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Dionysus as Metaphor: Defining the Dionysus of the *Homeric Hymns*
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Branded as “sub-epic” and “sub-Homeric,”¹ the *Homeric Hymns* have long lingered in the shadows of literary scholarship. Although attention has recently been paid to the longer hymns of the corpus, the three *Hymns* to Dionysus have continued to be victims of scholarly neglect. This is, to some extent, understandable, as *Hymn* 1 to Dionysus exists only in fragments and *Hymn* 26 to Dionysus offers a mere thirteen lines. Regarding *Hymn* 7 to Dionysus, T.W. Allen, W.R. Halliday, and E.E. Sikes bluntly comment, “the artistic merit of the hymn is not high.”² Perhaps the *Hymns* to Dionysus lack the sublimity of the greater epics of Homer, but as Miguel Herrero de Jáuregui states, the three hymns together represent one of the first attempts to “define Dionysos”³ and for this reason alone are worthy of attention. By regarding the three *Hymns* to Dionysus as a unit in the context of the hymnic corpus, one can follow Jenny Strauss Clay in reading the *Hymns* as a unified literary body central to Panhellenic Olympian tradition⁴ and thus better understand the image of Dionysus projected by the hymns, particularly by *Hymn* 7, the longest of the three. By reading *Hymn* 7 in the context of the other *Hymns* to Dionysus, one can see the function of the epiphany in *Hymn* 7 as the explication of Dionysus’ power and thus a key aspect of his identity within the greater Panhellenic narrative of the hymnic corpus. By looking at the way the divine epiphany in *Hymn* 7 differs from other epiphanies in the *Homeric Hymns*, one can perceive how epiphany structures the hymn in order to mirror Dionysus’ power as a metaphor—that is, a subject whose literal identity is made clearer through the non-literal, in this case, through illusion. Ultimately, the poet creates a narrative persona separate from himself to create a metapoetic space in the poem that allows Dionysus and his metaphorical power to transcend the poem and come to life through the text.⁵

Before one can interpret the function of the *Homeric Hymns*, one must evaluate the place of the *Hymns* in the tradition. Much ink has been spilled over dating the hymns, which seem to vary considerably in both their age and place of origin. As Richard Janko points out, these differences make it difficult to treat the *Homeric Hymns* as a cohesive corpus from a linguistic standpoint.⁶ Furthermore, the uncertainty of the dates given to Homer and Hesiod makes the relative dating of the *Hymns* even more problematic. However, Janko’s linguistic method provides a systematic way to estimate the dates of texts by calculating the frequency of archaisms and innovations in poems to figure out whether these reflect a consistent pattern of evolution.⁷ Due to the oral nature of the *Hymns*’ transmission, it is only possible to date when the *Hymns* were fixed in writing rather than when they were actually composed. Overall, the evidence points to a later date than the *Odyssey* and closer to Hesiod’s *Theogony*, sometime approximately within the seventh century.⁸ According to Janko’s method, the language and style of *Hymn* 7⁹ correspond to a relatively early but still post-Homeric date within the seventh century.¹⁰

From a historical perspective, *Hymn* 7 to Dionysus is particularly difficult to date on account of its lack of historical references.¹¹ Most scholars have generally cited evidence of Panhellenism to explain the lack of details that might orient the reader to a certain time or place in the *Homeric Hymns* as a corpus. Jenny Strauss Clay asserts that “a clear sign of the Panhellenic Olympian orientation of the Homeric Hymns resides in their self-conscious avoidance of local legend.”¹² As Janko writes, “only by considering [the *Hymns*] above all as literary works fully in the epic tradition do we see how profoundly they transcend the

parochialism of local cults.”¹³ The fact is that very little is known about the composition and performance of the *Hymns*. Therefore, Clay’s unified approach, which examines the *Hymns* in their “rightful and central place in Greek poetic thought concerning the Olympian order and its meaning for mankind” as “a necessary complement to the Panhellenic epic and theogonic poetry of Homer and Hesiod,” appears to be the most productive strategy.¹⁴

Scholars have heavily debated whether Panhellenism in the *Homeric Hymns* is “due to an explicit theological effort to unify the Greek pantheon, or [if] it is a by-product of the poets’ ability to adapt their songs to different audiences.”¹⁵ Clay postulates that “the Homeric Hymns were created in order to fill the perceived gap between Hesiod and Homer” within the Panhellenic Olympian narrative, although she admits that like the Epic Cycle, the *Hymns* also probably had a lengthy prehistory.¹⁶ The *Hymns* do seem to play a complementary role within the Panhellenic narrative; while the Homeric epics focus on heroes with whom the gods sometimes have relations and Hesiodic theogonic poetry focuses on the deities and the divine realm, the *Hymns* straddle the two, focusing on the deities who sometimes interfere with mortals. Clay argues that “each hymn describes an epoch-making moment in the mythic chronology of Olympus and, as such, inaugurates a new era in the divine and human cosmos.”¹⁷ The major concern of these *Hymns* revolves around “the acquisition or redistribution of *timai* [honors] within the Olympian cosmos” and involve “a point of crisis in the Olympian hierarchy,”¹⁸ although some disagree over the extent to which the longer *Hymns* concern the cosmic hierarchy. Rather than attempting to piece together a cohesive story of the Olympian cosmos, one can focus on piecing together what the *Hymns* have to say about a particular god within the overarching Panhellenic Olympian narrative.

For the most part, the *Homeric Hymns* offer a cohesive picture of each individual god. Most of the gods mentioned in the *Homeric Hymns* have only one hymn of considerable length dedicated to them. Any additional hymns about that god are short and consequently offer material too insubstantial to contradict the information the long hymn presents. In fact, most of the gods mentioned in the corpus have only one or two short hymns dedicated to them, or at most a single medium-length hymn. Dionysus is the exception. With one medium-length hymn in addition to one long hymn¹⁹ and one short hymn, he is the only god in the hymnic corpus who has two separate sources of substantial information. Thus, it is particularly important to read the *Hymns* to Dionysus in connection with one another and to understand their differences. This approach attempts to reconcile Miguel Herrero de Jáuregui’s analytical method, which focuses more on the complementariness of the three *Hymns* and less on the epiphany in *Hymn 7*,²⁰ with that of Dominique Jaillard, who focuses solely on the epiphany of *Hymn 7* rather than on the character of Dionysus by reading *Hymn 7* in the context of the other instances of epiphany in the hymnic corpus.²¹ After grasping how the three *Hymns* work in conjunction with one another, one can isolate the function that *Hymn 7* has in defining Dionysus and see how it uses epiphany in a unique way to fulfill that function.

All three *Hymns* involve Dionysus’ relationship to power, but they focus on different aspects of that power at different stages of his narrative timeline. It is most unfortunate that among the three *Hymns* to Dionysus, the first, and likely the longest, hymn has only survived in two short fragments. However, the fragmentary state of the *Hymn 1* to Dionysus does not mean that it has nothing to offer. The first fragment begins with a priamel, an unusual construction in the *Hymns*,²² which locates Dionysus’ birthplace at the mystical Nysa. Although details of Dionysus’ birth are difficult to extract from the fragments, West asserts that *Hymn 1* most likely tells the story of Dionysus’ reception in Olympus and acceptance by Hera, details taken from a

myth evidently well known from before 600 BCE.²³ According to this myth, when Hephaestus traps sends his mother a magical throne that traps her with invisible bonds, Dionysus succeeds in freeing her by bringing a drunk Hephaestus back to Olympus to undo his trick. Hera rewards Dionysus by admitting him as one of the Twelve Gods of Olympus. Although West's proposed origin story for *Hymn 1* appears as a connected account only in late sources, a series of fragments by Alcaeus confirm Homer's familiarity with the story.²⁴ *Hymn 1* to Dionysus is an origin story in two senses: it covers Dionysus' birth and his original designation as one of the Twelve Olympians. Although West's belief that the myth may have started with *Hymn 1*²⁵ cannot be definitively proved, the idea that the *Hymns* were created or at least collected for a specific purpose is certainly compelling. Together, the three *Hymns* to Dionysus reveal different aspects of Dionysus' character. By establishing Dionysus as one of the Twelve, *Hymn 1* tells the story of Dionysus' rise to power, a theme shared by the other two *Hymns*. In the shortest hymn, *Hymn 26*, Dionysus is depicted as being raised by the nymphs in Nysa (ὄν τρέφον ἠϋκόμοι νόμφαι, "whom the beautiful-haired nymphs reared," 1.3), but by the end of the hymn he is their leader (ἐξηγεῖτο, "he led," 1.19). In *Hymn 7*, Dionysus is kidnapped by pirates and is seemingly at their mercy until he reveals his divine nature and turns the pirates into dolphins, saving only the helmsman, who suspected his divinity from the beginning. Thus, each hymn begins with Dionysus at the bottom of a power structure but ends with his ascension to the full height of his power. Ultimately, the story is the same in all three hymns, but each one has a different point to make. *Hymn 1* explains Dionysus' origin; *Hymn 26* describes his relationship with his followers; and *Hymn 7* defines his divine abilities.

The form of *Hymn 7* is essentially question and answer. The first half of the hymn posits questions about Dionysus' identity, and the second half endeavors to answer them. The location of *Hymn 7* sets the tone for the poem, which takes place in a markedly different setting from the other two hymns. *Hymn 1* rejects various places before finally settling on the mythical Nysa, the same location where *Hymn 26* takes place, and then moving to Olympus. *Hymn 7*, on the other hand, deliberately avoids specifying the local of the action. The shore upon which Dionysus is initially discovered remains unnamed, and the majority of the hymn takes place in the middle of the sea. Herrero de Jáuregui argues that "there could not be a better place to symbolize the universality of Dionysos' relation to men."²⁶ Delocalization, then, is a means to Panhellenism. However, Herrero de Jáuregui agrees with Jaillard's suggestion that rather than taking *Hymn 7* to Dionysus purely as a model Panhellenic poem, one should recognize that "the process of distillation or delocalization of the narrative may have proved to be easier since the dionysiac sea is an 'elsewhere' that can be represented more abstractly."²⁷ As Marie-Claire Beaulieu points out, the sea is "the meeting point of the human and divine spheres,"²⁸ causing it to be the traditional locus of divine epiphany. Thus, though perhaps the greater function of the *Hymns* is to espouse panhellenism, it is not inappropriate to focus here on the symbolic function of the sea as the junction between mortal and immortal.

The contrast between mortality and immortality is emphasized by Dionysus' mixed familial background. Each hymn emphasizes a different aspect of Dionysus' parentage. *Hymn 1* addresses Dionysus as δῖον γένος ("divine stock," 1.3), linking him closely to his immortal father. *Hymn 26* ties Dionysus equally to his parents, addressing him as Ζηνὸς καὶ Σεμέλης ἐρικυδέος ἀγλαὸν υἱόν ("the splendid son of Zeus and glorious Semele," 1.2). In *Hymn 7*, on the other hand, it is only Semele who is mentioned explicitly. It must be acknowledged, however, that there is some dispute over Semele's mortal status, for there is no mention of her fatal love for Zeus before the fifth century.²⁹ Not until the Hellenistic era is there is agreement that Semele is struck

by Zeus' lightning bolt but that Dionysus is saved from a shared destruction. According to M.L. West, Semele can be connected to the Indo-European Earth-goddess whose name has been reconstructed in Proto-Indo-European as **d^hǵ^hm-*, which underwent metathesis to form the Greek *χθών*.³⁰ "Semele" is generally believed to be a Thracian name from **g^hem-elā* for the Earth-goddess, also recognizable under the name Plataia.³¹ Based on this connection, Jan N. Bremmer insists that Semele was not a purely human girl but "that Dionysos' human birth is not really human because of the lightning that killed his mother, which turned her into a goddess."³² In any case, there is some human element to his birth, and although Dionysus is an immortal, it is his mortal origins that are emphasized here. In this way, within the first line of the hymn, mortality and immortality come into conflict within the character of Dionysus. Indeed, Dionysus' mixed mortal-immortal parentage forms the common thread among the three *Homeric Hymns* to Dionysus; in all of them, he must, as Herrero de Jáuregui puts it, "assert his divinity, which is not immediately recognized."³³ This emphasis on Dionysus' mortality conflicts with the logic that his connection to Zeus would be more heavily stressed in a poem chiefly about his power as a god. Although there is no doubt regarding the nominal identity of the god, to define the god more precisely—who he is, where he came from, what his powers are—is another matter entirely. *Hymn 7* immediately confronts the reader with the seemingly paradoxical nature of Dionysus' essence. The hymn's setting on the sea is not merely acceptable but is in fact essential as a reflection of the character of Dionysus, the god from mortal and immortal stock. This is a hymn that is meant to make sense of the apparent contradictions that constitute Dionysus' character. The sea could not be a more appropriate setting, for, as a place located in between the human and divine spheres, it immediately and effectively lays out the problem of paradox central to Dionysus' nature.

It is not only Dionysus' mixed background that is thrown into conflict but his physical appearance as well. Only in *Hymn 7* does his physical appearance receive any description: the speaker states that Dionysus seems like a young man in the prime of youth (*νεηνίη ἀνδρὶ ἔοικώς / πρωθήβη*, "seeming like a young man in the prime of youth," ll.3-4). At no other time in the *Homeric Hymns* is the word *ἔοικώς* used to describe a god who looks or seems like a man. There are several instances of the word *ἔοικώς* taken together with god. In the *Hymn 4* to Hermes, for example, Hermes is compared to black night (*μελαίνη νυκτι ἔοικώς*, "looking like black night," l.358) and explicitly denies that he looks like a cattle rustler (*οὐ τι βοῶν ἐλατῆρι... ἔοικα*, "I do not at all look like a rustler of cattle," l.265; *οὐ τι βοῶν ἐλατῆρι... ἔοικώς*, "I, looking not at all like a rustler of cattle," l.377). In *Hymn 3* to Apollo, Apollo takes on the appearance of a dolphin (*δελφῖνι ἔοικώς*, "looking like a dolphin," l.400). In the *Hymns* to Aphrodite and Apollo, the god has taken on human appearance but still seems like an immortal (*γύναι εἰκυῖα θεῆσιν*, "O woman looking like the goddesses," 5.153; *καταθνητοῖσιν ἔοικας*, "you look like the immortals," 3.464). Mortals are compared to gods in the *Hymns* to Aphrodite and Demeter (*ἄθανάτοισιν ἔοικώς*, "looking like the immortals," 5.55 and 2.241), but gods are never compared to mortals, with the exception of Dionysus in *Hymn 7*.

Dionysus is the only god in the *Hymns* who deceives mortal vision without any obvious metamorphosis, and yet, by describing what appear to be plain facts, the initial lines of the hymn further complicate Dionysus' character. This complexity is reinforced when the helmsman states that Dionysus is *οὐ θνητοῖσι βροτοῖσιν εἶκελος, ἀλλὰ θεοῖς* ("not like mortal men but like the gods," ll.20-21), a statement that is in direct opposition to the initial description of Dionysus as a young man. *Hymn 7* describes Dionysus' physical appearance in great detail—his general aspect (*νεηνίη ἀνδρὶ ἔοικώς πρωθήβη*, "looking like a young man in the prime of youth," ll.3-4), his

hair (καλαὶ δὲ περισσεῖοντο ἔθειραι κυάνεαι, “beautiful, dark hair flowed around him,” ll.4-5), his clothes (φᾶρος δὲ περὶ στιβαροῖς ἔχεν ὤμοις πορφύρεον, “he had a crimson cloak around his strong shoulders,” ll.4-6), his eyes (ὄμμασι κυανέοισι, “dark eyes,” l.15). Despite all of this description, however, the narrator cannot make sense of what should be a concrete fact: Dionysus is like a man, but he is not like a man. What, then, is one to make of him?

Epiphany is the vehicle through which the poet chooses to express Dionysus’ power, and it is by the uncertainty of Dionysus’ identity that *Hymn 7* differs from the other epiphanic *Homeric Hymns*. With the exception of *Hymn 20* to Hephaestus, epiphanies occur in the *Hymns* whenever birth is not involved, namely in *Hymn 2* to Demeter l.188ff., 275ff.; *Hymn 3* to Apollo l.440ff.; and *Hymn 5* to Aphrodite l.81ff., 173ff.³⁴ In each case, the actions of the deity in disguise are attributed to the god or goddess by name: Demeter is the old woman, Apollo is the dolphin, and it is Aphrodite whom Anchises does not recognize. The myth of each hymn is related by some omniscient third-person narrator. This convention follows the principle³⁵ emphasized by Gerald F. Else regarding Homeric utterances, namely that “the poet always knows what god is present in or responsible for a given situation, while the human characters usually do not” and, moreover, that “the poet’s knowledge of the divine nature and behavior is precise, encyclopedic, binding.”³⁶ This is not the case in *Hymn 7*, which begins instead with a memory; from the very start, the members of the audience are aware that what they are about to hear is a subjective telling of a story in the speaker’s past rather than an objective, “encyclopedic” description of an event. Dionysus’ first physical appearance occurs within an indirect statement (μνήσομαι... ὥς, “I will remember how...” l.2), which distinguishes it structurally from the majority of the other *Homeric Hymns*; in these, a relative clause begins the central mythic section of each poem.³⁷ Meanwhile, Dionysus’ name and identification as the son of Semele are stated outside of the indirect statement—that is, before the mythic narrative actually begins. Once the story commences, Dionysus is not mentioned by name until the very end of the poem, when he speaks for the first time to reveal his true identity to the helmsman. Thus, the audience almost seems to experience the epiphany from the perspective of the sailors.

However, this is not a hymn told from the perspective of a third party as the events described take place. In all of the other *Hymns*, the word μνήσομαι is used at the very end in a variation of the phrase αὐτὰρ ἐγὼ καὶ σεῖο καὶ ἄλλης μνήσομ’ ἀοιδῆς “but I will remember you and another song.”³⁸ In every other hymn, the word is a promise of future remembrance. Only in *Hymn 7* does it introduce the story as a memory. This introductory word suggests that *Hymn 7* is a story told by a narrator recounting only of the subjective interpretation of the event. Instead of overtly describing the god and his actions, the omniscient poet separates himself from the narrative persona, who recalls the event from a subjective perspective.

The subjectivity of the narration is apparent in the way the narrator hints at but never explicitly names Dionysus or calls out his presence throughout the first half of the hymn. The nominal absence of Dionysus is especially noticeable when the helmsman attempts to persuade the rest of the crew that their captive is a god and tries to name which god their captive might be. In lines 19ff., he proposes Zeus, Apollo, and finally Poseidon before giving up and simply asserting that whoever this is, he must be one of the gods who live on Olympus (θεοῖς οἱ Ὀλύμπια δώματ’ ἔχουσιν, “[similar] to the gods who hold Olympian homes,” l.21). By this withholding of Dionysus’ name, the poet heightens the dramatic irony; the god is absent, yet ever present.

Indeed, hints of Dionysus’ presence are scattered throughout the first half of the hymn. One such hint is the formulaic expression ἀνδρεσσι μελήσει in line 27. Modern scholarship has

tried to understand what Lucia Prauscello calls “the apparent lack of any specific reference, direct or indirect, to a female dimension, either in myth or cult, within the narrative of Dionysus’ epiphany” in this hymn.³⁹ The description of Dionysus as a long-haired youth wrapped in a red cloak could potentially allude to the femininity that is so often present in later accounts of Dionysian epiphany, but this is a weak connection. In an endeavor to find an allusion to Dionysus’ feminine dimension within this hymn, Prauscello shifts attention from Dionysus to the other figures of the poem, analyzing the reaction of the pirates to Dionysus.⁴⁰ In so doing, she shows that hints of the god exist even in places where he is not explicitly mentioned. Prauscello first tracks down the times the formula *ἄνδρεςσι μελήσει* is used in Homeric epic in order to underscore the associations evoked by the phrase, which is used specifically in the speech type-scene in which a man, having felt his authority threatened, addresses a woman.⁴¹ Thus, when the captain in *Hymn 7* says, *ὄδε δ’ αὐτ’ ἄνδρεςσι μελήσει* (“this one (Dionysus) will be a concern to men,” l. 27), he feminizes the helmsman, the only one to believe that Dionysus is a god.⁴² Prauscello argues that a formulaic expression like *ἄνδρεςσι μελήσει* would alert the audience, familiar with Homeric epic, to the gender-ambiguous aspect of Dionysus’ world.⁴³ Just as the distinction between immortal and mortal is blurred by Dionysus’ mistaken identity, so too is that between male and female. Even though the captain does not realize Dionysus’ identity, the formula in his speech turns the one person on the boat who follows Dionysus into a woman, the gender of Dionysus’ traditional company. Thus, although Dionysus is not explicitly mentioned by name throughout the poem, as the other gods are in their epiphanies, perhaps Dionysus is present all along; even before the pirates realize it, “the womanish man-god was already there.”⁴⁴

The possibility of Dionysus’ presence in the first half of the hymn can be taken further, specifically by studying the use of the word *δαίμων* throughout the corpus of the *Homeric Hymns* and the way its use in *Hymn 7* differs from the rest of the hymns. In most of the hymns, *δαίμων* is used simply to mean “deity” and is essentially synonymous with *θεός*.⁴⁵ In its adjectival form, *δαίμωνι-*, it is used to mean “divine” and describes a deity.⁴⁶ However, in *Hymn 7*, the adjectival form is used twice and in each case means not “divine” but rather “possessed by a divinity” or “strange.” The helmsman first addresses the rest of the crew as “*δαίμόνιοι*” (l.17) when pleading with them to release their captive whom he alone thinks is divine. The captain retorts by addressing the helmsman with the same adjective: *δαίμόνι*’ (l.26). Superficially, *δαίμωνι-* is a common word of reproach. However, taken in the context of the hymn, it is not a stretch to argue that the audience would see the irony in this word, the root of which implies that the men are possessed by a *δαίμων*. Generally in Homer, “even after the gods have been differentiated, the idea of power lingering in the vaguer *daimon* often provides an easier explanation of the divine cause of things than could some more departmentalized god in human form.”⁴⁷ In this case, the audience knows the god is there, so the dramatic irony is heightened with these forms of address and reinforced when the captain says, *ἡμῖν ἔμβαλε δαίμων* (“a deity cast him [the captive] on us,” l.31).

Admittedly, all of these phrases are found in dialogue, so it could be argued that it is merely the characters of the *Hymn* who are confused about Dionysus’ identity, not the narrator himself. There are several features of the hymn that refute this contention. First, the hymn is introduced as a memory not only in word but also in structure; the narrative of the hymn begins in indirect statement and is related not as objective fact but rather as subjective description. Moreover, although the poet is omniscient, by creating a separate narrator he suspends his knowledge of Dionysus’ identity once the narrative begins in indirect statement in line 2. Instead, he presents the story from the eyes of someone remembering it and trying to comprehend the

incomprehensible wonder of the experience and the ambiguity of Dionysus. Thus, the direct speech of the characters could conceivably be tainted by memory and its attendant deficiencies; for if the narrator is not omniscient, his subjective perspective would inevitably bleed into the dialogue. Furthermore, there are phrases outside the dialogue that hint at the influence of a divinity. The mention of fate would by itself be of little consequence. However, while Homer more often uses the concept of the δαίμων in cases of misfortune caused by a vague entity, he does make “an occasional recourse to *Moirai*” to stand for the same idea of δαίμων—that is, “what is external to a man’s will, what he does in passion or infatuation.”⁴⁸ Taken in the context of these other instances of Dionysian innuendo, the narrator’s mention of fate in line 8 (τοὺς δ’ ἦγε κακὸς μόρος, “evil fate led them”) can reasonably be considered another hint at the god’s presence. The idea of an evil fate causing these events is reiterated in line 51 (κακὸν μόρον ἐξάλυοντες, “escaping an evil fate”). Ultimately, the effect of these Dionysian innuendos is to create three narrative levels: that of the poet, that of the narrator, and finally that of the characters themselves. This is an epiphany unlike any other found in the *Homeric Hymns*; it is a story told by a persona explicitly separate from the omniscient poet.

If, however, the point of *Hymn 7* is to reveal Dionysus’ power, it seems counterproductive for the poet to go to such great lengths to create a narrative persona that is not omniscient. The poet could just as easily narrate the Dionysian epiphany from the omniscient point of view and unambiguously describe Dionysus’ identity and power. In order to understand why the poet sets up this third-person subjective narrator in the first half of the poem, one must examine how Dionysus demonstrates his power in the second half of the poem at the moment of epiphanic revelation.

The complex nature of Dionysus’ power manifests itself on many different sensory levels. Immediately following the shift in the poem at line 34, the sailors are hit by a barrage of sensory experiences. Wine flows over the swift black ship (οἶνος μὲν πρώτιστα θοὴν ἀνὰ νῆα μέλαιναν, l. 35), “sweet to drink” (ἠδύποτος, l.36), but also “fragrant” (εὐώδης, l.36) with an “ambrosial smell” (ὀσμὴ ἀμβροσίη ll. 35-36). Wine is a substance that distorts humans’ senses, much like the god with whom it is associated. In this case, however, the distortion is twofold; wine normally causes illusion, but here it is illusion itself. The sailors see the wine, they taste it, and they smell it. This is an illusion that plays not with a single sense but with the entire mind. The third-person subjective narrator forces the audience to experience these phenomena just as the sailors do. The narrator does not describe how a god is causing these illusions to appear. Instead, the audience experiences each blow to the senses in quick succession with no explanation, only description. With this barrage of sensory experiences, Dionysus mentally possesses not only the characters in the poem but also the audience of the poem.

Dionysus manipulates the visual sense in particular by using both illusion and actual transformation. After the sea turns to wine, vines are stretched out along the mast, and many bunches of grapes hang on it. As Herrero de Jáuregui points out, Dionysus “has the power to break boundaries between land and sea, between living nature and dead wood.”⁴⁹ Not only can bonds literally not hold him (τὸν δ’ οὐκ ἴσχανε δεσμά, “the bonds did not restrain him,” l.13), but Dionysus actively breaks the metaphorical bonds that separate immortal from mortal, as he creates life on the barren sea, intertwining the living vines on the dead wood.⁵⁰ It is not just the sea but Dionysus himself that is the juncture between the mortal and immortal realms. Through him, the immortal and mortal can coexist. This concept is reinforced by Dionysus’ transformation of the sailors into dolphins. Associated with life and death, dolphins are often depicted as leaping, occupying “the space immediately above the waves, a space conceptualized

by the Greeks as an intermediary location between mortals and immortals.”⁵¹ Thus, they “act as intermediaries between different states of existence, a function they share with the sea”⁵² and, more importantly in this case, with Dionysus. Although dolphins’ affinity to music is not explicitly attested until Pindar in the fifth century,⁵³ this attribute need not be disregarded, as “sentiments towards animals are slow to change.”⁵⁴ Thus, the dolphin in *Hymn 7* can conjure up images of “dolphins leaping in a circle around the ship like a dancing chorus.”⁵⁵ Dionysus subdues his adversaries by turning them into a chorus, making them his followers, who, like him, dance on the line between immortal and mortal.

Although he is himself a god, in every one of the Homeric hymns dedicated to him Dionysus must prove his place among his fellow immortals. In *Hymn 7*, he must resolve the tension between the immortal and mortal parts of himself and prove that they can coexist within his person. Paradoxically, what makes Dionysus’ character shift from incomprehensible to comprehensible is illusion; this device, usually used to deceive, instead clarifies the identity of god who balances mortality and immortality within himself. Dionysus’ power is made manifest through paradox because he is paradox. The poet’s strategy of using a subjective narrator to tell the story is effective, for it prevents the audience from being detached from the narrative. As Jaillard states, this poem deals “not only with the narration of the divine epiphany, but with the epiphanic structuring of the narrative.”⁵⁶ Because the narrative is structured around epiphany, the first half involves a situation of identity that is yet to be understood and the second half reveals that identity. The structure thus mirrors metaphor: first, something literal is presented that warrants explanation; this element is then it is compared to something else that is not literally applicable but makes the first literal concept easier to understand. The vividness of the epiphany that comes from the third-person subjective narration reinforces the concept of Dionysus as metaphor. Thus, Dionysus can be seen as an intermediary figure in more than one sense—he is the intermediary between immortality and mortality but also between reality and illusion.

Although Dionysus also conjures up the image of a bear, another terrifying vision that serves to subdue the pirates and emphasizes his power, he himself becomes a lion, an animal that is not traditionally associated with him but that is the “king of similes” in Homer.⁵⁷ Steven H. Lonsdale states that “the symbol of the kingly, quasi-divine, lion from the Near East has been recreated in the similes in the image of the Homeric hero with all his strengths and weaknesses.”⁵⁸ However, ὀρούω is the word generally associated with the attacking lion in Homeric simile⁵⁹ and is the word used here to describe Dionysus leaping at the captain (ἐπορούσας, 1.50).⁶⁰ Although there are instances of the cowardly lion in Homeric simile, ἐπορούσας is a word specifically used to describe the flight of a weapon and the attack of a warrior.⁶¹ Thus, the purpose of *Hymn 7* is to allow Dionysus to show his powers, and he accomplishes this as a metaphor come to life. He is metaphor rather than simile because he blends reality with illusion, as opposed to simile, which is marked off by certain signifying words, such as ὡς... ὥς “just as... so too” or “like.” He blurs the line between real and unreal. By being metaphor, he shows his true essence.

The concept of Dionysus as intermediary can also extend to his position between the literal and the figurative, a position that is created as a result of the poet separating himself from the narrative persona. He is metaphor in that illusion makes sense of the literal facts of his nature, but he is metaphor also in that the literal experience of the poem makes sense of figurative words and phrases in the text, particularly epithets and other epic formulae. Indeed, seen in a certain light, all three *Hymns* to Dionysus endeavor to explain an epithet related to the god. *Hymn 1*’s location of Dionysus’ birth at Nysa is no doubt an attempt to derive through folk

etymology the origin of Dionysus' name, "Dio-" from his father Zeus and "-nysus" from Nysa, his birthplace. Another possible case of folk etymology in *Hymn 1* may be found with the epithet Εἰραφιῶτα, "bull god" in West's translation (Fragment A, 1.3 and Fragment D, 1.8), perhaps meaning "stitched-in one."⁶² Since the hymn is evidently about Dionysus' origin and addition as the last of the Twelve Olympians, it would not be aberrant for this epithet, which occurs at the beginning and end of the hymn, to derive its meaning from the story, just as Dionysus' name does. Dionysus is stitched into the Twelve Olympians just as he was stitched into Zeus' thigh. Although Dionysus is connected to the bull in later tradition, perhaps this was a false derivation from the epithet. At any rate, the fragmentary nature of the hymn makes it impossible to reach a definitive conclusion. *Hymn 26*, on the other hand, is a clear case of a poem being used to explain two epithets, namely Κισσοκόμην ("ivy-haired," 1.1) and ἐρίβρομον ("mighty roarer," 1.1).⁶³ Dionysus is Κισσοκόμης because he is wreathed in ivy (κισσῶι, 1.9) and ἐρίβρομος because noise (βρόμος, 1.10) pervades the woodland in which he and his followers roam.

Given the folk etymology present in *Hymn 1* and *Hymn 26*, that *Hymn 7* has the function of providing folk etymology for epithets and other formulae is unremarkable. *Hymn 7*, however, differs from the other two *Hymns* to Dionysus in the way folk etymology is presented. In most cases, the epithet is introduced first and then its folk etymology is explained. In this way, the poet can describe the situation that incorporates the epithet. This sequence occurs in *Hymn 1* and *Hymn 26*. In *Hymn 7*, however, the poet does not introduce the epithet first. Instead, the narrator describes how the transformed Dionysus roars loudly (μέγα δ' ἔβραχεν, "he roared loudly," 1.45), and then reveals himself with the epithet ἐρίβρομος ("loud-roarer," 1.56). Unlike the other two *Hymns* in which the poet explains the epithets associated with Dionysus, *Hymn 7* presents Dionysus the character showing how his story provides the folk etymology for his epithet. In this way, the folk etymology in *Hymn 7* works on a metapoetic level. The poet is no longer alone in recognizing the function of the hymn as a way to folk etymologize a formulaic phrase. Dionysus transcends the barrier between poet and character to explain the epithet. Thus, Dionysus not only conquers the sailors but also controls the text itself by subsuming the voice of the poet.

Dionysus' dominance over the text can be seen in the illusion of the sea turning into wine, a phenomenon that would certainly lead the audience to think back to the epithet οἴνοπα πόντον "wine-dark" in line 7. The "wine-dark sea" is an utterly commonplace formula in epic poetry and is not associated with the god Dionysus in particular. The epithet "wine-dark" refers to the color of the sea and has parallels in other Near Eastern traditions.⁶⁴ In *Hymn 7*, however, Dionysus takes the epithet and makes it his own. Dionysus is metaphor in two senses: he is metaphor in that he uses illusion to make sense of the literal facts about his person, but he is also metaphor in that the literal experience of the poem brings to life figurative textual formulae. The narrative persona acts as a bridge between the poet and Dionysus the character, muting the poet's power to provide explicit explanations of formulae and instead allowing Dionysus to transcend the text and take over the poet's voice. His power is all-consuming; he is metaphor personified, and the text, structured as metaphor, mirrors this. The shape of the poem is the shape of Dionysus; Dionysus is in the poem but is also the poem itself. On a macro level, Dionysus' power as metaphor overtakes the structure of the text. On a micro level, it overtakes the formulae of the text. Thus, *Hymn 7* is a poem about Dionysus' power, a "mental possession"⁶⁵ that begins with the very first action of the poem, the poet's remembrance. Introducing the poem with the word μνήσομαι in line 2, the poet begins the hymn with a root derived from Proto-Indo-European *men- "think," a poetic and religious root associated with singing and mental

activity.⁶⁶ Thus, from the very beginning, the poet not only yields to the narrator but also surrenders himself to Dionysus, who comes to life in the text and as the text.

Overall, the existence of a narrative persona separate from the poet confers upon the poem three narrative levels: that of the characters, that of the narrative persona, and that of the poet. On one level, Dionysus takes over the minds of the characters in the story in order to assert his power over them. On the second level, through the narrator, the story is told from a subjective perspective, causing the story of epiphany to shape the structure of the hymn. In this way, the narrative persona acts as the bridge between the poet and the characters. Dionysus not only takes over the minds of the sailors but also possesses the minds of the audience. His power is mirrored by the structure of the text, creating a parallel between the audience and the sailors and between the powerful effect of the textual structure and the power of illusion within the story. Finally, on the third level, the function of the poet, limited by the persona that narrates the poem, is also taken over by Dionysus as he transcends the boundary between character and author to dominate the text itself by taking control of the epithets and formulaic phrases that the poet writes. *Hymn 7* to Dionysus is a poem about power. As metaphor personified, Dionysus asserts his power both at the poetic and at the metapoetic level. Through the text, he comes to life.

Notes

1. Cora Angier Sowa, *Traditional Themes and the Homeric Hymns* (Chicago: Bolchazy-Carducci, 1984), 1.
2. T.W. Allen, W.R. Halliday, and E.E. Sikes, *The Homeric Hymns* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936), 379.
3. Miguel Herrero de Jáuregui, “Dionysos in the *Homeric Hymns*: The Olympian Portrait of the God,” in *Redefining Dionysos*, ed. Alberto Bernabé, Miguel Herrero de Jáuregui, Ana Isabel Jiménez San Cristóbal, and Raquel Martín Hernández (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2013), 235.
4. Jenny Strauss Clay, *The Politics of Olympus*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 16.
5. The Greek I quote throughout this paper is from M.L. West’s *Homeric Hymns, Homeric Apocrypha, Lives of Homer* (2003). All translations are my own.
6. Richard Janko, *Homer, Hesiod and the Hymns: Diachronic Development in Epic Diction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 1.
7. *Ibid.*, 189.
8. *Ibid.*, 184.
9. *Hymn 7* to Dionysus is just long enough to reasonably receive the same linguistic scrutiny that scholars have applied to the longer *Hymns*.
10. Janko, *Homer, Hesiod and the Hymns: Diachronic Development in Epic Diction*, 184.
11. Andrew Faulkner, “Modern Scholarship on the *Homeric Hymns*: Foundational Issues,” in *The Homeric Hymns: Interpretive Essays*, ed. Andrew Faulkner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 14.
12. Clay, *The Politics of Olympus*, 10.
13. Richard Janko, “Review: The Homeric Hymns,” *CR* 41, no. 1 (1991): 12, accessed April 17, 2016, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/712554>.
14. Clay, *The Politics of Olympus*, 16.
15. Herrero de Jáuregui, “Dionysos in the *Homeric Hymns*: The Olympian Portrait of the God,” 241.
16. *Ibid.*, 269.

17. Ibid., 10.
18. Ibid., 15.
19. According to West, the fragmentary *Hymn 1* to Dionysus would have been approximately 400 lines (West, “The First *Homeric Hymn* to Dionysus,” 30).
20. Herrero de Jáuregui, “Dionysos in the *Homeric Hymns*: the Olympian Portrait of the God,” 236.
21. Dominique Jaillard, “The Seventh *Homeric Hymn* to Dionysus: An Epiphanic Sketch,” in *The Homeric Hymns: Interpretive Essays*, ed. and trans. Andrew Faulkner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 136.
22. Richard Janko, “The Structure of the Homeric Hymns: A Study in Genre,” *Hermes* 109, no. 1 (1981): 12, accessed February 25, 2016, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4476188>.
23. M.L. West, “The First *Homeric Hymn* to Dionysus,” in *The Homeric Hymns: Interpretive Essays*, ed. Andrew Faulkner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 31.
24. Ibid., 32.
25. Ibid., 35.
26. Herrero de Jáuregui, “Dionysos in the *Homeric Hymns*: The Olympian Portrait of the God,” 242.
27. Jaillard, “The Seventh *Homeric Hymn* to Dionysus: An Epiphanic Sketch,” 145.
28. Marie-Claire Beaulieu, *The Sea in the Greek Imagination* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 167.
29. Jan N. Bremmer, “Walter F. Otto’s *Dionysos* (1933),” in *Redefining Dionysos*, ed. Alberto Bernabé, Miguel Herrero de Jáuregui, Ana Isabel Jiménez San Cristóbal, and Raquel Martín Hernández (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2013), 9.
30. M.L. West, *Indo-European Poetry and Myth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 174.
31. Ibid., 175.
32. Bremmer, “Walter F. Otto’s *Dionysos* (1933),” 10.
33. Herrero de Jáuregui, “Dionysos in the *Homeric Hymns*: The Olympian Portrait of the God,” 245.

34. Janko, “The Structure of the Homeric Hymns: A Study in Genre,” 13-14.
35. Else draws this principle from Ove Jørgensen, “Das Auftreten der Götter in den Büchern τ-μ der Odyssee,” *Hermes* 39 (1904) 357 ff.; E. Hedén, *Homerische Götterstudien* (diss. Uppsala, 1912) 16ff.; and Erland Ehnmark, *The Idea of God in Homer* (Uppsala, 1935) 64-5.
36. Gerald F. Else, “God and Gods in Early Greek Thought,” *TAPA* 80 (1949): 26, accessed March 3, 2016, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/283509>.
37. Janko, “The Structure of the Homeric Hymns: A Study in Genre,” 10-11.
38. Variations of the line αὐτὰρ ἐγὼ καὶ σεῖο καὶ ἄλλης μνήσομ’ ἀοιδῆς occur at the end of the following hymns: *Hymn 2 to Demeter* (1.495), *Hymn 3 to Apollo* (1.546), *Hymn 4 to Hermes* (1.580), *Hymn 6 to Aphrodite* (1.21), *Hymn 10 to Aphrodite* (1.6), *Hymn 19 to Pan* (1.49), *Hymn 25 to the Muses and Apollo* (1.7), *Hymn 27 to Artemis* (1.22), *Hymn 28 to Athena* (1.18), *Hymn 29 to Hestia* (1.14), *Hymn 30 to Earth* (1.19), *Hymn 33 to the Dioscuri* (1.19).
39. Lucia Prauscello, “‘Dionysiac’ Ambiguity: *HomHymn* 7.27: ὄδε δ’ αὐτ’ ἀνδρεσσι μελήσει,” *MD* 58 (2007): 209, accessed March 8, 2016, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40236354>.
40. *Ibid.*, 210.
41. *Ibid.*, 214.
42. *Ibid.*, 215.
43. *Ibid.*
44. *Ibid.*
45. Instances of θεός used to mean δαίμων are found in the following hymns: *Hymn 2 to Demeter* (1.300, 1.338), *Hymn 3 to Apollo* (1.11), *Hymn 4 to Hermes* (1.138, 1.343, 1.381, 1.551), *Hymn 19 to Pan* (1.22, 1.41), *Hymn 30 to Mother Earth* (1.16).
46. The word δαίμωνι- used to mean “divine” occurs in *Hymn 4 to Hermes* (1.97).
47. William Chase Greene, “Fate, Good, and Evil, in Early Greek Poetry,” *HSPH* 46 (1935): 5, accessed March 3, 2016, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/310720>.
48. Greene, “Fate, Good, and Evil, in Early Greek Poetry,” 4.
49. Herrero de Jáuregui, “Dionysos in the *Homeric Hymns*: The Olympian Portrait of the God,” 246.
50. *Ibid.*

51. Beaulieu, *The Sea in the Greek Imagination*, 144.
52. Ibid.
53. Ibid., 217.
54. Steven H. Lonsdale, *Creatures of Speech: Lions, Herding, and Hunting Similes in the Iliad* (Stuttgart: B.G. Teubner, 1990), 19.
55. Jaillard, “The Seventh *Homeric Hymn* to Dionysus: An Epiphanic Sketch,” 148.
56. Ibid., 150.
57. Lonsdale, *Creatures of Speech: Lions, Herding, and Hunting Similes in the Iliad*, 1.
58. Ibid., 105.
59. Hector is compared to a lion in Book 15, ll.630-6 of the *Iliad*. The attack of a lion is described within this simile in lines 635-6: ὁ δὲ τ’ ἐν μέσσησιν ὀρούσας / βοῶν ἔδει “[the lion] leaping in the middle devours a cow.”
60. Ibid., 46.
61. Ibid.
62. M.L. West, “The First *Homeric Hymn* to Dionysus,” 30.
63. Herrero de Jáuregui, “Dionysos in the *Homeric Hymns*: The Olympian Portrait of the God,” 239.
64. Cyrus H. Gordon, “The Wine-Dark Sea,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 37, no. 1 (1978): 51, accessed February 22, 2016, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/544295>.
65. Herrero de Jáuregui, “Dionysos in the *Homeric Hymns*: The Olympian Portrait of the God,” 246.
66. Joshua T. Katz, “Gods and Vowels,” in *Poetic Language and Religion in Greece and Rome*, ed. J. Virgilio García and Angel Ruiz (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), 18.

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