other sources.

An interesting reflection on the lyre's performative power to change the gods comes within Hermes' second song (already quoted in the section 'Hymnic Banter'), where at 427 he is said to be κραινῶν the gods with his theogony. The verb normally means 'ordain, ratify', and this sense can be defended with the advantage of hindsight as the narrator setting up the game just discussed, whereby the lyre is associated with prophecy. Hermes' song both advertises the lyre and describes his and Apollo's prerogatives: in this sense, we can infer that it involves a self-fulfilling prophecy of the fact that Apollo will take over the lyre, and in this sense, the song 'ordains' a change in Apollo.³¹ This change is not just one of prerogatives, however. As the *Hymn to Hermes* continues, contact with the lyre infects Apollo with a willingness to engage Hermes in verbal sport – an exchange of the outré metaphors of *kertomia*, as the narrator's comparison foretold – which leaves even Apollo's role at Delphi in an unresolved state of disconcerting strangeness at the end of the *Hymn*.

Conclusions

The *Hymn to Hermes* compares a half-formed hymn and a fully-formed theogony to sympotic games – to banter and to *skolia*, which could both take place to the lyre. One approach has been to take the fundamental similarity as being the *Hymn's* putative performative context at symposia, while brushing aside the marked dissimilarities. But the latter offends against Hermes, whom the poem shows to be a master of paradox and transformative imagination. (A tortoise is like a courtesan who is like the Pythia...) I therefore took a more circuitous but hopefully more Hermetic hermeneutic path.

No seal is closed off to Hermes, including those between genres. The two paradoxical comparisons are typical of his ability to create a passage without destroying normal boundaries, and they thrive on obvious discrepancies in respect of distinctions recognized at the time (though not articulated as such) between lyric genres – distinctions in terms of content, mode of performance, size of audience etc. Yet my approach also revealed, beneath the surface, a degree of similarity in the comparisons: the *Hymn to Hermes* is like a capping-performance towards the *Hymn to Apollo*, and Hermes' second song is like one towards Hesiod's *Theogony*, in that both are a form of competitive bonding with Apollo which involves delimiting his status.

³⁰ Both passages are delineated into positive then negative cases, using similar indefinite subordinate clauses, and include shared stems such as ἐπεείνεν ('ask', 483, 487, 547) and μάψ ('in vain', 488, 546).

³¹ Previous scholarship, failing to see this approach, has tried emending κραινῶν, or has accepted Hesychius' claim that the verb can mean 'honour' (κ.3922-4). There is no other evidence for the latter, which has a good chance of deriving from a banal attempt to make sense of our passage.

Pindar too understood that praise in the epinician *komos* is linguistically connected to erotic banter among komasts, and epic had long mentioned the sex-appeal of young choral dancers. So though it at first appeared that such connections were peculiar to Hermes, the hymnist allows an audience to realise that of course the worlds of praise-poetry and of courtesans at parties are not totally removed. Even Apollo gets caught up in the exchange of banter and reimagining when he takes over the lyre: ‘I raise you “Delphi is like you”, Hermes!’ The two gods conspire in a verbal game which gives the lie to apparent distinctions such as public and private, dignified and playful, religious and erotic, Apolline and Hermetic. Apollo’s first encounter with lyric is presented as having been formative for his outlook and interests. And hence the audience is prompted to ponder what kind of formative event Hermes’ songs can be for them.

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