

## REMEMBERING THE GOD’S ARRIVAL

EGBERT J. BAKKER

**T**he *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* is commonly believed by scholars to consist of two parts, one Delian, dealing with the god’s birth and his cult at Delos, and one Pythian, describing the foundation of his shrine at Delphi.<sup>1</sup> Stylistic and thematic differences between the two parts are adduced to argue for their separate composition and subsequent joining. The partition is thought to occur at line 181, when the *Hymn* makes a new start after the poet seems to have taken leave of the god in good hymnic fashion. Although I believe that the (mostly analytic) arguments for such a division have to be thoroughly rethought in light of the recent advances in our knowledge of archaic Greek poetry, the separate origin of the two parts can not in itself be disproved. What is important, however, is that we stop concentrating on the act of joining, or on the joint, and direct our attention to the recomposition of the resulting complex hymn. In what follows, I will draw attention to the cognitive aspects of archaic Greek poetics as a dimension in which the “unity” of the two Apollos is as evident as the preexistence of his constituent parts.

Following good hymnic practice, I will “start from the god.” In fact, the main subject of this paper is a starting point, the beginning of the *Hymn* (lines 1–13), which I have reprinted below (underlined phrases will be discussed later on):

Μνήσομαι οὐδὲ λάθωμαι Ἀπόλλωνος ἑκάτοιο,  
ὅν τε θεοὶ κατὰ δῶμα Διὸς τρομέουσιν ἰόντα·

---

<sup>1</sup> See West 1975.161; Janko 1982.99, 253; Clay 1989.18, with a survey of the older literature.

καί ῥά τ' ἀναΐσσουσιν ἐπὶ σχεδὸν ἐρχομ' νοιο  
 πάντες ἀφ' ἐδράων, ὅτε φαίδιμα τόξα τιταίνει.  
 Λητὸ δ' οἷ μίμνε παραὶ Διὶ τερπικεράνῳ,  
 ἥ ῥα βίον τ' ἐχάλασσε καὶ ἐκλήϊσε φαρ' τρην,  
 καὶ οἱ ἀπ' ἰφθίμων ὤμων χεῖρεςσιν ἐλοῦσα  
 τόξον ἀνεκρ' ἔμασε πρὸς κίονα πατρὸς ἐοῖο  
 πασσάλου ἐκ χρυσοῦ· τὸν δ' εἰς θρόνον εἶσεν  
 ἄγουσα.  
 τῷ δ' ἄρα νῶκταρ ἔδωκε πατὴρ δ' οὐραίου χρυσεῖω  
 δεικνύμενος φίλον υἱόν, ἔπειτα δὲ δαίμονες ἄλλοι  
 ἔνθα καθίζουσιν· χαίρει δ' οὐ πότνια Λητοῖα,  
 οὔνεκα τοξοφόρον καὶ καρτερόν υἱὸν ἔτικτεν.

I will remember nor be unaware of Apollo who shoots  
 far,  
 as he moves through Zeus's hall, all the gods trembling  
 at his coming,  
 as they jump to their feet as he gets closer,  
 all from their seats, when he strings his brilliant bow.  
 But Leto alone waits calmly at Zeus's side who delights  
 in thunder:  
 look, she has unstrung the bow and closed the quiver;  
 and taking it with her hands from his strong shoulders,  
 she hangs the bow on his father's pillar,  
 from a golden peg, and himself, she leads him to a  
 throne;  
 and to him his father has offered nectar in a golden  
 goblet,  
 and drinks a toast to his dear son; and thereafter all the  
 other gods,  
 they there sit down; scene of joy for Lady Leto,  
 since she bore a bow-bearing and powerful son.<sup>2</sup>

The *Hymn* starts, as we see, with a description of Apollo's arrival on Olympus. The central element is the god's bow, which makes the assembled gods jump to their feet. The only ones to remain calm are Leto, his

---

2 Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

mother, and his father Zeus. Leto calmly takes her son's bow, hangs it on a peg, and leads him to Zeus, who offers him nectar. After this, peacefulness returns and everyone sits down. Order has been restored and a new, young, powerful god has just been integrated into the Olympic pantheon.

It is important to realize at this point that the bow incident is told out of narrative sequence; it follows chronologically on the story of Leto's wanderings in search of a place to give birth to her son and the birth itself at Delos. The *Hymn* returns to the arrival scene at the beginning of the Pythian part, at lines 186 and following. In spite of their alleged stylistic discrepancy, the two parts are bound together by what is an acknowledged and essential feature of archaic Greek poetry: ring composition. The "preview" of an event in order to come back to it later and to provide an orientation to the narrative ahead is a pervasive technique from Homer to Herodotus, on all levels of composition (see Bakker 1997a.112–21).

But let us not shoot too far for the moment. Recent work on the first arrival scene by Penglase, West, and others has centered on its resemblance to the Sumerian hymn *An-gim*, in which the god Ninurta, arriving, strikes terror in the hearts of his fellow gods (Penglase 1994.99, West 1997.355). But this Near Eastern parallel does little to dispel the confusion that the scene has created among classical scholars. The main problem concerns tenses. The description of the scene starts with present tenses (2: τρομ<sup>ο</sup>ουσιν, 3: ἀναΐσσουσιν, 4: τιταίνει; then follows an imperfect (5: μίμνε), followed in its turn by a series of aorists (6: ἐχάλασσε, ἐκλήϊσε, 8: ἀνεκρ<sup>ο</sup>μασε, 9: εἶσεν, 10: ἔδωκε), after which the present tense returns (12: καθίζουσιν, χαίρει).

This combination of tenses has been found very problematic. The central question is whether the aorists in lines 6–10 are past (as opposed to the present tenses in line 2–4 and again in 12) or timeless. The timeless interpretation is backed by a long-standing tradition in Greek linguistics of the so-called "gnomic aorist," which is thought to lack specific temporal reference and to refer instead to states of affairs that are timeless and "universally" true.<sup>3</sup> But Janko, West, and others feel uncomfortable with a timeless interpretation: isn't it odd that the Olympic gods are terrified *each time* the archer god appears in their midst? Once the gods are familiar with

---

3 See, e.g., van Groningen 1948, Péristérakis 1962, Ruijgh 1971.257–65, Pelliccia 1986, McKay 1986.

Apollo's appearance, the scene, they felt, cannot happen again.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, the interpretation of the aorists as simply "past" is also problematic: if the scene describes Apollo's first arrival on Olympos, then the present tenses must be "historical presents," a usage that is quite common in classical Greek, but that does not occur in epic narrative (see Bakker 1997b.16, 1999b.51, 62).

A radical solution to the problem is offered by Richard Janko. In an article on the structure of the Homeric hymns, Janko speaks of a "debacle" and a "blunder" (Janko 1981.17). According to his analysis, the passage is a clumsy conflation of what are for him the two essential text-types in a Homeric hymn: an attributive scene and a myth. In an attributive scene, a given god's qualities are specified in the present tense; the myth, on the other hand, is defined "quite simply as events that happened in the past, i.e., simply as narrative in the past tense" (Janko 1981.11). The poet, according to Janko, was about to launch an attributive scene, using present tenses (vv. 2–4), when he realized the absurdity of it and switched to the myth mode, now using past tenses.

Janko's argument is based on the notion of the "irreversible mistake" as a crucial attribute of oral poetry.<sup>5</sup> The idea that oral poets cannot undo what they have said in the composition of their poems has to face criticism from scholars who are interested in performance as a diachronic process: very frequently, *reinterpretation* of a given passage takes place in the process of recomposition of a poem in an ongoing tradition.<sup>6</sup> In the present case, however, neither reinterpretation nor irreversible mistake seem to be the real issues. The problem, instead, is that the role of grammatical tense itself in archaic epic has not been fully grasped by Homer scholars. A first sense of the problem is offered by Jenny S. Clay, who proposes that the grammatical distinction between present and past collapses when actions of the gods are reenacted in hymnic discourse: "For the gods . . . past and present are almost interchangeable. Each divine manifestation resembles every other" (1989.26; cf. Clay 1997.494). She goes on to suggest that the aorists are "a usage peculiar to the Homeric Hymns, one not generally recognized in the grammar books" (1989.27). I disagree with Clay that the

---

4 E.g., West 1975.163, Janko 1981.17. See further references in Clay 1989.23, n. 15.

5 See also Janko 1998.7: "Poets composing orally cannot go back and alter what they have composed."

6 E.g., Nagy 1999b, in reply to Janko's position.

usage in question is limited to the Homeric hymns, but I quite agree that something crucial about the aorist is missing from our grammar books. What is missing, first of all, is an account of Greek tenses, and of epic poetry in general, in terms of perception and memory.

### THE DISCOURSE OF REMEMBRANCE

Speaking of memory, there is a feature of this passage that has been overlooked by those who focus on the riddle of the tenses: Apollo's arrival on Olympus is preceded by the opening phrase μνήσομαι οὐδὲ λάθωμαι, "I will remember and not be unaware." This phrase has not received much attention from commentators, but its simplicity is deceptive. In fact, I will argue that this phrase carries the seeds of a solution to our problem. What does it mean for a speaker, a poet, to "remember," and to "not to be unaware"? We can succeed here only when we have made explicit what "remembering" means in our culture, thus preparing ourselves for the relativism that is needed when we deal with such crucial concepts from the past.

Remembering is, of course, an essential cognitive and neural feature of the human species, but memory as a concept is very much dependent on a culture's intellectual habits and routines. More precisely, one can argue that "memory" is a function of a culture's dominant medium of communication. In the case of modern Western civilization, this dominant medium is writing. What has been written has been codified, preserved, and this idea of preservation is a powerful metaphor for memory in our culture. We implicitly conceive of memory as a place, a storage space "from which" we take or "where" we put something to preserve it or to retrieve it (see also Chafe 1994.53). We speak of "remembering" when names, events, or facts are retrievable from the mental archive we call "memory," and we speak of forgetting when this operation is difficult or impossible, when facts or names are lost, impossible to retrieve. So our implicit conception of memory is closely connected with knowledge,<sup>7</sup> with the possibility of recalling, and so controlling, the information stored. This idea of storage and recall turns memory into a matter of the past. The crucial temporal adverbs for our notion of memory are "still" and "not anymore": we "still" remember

---

7 See also Fentress and Wickham 1992.2–8.

something, or we don't "anymore," depending on whether the retention of this particular "fact" as it was once stored is "still" operative.<sup>8</sup>

Students of myth and of mythical conceptions of reality have often pointed out that such conceptions do not apply to the experience of memory of people for whom myth and epic are living realities. For archaic Greece, Jean-Pierre Vernant, in particular—to be followed by Marcel Detienne—has proposed a metaphysical understanding of what the poet "remembers":

The past thus unveiled is much more than the mere antecedent of the present: it is its source. Going back to it, memory does not seek to situate the events in a temporal framework but to reach the essence of things, to discover the original being, the primordial reality from which the cosmos derives and that permits us to understand coming to be in its entirety.<sup>9</sup>

The past in this experience does not simply precede the moment of speaking; it still exists, elsewhere, in another time and place. The poet's remembering is not the recall of things stored but an access to this "other" reality. It constitutes a bridge between the lived present of the poet and his audience and the world beyond. Vernant's mythical conception of memory is neither a location in time nor a retrieval of facts; it is an escape, a "decipherment of the invisible," access to a past that constitutes a form of the beyond. Vernant's mythical conception of memory is thus not a matter of temporality but of ontology.<sup>10</sup>

Suggestive as it is, however, Vernant's account neglects one crucial aspect of memory in archaic Greek mentality and poetics. Memory not only provides access to a reality that is ontologically prior; it also makes that reality present and is, as such, a strong mental experience. It is worthwhile to

---

8 For a general overview of memory and forgetting in cognitive psychology, see Rubin 1995.146–74.

9 Vernant 1990.115: "Le passé ainsi dévoilé est beaucoup plus que l'antécédent du présent: il en est la source. En remontant jusqu' à lui, la remémoration cherche non à situer les événements dans un cadre temporel, mais à atteindre le fond de l'être, à découvrir l'original, la réalité primordiale dont est issu le cosmos et qui permet de comprendre le devenir dans son ensemble."

10 Vernant 1990.116, Detienne 1967.15–17. Both may have been influenced by *Éliade* 1949.331f. and/or his sources.

explore the conception of memory in archaic Greek poetics as a function of the dominant medium of communication of that culture: speech and performance. Memory in Homer is not a retrieval of stored facts but a dynamic cognitive operation in the present, a matter of consciousness or, more precisely, of the *activation* of consciousness. The verbal root -μνη in Homeric Greek is used for the *actual experience* of the thing “remembered,” and -λαθ, its notional opposite, for the absence of that experience. In other words, “remembering” and “forgetting” in Homer are states of mind in the present. We may acquire a first sense of the “presence” of the thing “remembered” when we consider how Achilles remembers the quarrel with Agamemnon (*Iliad* 9.646–48, trans. Lattimore):

ἀλλά μοι οἰδάνεται κραδίη χόλῳ ὅπποτε κείνων  
 μνήσομαι ὥς μ' ἀσύφηλον ἐν Ἀργείοισιν ἔρεξεν  
 Ἀτρείδης ὥς εἴ τιν' ἀτίμητον μετανάστην.

Yet still the heart in me swells up in anger, when I  
remember  
 the disgrace that he wrought upon me before the  
 Argives,  
 the son of Atreus, as if I were some dishonoured  
 vagabond.

The possibility of retrieving pieces of information is not at issue here; Achilles speaks about his strong physical reaction when he relives the quarrel. The swelling of his κραδίη in the present situation is no different from the condition of that organ back then, at the moment of Agamemnon's insult.

But the most characteristic Homeric usage of the root -μνη goes a step further. Very frequently, the object of -μνη is not even the past but a very concrete aspect of an actually, physically experienced present. Thus warriors in the *Iliad* are often urged to “remember” battle, or the narrator reports that they did so:

ἀνῶρες ἐστε, φίλοι, μνήσασθε δὲ θούριδος ἄλκας  
 Be men, friends, and remember ferocious strength

μᾶλλον ἐπὶ Τρᾶεσσι θόρον, μνήσαντο δὲ χάρμης.

they rushed even more at the Trojans, and remembered  
battle.<sup>11</sup>

This “remembrance” (or “forgetting”) of battle has, of course, nothing to do with the retrieval of a piece of knowledge, a fact or concept from memory, or with difficulties in doing this. The verbal roots -μνη and -λαθ are used here not merely to designate a state of mind in the present but the conscious, physical experience that leads to decisive, immediate action. If you “remember” your strength, you are physically strong, if you “forget” it, you are weak. In the same way, one can “remember” one’s ἀρετή (“manly strength”), “remember” to stand guard, or to eat and drink.<sup>12</sup> And the only time that the “abstract” noun μνημοσύνη is used in the Homeric epics (*Il.* 8.181), it does not designate “memory” in our sense but the urge to throw fire into the Greek ships.

Another important aspect of “remembering” in Homer involves perception as a special, attentive act of cognition. For example, during the funeral games for Patroklos, Achilles places Phoenix in the position of σκοπός, special observer, of the chariot race, and he does this: ὥς μεμνῶτο δρόμους καὶ ἀληθείην ἀποείποι, “to ‘remember’ the course and bring back a true account” (*Il.* 23.361). Phoenix’s “memory” of the race is not the recall of a fact or experience from the past but an attentive perception from a privileged vantage point; and the “truth,” ἀληθείην, of his account as referee is not an objective relation between his account and “reality” but a special state of mind, both in seeing and in speaking. Phoenix’s mind (later on I will speak of νόος) is supposed to be free of λήθη.<sup>13</sup>

Memory in Homer, then, is very much a matter of the present; it enacts, makes present in the most literal sense.<sup>14</sup> It is always a special state of

11 Exhortation to “remember” battle: *Il.* 6.112; 8.174; 11.287; 13.48; 15.477, 487, 734, 16.270; 17.103, 185; 19.148. “He/they ‘remembered’ / ‘didn’t forget’ battle”: *Il.* 4.222; 8.252; 11.566; 13.835; 14.441; 15.380; 16.601–02. Other associations of “remembering” and action in battle: *Il.* 5.263; 17.364; 19.153. “Forgetting battle”: *Il.* 13.722; 15.322; 16.356–57; 22.282.

12 Stand guard: *Il.* 7.371; 10.99; 18.299; ἀρετή: *Il.* 22.268; eating and drinking: *Il.* 19.231; 24.129, 601, 602, 613; *Od.* 10.177; 20.246.

13 On this passage, see Cole 1983.10 with further access to the literature on “archaic truth.”

14 The only cases where Homeric Greek comes close to the modern “scientific” notion of remembering involve the perfect stem of the verb, denoting a permanent state in the



mind, an awareness that may be due to the special position of the “rememberer,” as in the case of Phoenix.

In a study on *μυμνσκομαι* in archaic Greek poetics, William Moran proposes that this verb is used as a technical term, a functional synonym for singing (Moran 1975.198; cf. Nicholas Richardson 1974.325). The present discussion allows us to go a crucial step further. The poet's memory is indeed the poet's singing, but it is more than just *ᾠοιδή*, the mere action of *ᾄδειν*. Remembering the song is to enact it, to ensure the presence of its heroic or divine protagonists. An essential example of this occurs in the realization of the Catalogue of Ships in Book 2 of the *Iliad*: after saying that he would be helpless were it not for the memory of the Muses (*μνησαίαθ'*, 2.492), the poet performs the tremendous task of giving what is, for us, a long catalogue of mere names but for himself and the audience much more. These heroes are real, and, after the catalogue, the poet can actually point at them in a rare occurrence (in the discourse of the narrator) of the deictic pronoun *οἱ τοι* (2.760): memory has created presence (see Bakker 1999a.8).

It is time to return to the *Hymn to Apollo*, where “remembering” features prominently, apart from its importance in the first line. In the description of the Delian festival, which may well have been the context of performance of the *Hymn* or of one of its earlier instantiations, there is a striking emphasis on “remembering” on the part of the participants (*μνησάμενοι*, 150), in particular the Delian maidens (*Apollo Hymn* 158–61):

αἵ τ' ἐπεὶ ᾗρ πρῶτον μὲν Ἀπόλλων' ὑμνήσωσιν,  
αὐτίς δ' αὖ Λητῆ τε καὶ Ἄρτεμιν ἰοχῶϊραν,  
μνησάμεναι ἀνδρῶν τε παλαιῶν ±δὲ γυναικῶν  
ῥυμνον ἀείδουσιν, θ᾽ ἄλγουσι δὲ φύλ' ἀνθρῶπων.

Who when they have first sung a hymn in praise of  
Apollo,  
and then also of Leto and Artemis showering her arrows,  
remembering men and women of past days  
they sing a ῥυμνος, and they enchant the race of  
humans.

---

present, e.g., *Il.* 6.222–23: Τυδῶα δ' οὐ μ᾽ μνημαι, ἐπεὶ μ' ἔτι τυτθὸν ἔοντα κάλλιψ', “I don't remember Tudeus <anymore>, because he left me when I was still little.”

The sequence of events in the performance of these maidens (first a hymn proper to the god, then a “hymn” in an extended sense, remembering the heroic world) strikingly captures the epic practice that seems to be inscribed in the last line of our *Hymn*. The noun ἀοιδή is here the direct grammatical object of the verb μιμνσκομαι, when, in ritual, formulaic fashion, “another ἀοιδή” is announced after the poet has said farewell to the god in the previous line: αὐτὰρ ἐγὼ καὶ σεῖο καὶ ἄλλης μνήσομ’ ἀοιδᾶς, “But I, I will ‘remember’ you as well as the rest of the song” (*Apollo Hymn* 546). Usually, ἄλλης . . . ἀοιδᾶς is taken to be another hymn to the same divinity, to be sung on a future occasion (e.g., Moran 1975.197–98, Clay 1997.493). This would mean that the verb μνήσομ’(αι) is future, referring to a time other than the present moment. There are various strong reasons for rejecting this reading that apply equally to the other recurrent closing phrase: μεταβήσομαι ἄλλον ἐς ὕμνον. First, the idiomatic usage of ἄλλος suggests “the rest of the song” rather than “another song.”<sup>15</sup> This means that the ἀοιδή in question is the self-same song that the poet is presently singing—which brings the ritual phrase much closer to the singing of the Delian maidens as well as to the traditional poetics of the Homeric hymns as proems: the “remainder of the song” would be the epic story at hand.<sup>16</sup> The verbs μνήσομαι and μεταβήσομαι, in other words, do not refer to another, future, occasion, but to the present performance; they could be called performative (“I will now proceed to / I will now enact the remainder of the song”).<sup>17</sup> In the case of μνήσομαι, such a performative reading is underscored by the semantics of the root -μνη that I just reviewed: remembering is making present.

But the presence of the “remainder of the song” is impossible without the god in whose honor the hymn is sung. Apollo, the god who

15 Usually this idiom is presented in a quantitative sense (οἱ ἄλλοι, “the remaining ones” [others within the same group], see Kühner-Gerth 1898–1904.1.635); but ἄλλος can very well modify collective or unitary concepts: Thuc. 1.2.6: τᾶς ἄλλης Ἑλλάδος, “the rest of Hellas”; 1.110.4: τᾶς ἄλλης συμμαχίδος, “the rest of the alliance.” In Homeric Greek, the definite article need not be used in this idiom.

16 See Nagy 1990a.54; 1990b.353, 359; and especially 2000a, where he discusses ὕμνος as a generic term for epic poetry: the start of the performance, “hymn” in our sense, comes to encompass the entire performance that follows. Ancient evidence for the “proem function” of the Homeric hymns: Pind. *Nem.* 2.3; Thuc. 3.104 (who cites passages from the *Apollo Hymn* as ἐκ προοιμίου Ἀπόλλωνος).

17 Notice that this nonfuture reading is equally important for the lines with which the allegedly separate *Hymn to Delian Apollo* ends (οὐ λήξω ἐκτεβόλον Ἀπόλλωνα / ὕμνων, “I will now continue singing of Apollo”); see Miller 1986.

presides over the séance, has to be present. It is this very presence that is enacted with μνήσομαι in the first line. Like μνήσομαι in the last line, this verb has no future temporal reference, and even to call it a “future” seems anachronistic. Coordinated with what, in Attic grammar, is recognizably a subjunctive (λάθωμαι), it expresses resolve;<sup>18</sup> but it is resolve whose very utterance performs the action that it denotes and accomplishes its purpose. Far from being a “hymnic cliché,” then, the opening formula of the *Hymn* is an indispensable ritual in which the performer performs the cognitive, poetic act that instates the god and makes possible that very performance.

### THE DISCOURSE OF PROXIMITY

This discussion of the neglected first line of the *Hymn* should now change our perception of the passage that follows. In fact, that whole passage is very much about cognition and perception. What happens in the passage is neither the attribution of qualities to the god nor mere narration, but *seeing*, an acute perception of the god that is made possible by the poet's “memory.” The passage describes neither a timeless scene nor a past one but something present, something happening right before the poet's mind's eye. This, I believe, is expressed by the tenses in the passage, present and aorist, that are used in a way that is not fully recognized in our handbooks of grammar.

In a number of recent publications, I have tried to bring out the thoroughly visual, evidential, deictic nature of Homeric narrative. Telling the epic story is for the poet very much a matter of seeing it, and of sharing this reality with the audience in the context of the performance. This is apparent, among other things, in the abundant use of deictic, evidential particles such as ἄρα and δὴ and in the use of deictic pronouns.<sup>19</sup> It is also apparent in the use of the tenses, but, in order to appreciate this, we have to rethink the notion of grammatical tense to a certain extent. Our usual notion of “tense” and of time, in fact, seems to be related to the way we conceive of

---

18 West 1966.152 (on Hes. *Theogn.* 1), Nicholas Richardson 1974.325 (on the last line of the *Demeter Hymn*). The present discussion has an obvious bearing on the problem of “first person futures” in Pindar, recently reviewed by Pfeijffer 1999. To address that question here would lead us too far afield; I merely wish to point out that to attribute a “text-internal” function to a future verb is *not* making it equivalent to a present (Pfeijffer 1999.13).

19 E.g., Bakker 1993.15–25, 1997a.74–80, 1997b.17–23, 1999a.

memory, so that the rethinking of memory may shed light on the notion of tense in early epic. If, in the Homeric mentality, memory is a matter of enactment, of making present what is absent, then tense, the prime vehicle for the articulation of events remembered, may well be less a matter of abstract temporal relations than it is for us. Remembering an event from the past is bringing it to the mind's eye, seeing it, and describing it as if it were happening before one's eyes. And so is announcing an event in the future.

The Homeric verb is fully equipped to deal with this visual reality. If we let verbal morphology speak for itself rather than use it to create such categories as “present,” “future,” or “past,” which merely confirm our own linguistic preconceptions, we notice, first, that certain verbal forms are marked with the suffix *-ι* (in our text, for example, τρομ<sup>ο</sup>ουσ-ι(ν), τιταίνε-ι, etc.). This suffix is often thought to be a reflex of the Indo-European marker for present tense (e.g., Lehmann 1993.173, 180), but I suggest that “tense,” the temporal relation between an event and the moment of speaking, is inappropriate here. While full exposition will have to await a future occasion, I submit here that the original function of *-ι*, of which we find a reflex in our text, was not to mark (present) tense so much as *presence*, the proximity to the speaker of the event. This would explain why the suffix *-ι* is equally present on the alleged future/subjunctive forms μνήσομα-ι and λάθωμα-ι. Presence is either a matter of actual perception or of immediate resolve, and the suffix *-ι* was originally a marker of proximal deixis (perhaps identical to *-ι* in such demonstratives as οὗτος-ι or ὅδε-ί); only later did it become a marker of tense (see also Bakker 1997b.29).

The evidence of morphology, then, should keep us from reading the present tense forms in the opening scene of the *Hymn* as “generic.” But what about the aorists? Let us first note that the aorist is quite frequently used by Homeric speakers in connection with νῦν, the adverb of temporal immediacy. Consider, for example, the words of Diomedes when Hector has just escaped his attack (*Il.* 11.362–63, trans. Lattimore):

ἐξ αὖ νῦν ἔφυγες θάνατον κύον· Στ<sup>ο</sup> τοι ἄγχι  
 Σλθε κακόν· νῦν αὖτ<sup>ο</sup> σ' ἐρύσατο Φοῖβος Ἀπόλλων,

Once again now you escaped death, dog. And yet the  
 evil  
came near you, but now once more Phoibos Apollo has  
saved you.

In such cases, it is important to observe that the aorist carries the augment much more frequently than when a past event is referred to. On this basis, summarizing the results of a discussion that I have presented elsewhere,<sup>20</sup> I propose that originally the function of the augment was quite different from the marking of past tense. The augment, I argue, was originally a deictic prefix used on the aorist stem, the verbal form for the completeness of an action, and it would signal that an action is completed in the speaker's presence. Thus the augment was originally, just like -ι, a prefix connected with proximity, perhaps identical to the prefix ε- in ἐ-κεῖνος. For practical purposes, we might say that the augment in Homer often has the effect of the present perfect tense in English.

Looking at Homeric narrative in this light, we may observe that the only place where the present tense is used by the Homeric narrator (that is, forms with the suffix -ι), and the only place where aorists always carry the augment is the simile, e.g., *Il.* 5.87–94 (trans. Lattimore):

θῦνε γὰρ ἄμ πεδίον ποταμῷ πλήθοντι ἐοικᾶς  
 χειμάρρῳ, ὅς τ' ὤκα ῥ' ὦν ἐκ' ὀδασσε γεφύρας·  
 τὸν δ' οὐτ' ἄρ τε γ' ὀφυραι ἐεργμ' ναι ἰσχανόωσιν,  
 οὐτ' ἄρα ἔρκεα ἰσχεῖ ἀλώων ἐριθηλ' ὦν  
 ἐλθόντ' ἐξαπίνης ὅτ' ἐπιβρίση Διὸς ὄμβρος·  
 πολλὰ δ' ὑπ' αὐτοῦ ἔργα κατήριπε κάλ' αἰζηῶν·  
 ὥς ὑπὸ Τυδείδῃ πυκινὰ κλον' ὄντο φάλαγγες  
 Τρῶων, οὐδ' ἄρα μιν μῖνον πολ' ἐς περ ἑόντες.

He [Diomedes] went storming up the plain like a winter-  
 swollen  
 river in spate that scatters the dikes in its running  
 current,  
 one that the strong-compacted dikes can contain no  
 longer,  
 neither the mounded banks of the blossoming vineyards  
hold it  
 rising suddenly as Zeus' rain makes heavy the water  
 and many lovely works of the young men crumble  
 beneath it.

---

20 Bakker 1999b.2001, with a review of previous scholarship on the augment in Homer.

Like these the massed battalions of the Trojans were  
 scattered  
 by Tydeus' son, and many as they were they could not  
 stand against him.

The usual interpretation of the present in similes as generic and of the aorist as “gnomic” is the basis of the problems with the opening scene of the *Hymn*. But I do not think that the temporal references in the similes are generic or gnomic. It is true that the simile evokes a recognizable scene that is well within the experiential orbit of the audience; and it is equally true that similes tell us how lions, boars, or swollen rivers typically behave. But that does not make the similes any less visual. The generic aspects may be a matter of common knowledge, but when the simile is actually performed, generic knowledge yields to a highly specific, sharp image: we are witnessing this lion, this boar, or this swollen river. Accordingly, the language of the similes is the language used for immediately observable reality (see further Bakker 2001).

The language of the similes is also that of the opening scene of the *Hymn*. The combination of present tense and augmented aorist in the similes exactly matches the use of tenses in the first lines of the *Hymn*—a use that has caused so much confusion. We can now see the present tenses as neither generic nor historical but as perceptual. And the aorists are neither gnomic nor a narrative anomaly but perceptual as well—their augment is the same as that of the perceptual aorists used by Diomedes in his immediate physical present.

There are more features that link Apollo's arrival to the syntax of the Homeric similes. Many similes offer what may be called an “extension,” a further description of the simile's image that is often syntactically autonomous with respect to the previous introduction of the image. In the arrival scene of our *Hymn*, the lines with the augmented aorists (vv. 6–11) would seem to have this function. They are separated from the section with the present verbs (vv. 2–4)—which I analyze as equivalent to the image proper of a simile—by a phrase with the only “imperfect” verb of the scene (μίμνε, v. 5). The phrase directs the listener's attention in processing the scene.<sup>21</sup>

---

21 On μίμνε, see West 1989. I agree with West that μίμνε is an archaic relic and analyze it as a form lacking the suffix -ι rather than as an “imperfect.” That is, the verb is not so much “past” as “nonpresent.” I would add, however, that the whole scene displays a use of tense that is “unrecognized” in Greek grammar.

After the moments zooming in on the god's parents, the poet's vision widens again and the assembly of the gods comes back into the picture. This is when the present tenses return (vv. 11–12).

We note further that the scene opens with a relative pronoun modified by the particle τε (ὅν τε), just like the simile of the mountain brook cited above and many other similes. The particle τε marks Apollo as a simile's central image. The adverbial use of τε in epic has been said to express a *fait permanent*, a “permanent fact,” but C. J. Ruijgh, the author of that idea, is careful to specify that what is permanent is not so much the fact itself as its link with another idea in a particular context.<sup>22</sup> That the river is swift-streaming and winter-swollen is a “permanent fact” only in the context of Diomedes' battle rage; it explains the crucial aspect under which the river is evoked. Similarly, the relative clause following Apollo's name does not signal—what has puzzled so many scholars—that the gods' trembling at Apollo's entrance is something permanent, generic, or repeated. If anything is repeated it is the performance of the scene, not the scene itself. The relative clause gives the specific aspect under which the god is evoked and his presence enacted: this is, for the purpose of the *Hymn*, the god's quintessential image. We could translate: “I will now remember Apollo as he enters Zeus's hall when the gods trembled at him.”<sup>23</sup> Epic τε recurs in the third part of the scene: χαίρει δ' οὖν τε πότνια Λητοῖα, v. 12. It does not signal that rejoicing is a “permanent fact” about Leto, but that this scene is Leto's quintessential moment of joy.

### SEEING, THINKING, ACHIEVING

The relative clause, then, presents Apollo in the same way as many essential images in similes are evoked. But here we encounter a difference. Apollo is not a simile's image, or so it would seem. There is nothing to which Apollo is compared. Before we address this problem, a further observation has to be made: Apollo's entrance scene is not as accessible as the rustic and pastoral scenes of the similes. In fact, the ability to see gods is not given to every mortal. The gods are seen and recognized only when they

22 Ruijgh 1971.15–18. Ruijgh proposes, plausibly, that “epic τε” derives from the more general connective use of the particle as it has been attested since Mycenaean.

23 Compare *Dionysos Hymn* 1–2: Ἀμφὶ Διὶ νύσσον Σεμέλης ἐρικυδέος υἱὸν / μνήσομαι ὡς ἐφάνη παρὰ θῖν' ἄλδος ἄτρυγ' τοιοῦτο.

want to be, and by whom they have selected for that purpose. Patroklos, for example, does not see Apollo when the god approaches to deal him his death blow. Nor does Telemachos see or recognize Athene when the goddess is present to arrange the recognition scene between Odysseus and Telemachos (*Od.* 16.160–61):

οὐδ' ἄρα Τηλεμαχος ἴδεν ἀντίον οὐδ' ἐνόησεν,  
οὐ γάρ πως πάντεσσι θεοὶ φαίνονται ἐναργεῖς

But Telemachos did not look her way nor did he take  
notice;  
for the gods do not manifest themselves in full  
evidence to all.

This extract gives us the religious basis of the later notion of ἐνάργεια: a god's full, unmediated presence (cf. *Il.* 20.131, *Od.* 7.201, Hes. fr. 165.5 M–W). This presence is possible because of a human's special faculties of cognition, which find their essential expression in Homeric Greek in the lexical root vo-. The negated verb of that root is used for Telemachos; the affirmative will be used four lines later for his father, who does see and recognize Athene. It is due to his νόος, his capacity to νοῶσαι, that Odysseus is able to “see” in more than just a perceptual sense. Νόος and νοῶσαι denote, in epic Greek, a special awareness of the beyond, of the metaphysical. He who has νόος is able (to repeat Vernant's formulation) to “decipher the invisible.” In fact, νόος and the cognitive faculty of νοῶσαι are very much in the semantic sphere of the verbal roots -μνη and of the negation of its notional opposite -λαθ.<sup>24</sup> The verbal idea -λαθ is not only the notional opposite of -μνη but also of νοη. And its negative, οὐ λαθῶσθαι, is equivalent to either verbal idea. So μνήσασθαι and νοῶσαι are two sides of one and the same coin; both are the lexical expression of Vernant's mythical conception of “memory” as a seeing beyond, a piercing of the surface appearance of things.

But just like the verbal root -μνη, the meaning of νοῶσαι and its cognates (such as νόος and νόημα) is not exhausted by this idea of “seeing beyond.” An act of νοῶσαι is more than a thought or a perception, however profound; it is at the same time the realization, the accomplishment, of its

---

24 E.g., *Il.* 21.441–43; *Od.* 1.321–22, 20.204–05. See also Nagy 1990a.210ff.



cognitive content. This is made abundantly clear in passages where the νόος or the νόημα of the gods, in particular Zeus, is concerned. It is the νόος of Zeus that makes Hector wake up after he has lost consciousness, and it is the νόος of Zeus that overwhelms the Greeks in the battle of the ships. And, in general, it is the νόος of Zeus that makes humans do what he wants them to do (*Il.* 15.242; 16.103, 684–91). The strong sense of accomplishment that is inherent in the semantics of νόος and νοῦσαι (see also *Od.* 2.278–82) is conveyed with particular clarity in the words of Calypso when she has to give up Odysseus; she pairs the verb νοῦσαι with the verb κραίνω/κραναι (*Od.* 5.169–70, trans. Lattimore):<sup>25</sup>

αἶ κε θεοί γ' ἐθ' ὀλωσι, τοῖ οὐρανὸν εὐρὺν ἔχουσιν,  
οἳ μιν φ' ὀρπεροί εἰσι νοῦσαι τε κραναι τε.

If only the gods consent. It is they who hold wide  
heaven.  
And they are more powerful than I to devise and  
accomplish.

The two major senses of νοῦσαι, accomplishment and seeing with special clarity, come together in a usage of νοῦσαι that has to do with the very enactment of epic events. Many times the course of events is essentially due to a character who was able to νοῦσαι. The most characteristic moments when this happens are the conspicuous “if not” or reversal situations in the battle narrative of the *Iliad*: if so and so had not performed the profound act of νοῦσαι, then the epic would not have been the same, or would not even have existed. The crucial formula is εἰ μὴ ἄρ' ὄξυν νοήσε, “if he/she had not seen sharply,” which enacts the epic tale as the consequence of a moment of penetrating vision.<sup>26</sup>

The semantics of νοῦσαι is fully pertinent to the opening scene of the *Apollo Hymn*. The ἐνάργεια of that scene is more than mere vividness. It is an act of full recognition of the god's presence. The poet is capable, due to his νόος, of “remembering” the god, which implies both seeing him and accomplishing his presence. The god's arrival is simultaneously a speech act and a mind act: the speech act of μνήσασθαι is the fulfillment of the mind

25 On κραίνω and poetic utterance, see also Detienne 1967.53–57.

26 See Bakker 1997a.178–80; on νοῦσαι, 1997a.173–77.

act of νοῦσαί. The god's presence now, with his terrifying bow and arrows, is a visualization of the poet's νόημα.

### JUST LIKE A NOHMA

We return to the question of the simile: if the opening scene has all the features of a Homeric simile, what is it that Apollo is compared to? The answer I will propose bears on the very unity of the *Hymn*, since it connects the opening scene with the second arrival scene. I have already observed that the two scenes are linked by way of the previewing technique of ring composition in archaic poetry: often the first mention of the event in question looks ahead to the second one and clears the ground for the narrative in between.

In the present case, the relation between the scenes is richer and more complex than usual in that the two scenes are complementary. The first one, with the bow as its central element, deals with potential violence or disturbance, whereas the second one is a vision of peace and harmony. No mention is made of the dangerous bow; instead, the lyre is now Apollo's instrument. The complementary unity of these two instruments, which needs no further elaboration, is underscored by the image, at the end of either scene, of Zeus and Leto looking happily at their beautiful son. Both times this image is followed by a formula in which the poet pretends to have trouble finding a suitable beginning: "How can I praise you in hymn, you who are so well hymned?"<sup>27</sup>

But the unity is further enhanced by a short comparison in the second arrival scene (*Apollo Hymn* 182–88):

εἶσι δὲ φορμίζων Λητοῦς ἐρικυδοῦς υἱὸς  
 φόρμιγγι γλαφυρῇ πρὸς Πυθᾷ πετρήεσσιν,  
 ἄμβροτα εἶματ' ἔχων τεθυμῶνα· τοῖο δὲ φόρμιγξ  
 χρυσοῦ ὑπὸ πλῆκτρον καναχὴν ἔχει ἱμερόεσσιν.  
 ἔνθεν δὲ πρὸς Ὀλυμπον ἀπὸ χθονὸς ὥς τε νόημα  
 εἶσι Διὸς πρὸς δῶμα θεῶν μεθ' ὁμήγυριν ἄλλων·  
 αὐτίκα δ' ἀθανάτοισι μῶλει κίθαρις καὶ ἀοιδή.

---

27 *Apollo Hymn* 19, 207: Πῶς τὰρ σ' ὑμνήσω πάντως εὐνυμνον ἔοντα;

He goes playing the lyre, son of glorious Leto,  
 the hollow lyre, all the way to Pytho rich in rocks,  
 clad in clothes immortal and fragrant; his lyre  
 under his golden plectrum gives an enchanting sound.  
 From there up to Olympos from the Earth like a thought,  
 he goes to Zeus's hall and the assembly of the other  
 gods.  
 Immediately song and the lyre are on the immortals'  
 minds.

We saw that, in the first scene, the poet's cognitive activity leads to the arrival of the god by way of the performance of a simile enacting the god's ἐνάργεια. Here we notice that the situation is reversed: the god's arrival is now, conversely, compared to cognitive activity: ὥς τε νόημα. This is not the only νόημα comparison in archaic Greek poetry.<sup>28</sup> The swiftness and weightlessness of thought are, of course, important points of comparison, but, in the present case, it is worthwhile to take into account the semantics of νόημα and νοῶσαι discussed earlier.

In comparing Apollo's arrival to a νόημα, that is, the mind act that gives rise to poetry, the *Hymn* is turning on itself. In fact, the god's arrival on Olympos, a νόημα, immediately creates a model for the setting of the *Hymn*'s performance: a poet producing ἀοιδή before an attentive audience. The image of the lyre player complements that of the bow wielder, revealing the unity of the paradoxes posed by Loxias, the oblique, ambiguous god. What creates this *palintropos harmonia* is the poet's remembering, the enactment of a penetrating vision. Not only is the poet able to see the god and present him to his audience by the power of poetry; he is also capable of seeing behind the outward terrifying appearance of the archer god and of discovering its benign counterpart, the lyre. The νόημα is the poet's νόημα and thus, ultimately, Apollo himself as the object of the poet's vision. This vision not only gives us an Apollo who is whole and integrated in all his complexity; it also gives us a *Hymn* that is whole and integrated in enacting it.

Université de Montréal

---

28 Compare *Il.* 15.79–83, *Od.* 7.36 (cf. 8.559), *Hermes Hymn* 43, *Apollo Hymn* 448, *Theogn.* 985.