Poetry as window and mirror: Hellenistic poets on predecessors, contemporaries and themselves
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CHAPTER 2:
HISTORICAL POETS AND CONTEMPORARY POETRY: COMING TO TERMS WITH
POETIC MODELS

2.1 Introduction

The previous chapter showed how Hellenistic epigrammatists reflected on the poetic
practices of their predecessors. It emerged from this discussion that to them, the literary past
was undeniably present, especially in the form of the written word, which constituted the
monument to character and existence of these poets. This chapter will now answer the
question how they were used and acknowledged as models in Hellenistic poetry, and what
possible problems of appropriation lurked in this process.

On the surface, it was a natural and traditional thing for Hellenistic poets to ground
their poetic practice in that of their predecessors. For whenever Greek poets did not credit
their ability to craft poetry to the Muses, Apollo or an inborn talent, they attributed it
to what they had learned from their poetic predecessors, as for instance the following fragment
from Bacchylides’ Paeanes illustrates.

'Ετερος ἐξ ἑτέρου σοφὸς
tὸ τε πάλαι τὸ τε νῦν.
[Οὐδὲ γὰρ ὅστον]       
ἀρρήτων ἐπέων πύλας       
ἐξευρεῖν. (Paean., fr. 5 Maehler)

One poet learns his wisdom from another,
Thus it was and thus it still is,
[For it is not at all easy to find]
The gates to words that have never been spoken.

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1 Cf. e.g. Od. 22.347-8 (Phemius): αὐτοδίδακτος δ’ εἰμί, θεὸς δὲ μοι ἐν φρεσὶν ὅιμας / παντοίας ἐνέφυσεν. (I am self-taught and the god has planted all kinds of song-paths in my heart).
2 Cf. Lanata (1963: 102) on Paean, fr. 5 Maehler. She furthermore follows Jebb (and the ancient scholiasts) in positing that it is humorously aimed at Pi. O. 2.86-88: σοφὸς ὁ πολλὰ εἰδὼς φυᾷ / μαθόντες δὲ λάβροι / παγγλωσσία κόρακες ὡς ἀκραταὶ γαρῷτοι Διός πρὸς ὁρνίχα θεῖου (Wise is he who knows many things by nature, whereas learners who are boisterous and long-winded are like a pair of crows that cry in vain against the divine bird of Zeus. transl. Race). On the alleged quarrel between Pindar and Bacchylides, see Lefkowitz (1981). For the feeling that a poet may learn from another poet, cf. further e.g. Antiphon (P. Oxy. 3.414 coll. 3): καὶ ποιητῆς μοι διὸ κεῖ ἀπὸ ποιητῶν ἀμείνων ἀν γενέεθαί... (and I think that a poet may become better by learning from another poet...) as cited by Lanata (1963: 217).
Indeed, it is generally acknowledged that *imitatio* and *aemulatio* characterize a large part of ancient literary production. In pre-Hellenistic Greek culture, the literary past was generally seen as the standard against which one’s own poetic production had to be measured. Ideas about poetic genre were influenced by the literal view of poetry as a tradition, a “handing down” of what constituted a fitting, beautiful, and worthwhile combination of meter and subject matter (τὸ ποëτον). This kind of reasoning may ultimately have been responsible for the development of (unwritten) generic codes. Certain subject matter became associated with specific forms because “it had always been;” hexametric verse came to be coupled mainly with dignified, serious subjects and iambic verse mainly with comedy or invective and license. This view of poetry implied that tradition could and indeed should be used to justify individual poetic choices: the way things had been done frequently became the way they had to be done.

There is no indicaton that ideas regarding the intrinsic value of the literary past fundamentally changed in the Hellenistic era, although this time of great cultural and political changes necessarily also saw changes in the field of poetry. Old literary forms were infused with new elements, resulting in what might be called new “genres” responding to the changed circumstances. Yet, despite this, the past continued to possess authoritative and legitimizing functions; it was eminently present, even if very different from the present. This is where tensions arose: how could Hellenistic poets establish continuity while responding to new circumstances, and creating new forms of poetry?

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4 Innovation also provided possible variations on established themes and forms, even if the post-romantic admiration of individual originality in poetic production was unknown to the ancient Greeks. The real exception to confirm the rule is Timotheus fr. 20 PMG: οὐκ ἅγιό τὰ παλαιά, / καὶ νὰ γὰρ ἀμα κρείσσων / νεός ὁ Ζεὺς βασιλεύει, / τὸ πάλαι δ’ ἦν Κρόνος ἄρχων· ἀπὶ τῷ Μοῦσα παλαιά. (I do not sing of old things; for what is new is also better. Young Zeus is king, while in the old days Cronos was the ruler. Be gone, old Muse.) Indeed, his dithyramb (*Persae*) on recent political events was exceptional in his era (fifth cent. BCE).
5 Traditionally this development was subsumed under Kroll’s (somewhat problematic) term “Kreuzung der Gattungen.” See on the topic in particular Hunter (1996) and Fantuzzi and Hunter (2004: 1-17).
2.2 Meeting Ancient Poets

The ancient poets who could serve as models were, as the numerous epitaphs composed in their honor stress, long dead by the Hellenistic age. Although their legacy was to some extent accessible for scrutiny and discussion among the learned Hellenistic poets, many factual questions about the ancient poets’ works and lives remained that could only have been answered by the dead poets themselves. In some epigrams, as we saw, this problem is solved by giving a voice to the deceased or his works (ethopoia, as in Callimachus’ epigram on the Oechalia: Halosis, AP 7.80, cf. Ch. 1.5.1). A comparable, if more complex, problem faced writers of innovative poetry based on ancient models: standing on the shoulders of giants, they produced their new works by combining disparate generic elements into new forms. Did they imagine their predecessors would have approved of the new lease on life they gave to ancient literary forms? Else, how did they justify divergences from the model, particularly modifications of style, genre, or subject?

A possibility was to defer authority to the gods of poetry, as Callimachus does by introducing Apollo and the Muses in the Aetia prologue to support his predilection for subtle, innovative poetry on a small scale. To corroborate the same preference, however, this fragment also employs human poets as examples (Mimnermus and probably Philitas). Apparently, in the learned surroundings of the Alexandrian Library, poetry could no longer depend on divine authorization alone; both divine authority and predecessors were called upon to validate Hellenistic practice. The question is how this latter justification could be made convincing. For instance, how did Callimachus convince his readers that he was justified in writing Iambi as Hipponax had done (cf. Iamb. 1, fr. 191 Pf.)? He could have merely named the dead poet as an example, as he does with Mimnermus and Philitas in the Aetia prologue. But an even better defense of one’s right to write in the style of a predecessor, as he apparently realized, was the “support” and “appearance” of the dead

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7 Cf. Pfeiffer (1949: ad fr. 1.8-9).
9 An interesting variant of this procedure seems to have been presented in Iamb. 13 (fr. 203 Pf.), where Callimachus defends his imitation of Hipponax. The diegesis says he was accused of polyeideia, “writing in many genres,” cf. Scodel (1987: 208), Acosta-Hughes (2001: 81). In order to justify this poetic practice he adduces Ion of Chios: so he uses one model (Ion) to justify his choice to follow another model (Hipponax).
author. The ensuing sections analyze this case and other Hellenistic solutions to the problem of claiming authority by incorporating a predecessor.

2.2.1 Timon, Xenophanes and Pyrrho in Homer's Hades

If a Greek writer or scholar wished to question a deceased poet in order to support his own views, books were really the only place to look for an answer. However, a playful alternative to this was found by Aristophanes in his Ranae. There, a katabasis to Hades is undertaken by Dionysus to enable a dialogue with and between the dead poets Aeschylus and Euripides in order to decide whose style should be favored in tragedy. With similar aims, the third-century BCE satirist and sceptic Timon of Phlius also appears to have described a katabasis in his Silloi, books 2 and 3. He gave these books the form of an emphatically Homeric Nekyia, in which Xenophanes, a philosopher-poet from the sixth century BCE, guided him through Hades and showed him the dead philosophers endlessly quarreling over useless and even detrimental “opinions” (δόξα). Timon presumably chose Xenophanes as his guide through Hades for two reasons: Xenophanes also wrote a collection or poem entitled Silloi and his writings revealed a mindset akin to that of the later sceptic philosophers.

The ultimate goal of Timon’s journey through Hades is a meeting with his dead master, the sceptic philosopher Pyrrho (fourth-third century BCE). He is the only one among the dead exempt from the plague of conflicting and useless opinions:

\[\alpha \lambda \prime \ ο\ι\o\ ν \ τ\o\ ν \ \acute{\alpha}τ\u03b1\o\ φ\o\ ι\o\ ν \ \acute{\e}γ\o\ ι\o\ ν \ \acute{\i}δο\o\ ν \ \acute{\i}δ' \ \acute{\a}δ\u03b1\a\o\ μ\o\ α\o\ στ\o\ ιο\n\p\a\o\σι\o\ ν, \ \o\o\ σι\o\ ν \ \d\a\o\μ\a\o\ n\a\o\ τ\o\ \o\m\i\o\ ν \ \a\o\ φ\o\ a\o\ ι\o\ ν \ \o\o\ a\o\ ι\o\ ν \ \o\o\ ν, \ \a\o\ ι\o\ ν \ \acute{\e}θ\o\ ν\a\o\ θ\a\o\ ι\o\ ν, \ \b\a\o\μ\u03b1\o\μ\o\ ν\a\o\ e\o\ ν\a\o\ ι\a\o\ k\o\ ι\o\ θ\i\i\a\o\ ν, \ \e\k\o\ \p\a\o\θ\e\o\ ν\a\o\ δ\o\o\ ξ\o\ ι\o\ ν \ \o\o\ τ\o\ k\o\ e\i\i\a\i\e\i\ ι\i\o\ ν\i\i\o\ ν\i\i\o\ ν. \ (783 \textit{SH})\]

But such as I saw him [sc. Pyrrho], not puffed up with arrogance and not oppressed by all those things by which the nameless and the famous are equally oppressed, the

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11 For the Homeric tone of the fragments, e.g. fr. 775 \textit{SH}: \textit{ἐστετε} νύν μοι οὐκοι πολυπράγμονες \textit{ἐστε} σοφιντα... (Tell me now, all ye troublemaking sophists...) a clear reference to \textit{II}. 2.484. Whereas the Muses are omniscient, the sophists are merely \textit{πολυπράγμονες}.

12 Xenophanes did make some positive claims about the nature of the physical world in his \textit{Περὶ \Φυσιῶν} (frs. 19-34 DK), but he also states that mortals can obtain no knowledge about the gods (fr. 34 DK).

13 Cf. fr. 782 \textit{SH}: \textit{οὐκ} \textit{ἄν} δὴ Πύρρωνι γ᾽ \textit{ἐρίσ}κε\o\ με\o\ ν βο\o\ τός \textit{ἄλλος}. (No other mortal would quarrel with Pyrrho).
weightless tribes of men, weighed down on all sides by the sufferings of false opinion and useless legislation.

So in this text, which employs the format of a Homeric Nekyia, Timon wishes to ratify the sceptic view of life held by his teacher (and presumably by himself). A crucial element in this setup that seems to have gone unnoticed until now is that, in itself, this whole idea is evidently an immensely ironic paradox. To describe existence beyond death in Hades in Homeric language in order to endorse a sceptic view of life is extremely odd. The afterlife is a subject about which no sceptic could ever seriously claim to know anything. Xenophanes, moreover, was a critic of Homer's theology,\textsuperscript{14} a believer in a mainly material reality,\textsuperscript{15} and something of a sceptic \textit{avant la lettre} with regard to metaphysical phenomena and the afterlife.\textsuperscript{16} Casting him as the guide through a Homeric Hades is therefore an incongruous way of dealing with his opinions. However, this is done in a work called Silloi, a title pointedly shared with a work by this same Xenophanes. Moreover, it is clearly done with the aim of ridiculing all non-sceptic philosophy. The joke must be on the quarreling dead philosophers, then, not on Xenophanes.

The tensions in this text strangely undermine and strengthen its message simultaneously. The afterlife is not something Xenophanes, Timon, or his teacher Pyrrho acknowledged certainty about; yet Timon places himself in a position of superior knowledge by casting himself in the role of explorer of Hades. By putting the quarreling philosophers there, he therefore playfully reveals the ridiculousness of their claims to know anything at all, including life and death. All of this is done in order to endorse the sceptic views of his teacher and mock all other philosophy. Thus, he subverts both the Homeric and the Xenophanic subtexts to authorize his own and his master's views. All in all, this presents a striking way of manipulating the literary tradition for one's own purposes.

2.2.2 \textit{Hipponax in Callimachus' Iambi}

In Callimachus' \textit{iambus} 1 (fr. 191 Pf.) things are the other way around: a dead poet returns to Earth of his own accord. Here, the sixth-century iambic poet Hipponax arrives in Alexandria

\textsuperscript{14} Cf. e.g. frs. DK 10, 11.
\textsuperscript{15} Esp. \textit{De Naturea} frs. 27, 29, 33 DK.
\textsuperscript{16} Esp. fr. 34 DK, on the impossibility of knowledge about the gods; but also \textit{AP} 7.20, a dig at Pythagoras' belief in reincarnation.
to scold the bickering scholars.17 The whole poem is spoken in his voice; to emphasize his authority as “the real thing,” he is made recognizable by means of idiosyncratic expressions, Ionic dialect, and the meter in which the Iambus is written (scacontes).18 His sudden arrival implies that the situation among scholars has become so desperate that intervention of the notorious dead iambist is necessary.19 As epigrammatic tradition had it, Hipponax was dangerous even after his death,20 so readers of this poem would have been prepared for some sharp invective. As it happens, Hipponax states he has returned to lecture the Alexandrian scholars on the virtue of modesty and make them stop their jealous quarreling. To this end, he tells them the tale of the Cup of Bathycles, which was to be given to the wisest man in the world (fr. 191. 32-77 Pf.). This golden cup was first handed to Thales of Milete, who handed it on; it then made the rounds of the rest of the Seven Sages before finally returning to Thales, who dedicated it to the god Apollo.21

At first sight, this mild and moral story seems uncharacteristic of the waspish Hipponax of old. Indeed, Hipponax claims that he and his interests have changed: “I am not bringing an Iambus singing of a Bupalaean battle” (3-4), he says, referring to the sculptor Bupalos whom he was said to have driven to suicide by his verse.22 This presumably means he is no longer an advocate or representative of crude personal invective, but rather a harbinger of peace.

If Callimachus introduces a peaceful Hipponax, does that reflect on the new iambic style he wishes to advocate? Is he presenting himself as the bringer of a peaceful, moral, and modest genre that causes no personal harm? If so, he does not live up entirely to his promises, as a look at some other Callimachean Iambi shows—as far as it is possible to make out their contents from the fragments. Although perhaps in a different tone than Hipponax’

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17 Cf. diegesis VI 6: Ὑποτίθεται φθιτὸν Ἱππώνακτα συγκαλοῦντα τοὺς φιλολόγους εἰς τὸ Παρμενίωνος καλούμενον Σαραπίδειον· ἥκουσι δ᾿ αὐτοῖς κατ᾿ εἶλας ἀπαγορεύει φθονεῖν ἀλλήλοις. (It features the dead Hipponax, who convenes the philologists to the so-called Sarapideum of Parmenion. When they appear in droves, he forbids them to envy each other).
20 AP 7.405; 7.408; 7.536; 13.3.
22 See Suda 2.665.16; Plin. N.H. 36.11. The name Bupalos appears in West frs. 17, 18; 19; 20.2, 86.18; 98.3, 4, 15; 121, perhaps also 77.4; 79.12, cf. Degani (1991 ad loc.)
Callimachus still presents his reader with invective. Scholarly quarrels, erotic rivalry, and literary debate are major concerns of the collection. How can this contradiction be explained? Why does Callimachus introduce Hipponax in such a way and then not follow him in his own poetry?

Although Hipponax’ initial story certainly is of an exemplary moral character, the way he illustrates the need for it nevertheless seems embedded in abuse directed at fellows of the Museum (who, by the way they are described, may have been individually recognizable to their contemporaries). He vehemently attacks the Alexandrian scholars’ behavior towards each other: some tell-tale phrases occur at the end of the fragment (fr. 191.78-95). According to Hipponax, the situation in scholarly Alexandria is so grave that anyone in his right mind is considered “crazy like Alcmeon” by the others (78-79), while nasty practices like plagiarism and backbiting abound (80-86) and violent and analphabetic charlatans threaten the true poet (87-91), who is poor (92-3). So, all considered, it seems invective poses as morality in Hipponax’ words; he does not truly abstain from quarrelsome insults himself either.

Another point of interest is Callimachus’ manipulation of the speaking situation he has created in this poem. Callimachus himself is probably supposed to be part of Hipponax’ quarreling audience. So, when Hipponax commands the gathered scholars to “write the story (which he is going to tell them) down” (fr. 191.31 Pf.), he alerts the reader to the fictional nature of his own “direct speech.” The poem purportedly presents a written report of this speech of Hipponax; indeed, it is the report by Callimachus as any reader could see, since his name would figure on the scroll of the Iambi. In other words, Callimachus places himself in a privileged position: he recounts an event that a great number of scholars are said to have witnessed—and at which they were abused—without admitting that it is fictional and controlled by himself alone. Why does he do this and what does he gain by it?

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23 It is often claimed that Callimachus’ Iambi are different from Hipponax’: less personal invective, more moral exhortations, cf. e.g Jung (1929: 24), Fraser (1972: I, 733-4), Kerkhecker (1999: 293-4), Acosta Hughes (2001: 21). Not so e.g. Clayman (1980: 58-9).
24 Iambi 2 (fr. 192 Pf.), 4 (fr. 194 Pf.) and 13 (fr. 203 Pf.).
25 So Pfeiffer (1949: ad loc.).
26 This may refer to Callimachus himself, who often claims his poetry earns him nothing, cf. fr. 193 Pf., AP 12.150.
It was characteristic for iambic poets to choose a “mask” to voice their own potentially controversial opinions; it would seem that this technique is used here in a sophisticated way. In the poem, it is Callimachus who describes Hipponax as voicing complaints about the quarreling philologists’ behavior. Yet, Callimachus himself was presumably one of the most vociferous of this quarrelsome lot, judging by the other lambi and passages from his other poetical works. By hiding behind Hipponax’ broad back, however, he remains scot-free: putting on the mask of Hipponax, Callimachus censures the quarrelsome ness of the others. He goes even further and indulges in some samples of invective and quarrelsome ness himself.

This creates a paradox: Callimachus treats Hipponax’ heritage ironically while simultaneously exploiting and continuing its traditions. Like Hipponax, Callimachus is quarrelsome, as the other lambi illustrate. Yet, he uses his (quarrelsome) model Hipponax as a counsel against such quarrelsome ness. Real iambic poets never change, apparently; even when advising against aggression they become aggressive. Perhaps Callimachus’ intricate method is an implicit acknowledgement that every appropriation of poetry of the past essentially turns the living poet’s personal mouthpiece. It is only too easy for Callimachus to make Hipponax teach a moral lesson to his contemporaries and insult them, while remaining scot-free himself. If he chooses to behave in a manner that would displease the Hipponax he has created himself, this Hipponax will not return to censure him.

28 Cf. Arist. Rhet. 3.1418b28-33: εἰς δὲ τὸ ἡθος, ἐπειδὴ ἑνα περὶ αὐτοῦ λέγειν ἢ ἐπιφθονον ἢ μακρολογίαν ἢ ἀντιλογίαν ἐχει, καὶ περὶ ἄλλου ἢ λοιδορίαν ἢ ἀγροικίαν, ἐτερον χρὴ λέγοντα ποιειν (...) καὶ ύς Αρχίλοχος ψεγει. ποιει γάρ τὸν πατέρα λέγοντα περὶ τῆς θυγατρίδος ἐν τῷ ἰάμβῳ ἀνύθμων ἀέλπτον οὐθέν ἐστιν οὐθ ἀπώμιστον,” καὶ τὸν Χάφωνα τὸν τέκτονα ἐν τῷ ἰάμβῳ ὦ ἀρχή ὦ μοι τὰ Γύγιεων.” (In regard to moral character, since sometimes, in speaking of ourselves, we render ourselves liable to envy, to the charge of prolixity, or contradiction, or, when speaking of another, we may be accused of abuse or boorishness, we must make another speak in our place (...) Archilochus uses the same device in censure; for in his iambics he introduces the father speaking as follows of his daughter: “There is nothing beyond expectation, nothing that can be sworn impossible” and the carpenter Charon in the iambic verse beginning: “I [care not for the wealth] of Gyges.” transl. Freese).

29 E.g. Aetia fr. 1 Pf.; Hymn II (105-113); fr. 398 Pf., an answer to AP 9.63 (in praise of the Lyde of Antimachus) by Asclepiades, cf. the Scholia Florentina to Aetia fr. 1 Pf. These texts, as well as the quarrel between Apollonius and Callimachus are discussed in Ch. 4.
2.2.3  *Hipponax in Herondas’ Mimiambi*

Another example of a Hellenistic poet’s encounter with a poet of the past (again, Hipponax) is found in Herondas’ *Mimiamb* 8, which is generally recognized as a metapoetic poem. The speaker, who may be identified with Herondas’ poetical persona, recounts a dream to one of his slaves, Annas, in which he met with some hostile goatherds and an old man. Joining the goatherds in a game of ἀσκολιασμός (jumping on a wineskin filled with air), he emerged as the winner. The description of the game suggests a characterization of Herondas’ own poetry with its mixture of violent slapstick and bawdy humor: τάντα δ’ ἦν, ᾿Αννᾶ, / εἰς ἐν γέλως τε κἀνίῃ[......]εὔτα (43-44: The whole scene, Annas, was a mixture of laughter and pain...).

Afterwards, the old man aggressively claims Herondas’ prize, a goat, or at least half of it. The arbiter, a young man (whom some critics identify with Dionysus, patron god of dramatic poetry), tells them to divide the prize. In the last lines of the poem, consisting of the interpretation of the dream, Herondas apparently claims that his poetry, modeled on that of Hipponax (named here for the first time), will be attacked by critics but nevertheless bring him great fame:

assign: παλαιά τοὺς ἑμοὺς μόχθους
τιλεύσιν ἐν Μοῦσαιν (...)

...κλέος, ναὶ Μοῦσαι, ἥ με ἐπέα κ[...
.ἐγ’ ἐξ ἰάμβων, ἕ με δευτέρῃ γν[...
. μετ’ ἵππωνακτα τόν παλαι[...
τ]ὰ κύλλ’ ἀείδειν ᾿Ζουθιδῆς ἕπιονουσι. (Mim. 8.71-2; 76-79)

Many will tear hard at my songs, at which I have toiled, with the Muses. ... fame, by the Muse, my poetry ... either from the *lamb*, or second ... after Hipponax of yore ... to sing the crooked verses for the Ionians. †...†

It is generally assumed that the angry old man who claims half the prize is identified as Hipponax by the speaker Herondas in his (partly lost) explanation of the dream (66-79). This

30 Another dream leading to a “poetic investiture” by the Muses, was described in Call. *Aetia* (fr. 2 Pf.), cf. Kambylis, (1965: 93-106); on speculation and scholarship on this dream, see Benedetto (1993).
32 E.g. Hutchinson (1988: 237). The prize of a goat seems to point in this direction (cf. the peripatetic explanation of the word τραγῳδία) as does the jumping on the wineskin.
33 The poem has often been read as a “masquerade,” cf. Reitzenstein’s interpretation of Theoc. *ld. 7* (Ch. 7.4). Knox reads it as a polemic against Call. *lamb* (1985: 107-119). Other interpretations have identified the goatherds as bucolic poets (e.g. Theocritus) and the young man (Dionysus) as Ptolemy Philadelphus.
raises the question why Hipponax is so angry with someone who claims to follow him as a model. One solution is to attribute his anger to the fact that Herondas has modified Hipponax’ genre (iamb) by mixing in dramatic elements (hence the name Mimiambi). This would mean that Hipponax is angry because his example is not being followed in the right way by Herondas. If this is correct, the poem in fact describes an attempt at appropriation of the literary past gone awry. The dead poet Hipponax subverts the frame his follower Herondas tries to put him in by behaving aggressively towards him.

It might however more attractively be argued that Hipponax is paradoxically validating Herondas’ claim by his presence. To support this, it may be pointed out that the behavior of Herondas at the beginning of the poem closely resembles that of the old man in the dream (Hipponax). In the dream, Hipponax threatens:

εὐρό' ἐκ προσώπου μὴ σε καίτες ἀν πρέσβυς
οὐλὴ κατ’ ἕθυ τὴ βατηρίηι κόψαι. (Mim. 8.56-7)

Get out of my sight, so I don’t hit you hard with my cruel stick, old man though I be.36

“Herondas,” on waking, had uttered a similar if differently worded threat towards one of his slaves:

τήνθρωπος καὶ κυν, μέχρις εὐ παραστάς σοι
tὸ βρέγμα τώι σκίπωνι μαλθακὸν θῶμαι. (Mim.8.8-9)

Yes, go on sleeping and snoring until I stand over you and crush your forehead to a pulp with my stick.

This near-quotation illustrates how Hipponax’ threat towards Herondas has taught him how to behave as a iambic poet (viz. aggressively). The fact that Hipponax and Herondas ultimately display the same behavior illustrates that Herondas qualifies as a real iambic poet in the vein of Hipponax. Verbal aggression and threats are the means through which Hipponax in this poem chooses to invest his imitator as a poet. His behavior should therefore not be interpreted as a condemnation of Herondas’ poetry by Hipponax, but rather as an

34 Rosen reads the ἀσκολιασμός (on which see Latte, 1958), as a symbol for this dramatic ingredient incorporated into Herondas’ Mimiambi (1992: 205-216). The presence of Dionysus as a judge and the award of the goat would point in the same direction.
36 This last phrase is in fact a literal quotation from one of Hipponax’ poems, Hipp. fr. 20 West: δοκεὶν ἐκέινον τὴ βατηρίηι κόψαι.
example which Herondas duly follows. This is similar to the way Callimachus employs Hipponax in his *lambi*. Both poets introduce the poet of invective as abusive, but consider his insults an invitation to abuse others in their own poetry. Callimachus is the more sophisticated of the two because he makes Hipponax’ condemnation of invective an invective in its own right aimed at others, while he himself emerges scot-free.

### 2.3 Ancient Poets as Paradigm

Theocritus 16 also evokes past masters as models for new poetry but in a way that is not so “close and personal” as the previous examples. *Idyll* 16 is a poem full of Pindaric reminiscences\(^{37}\) that was ostensibly written to obtain a commission for more poems from Hiero II, the future tyrant of Syracuse, Theocritus’ city of origin. It presents a meditation upon the history and mechanisms of patronage poetry, implicitly offering Hiero II the same relationship with Theocritus that the celebrated tyrant of Syracuse, his namesake Hiero I, had enjoyed with the great poets of his own era, prominently among them of course Pindar.\(^{38}\)

This same Pindar, the obvious if implicit model of the poem, disliked talking about material rewards for poetry and euphemized his aversion in terms like φιλία and χάρις (friendship, graceful reciprocity). His distaste for the coupling of money and poetry is famously illustrated by *Isthmian* 2, a relevant subtext for *Id*. 16:

> Οἱ μὲν πάλαι, ὦ Θρασύβουλε, 
> ϕωτες, οἱ χρυσαμπύκων 
> ἐς δίφρον Μοῖσαν ἔβαι−
> νον κλυτα φόρμιγγι συναντόμενοι, 
> όμιυμα παιδείους ἐτόξευον μελιγάρυας ύμνους, 
> ὅστις ἐὼς καλὸς εἶχεν Αφροδίτας 
> εὐθρόνου μνάστειραν ἁδίσταν ὀπώραν. 
> ἀ Μοῖσα γὰρ οὐ ϕιλοκερδής 
> πω τότ’ ἢν οὐδ’ ἐγχάις−
> οὐδ’ ἐπέρναντο γλυκεῖ−
> αἱ μελιθδόγγου ποτὶ Τερψιχόρας 
> ἁργυρωθεῖσαι πρόσωπα μαλθακόφωνοι ἀοιδαί. 
> νῦν δ’ ἐφίητι [τῷ] τῶργείου φυλαῖ
> ὃμ’ ἀλαθείας [...] ἀγχιστα βαῖνον,


\(^{38}\) Hunter (1996: 82).
The men of old, Thrasybulus, who used to mount the chariot of the golden-wreathed Muses, taking with them the glorious lyre, freely shot their honey-sounding hymns of love at any boy who was beautiful and had the sweetest bloom of late summer that woos fair-throned Aphrodite. For at that time the Muse was not yet greedy for gain, nor up for hire. Nor were sweet soft-voiced songs with their faces silvered over being sold, from the hand of honey-voiced Terpsichore. But now, she bids us heed the Argive adage, which comes closest <...> to truth: “Money, money makes the man,” said he who lost his possessions and friends as well. But enough, for you are wise. (transl. Race)

The ancient scholia understood Pindar to be referring here to his predecessors, the lyric poets Alcaeus, Ibycus, and Anacreon, who wrote their love songs inspired by the grace of beautiful youths, without any consideration of monetary gain. Pindar expresses regret that such a pure motivation has been replaced by a concern for profit, and the scholia inferred that Pindar blamed Simonides for this.

To demonstrate a somewhat similar idea about poetry and its rewards, Theocritus uses three other poets in Id. 16: Simonides and Homer, whom he both names, and Pindar, to whom he merely alludes. In the first part of the poem (1-70), he implies that whereas poetry used to be a favor (in Homer’s times), poets need to ask their patrons for a material reward in the present age (since Simonides invented the union of poetry and money). In the second half (70-109), Homeric κλέος (fame in song) is combined with the Simonidean model of...
κλέος for money, and an ideal merging of these two attitudes is implicitly found in Pindar, who emerges as the ideal model for patronage poetry.\textsuperscript{42}

In the first 70 lines, Theocritus addresses the world at large, especially misguided people who are unwilling to spend their money on poetry. In lines 5-13, Theocritus relates how he sends out his “Graces” (personifications of his poems) only for them to return home graceless since they earn no reward (8-10: οικνιζόμεναι: with long faces; πωλά με τωθάζοισαι: continually blaming me; οικνηραι: intimidated).\textsuperscript{43} The implication is that the χάρις (charm) of poetry can only come into its own when appreciated and rewarded (χαριζεσθαι). The most important characteristic of χάρις, then, is reciprocity. In this respect, χάρις resembles the working of κλέος, the other main theme of the poem.

Finally, the Graces return moodily to the box Theocritus keeps them in (10-12: οικνηραι δε παλιν κενες εν πυθμενι χηλου/ ψυχοις εν γονατεσοι καρθη μιμοντι βαλοισαι, / ενθ' αιει σφισιν έδην, έπην ἀπρακτοι ικανται). At the basis of this image is a famous anecdote about Simonides. When asked to write a song for χάρις (equivalent to Latin gratis), this poet apparently replied that he kept two boxes, one for χάρις and one for money. The one containing χάρις was always empty, when he opened it in case of need.\textsuperscript{44} Theocritus has cleverly turned this bon mot around,\textsuperscript{45} so the point becomes that χάρις (grace; his poems) without χάρις (thanks, reward, appreciation) is useless.

At this point (14), Theocritus begins to explain what has gone wrong in the present day. People are unaware that, given the human condition, κλέος is the single most important thing to obtain. They misunderstand the true meaning of κέρδος (profit), thinking that money, not generously spent but jealously guarded, is profitable:

(...) ου γαρ ετ' άνδρες επ' έργμασιν ώς πάρος εσθλοις αινειοθαι σπευδοντι, νενικηνται δ' υπο κεφδεων πας δ' υπο κολου χειρας έχουν πόθεν οισεται αθρει άργυρον, ουδε κεν οιον άποτρίψας τινι δοη ἀλλεν ένθυσε μυθειται “απωτέρω ή γόνι ρυμα λαμα

\textsuperscript{42} Griffiths (1979: 32, quoting von Holzinger 1892: 194) points out the sublety of not naming what is the central model for this poem.

\textsuperscript{43} Merkelbach (1952: 312-327) suggests that the Graces reminded the ancient reader of bands of children going around the doors begging for sweetmeats. Hunter thinks they reminded him of the anecdotes told about Homer’s life as a traveling bard (1996: 94).

\textsuperscript{44} Cf. T-scholien 104 and Stob. 3.10.38.

\textsuperscript{45} Hunter (1996: 100): in the anecdote χάρις is what the mean patron offers the poet, in Id. 16 the poet sends χαρίτες to mean patrons.
αὐτῶ μοι τι γένοιτο.” “θεοὶ τιμῶσιν ἀοιδοὺς.”
“τίς δὲ κεν ἀλλου ἀκούσας; ἄλις πάντεσσιν Ὀμήρους.”
“οὔτος ἀοιδὸν λέστος, ὃς ἕξ ἐμεύ ὠίσεται οὐδέν.”
Δαιμόνιοι, τί δὲ κέρδος ὁ μυρίως ἐνδοθὶ χρυσὸς
κείμενος; οὐχ ἀλλὰ πλούτου φρονέουσιν όνασις,… (16.14-23)

No more, as before are men eager to win praise for glorious deeds, but are enslaved by gain; and each, his hand within his purse-fold, looks to see whence he may win money and will not rub the very rust from it to give another, straight answering rather: “the knee is closer than he shank; may somewhat befall me myself,” or: “the gods reward the poets,” and “who would listen to another? Homer is enough for all,” “he is the best of poets who shall get naught of me.” Fools, what gain is it, the gold that lies uncounted in your coffers? Herein is not, to thinking men, the profit of wealth… (transl. Gow, adapted)

The miserly contemporaries are also impervious to poetry’s true nature and function and foolishly believe that poets need no money (19, 21) and that Homer is enough for all (20). Theocritus therefore explains in Pindaric manner how best to spend one’s money (24-29): spend some on yourself and some on the bards (ἀοιδῶν, 24), treat many of your kin and many others well, be pious towards the gods, be a good host, and, most of all, honor the holy priests of the Muses (Μουσάων δὲ μάλιστα τίειν ἱεροὺς ὑποφήτας, 29).

What happens if one fails to spend money on poetry is then demonstrated: the lack of κλέος has the same effect as having been poor all your life. You should really spend some money on poetry! (30-33) To illustrate this, Theocritus provides some examples from the past, a “history of poetry” as Griffiths calls it, which is determined by the fact that “the further Theocritus gazes into the past, the less he sees of poetry’s historical context and the more he feels its essence” (1979: 31). In other words, the link between poetry and κλέος

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46 This refers to an anecdote about Simonides. One day the Scopadae refused to pay Simonides for a song composed in their honor because it paid to much attention to the Dioscuri, saying: “Let them pay the other half.” Thereupon a mysterious young man called Simonides outside, and the banquet hall in which all had been seated collapsed. Simonides interpreted this as a sign that the Dioscuri had saved him and had so repaid him for his tribute to them (Cic. De Or. 2.352).

47 This refers to an anecdote about Xenophanes complaining to Hiero (I) of Syracuse that he could not make a living for himself and his two slaves out of his poetry. Hiero answered: “Well, that Homer you despise so much is able to feed more than ten-thousand, even now that he’s dead.” (Plut. Reg. Apophth. 175c).

48 The relevant subtext is Pi. P. 1.90-98, advising Hiero I not to economize, in order to gain a good reputation beyond death (cf. Hunter 1996: 86-7).

49 On the Homeric ἑπαρχία ὑποφήτης, see Ch. 8.

50 Cf. Pi. I. 1.66-68: εἰ δὲ τις ἐνδον νέμει πλούτον κρυφαίοιν, ἀλλοισι δ’ ἐμπίπτεισιν γελα, ψυχὰν άίδα τελέων / ὡς φραζέται δόξας ἀνειθεν. (But if a man keeps wealth hidden inside and attacks others with laughter, he does not consider that he is paying up his soul to Hades, devoid of fame).
keeps being emphasized, while the relation between poetry and monetary rewards fades into insignificance in the far past, the age of the traveling bards and Homer (48-57). The message of this “history of poetry,” is that Homer is not a valid example for modern poets (cf. 20: ἀλις πάντεσσιν Ὁμηρος). Poetry may not have changed intrinsically, but the times have. This is why Simonides (34-47) is emphatically named, the poet who enjoyed the questionable fame of being the first to establish a relationship between praise poetry and money. He was a “divine poet” (θεῖος ἀοιδὸς ὁ Κήιος 44, the epithet it usually reserved for Homer!) but had to live with the realities of his age: for money, he provided his patrons, the Scopadae and the Creondae, with an extremely valuable gift, κλέος (36-44). Hence, Simonides represents the model of the two seemingly incompatible sides of poetry: the unpleasant, base monetary aspect and the divine, eternal κλέος it provides.

After Simonides’ example, Theocritus once more travels back further into the past, to the bards of the epic cycle (48-50). They sang of the heroes of the Trojan War, such as the Lycian princes (48), the sons of Priam (49-50), and Cyncus (50). These princely heroes once again fall outside the Simonidean system of κλέος. They did not pay a singer to sing of them, but their deeds were exceptional. So, the fact that their names have remained again serves solely to illustrate that κλέος is the best thing attainable for humans and that it depends entirely on singers.

Next comes a reference to Homer’s Odyssey (51-57): Odysseus would have been forgotten, like Eumaeus, the swineherd, Philoetius the cowherd and old King Laertes, if it had not been for the songs of Homer (57). Here the simplicity of the majority of the characters selected (a swineherd, a cowherd and an old nobleman on a small island) and the reach of the fame they achieved seem at the furthest remove from each other and therefore provide the most striking example of the power of poetry. In the lines that follow, Theocritus once more recapitulates the essence of all these examples (58-9): “From the Muse comes noble fame for humans, and the possessions of the dead are wasted by the living.” Ergo, one should spend money on poets.

After this, he shifts to a different paradigm and enters the Pindaric realm, which is much less straightforward. The possession of wealth is here opposed not to fame beyond

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51 The example of Cyncus is from the cyclic poems, cf. Gow (1952: II, ad loc.).
52 These examples may have been chosen on purpose to underline Theocritus’ claims as a bucolic poet who would provide κλέος even to the humble themes he specialized in, cf. Gutzwiller (1983: 227).
death, but to “appreciation and the affection of people” (τιμήν τε καὶ ἀνθρώπων φιλότητα, 66). Monetary rewards and wealth are not mentioned anymore. Instead, great deeds are now recognized as vital for attaining fame. Any poet who will be received κεχαρισμένος (with warm welcome, 68) will be glad to sing of the Achilles- or Aias-like Hiero II (74), who will chase the Carthaginians and bring a reign of peace to Sicily (76-90, a brief reworking of Pi. P.1, in honor of Hiero I). The days of Homer almost seem to have returned, but with the genteel and graceful touch of Pindaric reciprocity. Song and κλέος will be Hiero’s reward for the establishment of peace (90-103).

The ending of Id. 16 thus becomes a subtle Umwertung aller Werte. Κλέος is no longer dependent on money but on χάρις, in the triple sense of thanks due to Hiero for his great deeds, graceful reception (χαρίζεσθαι) of the poet, and glamorous charm (χάρις), which Theocritus’ compositions will bestow on Hiero. Nor is κλέος any longer solely a possession with special value after death; it is enriched with χάρις (in all senses of the word) and therefore valuable during life. This is why the Muses, who traditionally guaranteed κλέος for ages to come (cf. 1-2), are united in the end with the Graces, who provide the human present (cf. 4: ἀμμες δὲ βροτοὶ οἴδε, βροτοὺς βροτοί ἀείδωμεν) with charm and glamor (108-9: τί γὰρ Χαρίτων ἀγαπητόν / ἀνθρώποις ἀπάνευθεν). The final lines (103-109) are a close reworking of a Pindaric hymn to the Graces (O. 14, 3-9), whereas the beginning (5-13) featured the Graces in the adaptation of a Simonidean anecdote. Poetry, no longer encumbered by financial concerns, is all heavenly χάρις at this point.

eἰς μὲν ἐγώ, πολλοὺς δὲ Δίως φιλέοντι καὶ ἄλλους θυγατέρες, τοῖς πάσι μέλοι Σικελήν Ἀρέθοισαν ὑμεῖν σὺν λαοῖς καὶ αἰχμητὴν Ἴερωνα.

ω ᾠκλειοὶ Χάριτες θεαί, ὦ Μινυέιον Ορχομενον φιλέοσαι ἀπεχθόμεπον ποτε Θήβαις, ἀκλήτος μὲν ἐγὼ γέγονε μένοιμα κεν, ἓ δὲ καλεύτων θαρσήσαις Μινυᾶν ἐπίσκοποι σὺν ἄμετραισιν ισοίς ἄν.

καλλείψω δ’ οὔδ’ ὑμεῖς· τί γὰρ Χαρίτων ἀγαπητόν ἀνθρώποις ἀπάνευθεν; ἂει Χαρίτεσσιν ἀμ’ εἴην. (16.101-109)

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53 O. 14, 3-9: ὃ λυπαράς ἀοίδοιμοι βασίλειαι / Χάριτες ᾠρυχμενοὺ, παλαιγόνων Μινυῶν ἐπίσκοποι, / κλέος, ἐπεὶ εὐχόμεῖ σὺν γὰρ ὑμῖν τὰ <τ> τερτνα καὶ / τὰ γλυκέ ἀνέται πάντα βροτοί, / ἐι σοφός, εἰ καλός, ἐι τις ἀγλαος ἄνηρ. / οὔδ’ γὰρ θεοί σεμνὰν Χαρίτων ἀτέρ / κωμαναῦτι χοροὺς / οὔτε δαίταις ... (O Graces, much-sung queens of shining Orchomenos and guardians of the ancient Minyai, hear my prayer. For with your help all things pleasant and sweet come about for mortals, whether a man be wise, handsome, or illustrious. Yes, not even the gods arrange choruses or feasts without the august Graces... transl. Race).
I am but one, and the daughters of Zeus love many another beside; and may they all be fain to sing of Sicilian Arethusa with her warriors and the spearman Hiero. O Graces, goddesses whom Eteocles adored, O you that love Minyan Orchomenus hated by Thebes of old, when no man summons me, I will abide at home, but to the houses of them that call I will take heart and go, together with our Muses. Nor will I leave you behind, for without the Graces what has man desirable? With them may I ever dwell. (transl. Gow)

These lines suggest that Theocritus has become one of the many singers beloved by the Muses, who will hymn the Homeric-Pindaric hero (αἰχμητήν, spear swinger, 103) Hiero, and Syracuse. The transformation is complete: κλέος and χάρις are united as they should be (107-108) and reciprocity (in the form of a reward for a poet who bestows κλέος) is elegantly reacknowledged as the condicio sine qua non of poetry (106-107). Poets need patrons as much as patrons need poets. The Idyll exquisitely illustrates how the reputations and works of poets of the old days can be exploited in an erudite and subtle way to propose, authorize, and justify a new paradigm for the interaction between Hellenistic poets and their (prospective) patrons.

2.4 A Biased Reading of Ancient Poets

The discussion of ld. 16 has shown how the works and lives of poets of the past could be made to meet the needs of modern poets through an emphasis on (or the literal quotation of) certain characteristic elements of their poetry and items from the anecdotal tradition about their lives. By these means, they are customized for the new social context of the Hellenistic world, in this case the personal situation of Theocritus. Considering their function in this poem, it is to be expected that these examples do not grossly distort the reputation or the nature of the poetry of the model poets beyond recognition.

On the contrary, a complete distortion of literary and philosophical history can be found in Hermesianax’ Leontion (fr. 7 Powell), in which all the poets and philosophers named are claimed to have written their works merely as “allegories” of or testimonies to their love

54 The word is also used of Ptolemy Philadelphus in ld. 17.56. It is found both in Homer (Il. 3.178, describing Agamemnon) and in Pindar (P. 4.12, N. 5.7, describing Jason and the sons of Aiaacus respectively). Theocritus implies that Hiero will have a model in the subjects of these poets, and specifically in the patrons of Pindar’s poetry.

affairs.\textsuperscript{56} The whole exercise looks like an elaboration upon the theme "Love teaches one to be a poet,"\textsuperscript{57} but it is unlikely that this was the reading of ancient poetry (or philosophy) that Hermesianax \textit{seriously} proposed. To name but some of the more outrageous examples, according to Hermesianax, Homer really composed the \textit{Odyssey} because he was hopelessly in love with Penelope (\textit{λεπτήν ἢς Ἡδάκην ἐνετεινάτο θείος Ὄμηρος / ὃδησιν πινυτῆς εἴνεκα Πηνελόπης}, Homer put tiny Ithaca in his songs because of trustworthy Penelope, 29-30) and Hesiod wrote his \textit{Γυναικῶν Κατάλογος (Ηοῖαϊ)} out of love for the girl Ehoia:\textsuperscript{58}

\begin{quote}
Φημὶ δὲ καὶ Βοιωτῶν ἀποσπολιστόντα μέλαθρον

\textit{Ἡσίοδον πάσης ἤρανον ἱστορίης}

\textit{Ἀσκραίων ἐσικέσθαι ἐρῶθ}

\textit{Ἅρων' Ἐλικωνίδα κόμην·}

\textit{ἔνθεν ὁ γ' Ἡσίὼν μνώμενος Ἀσκραϊκὴν}

\textit{πόλλ' ἐπαθεν, πάσας δὲ λόγων ἀνεγράψατο βίβλους}

\textit{ὑμνών, ἐκ πρώτης παιδὸς ἀνερχόμενος. (Leontion, fr. 7.22-26 Powell)}
\end{quote}

And I claim that Hesiod, too, the shepherd of all history, leaving behind his Boeotian homestead, came to the Heliconian village of the Ascræans as a lover. And from that moment he suffered much in his wooing of Ascræan Ehoia and wrote all his books hymning her, ever starting over from that first girl.

These are statements no one could be expected to take seriously; rather they pose as clever and playful distortions serving to justify and authorize Hermesianax' choice to write erotic elegy. He positions himself in a long "tradition" of erotic poets of his own creation.\textsuperscript{59}

Hesiod's thematic catalogue-poem \textit{Ehoiai}, which featured the loves of gods for mortal women, serves as the main model of the present catalogue of loves. The girl Ehoia, who, as Hermesianax implies, furnishes the title, addressee, and recurrent "apostrophe" of Hesiod's poem, likewise functions as a model for Leontion, the beloved addressee who lends her name to Hermesianax' own poem. The love of the gods for mortal women and the heroic

\textsuperscript{56} Caspers (2006: 21-42) emphasizes the "allusive" nature of these allegories; the fragment often echoes the vocabulary of the poets mentioned, or alludes in other ways to their poetry.

\textsuperscript{57} Cf. Nicias fr. 566 \textit{SH}, allegedly in response to Theocritus \textit{Id.} 11.

\textsuperscript{58} The other couples are: Orpheus and Argiope, Musaeus and Antiope, Mimnermus and Nanno, Antimachus and Lyde, Alcaeus and Anacreon rivaling for the love of Sappho, Sophocles and Theoris, Euripides and a servant of Archelaos, Philoxenus and Galatea, Philitas and Bittis, Pythagoras and Theano, Socrates and Aspasia, Aristippus and Lais.

\textsuperscript{59} Cf. Phanocles' \textit{Ἐρώτες ἡ Καλοῖ} (fr. 1 Powell). The genre of (elegiac) catalogue poetry was popular in the third century, cf. the anonymous "tattoo-elegy" (Huys, 1991), \textit{Arai (Curses)} by Moero, and \textit{Ibis} by Callimachus, which provide catalogues of legendary examples for punishments and insults.
offspring that resulted from these couplings are reflected by the desire of the poets for their beloveds and the poetry this generated.\textsuperscript{60}

The idea that poetry is the allegorical expression of real experiences, as posited in the \textit{Leontion}, is related to the biographical mode of reading, which deduces a poet’s character and way of life from his poetry (cf. the epigrams in the previous chapter).\textsuperscript{61} However, in Hermesianax’ case, the presupposed relation between a poet’s life and work is not a straightforward one. Hermesianax interprets the classics, searching for hidden clues from which he reconstructs the stories of numerous love affairs, as the example of Hesiod’s love for “Ehoia” illustrates. In this aspect, his mode of reading is similar to (or perhaps a parody of) that of the allegorical interpreters of ancient epic, who strove to find the deeper truth \textit{under} the words of the poets, their so-called \textit{ὑπόνοια}.\textsuperscript{62} The \textit{Leontion} thus testifies to the belief that literature depicts reality through a distorted lens. Hence, it is implied that literature demands an informed (or biased?) reader to reveals its deeper meanings, such as, in this case, that all poets wrote out of love.\textsuperscript{63}

In the process, Hermesianax is actually reversing this allegorical mode of reading: in order to understand the alleged facts in the \textit{Leontion} (“all poets wrote out of love”), the reader has to be aware of the \textit{true} facts of Greek literary history, for instance, that “Ehoia” was not a girl, but the recurrent phrase opening a new passage in Hesiod’s \textit{Catalogue of Women}. Being able to recognize the many distorted allusions to the life and works of the poets of the past is essential in order to unravel the logic of Hermesianax’ fictions (or the method to his madness). The \textit{Leontion} thus demonstrates on two levels the idea that all literature, no matter how fantastic, is ultimately reducible to the true events that lie at the

\textsuperscript{60} For the idea of poetry as spiritual offspring, cf. Pl. \textit{Symp.} 209c-d.

\textsuperscript{61} The formula at the beginning “Οἵην μὲν ὁμιξία” (cf. 85) reads like a reference to the \textit{Megalai Ehoiai}. Some examples in the fragment conform to the logic that “name of the work = name of beloved” viz. \textit{Nanno, Lyde, Bittis}. In others the explanation of the love affair is sought in well known anecdotes or legends about a poet or philosopher (e.g. Orpheus’ love for Argiope), historical closeness (Alcaeus and Anacreon rivals for Sappho’s love, Socrates in love with Aspasia, Aristippus in love with the famous courtesan Lais). In some cases, the explanation remains obscure (Euripides, Sophocles, Pythagoras).


\textsuperscript{63} Note the emphasis on \textit{knowing} in the fragment, e.g. 49, 73, 75, cf. Caspers (2006: 24): only the educated reader could be expected to understand the subtle allusions in the apparently trivial stories.
basis of its conception. Explicitly (and playfully), it claims that love is at the basis of all great Greek poetry. Implicitly (and factually), it forces the reader to realize that all of these outrageous claims have their basis in deliberately misinterpreted facts: whereas it is true that Homer wrote about Ithaca and Penelope, it is presumably not true (nor was it generally believed) that he did so out of love for Penelope.

On another level, the fact that Hermesianax presents all great poets from the Greek tradition as erotic poets (albeit in disguise) evidently serves to justify his own choice of erotic elegy as a genre. In last instance, it may be asked if this biased and willful reading of Greek literature as one great erotic elegy intends to ridicule the process of choosing models to reflect the poet’s own image or, as the case might be, distorting them somewhat to do so. Perhaps Hermesianax aimed to highlight the dangers of misinterpretation that can be incurred by literary appropriation through playful exaggeration of this principle.

2.5 Avoiding Ancient Poets

In a few cases, an ancient poet is advised against as a model. According to generations of early modern scholarship, the most notable case in point was Homer. They assumed that Callimachus rejected Hellenistic writers of heroic epic who tried to imitate, or emulate Homer, such as Apollonius (cf. Chapter 4). It is however the question whether Callimachus actually warned against “Homeric” poetry in particular, and if he did, why. Let us cast a brief glance at some passages relevant to this issue.

2.5.1 Dangers of Imitating Homer

To begin with, the end of Callimachus’ Hymn II has often been read as a deprecation of poets who follow Homer:

ό Φθόνος Ἀπόλλωνος ἔπ’ οὔτα λάθριος εἶπεν.
“οὐκ ἁγίας ὁ ἀνιości δ ὀς τοὺς πάντος ἄδεις,”
τὸν Φθόνον ὑπόλλον ποιήσετε ὑδέ τ’ ἔειπεν.
“Ἀσσυρίου ποταμοί μέγας ῥόος, ἄλλα τὰ πολλά λύματα γῆς καὶ πολλὸν ἐφ’ ὑδατί συρφετὸν ἔλκει.
Δηνδεικαί ὅ ὀντὸ πάντος ὑδατι φορέουσι ἑλλάς.

64 A concept also found for instance in the contemporary Dionysius Scytobrachion’s rationalized reading of the Argonautic quest, cf. Rusten (1982). Cf. Euhemerus and his rationalizing treatment of myth, explaining away from religion all that was supernatural.
Envy whispered into Apollo’s ear: “I don’t like a poet who does not sing as much as the sea.” Apollo kicked Envy aside and said, “The Assyrian river rolls a massive stream, but it’s mainly silt and garbage that it sweeps along. The bees bring water to Deo not from every source, but only where it bubbles up pure and undefiled from a holy spring, its very essence.” (transl. Nisetich)

Williams here understands the enigmatic reference to “the sea” as an allusion to Homer, explaining the passage as follows:

Phthonos’ complaint is that Callimachus does not emulate even the length of Homer’s poems (...) Apollo, expressing of course Callimachus’ own views, rejects the suggestion that poems which are merely lengthy are by that token “Homeric” (...) Callimachus’ own goal is to emulate and recreate Homer in a more meaningful and original way than merely to reproduce slavishly the external dimensions of his epic. (Williams, 1978: 85-89)\(^65\)

This (i.e., “to reproduce slavishly the external dimension of epic”) is in turn often interpreted as a covert reference to the practices of Apollonius, whose lengthy and apparently Homeric \textit{Argonautica} would be the real target of Apollo’s and hence Callimachus’ mudslinging.\(^66\) As Cameron and Köhnken make clear, however, there are no cogent reasons to believe that this passage contains an allusion to Homer. For one thing, the metaphor of Homer as “the sea,” is not attested before Hellenistic times, which would make Callimachus the first to use this rather oblique way of referring to him. The issue here is rather one of “size” as such.\(^67\) All that this text makes clear is that Callimachus advises against writing long poems for the sake of size, not necessarily against writing Homeric poems. While it is true that the \textit{Iliad} and the


\(^{66}\) Cf. e.g. Kahane (1994: 121), with bibliographical references. Strootman (forthcoming, 2009) on the other hand proposes a novel interpretation: the Assyrian river (the Orontes rather than the Euphrates as is generally believed) is an implicit reference to the court of the Sassanids in Assyria and hence to poets who were working under their patronage. The remark of Apollo implies that they write ponderous and unrefined poetry. Ultimately, this constitutes an implied compliment to the literary taste of Callimachus’ own patron, who appreciates small and refined poetry. This interpretation certainly provides an elegant explanation for the choice of the \textit{Assyrian} river. Strootman does not need to bring in Homer to make his point.

*Odyssey* were, for a long time, not only the greatest but also probably among the most sizeable poems in Greek literature, this does not necessarily mean that Homer’s poetics are being criticized.

The next alleged reference to Homer and the dangers of imitating him is found in the *Aetia* prologue itself, where Apollo counsels against driving along the “broad way,” a phrase understood as referring to epic poetry in the vein of Homer. The phrase in question is found in lines 25-28:

καὶ γὰρ ὅτε πρῶτηστον ἐμοῖς ἐπὶ δέλτον ἑθηκα
γούνασιν, Ἀ[πόλλων εἶπεν ὁ μοι Λύκιος:
“......]... αἰστε, τὸ μὲν θύος ὅτι πάχιοτον
θρέψαι, τῇν Μοῦσαν δ’ ὁγαθὲ λεπταλέην·
πρὸς δὲ σε] καὶ τὸδ’ ἀνωγα, τὰ μὴ πατέουσιν ἀμαξαί
τὰ στείβειν, ἐτέρων ἰχναὶ μὴ καθ’ ὀμᾶ
διόρον ἐλαῖν μηδ’ οἴμον ἀνὰ πλατύτων, ἀλλὰ κελευθοὺς
ἀτρίπποις, εἰ καὶ στείνοσέρην ἐλάσεις.” (fr. 1. 21-28 Pf.)

For, the very first time I put a writing tablet on my knees, Apollo Lycius said to me: “[Remember, dear] poet, to [fatten] the victim for me as much as you can, but, my friend, to keep the Muse elegant. [And I’m telling you another thing]: take the roads that are not open to hackneys and do not drive your [chariot] in the ruts of others and not over the broad way, but on [untrodden] paths, even if that means driving along a narrower lane.”

For this passage, a Pindaric subtext was found, namely in the (problematic) text of *Paean* 52h Snell-Maehler:68 Ὄμηρον [δὲ μὴ τριπτὸν κατ’ ἀμαξιτόν / ἰόντες, ᾧ θρέοντο τοίτοις ἀν’ ἵπποις (Not going through the worn wagon tracks of Homer, but drawn by another’s horses.) At first glance, it would indeed seem that the near-quotation should be read as an indirect reference to Homer. However, as Asper has pointed out, the supplement of the Pindaric *Paean* is far from secure.69 It seems Snell and Maehler, in their search for a supplement, were influenced by the supplement of *Aetia* prologue 28 and thought they had found a precedent for Callimachus’ anti-Homer polemics in Pindar. It is clear at any rate that the advice of Apollo at *Aetia* fr. 1.28 implies the same stance towards poetics as the god expresses at the end of *Hymn II*: a preference for small, delicate, and refined poetry rather

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68 Asper (1997: 64-72) denies that the metaphor of the road points back to any one particular poetic text; it was widespread.

69 Asper (1997: 66-69). The problems of the supplement are manifold: ἀμαξιτός is feminine and τριπτός is always of three endings; moreover the π of τριπτός in Pindar is far from certain.
than poetry on a grand scale, perhaps including but certainly not limited to Homeric imitation.

Finally, it has often been argued that Theocritus was a supporter of these “Callimachean poetics” on the basis of “his” verdict on the followers of Homer. In reality, the opinion at stake is expressed by the goatherd poet Lycidas, who speaks to the young aspiring poet Simichidas in Id. 7 as follows:

\[ \text{ὥς μοι καὶ τέκτων μέγ' ἀπέχθεται ὡστις ἔρευνὴ
ιὸν ὄρευς κορυφὰ τελέσαι δόμον Ὄρομέδοντος,
καὶ Μοισάν ὄρνιξες ὡσι ποτὶ Χῖον ἀοιδόν
άντια κοκκύζοντες ἐτώσια μοχθίζοντι. (Id. 7.45-48) \]

For much I hate the builder who seeks to raise his house as high as the peak of mount Oromedon, and much those cocks of the Muses who lose their toil with crowing against the bard of Chios. (transl. Gow)

Lycidas explicitly criticizes the mistaken idea that Homer’s poetry could and should be imitated. The result of such *imitatio Homerica* is inevitably liable to uncomplimentary comparison with the original; in a sense, it is as ridiculous as a house that strives to be as high as a mountain. More to the point, however, is the fact that in the context of *Idyll 7* Lycidas’ interlocutor Simichidas, the young and aspiring poet, has just expressed his conviction that he is “not yet” as good as Asclepiades and Philitas, two established great names of the early Hellenistic age (39-41).\(^{70}\) What Lycidas is also implying, therefore, is: “be careful to whom you compare yourself.”\(^{71}\) Seen in this light, the phrase expresses Lycidas’ verdict on the poetic capacities of Simichidas rather than the value of Homer’s poetry.

To recapitulate, whether or not a warning against imitating Homer should be sought in Callimachus’ poetry is difficult to establish, but the idea that new poetry should be on a small scale and innovative and not follow the “well-trodden paths” appears to be shared by both Callimachus and Theocritus, as their common imagery of big (and ridiculous and unrefined) versus small (and modest and elegant) suggests. If Callimachus is indeed advising against imitations of Homer, it is presumably because Homer is so great; like Theocritus, he fears the result of an unsuccessful imitation of Homer.


\(^{71}\) More on this passage in Ch. 5.4.
This fear is easy to comprehend. It is probably no exaggeration to say that the consensus about Homer’s prime importance and greatness is constant throughout Greek history, even if occasional criticism may have been leveled at the historical truth of his poems. The fact remains that *Iliad* and *Odyssey* together formed the greatest and most central poems in the Greek language. To try and rival a classic so ingrained in Greek consciousness was not only a supreme sign of hubris, it was also completely ridiculous. It might be possible to study Homer in a philological context but not to imitate him, let alone hope to emulate him on his own terms.

There is, however, one interesting exception to confirm this general rule: in one epigram the 300 (hexameter) verses of Erinna, a poet from the comparatively recent past, are said to equal Homer. From this example, it may be concluded that comparison with Homer is only possible when the *comporanda* are so different as to have virtually nothing in common:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Λέσβιον Ἡρίννης τόδε κηρίον· \\
\text{αἱ ἀλλ’ ὀλον ἔκ Μουσέων κιρνάμενον μέλιτι.
}
\end{align*}
\]

οἱ δὲ τριηκόσιοι ταύτης στίχοι ἦσσον Ὅμήρῳ,
τῆς καὶ παρθενικῆς ἐννεακαδεκέτευς·
ἡ καὶ ἔπ’ ἠλακάτῃ μητρὸς φόβῳ, ἢ καὶ ἔφ’ ἵστῳ
ἐστήκει Μουσέων λάτος ἐφαπτομένη.
Σαπφῶ δ’ Ἡρίννης ὅσσον μελέεσσιν ἀμείνων,
‘Ἥριννα Σαπφοῦς τόσσον ἐν ἰξαμέτροις. (AP 9.190, anonymous)

This is the Lesbian honeycomb of Erinna; and if it be small, well, it is all put together from the honey of the Muses. Her three hundred verses equal Homer—and that for a girl of only nineteen years old. She, the servant of the Muses, stood bound to the spindle and the loom out of fear of her mother. And as much as Sappho surpasses Erinna in melic poetry, so much Erinna surpasses Sappho in hexameters.

Homer was the undoubted *non plus ultra* of Greek poetry; Erinna reputedly a girl of nineteen who had written 300 lines lamenting her dead childhood friend Baucis. The feminine, unassuming pathos of Erinna’s poetry is here provocatively set off against the war-and-adventure-ridden, all-encompassing heroic poetry of Homer. Her few lines, the epigram claims, rival Homer for quality. The comparison is unlikely, and preference for the scanty lines Erinna left over the universally acknowledged founding text of Greek culture signifies both a marginal taste and a deliberate provocation.\(^72\) These appear to be implicitly admitted

\(^72\) For praise of Homer in Hellenistic epigram: AP 7.1, 7.2, 7.4, 7.80, 9.24, on which see in particular Skiadas (1965).
by the author because he also compares Erinna to Sappho, to whom she is much more similar (hence the epithet “Lesbian” qualifies Erinna’s work). One element in the comparison to Sappho suggests a possible reason why the comparison with Homer was broached: both Homer and Erinna wrote hexameters. All other factors considered, the difference could not have been greater and hence the comparison more unexpected.

2.5.2 Dangers of Liking Antimachus

The category of “predecessors not to be imitated” also contains poets nearer to the Hellenistic era, such as Antimachus of Colophon, criticized by Callimachus in fr. 398 (cf. below), as a writer of obtuse and unclear poetry.\(^73\) Apart from the question of his poetic merits (which are hard to evaluate, owing to the state of his works),\(^74\) his proximity to Callimachus’ own time and practice might have been reason for Callimachus to criticize Antimachus. Alan Cameron claims it may be that Callimachus regarded Antimachus as an imitator of Homer in the wrong mode; Antimachus was apparently prone to literal citation of Homer to an extent that is not found and perhaps therefore unacceptable in Hellenistic poetry. As has been demonstrated, Callimachus certainly did not reject Homer per se but may have loathed dull imitatio Homerica all the more. Moreover, since both poets wrote conspicuously learned elegies (the Lyde and the Aetia, respectively), there may have been another reason why Callimachus found so much fault with Antimachus. Maybe he found that Antimachus’ practice was was too close to his own, but in a manner which he could not appreciate.

On the other hand, it appears that Antimachus was not rejected wholesale by the Hellenistic poets (cf. Asclepiades AP 9.63, Posidippus AP 12.168).\(^75\) In an earlier generation, he was apparently admired.\(^76\) In Asclepiades’ epigram AP 9.63, the elegiac Lyde, Antimachus’ most famous poem declares herself to possess undying fame, thanks to her author:

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\(^{73}\) On Antimachus in general, see Wyss (1936) and Matthews (1996).

\(^{74}\) Antimachus appears to have been a learned poet, writing in a mannered style, with preference for obscure words; characteristics he shares with some of the Hellenistic poets, e.g. Callimachus. On Callimachus’ evaluation of Antimachus, see Brink (1946: 11-26), Krevans (1993: 141-161), Cameron (1995: 301-309).

\(^{75}\) Posidippus names Antimachus in one breath with Mimnermus, whom Callimachus names as his model in Aetia fr. 1 Pf.

\(^{76}\) Cf. Brink (1946: 11-26).
Lyde am I, by descent and by name, and thanks to Antimachus I am more famed than all the descendants of Codrus. For who has not sung of me? Who has not read the Lyde, the joint writing of Antimachus and the Muses?

Lyde, who had introduced herself in the first line as a woman, finally reveals herself for what she is: “the joint writing (γράμμα) of Antimachus and the Muses.” She has become a lady of letters in the most literal sense. The clever tournure, turning a woman into a book in the course of four verses, reflects what Antimachus has done with his love for Lyde in the course of the long process of writing his poetry. This is exactly what Callimachus seizes upon when he ridicules the Lyde (fr. 398 Pf.). His words cleverly parody the first line of Asclepiades: Λύδη καὶ παχὺ γράμμα καὶ οὐ τορόν (Lyde, a thick and inarticulate book). The fact that the book is immediately called (or calls itself, perhaps) a book (γράμμα) in Callimachus’ fragment might express his opinion that it did not have and never had had any life in it. The scathing verdict that it is a piece of “thick/fat” (παχὺ) and “inarticulate” (οὐ τορόν) writing demonstrates that Callimachus regarded it as nothing more than a piece of faulty craftsmanship. He consciously subverts the image conjured up by Asclepiades’ praise that Lyde was “a living woman turned poetry.”

Antimachus, then, is a model whose merits were still subject of debate at the time of early Hellenism; could and should he serve as the model for Hellenistic poetic practice? Callimachus thought this was not the case, and regrettably it is impossible to form an opinion on his verdict, since history has deprived us of a possibility to form a clear image of this intriguing poet.

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78 Krevans (1993: 157-8) argues that the qualifications παχὺς and οὐ τορός probably mean “verbose, florid” and “metrically rough.” However, apart from these more technical-rhetorical meanings, they could also mean “fat/thick and inarticulate,” so the personification intended by Asclepiades would be retained. See further Asper (1997: 160-189).
2.6 Conclusion

This chapter has exemplified and analyzed some of the manifold ways of dealing with the “cultural memory” of Greek poetry found in the works of Hellenistic poets, who imitate, emulate, and alter their models. Sometimes a predecessor is introduced to underscore the authority of a modern poet trying his hand at an old genre or creating a new one while basing it (and himself) on old examples. Together with the genre, he literally wishes to bring its originator back to life. At the same time, however, it is difficult to manage these poetic models because they are the voices of authority.

It is less risky to choose a more indirect way of incorporating the models: not giving a predecessor his own voice but naming him and referring to well chosen anecdotes from his life instead. This is how Theocritus Id. 16 justifies his novel position of praising poet in the age of paid poetry. Alternatively, models could be mutilated and reformed into a reflection of the modern poet himself, as Hermesianax does in order to construct a long and venerable tradition of erotic poetry inspired by a beloved (Leontion fr. 7 Powell). This is evidently not a serious way of authenticating a new genre.

Finally, there is the issue of predecessors better avoided as models. These may be either categorized hors concours, like Homer, or open to much criticism because are not yet embedded in the established tradition, like Antimachus. This does not mean they are unadmired or not imitated, but modeling poetry on them risks incurring the danger of opposing critics.

This demonstrates that for poets of the early Hellenistic era there were many ways of dealing with and regarding the past. However, one thing was clear: the past was always present, and poets had to come to terms with it. Scholarly interest and the wish to find a plausible model for poetry in changed circumstances inform the assimilations, critiques, and reflections upon the cultural heritage that was gathered and considered as such for the first time. Ultimately, the dictum taken from Bacchylides’ paean, “one poet learns from another,” is still, or indeed, more than ever, valid in the Hellenistic period. The poets of the past taught the Hellenistic poets who they were and how and what they should write. Metaphorically speaking, they were the true Muses of the Hellenistic era; it was their cult that was celebrated in the Museum of Alexandria.