

REVISING ILLEGITIMACY: THE USE OF EPITHETS IN THE *HOMERIC HYMN TO HERMES*

According to Jenny Strauss Clay, the characteristic concern of the major Homeric Hymns is to explain ‘the acquisition and redistribution of *timai* within the Olympian cosmos’.¹ In the case of the *Hymn to Hermes*, my claim is that much of this work is accomplished through the poem’s epithets. The *timai* of Hermes are clearly reflected in the hymn both by the actions of the god and by the context-specific epithets chosen by the poet to describe him. Additionally, the epithets reveal shifts in focalization throughout the poem as Hermes’ status is accepted or questioned by his divine relations. The poet’s strategic selection and placement of epithets provide an overview for the dynamic of the narrative: from the epithets alone we can understand the progress of Hermes. Unlike the epithets in Homeric epic, which Milman Parry saw as purely ‘ornamental’ and John Foley views as imbued with ‘traditional referentiality’, the epithets in the *Hymn to Hermes* frequently hold specific contextual significance.²

Within the *Hymn to Hermes*, the poet uses three styles of naming for the deity: name alone, name with a generic epithet, and context-specific epithet(s). Identifications of Hermes by name alone often occur when the poet seeks to highlight the deity and his activity at a particular moment, or at a point when the god is unworthy of a glorifying adjective. I call generic epithets those that typically appear as the penultimate word in a line and contribute little to the reader or listener’s knowledge of any specific attributes of the deity. Context-specific epithets are used most frequently and occur in three types: proleptic epithets which predict certain attributes that Hermes will obtain as the hymn progresses or during his tenure as an Olympian, analeptic or earned epithets which identify attributes the god has acquired earlier in the hymn through some specific activity, and genealogical epithets which name Hermes according to his parenthood.³

The need for validation through epithetic syntax or otherwise comes into greater play in the *Hymn to Hermes* than in the other hymns primarily because of the young god’s functional illegitimacy at the beginning of the poem. Until Zeus’ formal recognition of Hermes, we know the god primarily from his matrilineal tree, suspect from the outset as a result of his association with Maia. As the poet informs us (4–6), fair-tressed Maia shuns the very company of the gods, dwelling in her shadowy cave.⁴ Genealogically, Maia is named in the *Theogony* as a daughter

¹ J. S. Clay, *The Politics of Olympus: Form and Meaning in the Major Homeric Hymns* (Princeton, 1989), 15. On 96, Clay particularizes the claim to the *Hymn to Hermes*.

² M. Parry, *The Making of Homeric Verse* (Oxford, 1971), 118–20; J. M. Foley, *Immanent Art: From Structure to Meaning in Traditional Oral Epic* (Bloomington, 1991), 7.

³ Hermes is identified by the bard 70 times throughout the hymn; 19 per cent of these mentions are by name alone, 14 per cent are with a generic epithet, 17 per cent with a combination of generic and context specific epithets, and 50 per cent with context specific epithet(s) alone. In all dialogue between Hermes and other characters in the hymn, context-specific epithets are used; generic epithets never appear in dialogue.

⁴ As if to minimize the significance of Hermes’ maternal lineage, the poet here describes Maia with the epithet *εὐπλόκαμος*, in lieu of a genealogical notation; in the shorter *Hymn to Hermes* (18), the clause is repeated, but the poet switches Maia’s epithet to *Ἀγλαῖος θυγάτηρ*. Unlike Leto, who sits beside Zeus at his table (*Hymn. Hom. Ap. 5*), Maia never gains admission to Olympus.

of the Titan Atlas, son of Iapetus.⁵ In *Il.* 8.478–81, Iapetus is the sole Titan listed as dwelling in Tartarus with Cronus. Atlas himself, according to *Theog.* 517–20, is condemned by Zeus to hold the sky on his shoulders.⁶ His three brothers Prometheus, Epimetheus, and Menoetius are similarly at odds with Zeus.⁷ From birth, then, Hermes' maternal legacy of rebellion makes him an outsider and throws him into direct genealogical competition with his father; his current and future standing requires resolution over the course of the poem.

In the proem of the hymn, all of Hermes' epithets are proleptic. They set up a metaphorical bank account of traits from which the child can draw as he wins his *timai* in succeeding episodes. In his invocation to the Muses, the bard calls Hermes the son of Zeus and Maia, ruler of Cyllene and Arcadia, and the swift or beneficent messenger of the gods (1–3: *Ἑρμῆν ὕμνει Μοῦσα Διὸς καὶ Μαιάδος υἱόν, / Κυλλήνης μεδέοντα καὶ Ἀρκαδίας πολυμήλου, / ἄγγελον ἀθανάτων ἐριούνιον*).⁸ These epithets, which may seem merely descriptive, in fact comprise the first deposit by the bard into Hermes' account: a listing of his parenthood, his birthplace and future cult sites, and his primary role on Olympus, all of which are proleptic for the deity who, from a narratological perspective, has yet to be born. Upon his birth, Hermes is called *πολύτροπος*, *αἰμυλομήτης*, *ληιστήρ*, *ἐλατήρ βοῶν*, *ὀπωπητήρ*, and *πυληδόκος* (13–16), all of which will be associated with his clever intelligence, exhibited in his creations, theft, and denial of the accusations of his fellow gods. Hermes, *ἡγήτωρ ὀνείρων*, forecasts a role of the deity, described by the bard at the end of the hymn, of beguiling the tribes of men at night.⁹ Throughout the hymn, Hermes draws from the account of epithets established in the proem as he creates his own identity.

In the three main sections that comprise the body of the hymn—the *kluta erga* of Hermes (20–153), his confrontations with the gods (154–415), and his final reconciliation with Apollo (416–580)—the number and variety of epithets increase progressively as the child gains recognition and acquires the right to collect his titles. Until Hermes has fully accomplished the tasks that will allow him to claim his *timai*, the context-specific epithets used to describe him are somewhat infrequent. As the child heads to Pieria (68–72), epithets are provided for the mountains (70: *ὄρεα σκίοεντα*), the cattle (71: *βόες ἄμβροτοι*), the gods (71: *θεῶν μακάρων*), and the meadows (72: *λεμῶνας ἀκηρασίους ἐρατεινούς*), but not for Hermes (69: *Ἑρμῆς*), who has no *timai*. Generic adjectives like *κύδιμος*, *ἄλκιμος*, and *ἐρικυδής* appear often in this section and identify the deity in narrative contexts, without defining his character or honours. Before Hermes has encountered any of the other gods and

⁵ *Theog.* 938. In a hexameter fragment attributed to the Hesiodic corpus (fr. 169 MW), Maia is named as one of the Pleiades along with Taugete, Electra, Alcyone, Asterope, Celaeno, and Merope.

⁶ On Atlas' punishment, see also Hom. *Od.* 1.52–54; Pind. *Pyth.* 4.289–90; and Aesch. *PV* 347–50. Hyg. *Fab.* 150 explains that Atlas led the Titans in battle against the Olympians.

⁷ Least known of Atlas' three brothers, Menoetius, described as *ὑβριστής* (*Theog.* 514–16), is struck with a thunderbolt by Zeus and sent to Erebus.

⁸ On *ἐριούνιος*, meaning 'most beneficent' or 'good runner', see S. Reece, 'A figura etymologica in the Homeric Hymn to Hermes', *CJ* 93 (1997), 29–39 and 'σῶκος ἐριούνιος Ἑρμῆς (*Iliad* 20.72): the modification of a traditional formula', *Glotta* 75 (1999), 85–106. Reece supports the former reading for Homeric and later usage; I wonder, however, whether the second use of the same epithet at line 28 draws a conscious distinction between the youthful divinity's speed and the turtle's unfortunate slowness. If so, *ἐριούνιος* would serve a specifically proleptic function here.

⁹ For Hermes as a dream god, see T. W. Allen, W. R. Halliday, and E. E. Sikes (edd.), *The Homeric Hymns* (Oxford, 1936), 279. In *Od.* 24.1–4 Hermes enchants the eyes of mortals and wakes the sleepers.

negotiated his *timai*, it is logical that generic epithets, equally suitable for any god or mortal, are more frequent.

In the description of his famous deeds, Hermes appears three times as the son of Zeus (28, 101, 145) and twice as the son of Maia (73, 89). Epithets of parentage are consistently meaningful in their reflection of the progress of Hermes towards the Olympian glory he desires, specifically, recognition of his relationship to Zeus.¹⁰ Acts of creation raise the status of Hermes and bring him closer to his goal of recognition. Immediately before he creates the lyre and fire, Hermes is called the son of Zeus.¹¹ Conversely, the two occurrences of Hermes as *Μαιάδος* (or *Μαίης*) *υἱός* name the child as he performs subversive rather than creative acts such as the theft of Apollo's cattle and the cryptic speech to the old man from Onchestus (73, 89).¹²

Upon his return from theft and invention, Hermes faces three confrontations: with Maia, Apollo, and Zeus. A greater number of context-specific epithets occur in these encounters, through which the earned *timai* of Hermes begin to be identified. In his confrontation with Maia, Hermes threatens to become the leader of thieves (175: *φληγτέων ὄρχαμος*) if he does not receive his due respect.¹³ With these words, he predicts the title that he will receive from Apollo in line 292, *ἄρχος φληγτέων*. At the end of the exchange between mother and son, the poet records:

"Ως οἱ μὲν ῥ' ἐπέεσσι πρὸς ἀλλήλους ἀγόρευον
υἱὸς τ' αἰγιόχοιο Διὸς καὶ πότνια Μαῖα (182–3)

Hermes has won his first confrontation, and his paternity is named as proof.¹⁴ Following her son's lead, Maia is the first of the hymn's characters to acknowledge Hermes' place among the gods.¹⁵

¹⁰ In Homer, Hermes is mentioned only once as the son of Maia (*Od.* 14.435) and once as the son of Zeus (*Od.* 8.335). See J. H. Dee, *The Epithetic Phrases for the Homeric Gods: A Repertory of the Descriptive Expressions for the Divinities of the Iliad and the Odyssey* (New York, 1994), 56–9 for a collection of the Homeric epithets used for Hermes. In the first and last lines of the hymn, Hermes is identified as the son of Zeus and Maia. Throughout the hymn, Hermes is named six times as the son of both parents, eleven times as the son of Maia alone, and nine times as the son of Zeus. C. Higbie, *Heroes' Names, Homeric Identities* (New York, 1995), 23 explains the naming of Homeric heroes with respect to their patronymics, genealogies, and attributes, but writes that, 'Homer's intense interest in heroic names and identities is not extended to those of the gods.' In the hymns, however, the use of genealogical epithets is critical to our understanding of the status of the deity addressed.

¹¹ At 28 and 101, Hermes is the son of Zeus; when he is named as the first creator of the lyre or fire (25, 111), steps that allow him to stand on his own as a divinity, Hermes is identified without epithet, by deed alone: *Ἑρμῆς τοι πρῶτιστα χέλυν τεκτῆνατ' αἰοιδόν. Ἑρμῆς τοι πρῶτιστα πυρήια πῦρ τ' ἀνέδωκε.*

¹² Y. Tzifopoulos, 'Hermes and Apollo at Onchestos in the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes*: the poetics and performance of proverbial communication', *Mnemos.* 53 (2000), 148–63 interprets Hermes' speech to the old man as a gnomic utterance, advising him to 'play the fool'.

¹³ When Hermes speaks *μῦθοισιν... κερδαλέοισι*, as the poet records for his dialogue with Maia here (162) and later at 260 and 463, he receives no additional epithet. In each case, the noun phrase seems to take the place of a context specific epithet.

¹⁴ Clay (n. 1), 127 notes that Hermes' consciousness of his new status is present immediately upon his return to his mother's cave. According to Clay, 'The poet underlines the changed situation by introducing Maia's speech as an exchange between gods, *θεῶν θεός* (154). No doubts remain concerning Hermes' divinity or Maia's.' Clay seems to suggest here that the divinity of Hermes has now been accepted by all. I believe that the poet presents the scene from the eyes of Maia, who is the most willing of the gods to accept the divinity of her own son. Hermes has not yet won approval from the rest of the Olympians.

¹⁵ Maia and Hermes, at lines 160 and 174 respectively, speak of Hermes' unnamed *pater*; we can assume that there is no question as to Zeus' identity.

But the child's struggle for recognition is by no means complete. His next confrontation sets him against Apollo.¹⁶ Maia brings forth her child, again named Διὸς παῖδα Κρονίωνος (230). Here, the poet identifies Hermes from the perspective of his mother, who has accepted the rightful paternity of her own son. From the perspective of Hermes, who conceals himself in his swaddling clothes as his brother appears, the child is the son of Zeus and Maia (235: Διὸς καὶ Μαιάδος υἱός). Apollo, however, in his first direct address to Hermes (254–9), uses no proper name. He classifies Hermes merely as a child in his cradle (ὦπαῖ ὃς ἐν λίκνῳ κατὰκειαι) and demands to be told of his cattle.

Hermes claims innocence and, for the moment, denies his role as cattle-driver.¹⁷ Responding to Hermes, Apollo still does not name the child, but addresses the young nuisance as πέπον ἡπεροπεντὰ δολοφραδές (282) and μελαίνης νυκτὸς ἑταῖρε (290); each epithet is connected specifically to the idea of Hermes as a crafty night-time thief. In line 292, Apollo bestows on Hermes his first official title among the gods, which Hermes himself had predicted earlier (175): ἀρχὸς φηλητέων.

For now, Apollo proceeds no further in his contribution of epithets. He addresses Hermes only mockingly (300: κερτομέων) as the son of Zeus and Maia:

Θάρσει σπαργανῶτα Διὸς καὶ Μαιάδος υἱέ·
εὐρήσω καὶ ἔπειτα βοῶν ἴφθιμα κάρηνα
τούτοις ὠλωνοῖσι· σὺ δ' αὖθ' ὁδὸν ἡγεμονεύσεις. (301–3)

Apollo taunts the child with a genealogical epithet whose validity he has not yet accepted. His teasing words prove prophetic, however, not only for Hermes' acceptance by his father, but also for his future epithet διάκτορος and his role as a guide.¹⁸ Later in the hymn (446, 550), Apollo will use the same address without the mocking tone.

As Apollo and Hermes head to Olympus for the arbitration of Zeus, the bard chooses his epithets carefully. Hermes is mentioned four times: twice as Κυλλήνιος (304, 318), once as οἰοπόλος (314), and once with the generic κύδιμος (316). Cyllenian Hermes is connected to the land of men; the flocks over which Hermes is shepherd are the natural inhabitants of the land. The titles used for Hermes here stand in opposition to the divine markers of Apollo, who is ἑκάεργος (307), Λητοῦς ἀγλαὸς υἱός (314), and ἀργυρότοξος (318).

Hermes' undefined status is reinforced when the child, named without epithet, approaches Zeus along with ἀργυρότοξος Ἀπόλλων (327). The two stand at the knees of Zeus, who addresses Apollo alone and asks:

Φοῖβε πόθεν ταύτην μενοεικέα ληίδ' ἐλαύνεις
παῖδα νέον γεγαῶτα φυὴν κήρυκος ἔχοντα; (330–1)

¹⁶ On the confrontation between Hermes and Apollo, see S. E. Harrell, 'Apollo's fraternal threats: language of succession and domination in the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes*', *GRBS* 32 (1991), 307–29. Harrell argues that the enactment of fraternal strife encapsulates the larger crisis for the Olympian order of the entrance of a new god into the pantheon.

¹⁷ A. Haft, 'The mercurial significance of raiding: baby Hermes and animal theft in contemporary Crete', *Arion* 42 (1996), 40 notes that here Hermes 'makes a brave show of contempt for his victim, even though his eventual aim is to gain Apollo's friendship and acceptance by Zeus and the other gods'. This acceptance can be achieved only by second party mediation, so Hermes must wait to claim his epithets until after the meeting with Zeus.

¹⁸ S. Shelmerdine, *The Homeric Hymns* (Newburyport, MA, 1995), 111 notes the 'nice irony' in Apollo's threat that predicts a future role of Hermes.

All-knowing Zeus does not admit recognition of his son although he suggests Hermes' future role as *κηρυξ*.¹⁹ Apollo presents his case to Zeus and exhibits the child, to whom he gives no name and admits no sense of kinship.

At this critical moment of confrontation, Hermes deliberately names and addresses his father, *Ζεῦ πάτερ* (368). The crafty words of Hermes may not be enough to prove his innocence, but clearly earn him recognition. At the end of the speech, Zeus orders them both to search for the cattle, and for Hermes *διάκτορος* to lead the way (387–92). Hermes earns his title *διάκτορος* at the moment he is ordered to carry out such a role. As they depart from Olympus together, Hermes and Apollo are united as *Διὸς περικαλλέα τέκνα* (397), suggesting Zeus' acceptance of his two sons.

The narratological perspective shifts to that of Apollo as soon as the two deities leave Olympus. Until this point, all epithets given by Apollo or representing his outlook have been specifically connected to the birth of the child to Maia in Cyllene or to his theft of the cattle.²⁰ As Hermes begins to hymn the birth of the immortals on his lyre, however, he is named the splendid son of Zeus (432: *Διὸς ἀγλαὸς υἱός*) by the bard, who predicts Apollo's reaction to the sound.

Struck with longing for the instrument, Apollo addresses the child: *Βουφόνε μηχανῶτα πονεύμενε δαιτὸς ἐταῖρε* (436). Based on the actions that Hermes has now admitted, Apollo bestows earned epithets which recall the proleptic proem, epithets that Hermes no longer will deny. Industrious and inventive with his creations on the first day of his life, Hermes also killed two oxen; the music of his lyre, as Hermes had noted to the tortoise (31), would serve as an ideal companion at any feast.

Making an appeal to Hermes through these epithets, Apollo seeks knowledge about the origin of the lyre. He addresses his question first to the resourceful son of Maia (439: *πολύτροπε Μαϊάδος υἱέ*). Without pausing for an answer, he addresses Hermes as the thieving son of Zeus and Maia (446: *φηλῆτα Διὸς καὶ Μαϊάδος υἱέ*). Finally, he confesses: *θαυμάζω Διὸς υἱὲ τὰδ' ὡς ἐρατὸν κιθαρίζεις* (455). Through this progression of titles, Apollo names Hermes first with respect to his mother, then by Maia and Zeus, and finally by Zeus alone, acknowledging their fraternity by addressing Hermes as the son of a mutual father.

In response, Hermes proposes to trade his lyre for the cattle. Agreeing readily, Apollo puts his goad into Hermes' hand and gives Hermes the right to keep the cows that he has stolen. With their trade, the half-brothers are united; four lines later, the poet links them officially as the beautiful children of Zeus (504: *Διὸς περικαλλέα τέκνα*). Hermes has now been accepted as a divine son of Zeus by his mother, father, and brother. As Apollo increases his gifts, he hands Hermes a golden staff, from which Hermes earns his epithet *χρυσόρραπις* (539). At the same time, Hermes is called *κασίγνητος* by Apollo, in a final admission of their fraternity.

As Zeus confirms his *timai*, Hermes gains rule over animals and is appointed to his role of messenger to Hades.²¹ He is named the intermediary between mortals and immortals and beguiles the tribes of mortals at night, perhaps with dreams in fulfillment of the title *ἡγήτωρ οὐνείρων* from the proem. The bard's final naming of Hermes recalls the proem, as he bids farewell to the son of Zeus and Maia (579). The parental epithet is now earned, rather than proleptic. Zeus has admitted

¹⁹ Allen, Halliday, and Sikes (n. 9), 324 note that the writer anticipates Hermes' later functions.

²⁰ With the exception of his mocking appellation of Hermes as the child of Zeus and Maia in 301.

²¹ Note that the subject is unexpressed, but Allen, Halliday, and Sikes (n. 9), 348 note that subject must be Zeus.

Hermes' divinity, a recognition that allows him his place on Olympus. By the end of the hymn, Hermes, through the names he is given by the bard, withdraws the attributes that have been set out for him in advance. Hermes has closed out his epithet account—with one exception.

As a final example of the specific usage of epithets in the *Hymn to Hermes*, I turn to ἀργειφόντης, or Argos-Slayer. Used frequently in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* to identify Hermes by an association that would hold resonance for an audience, ἀργειφόντης assumes a context-specific function in the hymn.²² Appearing four times in the hymn, always in the context of Hermes' theft of Apollo's cattle, the proleptic title predicts his destruction of Argos and abduction of bovine Io, perhaps the best known instance of Hermes in his role as a leader of cattle.²³ As with the other epithets in the hymn, ἀργειφόντης is used consciously by the bard because of its situational suitability.

The fundamental illegitimacy of Hermes at the outset of the hymn and according to his standing in the mythological tradition compels the poet to reinforce the god's *timai* with an explanation of his deserved epithets. Hermes' illegitimacy stems primarily from his birth to Maia alone in her cave, a circumstance that would make him a bastard or *nothos* in mortal terms.²⁴ In the hymn, recognition and acceptance by Zeus serve as Hermes' passport into Olympus. By the end of the poem, Hermes indeed joins the Olympians, but his status beneath his older brother Apollo is made

²² The epithet ἀργειφόντης appears at *Il.* 2.103; 16.181; 21.497; 24.24, 109, 153, 182, 339, 345, 378, 389, 410, 432, 445; *Od.* 1.38, 84; 5.43, 49, 75, 94, 145, 148; 7.137; 8.338; 10.302, 332; 24.99.

²³ The epithet appears at lines 73, 84, 294, and 387. F. Cassolà, *Inni Omerici* (Verona, 1975), 160–1 interprets ἀργειφόντης as 'Argos slayer' and makes a general connection between the Argos myth and the role of Hermes as god of thieves. M. L. West, *Hesiod: Works and Days* (Oxford, 1978), 368–9 suggests a primary meaning for the epithet of 'dog-slayer', appropriate to Hermes as the god of thieves. A connection between Hermes' theft of Apollo's cattle and his abduction of Io following the destruction of Argos can be seen in vase painting as well as in the hymn. Depiction of the scene of Hermes, Argos, and Io in the shape of a cow is common on Attic vases from the sixth and fifth centuries; the theft by Hermes of Apollo's cattle occurs somewhat less frequently. A fragmentary red figure cup from the Princeton University Art Museum (*Record of the Art Museum, Princeton University* 50 [1991] 57; y1990–2), attributed to the Brygos Painter and dated to the early fifth century, combines the two myths. On the outside, it portrays baby Hermes and the stolen cattle of Apollo; inside the cup, an adult Hermes leads away a single cow, which is likely to be Io, as Hermes here is full grown with all his attributes. In the hymn and on the Princeton cup Hermes ἀργειφόντης is also Hermes the cattle-driver. J. Chittenden, 'Diaktoros Argeiphontes', *AJA* 52 (1948), 27 draws a connection between Hermes as cattle-thief and slayer of Argos.

²⁴ It is not my aim to enter the debate on the dating of the hymn except to note that, if it were performed in Athens, the strategy by which Hermes is incorporated into Olympus would reflect an understanding of the rules of familial inclusion that predate the reforms of Pericles in 451 B.C. which required citizenship (or divinity) from both parents to produce an Athenian citizen (or Olympian). For a late sixth-century dating of the hymn, see R. Janko, *Homer, Hesiod and the Hymns: Diachronic Development in Epic Diction* (Cambridge, 1982), 133–50. H. Görgemanns, 'Rhetorik und Poetik im homerischen Hermes hymnus', in H. Görgemanns and E. A. Schmidt (edd.), *Studien zum antiken Epos* (Meisenheim, 1976), 113–28 makes a convincing case for a fifth-century dating. D. Ogden, *Greek Bastardy in the Classical and Hellenistic Periods* (Oxford, 1996), 32–82 provides an excellent historical discussion of Athenian bastardy laws; M. Ebbott, *Imagining Illegitimacy in Early Greek Literature* (Lanham, MD, 2003) explores different ways that Athenian tragedians conceptualize the *nothos* after the Periclean citizenship laws. S. I. Johnston, 'Myth, festival, and poet: the Homeric Hymn to Hermes and its performative context', *CP* 97 (2002), 116 suggests a performance context for the hymn 'during a festival of Hermes that encouraged or celebrated the maturation of males'; we might imagine the hymn's performance at any number of initiatory events.

clear. As Clay is careful to point out, Hermes never achieves *timai* equal to Apollo's.²⁵ Apollo expresses this inferior status through his preference for naming Hermes by his matronymic, *Μαϊάδος υἱός* (567, 574), even at the end of the hymn. Unless asking a favour or offering *timai*, Apollo maintains a distance from his younger half-brother. Hermes gains legitimacy as he joins the divine cosmos, but is made aware, by his epithets, of his ranking beneath his brother.

Such a position is perhaps fitting, in social terms, for the protector of merchants and craftsmen rather than of lyre-playing aristocrats. Baby Hermes composes the first song he plays on his tortoise-shell lyre in the manner of banqueting youths (55–6: ἥντε κοῦροι ἤβηται θαλίῃσι). With a proleptic hymn to his own renowned lineage (59: αὐτοῦ γενεὴν ὀνομακλυτόν), Hermes is the first of the Olympians to recognize his place in the pantheon and to predict the title he will obtain as the god born from Zeus, son of Cronus and fair-shod (καλλιπέδιλος) Maia.²⁶ Reacting to the youth's second and final song, Apollo later repeats the simile (454: οἷα νέων θαλίῃς), but then takes over both the lyre and its associated social valence.²⁷ Hermes willingly exchanges aristocratic aspirations for legitimacy and withdraws his earned epithetic capital from each of the players in the hymn's narratological framework: Maia, Zeus, Apollo, and the bard himself. Through the use of naming and epithets in the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes*, the poet is able to create, predict, and confirm the roles of the divinity and to define his position among the Olympians.²⁸

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²⁵ Clay (n. 1) 150 notes, '[T]o set Hermes above Apollo even in a poem in Hermes' honor—would have meant to ignore and distort the organization of Olympus. . . . If Hermes cannot seriously rival or challenge Apollo, he nevertheless gains his destined place on Olympus and fulfills an essential function within the pantheon.' On this rivalry, see also Harrell (n. 16).

²⁶ At no point in the hymn is Maia named by Hermes or anyone else with a patrilineal epithet.

²⁷ As Johnston (n. 24), 120 notes, the syrinx taken by Hermes in exchange for the lyre is vocally subordinated to the lyre, just as bird and bee divination are inferior to Apollo's oracular skills.

²⁸ I am grateful to A. L. Ford, J. T. Katz, M. R. Lefkowitz, F. I. Zeitlin, and CQ's anonymous reader for comments on drafts of this paper, versions of which have been presented to audiences at the CorHaLi Conference and the APA Annual Meeting.