

In the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes* the new-born god performs twice as a bard on his lyre. These two musical performances differ from each other in content, style, and function, and reveal a development in Hermes' personality and use of speech, which has not been yet sufficiently appreciated. At the same time the Hymn's poet is implicitly commenting on what a proper bardic performance is.

In vv. 52-63, the divine babe sings a hymn to himself. At this stage of the story Hermes appears to be concerned with establishing his identity—a recurring theme in the Hymn (cf. Clay, 1989, 109; 137-38). Thus, he sings of his parents and their love-affair, which he characterizes as *companionable intimacy* (West 2003, 116 for *ἑταιρείη φιλότητι*), thereby suggesting that he is the offspring of a lasting relationship as opposed to one of Zeus' flings. In the second song (vv. 423-33), however, his interest has shifted from a purely personal to a cosmic level, as he performs a Theogony in the Hesiodic manner. He begins with the Muses and narrates the birth of each divinity and their acquisition of honors *κατὰ πρέσβιν* according to seniority. The song must culminate with Hermes' own birth (cf. Clay, 1989, 139-40), and the young god thus includes himself as a member of the divine and cosmic order.

The two songs also differ in the god's ability to focus on his theme. Hermes' first performance reveals that he is as yet unable to sing properly. He begins to sing a birth-hymn, but his attention shifts as he praises his dwelling, the maids, and the cave's furnishings. As a child, Hermes' attention is diverted to whatever happens to impress him at the moment (cf. Shelmerdine, *GRBS*, 25, 1984, 202). The second song, however, is delivered *κατὰ κόσμον* (v. 433) and Hermes is by that time *δεδαώς* (v. 510, and implied in vv. 482-85). His musical progress is paralleled by the development of his ability to speak in the course of the Hymn: at the beginning he addresses the tortoise using short, choppy, and loosely connected phrases, but later he delivers an articulated, highly organized speech to his brother (vv. 464-95).

In addition, the poet describes Hermes' "Hymn" to himself as an improvisation resembling the frivolous exchanges of youths at the symposia. This comparison renders the absence of an audience especially prominent. Hermes' first performance is a solitary one that precludes the possibility of a reward or even praise of the bard's skill. His "Theogony", however, has a targeted audience of one and a specific purpose: to sooth Apollo's anger and simultaneously to advance his own claims to divine honors. Hermes' second song appears to be problematic, since bardic performances, as Scodel has argued (*AJP* 119, 1998, 172), are normally "disinterested": the bard does not seek to manipulate his audience for a particular end. Hermes, on the contrary, uses music in the wrong way and aims at satisfying his greed for divine honors (expressed already in vv. 166-81).

The differences between Hermes' two songs, then, reveal the young god's maturation and (self-) insertion into the community of the Olympians. At the same time, these songs are self-reflexive (cf. Thalmann, 1984, 154 and 230 nt. 40) and offer negative exemplars of proper bardic performance. The bard, to whom we are in fact listening, is not the subject-matter of his own song. While he presents himself as an improvising oral poet (just as Hermes, cf. v. 55), he --unlike Hermes-- does not miss his focus, and his performance is "disinterested". For Hermes, however, music is simply a means to an end and appropriately, by the end of the Hymn, he hands over to Apollo the lyre that has been instrumental in allowing him to obtain his rightful honor, the *ἐπαμοίβιμα ἔργα* (v. 516).