

Aphrodite's Aorists: Attributive Sections in the Homeric *Hymns*¹

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Abstract: This article examines the use of aorists in the attributive passages of early hymnic poetry, using as a point of focus the wealth of examples found in the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite*. After outlining the extent of the alternation of tenses in these passages, the temporal reference of the aorists, which have often been termed 'gnomic', is discussed. It is suggested that their temporal reference is not always equal, influenced in each case by the use (or absence) of the colouring particle τε, the content of the sentence, and the wider context in which it appears; three broad categories are proposed as a framework for understanding this variation. Second, the use of these aorists is considered with respect to any possible structural role they might play. They do not appear to be used entirely at random, often assisting in the transition from historic narrative to generic praise, but nor does any theoretical approach satisfactorily explain all instances. If at times they were used with some structural effect in mind, constraints of metre and the appropriation/adaptation of material transmitted through a long tradition of hymnic poetry may also have been factors in their use.

The four longest Homeric *Hymns*, those to Demeter (*Dem.*), Apollo (*Apoll.*), Hermes (*Herm.*) and Aphrodite (*Aphr.*), might be divided into two groups according to their structure. *Dem.* and *Herm.* move directly from the introduction of the deity into a mythic section (the narration of an historic event in the god's

¹ I am indebted to Prof. C.J. Ruijgh, Prof. A. Rijksbaron, Prof. I.J.F. de Jong, Dr. N.J. Richardson, Dr. M. Campbell, Dr. M.L. West and Dr. P. Pormann, all of whom read and commented upon drafts of this article. It hardly needs to be said that the responsibility for accepting or rejecting their suggestions rests entirely upon me. A version of the article was also read at a meeting of the Japanese Philological Society in Tokyo and I am grateful for the comments of all those who took part.

life), while *Apoll.* and *Aphr.* first enter an attributive section (the description of general attributes and characteristic activities of the god), before eventually passing also into a mythic section. Janko has suggested that in the *Hymns* 'myth' (a mythic section) can be defined broadly as 'events that happened in the past, i.e. simply as narrative in the past tense', while 'non-myth' (an attributive passage) can be defined as 'happening in the present, i.e. by its present tenses'.² These definitions are to some degree useful; mythic sections often describe a particular past event in what are commonly called past tenses, while attributive sections frequently describe generic truths in what is commonly called the present tense.³ A separation, however, of these two types of section, based upon the inflexional forms which they employ, encounters problems when one looks at the texts. Janko goes on to admit a number of exceptions, where past tenses are used in attributive scenes.⁴ In fact, the *Hymns* make such extensive use of past tenses in attributive passages that, as Clay has suggested, it is difficult to consider them simply to be exceptions or signs of poor composition.⁵

The prologue of *Aphr.* is a remarkable example of how aorists can be used in an attributive section. The poet frequently

² Janko (1981, 11).

³ In semantic terms, it is imprecise to speak of particular inflexional forms as locating an event uniquely in the past (even if in the majority of cases forms which are traditionally called past tense do locate an event in the past). The same is true of the inflexional form which has traditionally been called the present tense. Often it does not actually imply contemporaneity with the act of utterance but has a more generic function; semantically it is better referred to as the 'non-past'. A concise discussion of these linguistic principles can be found in Lyons (1977, 677ff.). For reasons of convention, however, the terms 'past tense' and 'present tense' are used throughout this article to refer to the inflexional forms which they have traditionally signified.

⁴ Janko (1981, 11-12, 17 and 19-22).

⁵ Clay (1989, 26) 'the existence of a significant number of parallels within the hymnic corpus to this apparent confusion of tenses [in *Apollo*] suggests that we are not dealing merely with a superficial phenomenon.'

alternates between present and aorist forms in the first 44 lines of the poem, as he gives attributive praise not only to Aphrodite, but also to Athena, Artemis, Hestia, Zeus and Hera. Only limited attention, however, has been given to this feature of *Aphr.*: Janko makes no more than passing mention of the poem's alternation of tenses,⁶ while Clay, noting the omission in Janko's study, remarks only briefly that the hymn opens with aorists.⁷ Commentators have discussed individual aorists in *Aphr.*, but have said nothing about the complex alternation of present and aorist tenses in the poem as a whole.⁸ Using *Aphr.* as a point of focus, this article will re-examine the use of aorists in the attributive sections of the *Hymns* and Hesiod.⁹ First, it will outline the extent of the alternation of tenses in attributive sections. Second, it will look more closely at the aorists in these sections, suggesting a clearer definition of what points or periods of time they imply and how they function within the structure of the attributive passages of the *Hymns*.¹⁰

1. Alternation of Tenses

In the first 44 lines of *Aphr.* the poet alternates between present, perfect¹¹ and aorist tenses in describing the general

⁶ Janko (1981, 19).

⁷ Clay (1989, 26).

⁸ See most recently Allen, Halliday and Sikes (1936), Càssola (1975), Van Eck (1978) and Van der Ben (1986).

⁹ Included in this study is the proem of Hesiod's *Theogony*. Friedländer (1914) discusses the similarities between it and the longer *Homeric Hymns*. Some reference is also made to the use of aorists in the *Works and Days*. Cf. West (1966, 151).

¹⁰ For the terms 'point' and 'period' of time see Lyons (1977, 719). Broadly, they distinguish events, which occur at a particular 'point' in time, and states and processes, which last throughout a 'period' of time.

¹¹ The so-called 'intensive' perfect (with the sense of a present tense) sometimes alternates with the present tense in these attributive passages; 'intensive' μέμηλεν, τέτυκται, ἔστᾱσι (listed below) are all known in Homer

attributes and characteristic activities of Aphrodite and the other gods whom he is praising: v.2 ὤρσε, v.3 ἐδαμάσσατο, v.5 τρέφει, v.6 μέμηλεν, v.7 δύναται, v.9 εὐαδεν, v.10 ἄδον, v.12 ἐδίδαξε, v.15 ἐδίδαξεν, v.17 δάμναται, v.18 ἄδε, v.21 ἄδεν, v.22 τέκετο, v.30 ἔζετο, v.31 ἐστί, v.32 τέτυκται, v.33 δύναται, v.34 πεφυγμένον ἔστ', v.36 ἤγαγε, v.37 ἐστί, v.39 συνέμειξε, v.42 τέκετο.

This alternation of tenses in an attributive section occurs also at:

Aphr. 258ff., of the Nymphs – present, perfect and aorist: v.258 ναιετάουσιν, v.259 ἐπονται, v.260 ἔδουσι, v.261 ἐρρώσαντο, v.263 μίσγονται, v.265 ἔφυσαν, v.267 ἐστᾶσι and κικλήσκουσιν etc.

Hes. Th. 1ff., of the Muses – present, imperfect¹² and aorist: v.2 ἔχουσιν, v.4 ὀρχεῦνται, v.7 (χοροῦς) ἐποιήσαντο, v.8 ἐπερρώσαντο (δὲ ποσσίν), v.10 στεῖχον, v.37 τέρπουσι etc.

Apoll. – present, imperfect and aorist: v.2 τρομέουσιν, v.4 τιταίνει, v.5 μίμνε, v.6 ἐχάλασσε and ἐκλήϊσε, v.8 ἀνεκρέμασε, v.9 εἶσεν, v.10 ἔδωκε, v.12 καθίζουσιν and χαίρει etc. (cf. also the curiously double-ended vv.29ff. – a switch to the general present at v.29 πᾶσι θνητοῖσιν ἀνάσσεις, after the announcement of Apollo's historic birth, is followed by a list of place names over which he rules, which then at v.45 turns out to be a list of

(see Schwyzer (263-4) and LSJ s.v.); cf. below n.39. For λέλογχε at *Hy.* 19.6, which is not 'intensive' see below ad category 3.

12 Four imperfects, all without the augment, are found in these attributive passages. West (1989) makes a strong argument for seeing these as a rare injunctive use in Greek ('whereby a primary stem modified only by the so-called secondary personal endings was neutral in respect of tense and mood'); an archaic feature which survived from an earlier period of a continuous hymnic tradition. Imperfects with the augment (for example ἐμῶντο at *Aphr.* 24) cannot be included in this group and must be treated as having purely historic reference.

places which functions also in the historic account of Apollo's birth; all the places where Leto arrived while pregnant).

Hy.11 to Athena – present and aorist: v.2 μέλει, v.4 ἐρρύσατο.

Hy.19 to Pan – present, perfect and aorist: v.3 φοιτᾶ, v.4 στείβουσι, v.6 λέλογχε, v.8 φοιτᾶ, v.10 διοιχνεῖ, v.12 (πολλάκι) διέδραμεν, v.13 (πολλάκι) διήλασε; also present and imperfect at vv.27-9, ὕμνευσιν, ἔννεπον, ἐστί.

Hy.22 to Poseidon – present and aorist: v.3 ἔχει, v.4 ἐδάσαντο

Hy.29 to Hestia – present and aorist: v.3 ἔλαχε, v.6 σπένδει etc.

Hy.33 to the Dioscuri – present and aorist: v.9 καλέουσι, v.11 θῆκαν and ἐφάνησαν etc.

Note also the switch between present, perfect and aorist in general statements of truth at Hes. *Op.* 238ff.: v.238 μέμηλε (as at *Aphr.* v.6), v.239 τεκμαίρεται, v.240 (πολλάκι) ἀπηύρα, v.241 ἀλιτραίνει and μηχανάαται, v.242 ἐπήγαγε, v.243 ἀποφθινύθουσι etc.; and the switch between present and imperfect at *Th.*267-9 v.268 ἔπονται, v.269 ἴαλλον.

Aphr. begins with the aorist, rather than with a present before moving to an aorist; this is paralleled in the shorter *Hy.14* (v.4 εὐαδεν), which employs only this one aorist and no present-tense verb, and *Hy.29* (v.3 ἔλαχε).

2. Aorists

Although it seems from the examples cited above that aorists used in passages of general praise are a relatively common

feature of the hymnic genre, exactly how they should be classified has been a matter of some debate. The aorists in the proem of the *Theogony*, which have the Muses as their subject, are a good example of how views have conflicted:

καί τε λοεσσάμεναι τέρενα χροά Περμησσοῖο
 ἢ ἴππου κρήνης ἢ Ὀλμειοῦ ζαθέοιο
 ἀκροτάτῳ Ἐλικῶνι χοροῦς ἐνεποιήσαντο,
 καλοῦς ἱμερόεντας, ἐπερρώσαντο δὲ ποσσίν (vv.5-8)

West calls them ‘timeless’;¹³ Van Eck terms them ‘gnomic’ aorists, grouping them together with the verbs of *Aphr.*2-3;¹⁴ Janko on the other hand suggests that they refer to an historical moment because the Muses cannot always be singing the same song (he believes for the same reason that the imperfect ἔννεπον is historical at *Hy.*19.29).¹⁵

Of these three classifications ‘gnomic’ is certainly the least appropriate, implying that the aorists are understood in an entirely generic sense, without a past value. Such a term is perhaps better applied to Achilles’ statement of universal truth at *Il.*1.218 ὅς κε θεοῖς ἐπιπειθῆται μάλα τ’ ἐκλυον αὐτοῦ, where no particular individual is envisaged obeying the gods; any possible historical sense, referring to a particular event, is less obvious there. When, however, specific deities such as the Muses are the subject of the verb, and the scene is set with particular place names, there seems to be some historical aspect implied; as Janko suggests, the meaning might almost be translated into English as ‘having bathed either in the Permessus or the... they sang and danced...’. Yet the sense of repeated activity also intended by the aorists in this case is signalled by the listing of alternative bathing places in vv.5-6; the Muses might bathe in one spring or another before singing and dancing

¹³ West (1966, 155).

¹⁴ Van Eck (1978, 13 ad *Aphr.*7).

¹⁵ Janko (1981, 20-21).

on Helicon, and this has present as well as historic reality.¹⁶ Also important here for the implication of repeated activity is the use of adverbial τε (v.5 καί τε), which often signals habitual action.¹⁷ Of the three classifications then, West's 'timeless' seems to be most appropriate here because it neither limits nor entirely imposes an historic sense. But nor is it entirely satisfactory. More exactly, one might say omnitemporal rather than 'timeless', as the question of time is not altogether absent in these propositions.¹⁸ The singing and dancing of the Muses on Helicon (and elsewhere) is a general characteristic of the goddesses, which can be envisaged as an event with historical reality, but which mainly conveys an omnitemporal quality.

With this example in mind, it is now easier to turn to the first two aorists in *Aphr.*, ὄρσε and ἔδαμάσσατο (vv.2-3). Ruijgh admits that it is possible to see the two verbs as 'gnomic', but

¹⁶ Cf. Clay (1989, 28) who suggests that these past tenses 'refer both to their [the Muses] ever-repeated activity and to the unique occasion of their meeting with Hesiod.' Consider an English phrase such as 'a man walks into a bar'; contemporary speakers of English will often immediately associate this with a joke, expecting either a punch line to follow right away, or a more extended tale leading to a punch line. Told in the 'present' tense, there is certainly some feeling that this is a past event which is now being narrated, while at the same time its generic quality as a joke (a standard genre of fictitious humour) dilutes any strong sense of a past event; the temporal reference is subtly ambiguous.

¹⁷ On the permanence conveyed to a fact by adverbial τε see Ruijgh (1971, *passim*). He discusses the cases of the particle in *Aphr.* and in the proem of the *Th.* on pp. 23, 273, 900-1 and 913. Also, in the case of καί τε see Denniston (1954, 528); 'the great majority of passages in which τε is coupled with another particle contain general propositions, or describe habitual action.' Note that adverbial τε is used with ἐπρώσαντο of the Nymphs at *Il.*24.616 and *Aphr.*261 (see Ruijgh, 1971, 412-13), and frequently with aorists in attributive passages. For other examples see category 1 below.

¹⁸ J. Lyons (1977, 679-81) distinguishes between timeless propositions 'for which the question of time-reference simply does not arise' and omnitemporal propositions which say that 'something has been, is and always will be so'.

considers it more tempting to understand them as referring to a past event.¹⁹ He therefore suggests that the use of the aorist here indicates a mythic event (perhaps even that near the beginning of the world when Aphrodite first introduced love to the human and divine worlds), which at the same time implies a permanent fact – ‘à savoir que la déesse s’occupe de l’amour dans tous les temps’; he proposes the term ‘fait mythique’. In this case, the presence of adverbial *τε* again suggests the permanent quality of the aorist, as at *Th.5* above.²⁰ This further explains how such aorists operate in the context of general hymnic praise, by granting some historic reference to what is essentially a statement of permanent fact.

The development of an omnitemporality in such aorists would have been natural in hymnic and genealogical poetry of the divine, where the narration of historic events in a deity's life helps to explain his permanent characteristics; i.e. Aphrodite's seduction of Anchises on Ida suggests her power over mortals in matters of love. A good example of this is Callimachus' treatment of Artemis' first activities as a child in an historic narrative in his third *Hymn* (v.110 ff.); in this case the historic aspect of the aorists is dominant, but each historic event described (her first hunting expedition, her punishment of unjust cities etc.) also refers to a characteristic activity of the goddess, which would have had a permanent reality in cult for the audience.²¹ As Clay has argued, the use of past tenses in attributive passages points to a characteristic of the gods; ‘their actions, prerogatives, and epiphanies can be called timeless – not in the sense that they are beyond or outside time, but insofar as their unique manifestations are indistinguishable from their eternal ones.’²² In other

¹⁹ Ruijgh (1971, 23 and 273).

²⁰ See above n.17.

²¹ For an example of a specific past event in a god's life, which acts as an *aition* for cult practice, see Demeter's purification and fasting in *Dem.192ff.* (cf. Richardson, 1974, 211ff.).

²² Clay (1989, 27ff.); again, omnitemporal is a better term than ‘timeless’ (see above n.18). Cf. also the comment of Janko (1981, 11-12) on the aorists

words, these aorists are as omnitemporal as the gods they describe.

If, however, there is a certain overlap of temporal reference in the aorists used in the attributive passages of these hymns, it does not seem that this is equal in every case. The aorists in the *Hymn to Aphrodite* might be divided into three broad categories.

1) Aorists which are strongly signalled as having omnitemporal reference by external indicators: v.2 ὤρσε, v.3 ἐδαμάσσατο, v.15 ἐδίδαξεν, v.30 ἔζετο, v.36 ἤγαγε, v.39 συνέμειξε and v.261 ἐρρώσαντο. In *Aphr.* all of the aorists of this category are signalled by adverbial τε, just as καὶ τε at *Th.5* indicates the permanent implication of the verbs in that passage (cf. also *Hy.11.4* and *Aphr. 260-1*).²³ In *Hy.19.12-13* the permanence of the aorists is signalled by πολλάκι (as at *Op.240*, mentioned above).²⁴

2) Aorists which are not signalled as having omnitemporal reference by external indicators, but whose historic reference indicates a typical action of the god. These may have originally been included in a narrative of an historic first action, which explained a characteristic of the deity. It is not simply that the historic action had a permanent effect, but that the action itself can logically continue to take place: v.9 εὔαδεν, v.10 ἄδον, v.12 ἐδίδαξε, v.18 ἄδε, v.21 ἄδεν, and v.265 ἔφρυσαν.²⁵

used in *Hy.23* to the Dioscuri; 'the variation in tenses is caused by the ambiguous nature of St. Elmo's fire, the manifestation of the Dioscuri, which could be thought of as a present Attribute or a past attribution.'

²³ See above n.17.

²⁴ The aorist accompanied by πολλάκις, or αἰεί may represent a stage in the development of the generic aorist; see Sicking (1991, 36) 'the fact that a thing repeatedly, or always, or never was so in the past, may be taken to imply that it repeatedly, or always, or never, is so in general'; he cites Rijksbaron, 'the empiric aorist may have played a role in the development of the so-called "gnomic" aorist'. Note *Apoll. 140ff.*, where the aorist (v.141) ἄλλοτε ... ἐβήσασο, and then imperfect (v.142) ἄλλοτε ... ἠλάσκαζες lead from the historic description of Apollo's birth to the present general description of his delights (vv.146ff. ἐπιτέρπει etc.).

²⁵ Note the lack of syllabic augment in some of these verbs. In Homer, the

At v.12 ἐδίδαξε is clearly signalled as a mythical first by πρώτη at the beginning of the sentence, but it is also an action which can occur eternally. Athena was the first to teach carpenters, and continues to teach them as their patron goddess in cult.²⁶ At v.265, ἔφουσαν is also an action which can occur eternally; by their joint nature, trees grow whenever a Nymph is born. In this case the omnitemporal reference of the verb is signalled also by surrounding present-tense verbs (v.263 μίσγονται, v.267 κικλήσκουσιν)²⁷. The use of the aorist here may be explained by the connection with birth (τῆσι δ' ἄμ'... / γεινομένησιν ἔφουσαν – vv.264-5), a singular event for individuals, but a permanently recurring one for the race of Nymphs. Similarly, the imperfect ἔννεπον at *Hy*.19.29 (preceded and followed by present verbs – ὑμνεῦσιν and ἐστί), refers to the Nymphs' hymning of Hermes pre-eminently amongst the gods. This is both an historic event in myth, but also an action which can be repeated; Hermes was, is, and will continue to be hymned pre-eminently by the Nymphs (and of course in cult as well), as the father of Pan.²⁸ This applies also to the use of aorists in *Apoll*.5-12; the gods are described in the present as

syllabic augment is always found in 'gnomic' aorists, with the exception of the doubtful κάτθανε at *Il*.9.320 (see the discussion of West, 1978, 243, who lists more bibliography). As this article argues, these aorists in *Aphr*. might not be defined strictly as 'gnomic', and one therefore does not necessarily expect an augment, even though they indicate something omnitemporal. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that the consistency of the augment in the 'gnomic' aorist falters slightly after Homer. West lists several examples from Hesiod onward, where the lack of augment is guaranteed by the metre (*Op*. 345 ζώσαντο, 705 δῶκεν etc.), and quite a few more which are uncertain.

²⁶ Athena, along with Hephaistos, was the first to teach arts and crafts to humans (*Od*.6.232-4 etc.). See Allen, Halliday and Sikes (1936, 410).

²⁷ In the case of ἐδίδαξε at v.12, a present tense does not follow or precede, but there does follow an aorist which is signalled as having omnitemporal reference by adverbial τε.

²⁸ Janko (1981, 19) argues that the Nymphs cannot always be singing the same song. Hermes and the Nymphs are invoked together in a prayer at *Od*.14.535, and they are elsewhere connected in cult (see Hoekstra, 1989 ad loc.).

trembling (v.2 τρομέουσιν) at the coming of Apollo to the house of Zeus, while the welcome of honour he receives each time he comes to Olympus is described in past tenses. The objection of Janko that this event could not occur frequently, because ‘the scene depicted could not happen once the gods were familiar with Apollo’s appearance’, disregards the permanence of Apollo’s awe-inspiring divine nature, signalled just a few lines above by the present τρομέουσιν.²⁹ On the contrary, his observation that this scene resembles a deity’s first arrival on Olympus suggests that, as at *Aphr.*12-13, this is an historic first which here indicates a characteristic event. In these cases, the lack of an external indicator signalling repeated action seems to make the historical reference stronger than in the aorists of category 1, but there is still an omnitemporal reference.

The aorist forms of ἀνδάνω listed under this section may form a special sub-category, as verbs which indicate like or dislike. Simple reference to like or dislike in the past often implies a continued state of affairs. If, for example, one tries food for the first time and says (in many European languages; μου ἄρεσε, me gustó etc.) that it was pleasing or that one liked it on the first occasion, it implies that the food will be pleasing if one eats it at the present moment, and in the future. Again though, these may have originally had a place in an historical narrative which indicated a permanent characteristic of the goddess.

3) Aorists which refer to a specific past event which cannot logically happen more than once, such as apportionment and birth: vv.22 and 42 τέκετο. Nonetheless, they are frequently found in attributive passages because they indicate the permanent honour which that specific event has brought to the god. Included are verbs of apportionment such as ἐδάσαντο at *Hy.*22.4 and ἔλαχεσ at *Hy.*29.3 and those of birth such as at

²⁹ Janko (1981, 16-18); see Clay (1989, 23 n.15) who summarizes the divided scholarly opinion about the tenses of the proem of *Apoll.* The most recent treatment is by E. Bakker (2002).

*Hy.*12.1 τέκε etc.³⁰ Here it should be stressed that the verbs of birth in particular are on the cusp of narrative, and are often found at the transition point between narrative and attributive passages; so the statement of the birth of Hera in *Aphr.*42-3 leads to a one-line narrative about her marriage to Zeus at v.44, which itself provides a transition to the main narrative at v.45. Similarly, the announcement of the birth of Hestia in *Aphr.*23-4 immediately precedes a short narrative about her oath of virginity, while the statement of Dionysus' birth in *Hy.*7.56-7 conversely provides a transition from the narrative to the closing farewell. In cases such as *Herm.*3 or *Hy.*28.4, where the announcement of the birth leads into a more extended narrative describing the birth of the deity, such verbs should in fact be classified as part of the narrative. These verbs refer entirely to a past event, which is not itself repeated, but bestows permanent honour.

That the ancient audience of these poems interpreted the temporal reference in such aorists with some subjectivity, as is suggested above, should not be overly surprising. Speakers of modern languages also rely upon the content of a sentence and the wider context in order to distinguish temporal reference: for example, an English audience can sense immediately that 'he goes up to the man and tells him what he thinks' is unlikely to be a statement of habitual action, despite the present tense, because it is not something which would commonly be an habitual action. In contrast, in the case of the isolated phrase 'I go to the rocky shore and walk in the foamy surf', the action can more probably be interpreted to be habitual; in both these cases, of course, the wider context (i.e. whether other habitual activities are being described in the passage) will be important for understanding the temporal reference of the present inflexional form.

³⁰ Cf. Janko (1981, 12).

3. Structural Function

The above classification is not intended to give absolute values of the temporal reference of these aorists, but rather to show that the lines of division are blurred to a certain degree. This blurring can be used structurally for a smooth transition from an attributive to a narrative passage and vice-versa. Some examples of this have already been given under category 3 above.³¹ Some other examples in the *Hymns* and Hesiod:³² *Aphr.*30, ἔξετο from category 1, is permanent in sense (and marked as such with καί τε) but it maintains a mild historic aspect which allows it to be a good transition from the historic narrative of Hestia's oath of virginity to the present and perfect verbs of general praise in vv.31-2 (ἐστί, τέτυκται); *Th.*7-9, ἐνεποιήσαντο and ἐπερρώσαντο are again marked as permanent by καί τε in v.5, and they begin the transition to the historic narrative of the epiphany of the Muses to Hesiod at vv.22ff.;³³ Janko has pointed out that the switch to past tenses at *Hy.*19.12ff., in the middle of an attributive section, may have been influenced by the 'impending transition to myth'.³⁴ A

³¹ Cf. also the example of *Apoll.*140ff. discussed above in n.24.

³² In Homer as well the transition between scenes of description and narrative is made by the alternation between present and aorist tenses, such as at *Il.*5.722ff, 22.147ff. or *Od.*7.100ff. (see the discussion of Ruijgh, 1971, 270-1). Cf. also Bakker (2002, 76) on the similarity between the language of Homeric similes and the poem of *Apoll.*

³³ Cf. Ruijgh (1971, 900); 'Comme à priori, l'indicatif de l'aoriste peut également exprimer un fait du passé, il y a une transition graduelle vers la phrase suivante, qui exprime nettement un fait du passé (στεῖχον)'. On the possible injunctive use of the augmentless imperfect στεῖχον see above ad n.12; it may well itself form part of the transition to the past tense narrative beginning at *Th.*22.

³⁴ Janko (1981, 20). Later in the same hymn, the switch to the imperfect tense ἔννεπον at v.29 (although immediately followed by the present ἐστί) may be explained also by the historic narrative of Hermes' birth which begins in the next line.

remarkable case of the transitional function of aorists is found in *Aphr.*50-2:

ὥς ῥα θεοὺς συνέμειξε καταθνητῆσι γυναιξί
καί τε καταθνητοὺς υἱέας τέκον ἀθανάτοισιν,
ὥς τε θεὰς ἀνέμειξε καταθνητοῖς ἀνθρώποις

Having entered the narrative at v.45, the poet unexpectedly returns in these lines to attributive statements, thereby delaying the beginning of the narrative proper until v.53. Although there is no return to present tense description here, *καί τε* in the central line indicates the permanent aspect of the aorist *τέκον* (category 1). Meanwhile, the two unmarked aorists *συνέμειξε* and *ἀνέμειξε* (category 2) provide transition, at first from the narrative begun at v.45, and then afterwards to the resumption of the narrative in v.53.³⁵

Elsewhere, however, aorists in attributive passages seem to be used without any transitory intention (*Aphr.*2-3, 9-10, 12-14, 36-39 etc.). In such cases, some might be inclined to take refuge in the recent theory of aorist and present stem distribution offered by C.M.J. Sicking.³⁶ He has argued, *contra* traditionally held views, that the choice between aorist stem (AS) and present stem (PS) forms in Greek is not governed by the temporal relationship of the 'facts' being described, but rather by considerations of pragmatic function and discourse organisation. He suggests that 'AS is appropriate to a verbal constituent which performs an *independent informative function*', while PS 'is adopted if the speaker wishes to suggest questions as to what he further has to say' or when 'the constituent in question plays no

³⁵ Ruijgh (1971, 900) classifies this use of *καί τε* as 'une application temporaire'. The case is unique also because the audience here imagines these lines as reported speech, of Aphrodite boasting amongst the gods. Nonetheless, the mixing of gods and mortals in love, thereby resulting in mortal sons for the divine, is a characteristic activity of the goddess; *καί τε* seems to be signifying that fact here.

³⁶ C.M.J. Sicking (1991). See also his further arguments on the subject in Sicking (1996).

part, or only a subordinate part, in informing the hearer'.³⁷ He applies this also to 'gnomic' aorists, concluding that 'both present *and* aorist indicative may be used to express general truths, and that their distribution is determined by the same criteria which decide the choice between PS and AS in other contexts'.³⁸

One can apply this theory to some instances of the alternation between aorist and present verbs in attributive passages. The present tense δύναται used at *Aphr.*7 certainly suggests questions as to what the poet further has to say – who will be the three exceptions to Aphrodite's otherwise universal power? – while the aorists in the passage that follows (vv.8-14) perform an independent informative function; similarly, the present tense δάμναται used at *Aphr.*17 introduces the passage devoted to Artemis, while the aorist ἄδε which follows again performs a more independent informative function; the aorist ἔδαμάσσατο at *Aphr.*3 focuses the more general statement in the present tense at *Aphr.*5 ἡμὲν ὅσ' ἤπειρος πολλὰ τρέφει ἢδ' ὅσα πόντος – more specifically φῦλα καταθητηῶν ἀνθρώπων/οἰωνούς τε διειπετέας καὶ θηρία πάντα.³⁹

On the other hand, this theory is not always applicable to the distribution of aorist and present tense verbs in attributive passages. For example, *Aphr.*36-9:

³⁷ Sicking (1991, 37-8).

³⁸ Sicking (1991, 36-7). He cites *Il.*17.176-7 as an example of how the two forms may be used in the same context:

ἀλλ' αἰεὶ τε Διὸς κρείσσων νόος αἰγιόχοιο,
ὅς τε καὶ ἄλκιμον ἄνδρα φοβεῖ καὶ ἀφείλετο νίκην

³⁹ Note that it is the 'intensive' perfect μέμηλεν at *Aphr.*6 which sums up the first five lines of *Aphr.* as a whole. This is also the case at *Aphr.*32, where the 'intensive' perfect τέτυκται follows the present ἐστί. On the alternation of perfect with aorist and present in statements of general truth cf. Sicking (1991, 37 n.71) who points to Pl. *Prot.*328 B.

καί τε πάρεκ Ζηνὸς νόον ἤγαγε τερπικεραύνου,
 ὃς τε μέγιστός τ' ἐστί, μεγίστης τ' ἔμμορε τιμῆς·
 καί τε τοῦ εὐτ' ἐθέλη πυκινὰς φρένας ἔξαπαφοῦσα
 ῥηϊδίως συνέμειξε καταβνητήσι γυναιξίν.⁴⁰

The use of the present tense in v.37, between two aorists at v.36 and v.39, does not seem to have been motivated by any intention to suggest further questions about the greatness of Zeus, nor to mark it as a subordinate piece of information. On the contrary, the alliteration of the line and its carefully balanced structure seem to mark it out as a focal point for the audience.⁴¹ The overwhelming greatness of Zeus underlines the irony of his being conquered by Aphrodite. Similarly, it is difficult to see how the switch to the aorist ἔρρωσαντο at *Aphr.*261 is motivated in any way by discourse organisation. A case such as *Th.*2ff. is more ambiguous, but there too there is no particular reason to consider vv.7ff. points of independent informative function any more than the preceding lines. Despite, then, some instances in which this theory might be applied to early hymnic poetry, it is in fact not borne out by the usage of aorists in the attributive passages.

⁴⁰ At *Aphr.*38 manuscript M reads the subjunctive εὐτ' ἐθέλη, dependent upon the aorist συνέμειξε, while the other mss. read the optative ἐθέλοι. The subjunctive, certainly the *lectio difficilior*, is supported by the presence of adverbial τε, which indicates the permanence of the verb; Ruijgh (1971, 913) prefers the subjunctive. An excellent parallel is found in the declaration of a general attribute of sleep at *Od.*85-6 ὁ [ὑπνος] γάρ τ' ἐπέλησεν ἀπάντων/ ἔσθλων ἠδὲ κακῶν, ἐπεὶ ἄρ' βλέφαρ' ἀμφικαλύψει; as in *Aphr.* adverbial τε signals the permanence of the aorist, which is followed by a subjunctive. See also the subjunctive dependent upon the aorist in Achilles' statement of general truth at *Il.*1.218 ὃς κε θεοῖς ἐπιειθεται μάλα τ' ἔκλυον αὐτοῦ. In later Greek see the subjunctive in the subordinate clause after the 'gnomic' aorist at *Pl. Symp.*188 A 7-8, discussed by Sicking (1991, 36). Van der Ben (1986, 4-5) argues for the optative in the belief that the narrative of *Aphr.* signals the end of Aphrodite's mixing of gods and mortals in love, thus making Zeus' love affairs a thing of the past (see also Clay, 1989, 166-70 and 192-3). This case, at least, lends no support to such a reading of the poem.

⁴¹ On the striking alliteration of the line see Porter (1949, 264).

Finally, it is worth considering N. van der Ben's suggestion that the use of the aorist ἐρρώσαντο at *Aphr.*261 is explained by the anteriority of the action ('the dance precedes the congress denoted by μίσγονται').⁴² In this he follows the earlier proposal of Ruijgh that anteriority might explain the use of ἐρρώσαντο at *Il.*24.615-16 ἐν Σιπύλῳ, ὅθι φασὶ θεάων ἔμμεναι εὐνάς/νομφάων, αἶ τ' ἄμφ' Ἀχελώϊον ἐρρώσαντο ("...qui ont dansé...", fait antérieur au repos que désigne le mot εὐναί').⁴³ In the Homeric passage, some sense of anteriority is at least plausibly intended (the fatigue of dancing might naturally lead the Muses to seek relaxation on their beds), although even there it is by no means certain. In the case of *Aphr.*, however, it is far from clear why their dancing should always precede their love-making. Nor is it clear how this principle can explain the choice of the aorists in other cases. Remaining with dancing Nymphs, the use of the aorists ἐνεποιήσαντο and ἐπερρώσαντο at *Th.*7-8 can hardly indicate any anteriority (certainly not to στείχον in v.10).⁴⁴ Elsewhere, ὤρσε and ἔδαμάσσατο at *Aphr.*2-3 are not anterior actions to her inability to conquer Athena, Artemis and Hestia, expressed in the present tense at v.7 οὐ δύναται. Aphrodite stirs up desire amongst the gods, and conquers humans in love, while at the same time she is unable to deceive the three goddesses who are the exceptions to her universal power; one does not necessarily precede the other. The same is true of εὐάδεν v.8, ἄδεν v.9 etc.; these facts are not anterior to the present tense statement οὐ δύναται at v.7 (Aphrodite is not able to deceive...for her works had not been pleasing to Athena etc.), but contemporary (Aphrodite is not able to deceive...for her works are not pleasing to Athena etc.). A denotation of anteriority does not convincingly explain the choice of

⁴² Van der Ben (1986, 35).

⁴³ Ruijgh (1971, 412). The word εὐνή 'bed' at *Il.*24.615 amounts to 'resting place' or 'abode' and does not have any sexual connotations to liken it to *Aphr.*261-2 (cf. *Lfgre* s.v. 'Schlafplatz').

⁴⁴ The use of ἐρρώσαντο in *Aphr.* may have been influenced by these opening lines of the *Theogony*; see Janko (1982, 154).

ἔρρώσαντο at *Aphr.*261, nor the other aorists in the attributive sections discussed above.

4. Conclusion

It is overly simplistic to treat the aorists in the attributive sections of early hymnic poetry as referring solely to either a past event or a generic truth. Rather, there seems to be some overlap of historic and omnitemporal reference in these aorists; a feature aided by, and characteristic of, the omnitemporal nature of the gods, who perform historic feats which have omnitemporal truth. Furthermore, not all aorists in these sections can be treated as equal in this respect. They may be divided into three broad categories: 1) aorists which are signalled as having a mostly omnitemporal reference by an external indicator such as adverbial τε or πολλάκις; 2) aorists which are not signalled as having omnitemporal reference by an external indicator, but whose historic reference indicates a characteristic action of a god which has omnitemporal reality (perhaps originally part of a narrative of an historic first); 3) aorists which refer to a past event which cannot logically happen more than once, such as apportionment and birth, but which bestows permanent honour. This categorisation is not intended to suggest absolute values of temporal reference in these aorists, but rather to provide a framework in which to understand various shades of temporal reference, influenced in each case by external indicators such as epic τε, the content of the sentence and the broader context in which it is situated.

The choice between the aorist and present tense does not appear to be entirely random. On several occasions, aorists appear to aid in the transition from an attributive to a narrative section by easing the switch to past-tense inflexional forms which have purely historic reference. In the end, however, the use of aorists is not satisfactorily explained by any universally applicable theory. Many aorists in these sections do not seem to

have any clear structural function. In such instances, one must consider that the choice of an aorist was sometimes motivated by constraints of metre, or by appropriation and adaptation of verses or formulae from existing narratives describing historic firsts of deities. This latter possibility is particularly attractive when one considers that some aorists of category 2 discussed above seem clearly to refer to an historic first by a god; in particular *Aphr.*12 πρώτη ... ἐδίδαξε. As the tradition developed, the aorists could be used with a structural function in mind, but archaic features would nonetheless be preserved which are not explained by any purely theoretical approach.

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