Poetry as window and mirror: Hellenistic poets on predecessors, contemporaries and themselves
Klooster, J.J.H.

Citation for published version (APA):

General rights
It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

Disclaimer/Complaints regulations
If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: http://uba.uva.nl/en/contact, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.
CHAPTER 3:
INVENTION OF TRADITION IN HELLENISTIC POETRY: THE APPROPRIATION OF MYTHICAL POETS

3.1 Introduction

As the previous chapter has demonstrated, (false) ascription of poetical ideas to poets of the historical era, whose works were still there to be read, seems to have been recognized as problematic in Hellenistic poetry. It may be asked how this issue was handled in the Hellenistic treatment of mythical poets, whose works were no longer extant, or at best of doubtful authenticity. There are clear differences in the way these poets are approached, as this chapter will show through a discussion of two poets and their way of handling this issue, Apollonius and Theocritus.

I will begin with the case of Apollonius’ Argonautica, focusing on his portrayal of the mythical bard Orpheus. Orpheus’ introduction at the top of the catalogue of Argonauts as the son of the Muse of epic, Calliope, has usually been interpreted as signifying that he is of paramount importance to the subsequent narrative.\(^1\) The entry in the catalogue introducing him reads as follows:

Πρῶτα οὖν Ὀρφῆος μνησώμεθα, τὸν ὡς ποτ’ αὐτή
Καλλιότη Θρήικη θατάτα, εὐνηθεῖσα
Οἰάγρῳ θρῆικῃ ψατόται
αὐτὰρ τὸν γάτ’ ἐνέπουσιν ἀπειράς ὁμοίοι πέτρας
θέλει, ὑπὸ διάδοχον ἐνοπῇ ποταμῶν ῥέεθρα∙
φηγοὶ δ’ ἀγριάδες κείνης ἑτεροία σήματα μολπῆς
ὀψινθείας Ζώνης ἐπιτιθόμενοι
ἑξείτης στίχους ἐπήτριμοι,
промышλοσεὶς Κυπρίης ἑπομοδόντις
πᾶσας δαίμων πεπρομεῖναι
ὄνομαῖς Πιέριας ἔβαν ιταζοῦμεν
Ὀρφέα μὲν δ’ ἀείλοι, ἀγαθὰν ἐν χείρας
Πιέριας Πιμπλῆδος ἐφημοσύνῃσι
δέξατο,
Πιέριας Βιστωνίδι κοιρανέοντα.

(\textit{Arg}. 1.23-37)

First then let us name Orpheus whom once Calliope bare, it is said, wedded to Thracian Oeagrus, near the Pimpleian height. Men say that he by the music of his songs charmed the stubborn rocks upon the mountains and the course of rivers. And the wild oak-trees to this day, tokens of that magic strain, that grow at Zone on the Thracian shore, stand in ordered ranks close together, the same which under the

---

1 Orpheus’ position in the catalogue (1.23-34) and its implications have been remarked upon by practically everyone studying the \textit{Argonautica} from antiquity (\textit{scholia}) to modern times. For bibliography, see Scherer (2002: 115, n. 386), Cuypers (2005: 58).
charm of his lyre he led down from Pieria. Such then was Orpheus whom Aeson's 
on welcomed to share his toils, in obedience to the behest of Chiron, Orpheus ruler 
of Bistonian Pieria. (transl. Seaton)

Strange as it may seem, however, this introduction seems to bear little relevance to the actual 
feats of Orpheus in the rest of the epic. Although it is claimed here (ἐνέποιησεν, 4) that 
Orpheus enchanted inanimate nature with his songs, and material remains (the oaks 
standing in neat rows at cape Zone) are adduced as proof, Orpheus never explicitly performs 
a similar miracle in the epic.² So what exactly is the meaning of this place of honor in the 
catalogue of heroes? Scholars have often speculated that Apollonius wanted to identify 
himself as narrator with Orpheus: Orpheus should be regarded as an intra-textual alter ego 
of the poet. Alternatively, they see in Orpheus the representation of the ideal singer, or a 
man of brain (as opposed to a man of brawn like Heracles), or an Apollo-like figure bringing 
order and harmony (as opposed to the chthonic force embodied by Medea).³ These 
interpretations are of course not mutually exclusive and indeed help clarify the position he 
takes in the epic as a character.

In this chapter, I will investigate in particular the claim that Orpheus should indeed 
be interpreted as a text-internal alter ego of the narrator/poet Apollonius. I will concentrate 
in particular on the question which of Orpheus’ characteristics are highlighted and what this 
can tell us about Apollonius’ own persona.

The case of Orpheus and Apollonius is not unique. The second part of the chapter 
will demonstrate that Theocritus too uses mythical bards (Daphnis and Comatus) to reflect 
on and legitimize his poetical choices. It is my contention that a similar background informs 
the choices of both poets for mythical singers. A brief glance at the position mythical poets 
took in Greek culture and in particular Hellenism will illuminate this.

² Orpheus comes closest to truly miraculous enchantment in 1.678-9: the peaceful (enchanted?) fishes 
swimming in the wake of Argo. The character of this scene is discussed by Levin (1971: 220), Vian 
(1974: 77), Zanker (1987: 68), Clare (2002: 235). Another ambiguous scene is 2.159-63, on which see 
³ Identification with narrator: Fränkel (1968 ad 1.23), Hunter (1993: 120-121), Cuypers (2004: 58); ideal 
singer: Busch (1993: 301-324); man of brain: Lawall (1966); Apollo-related, bringer of harmony and 
order: Clare (2002, passim). Scholarly attention has further focused on the cosmogony in 1.494-511 and 
115 n. 387) for further bibliography on Orpheus in the Argonautica.
3.2 The Greeks and the Mythical Poets

Cicero was certain there had been poets before Homer. He gives the following reason for this assumption:

Nihil est enim simul et inventum et perfectum; nec dubitari debet quin fuerint ante Homerus poetae, quod ex eis carminibus intellegi potest, quae apud illum et in Phaeacum et in procorum epulis canuntur. (Brutus, 71)

For nothing is at the same time invented as it is perfected, and we need not doubt that there were poets before Homer, as can be gathered from those lays in his works which are sung at the banquets of the Phaeaceans and the suitors.

Broadly speaking, this was also the Greek point of view: the Greeks told stories about genealogies or miraculous deeds of pre-Homeric bards such as Orpheus, Musaeus and Linus. The status of these poets’ “works” was (and in Orpheus’ case remains) complicated. Throughout antiquity, they occupied a different position than works ascribed to Hesiod and Homer, who were generally believed to have been historical personages and were seen as authors of a fixed corpus. The character and social function of works of historical and mythical poets also differed. Whereas Homer and Hesiod had produced canonical works of literature that were widely available and performed at public festivals, the so-called Orphic writings “aspire to be more than poetry: an esoteric knowledge, revelation rather than literature.” Consequently, their place was at mystic rites in a select company of initiates rather than at public festivities, and they were not used as educational texts in schools, unlike Homer’s and Hesiod’s works.

The mythic or legendary status of poets such as Orpheus, Linus, and Musaeus influenced the approach to their supposed works. Deliberate misattributions that endowed what were actually new poems with an air of venerable antiquity and/or revelatory authority can be traced as far back as the sixth century BCE; false attributions to Orpheus and

---

4 Cf. e.g. Arist. Po. 1448b28-30: τῶν μὲν οὖν πρὸ Ὀμήρου οὐδενός ἔχομεν εἰπεῖν τοιοῦτον ποίημα, εἰκός δὲ εἶναι πολλοῦς, ἀπὸ δὲ Ὀμήρου ἁρξαμένος ἔστιν. (We cannot name a similar poem of anyone before Homer, although it is likely that there were many, yet we must start with Homer...).

5 The term is used widely here. De facto, there is little difference between writings attributed to Orpheus and Musaeus, except that Orpheus was more popular, cf. West (1983: 39).


7 West (1983: 5).
Musaeus were taken for granted by Plato and Aristotle.8 In addition, as mythical poets could easily and safely be credited with controversial poetic ideas, they were ideal figures to be cast as prōtoi heurētai:9 there was no written proof to the contrary, which gave them a protean quality.10 The era and profession of the legendary bards moreover implied to later Greeks that they were related more closely to the gods than contemporary humans were,11 as they were supposed to have lived in the heroic age and, as poets, were thought to enjoy privileged relationships with the gods.12 Orpheus, for example, was usually called the son of the Muse Calliope or Polyhymnia and/or of the god of poetry, Apollo.13 Poets who were so close to the gods and to the origins of poetry were naturally considered endowed with great authority in poetical matters.14

The absence of a clearly established written legacy and a venerable position in matters concerning poetry made mythical bards into ideal objects for interpretation, projection, and appropriation by later poets. Focusing on Apollonius and Theocritus, this chapter argues that these Hellenistic poets sought to establish their poetic authority by taking recourse to such mythical poets. This may be explained as an example of what social historian Eric Hobsbawm has called “the invention of tradition:”

---

8 Pl. Resp. 364e2-365a3, cf. Arist. fr. 7 Rose (1, 5.1410b 28): “ἐν τοῖς Ὀρφικοῖς καλουμένοις ἐπεσι” (fr. F 3a sup.): “Λεγομένοις” ἐπέπεφθη μή δοκεῖ Ὀρφέως εἶναι τὰ ἔπη, ὡς καὶ αὐτὸς ἐν τοῖς περὶ φιλοσοφίας λέγει: αὐτοῦ μὲν γὰρ εἰσὶ τὰ δόγματα, ταῦτα δὲ φήσιν Ὀνομάκριτον ἐν ἔπεις κατατείναι. (“In the so-called Orphic poems...” He says “so-called” because he does not believe that the poems are by Orpheus, as he says himself in his On Philosophy: for the teachings are Orphic, but these things, he says, have been versified by Onomacritus). Cf. Cic. De Nat. Deor. 1.38: Orpheum poetam docet Aristoteles numquam fuisse et hoc Orphicum carmen Pythagorei ferunt cuiusdam fuisse Cercopis. On the identity of early forgers of Orphic texts and their motives, cf. West (1983: 15).
9 On the concept of the prōtos heurētēs, see Kleingünther (1933), cf. DNP s.v.: “Ihre heurēmata sind von Beginn an ausgereift, so daß Erfinder nicht nur die »ersten«, sondern gleichzeitig die »besten« sind.” Gutzwiller (1991: 4): “Origin implies the source, the first time that establishes the pattern for all time, the authorizing event and so the authority... The appeal of origins is (...) that of value; the first is inherently the best, because it sets the standard by which the thing begun is measured ever after.”
10 The (false) ascription of poetical innovations to a venerable forebear was more of a problem in the case of poets of the historical era, whose works were still there to be read, cf. Ch. 2 passim.
12 According to tradition, many of them had bonds of direct kinship with the gods, cf. Pl. Resp. 366b1: οἱ θεῶν παῖδες ποιηταὶ (poets are the children of the gods).
13 See Kern ([1922]1972) test. 22-23.
14 E.g. Sperduti (1950: 209-240); for the idea that music and poetry were originally creations of the gods themselves, see esp. 210-213. E.g. Pi. fr. 31 Snell-Maehler: Zeus created the Muses and Apollo especially to praise the cosmos in words and music; H.H. 4.420-423 describes the invention of the lyre by Hermes; Pl. P. 12.6ff describes the invention of the flute by Athena.

80
The peculiarity of invented traditions is that the continuity with [the past] is largely factitious. In short, they are responses to novel situations, which take their form of reference to old situations. (...) There is probably no time and place with which historians are concerned that has not seen the “invention” of tradition in this sense. However, we should expect it to occur more frequently when a rapid transformation of society weakens or destroys the social patterns for which the old traditions had been designed, producing new ones to which they were not applicable, or when such old traditions and their institutional carriers and promulgators no longer prove sufficiently adaptable and flexible or are otherwise eliminated; in short, when there are sufficiently large and rapid changes... (Hobsbawm, 1983: 1-4)

It is generally acknowledged that the early Hellenistic era was indeed a period of rapid societal transformation,\(^\text{15}\) which may explain why many instances of invented tradition are found in this era, in literature, religion and court ritual amongst others.\(^\text{16}\) The main use to which invented traditions are put, according to Hobsbawm, is “the establishing or legitimizing of institutions, status, or relations of authority” (1983: 7). Something similar is done by the Hellenistic poets to establish and legitimate their authority as poets in the venerable continuum of Greek poetical culture. How this applies to the character of Orpheus in the *Argonautica* will be the subject of the following section.

### 3.3 Orpheus in Greek Tradition up to the Hellenistic Era

In order to appreciate the associations Orpheus carried for readers of Apollonius’ *Argonautica*, one must be aware of the way he was viewed by the Greeks in general. He enjoys a special position in Greek culture, being neither a fully legendary or divine figure (e.g. Heracles or Dionysus) nor a plausible historical author (such as Homer or Solon). As Martin West puts it: “The stories portray him not as a distant forerunner of Homer, but a singer of a different type: one who can exercise power over the natural world and who can countermand death itself, a “shamanistic” figure...”\(^\text{17}\)

---


\(^{16}\) Cf. the remarkable popularity of aetiology in Hellenistic poetry, which illustrates how the search for (fictitious/factitious) origins to ground contemporary usage (some no doubt of rather recent origin) in a venerable shared past takes a great flight. For more remarks on the importance of the past in Ptolemaic ideology and hence in Alexandrian literature, see Ch. 1.3.

\(^{17}\) Such shamanistic features are e.g. his enchantment of nature, his ability to travel into the realm of the dead and communicate with the souls of the dead (West 1983: 4-5).
Four basic elements in the myth of Orpheus have been attested since classical times: 1) he was a singer and lyre player able to enchant inanimate and animate nature; 2) he was an Argonaut; 3) he (successfully or otherwise) prevailed upon the powers of the netherworld to release his wife; 4) he was killed by Maenads or Thracian women, in some versions because they considered him the inventor of pederasty, in others because he refused to honor Bacchus.

Although the myth surrounding him is therefore more or less consistent, Orpheus remains controversial in many respects. Plato places him before the Trojan war. Herodotus, on the other hand, maintains that Orpheus is to be dated after Homer and Hesiod (Hist. 2.53). Aristotle did not even believe Orpheus had ever existed (cf. note 8). It is no surprise, then, that the problems of authentication of Orphic writings are widely acknowledged. The problematic Orphic corpus known to the classical and Hellenistic ages consisted of Theogonies, hymns, oracles, and ritual verse relating to the afterlife and the mysteries that allowed initiates access to it. Different from the Orphic myth, however, it does not show great consistency in beliefs or phrasing.

In Hellenistic poetry (third century BCE onwards), the basic image of Orpheus remained substantially the same as in the classical age. There is however a novel, playfully romanticized, approach to the myth of his love for his wife or his pederasty. These items in his biography make him an excellent candidate for featuring as a kind of prōtos heuretēs of heterosexual or homosexual erotic elegy/lyric monody, as in Hermesianax’ elegiac catalogue of poets and their beloveds, Leontion (fr. 7.1-14 Powell) and Phanocles’ Ἐρωτες ἢ Καλοί (fr. 1 Powell, an elegiac catalogue of homosexual loves).

18 The very first mention in Greek literature (Ibycus, sixth cent. BCE) already calls Orpheus ὄνομακλάττος, famous (fr. 25 PMG). All ancient testimonia regarding Orpheus may be found in Kern (1972 [1922]); on Orpheus in general see also Guthrie (1952 [1935]), Robbins (1982), West (1983), Burkert (1985: 296-301), Segal (1989), Massaracchi (1993), Bernabé (2007).
20 Simon. fr. 567 (cf. 544-8, 576, 595 PMG); Pi. P. 4.176; Herodorus 31F 42-43. An alternative tradition claimed Philammon was the Argo’s musician (Pherec. 3F26, cf. scholia ad Arg. 1.23). On the Sicyonian treasury at Delphi (570-560 BC), Argo is represented with two singers aboard, one identified as ΟΡΦΑΣ (Mus. 1323-1323a1210).
22 Pl. Symp. 179d, Resp. 620a. Orpheus’ death at the hand of Maenads because of his refusal to honor Bacchus also seems to have been the theme of Aeschylus’ Bassarae.
24 See in general West (1983).
3.4 Orpheus in the Argonautica

As noted, Orpheus is introduced quite emphatically at the top of the Catalogue of Argonauts by Apollonius. This raises the expectation that his actions will be of paramount importance to the epic. Yet, at first sight his importance is not so easy to define. He either sings or instigates the foundation of new cults, but these actions hardly classify as heroic feats in the traditional sense. Only when he saves the Argonauts from the Sirens does his presence on the Argo seem fully justified (4.902-909).\(^{25}\)

Since Orpheus is predominantly represented as a singer by Apollonius, it seems a natural start to analyze his performances in this field closely. They comprise the following passages:\(^{26}\)

(a) 1.494-515: cosmogony/divine succession song
(b) 1.540: rowing song
(c) 1.569-72: song for Artemis
(d) 2.161-2: song to honor victory of Polydeuces over Amycus
(e) 2.685-93: song for Apollo
(f) 4.902-909: song against the Sirens (unclear what kind of song)
(g) 4.1158-60 and 1193-6: songs for the wedding for Jason and Medea

Considering the evident interest of Hellenistic scholarship in the historical development and classification of poetry, it is profitable to ask what kind of songs Orpheus is presented as singing and why, as well as how the Alexandrians would have classified them.\(^{27}\) Some of the passages fail to indicate whether a song (in the sense of melody and lyrics) is performed or what kind of song it might be. These are items (b) (the “rowing song”) and (f) (the “song

---

25 Cf. schol. ad Arg. 1.23: ἐπιθείται δὲ, διὰ τὴν Ὀρφέως ἀσθενείας ἄν συνέπλει τοῖς ἡρώοις. (It is asked why Orpheus, weak as he is, sailed along with the heroes). The explanation is extrapolated from Apollonius' own text: ὅτι μάλις ὄν ο Χείρων ἔχοιε ἀνάστραφη καὶ τὰς Σειρήνας παρελθεῖν αὐτοῖσ Ὀρφέως συμπλένωτος. (Because Chiron, being a seer, prophesied that they could even pass by the Sirens if Orpheus sailed along).

26 Other, dubious candidates are 1.1134-7 (the dance for Rhea) and 4.1409-1422 (prayer to the Hesperides). The first is like a Pyrrhiche (armed dance); it is not certain whether Orpheus performs music on this occasion; in the second case it is certain that he does not, but the passage resembles the ἤμνος κλητικός, cf. Ardizzoni (1967: ad Arg. 4.1141). Prayer and hymn are often hard to distinguish, cf. Furley and Bremer (2001: 3).

27 Suda s.n. Απολλώνιος states that Apollonius was head librarian of the Alexandrian library, so he would have been interested in development and classification of poetry from a professional point of view.
against the Sirens"). The rowing song (b), if indeed a song, must have concentrated on rhythm rather than text. Orpheus here functions as the “keleustés” of the Argonauts, ensuring that their rowing will be orderly. It is noteworthy that the rowing of the Argonauts to Orpheus’ accompaniment is compared to a dance for Apollo in the preceding lines. As has often been observed, this implies that the whole journey of the Argonauts is in some sense a ceremony in honor of the god Apollo, just as the song of this entire exploit, the Argonautica, is presented as a hymn in his honor (cf. below on Arg. 1.1-4). This creates an implicit connection between the author of the poem, Apollonius, and the musician who accompanies the rowing Argonauts, Orpheus. The comparison moreover lends both Orpheus’ performance and the act of rowing a religious aura thus emphasizing the association between Orpheus and Apollo.

The musical performance that is aimed against the Sirens (f) is characterized as κραίπνον ἐνυφοχάλλω μέλος ἁοίδης (a swift strain of rippling song). This does nothing to help classification; it might just be a more vigorous version of the rowing song (b). The last phrase of the passage παρθενίνη δ’ ἐνοτήτι ἐβήματο φόρμιγξ (and the lyre overcame their maiden voice, 4.909) implies that the sound of the lyre is more important than any vocal performance by Orpheus. The type of music is really irrelevant anyway, since the performance’s sole function is to deafen the Argonauts to the dangerous voices of the Sirens.

28 Arg. 1.536-541: οἱ δ’ ἡτεῖαν Φοῖβο τηρον ἢ ἐν Πυθοῖ / ἢ που ἐν Ὠρτυγίᾳ ἢ ἐφ’ ὕδασιν Ἴσυμνοῖο / στησάμενοι, φόρμιγγος ὑπάρχει περὶ βωμὸν ὁμαρτῇ / ἐμμελέως κραιπνοῖσι πέδον ὑγίονται πόδεσσι — / ἡς ὀι ὢφθας θεοὶ κραίπνησι πέπληθον ἐπιδείκνουσι / πόην πάντων λάβρον ὕδωρ, ἐπὶ δὲ θάλα γλυκόντος... (And just as youths set up a dance in honor of Phoebus either in Pytho or happily in Ortygia, or by the waters of Ismenus, and to the sound of the lyre round his altar all together in time beat the earth with swiftly moving feet; so they to the sound of Orpheus’ lyre smote with their oars the rushing sea-water and the surge broke over the blades... transl. Seaton).

29 Arg. 4.902-909: (... ἀπιπλεγόμενοι δ’ ἄμα καὶ τοις / ἰέσαν ἐκ στομάτων ὤτα λείριον—οἱ δ’ ἀπὸ νηὸς / ἵκα πεισματ’ ἐμμελέον ἐπ’ ἱόμενοι βαλεόθαι, / ει μή ἂρ’ Οὐάγροι πᾶς Θορήκιος Θραύς, Ἱστενῆν εἰς χερσίν εἰς φόρμιγγα τανύσασα, / κραίπνον ἐνυφοχάλλῳ μέλος κανάκρισιν αἰοίδης, / ἄρ’ ἄμιδος κλονύντος ἐπιθυμεσθοῦσα ἀκοώσα, / κραίπνῳ παρθενίνη δ’ ἐνοτήτι ἐβήμασε φόρμιγξ. (And suddenly to the heroes too, they sent forth from their lips a lily-like voice. And they were already about to cast from the ship the sawers to the shore, had not Thracian Orpheus, son of Oeagrus, stringing in his hands his Bistonian lyre, rung forth the hasty snatch of a rippling melody so that their ears might be filled with the sound of his twanging; and the lyre overcame the maidens’ voice. transl. Seaton). Kyriakou (1995: 190-205) and Hunter (1996: 146-147) propose to interpret this passage as a meta-poetical statement in which Orpheus stands for “new music” drowning out Homeric epic; I prefer to follow Knight (1995) and read the passage as a reworking of and reaction to the Homeric passage, cf. Klooster (2007: 185-200). For the significance of the Homeric Sirens, cf. Gresseth (1970: 203-218) and Pucci (1979: 121-132); on Sirens in general, Hofstetter (1990).
As in the case of the rowing song, however, its purpose is to create order, or at least counteract the power of the Sirens, who threaten the success of the journey.

The other songs (a, c, d, e, g) are more promising: they are united by a number of prominent characteristics. Items (a) (c) and (e) all have religious contents. Item (a) is a cosmogony/divine succession song; a counteract (c) and (e) are both hymns to Apollo and to his sister Artemis. Item (g) refers to the epithalamia/hymenaea (wedding songs) for Jason and Medea; these may also be said to contain a religious aspect since they address invocations to Hymenaeus (4.1197) and Hera (4.1199). Item (d) finally celebrates the victory of one of the Dioscuri (Polydeuces) over Amycus, King of the Bebrycians, in a boxing match. This is once more a celebration of victory of order and civilization (in the figure of Polydeuces) over barbarian custom (in the form of Amycus); we will return to this passage below. In conclusion, the uniting characteristics of the songs are religious context and lyric accompaniment. In addition, the word ἐμμελέως (harmonious) returns in passages (b), (g), and (d) describing the actions of the Argonauts. It suggests harmony (a form of order, cf. LSJ s.v. ἐμμελής II).

Now a number of questions suggest themselves. Why do Orpheus’ performances share the characteristics detailed above? Is Orpheus presented as the prōtos heuretēs of the poetic forms he is performing (as in the contemporary works of Phanocles and Hermesianax, cf. previous section)? And how do his performances fit in with the alleged identification of Orpheus and Apollonius’ poetical persona? To answer this, it would be helpful to know how Alexandrian contemporaries of Apollonius, and hence Apollonius himself, would have regarded Orpheus’ songs. Although little direct evidence regarding Alexandrian poetic taxonomy survives, it is possible to form a reasonably plausible picture by looking at theories of previous and later thinkers.

Orpheus’ songs are religious lyric music. How would they have been classified? In Plato’s writings, there is a main distinction between secular (ἐγκώμια) and religious poetry

31 The fact that the epithalamium was sung twice caused Fränkel to excise lines 4.1193-6. Ardizzoni (1967 ad loc.) points out that there are two kinds of epithalamia: the katakoimetika (on the eve of the wedding) and the orthria or diegertika (to raise the newlyweds). This suggests that Apollonius was aware of the finesses of tradition.
(ὕμνοι, Resp. 607a5). However, in the Leges, there is a different distinction, namely between (hexameter) hymns proper (ὕμνοι) and genres such as paeans, dithyrambs, and nomes.33

(...) καὶ τι ἦν εἴδος ὕψος εὑρεῖ πρὸς θεοὺς, ὅνομα δὲ ὕμνοι ἐπεκαλοῦντο· καὶ παῖωνες ἔτερον, καὶ ἄλλο, Διονύσου γένεσις οἶμαι, διθύραμβος λεγόμενος. (Leg. 700b1-5)

For there was a type of song that consisted of prayers to the gods and they were called “hymns”; and “paeans” were another type, and there was another, about the birth of Dionysus, I think, called the “dithyramb.”

The Alexandrian scholar Didymus (second century BCE) adheres to the first distinction, using the term ὕμνος for the genus of religious song and particular names (paean, etc.) for the species or subcategories.34 It is probable that the Alexandrian contemporaries of Apollonius would have followed this latter system of categorization,35 which means that they would have considered the majority of Orpheus’ songs as types of hymn: religious song praising the gods.

Returning to the first question posed above, it is now clear why Orpheus should be represented as performing these songs: this is entirely in line with the traditional Greek idea that the first poetry was composed as praise of the gods. Orpheus’ concerns are the origin of the cosmos and the gods and their praises. This will prove important for answering the question of how Orpheus is related to Apollonius’ persona.

The second question was whether the poet cast him as the πρῶτος ψηφίστης of the songs he performs.36 Overall, it does not appear that Apollonius had any special interest in presenting him thus, with one possible exception, namely the song Orpheus sings to celebrate Polydeuces’ victory in the boxing match (item d). This holds, as I argue, some special clues. It is sung to celebrate a victory in a boxing match; the term Apollonius uses to describe it, however, is ὕμνος (hymn). This has caused surprise and misunderstanding,37 since, as we saw, in ancient poetic taxonomy, “hymn” primarily indicated “a song in honor of a god” while here the Argonauts sing in honor of their crewmember Polydeuces, whom

33 Cf. Proclus (Phot. Bibli. 320a19-20), who states that the hymn proper (kuriōs hymnos) is sung round the gods’ altar to the accompaniment of the lyre.
34 So Didymus, quoted by Orion (p. 155-6) and Proclus Phot. Bibli. 320a12-17.
36 Orpheus is not presented as first κιθαρίστης ever either, cf. the references to Amphion (Arg. 1.740).
37 The scholiast thinks a ὕμνος has to praise an Olympian god, since he interprets “the Therapnaean son of Zeus” as Apollo (schol. ad 1.162-3), like Färber (1932: 81). However, the phrase must indicate Polydeuces, the son of Zeus, who was born and had a cult in Therapnae, Sparta (cf. Vian 1974 ad loc.).
they do not revere as a god elsewhere. However, as Hermann Fränkel (1968, ad loc.) suggests, the passage should perhaps be interpreted as describing the origins (aitia) of epinician ode. Apollonius would have been aware that these odes often contained hymnic elements praising gods or heroic athletes, especially the Dioscuri and Heracles. He sought to explain this fact by making Orpheus, a contemporary of these heroes, the inventor of the genre, the singer of a proto-epinician hymn. It is unclear whether this was his own invention or that he was adopting received opinions unknown to later scholars. At any rate, it seems clear that Apollonius portrays Orpheus as the inventor of epinician odes hymning heroes. So there is another item that can be added to the list of characteristics defining Orpheus and his music: the invention of epinician song, which praises heroes in a particularly hymnic manner.

Besides his songs, Orpheus’ non-musical actions are also important to the success of the expedition on a number of occasions. The common denominator of these actions is once more a religious component. In them, Orpheus functions as the mediator between the Argonauts and the gods who helps to establish or restore the (disturbed) relationship between humans and the divine world, often by introduction of a new cult. He is a kind of priest who knows intuitively at which moment what kind of religious action is required (dedication, prayer, apotropaic dance) to recreate the correct harmony between the divine and the human world. Once more, then, religion and order seem at the basis of his actions. Contrary to the seers who join the Argonautic quest (Idmon, Mopsus and Phineus), Orpheus is no real prophet: he does not explicitly know or predict the will of the gods but can only guess at it. However, this he does well, which gains him a position of great importance in the community of the Argonauts. Significantly, in half of the occasions, the god to whom tribute is paid is Apollo. Orpheus founds an altar to Apollo at Thynia (2.685-93) and on different occasions dedicates his lyre and a tripod to him (2.928-9. 4.1547-1459 resp.). He clearly is the most important god to the expedition in the perception of Orpheus. This he also appears to be in the perception of the narrator who addresses the poem to him:

39 The term “Castor- or Iolaos-song” is used by Pindar (P. 2.69; l. 1.16), cf. Robbins (1997: 244).
40 The other occasions are: initiation of the Argonauts in the rites of the Cabiri (1.915-7); instigation of armed dance in honor of Great Mother (1.1134); prayer of appeasement to the Hesperides (4.1409-1422).
Beginning with you, Phoebus, I will recall the famous deeds of men born in olden days, who steered Argo of the good rowing benches through the mouth of Pontus and through the Cyanean Rocks on the behest of King Pelias, in search of the Golden Fleece. (transl. Seaton)

It is through Apollo’s oracle that the expedition was set going, as the narrator reveals at the beginning of his poem (Arg. 1.4, 8): before departure (1.359-362 and 1.440-7, through the mouth of Idmon) it was prophesied that the Argonauts would accomplish their task if they sacrificed to Apollo.

Concluding: Orpheus is a singer of hymns and the inventor of hymnic epinicia praising heroes, with an especial interest in Apollo. This importance of Apollo will prove to be another key to the portrayal of Orpheus and hence his function as alter ego of Apollonius, as the next section will argue.

3.5 Orpheus and the Hymnic Argonautica

So what relevance does the portrayal of this epitome of religious poetic art and prophetic insight have for the self-representation of Apollonius’ poetic persona? The peculiar beginning of the epic (Arg. 1.1-4) cited above holds a clue. The significance of this hymnic invocation to Apollo at the beginning of the epic Argonautica has been interpreted in various ways. It has mostly been read as a reference to the traditional practice of starting an epic with a hymn to a god (prooemium), as is the alleged function of the Homeric Hymns,41 or the hymn to the Muses at the beginning of Hesiod’s Theogony.42 If this were true, the hymnic proem would in the Argonautica’s case have been shortened to the mere invocation in the first line. However, as was demonstrated, the god Apollo plays a key role in numerous instances in

---

41 Thuc. 3.104.4, a discussion of the relevance of this passage for the Homeric Hymns can be found in Richardson (1974: 3-5).
42 Hunter (1996: 49-51) remarks upon the remarkable popularity of hymns in Hellenistic poetry, e.g. Call. Hymns; the hymnic opening of Arat. Phaen.; Cleanthes’ Hymn to Zeus. Theocr. ld. 17 also plays with the format of hymn; ld. 22 is a hymn, ld. 24 probably had a hymn-like ending. The song about Daphnis in ld. 1 is also called a hymn. This preference for hymns may have been influenced by the god-like status of the King (esp. Call. Hymn I and IV, Theoc. ld. 17, 22 and 24).
the Argonautica and is mentioned by name in a variety of contexts. This suggests that he is continually important in the background and that this epic is, in a sense, both about him and in praise of him.\textsuperscript{43} The hymn-like ending of the Argonautica, saluting the Argonauts as μακάρων γένος (best translated as “race of gods” 4.1773-81)\textsuperscript{44} is also remarkable. It is unparalleled in extant epic.\textsuperscript{45} Yet, surely it goes too far to claim, as some have done, that the whole Argonautica is intended as one long hymnic proem.\textsuperscript{46} I would rather argue that the incorporation of hymnic elements indicates that Apollonius wanted to relate his own epic song to the songs of Orpheus, which, as we have seen, are predominantly hymn-like and often related to the worship of Apollo.

To make this more compelling, the invocation of Apollo at the beginning of the epic should be taken into account. This passage, as many scholars have acknowledged, should be connected to Orpheus’ own hymn to Apollo (2.702-713), in which the voices of the narrator and Orpheus blend so completely as to become indistinguishable:

\begingroup
\small
(\dots) σὺν δὲ σφιν ἐνὶ πάις Οἰάγροιο
Βιστονίη φόρμιγι λιγείης ήχουν αὐθής·
ὡς ποτε πετραίῃ ὑπὸ δειράδι Παρνησσοῖο
Δελφύνῃ τόξοισι πελώριον ἔξεναριξέν,
κοῦρος ἐὼν ἐτι γυμνός, ἐτι πλοκάμοιοι γεγηθὼς
(ιλήκοις· αἰεὶ τοι, ἀναξ, ἀτμιητο ἐθειωά,
ἀιὲν ἀδήλητοι, τῶς γαρ θέμως, οἰόθι δ' αὕτη
Λητὼ Κοιογένεια φίλαις ἐνὶ χερσὶν ἀφάσσει).
πολλὰ δὲ Κωρύκιαι νυμφαῖ, Πλειστοῖο θύγατρες,
θαρσοῦσκοι ἐπέσσον, “ἡ ἕ” κεκληγυῖαι·
ἐνθὲν δὴ τόδε καλὸν ἐφύμινον ἐπλέτο Φοίβῳ. (Arg. 2.702-713),
\endgroup

And with them Oeagrus’ goodly son began a clear lay on his Bistonian lyre; how once beneath the rocky ridge of Parnassus he slew with his bow the monster Delphyne, he,

\textsuperscript{43} Cf. Cuypers (2004: 44): “Apollo is the cause of the poem’s action, the cause of its narration and the divine model of its main hero (Jason is associated with Apollo throughout the poem).” The name Apollo recurs 21 times (bk 1: 307 360, 403, 410, 502, 759, 966, 1181, 1186; bk 2: 493, 686, 700, 927, 952, bk 3 1283; bk 4: 528, 612, 1218; 1548, 1714, 1759) while the epithet Phoebus returns seventeen times (bk 1: 1, 301, 353, 536, 759, bk 2: 216, 506, 702, 713, 847, bk 4: 529, 1490, 1493, 1550, 1702, 1717, 1718) and Païɛn once (4.1511). Apollo plays hardly any role in book 3 (Medea’s love, the events in Colchis); this fits the fact that Orpheus too is virtually absent in this book.

\textsuperscript{44} Cuypers (2004: 45); cf. on the similar phrase in Theoc. Id. 17, Fantuzzi (2001: 232-241).

\textsuperscript{45} It does however find a striking parallel in the elegiac “New Simonides” (P. Oxy. 3965), which ends as a hymn to the hero Achilles. See on this poem Boedeker and Sider (2001).

\textsuperscript{46} Cf. Hunter (1996: 46): “…the Argonautica of Apollonius is framed as a “Hymn to the Argonauts,” that is, a hymn on the traditional “Homeric” model in which the central mythic narrative has been greatly extended, but in which the hymnic frame remains.”
still young and beardless, still rejoicing in his long tresses. (May you be gracious! Ever, O king, be your locks unshorn, ever unravaged; for so is it right. And none but Leto, daughter of Coeus, strokes them with her dear hands.) And often the Corycian nymphs, daughters of Pleistus, took up the cheering strain crying “Healer”; hence arose this lovely refrain of the hymn to Phoebus. (transl. Seaton, adapted)

The passage begins as indirect discourse (Arg. 2.704-5) but soon “slips into” direct address of the god (Arg. 2.708). Thus, the distinction between the voices of the narrator and Orpheus becomes difficult, if not impossible, which makes this one of the most significant performances of Orpheus, if he is to be considered Apollonius’ text-internal alter ego. Orpheus is singing a hymn to Apollo, like the narrator of the Argonautica, 1.1-4. He moreover provides aitia for aspects of the cult of Apollo-Paion (2.711-13), which again makes him resemble the narrator, who recounts aitia for cults on numerous occasions in the epic. The resemblances are enforced by the blending of voices with the result that both the narrator and Orpheus seem simultaneously to be hymning Apollo.

A significant parallel for the hymn-like ending of the epic in honor of the Argonauts may be found in another performance of Orpheus, the epinician hymn for Polydeuces (2.161-2), singled out above. There, a (semi) mortal was given divine honor in song. This is comparable to the explicit poetic aims of the Argonautica; the “men born long ago,” (παλαιγενέων ... φωτών Arg. 1.1) whose deeds are sung of to honor Apollo, have become “heroes”, a “race of gods” honored for their own sake in the process of the narration:

"ἲλατ’ ἀνωτήτες, μακάρων γένος, αἴδε δ’ αἰωνάι
eἰς ἐτος ἔξ, ἐτος γυμνερωτέρας εἰς ἄειδειν ἀνθρώπως...
(Arg. 4. 1773-5).

Be propitious, heroes, race of the gods, and may these songs grow sweeter to sing for men from year to year...

The two dominant features of Orpheus’ portrayal, his hymnic interest in particularly Apollo and his invention of an epinician hymn celebrating heroes, therefore emphatically return in Apollonius narrating persona, which has recently been characterized as follows:

By assuming the role of a hymnic narrator, Apollonius underscores that the Argonautica’s narrative goal is praising: praising both the gods and the “famous deeds of men born long ago.” This double goal (simultaneous celebration of human exploits and the gods) is shared with the victory odes of Pindar, whom we may regard as a model for the Argonautica’s narrator. (Cuypers, 2004: 45)

It may now however be added that Apollonius’ choice to endow his epic with these striking formal characteristics of hymn may indicate that he wished to return to Orpheus’ preferred genre, the songs of praise for the divine and for heroes, hymn. Thus, with the form of the *Argonautica* and his representation of Orpheus, Apollonius points to the beginnings and original function of poetry: religious song that brings order and harmony to the world. In doing so, at the same time he creates something seemingly new by combining generic elements of two types of poetry which had in his day become distinct: epic and hymn.

The fact that this “epic hymn” should be dedicated to Apollo is unsurprising: Apollo is the god of seers who set the expedition of the Argo in motion by his oracle and the god of singers and poets who can appropriately be invoked at the beginning of any poetical undertaking. The importance of Apollo to the narrator of the *Argonautica* is reflected in the close relationship Orpheus enjoys with this god. Orpheus forecasts his intentions accurately and sings his praises.

And yet, at the occasion just discussed, Orpheus (or is it the narrator?) appears to make a small mistake in his hymn to the god (*Arg.* 2.708-10, the fact that he says Apollo’s hair is still unshorn, while it is always unshorn). While it is impossible to determine whether this error should be attributed to Orpheus or the narrator, it is reminiscent of the narrator’s own frequent professions of ignorance concerning events in the narrative, all of which were predicted and set in motion by the oracles of Apollo.

I would suggest, therefore, that Apollonius (perhaps even playing on the meaning of his name and his function as a “priest of the Muses and Apollo” in the Museum of Alexandria, cf. Chapters 7 and 8 respectively) wished to present himself as a latter-day embodiment of the Apollo-related singer/religious expert Orpheus. Like Orpheus, who is

48 Such praise was what the Greeks considered to be the original function of poetry, as is for instance stated in the *testimonium* about Pindar fr. 31 Snell-Maehler. This one-sentence report says that Pindar recounted the origin of all song thus: at the marriage of Zeus, or his ascendance to power, Zeus asked the gods what was needed to complete the cosmos and they asked for Muses to provide music and words, to serve as “kosmos” (adornment, final ordering), cf. Snell (1975 [1946]: 94-5), Ford (2002: 143).

49 The importance of Apollo (and the Muses) for the narrator is topic of Ch. 8.4-5.


51 For the religious overtones of the Museum and its employees, see Fraser (1972: I, 324), Weber (1993: 353), (Too 1998: 119). The function Apollonius held as head of the library was called ἐπιστάτης or, significantly, ἰερεύς. Diod. Sic. calls the Alexandrian Library “sacred” (1.49.3). For the idea that Orpheus in particular resembles the wise counselor-type *alter ego*, as found in Hesiod, cf. Cuypers (2004: 59, n. 30).
not entirely able to grasp the intentions of Apollo at the time of the events yet has a divinely
guided intuition, Apollonius has difficulty establishing their true narrative, which he
dedicates to the god who originally set them in motion and inspires him to sing of them
many centuries afterwards. Considering the resemblances and correspondences between the
narrator and the character Orpheus, the relevance of Apollonius’ Orpheus to Apollonius’
poetical persona becomes clear: his Orpheus is an illustration of Apollonius’ ideas about the
origins and aims of poetry and the role of religion in it. His ancient authority legitimates
contemporary poetical practice, especially Apollonius’ own.

3.6 Theocritus and the Origins of Bucolic Poetry

Since antiquity, the search for the origins of bucolic poetry has been a favorite scholarly
pursuit. This ongoing interest can be partly explained by the fact that the first bucolic
poems known to us, those of Theocritus, “inscribe within themselves a sense of tradition.” Of
course, there may have been singing rustics before Theocritus in historical reality as well
as in literary fiction, yet bucolic poetry as such remains a Hellenistic invention that must be
ascribed to Theocritus alone. This section will therefore analyze the way in which he creates
the impression that he works in a long standing tradition of singing herdsmen, illustrating
how he hints that he is following time-honored practices and emulating predecessors while
actually establishing the tradition at the moment he is writing about it.

The first question that should be addressed is: what exactly is “bucolic poetry?” It
would seem that this term goes back to passages in the *Idylls* themselves in which the
characters refer to their songs as βουκολικὰ ἀοίδα (bucolic song, *Id.* 1, 7). Bucolic
(βουκολικός) literally means “related to ox herd/cowherd” (βουκόλος), but what exactly

53 The earliest collections that included Theocritus’ poetry (together with that of Moschus and Bion)
were called βουκολικά, cf. Nauta (1990: 117-137) with bibliography. This is also the title Vergil
adopted for his pastoral poems, otherwise known as the *Elegies*.
55 For the distinction *bucolic* versus *pastoral*, see e.g. Rosenmeyer (1969), Halperin (1983). Suffice it to say
that pastoral developed from bucolic.
56 For the connotations of βουκολικός, cf. *Proleg. D8: τά τῶν ἀγροίκων ἢ ἑκμᾶσται αὕτη ἡ
ποίησις, τερπνῶς πάνυ τους τῇ ἀγροκίας σκαθεύονται κατὰ τὸν βίον χαρακτηρίζοντα. (This kind

92
does “bucolic song” amount to? What are its particular formal and content-related characteristics? Is it a genre? An initial methodological problem is the distinction between “the songs represented in the poems” and “the poems as written by Theocritus.” For the time being, the term “bucolic poetry” will be taken to mean both the Theocritean poems featuring (singing) herdsmen and, within these poems, the songs that these herdsmen sing.57

The use of hexameter, not a lyric but an epic metre, is prevalent in both the Idylls and the songs of the herdsmen. The Idylls and the herdsmen’s songs moreover both contain a high quantity of Doricisms sometimes mixed with epic Ionic forms. The Doricisms can probably best be explained as a rendering of the dialect that was spoken in Theocritus’ hometown, Syracuse (a Corinthian colony), and perhaps more broadly in the region of south-eastern Sicily.58 For contemporary audiences not from this area, however, they may have carried associations with the choral lyric of tragedy or Pindaric epician. Significantly, this dialect and metre also occur in Idylls not featuring herdsmen.59

A remarkable trait that calls attention to Theocritus’ role as author in fashioning the written form and content of the poems is the artificiality and intertextuality of the language of the Idylls. They employ an idiom that is wholly constructed and could never have been spoken by the rural inhabitants of Sicily;60 it is a bewildering mixture of high-flown, allusive Homerisms and down-to-earth, everyday colloquialisms.61 The strange clashes between the two stylistic levels within the idiom, and between the elevated metre and common subject

of poetry mimics the characters of rustics, characterizing the boorishness of those in the countryside very charmingly and true to life). For βουκόλος as lowly slave, cf. Pl. Ion 540c.

57 The herdsmen regard the songs they perform as bucolic song (βουκολιάσδεσθαι or βουκολικά ἀοιδά, cf. Id. 1.64 etc.; 7.36, 5.44, 5.69).


59 Excluding the Aeolic Idylls 28, 29, 30.

60 On the problems of establishing linguistic variants in the Idylls, cf. e.g. Dover (1971: xxxi-xlv). He names as sources for Theocritus’ diction: epic, Syracusan poets (Epicharmus, Sophron), choral lyric (in particular Pindar, but possibly also the lost works of Simonides and Stesichorus) and individual Doric dialects of Theocritus’ own time.

61 See Dover (1971: li), colloquialisms esp. in 5 and 10 (oaths and proverbs: e.g. 5.23: ὃς ποτ’ Ἀθαναίαν ἔφε δήλετ’ ἁμέλεγειν; Who shears hairs for wool, or chooses to milk a filthy bitch when a goat with her first kid stands ready? transl. Gow); Homerisms: e.g. 7.137: κατεξέθαινον κελάρυζε, 7.139: ἔχον πόνον, 11.27: ὅδιν ἀγεμόνευν). For the idea of such Homerisms as “genre-markers” that simultaneously indicate the reference to and distance from the original, cf. Zanker (1998: 225-7).
matter emphasize the utter artificiality of the poetic world created by Theocritus.\textsuperscript{62} It is impossible to believe that ancient herdsmen spoke in this way; the reader is constantly referred to the author who presents them as speaking thus.\textsuperscript{63} At the same time, the epic metre brings into question the position these poems take in the tradition of Greek heroic poetry and the intertextuality is a warning that this poetry is not a product of spontaneous creation on the hillsides of Sicily, but rather of a learned and playful reception of disparate elements from the Greek literary heritage.\textsuperscript{64} Once more, it should be pointed out that these features are found not only in the bucolic \textit{idylls}, but are also shared by other works, including the (urban) mimes 2, 14, and 15.

In bucolic song, one theme predominates: (unrequited) love (\textit{Id.} 1, 3, 6, 7, 10, and 11).\textsuperscript{65} Other recurrent motifs are the \textit{locus amoenus}, described with the employment of many rare botanical words,\textsuperscript{66} the flocks, and the fate of mythical herdsmen (\textit{Id.} 1, 3, 7, and 11). It would furthermore appear that in Greek poetry before Theocritus literary renderings of rustic song had often been associated specifically with Sicily and the legendary herdsmen (in particular the Cyclopes and Daphnis) inhabiting this island.\textsuperscript{67} This geographical setting reappears in some of the bucolic poems (\textit{Id.} 1, 6, and 11).

Returning to the question of the definition of bucolic poetry, it may now be stated that it is artificial, intertextual, and sophisticated poetry by or about herdsmen in an elevated language, style and meter, meant to collide with its subject matter, recounting the experiences (of unrequited love) of simple countrymen. It is written in hexameter, employing

\textsuperscript{62} On the Hellenistic tendency to combine low subject matter with elevated style/genre (esp. epic), see Zanker (1987: 139-44).

\textsuperscript{63} Cf. Gutzwiller (1991: 5): “To ignore the part played by transformation in giving these speech acts [sc. of simple herdsmen] literary form is to miss something even more fundamental to pastoral than to other genres, the tension between what is being represented and the act of representation.”

\textsuperscript{64} E.g. the description of the goatherd’s cup (\textit{Id.} 1.28-60) is usually considered a reference to the shield description in \textit{Il.} 18 or the [Hesiodic] \textit{Scutum}. \textit{Id.} 11 also contains several allusions to Hom. \textit{Od.} 9, e.g. lines 50-54; 61; 79. See e.g. Hunter (1999 \textit{ad loc.}).

\textsuperscript{65} This is also the predominant theme of urban or mythical poems 2, 13, 14. However, see Stanzel (1995: 146): “Theokrits Hirtendichtung ist in einem konstitutiven Sinn Liebesdichtung oder erotische Poesie.”

\textsuperscript{66} They share this feature with the mythological \textit{Id.} 13 and 22, cf. Rosenmeyer (1969: 179-206), Hunter (1999: 12-16). On Theocritus’ interest in botany and the idea that he may have been a botanist, see Lindsell (1937: 78-93), Lembach (1970).

\textsuperscript{67} In Homer, the Cyclops is not localized, but in later tradition, he was supposed to have lived on Sicily near Etna. In \textit{Od.} 9 Polyphemus is a herdsman, although he is hardly a musical personage; Eur. \textit{Cyclops} (set on Sicily) features a distinctly bucolic song (42-81); cf. the song of the chorus in Ar. \textit{Plut.} 290-315 (presumably a parody of Philoxenus’ dithyramb, which portrayed the Cyclops as a singer, \textit{PMG} 817). Daphnis is usually a Sicilian herdsman, cf. e.g. Diod. Sic. 4.84.
a mixture of Doric and Ionic forms, and reveals a geographical connection with Sicily. Of all these characteristics, the only one that distinguishes bucolic poetry is that it deals with (singing) herdsmen. Can this poetry be called a genre in its own right? A complicating factor is the circumstance that the whole collection of Theocritus’ poetry, including the “urban mimes” (2, 14, 15), the mythological poems (13, 18, 22, 24, 25, 26), the encomia (16, 17), and the pederastic poems (12, 29, 30, 31), was apparently known under the title Βουκολικά in antiquity. Apart from this, there is the tricky definition of “genre,” always a problem, not least when it comes to the Hellenistic period.

To start with, it is reasonably certain that in antiquity, the Idylls were regarded as a subspecies of epic on formal grounds (meter). This approach took no account of the (non-heroic) content or of formal elements such as dramatic representation of dialogue and Doric dialect. In antiquity, apparently, Theocritus’ poems could simply be called both “bucolic” and “epic.” There are two possible explanations for this. The poems could have come to be called bucolic after their most distinguishing examples: poems about herdsmen. The name would then be a kind of metonymia, a pars pro toto approach to the whole collection. The other, more ingenious, explanation derives the name of the collection from the identification of Theocritus the poet with the pseudo-herdsman Simichidas of Id.7. This would automatically turn all Theocritus’ poetry into bucolic poetry, viz. poetry by a herdsman. Although the simpler explanation is more compelling, it cannot be ruled out that perhaps both may have been true at different moments in time. A convoluted presentation playing with the implications of this equivocation of songs by or about herdsmen can be found in Id.1 and 7, the two poems generally recognized as programmatic for Theocritus’ poetry. They are both bucolic poems which feature bucolic poets singing

---

68 The name Eidyllia was given to the collection only later, in the scholia. On testimonia for ancient collections of Theocritus’ poetry and their titles, see Gutzwiller (1996: 119-148).
70 Except Id. 28-31, which are in lyric meters and use Aeolic dialectal forms.
72 That is, without the intervention of a third person narrator.
73 Nauta (1990: 117-137), cf. the (Byzantine) poem addressing the poet as a herdsman by the vocative Συμιχίδα Θεόκριτε (Wendel 1914: 333). Earlier readers may have seen that Simichidas, often interpreted as alter ego of Theocritus in Id. 7, is not unambiguously a herdsman (he comes from town) but rather a poet posing as one cf. Giangrande (1968: 491-533).
about ... bucolic poets. This is a meaningful *mise en abyme*, as I will argue below. Furthermore, the circumstance that many of the poems are mimetic and not embedded in a narrative frame (1, 3, 4, 5, 10) blurs the distinction between the level of the poet (Theocritus) and his characters: these poems pretend to be direct reports of the songs of the rustics. Thus, they are indeed bucolic songs in both senses of the words.

If not a real genre, then, at least Theocritus created a new form or style of poetry in which he brought the theme of country-life, formerly only marginally treated in elevated poetry, to prominence. However, he implies that this new poetry is really derived from Sicilian herdsmen (*Id*. 1, 5, 6, 7). While this is possibly partially true, the bucolic *idylls* owe much to Greek literary tradition as well. In sum, he himself is the historical inventor of what came to be known as bucolic poetry. He fashioned this poetry from elements of high literature and low subject matter and influences from folk song. Yet, he contrives the impression of working in an age-old tradition with mythical predecessors, such as Daphnis, Comatas (*Id*. 7), and (to a lesser extent) the Cyclops Polyphemus, who are at the same time presented as traditional subjects of bucolic song. The following sections will undertake an inquiry into the credentials of the alleged mythical forebears of Theocritus’ poetry and the way they are used to create the sense of tradition that his new poetry so obviously breathes.

### 3.7 Antiquity’s Views on the Origins of Bucolic Poetry

---

74 As noted, Simichidas (*Id*. 7) is not unambiguously a herdsman, and his song is not bucolic, in that it does not deal with herdsmen. However, Lycidas in the same *Idyll* is unmistakably a herdsman and his song does treat singing herdsmen (Comatas, Daphnis). More on Lycidas and Simichidas in Ch. 7.4.

75 Some more or less “pastoral” predecessors could be sought in Homer’s Cyclops and Eumaeus; Stesichorus allegedly wrote on Daphnis (see next section); furthermore Eur. *Cyclops*, Old comedy (e.g. Cratinus’ comedy *Goats*, fr. 14 Cock; passages from Aristophanes), passages from tragedy (e.g. Eur. *Antiope*, featuring the shepherd-musician Amphion, *Alexander*, in which Paris is a herdsman), Philoxenus’ dithyramb *Cyclops or Galatea*, and the (lost) works of Philitas, allegedly Theocritus’ teacher. Clearchus (third cent. BCE) mentions a certain Lycophronides, who wrote a dithyramb about a goatherd in love (Ath. 14.613c-d). Finally Sositheus, an Alexandrian dramatist (third cent. BCE) wrote *Lityerses*, a kind of satyr play involving Daphnis, a maiden kidnapped by a pirate, and Heracles (see Rosenmeyer 1969: 39, n. 36). There clearly were many poets working with pastoral subject matter, yet none of them wrote “bucolic poetry” proper.

76 A much-debated topic, cf. e.g. Rosenmeyer (1969: 30-34) with bibliography. The evaluations range from “Theocritus’ poetry is such as he might really have heard on the shores of Sicily,” to “The raw desperadoes of the wilderness were not likely to furnish him with poetry.” It seems impossible to deny any influence of folk-song, but the intrinsically literary and sophisticated character of Theocritean poetry must be remembered.
The scholia to the Idylls are preceded by a late antique or Byzantine essay that attributes the invention of bucolic poetry to certain cults of Artemis in Laconia or Sicily. This appears to have no basis in the surviving poetry of Theocritus, nor can Artemis or cultic thiasoi of bucolic initiates be found in any other later bucolic poetry. Nowadays, received opinion is that this theory was the scholarly response to the peripatetic explanation of the development of tragedy out of obscure rural cults.

Other ancient explanations (usually post-Theocritean) singled out a mythical prōtos heuretēs for bucolic song; naturally, this would be a herdsman. The names encountered most frequently in this connection are Diomus, Menalcas and Daphnis. Of these, the relation between Daphnis and Theocritus’ Idylls is most important and complicated. Later writers tell aetiological stories about this legendary herdsman, for instance Diodorus Siculus:

(... μυθολογούσι γεννηθήναι τὸν ὅνομαζόμενον Δάφνιν, Ἐρμοῦ μὲν καὶ Νύμφης ὑίόν, ἀτὸ δὲ τοῦ πλῆθους καὶ τῆς πυκνότητος τῆς φυομένης Δάφνης ὄνομαζομαι Δάφνιν, τούτων δ’ ὑπὸ Νυμφόν τραφέντα, καὶ βωλὸν αγέλας παμμηθέντες κεκτημένον, τούτων ποιεύομαι πολλὴν ἐπιμέλειαν∙ ἃ δ’ ἂν αἰτίας βουκόλον αὐτὸν ὄνομαζόμενοι. φύει δὲ διαφόρων πρὸς εὐμέλειαν κεχορηγημένον ἐξευρεῖν τὸ βουκολικὸν ποίημα καὶ μέλος, ὅ μέχρι τοῦ νῦν κατὰ τὴν Σικελίαν τυχάνει διαμένει ἐν ἀποδοχῇ. μυθολογούσι δὲ τὸν Δάφνιν μετὰ τῆς Ἀρτέμιδος κυνηγεῖν ὑπηρετοῦντα τῇ θεῷ κεχαρισμένος, καὶ διὰ τῆς σύρυγγος καὶ βουκολικῆς μελῳδίας τέρπειν αὐτὴν διαφερόντως. λέγουσι δὲ αὐτὸν μίαν τῶν Νυμφῶν ἐρασθεῖσαν προειπεῖν, ἐὰν ἄλλη τινὶ πλημμαση, στερηθεῖσαι τῆς ὀράσεως κακείνον ὑπὸ τίνος θυγατρὸς βασιλέως καταμεθυθέντα, καὶ πληροῦσαι αὐτή, στερηθήσεται τῆς ὀράσεως κατὰ τὴν γεγενήμενην ὑπὸ τῆς Νύμφης πρόφορησιν. (4.84.3-5)

77 Wendel (1914: 2) Prolegomena B. These accounts formed the basis for Reitzenstein’s idea of the bucolic masquerade (1893: 233-4).
78 Although, as we shall see, Artemis does figure in Diodorus Siculus’ account of the origin of bucolic poetry.
79 See Hunter (1999: 6, n. 20) for bibliography on the critical consensus.
80 Halperin (1983: 80). Diomus is referred to in Ath. (14.619ab) as a character in a play by Epicharmus (the fifth cent. BCE Sicilian comic poet). The βουκολιασμός mentioned in connection with him was apparently a kind of song sung by herdsmen. It is impossible to establish if there is a connection between this Diomus-figure and Theocritean herdsmen. The information only shows that singing herdsmen were not alien to Sicilian literary tradition. The shepherd Menalcas, according to Clearchus of Soloi, a contemporary of Theocritus was loved by a lyric poetess, Erphanium who pursued him singing, “High are the oaks, Menalcas,” (Ath. 14.619c-d) giving rise to bucolic song. It is unclear whence Clearchus derives this information. This may well have been his invention, but, in any case, the story attests once more to the interest in the origins of bucolic at Theocritus’ time.
They tell the legend that [in that place] the man named Daphnis was born, a son of Hermes and a nymph and that he was named Daphnis after the great amount of thick laurel that grew there. He was brought up by the nymphs and acquired enormous herds of cows and was greatly concerned with them, which is why he was called “The Cowherd.” Being by nature favored with an extraordinary talent for music, he invented the bucolic poem and melody, which, up to the present day, is present as a tradition they received from him. And they tell that this Daphnis went hunting with Artemis, gladly helping the goddess and that he pleased her exceedingly with his Syrinx and his bucolic song. They also say that one of the nymphs who fell in love with him foretold that he would be robbed of his sight if he ever made love to another woman. And indeed, made drunk by a daughter of some king and having made love to her, he was robbed of his sight according to the prophecy of the nymph.

A similar story is told by Aelian, who continues:

εἰς δὲ τούτον τὰ βουκολικὰ μέλη πρῶτον ἔσθη, καὶ εἶχεν υπόθεσιν τὸ πάθος τὸ κατὰ τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς αὐτοῦ. καὶ Στηρίχορον γε τὸν Ἰμεραίον τῆς τοιαύτης μελοποιίας ὑπάρξασθαι. (VH 10.18)

As a result of this, bucolic song was sung for the first time and its subject was what happened to his eyes. Stesichorus of Himera (PMG fr. 279) began this kind of lyric.

The meaning of these last phrases is not clear.81 Do they imply that Daphnis sang his own lament and Stesichorus made it into a subject for his own poetry or that others sang about Daphnis before Stesichorus wrote a poem about it?82 Whatever the more likely interpretation, bucolic poetry was probably assigned two fountainheads in this passage: a mythological one in Daphnis and a historical one in Stesichorus. Once again, the distinction between poetry about herdsmen and poetry by herdsmen is blurred. As Halperin remarks à propos of such stories:

[They] are most plausibly viewed in the context of the Greek habit of searching out mythological precedents for all existing social and literary institutions, a habit whose effect begins to be felt at a very early date in Greek culture.83

Clearly, there was a decided interest in aetiological stories about the origins of bucolic poetry in the Hellenistic period, and a post-Hellenistic tradition connecting Daphnis (and other

82 Or perhaps Stesichorus sang of how he lost his own eyesight, as was related in connection with the Palinode about Helen (fr.15, 16 PMG), cf. Pl. Phaedr. 243a5?
83 Cf. Hunter (1999: 67): “In the Hellenistic age, traditional tales, like the story of Daphnis, were commonly fashioned into aetologies for ritual practice; bucolic song is the recurrent commemoration of the pathos of Daphnis…” Cf. Hobsbawm’s definition (1983: 7) of the function of “invented tradition.”
Sicilian herdsmen) with these origins. It is worthy of note that the important character of the goatherd Comatas, who is sung of by Lycidas in the seventh Idyll as a legendary singer, is not mentioned in this enquiry into the origins of bucolic song. Does this imply that he is Theocritus’ invention? With this question at the back of our minds, an attempt to explore Theocritus’ stance regarding the origins of bucolic poetry may be undertaken.

3.8 Daphnis in Idyll 1

As is generally recognized, Idylls 1 and 7 seem to propose a meta-poetic enquiry into the nature of bucolic poetry. Idyll 1 is a mime set in a timeless pastoral landscape (in all likelihood on Sicily) in which two herdsmen exchange compliments, gifts, and songs. The bucolic song is performed by the shepherd Thyrsis, who “is wont to sing the woes of Daphnis and is come to mastery in bucolic song,” according to his interlocutor, the nameless goatherd (19-20). This implies that the sufferings of Daphnis were an established subject of song (it almost sounds like a title) and that bucolic song was a broadly practiced form in which Thyrsis has reached mastery. It is important to keep this in mind in the ensuing discussion of the song of Thyrsis.

Thyrsis’ song is framed by a changing refrain calling on the Muses to begin, continue, and end the bucolic song (ἄρχετε βουκολικάς / πάλιν ἄρχετ’ / λήγετε ἀοιδᾶς, 64-142). Above, the version of the story of Daphnis as it has come down in tradition has been discussed, in which the cowherd Daphnis is untrue to a nymph to whom he has made a vow of chastity and as a result is punished with blindness and somehow dies. It is, however, remarkably unclear whether this is the version in the first Idyll. Despite assurances to the contrary, the song in this poem is told in an allusive way and hard to comprehend fully. The main difficulties involved center around the questions of how and why Daphnis met his end.

---

84 The scholia are contradictory on this point, cf. below.
86 Cf. ld. 1.65, and allusions to geographical points of reference in Thyrsis’ song, passim.
87 Lawall (1967: 26-7).
Before addressing these, the way the narrative is recounted in Thyrsis’ song must be considered. The introduction to the story recounts how Daphnis is “wasting away” (ἐτάκετο, 66), a phrase which triggers the expectation that he is languishing from the pangs of unrequited love.\(^8\) It is then related how, before he dies, gods and men come to enquire into the cause of his suffering and offer help, commiseration, or comment upon it. The series of visitors who come to see Daphnis represents a range of understanding: complete ignorance as to what causes Daphnis’ suffering (humans, who ask what the matter is, 80-1), to inference (Hermes: “With whom are you so in love?” 77-78), assumption (Priapus: “You are awkward in love (δύσερως); the girl is looking for you but you do not go to her,” 82-93) and (apparent) knowledge (Aphrodite: “You said you would vanquish Eros, but now he has vanquished you,” 97-8). Aphrodite’s remarks are singled out by the fact that Daphnis deigns to answer only when addressed by her; they appear to stand on a familiar footing and know a great deal about each other’s affairs. After this, Daphnis “goes to the stream and the waters close over his head” (140-1). There are three possible explanations for the difficulties encountered when trying to square Theocritus’ reading with the account of post-Hellenistic tradition:

1) *Id.* 1 more or less follows the tradition represented by Aelian and Diodorus, but in an obscure way;

2) Theocritus follows a now unknown variant tradition that was either known or unknown to most of his contemporaries;

3) Theocritus has made up a new story on the basis of the legendary Sicilian character Daphnis,\(^9\) which was either fully comprehensible or incomprehensible to a contemporary audience.

Apart from Ogilvie, practically no scholars embrace the first hypothesis; indeed, it has little to recommend itself and can be discarded here.\(^9\) The other two demand closer inspection. In particular, the likelihood that contemporary audiences would, in these cases, have been able

---

8 Cf. other instances of the verb, e.g. in Theoc. *Id.* 2.29; 82.

9 Like his contemporaries Hermesianax (*schol. ad Id. 8.93*) and Sositheus (*Servius ad Verg. Ecl. 8.68*).

91 Ogilvie (1962: 106-110). Ogilvie’s reading is forced on a number of points. In the first place, he fails to recognize the role of Aphrodite, whom he denies is guilty of Daphnis’ sufferings. Another point is his forced reading of δύσερως (1.85) as “in love with the wrong object” and not “cursed in love, gauche.” This finds no echo in the use in Theocritus’ other *Idylls* (6.6-7). On the Theocritean *topos* of the δύσερως goatherd, see Stanzel (1995: 48-50).
to grasp the song of Thyrsis in all its detail needs to be weighed, as it has obvious consequences for the analysis of Theocritus’ presentation of bucolic tradition.

In the narrative Theocritus presents, there are two possible readings of the visits of men and gods; the choice between them dictates whether this narrative can be understood on its own terms, even if it does not conform to the traditional account. One interpretation takes every utterance of the gods at face value. This is the reading proposed by Lawall (1967), who sees in Daphnis a kind of bucolic Hippolytus determined to remain chaste, even in the face of (his own) consuming passion. Even if this interpretation is correct, comparison with the other versions shows that this was not, in any case the traditional account. Lawall’s appraisal is based on the assumption that Priapus’ remark, that “the girl” (ἁ κώρα, 82) is looking for Daphnis, is correct. Since Daphnis does not reply to Priapus’ remarks and Hermes is not aware of any details of the situation, there is no compelling reason to assume that this is in fact so. Even if he should be correct: who is “the girl?” Is she the nymph to whom Daphnis pledged faithfulness? The princess who seduced him? Another (mortal/immortal) girl he is in love with but cannot or will not be with? And what does Aphrodite’s statement that Daphnis had vowed “to vanquish Eros” refer to in combination with this girl? Of course, all kinds of explanations can be crafted to fit all kinds of mythical parallels, even perhaps the one later represented in Diodorus and Aelian, but that is the point: which of these vaguely familiar stories is being related? Finally, what happens when Daphnis dies also remains ambiguous:

(...) τὰ γε μὰν λίνα πάντα λελοίπει
ἐκ Μοῖραν, χώ Δάφνις ἔβα ὀόν, ἔκλυσε δίναι
τὸν Μοῖσας φίλον ἄνδρα, τὸν οὐ Νύμφαισιν ἀπεχθή, (1.139-141)

But all the thread the Fates assigned was run, and Daphnis went to the stream. The waters closed over him whom the Muses loved, nor did the Nymphs dislike him. (transl. Gow)

Various explanations, once more, have been provided to clarify this mysterious reference. Does Daphnis drown himself (by accident or on purpose)? Does the angry (water) nymph drown him? Does he change (melt away) into a river or fountain, like his fellow

---


93 Like Hylas in 13? So e.g. Prescott (1899: 121-140).
countryman Acis?94 Or is “the river” an unusual way referring to the river of the dead, the Acheron?95 Without wanting to discuss the likelihood of these suggestions, it is clear that interpreting this song is a complicated matter. Yet, in the Idyll itself, there is no sign that the goatherd, the interlocutor and addressee of Thyrsis, has any difficulty understanding the account. Indeed, as pointed out earlier, he seems perfectly familiar with it (cf. 1.19).

This, then, leads to the other reading, the one that accepts that “Theocritus has veiled the whole story in a cloak of allusive obscurity.”96 Taking stock of the difficulties in making the story (which seems so provokingly familiar) into a fitting one, it seems plausible that Theocritus wanted his readers to be tantalized by this allusive account of Daphnis’ story. Given the way the Daphnis narrative is poetically balanced by the ekphrasis of the goatherd’s cup (“too much” information97 against “too little” information), this idea begins to look even more attractive.98 The possibilities that either Theocritus invented the story himself or used a little known variant of the myth remain. Even in the latter case, the majority of his ancient audience would not have been familiar with this recondite Sicilian lore, so this distinction is minor. But what was Theocritus’ motivation for relating the story, or, rather, having Thyrsis relate it, in such an allusive way? Looking for parallels is the best way to find an answer to this question.

---

95 This may well be the right interpretation. Van Erp Taalman Kip (1987: 249-51) points out that in 1.71 Daphnis is explicitly said to be dead, when the animals come to mourn at his feet, so he cannot have walked to the stream. For the unusual reference to Acheron, see the parallels adduced by Gow (1952: II, ad loc).
96 Phrasing Ogilvie (1962: 108); so e.g. Gow (1952: II, 1), Hunter (1999: 67). Segal (1981: 36): “Such a distortion of the myth in a poet as learned and sophisticated as Theocritus cannot but be intentional. The effect of departing from the received legend while subtly hinting at it, as Priapus’ speech seems to do, forces the reader to explore further. The very mystery of Daphnis’ end may be the most essential element in the poem.”
97 In particular the description of the woman and the two young men (1.33-37), which, in the typical mode of ekphrasis, describes things that are strictly speaking, invisible.
3.9 Allusive Narrative in other Ancient Poetry

It is revealing to consider allusive narratives known from other ancient poetry. Frequent examples can be found, for example, in the choral lyric of Pindar.99 One of the many is the following, in which Hieron I, tyrant of Syracuse, is compared to Philoctetes:

φαντὶ δὲ Λαμνόθεν ἔλκει
τειρόμενον μεταβάσοντας ἐλθεῖν
ήροας ἀντίθεους Ποίαντος υἱόν τοξόταν·
ὁ Πριάμωι πόλιν πέρσεν, τελευτα-
σέν τε πόνους Δαναοῖς,
ἀσθενεῖ μὲν χρωτὶ βαίνων, ἄλλα μοιρίδιον ἦν. (P. 1.52-55)

They tell that the godlike heroes came to fetch him from Lemnos, wasting from his wound, Poias’ archer son, who destroyed Priam’s city and ended the Danaans’ toils, he walked with flesh infirm, but it was the work of destiny. (transl. Race)

Without awareness of the story of Philoctetes, the reader must wonder why he was wounded and how, what his relation to Lemnos was, and how he (with only his bow) destroyed the city of Priam. The great difference between this allusive narrative and the one in the first Idyll is its familiarity. Not many in ancient Greece would have been ignorant of the basic elements of the myth of Philoctetes. Of course, examples of Pindar’s tendency to adapt or manipulate a well-known story to fit his own purposes, as he does in O. 1.35-41 concerning the story of Tantalus and his son, have also survived. The fact remains that the audience could be expected to appreciate Pindar’s additions or conversions, despite or perhaps rather because of their knowledge of the main line of the famous narrative. Indeed, Pindar sometimes explicitly calls the reader’s attention to the fact that he is deviating from the traditional version of the myth: “Son of Tantalus, I shall tell your story contrary to my predecessors...” (νἱὲ Ταντάλου, σὲ δ’ ἄντια προτέρων φθέγξομαι, Ο. 1.36).100

How do these examples compare to the narrative in Idyll 1? As pointed out, the audience of Thyrsis (the goatherd) within the text apparently experiences no difficulties of comprehension (cf. 1.19), while the modern reader does. Neither is the reader (ancient or modern) alerted to the possibility that this is a variant of a traditional tale. It must be taken

99 Cf. Pi. I. 4.36-39 (the death of Ajax): ἵστε μὰν / Αἰάντος ἀλκάν, φοίνικον τὰν ὅψια / ἐν νυκτὶ ταμών περί ὦ φαισαγόνῳ μομβάφαν ἔχει / παιδέσοτοι Ἐλλάκων ὧσις Τροϊανοῦ ἐβαν. (Surely you know of Ajax’ bloodstained valor, which he pierced late at night on his own sword, and thereby cast blame upon all the sons of the Hellenes who went to Troy. transl. Race).

100 Cf. Pi. O. 9.35-40; N. 7.22-27; 8.32-37; Stesich. Palinode (fr. 15, 16 PMG).
for granted that (at least within the fiction of the poem) this is a similar situation to the one I described with regard to Pindar P. 1. In other words, the reader is invited to believe that an age-old myth familiar to the rural world is being recounted. The lack of detail underscores the impression of the venerable antiquity and familiarity of a story in which the particulars need no repeating. While the story of Daphnis in Theocritus’ version therefore may be relatively new, it is in this way subtly provided with credentials implying that there was a traditional version. It sounds familiar despite the elusive details. Theocritus’ ancient readers, in asking themselves why they could not understand this story, would in all likelihood have assumed that it was because they were not part of the same rural community to which the herdsmen belong.

The technique used in Id. 1, pretending there is an established, ancient version of the (recent/made up) story one is telling, is not entirely unprecedented; Pindar and Plato use similar means for authenticating and authorizing newly invented stories. Within Theocritus’ own poetry, the best parallel can be found in Id. 22, where the story of the Dioscuri is told in a version markedly different from earlier known traditions: Castor and Polydeuces both survive the fight with Idas and Lynceus, whereas they do not, or at least not both, in all other extant versions. In the envoi, Homer is indirectly adduced as the authority for tales about heroes in general and the Dioscuri in particular (22.216-219). Remarkably, however, in Homer’s Iliad, the Dioscuri are explicitly dead and buried (II. 3.236-44), presumably because of their fight with Idas and Lynceus. Rather than attributing this discrepancy to an “unfortunate” mistake on the part of Theocritus, like Gow, it is better to say that Theocritus wants his own poetical treatment of the Dioscuri to be contrasted with

---

101 The only candidate for an older version appears to be Stesichorus, but the details in Ael. VH 10.18 suggest that he told a different version.
102 E.g. Pi. O. 7.54-7, a new account of the origins of the Isle of Rhodes, attributed to “the ancient reports of men.”
103 E.g. Pl. Tim. 21a: “Having heard an old story from a man who was not young.”
105 E.g. Pi. N. 10, Cypria fr. 8 (Bernabé) and II. 3.236-44. Cf. Gow (1952: II, 383-4), Sens (1997: ad 210-11). See on this passage further Ch. 8.7.3.
106 The idea that Theocritus here refers to the (short) Homeric Hymns concerning the Dioscuri, or the (non-Homeric) Cypria, rather than to the Iliad is unattractive, cf. Sens (1997: 218-9).
the brief handling they receive in the *Iliad*. In the process, he ironically pretends to be deriving the authority for his tale from a venerable source, namely Homer. This looks similar to the story of Daphnis as told by Thyrsis in *Id.* 1. Although it is not explicitly traced back to ancient sources, as in the examples from Pindar, Plato, and *Id.* 22, the context certainly implies that it is a classic of the rustic world.

### 3.10 Daphnis in the other *Idylls*

Starting from the assumption that Theocritus’ poems were read as a book in antiquity, in which cross-reference was an important hermeneutic tool for the comprehension of single poems, a natural step would be a closer look at other references to the story of Daphnis in the *Idylls* that also presuppose knowledge of his fate.

The first is a brief one in *Id.* 5, where a certain Lacon, one of two bickering goatherds (presumably “contemporaries” of Theocritus),

> says: “The troubles of Daphnis fall on me if I believe you” (αἴ τοι πιστεύσαιμι, τὰ Δάφνιδος ἄλγε ἀροίμαν, *Id.* 5.20). Clearly both herdsmen know to which unpleasant event this refers, so the reference presumably functions as a proverbial expression. Later, the other herdsman Comatas declares, “The Muses love me much better than the singer Daphnis” (ταὶ Μοῖσαί με φιλεῦντι πολὺ πλέον ἢ τὸν ἀοιδόν / Δάφνιν, *Id.* 5.79-80), once more suggesting a proverbial expression.

The third reference appears in *Id.* 7, when Lycidas, a goatherd/poet who is represented as a contemporary of Theocritus, sings how Tityrus, a rustic musician, will sing of Daphnis:

(...) ὁ δὲ Τίτυρος ἔγγυθεν ἄσει

> ἡ ζησασατο Δάφνις ὁ βούτας,

> χῶς ὅρος ἀμφετονεῖτο καὶ ὡς ὕδως αὐτὸν ἐθρήνευν

> ἵμερα αἴτε φύνοντι παρ’ ὧχθαισιν ποταμῷ,

> εὔτε χοῦν ὡς τὶς κατετάκετο μακρὸν ὑφ Ἄθω ἢ Ῥοδόπαν ἢ Καύκασον ἐσχατῶντα. (7.72-77)

---


108 For the idea that the “fragmentation” of the Daphnis narrative “hints towards a pastoral world” (without however elaborating on what this entails), cf. Goldhill (1991: 242).


110 They do not represent mythical figures; cf. the reference to Thurii (72), a colony that was founded in the fifth century BCE.

111 Cf. the references to Philitas and Asclepiades (7.40), poets slightly older than Theocritus.
And close at hand Tityrus shall sing how once Daphnis the neatherd loved Xenea, and how the hill was sorrowful about him and the oaktrees which grow upon the river Himeras’ banks sang his dirge when he was wasting like any snow under high Haemus or Athos or Rhodope or remotest Caucasus. (transl. Gow)

Once more, only snatches of the story are accessible: Daphnis’ “wasting,” his love for the girl, here called Xenea, and the grief (Sicilian) nature showed at his suffering. The temptation to combine the information found here with that of Id. I could not be greater, but it does not add up to a clearer picture of events.112 All that it confirms is that the story is well known to Tityrus, Lycidas, and presumably also to Simichidas, who is after all the audience of Lycidas’ song in Id. 7 and shows no problems of comprehension. Moreover, the setting of this Idyll on Cos in the eastern Mediterranean and not in Sicily implies the widespread familiarity of the song among rustic singers.113 With the help of tantalizing and allusive cross-references, the Idylls thus manage to convey the illusion of a fully rounded bucolic world endowed with its own traditions and cultures that are well known to its inhabitants. In this way, Theocritus provides his poetic creation with credibility and a sense of tradition. The Daphnis myth is particularly suitable to this venture, drawing as it does on a possibly pre-existent yet largely unfamiliar myth.

A different case, however, is the other theme of Tityrus’ imagined song, the legendary goatherd-musician Comatas:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{ᾅσεὶ δ’ ὡς ποι’ ἐδεκτο τὸν αἰτῶλον εὐφέα λάρναξ} \\
\text{ζωὸν ἕνατα κακαίσαν ἀπασθαλιάσαν ἀνακτῶς,} \\
\text{ὡς τὸν αἰεί σιμαῖλη φέρβον ἀπάσχοισαι} \\
\text{κέδρον ἐς ἄδειαν μαλακοῖς κατὰ στόματος φεῦσαι,} \\
\text{οὕνεκα ἐς θεῖα Μοῖσα κατὰ στόματος χέε νέκταρ.} \\
\text{ὡ μακαριστὲ Κομᾶτα, τὴν ταῦτα τερπνὰ πεπόνθεις∙} \\
\text{καὶ τὸ κατεκλάσθης ἐς λάρνακα, καὶ τὸ μελισσᾶν} \\
\text{κηρία φεῦσον ἐς ἄδειαν μαλακοῖς πεπόνθεις.} \\
\text{αἴθ’ ἐπ’ εὐφέαν άποιδημοῖο ωφελεῖ τὸν Κομᾶτα. (7.78-89)}
\end{align*}
\]

112 Pace Ogilvie (1962: 106-110).

113 Cf. Dover (1971: lxiv), noting moreover the Cydonian (i.e. Cretan) origin of Lycidas. He suggests Theocritus is implicitly paying himself a compliment and compares this to the fact that in Call. AP 7.518 Cretan herdsmen sing of Daphnis’ fate; this would constitute a compliment by Callimachus to Theocritus.
And he shall sing how once a wide coffer received the goatherd alive by the impious presumption of a king; and how the blunt-faced bees came from the meadows to the fragrant chest of cedar and fed him on tender flowers because the Muse had poured sweet nectar on his lips. Ah, blessed Comatas, yours is this sweet lot, you too were closed within the coffer; you too, fed on honeycomb, did endure with toil the springtime of the year. Would that you had been numbered with the living in my day so that I might have herded your fair goats upon the hills, and listened to your voice, while you, divine Comatas did lie under the oaks or pines, and made sweet music. (transl. Gow adapted)

Who is this Comatas? Apparently, he is another mythical singer of bucolic poetry, a legendary rustic character closely linked to the Muses. He is an example of how music and herdsmen are intimately related, illustrating the essentiality of music for the herdsmen’s life: his own life was saved by it through a miracle of nature. In this sense he looks like a foil to Daphnis, who could not be saved, even by music, no matter what miracles nature generated at his death.

Although Comatas’ name is not attested elsewhere, the scholia ad 79c are aware of a story closely resembling what is found here and attribute it to a certain Lycus of Rhegium, a local historiographer. However, this is in opposition to the remarks in schol. ad 78/79a and 83 to the effect that Theocritus has “made this story up himself” (πέπλασταί τά περι τοῦ Κομάτα ὑπὸ Θεοκρίτου, 83) or has “transferred” (μετήνεγκεν, 79c) “elements of the Daphnis-legend to it” (καθάπερ ὁ Δάφνις ἱστορεῖται, 83). Once more then, the story is an obscure variant of a local myth (at best) or, alternatively, an invented story formed out of familiar mythical elements presented as traditional lore, supposedly well known to the audience within the bucolic world of the poem. The juxtaposition of Comatas’ story with the story of Daphnis, who may have had a somewhat wider familiarity, provides the tale of the former with greater credibility.

---

114 I do not agree with Radt (1971: 254-55) and Hunter (1999: 176), who, based on the recurrent καί (84), think “the goatherd” (78) and “Comatas” refer to two distinct individuals. The connection (καί) is rather between Comatas and Daphnis, who was apparently also exposed in a chest and fed by bees (cf. schol. ad 83), or between Comatas and other examples from myth (Danae was closed in a chest, Iamos, son of Euadne was fed by bees; cf. Dover ad 83). Gow (1952: II ad 83) also takes “the goatherd” to refer to Comatas.

115 This opposition will be treated below in the final interpretation of the figures of Daphnis, Comatas, and Polyphemus and their interrelations.

116 Schol. ad 78/9 b, cf. the discussions of Gow (1952: II, ad loc.), Dover (1971) and Hunter (1999: ad loc.).

3.11 The Identities of Daphnis and Comatas

Related to the tantalizing recurrent allusions to Daphnis addressed above, the recurrence of identical names is a puzzling and often remarked upon characteristic that connects many of the *Idylls*.\(^1\) Is the mythical cowherd Daphnis in *Id*. 1 identical to the (contemporary?) cowherd Daphnis in *Id*. 6,\(^2\) described as a young boy “with half-grown beard” (2-3)? Similarly, the goatherd Comatas in Lycidas’ song in *Id*. 7 seems a legendary, even divine, figure close to the Muses, while the goatherd Comatas in *Id*. 5 is involved in a vulgar shouting match. Yet, are they the same?\(^3\) These recurrent names, I submit, are not coincidences that demonstrate a lack of fantasy on the part of Theocritus but serve as a way to provide unity.\(^4\)

To understand this, it is important to remember that Theocritus is often interested in the fate of his mythical protagonists “before they entered traditional myth.” This can be seen in the case of young Polyphemus (*Id*. 6 and 11 recount an episode before book 9 of the *Odyssey*, when he is in love with Galatea “with the down on his lips,” cf. *Id*. 6.2-3) and in the wedding song for that soon-to-be notorious young couple Helen and Menelaus (18). It is therefore not unlikely that Daphnis in *Id*. 6 is the same Daphnis as the one in *Id*. 1, only before his sufferings befell him. The interpretation that identifies Daphnis of *Id*. 1 with the singer in *Id*. 6 is made even more attractive by considerations of content. There are numerous thematic correspondences between *Id*. 1 and *Id*. 6. Whereas Daphnis in *Id*. 6 plays the role of giver of advice in amorous matters to Polyphemus, in *Id*. 1 he is himself a victim of love; *Id*. 6, with Cyclops playing hard to get, is a comic reflection of the (apparently) self-imposed and fatal abstinence of the lovelorn Daphnis in *Id*. 1.\(^5\)

---


\(^2\) He is explicitly called “The cowherd” (ὁ βουκόλος) in 6.1; 86; 113; 116; 120-121.

\(^3\) To these examples, which are the most interesting to the discussion, could be added Amaryllis (serenaded by the shepherd in 3 and referred to as dead in 4.36-40); Aratus (the addressee of *Id*. 6 and referred to in Simichidas’ song in *Id*. 7 as an unhappy lover).

\(^4\) With regard to Daphnis, esp. Bernsdorff (1994: 38-51) and Hunter (1999: 245); with regard to Comatas esp. Schmidt (1987); this latter identification has found no wide acceptance.

Along the same lines, it has been argued that the “divine poet” Comatas in *Id.* 7 (whose origins are unclear and, in all likelihood, lie at least partly in Theocritean invention) is identical to the foulmouthed goatherd/slave with that name in *Id.* 5.123 This latter identification, however, has not found wide acceptance because of the discrepancy between a divine singer and a foulmouthed pederast.124 Although indeed it is not as convincing as the case of Daphnis, the recurring name is nonetheless significant. It might be argued that the two versions of Comatas possess the complementary aspects which taken together make up the essence of bucolic poetry. In this, they are like many of Theocritus’ character-couples: Daphnis is a tragic lover, Polyphemus his comic counterpart; Lycidas’ song in *Id.* 7 is full of deep feeling and melancholy; Simichidas’ song is harsh and derisive.125 Likewise, the single name “Comatas” comes to bear a double meaning: it represents both the elevated legendary goatherd and the down-to-earth contemporary one. In this, it is indeed symbolic of bucolic poetry, which derives much of its distinctive character from the (often surprising) clash of such opposites.

Theocritus’ way of referring to time in the *Idylls* helps to blur the distinctions between these mythical herdsmen and their contemporary counterparts.126 For instance, the difficulty in ascertaining whether Thyris in *Id.* 1 and Daphnis in *Id.* 6 are mythical or contemporary herdsmen arises from this vagueness. The majority of Theocritus’ time-indications belong to the category “once” (πότε, πόκα, ἤς χρόνος ἁνίκ’), which does not refer to an equidistant past.127 Many of the mimes moreover lack a narrative frame that could anchor them to any particular period (e.g. *Id.* 1 and 3).

A second reason for the semblance of timelessness in Theocritus’ bucolic world is the general lack of references to historical, political, or mundane events that would allow the

---

127 In *Id.* 7, “there was a time when” (ἤς χρόνος ἁνίκ’) refers to an episode within the lifetime of the narrator, Simichidas, who is firmly situated in Theocritus’ contemporary world by his references to Asclepiades and Philitas (39-40). Whereas πόκα’ in 18.1 (the epithalamium of Helen) refers to the heroic times just before the outbreak of the Trojan War, it remains unclear whether πότε in *Id.* 6.2 refers to the age of heroic legend or not. More remarks on the expression below, Ch. 7.4.
dramatic date of the poems to be fixed.\textsuperscript{128} Against a background of unchanging nature and the unchanging ways of the countryside, the adventures of unchanging herdsmen are narrated. This exemption from the passage of time must be the reason for the deliberate chronological vagueness of the \textit{Idylls}; it does not greatly matter whether the stories occurred in Theocritus’ day and age or in an unspecified mythological past thousand years earlier. In the world of herdsmen nothing much changes; the rustic world is a continuum.

3.12 Echoes and Correspondences: a World of Song

So how does this web of recurring personages and the overall impression of timelessness affect the way in which Theocritus positions his bucolic poetry in literary history? Considering the lack of temporal differentiation, the question of the identification of the herdsmen Daphnis and Comatas in \textit{Id}. 1, 6, 5, and 7 can be seen from a new angle; it does not greatly matter whether they are exactly identical, as they are, at any rate, greatly alike. Mythical and contemporary Theocritean herdsmen inhabit a curiously atemporal and unchanging continuum in which the constant factors determining human life are love and song. Thus, Polyphemus in \textit{Id}. 11 is hardly different from Bucaeus in \textit{Id}. 10, or from Theocritus the poet and his contemporary addressees in this respect, a thought that is worded most memorably in the address to Nicias in \textit{Id}. 13:\textsuperscript{129}

\begin{quote}
Οὐχ ἀμῖν τὸν Ἐρωτα μόνοις ἔτεχ’, ὡς ἐδοκεῦμες,
Νικία, ἄτιν τοῦτο θεών ποικα τέκνον ἐγέντο·
οὐχ ἀμῖν τὰ καλὰ πρότοις καλὰ φαίνεται ἡμεν,
οἱ θνατοὶ πελόμεσθα, τὸ δ᾿ αὔριον οὐκ ἐσοφομες· (1-4)
\end{quote}

Not for us alone, Nicias, as once we thought, was Love begotten by whosoever of the gods begat him, nor does fair seem fair first to us, who are mortal and see not the morrow… (transl. Gow; the poem continues to describe the love of Heracles for the beautiful Hylas, an example from the heroic age.)

Theocritus then, represents himself and his contemporaries as similar, at least in this respect, to the characters he represents in his poems. This collapsing of different levels of the poem

\textsuperscript{128} Stanzel (1995: 38-44). The exceptions have already been mentioned, viz. the references to Thurii (5.70) and to Philitas and Asclepiades (7.40).

\textsuperscript{129} This poem does not qualify as “bucolic,” but a similar conclusion may be drawn from the introduction to \textit{Id}. 11. Gutzwiller (1991) shows that there is always an element of “analogy” in the \textit{Idylls}; i.e., what happens in the narrative introduction is in some way supposedly similar to what happens in the main body of the song.
(of author and personage, of the question whether bucolic poetry is poetry by herdsmen or about herdsmen) is brought about in many other ways besides. Thus in *Id.* 1, Thyrsis, the bucolic master, sings of *Daphnis*, the original subject/singer of bucolic song. In *Id.* 7, Lycidas, the modern bucolic poet and, of course, a character of Theocritus’ own bucolic poetry, sings of Tityrus, who also sings of *Daphnis* and of Comatas, another subject/singer of bucolic song. He even wishes Comatas might have been alive in his own day. In *Id.* 6, Theocritus the poet sings of *Daphnis*. In this respect then, he is like Thyrsis and Lycidas. He is even very like Lycidas in another respect: both sing songs about herdsmen singing songs about herdsmen.

This Chinese-box effect dazzles the reader and results in blurring the distinction between the narrating voices. In the mimetic *Id.* 5, moreover, Theocritus presents the character Comatas as if he were among the living; he at once makes the wish of Lycidas (*Id.* 7) come true and is himself like Lycidas in the choice of his topic. The fact that he is able to imagine what Comatas would be like if he were a contemporary, places him both close to Comatas, the “divine” subject of Lycidas’ song and close to Lycidas himself, who also tries to imagine this. At the same time, the unpleasantness of the character of Comatas in *Id.* 5 makes Lycidas’ wish in *Id.* 7 appear in a comic light.

The young Daphnis in *Id.* 6, in his turn, sings of the Cyclops Polyphemus in love, as does Theocritus, in *Id.* 11. Therefore, Theocritus is also like Daphnis. In turn, Daphnis is simultaneously unlike and like Polyphemus in his struggle with unrequited love (*Id.* 1 and 7). Finally, in *Id.* 11 the poet/herdsman Polyphemus, trying to cure his love with song, is extraordinarily like Theocritus and his contemporaries in this respect: Theocritus explicitly says so in the opening of this *Idyll*.

At this juncture, it becomes apparent that what Theocritus presents in the bucolic *Idylls* is a world held together by analogies, correspondences, *mise en abyme*, interrelations, echoes, and oppositions. His intricate juggling creates the impression that he is part of and deeply imbedded in a vital Sicilian bucolic tradition; he seems close to its origins by his marked resemblances to its mythical originators. These mythical originators, on the other hand, are such that they could well be present in Theocritus’ day, up on the hillsides of Sicily. Together, they form a continuum that appears like a closed and rounded world full of

---

130 Goldhill (1991: 245) terms this *polyphony*.

131 On the direct apostrophe of Comatas at the end of Lycidas’ song, cf. Ch. 7.4.
ancient but ever-renewed traditions and songs. It is a world of timeless poetry at once generated by poetry and echoing with it.

The truth of the matter, of course, as argued earlier, is that Theocritus is himself the actual originator of the bucolic genre. Up to a certain point, he created the origins of bucolic himself by writing about them. That he makes the correspondences between his alleged ancestors and himself so close and that he presents these ancestors so ambiguously as being both subject and author of bucolic song should tell us enough: a major subject of bucolic song is the origin of bucolic song. This is what Theocritus is showing by his invention of traditions and by inextricably entangling himself in the web of corresponding songs.

3.13 Conclusion

In this chapter, the potential for Hellenistic poets to exploit mythical poets for the creation and authorization of new poetry has been illustrated with two examples. The openness to interpretation, combined with venerable authority of characters such as Orpheus and Daphnis provided the authors who used them as their models and mirrors with particular possibilities for legitimizing their own poetical choices, inventions, and personae. Crucially, this process permitted them to endow their characters with features that best mirrored their own objectives. This process was enabled by the flexibility of Greek mythological material and the respect the Greeks had for anything ancient. These characteristics provided the perfect circumstances for the flourishing of “invented tradition.”

Written works formed no obstacle to this enterprise: in the case of Daphnis, there were no *ipsissima verba*. In the case of Orpheus, these were highly controversial but, if they had to be taken into account, they at least revealed a close connection to the divine hymnic origins of poetry. The myth of Daphnis, though probably of local fame, was used in an allusive way by Theocritus as a kind of universal classic of the bucolic world he was creating in his *Idylls*. This lent credibility and substance to this world of which his readers were no part; Theocritus could tell Daphnis’ story in such a way as to make his readers feel they were listening to a familiar story, while at the same time tantalizing them with the fragmentary and allusive quality of his account.

Orpheus, on the other hand, was broadly famed throughout the Greek world. The characteristics Apollonius chose to attribute to him, which mainly focus on his close
relationship to the divine world and Apollo in particular, were welcome tools for the creation of an eminently authoritative reflection of his own poetical persona and practices. The means by which these correspondences between the narrator/creator of the new poetry and their mythological alter egos/forebears are implied, are manifold, subtle, and cumulative. They pervade the works of Theocritus and Apollonius like a slight strain, a motif that repeats and echoes just audibly enough to be picked up by the perceptive reader and be construed as a pedigree for their poetry.