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Source: *Mnemosyne*, Fourth Series, Vol. 53, Fasc. 2 (Apr., 2000), pp. 148-163
Published by: BRILL
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/4433083
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HERMES AND APOLLO AT ONCHESTOS IN THE *HOMERIC HYMN TO HERMES*: THE POETICS AND PERFORMANCE OF PROVERBIAL COMMUNICATION

BY

YANNIS Z. TZIFOPOULOS

τὸν δὲ γέρων ἐνόησε δέμων ἀνθοῦσαν ἀλωὴν
ἱέμενον πεδίον δὲ δι' Ὀγχηστὸν λεχεποίην·
τὸν πρότερος προσέφη Μαίης ἐρικυδέος υἱός·
ὦ γέρον, ὥστε φυτὰ σκάπτεις ἐπικαμπύλα κᾶλα,
ἢ πολυοινήσεις εὖτ' ἂν τάδε πάντα φέρῃσι·
καί τε ἰδὼν μὴ ἰδὼν εἶναι καὶ κωφὸς ἀκούσας,
καὶ σιγᾶν, ὅτε μή τι καταβλάπτῃ τὸ σὸν αὐτοῦ.
Τόσσον φὰς συνέσευε βοῶν ἴφθιμα κάρηνα.
Hymn to Hermes 87-94[1])

The baby-god Hermes, after the invention of the lyre and his elaborate *mechane* to cover his and the cattle's tracks, drives Apollo's cattle from their pasture in Pieria to a hiding place in the Peloponnese, in a cave by the bank of Alpheios. Approximately halfway there, at Onchestos, Hermes' theft is witnessed by an anonymous old man, the only human character present in the *Hymn*. Hermes addresses him first (lines 90-3) and without any reaction whatsoever from the old man he moves on to his destination. These four lines constitute a puzzle, especially when this meeting is compared, as the narrative requires, with the one the old man has with Apollo a few lines later, where the old man is 'metamorphosed'. It is not only the textual difficulties of the Onchestos episode, but the cryptic and ambivalent nature of both Hermes' and the old man's speech. In her convincing and definitive interpretation of the *Hymn to Hermes*, J.S.

1) The text of the Homeric *Hymn to Hermes* is: T.W. Allen, *Homeri Opera*, vol. 5 (Oxford 1912); F. Càssola, *Inni omerici* (Milan 1975), and T.W. Allen, W.R. Halliday, and E.E. Sikes (eds.), *The Homeric Hymns* (Oxford 1936) (hereafter AHS) were also consulted, as well as the readings J.S. Clay has proposed for certain passages in: *The Politics of Olympus. Form and Meaning in the Major Homeric Hymns* (Princeton 1989), 95-151 (hereafter Clay); my debt to her persuasive interpretation of the *Hymn* is evident throughout.

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Clay (106) argued that: "Speech, insofar as it involves communication or mediation between individuals, belongs to Hermes' domain. But the rhetoric of Hermes is of a peculiar sort; persuasive, seductive, and deceptive, it is characteristically ambiguous and riddling, concealing as much as revealing, and abounding in double and ulterior meanings."

And yet, this peculiarity of Hermes' *logos* is nothing else,[2]) but the intrinsic characteristic of wisdom expressions whose polysemy and ambivalence are exploited by the poet, in order to highlight another *time* or expertise of the new god: Hermes is also a master of manipulating and controlling proverbial wisdom. The fact that the poet employs a proverb and a gnome in the two Onchestos episodes, and three more 'proverbial moments' in the narrative of the *Hymn to Hermes* cannot be a coincidence. Proverbial wisdom is a striking and significant feature of the narrative of the *Hymn to Hermes* that has been overlooked so far. As A. Lardinois has shown in his thorough and important study of *gnomai* in Homer and archaic poetry, wisdom expressions in general are not as common in the *Homeric Hymns*, because speeches are very few, and encounters between gods and humans are rare in this genre.[3]) In the *Hymn to Hermes*, however, only Maia and Zeus are not 'privileged' to use or be the addressees of a wisdom expression, no doubt because parents and child know each other very well, whereas the *Hymn's* 'strangers',[4])

2) H. Görgemanns, *Rhetorik und Poetik im homerischen Hermeshymnus*, in: H. Görgemanns and E.A. Schmidt (eds.), *Studien zum antiken Epos* (Meisenheim 1976), 113-28, discusses the sophistic elements in the *Hymn*, in order to create a chronological criterion. D.T. Steiner, *The Tyrant's Writ.* Myths and Images of Writing in Ancient Greece (Princeton 1994), 40-9 points out Hermes' mastery in transforming "objects into tokens and tokens into encoded signs in a positive light" (48), which reveals a system of exchange and trade "motivated by profit" (49). C. Coulet, *Communiquer en Grèce ancienne* (Paris 1996), trans. in modern Grk. by K. Tsitarakis (Athens 1998), 251-4, based on L. Kahn's work, offers a summary of the various traits of the communications-god, among them his rhetorical skills. Unfortunately, I was not able to see: T. Van Nortwick, *The Homeric Hymn to Hermes: A Study in Early Greek Hexameter Style*, Diss. (Stanford University 1975); L. Kahn, *Hermès passe ou les ambiguïtés de la communication* (Paris 1978); and S.C. Shelmerdine, *The 'Homeric Hymn to Hermes': A Commentary (1-114) with Introduction*, Diss. (University of Michigan 1981).

3) *Wisdom in Context: the Use of Gnomic Statements in Archaic Greek Poetry*, Diss. (Princeton University 1995), 168 and 170. Without counting proverbs, only ten *gnomai* are found in the *Hymns* (168-71, 296).

4) According to W. Burkert, *Greek Religion*, trans. J. Raffan (Cambridge, Mass. 1985), 156-9, 158: "[s]uccessful communication with enemies and strangers is the

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Hermes, Apollo, and the old man, employ and are the addressees of wisdom expressions: in each of the two Onchestos episodes first Hermes, and then the old man, imitating the baby-god, resort to wisdom expressions, as is the case in Hermes' address to the tortoise, and also in the exchanges Hermes has with his brother Apollo.

In what follows the five instances where proverbial expressions occur, and in particular, the encounters of the only human in the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes* with both Hermes and Apollo at Onchestos, are examined and compared in terms of their structure and context within the *Hymn*. The narrative strategy of the poet's use of proverbial wisdom is not simply to amuse, but to show another characteristic of the new god, i.e. Hermes' control and manipulation of a special kind of speech, and its poetics and performance. For, within the narrative of the *Hymn to Hermes* communication by proverbs—didacticism through authoritative speech that is polysemous, and performance of wisdom expressions—is part of the rhetoric the three protagonists consistently employ in an antagonistic way, so that the relations to one another surface in a vivid and dramatic way.

Before discussing the Onchestos episodes and their difficulties, it is necessary to briefly repeat and clarify some assumptions apropos proverbial wisdom which are taken for granted in the following discussion and which in recent years have been articulated in the fundamental work of R.P. Martin,[5]) J. Russo,[6]) and A. Lardinois.[7]) Their important contributions have enriched our critical approach to, and

work of Hermes, and the interpreter, *hermeneus*, owes his name to the god. The allegorical equation of Hermes with speech *tout court, logos*, is reflected in our words hermeneutics"; but for Hermes' activity by the Alpheios, which Burkert and others interpret as Hermes' 'invention of sacrifice' (157), see Clay's (116-127) convincing arguments that the episode should be understood as a *dais*, a feast for the twelve Olympians, that vividly betrays Hermes' identity crisis in relation to whether he is mortal or immortal.

5) *Hesiod's Metanastic Poetics*, Ramus 21.1 (1992), 11-33; *The Seven Sages as Performers of Wisdom*, in: C. Dougherty and L. Kurke (eds.), *Cultural Poetics in Archaic Greece*. Cult, Performance, Politics (Cambridge 1993), 108-28, esp. 115-9; and *Similes and Performance*, in: E. Bakker & A. Kahane (eds.), *Written Voices, Spoken Signs*. Tradition, Performance and the Epic Text (Cambridge, Mass. 1997), 138-52.

6) *The Poetics of the Ancient Greek Proverb*, Journal of Folklore Research 20 (1983), 121-30; and *Prose Genres for the Performance of Traditional Wisdom in Ancient Greece: Proverb, Maxim, Apophthegm*, in: L. Edmunds & R.W. Wallace (eds.), *Poet, Public, and Performance in Ancient Greece* (Baltimore and London 1997), 49-64, 143-9.

7) Above n. 3, and *Modern Paroemiology and the Use of Gnomai in Homer's* Iliad, CP 92 (1997), 213-34.

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sensitized our appreciation of, the oral and elusive genre of wisdom literature, and its poetics and performance, by borrowing models of analysis from modern paroemiology, ethno- and socio-linguistics, anthropology and ethnography, and by applying them to ancient Greek literature with rewarding results.

In Greek literature many terms are found that apparently allude to different sub-genres of wisdom literature, παροιμία, γνώμη, ἀπόφθεγμα, αἶνος, ὑποθήκη, etc., all of them formally distinguished with varying degrees of success. In terms of their function, however, within a narrative, especially the proverb and the gnome are used in exactly the same way, i.e. to persuade the listener(s) to act accordingly.[8]) By expressing generalizing and therefore authoritative ideas, these statements belong to the collective wisdom and accumulated experience of the society at large, and constitute part of the society's cultural heritage, because they present solutions which in the past have been proven successful and therefore their validity is universally acknowledged. The insertion of this authoritative text is almost always signaled intentionally in the text, as if it were a quotation, by expressions like τὸ λεγόμενον, or presumably, if no textual indication is present as is the case in poetic texts, by the performer's change of voice or even an appropriate gesture.[9]) These statements, however, by being generalized, are inherently ambiguous, because their meaning, function and purpose is conditioned by the context—discourse, narrative, social—and therefore their function admits more than one interpretation.[10]) This performance of proverbial wisdom, "the optional and impromptu creative response to an important social and psychological situation", as Russo (n. 5, 51) has recently defined it, is an additional narrative device that the poet of the *Hymn to Hermes* employs five times, in order to show the functional and interpretative polysemy proverbial wisdom generates, through which he presents the dynamics of its poetics and performance within a narrative. These expressions, then, allow for a variety of

8) Lardinois (above n. 3), 1-41, and (above n. 7); and Russo, *Prose Genres* (above n. 6), 50-2, 55-60, and notes 6, 14, and 20 with earlier bibliography.

9) Russo (above n. 6), 53.

10) For applications of this contextual approach see Lardinois (above n. 3), 42-167, and (above n. 6); Russo (above n. 6); and Y.Z. Tzifopoulos, *Proverbs in Menander's* Dyskolos: *the Rhetoric of Popular Wisdom*, Mnemosyne 48 (1995), 169-77.

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interpretations within the narrative of the *Hymn to Hermes* in terms of their form, the individual(s) employing them, and the creative reaction to them. The correspondence of the wisdom expression to the particular narrative context requires interpretation on the part of the addressee, and thus the protagonists are compared and contrasted to one another in terms of their abilities, or lack thereof, to communicate by, manipulate, and interpret wisdom expressions.

This brief overview only hints at the ramifications that proverbial wisdom entails when it occurs within a narrative, which will be further elaborated by the discussion of the five instances in the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes*. In the very first speech of the *Hymn*, Hermes addresses the tortoise in joyous, but riddling words (30-38), and in line 36 he utters the proverb: οἴκοι βέλτερον εἶναι, ἐπεὶ βλαβερὸν τὸ θύρηφιν,[11]) which occurs verbatim in Hesiod *WD* 365. Literally, the proverb declares that it is better to stay inside, because being outside the house is dangerous. This straightforward meaning, however, is rendered ambiguous in this context, because of Hermes' own comment on the proverb in lines 37-8: Hermes changes the subject and foreshadows a new τιμή for the tortoise from now on, i.e. after Hermes' intervention in the tortoise's life—actually presenting an aition for the tortoise's usefulness: while alive, tortoises are used as charms against evil spells, but after death, thanks to Hermes' inventiveness, their shells are used as the lyre's sounding board and sing charmingly (37-8). Apparently, the proverb is employed by Hermes only as a bait to persuade the tortoise to go inside the cave, but with Hermes also inside the danger is deadly. This, as Clay aptly put it (106), is "Hermes' seductive rhetoric, full of flattery and riddling paradox [to] mask the violence of these metamorphoses [sc. the tortoise's]".

Yet, there is another level of meaning with the proverb and the situation of the tortoise, as lines 37-8 suggest. Inside and outside appear to be identified with safety and danger, respectively. While alive and outdoors the tortoise's usefulness is to avert evil spells, whereas, when dead and indoors, *she* becomes the enchanter (Clay 106). More importantly, however, once the deterrent of evil spells

11) *Corpus Paroemiographorum Graecorum* (hereafter *CPG*), eds. E. Leutsch and F.G. Schneidewin, 1-2 (Göttingen 1839, 1851), Diogenianos VII.35; Apostolios XII.38, 45.

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becomes itself the spell, then the enchantment *can no longer* be averted. The issue, therefore, of life and death raised by the proverb appears to be irrelevant. According to M.L. West, the context should be the guide for understanding this expression, and his translation: "it is preferable to have *things* safely inside, for what is outside is at risk (emphasis mine)" suits the context admirably.[12]) To Hermes the tortoise is a thing with two functions: to avert spells and now, thanks to his ingenuity, to cast spells with no remedy. Of the two, as the comparative βέλτερον indicates, Hermes chooses or rather prefers the tortoise's latter function, because eventually the tortoise-lyre will save the day for him. Even this early in the narrative, Hermes anticipates the confrontation with his brother Apollo, and shows his resolve to utilize every weapon possible to reach his goal. At the same time, being the playful baby-god that he is,[13]) and because of the proverb's relevance to other similar circumstances, Hermes may also allude to other things that are in danger by being outdoors, namely Apollo's cattle, which, because outdoors, will soon suffer similar transformations, two of them in a violent way, similar to the tortoise. Hermes' violence in killing the tortoise and creating a lyre out of her shell appears to be only incidental.[14]) It is disguised not only by the swiftness of the god's action and therefore of the narrative, but also by its presentation as the new, and more important honor the tortoise receives from Hermes. In the very first speech of the baby-god, the poet in a masterstroke employs a proverbial expression whose ambiguity presents the many layers of interpretation, but more importantly alerts the audience to a distinguishing feature in the speech of the new god that sets the tone.

In like manner, Hermes approaches the old man at Onchestos. Structurally, the first episode at Onchestos occurs during Hermes' accomplishing the second *klyton ergon* and is framed by the speech

12) M.L. West, *Hesiod Works and Days*, edited with Prolegomena and Commentary (Oxford 1978), 248.

13) W.G. Thalmann, *Conventions of Form and Thought in Early Greek Epic Poetry* (Baltimore and London 1984), 154-6 discusses elements of parody in the *Hymn* which is "a jeu d'esprit that plays on poetic conventions, including the habit of self-reflection" (154). Similarly, C.A. Sowa, *Traditional Themes and the Homeric Hymns* (Chicago 1984), 157, 161. The playful spirit, however, throughout the *Hymn* is unmistakably serious, as Hermes' stakes are high.

14) S.C. Shelmerdine, *Hermes and the Tortoise: a Prelude to Cult*, GRBS 25 (1984), 201-8 detects language appropriate to the ritual of sacrifice.

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to the tortoise and the invention of the lyre, and the *dais* in the cave by the Alpheios. Hermes' riddling speech to the old man is only the second time the baby-god is speaking in *oratio recta* in the narrative, and as J.S. Clay has pointed out, it is parallel to and resembles the god's first speech to the tortoise (cp. lines 91-3 and 36-8). The parallels between the first two speeches of Hermes are indeed intriguing, but extend beyond diction. In both speeches the real target is Apollo; metamorphoses occur through Hermes' art, or simply his speech; and Hermes employs generalizing statements that intrigue and involve both the addressees and the audience, as their immediate and wider contexts allow more than one interpretation.

This second speech of Hermes, quoted in the beginning, consists of only four hexameters with many textual difficulties which Clay (115-6 and n. 69) has solved in a meaningful way[15]):

ὦ γέρον, ὥστε φυτὰ σκάπτεις ἐπικαμπύλα κᾶλα,
ἦ πολυοινήσεις εὖτ' ἄν τάδε πάντα φέρῃσι·
καί τε ἰδὼν μὴ ἰδὼν εἶναι καὶ κωφὸς ἀκούσας,
καὶ σιγᾶν, ὅτε μή τι καταβλάπτῃ τὸ σὸν αὐτοῦ.

'Old man, you dig curved logs as if they were plants; you'll have lots of wine when all these bear (i.e., never!). Seeing, be unseeing and deaf, having heard, and keep silent, when no harm is done to your interest.'

According to Clay (115), the first couplet is Hermes' sarcastic comment on the harvest of the hard working old man, and the second, being compared to Hermes' riddling speech to the tortoise, highlights the old man's "bluntness of intellect and a total absence of curiosity", as he is revealed, perhaps because he does not reply, "too slow-witted to comprehend Hermes' riddling warning (87-94)". Thus, the old man's activity and behavior "seems to represent a primitive phase of human existence, preagricultural, prepastoral, and prepolitical" (115 and n. 71).

Lines 92-3, however, constitute an extended form of a proverb. What is interesting is that the proverbial statement of Hermes includes the three ways humans perceive reality and react to it:

15) Allen (above n. 1) and AHS printed a lacuna between lines 91 and 92 on Groddeck's assumption, for which E. White proposed: εἴκε πίθῃ μάλα περ μεμνημένος ἐν φρεσὶ σῇσι.

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sight, hearing and speech, which are a sine qua non for communication. Clay (116) rightly directed attention to Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound* 447-48, where the context seems to be analogous. This, however, is not the only instance of the expression in Aeschylus.[16]) Albeit in a somewhat different context than that in the *Hymn to Hermes*, Aeschylus employs the proverb three more times, in the *Agamemnon* 1623 which is extended in 1624 by another proverb,[17]) in the *Seven Against Thebes* 246, and in a slightly different form in the *Choephoroi* 882, whereas by Demosthenes' time (*Against Aristogiton* 25.89) the expression seems to have become a commonplace. In all these instances the expression is applied to pertinent situations, and is used to question, affirm, or comment on a person's behavior: shut (or do not shut) your eyes to what you see, and turn (or do not turn) a deaf ear to what you hear, and be silent, i.e. 'play (or do not play) the fool and therefore show (no) mercy to a person.' When the old man's interests are not in danger, he should play the fool as to what he sees and hears and he should not open his mouth. The proverb's immediate context suggests that Hermes uses this authoritative dictum as a warning to the old man not to behave treacherously and not to double-cross him. What causes the ambiguity, however, is that Hermes cleverly does not offer any indication as to the person(s) towards whom the old man should behave in this manner: anybody, Apollo who soon, Hermes expects, will be visiting Onchestos, or even towards Hermes that has just issued this warning.[18]) Interestingly, the only person who does in fact 'play the fool' later on in the *Hymn* is none other than Hermes himself. In the confrontation between the two brothers in Maia's cave Hermes, perhaps remembering his advice to the old man, adopts this proverbial truth as his line of defense against Apollo's accusations and eventually gains access to Olympus, even if for a trial.

16) R. Strömberg, *Greek Proverbs*. A Collection of Proverbs and Proverbial Phrases Which are not Listed by the Ancient and Byzantine Paroemiographers (Göteborg 1954), 15 no. 2. For more repetition-patterns with an oxymoron, i.e. the predicate contradicting the verb see: D. Fehling, *Die Wiederholungsfiguren und ihr Gebrauch bei den Griechen vor Gorgias* (Berlin 1969), 290-1.

17) E. Fränkel, *Aeschylus Agamemnon*, vols. 1-3 (Oxford 1950), vol. 1, 190, vol. 3, 767-8 comments on the disagreement that the meaning of this expression has caused.

18) Epimenides' 'Cretans are always liars' is an analogous example: Epimenides, being a Cretan, lies about the Cretans' veracity.

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Again, as in the speech to the tortoise, the immediate context admits a straightforward interpretation, but only until the second episode at Onchestos between Apollo and the old man (185-212), where, what Hermes really meant and intended, is revealed by the old man's performance according to Hermes' proverbial warning. Once the baby-god is back in his cradle awaiting the results of his accomplishments, Apollo, passing through Onchestos in hot pursuit of the cattle's tracks, finds the old man by the road (παρὲξ ὁδοῦ 188), building his orchard, just as Hermes did. Apollo 'explains' to the old man that what has happened to him is a wonder (θαῦμα 196) and that he is in search for a man that did it (εἴ που ὄπωπας ἀνέρα 199-200). The old man's reply (202-211), who, as Clay put it (131), "has suddenly become garrulous, for Hermes' passage seems to have endowed him with speech", proves him an excellent student of Hermes. It is not speech in general with which Hermes endowed the old man, but Hermes' peculiar kind of speech: communicating by proverbs. The old man's speech falls into two parts: his maxim to Apollo in 202-5,[19]) and in 206-11 his interpretation of Hermes' proverb 'to play the fool'. To Apollo's amazement at the theft (196) and his question if he saw a man (199-200) the old man replies first with a generalized statement on seeing and its shortcomings as the only criterion to distinguish, among the many travelers, those with evil and those with good intentions—the elaborate expression in 203: πολλοὶ γὰρ ὁδὸν πρήσσουσιν ὁδῖται may allude to Hermes' control of roads and protection of passers-by—and he then proceeds to narrate what he saw. Apollo's amazement is caused by the fact that the dogs and the bull stayed behind, and the logical conclusion for him is that a man must have been responsible, whereas for the old man what is an unbelievable wonder is that he thought he saw a baby-boy, as he emphatically repeats three times (208, 209, 210).

This indeed is a metamorphosed old man, who, however, does perform according to Hermes' proverb, at least as he interprets it. In addition to being a γέρων (and γέροντες do philosophize), the old man shows the same cunning, craftiness, and ability in employing proverbs, as his teacher Hermes does. Furthermore, he also offers

19) Lardinois (above n. 3), 171.

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a vivid paradigm of how to behave according to proverbial wisdom. Hermes asked the old man to ignore what he saw and heard, and to keep his tongue, if his interests are not threatened. In turn, the old man counters Hermes' proverb with an extended maxim on seeing that corresponds both to the first part of Hermes' proverb—vision is a treacherous witness—and also to Apollo's question—did you see anywhere a man. There can be no question that the old man does not hold his tongue and reveals to Apollo what he saw, albeit not what he heard from Hermes, even though with an air of uncertainty and ambiguity, because of the maxim: what he saw is indeed difficult to believe (208). This is more than enough information for Apollo to realize not where his cattle are hidden, but who the culprit is, even though Apollo is not as good a student as the old man is in the novel way of communicating by proverbs. He insists on following the cattle's tracks all the way to Pylos (212-218), in order to discover them himself, but instead, exacerbated and utterly helpless, Apollo finally admits in a monologue his utter aporia of understanding, explaining, interpreting (219-226), and turns towards the direction the old man implied and Hermes longed for all along: the solution lies in Maia's cave in Kyllene (Clay 131).

Communicating by proverbs is ambiguous and polysemous, and special skills are required for it, as the old man's performance shows. Herein may lie the reason for the absence in the *Hymn to Hermes* of the old man's punishment by Hermes, despite of his revelations to Apollo, that is found in a Hesiodic version of this episode.[20]) The old man in that version is named Battos whose trustworthiness Hermes in disguise tested and whom he turned into a rock upon discovering Battos' double-crossing. The Onchestos episode must have been part of the tradition, and perhaps Apollo's use of the epithet βατοδρόπε 'berry-picker' (190) may be an allusion to that version.[21]) The narrative strategy, however, of the poet of the *Hymn to Hermes* is different. In both episodes the poet employs wisdom expressions which are closely interrelated and their interpretation

20) *Catalogue of Women* fr. 256 M-W from Antoninus Liberalis 23; the story is also told by Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 2.687-707. For earlier interpretations of the incident see Clay 114 with notes 64-8.

21) Sowa (above n. 13), 163. Clay (114) emphasizes that the hymnist's deliberate "omission of Hermes' revenge completely alters the meaning of the incident".

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interdependent. The reason for the inconsistency between the Hesiodic version and the narrative of the *Hymn to Hermes* must be none other than that the old man performs masterfully and according to Hermes' proverbial instructions, helping and collaborating with the god. As the old man interprets the god's proverbial warning, it means something like: 'do tell to whoever asks you so much that you send him directly to me to get his cattle!'; otherwise, the old man would certainly have been punished by Hermes, especially because this incident was part of the tradition, as the Hesiodic version indicates. In other words, the old man is doing what he was told to do, not simply repeating or mimicking Hermes' proverb, but elaborating on the underlining message of Hermes' riddling expression and Apollo's question with another creation of his own. After all, Hermes wants to be discovered by his brother, and the old man's instructions lead Apollo directly not to the cattle, but to Maia's cave. The ambiguity of proverbial wisdom arises from the immediate and the wider narrative context, but the two proverbial moments that are interwoven no doubt require that they be viewed and interpreted side by side. In the Onchestos episodes the poet "transforms a local tale of limited interest into a dramatic account of the brutish status of human life prior to the advent of Hermes" (Clay 116). Through the representative of the human race the poet presents a quick lesson by Hermes to the old man on the potential of the new way of communication by a special kind of speech, proverbial wisdom.

Hermes' teaching through performance of the new sort of speech does not end at Onchestos, because Apollo must also acknowledge this as Hermes' τιμή, and for that two more proverbial moments occur in the *Hymn to Hermes*. The first time the two brothers meet in Maia's cave, Apollo finally comes face to face with the thief and tries to intimidate him (254-9), to which Hermes responds by 'playing the fool', performing, as it were, his own advice to the old man at Onchestos. Hermes' posture makes Apollo laugh, and in his reply Apollo makes the first concession to Hermes. First, he offers a vivid and negative description of Hermes the thief and his accomplishments (282-8), and then by conceding to Hermes the prerogative of thievery he again threatens use of force if the baby-god does not come down from the crib (289-292). In his description of the consequences of Hermes' activities Apollo, probably influenced by the

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old man, attempts to use a proverb (282-5): Hermes' entrance into houses, and passage through them forces the occupants to literally sit on the ground (ἐπ' οὔδεϊ φῶτα καθίσσαι 284), because Hermes steals everything down to the last stool.[22]) This is the first instance in the *Hymn*, where the proverb's content and metrical form, the paroemiac, coincide, and one genre is embedded in the other.[23]) Either an original creation or an already known expression, the proverb is employed by Apollo in a way that shows Apollo's knowledge of this genre and its conventions, since with the expression Apollo legitimizes, as it were, his description of Hermes' accomplishments. At the same time, however, the god admits that the best way to describe Hermes' activities is through proverbs, the sort of speech that is peculiar to this god throughout the *Hymn*. The immediate context implies that the proverb is meant by Apollo either in a literal or a metaphorical way (282-92), but the addressee, Hermes interprets it in his own way. A few lines later (294-8), Apollo attempts to use force and picks up Hermes out of the crib in order to carry him outside the cave. Hermes' reaction is simple and reveals to Apollo another way of interpreting the proverb Apollo has just used. He farts loudly and then sneezes, so as to force Apollo to put him on the ground. Although not directly related with the proverb just heard from Apollo, it cannot be a coincidence that Hermes behaves according to a literal interpretation of the proverb and plays with the ambiguity, inherent in proverbs, and Apollo's expectations. Hermes forces Apollo to put him on the ground, whereas just a

22) AHS 320; and Strömberg (above n. 15), 50 no. 1.

23) Fehling (above n. 15), 166 discusses briefly the repetition-patterns that occur in the second half of the hexameter, most of them paroemiac in genre and in meter, for which, however, see G. Nagy's review in AJP 92 (1972), 730-3. For the Indo-European origin and antiquity of the paroemiac and its gnomic content see J. Fernández Delgado, *La poesía sapiencial de Grecia arcaica y los orígenes del hexámetro*, Emerita 50 (1982), 151-73; J. Whatmough, *The Oldest Greek Paroemiac*, International Journal of Slavic Linguistics and Poetics 3 (1960) 150-1 has even proposed to read the inscriptions on the Linear B tablets An 35 and An 1 from Pylos as paroemiacs (M. Ventris and J. Chadwick, *Documents in Mycenaean Greek* [Cambridge 1956]). For Near-Eastern wisdom literature see West (above n. 12), 3-30; for Hesiod's rhetorical strategy of embedding proverbs see Martin, *Hesiod's* (above n. 5), 25-9; a similar strategy, a narrative created by proverbs, is portrayed in the painting 'The Netherlandish Proverbs (1559)' by Pieter Bruegel the Elder, now in the Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin: more than one hundred wisdom expressions are illustrated in vignettes, whose underlining theme is human weaknesses.

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few moments ago Apollo declared that this is Hermes' prerogative. Hermes is not the only one that forces men to sit on the ground, but Apollo too puts babies on the ground! Hermes upsets the validity of this generalized statement, used by Apollo for Hermes' activities, by forcing Apollo to perform accordingly. The inherent ambiguity of this thought-pattern, which implies a great turn over of a situation, may also be understood to apply to the turn over that is about to take place, as Hermes enters Olympus for the trial in front of Zeus, and the family feud begins the process of reconciliation.

The final instance of a gnomic moment betrays serious intention and straightforward and unmistakable interpretation. The most crucial issue to be resolved for a lasting peace between the two brothers is Apollo's prophetic powers. This is not an issue to play games with, and Hermes brings it up in his last speech (464-95). Apollo, beguiled by Hermes' playing the tortoise-lyre, has just finished conferring on Hermes honors and gifts (436-62). In turn, Hermes, μύθοισιν κερδαλέοισιν (463),[24]) replies positively to Apollo's offer for a settlement, but at the same time expresses a feeling of injustice at having been unfairly treated by Apollo who does not seem to realize Hermes' true nature. Hermes forthright professes that he does not resent the fact that from now on he will share his art with Apollo (αὐτὰρ ἐγώ σοι/τέχνης ἡμετέρης ἐπιβήμεναι οὔ τι μεγαίρω 464-5), as he is about to prove in the second part of his speech (475-95), and he then proceeds to describe the special relationship between Apollo and Zeus. Although this passage is wrought with difficulties, the manuscripts' reading of the lines in question seems preferable with the slight modification Clay (130 nn. 115, and 141) has proposed. For thus, Hermes is not denied his last use of a paroemiac in meter and in content, because, according to AHS (337), "[t]o make a gnome of Διὸς πάρα θέσφατα πάντα (ἐστί) would be too pompous for Hermes" (469-72)[25]):

24) For the formula see Clay 144-5 and n. 153.

25) Allen (above n. 1), and AHS change the punctuation of the manuscripts and print:

. . . φιλεῖ δέ σε μητίετα Ζεύς
ἐκ πάσης ὁσίης, ἔπορεν δέ τοι ἀγλαὰ δῶρα·
καὶ τιμὰς σὲ δέ φασι δαήμεναι ἐκ Διὸς ὀμφῆς
μαντείας θ' Ἑκάεργε Διὸς πάρα, θέσφατα πάντα·

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. . . φιλεῖ δέ σε μητίετα Ζεύς·
ἐκ πάσης ὁσίης ἔπορέν γέ τοι ἀγλαὰ δῶρα
καὶ τιμάς· σὲ δέ φασι δαήμεναι ἐκ Διὸς ὀμφῆς
μαντείας θ' 'Εκάεργε· Διὸς πάρα θέσφατα πάντα·

Although excessive pomposity is not a trait alien to Hermes (cp. his speech to Maia 162-81), nevertheless, Clay (130 n. 115) has already detected a somewhat envious sentiment in this part of Hermes' speech. Hermes' earlier show of magnanimity in sharing his art (464-5) and the subsequent description of the intimate relation between Apollo and Zeus, in which Hermes emphasizes Apollo's knowledge of Zeus' ὀμφή and μαντεία, certainly implies Hermes' masked accusation against Apollo that he is too jealous to share his supreme art, prophecy. Thus, Hermes' final wisdom expression, in form and content matching that of Apollo, is his last strategic move to make Apollo realize what he is after, a share in the γέρας of Apollo's communication, and to gain, through Apollo, Zeus' consent for this art, the peculiar kind of speech he has been performing in a variety of ways throughout the *Hymn.*

Hermes' complaint that he is not getting an equal share from Zeus as regards prophecy is answered by Apollo in the final speech of the Hymn (527-66) where Apollo appears to fully comprehend his baby-brother's nature: a god with no domain, exclusive to him, but sharing in the domains of the others by means of contact, passage and communication. One of the last gifts Hermes is endowed with by Apollo is the bee maidens oracle (550-66) that, in light of the foregoing discussion, is best suited to the special kind of speech Hermes has been performing. The bee maidens oracle's characteristics are almost identical to those of proverbial wisdom (560-6)[26]: it is a trickster's oracle that betrays the same playful ambiguity that is intrinsic to proverbial wisdom, as "successful consultation depends not on skill or art, but on positive omens" (Clay 147); and more importantly, an oracle that can be taught to mortals who, if they are lucky, may even hear Hermes' ὀμφή.

Although *paroimia* and Hermes were not explicitly associated by

26) For the bee maidens oracle see: S. Scheinberg, *The Bee Maidens of the Homeric* Hymn to Hermes, HSCP 83 (1979), 1-28; Clay 146-8; and J. Larson, *The Corycian Nymphs and the Bee Maidens of the Homeric* Hymn to Hermes, GRBS 36 (1995), 341-57.

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tradition, nevertheless the very word's probable etymology παρὰ + οἴμη implies some kind of relation with roads. According to a gloss in Hesychios, it was the son of Peisistratos, Hipparchos who introduced in Athens the herms on which he also inscribed *elegeia* (letter iota 783 s.v. Ἱππάρχειος Ἑρμῆς): Ἱππάρχειοι Ἑρμαῖ, ἃς ἀνέστησεν Ἵππαρχος στήλας ἐγγράψας εἰς αὐτὰς ἐλεγεῖα, ἐξ ὧν ἔμελλον βελτίους οἱ ἀναγινώσκοντες γίνεσθαι.[27]) Similarly, the paroemiographer Diogenianos (2nd century A.D.) in his introductory remarks on the association of the word with wisdom expressions relates among various explanations (*CPG* 1, 177-80):

> οἱ δὲ ἄνθρωποι, ὅσα κοινωφελῆ εὕρισκον, ταῦτα κατὰ λεωφόρους ὁδοὺς ἀνέγραφον ὑπὲρ τοῦ πλείονας ἐντυγχάνοντας τῆς ὠφελείας μεταλαμβάνειν· οὕτω καὶ τὰ τῶν σοφῶν ἀποφθέγματα γνωθῆναί φασι, καὶ τὰ Πυθαγορικὰ παραγγέλματα.

And the Byzantine paroemiographer Apostolios (15th century A.D.) basically repeating the same story offers more details (*CPG* 2, 237-8):

> παραοιμία καὶ παροιμία· ἤτοι τὸ παροδικὸν τρῖμμά τε καὶ διήγημα. ἐν γὰρ τῇ ἀρχῇ ἔτι τῶν τρίβων ἀσήμων οὐσῶν, διὰ τὸ τοὺς ὁδεύοντας μὴ ἀποκάμνειν τῷ μὴ γινώσκειν πόσον τῆς ὁδοῦ διήνυσαν καὶ τί λείπεται, τὰ νῦν προσαγορευόμενα μίλια πρὸς Ῥωμαίων, τότε σημεῖα καλούμενα, οἱ παλαιοὶ κατά τινας τῆς ὁδοῦ τόπους ἐτίθεσαν· καὶ τούτοις ἐπέγραφόν τινα ζητήματα. τοῦτο δὲ ἐποίουν δυοῖν ἕνεκεν, τοῦ τε γνωρίζειν τὸν ὁδεύοντα τῆς ὁδοῦ τὸ ποσόν, καὶ *τοῦ ἀναγινώσκοντα τὸ ἐπίγραμμα, καὶ περὶ τὴν τούτου σαφήνειαν καταγιγνόμενον καμάτου ἐπικουφίζεσθαι. περιέχει δὲ παίδευσιν ἠθῶν καὶ παθῶν ἐπανόρθωσιν καὶ τῶν πρακτέων πυκνὰς ὑποθήκας.*

Whatever the origin and trustworthiness of these late explications about the word *paroimia*, chances are that the paroemiographers were not drawing upon the *Hymn to Hermes*. The similarities, however, between their explications and the Onchestos episode are remarkable, as the old man at Onchestos, among other things, may also represent the living prototype of the latter-day 'talking' Herms

27) This information is accepted as a matter of fact by, among others, Burkert (above n. 4), 156: "The stone form was introduced in Athens about 520 by Hipparchos, the son of Pisistratus, to mark the midway points between the various Attic villages and the Athenian Agora . . .". Hesychios' gloss need not be an indication for the date of the *Hymn to Hermes*, for which see Thalmann (above n. 13), 230-1 n. 40; and Clay 100 n. 20.

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(παρὲξ ὁδοῦ 188). Hermes, the protector of anonymous travelers, and road markers, emerges, albeit implicitly, in the *Hymn to Hermes* as the master of a special kind of speech, proverbial wisdom. He is not only a trickster in deeds, but also in words, because Hermes loves to talk and he is good at it.[28]) Communication, in its broadest sense, as well as in the particular sort displayed in the *Hymn*, is the master trait of this new god that defies concrete definitions.

The hymnist's strategy to set Hermes in comparison and contrast to Apollo could not have been more successful, as Clay has argued (101-2). One piece of the tangible evidence for communication is speech of all kinds, one of which Hermes claims to be his own invention, but not his exclusive prerogative, as his successful teaching and performance of wisdom expressions demonstrates in his speeches to the tortoise, the old man at Onchestos, and to Apollo in Maia's cave and on Olympus. Hermes' use of proverbial wisdom displays the potential of their poetics and emphasizes the polysemy of these expressions within the narrative context. Furthermore, it highlights the new god's intimate relationship with the tortoise and the old man at Onchestos, both of who are immediately won over by the baby-god, but also with his great rival Apollo. Eventually, Apollo keeps exclusively for himself the special kind of speech that arises from Zeus, and concedes to Hermes the bees oracle that may also symbolize the concretization of the abstract notion of proverbial wisdom. These five proverbial moments in the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes* present vividly the interpretative skills required, which Hermes exhibits throughout the narrative, i.e. profound understanding of the poetics and performance of proverbial wisdom.[29])

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28) For Hermes' association with trickster figures, especially Odysseus see Thalmann (above n. 13), 173-4; Sowa (above n. 13), 161-6.

29) For their perceptive comments and criticisms on an earlier draft of this paper I am grateful to S.A. Frangoulidis and the editor and referee of Mnemosyne.

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