Poetry as window and mirror: Hellenistic poets on predecessors, contemporaries and themselves

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CHAPTER 4:
THE MUSES' BIRDCAGE: POETIC CRITICISM OF CONTEMPORARIES

4.1 Introduction

Although Hellenistic poets were strongly influenced by their predecessors, as the previous chapters have shown, it would go too far to say that they had no eye for contemporary colleagues. Numerous poetical testimonies show that they reflected and commented upon them as well. How these comments function and what drives underlie them, are the topics of the next two chapters.

Before starting the discussion of this topic, it is important to recognize that literary criticism is rarely a question of aesthetic judgment alone; it is embedded in the societal values and interests of the community in which it is formed. In the case of the Alexandrian poets, this community primarily consisted of the select company of scholars and poets in the library and museum of the Ptolemies and the friends, family, and guests of the monarch. Most Alexandrian poetry, like a good deal of Hellenistic poetry in general, was therefore in all likelihood (financially) encouraged by the court and meant to please it. Hellenistic poets must have been continually aware of the necessity to garner the favor of patrons, particularly when interacting with their contemporaries, who were presumably both colleagues and rivals. The fragment of Timon of Phlius referenced in the title of this chapter is usually quoted to illustrate this:

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1 Cf. e.g. Eagleton (1985); contra e.g. Schwinge (1986), who believes that Hellenistic poetry should be read as pure art for art's sake. Nowadays this is a minority view.

2 Alexandria is the literary community about which most is currently known. Other literary societies at other courts would presumably provide a similar picture. At any rate, Alexandria was the largest centre of learning and culture. It attracted more scholars and poets than other courts, such as Pergamon.

3 Weber shows that this does not imply that Hellenistic poets wrote propagandistic poetry in a modern sense; on the methodological problems of defining “propaganda” in antiquity, see Weber (1993: 400-417), Enenkel and Pfeijffer (2004: 1-13).

4 This has not always been sufficiently recognized in scholarship, although recently there is an awakening of interest in this aspect of Hellenistic poetry, cf. Weber (1993), Too (1998), Stephens (2005), Strootman (2007: 189-246). These studies do not, however, treat the specific topic of the interaction between poets. For other Hellenistic references to Ptolemaic patronage, cf. e.g. Theoc. ld. 17.111-116, where Ptolemy II is praised for his εὐεργεσία towards poets.

5 The passage in Ath. 1.22d, where these lines are cited, indicates that the fragment refers to the Alexandrian Museum; it is however not certain that poets are primarily meant; the scholarly occupations may have afforded even more scope for argument and quarrels.
In Egypt of the many tribes, many bookish scribblers are being fed, endlessly wrangling in the Muses’ birdcage …

Besides illustrating the importance of royal patronage for the *philologoi* and poets of the Museum, it is taken to imply that mutual relations at this institution were not always of a peaceful nature; endless cackling and crest picking apparently went on amongst its fellows.\(^6\)

Such aggression, which is often considered characteristic of this period (particularly Callimachus is notorious for his polemical persona) is the focus of this chapter. The professions of friendship and admiration also found in the poetry of this age are addressed in the next.

### 4.2 Competition and Strife in Pre-Hellenistic Poetic Culture

Before the “Muses’ birdcage” of the Hellenistic era can be explored, the tradition of literary competition in which it stands deserves some comment. Hesiod’s description of Ἐρίς (Strife)

\[ \text{Ὁὐκ ἄρα μοῦνον ἔην Ἐρίδων γένος, ἀλλ’ ἐπὶ γαῖαν εἰσὶ δύω∙ τὴν μέν κεν ἐπαινήσει νοήσας, ἢ δ’ ἐπιμωμητή· διὰ δ’ ἀνδίχα θυμὸν ἔχουσιν. ἢ μὲν γὰρ πόλεμον τε κακὸν καὶ δῆριν ὀφέλλει, σχετλίη οὐ τὴν ἐπὶ γαῖαν ἔρημη ὀφελοῦσα, ἢ ἐπὶ γαῖας ἄναγκης ἄθαντῶν βουλήσιν Ἐρίν τιμῶσι βαρείαν. τὴν δ’ ἐτέρην προσερήθην μὲν ἐγείνατο Νὺξ ἐρεβελλιῇ, θῆκε δὲ μὲν Κρονίδης ὑψιζύγος, αἰθέρι ἀνήν, γαῖης [τ’] ἐν ὑβιζήμης καὶ ἀνδράσι πολλὸν ἀμείνω∙ ἢ τε καὶ ἀπάλαμον περ ὁμοὶ ἐπί ἔρημον ἐγείρει· εἰς ἔτερον γὰρ τὸ πολλὸν ἐπὶ ἔρημον ἔγειρε· ἤσπερ εἰς ἐτερον γὰρ τὸ ἐπὶ ἔρημον ἐγείρει· εἰς ἄφενος ἐπὶ οἰκὸν καὶ πολλόν ἀδελφόν ἐπὶ ἔρημον ἐγείρει· ἤσπερ εἰς ἐτερον γὰρ τὸ πολλὸν ἐπὶ ἔρημον ἐγείρει.]

\[ \text{καὶ κεραμεὺς κεραμεῖ κοτέει καὶ τέκτων τέκτων, καὶ πτωχὸς πτωχῷ φθονέει καὶ ἀοιδὸς ἀοιδῷ. (Op. 10-25)} \]

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So there was not just one birth of Strifes after all, but upon the earth there are two Strifes. One of these a man would praise once he got to know it, but the other is blameworthy; and they have thoroughly opposed spirits. For the one fosters evil war and conflict—cruel one, no mortal loves that one, but it is by necessity that they honor the oppressive Strife, by the plans of the immortals. But the other one gloomy Night bore first; and Cronus’ hithroned son, who dwells in the aether, set it in the roots of the earth, and it is much better for men. It rouses even the helpless man to work. For a man who is not working but who looks at some other man, a rich one who is hastening to plow and plant and set his house in order, he envies him, one neighbor envying his neighbor who is hastening towards wealth: and this Strife is good for mortals. And potter is angry with potter and builder with builder, and beggar begrudges beggar, and poet poet. (transl. Most)

Hesiod distinguishes bad Strife, which engenders aggression and destruction, from good Strife, which ensures cultural and economical progress by inciting envy of others’ success and hence competition (19-23). He apparently sees the latter as an active force in the development of song, as it may be inferred that the professional envy that poets feel towards each other pushes them towards better composition and performance. The mechanism posited in this passage seems to be confirmed by the observation that several early Greek poets use the perceived defects of their predecessors or contemporaries to draw attention to their own superior poetic judgment and qualities. This is demonstrated for instance in Pindar’s and Aristophanes’ well known criticism of other poets.

Alternatively, poets may claim to be the object of envy (presumably of their colleagues), for only what is excellent is envied, as Pindar states:

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\text{πολλὰ γὰρ πολλὰ λέλεκται, ν<εω>φά δ’ ἐξευ-}
\text{ρόντα δόμεν βασάνῳ}
\text{ἐς ἐλεγχον, ἄπας κίνδυνος· δ-}
\text{ψον δὲ λόγοι φθονεροίσιν,}
\text{ἀπτεται δ’ ἐσλών ᾧ, χειρόνεσσι δ’ ὦκ ἐρίζει. (N. 8 18-24)}
\]

For many things have been said in many ways, but to discover new ones and put them to the touchstone for testing is sheer danger, since words are dessert to the envious, and envy fastens always on the good, but has no quarrel with lesser men. (transl. Race)

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7 Cf. Hdt. 3.80.3: envy is natural to man and has been so from the beginning. On the Greek concept of envy, see Walcot (1978), Konstan and Ruthers (2003).
8 E.g. Pi. N. 4.6, N. 7.15-24, O. 2.87-8; the scholia claim that Pindar is quarreling here with Bacchylides and Simonides. P. 2.55, N. 7.21 respectively invite comparison between Archilochus’ and Homer’s poetry and Pindar’s own. Aristophanes’ parabaseis (e.g. Ach. 629; Eq. 507; Nub. 518; Vesp. 1015; Pax 734; Ran. 12) criticize his colleagues in the field of comedy.
As Hesiod saw correctly, then, this all works on the principle of competition: a poet gains status if he is better than a colleague or predecessor or if he is object of envy. Thus early poetic criticism often involved poets positioning themselves against others.

In addition to being influenced by such mechanisms of personal competition and strife, criticism over time acquired theoretical, often aesthetic or moral, foundations. Literary criticism in the modern sense (i.e., the systematic interpretation and evaluation of literary texts) became a discipline in its own right in the time of the sophists, such as Gorgias. It was laid down in treatises (e.g., Aristotle’s Poetics and Rhetoric) and presumably formed the subject of many of the (now lost) writings of scholars in the Museum and Library of Alexandria, the first to be referred to as κριτικοί. However, about such Hellenistic literary criticism little is known. What remains is fragmentary, taken from tattered papyruses or from paraphrases in later grammarians. A category apart is formed by the badly damaged Herculaneum papyri of Philodemus’ On Poems; yet most theories discussed in this work seem to have little in common with what can be seen in Hellenistic poetic practice. Other critical treatises that contain or reflect Hellenistic theories are from later periods and therefore contaminate these theories with earlier and later views, making them hardly useful for judging Hellenistic criticism.

This lack of independent information about Hellenistic criticism explains why analyses of meta-poetic and critical expressions in Hellenistic poetry itself have been

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10 Cf. Str. 14.657 on Philitas: ποιητῆς ἄμα καὶ κριτικός. This combination had never been applied to anyone before; the stress in the expression falls on ποιητῆς, cf. Pfeiffer (1968: 89).

11 Cf. Janko (2003: 120-165). The main concern of the critics who Philodemus discusses is εὐφωνία (the pleasantness of sound, putting sound over content). This is presumably an Epicurean tenet, related to the idea of ψυχαγωγία (poetry’s ability to enchant the soul). Only a certain Heracleodorus named by Philodemus has something in common with Hellenistic poets. He rejects the (Aristotelian) notion that genre is linked to style and word-choice. This resembles the views expressed on polyeideia in Call. lamb. 13 (fr. 203 Pf.). However, Janko dates him after Callimachus. See also Fantuzzi and Hunter (2004: 449-461), who do find some subtle likenesses between tenets discussed by Philodemus and general “poetics” discernible in Hellenistic poetry.

12 E.g. Demetrius’ On Style (first cent. CE, according to Schenkeveld 1964: 135-148), Horace’s Ars Poetica, the works of Dionysius of Halicarnassus (first cent. CE), Quintilian’s Institutio Oratoria (idem), or ‘Pseudo-Longinus’ On the Sublime (third cent. CE), Photius’ Bibliotheca (ninth cent. CE), discussing the ideas of the Alexandrian scholar Didymus (second cent. BCE).
attempted time and again. Since this poetry frequently self-consciously addresses poetics, often while demonstrating them, the approach initially seems promising. This explains the large corpus of scholarship dedicated to the aesthetic views of the man generally considered the *arbiter elegantiarum* of the Hellenistic period, Callimachus.\(^{13}\) When examined, the aesthetic points of view expressed in his poetry (most importantly the *Aetia*-prologue and *Hymn II*) reveal that he disliked long bombastic works and preferred elegant poetry on a small scale. All in all this seems a bit disappointing and rather unsurprising, since it reflects the exact image of the poetry he himself produced. An analysis of the *rhetorical* strategy underlying his expressions is more instructive.

In the ensuing, I discuss some Callimachean passages from such a rhetorical and strategic point of view. Besides I will analyze the famous debate allegedly instigated by Callimachus on how (not) to write poetry. To structure observations on these issues, reference will be made to the theory of the Field of Cultural Production as established by Pierre Bourdieu. While the relative scarcity of material prevents sociologists from composing an image of the Alexandrian Field of Cultural Production as complete as that of, say, mid-twentieth-century France, Bourdieu’s theory will, as I hope to show, nevertheless shed new light on the social aspects of Alexandrian poetry.\(^{14}\)

### 4.3 Bourdieu’s Field of Cultural Production

Pierre Bourdieu’s sociological theory centers on the idea that art is not a category on its own, separate from society. It is therefore not simply a disinterested expression of ideas and emotions on the part of an artist, who is a lone genius.\(^{15}\) Nor is it a product that can be described as the outcome of rigidly determined social-historical processes, as Marxism, for instance, assumes. Bourdieu contends that the art world (like the fashion world, academic world, and clerical world) has its own economic laws similar to those in the world at large.

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\(^{13}\) The scholarly discussion following the discovery of the papyrus containing the *Aetia prologue* (1928) is described by Benedetto (1993), with ample bibliography. He also discusses the “quarrel between Callimachus and Apollonius.” Eichgruen (1961) and Cameron (1995) are examples of monographs dedicated to Callimachus’ quarrels and critics.

\(^{14}\) For a study of Roman literary patronage in the age of Domitian, employing the principles of Bourdieu’s theory, see Nauta (2002). Of course, *testimonia* for this era are much richer than for the Hellenistic period.

\(^{15}\) For a comprehensive overview, see e.g. Bourdieu (1993).
He calls these “fields of cultural production” and maintains that each one operates by its own rules and should be studied in its own right, paying attention to its specific idiosyncrasies. Yet, it is also true that all fields operate on a similar set of principles.

The interaction between actors in a particular field determines how the “symbolic capital” that circulates is divided. These actors include artists, patrons, “brokers” who introduce artists to powerful and wealthy patrons, public opinion, art galleries, publishers, and critics. The acquisition of symbolic or “cultural” capital (e.g. recognition by peers as a distinguished artist or the power to decide “who’s in and who’s out”), can lead to the acquisition of real, monetary capital. It is clear that competition determines the economic laws operative in the field of cultural production, but not always in obvious ways. For instance, Bourdieu claims that elite, avant-garde, or experimental art is sometimes considered better if less people are able to enjoy or understand it. In the example he takes, the literary world of twentieth century France, this entailed that the avant-garde artist generally received no share, or a relatively small share of monetary capital. Popular art was, on the same logics, considered despicable, whereas the artist who was only considered a genius by few, or hoped to be so by future generations, emerged as the real winner, and thus came in possession of cultural capital of a specific type. By this kind of reasoning the avant-garde artist and his select public “distinguished” themselves from the broad masses. “Distinction” is a form of cultural capital: a distinctive taste (e.g., for avant-garde art) proclaims membership to an elite social or intellectual category; it can only be obtained by the happy few.

In Alexandrian literary culture, the cultural elite that appreciated avant-garde poetry were presumably primarily formed by the fellows of the Museum and Library and by royal society (i.e., the king and his family, friends and courtiers). Elitist avant-garde poetry created for a select public would therefore presumably obtain cultural capital as well as monetary capital, or at least the material benefits of royal patronage. This makes the logic of the Alexandrian Field of Cultural Production somewhat different from Bourdieu’s standard.

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16 Some of these categories are anachronisms in the Hellenistic era (e.g. publishers, art-galleries, critics in the modern sense of the word). However, there were patrons (the court elite), literary scholars, and guilds of (dramatic) poets to foster and promote literature, cf. Weber (1993: 122-182).
4.4  Callimachus and Apollonius: How (not) to write an Epic?

A fitting beginning to an analysis of the Alexandrian Muses’ Birdcage against this theoretical background is the discussion of the most famous example of “Strife” in Hellenistic poetry. It has long been received opinion in scholarship that the two major Alexandrian poets, Callimachus and his student (μαθητής, Vitae) or friend (γνώριμος, P. Oxy. 1241) Apollonius, quarreled. However, there are no unequivocal ancient sources that describe the dispute or explain what it was about.

Let me start with the first issue. The story of the quarrel can be traced to the (probably unreliable) anonymous Vitae of Apollonius, which mention his departure to Rhodes after an unsatisfactory public reading of the Argonautica. The text of the relevant passage in the first Vita reads:

οὗτος ἐμαθήτευσε Καλλιμάχῳ ἐν Ἀλεξανδρείᾳ ὁντι γραμματικῷ, καὶ συντάξας ταῦτα τὰ ποιήματα ἐπεδείξατο. σφόδρα δὲ ἀποτυχὼν καὶ ἐρυθριάσας παρεγένετο ἐν τῇ Ῥόδῳ κἀκεῖ ἐπολιτεύσατο καὶ σοφιστεύει ῥητορικοὺς λόγους, ὧδεν αὐτὸν καὶ Ῥόδιον ἀποκαλεῖν βούλονται. (Vita β, 4-9)

He was a student with Callimachus, the grammarian, in Alexandria and, after having composed these poems [i.e., the Argonautica], he gave a public reading of them. But seriously failing to obtain success and therefore very much ashamed, he went to Rhodes and became a citizen there and taught rhetoric, and this why they like to call this same man “of Rhodes.”

The passage makes no mention of any quarrel between Callimachus and Apollonius. That Apollonius’ lack of success had anything to do with Callimachus must have been read into it only later, in connection with other texts. One of these is an epigram containing an attack on Callimachus, which was purportedly written by Apollonius:

Καλλιμάχος τὸ κάθαρμα, τὸ παίγνιον, ὁ ξύλινος νοῦς αἴτιος ὁ γράψας Αἴτια Καλλιμάχου. (AP 11.275)

17 So e.g. Rose (1960: 325): “Apollonius clearly had a following, although Kallimachos remained the leader of orthodox literary opinion, and the two poets did not spare each other ... the most famous literary quarrel in antiquity.” Cf. Lesky (1971: 819), Fraser (1972: I, 749-54), Green (1997: introduction).
The Latin poets, many of them imitators of Callimachus, do not mention the quarrel.

Callimachus, the piece of waste, the insipid joke, the wooden mind is guilty, he who wrote the Ἀετία of Callimachus.\footnote{It is explained by Ferguson (1970: 66) as follows: Καλλίμαχος: / Κάλλυσσα: τὸ κάθαρμα / Καλλώπισσα: τὸ παίγνιον / Καλόπους: ὁ ξιδίνος [πούς] νοῦς. (Callimachus: Kallysma: piece of filth; Kallopisma: joke; Kalpopous: wooden [leg] mind); i.e., the epigram pretends to be based on an alphabetical dictionary.}

As Wilamowitz recognized, the presupposed situation of the epigram is that Apollonius, when asked who was guilty of his banishment to Rhodes, gave this answer.\footnote{Wilamowitz (1924: I, 96-7). However, he did not believe that the epigram was written by Apollonius, and placed it in the tradition of rhetorical exercises in ἑθοποιία, cf. e.g., AP 7.351 (on the daughters of Lycambes).} However, there is severe doubt that this epigram should be attributed to Apollonius of Rhodes, considering the addition in the MS of the Palatine Anthology of the cognomen ΓΡΑΜΜΑΤΙΚΟΥ (The Grammarian) instead of the expected ΡΟΔΙΟΥ (of Rhodes).\footnote{Cf. Cameron (1995: 227-228). He relates it to (late) epigrams disparaging the style of Callimachus, e.g., AP 11.321, 11.322 (1995: 229).} That the epigram is found in the eleventh book of the Palatine Anthology amidst satiric epigrams from the Imperial Age also lessens its value as trustworthy evidence.

Another text (probably the latest chronologically) regarding the matter, is found in the Suda’s remark concerning Callimachus’ enigmatic (lost) invective poem Ἰβις.\footnote{Suda s.v. Καλλίμαχος, 15-16}

\begin{quote}
‘Ἰβις ἐστὶ δὲ ποίημα ἐπιτετηθεμένον εἰς ἀσάφειαν καὶ λοιδορίαν, εἰς τινα Ἰβιν, γενόμενον ἐχθρόν τοῦ Καλλιμάχου. ἦν δὲ οὕτος Απολλώνιος, ὁ γράφας τὰ Αργοναυτικά. (Suda s.v. Καλλίμαχος, 15-16)
\end{quote}

Ibis is a poem written with the intention of obscurity and blame against a certain Ibis, who had become an enemy of Callimachus. And this was Apollonius, the one who wrote the Argonautica.

According to the Suda then, the Ibis was written to attack Apollonius. This implies that the poem was another expression of the literary quarrel between the two contemporaries. Alan Cameron however persuasively argues that the second half of the explanation (“And this was...”, ἦν δὲ οὕτος...) is a later interpolation and therefore presumably guesswork. Ibis is the only title in the Suda’s lemma on Callimachus’ works that is explained at all, which of itself should raise some suspicion. It is very likely that no one knew who was referred to by “Ibis,” certainly not the tenth-century CE scribe of the Suda (or an even later interpolator). It may
Indeed, the poems have been the case that the poem was a literary exercise in curse poetry, which would mean that the person attacked never even existed.\(^{23}\) Unfortunately, there is little other information about Callimachus’ *Ibis* apart from this mention and hardly any about the extent of its resemblance to Ovid’s extant poem of the same name.\(^{24}\) A final verdict on the probability that it dealt with Apollonius cannot be reached therefore.

Recently, some scholars have tried to draw the *diegesis* to Callimachus’ *lambi* 5, into the debate about the quarrel. It forms the synopsis to one of the more heavily tattered *lambi*, of which the contents are hard to make out. The text states:

> Γραμματο[δ]ιδάσκαλο[ν], όνομα Απολλώνιον, οί δε Κλέωνα τίνα, ίαμβίζει ώς τοὺς ἰδίους μαθητάς κατασχύνοντα, ἐν ἣθει εὐνοίας ἀπαγ[ο]ιέων τούτω δράν, μὴ ἀλώ. (fr. 1.195 Pf.)

He [sc. Callimachus] is mocking a schoolmaster by the name of Apollonius, or, according to others, some Cleon, as abusing his own pupils, telling him in a friendly way not to do that, so as not to get caught.

Since the *lambi* itself is in such poor condition, it is not easy to establish what this *diegesis* refers to. Was there an unnamed schoolmaster attacked in *lambi* 5? If so, do some critics identify him with Apollonius and others with a certain Cleon?\(^{25}\) Or was there a schoolmaster whom Callimachus called “Apollonius” but who was a certain Cleon in reality?\(^{26}\) And what does the phrase “abusing his own pupils” (τοὺς ἰδίους μαθητάς κατασχύνοντα) refer to?

Based on the information in the *diegesis*, unsurprisingly, the *lambi* has been held to attack a schoolmaster for the erotic abuse of his pupils.\(^{27}\) Emanuele Lelli however has recently proposed a different interpretation: the *diegesis*’ phrasing should be read in terms of *literary*...

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\(^{23}\) So Housman (1921: 67-8), Cameron (1995: 228). Cf. e.g. the Hellenistic catalogue poems *Arai* (Curses) by Moero and the anonymous *Tattoo-elegy* (on which see Huys 1991). These too appear to be mere literary exercises in invective, not aimed at anyone in particular.

\(^{24}\) Except Ov. *Ib*. 55-60: *Nunc quo Battiaudes inimicum decevit Ibin / Hoc ego decoaveo teque tuosque modo. / Utique ille, historis involvam carmina cecis: / Non soleam quamvis hoc genus ipse sequi. / Illius ambages imitatus in Ivide dicar / Oblitus moris iudiciique mei.* (Now, as Battiaides cursed his enemy Ibis, I will curse you and yours in the same way. And like him I have involved my poem with hidden matters: I have followed him, though I am unused to this sort of thing. Its convolutions are uttered in imitation of those in *Ibis*, oblivious of my own custom and taste.) See on the possible likeness between the two poems Housman (1921: 67-8), La Penna (1957) introduction, Cameron (1995: 228).


\(^{26}\) So Cameron (1995: 229).

\(^{27}\) So first (before the *diegesis* had been found): Coppola (1933: 167), afterwards: Clayman (1980: 29-33), Kerkhecker (1999: 136-7), Acosta-Hughes (2002: 251-2), Fantuzzi and Hunter (2004: 14). The verb *κατασχύνω* can be used of sexual abuse (LSJ s.v. 2, e.g. Lys. 1.49.5).
polemic: the word “schoolmaster” is employed as a deprecatory term to belittle literary pretence. This extremely speculative hypothesis aims to assert once more that there was a quarrel between Apollonius and Callimachus about (epic) poetry. The weak point in Lelli’s reasoning is evidently that there are no arguments whatsoever to assume that this *lambus* is indeed about a literary quarrel rather than about a schoolmaster abusing his pupils. The assumption that the fifth *lambus* attacked the *Argonautica* of Apollonius, then, does not appear likely.

Clearly, the evidence that Apollonius and Callimachus quarreled is scanty, but, if they did, what was supposed to have been at issue? An answer to this has generally been sought in Callimachus’ own works, in particular the *Aetia*-prologue (fr. 1 Pf.). The main theme of this fragment is the objection to long and unrefined poetry on hackneyed themes. Its polemic tone makes it attractive to be connected with the alleged quarrel. This has led to the idea that Callimachus disliked *Apollonius’ epic*, as being too long, unrefined and treating hackneyed subject matter. Along an entirely different line of reasoning, scholars have argued that one should not try and find a historical basis for the quarrel but look at it in different terms, namely as fitting certain recurrent patterns of anecdotic biography. It is generally held that ancient biography, as exemplified by the Apollonius-*Vitae*, works along schematic, conventional lines; the insertion of a quarrel is a standard way of expressing the assumed relationship of rivalry between two contemporary authors. An excellent comparison for this process can be found in the way the *scholia* describe the relation between Pindar and Simonides or Bacchylides. These three contemporaries all wrote epinician poetry, sometimes even for the same patrons. The scholiasts therefore assume that they were rivals and that they quarreled. And so obscure references to “a pair of unwise crows that cackle against the divine bird of Zeus” in Pindar’s poetry (*O. 2.87-88*) are interpreted in the *scholia* as referring to Bacchylides and Simonides, attacking Pindar.

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28 Cf. e.g. *Aetia* fr. 1 Pf.; *Hymn* II (105-113); *AP* 12.43. Cameron argues it is unlikely that the elegiac *Aetia* was criticizing epic (1995: 337-8).
31 Lefkowitz (1980: 1-19) argues that Callimachus and Apollonius deliberately created a rivalry on the model of famous examples like these. Examples of representing contemporaries in the same field as rivals are the *Certamen Homeri Hesiodi* and *Ar. Ran.* (Aeschylus and Euripides). *Vita Aeschyli* cap. 8, mentions the rivalry between Sophocles and Aeschylus over tragedy and between Simonides and Aeschylus over elegy.
Another line of approach keeps the idea of the quarrel intact but denies that it was about poetry. This argument is as follows: Apollonius’ epic poetry is nothing if not Callimachean in its aesthetic aims (polished, extremely refined, not really long compared to for instance Homeric epic; a new approach to heroic subject matter). Consequently, there must have been another ground for quarreling. Fraser, for example, wildly speculates that Apollonius’ humble Egyptian origin must have been at the bottom of it; this earned him the scorn of the aristocratic, Greek-Cyrenaic Callimachus. This kind of conjecture of course remains impossible to prove.

The recent return to the idea (not shared by many scholars) that the quarrel in fact does focus on the right way to compose epic poetry is based on a new evaluation of Callimachus’ *lambi* (esp. 4 and 5). Since Apollonius and Callimachus were both masters of the art of epic and agreed in general lines about the way to renew it, their quarrel, as defenders of this theory claim, must have concentrated on the finer poetic details. If so, it is hard to see how modern scholars, more than two thousand years later and with little more to go on than the implicit poetic remarks of Callimachus and their own evaluation of Apollonius’ style, could hope to unearth this discussion.

Rounding up these considerations, it is time to reach a conclusion and to formulate my own hypothesis about these matters. In the first place, the texts usually adduced do not appear to justify the claim that Callimachus quarreled with Apollonius and do not suggest what this quarrel was about. Considering that Apollonius’ epic shows definite signs of Callimachean influence, it seems unlikely that Callimachus objected to Apollonius’ poem

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33 Fraser (1972: I, 753-4) bases this on the fact that the ibis (hence the title of the poem *Ibis*) is an indigenous Egyptian bird; from this he deduced that Apollonius had a native Egyptian background.
34 Arrighetti (1989: 157), D’Alessio (1996: *ad loc.*), Lelli (2004: 78-82). The latter claims they quarreled about the merits of the *Argonautica* and the *Hecale* on the following grounds: 1) Length: Apollonius adhered to the length of three tragedies and a satyr play for his epic, unlike Callimachus. 2) Unity: Apollonius chose a grand unified theme for his epic; Callimachus chose a futile, un-heroic element of myth (*Hecale*). 3) Character: Apollonius’ epic is “tragic” whereas Callimachus’ epic is elegiac-comic (*Hecale*). Most of these assumptions cannot be proven: *ad 1*: It is unknown whether the length of the *Argonautica* was coincidence or planned; it is unknown how long *Hecale* was (cf. Hollis 1990: 3-7). *Ad 2*: The unity of the *Argonautica* is not of the kind that Aristotle meant (cf. Hunter, 1993: appendix). *Ad 3*: This might be granted, cf. Callimachus’ objections against poems about “deeds of heroes and kings” (*Aetia*). However Apollonius’ Jason and Medea are not traditional heroes; cf. e.g. Lawall (1966: 121-169).
35 E.g. the numerous aetiological explanations, the fact that Callimachus also treated the myth of the Argonauts (cf. *Aet. frs.* 7-21 Pf.), the innovative style in general. This approach presumes, as most
for being at odds with his own poetic credo of elegance, refinement, and the novel treatment of traditional subject matter. Therefore, I would prefer to propose an altogether different approach. It was natural for later readers to suppose that a quarrel between Callimachus and Apollonius rather arose out of the (uncomfortably) close similarity of style and subject matter. Like Pindar and his “rivals,” Callimachus and Apollonius worked in the same environment for the same patrons and wrote poetry in similar styles on the same subjects. Later generations may have felt this situation was bound to end in quarreling. In Bourdieu’s terms, it was attractive to assume that two actors operating in the same field of cultural production, striving for the same cultural capital, dependent on the same recipients, would end up as rivals. This has been garbled into a story about a quarrel on poetic differences. The polemical persona that speaks from so much of Callimachus’ poetry did the rest.

4.5 The Aetia-Prologue: Polemic or Preaching to the Converted?

The most notorious instance of this polemical persona of Callimachus appears in the Aetia-prologue (fr. 1 Pf.). However, if we can no longer connect this text to an alleged quarrel between Apollonius and Callimachus, it is unclear which dispute it references, if any. It has often been read as a forestalling of expected criticism on the Aetia (or Callimachus’ poetics in general) from a rivaling poetic faction. Recently, the historical realities behind the polemics presented in the prologue have, like the quarrel between Apollonius and Callimachus, become subject to doubt: was Callimachus as beleaguered by critics as he would have his readers believe? Is it necessary, or even possible, to identify the critics whom Callimachus (like the Scholia Florentina on the Aetia) calls the “Telchines?”

scholars from antiquity onwards do, that Callimachus is the elder of the two and therefore more likely to have influenced Apollonius, cf. e.g. Fraser (1972: I, 627, 631-2, 635, 751, 776, 783).

36 Cf. Lefkowitz (1980: 1-19). It could be objected that there is also a great similarity between Theocritus (esp. Id. 13 and 22) and Apollonius, while here ancient tradition makes no mention of a quarrel. However, presumably Theocritus was not linked to the Alexandrian Museum. It might also be argued that his poetry was rather different from that of Apollonius, in not containing a full-blown epic, like e.g. Callimachus’ Hecale was.

37 Cameron (1995: 104-133) thinks the reference is strictly to the Aetia; Fraser (1972: I, 754-6, 760) thinks it refers to Callimachus’ poetics in general; this has long been the dominant view in histories of Greek literature.

The answer to both questions partly depends on which readers Callimachus envisaged for the *Aetia*.\(^{39}\) It may be confidently asserted that this poem was meant primarily for court circles, since the Ptolemies figure prominently in it.\(^{40}\) Its secondary audience would have been broader: anyone able to appreciate Callimachus’ style of writing. This would have included his educated Greek-speaking contemporaries in Alexandria and abroad, and eventually, later generations.\(^{41}\) As it seems inherently likely that appreciation of his work would not have been limited to an inner circle, references to “literary adversaries” would have had to be comprehensible for them, too, and cannot have been entirely esoteric.

It could be asked, *a fortiori*, why the Ptolemies, the most important members of Callimachus’ intended audience, would have lent their support to a poet who was obscure, controversial and continually occupied with personal literary feuds when they could have had any poet at their command. Surely, the esoteric detail of literary quarrels in which rivals needed to be identified from obscure clues would have held little interest for them and can therefore hardly be expected to have featured in a poem that sang their praises, as the *Aetia* does. On the other hand, supporting an excellent poet who stated that his elitist aesthetics were not to be grasped by all may have appealed to their expectations and given them the pleasurable sense of possessing a distinguished taste. The question must therefore be repeated: was Callimachus what he wants the reader to believe he was, a truly controversial poet admired by few and envied, attacked, and misunderstood by many? It may well be that this is a convenient and flattering exaggeration, perhaps even a partial fiction, designed to enhance the sense of “exclusive taste” in order to please his patrons. Whether or not “the Telchines” attacked in the *Aetia*–prologue actually are the individuals identified by the Scholia Florentina becomes of secondary importance in this light. What counts is that

\(^{39}\) In the ensuing, I will use the word “readers” to indicate the recipients (contemporary or otherwise) of Callimachus’ poetry; this does not mean that I think Callimachus never recited his poetry.

\(^{40}\) E.g., *The Lock of Berenice* (fr. 110 Pf.). For Callimachus’ relation with the Ptolemaic court, see e.g. Fraser (1972: I: 663, 789-90), Weber (1993: 122-149), Cameron (1995: 3-71), Stephens (2004: 161-176). Weber argues that such an audience would have comprised an educated elite from several Greek *poleis* consisting of intellectuals, friends of the King, high military officers, rich merchants, aristocratic guests and ambassadors of other Kings.

\(^{41}\) Even Callimachus’ larger readership will presumably have been a relative minority. However, estimates of ancient literacy are greatly at odds; for arguments in favor of a relatively high rate of literacy in Hellenistic Egypt, see Cameron (1995: 47-53). For Callimachus also having future generations in mind, cf. fr. 7.13-4 Pf.
Callimachus can boast of envious opponents, like Pindar once did, and thus paradoxically heighten his own standing as a poet.\(^{42}\)

This insight enhances the importance of analyzing the Telchines’ portrayal as literary opponents. Taking the *Aetia* prologue as a primary example and providing parallels from other poems, I will illustrate how Callimachus manipulates his readers, making them an offer they cannot refuse.\(^{43}\) The attempt to gain distinction in the field of cultural production will prove to be an important factor determining this rhetorical strategy.

To return to the initial problem, approaching it in terms of rhetorical strategy (rather than historical investigation), we may now ask: who is Callimachus addressing in the prologue to his *Aetia* and how does he address them? It is necessary to look at the text in its entirety to answer this.

\[\ldots\]ι μοι Τελχίνες ἐπιτρύζουσιν ἀοιδῇ,
νήδες οἱ Μοῦσαι οὐκ ἐγένοντο φίλαι,
ἐίνεκεν οὐχ ἐν ἁεσμα διηνεκὲς ἢ βασιλ[η]
\ldots\]ς ἐν πολλαῖς ἠνυσα χυλισσιν
ἡ ....]ους ἠμως, ἐπος δ’ ἐπ’ ὑπον ς[ιςω (5)
παῖς ἀτε, τῶν δ’ ετέων ἢ δεκάς οὐκ ὁλίγη.
\ldots] [.α]κει Τε[λ]χίνσιν ἐγὼ τόδε· “φυλον α[]
\ldots\] τήκ[ειν] ἦταρ ἐπιστάμενον,
\ldots\].. φειν [ὁ]λγοστιχος· ἀλλά καθέλκει
\ldots\] πολύ τὴν μακρὴν ὀμπνια Θεσμοφόρος (10)
τοῖν δὲ] δυο[ν] Μιμνεμος ὀτι γλυκύς, αἱ κατά λεπτόν
\ldots\] ] ἡ μεγάλη δ’ οὐκ εδιδαξε γυνη,
\ldots\] ξον ᾔτη Θηψιάκας ἀπ’ Αἰγύπτου [πέτοιτο
αίματ], Πηγαίων ἤδονεν [γ]έρανος,
Μασσαγέται καὶ μακρον οἰστευοιεν ἐπ’ ἄνδρα (15)
ἔλλετε Βασικανής ὀλοον γένος· αὐθὶ δὲ τεχνὴ
κρίνετε,] μὴ σχοίνῳ Περσίδι τὴν σοφίην∙
μηδ’ ἀπ’ ἐμὲ διφάτε μέγα ψοφέουσαν ἀοιδὴν
τίκτεσθαι· ὑροντάν οὐκ ἐμὸν, ἀλλὰ Διός.” (20)
καὶ γὰρ ὅτε πρώτιστον ἐμοὶ ἐπὶ δέλτον ἐθηκα
gούναιν, Α[πὸ]λλων εἶπεν ὁ μοι Λύκιος.
“\ldots\] ἀοιδή, τὸ μὲν θυσὶ ὅτι πάχισεν
θηρίας, τῇ]ν Μοῦσαν δ’ ὕγαθε λεπταλέγην·
πρὸς δὲ σε] καὶ τὸ’ ἄνοιγα, τὰ μὴ πατέουσιν ἀμαξαί (25)
tὰ στείβειν, ἐτέρων ἵνα μὴ καθ’ ὀμα


\(^{43}\) The following builds upon some important insights formulated by Asper (1997: 246-247) and Schmitz (1999: 151-178).
The Telchines, ignoramuses, who are no friends of the Muses, often grumble at my poetry, because [I don’t write] one continuous poem about kings’ [deeds], in many thousands of lines, [or about] the heroes [of yore], but unfold my poetry in small stretches like a child (5), though the decades of my years are not few. But I say this to the Telchines: “You […] tribe, who only know how to eat your own heart out, yes, indeed he [or: I] was a man of few verses, but bountiful Demeter outweights by far the long (10) […] and of the two [books] Mimnermus [wrote], not the Big Woman, but the delicate […] show that he was sweet. Let the crane that revels in the [blood] of Pygmys fly a long stretch to Thrace from Egypt and let Massagetae shoot from a long way off at the [Mede] (15). Yet [nightingales] are sweeter this way. Be gone, you wretched race of the Evil Eye and from now on [judge] artistry by its craftsmanship, not with the Persian yardstick. And don’t expect me to bring forth a loudly roaring song. The thunder belongs to Zeus, not to me.”(20) For, the very first time I put a writing tablet on my knees, Apollo Lycius said to me: “[Remember, dear] poet, to fatten the victim as much as you can, but, my friend, to keep the Muse slim. And I’m telling you another thing: take the roads that are not open to hackneys, (25) and do not drive your [chariot] in the ruts of others, and not over the broad way, but on [untrodden] paths, even if that means driving along a narrower lane.” [Him I obeyed], for we sing among those who love the shrill sound [of the cicada], but not the braying of asses. (30) Let [another] swell till he grows indistinguishable from the long eared beast; I’d rather be the small one, the winged one, yes, indeed, that I might sing and feed on dew, the food from the air divine and shed old age that weighs upon me, as heavy as the Three Cornered Isle weighs on Enceladus. (35) [But no matter]: for upon who the Muses in childhood looked with no unfriendly gaze, they won’t neglect them when they are grey. […] no longer stirs its wing, then most energetically […]. (40)

Callimachus opens by referring to the Telchines in the third person, which immediately makes clear that they are not the addressees of the prologue, but rather its subject. Educated
contemporaries of Callimachus would have known that the “Telchines” were mythical wizards with associations of malevolence and envy. But modern readers also easily understand without this detailed knowledge that the Telchines are to be understood as Callimachus’ rightful enemies. They are unintelligent creatures (νηίδες, 2) and no friends of the Muses, the goddesses of poetry (2) with whom Callimachus professes to be closely associated (37), or Apollo (22-28). Since the Telchines are disqualified as unperceptive readers of poetry, his readers will want to feel that they are more discerning than these creatures, even if Callimachus does not directly tell them so. The Telchines function as foils.

In the sequel, the readers are again invited, this time in a positive way to identify with Callimachus’ ideal audience: “We sing for those who love the sweet sound of the cicada, but not the loud braying of asses” (29-30). When confronted with this easy dichotomy, no one would care to be among those who prefer the braying of asses to the cicada’s music. In both instances, Callimachus manipulates his readers’ self-esteem in order to assure their sympathy. He maneuvers them into the role of the ideal audience.

Apart from assuring his audience’s sympathy in this way, Callimachus moreover contrasts the alleged opinions of the Telchines with his own poetic practices and with the instructions he has received from the god of poetry, Apollo. As relayed by Callimachus, their charges amount to the following (1 paraphrase): lack of unity, lack of elevated subject matter, and lack of length, resulting in incoherent, whimsical, and short poems.

Callimachus’ defense against this criticism is the following: you are just envious (7/8); I know short poetry that is better than long poetry (examples, 9-16); One should

44 The Telchines are chthonic wizards (Hesych. s.v. Τελχίνες associates their name with θέλαγεῖν, to bewitch), connected with metallurgy, envious of sharing their professional knowledge, and generally linked with envy, spite and the evil eye (Suda s.v. Τελχίνες, Ov. Met. 7.366). They brought up Poseidon on Rhodes (Diod. Sic. 5.55.3), which might be interpreted as providing a connection with Apollonius; except he was not of Rhodian origin, but went to Rhodes late in life. Presumably the epithet “Rhodian” was given after his death, to distinguish him from the later Alexandrian librarian also called Apollonius (“the Eidographer,” cf. P. Oxy. 1241).


46 Schmitz (1999: 163) uses the term “implied reader.”

47 For examples of this tactic, cf. e.g. Pi. N. 4.36-43; P. 1.81-85; P. 2.88-end; O. 2.87-8, cf. Lefkowitz (1981: 120-121).

48 The epithet Lycius is relevant, since according to Serv. Aen. 4.377, it is linked with the god as destroyer of the Telchines. Apollo features as champion of Callimachus’ poetics too in Hymn II, 105-113.

49 For the implication of jealousy in 8: τήρησέν τόπωσεν ἡπαρ ἐπιστήμονον, cf. Pfeiffer (1949: ad loc.), cf. also line 17, where the Telchines are addressed as the hateful children of Βασκανίη (the Evil Eye).
judge poetry by its craftsmanship, not by its length (17-8); don’t expect loud and booming poetry; it is not my job (19-20). By accusing the Telchines of envy, he implies that their criticism is not based on aesthetics but rather on (professional) rivalry: they object to his success, rather than to his style. As Glenn Most has remarked with reference to Pindar’s frequent mention of this emotion, “Envy is the necessary concomitant of great deeds; its presence is a proof of the greatness of outstanding success just as its absence is an indication of mere mediocrity.”

This observation sheds an interesting light on the representation of the Telchines’ judgment; actually, by implication, it reverses it. By claiming that the Telchines are envious of his poetic achievements, Callimachus wishes to make his readers think that he must be really good.

Reinforcing this indirect appeal, he addresses their unfair criticism by demonstrating that long poetry is not necessarily better than short poetry with examples from earlier elegiac poetry (Mimnermus, Philitas). Length (the Persian schoenus) is no criterion for judging poetry; craftsmanship (τέχνη) is. This claim is patently obvious, as it would be ridiculous to consider length a concern of literary criticism, but it also implies that Callimachus’ poetry would fare well in an assessment of craftsmanship. Next, he says he will not “thunder like Zeus” (i.e., produce bombastic poetry), implicitly connecting a bombastic style to the kind of poetry that the Telchines accuse him of not writing.

It is noteworthy that Callimachus does not answer the remaining charges himself. The lack of unity and triviality of the subject matter are apparently harder to counter than the (absurd) claim that a poem should be long in order to be good. So divine authority is introduced. Apollo himself gave Callimachus two pieces of advice when he was young (I paraphrase): “A sacrificial animal should be fat, but the Muse should be slender. Take the roads that are not open to all” (23-28). Both components are metaphorical and, coming from

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50 The possible supplements to lines 9-12 are a veritable can of worms. I favor Cameron’s reading, based on the remarks of Bowie (1986: 13-35): the poets referred to are Philitas and Mimnermus; their short poems appear to be contrasted favorably to their long ones.

51 Most (2003: 139). Considering the frequency with which Callimachus refers to the envy his poetry has roused this is an important statement. E.g. Hymn II, 105-113 and. AP 7.525,4, where the coupling of Φθόνος (Envy) and Μόμος (Blame) implies that any blame of Callimachus’ poetry can only be the result of envy.

52 Cf. Ar. Ran. 814 on Aeschylus’ style; Ar. Ach. 530-1 on that of Pericles’. In itself thunder coming from Zeus is respectable; when it comes from someone trying to imitate him, it becomes hubristic. Callimachus thus implicitly accuses the Telchines of impious expectations.

53 Cf. the criticism of Φθόνος in Hymn II, 105-113, where length is the single criterion too.
Apollo, one might be tempted to say, slightly oracular. This indeterminacy of Apollo’s guidance is purposeful. The opposition between the fat sacrificial animal and the slender Muse refers to the opposition between big and small poems. The adjective qualifying the Muse, λεπτός, moreover, is a keyword in Hellenistic poetic discourse meaning not only “slim, thin” but also “refined, elegant, delicate.” Similarly, πάχυς means “physically thick” as well as “(mentally) thick, obtuse, slow-witted.”

Although the poem did not start out with the idea that small equals refined and big equals unrefined per se, this is where Callimachus has now maneuvered his readers: first purely quantitative terms, they have surreptitiously metamorphosed into qualitative terms or even metaphors, on the authority of the god of poetry, Apollo. In the second half of his reply, Apollo tells Callimachus not to enter the broad roads full of carriages, but to choose small, difficult paths. This debated phrase seems to refer to what might be termed “originality” or the “avant-garde.” Apollo’s precept probably serves to justify Callimachus’ “lack of unity”; “lack of serious subject matter” and “frivolity.” He legitimates brevity by implying that it is equal to elegance and justifies the lack of unity and serious subject matter as “original and out of the ordinary,” “following of the untrodden paths.” A divine sanction thus rests on the poetics that Callimachus claims to embrace.

Now, Callimachus has put forward two points of view regarding poetry: that of the envious demonic Telchines and that of Apollo, god of poets. Even disregarding their views, this opposition does not represent a difficult choice. It is entirely justified that Callimachus should follow the latter (“Him I obeyed”, 29 [τῷ πιθόμην]). He restates his credo for reinforcement: “We wish to sing among an audience that prefers the shrill sound of cicadas to the braying of asses” (29-30); “I would rather be a refined cicada than a puffed up ass, so

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54 The first to remark on this was Reitzenstein (1931: 23-70). For the topic of λεπτότης, see Ch. 5.2.
56 Cf. Apollo’s answer to Φθόνος criticism, Hymn II, 105-113. Here too greatness is linked with filth (the Assyrian river) and shortness with purity (springs of water from which offerings to Demeter can be fetched). Call. AP 9.566 links brevity with victory in dramatic contests. Cf. Asper (1997: 198).
57 The image of the untrodden road as metaphor for refined if underestimated poetry returns in Call. AP 9.565. Asper (1997: 64-72) shows that the metaphor of the road does not derive from one particular poetic text, e.g. Pi. Paean 7b, as has often been claimed, or Hesiod Op. 290-292.
58 He favors disjunctive and allusive narrative (e.g. Acontius and Cydippe, Aetia fr. 67-75 Pf.) chooses humble subjects (e.g. Hecale) and quaint angles (e.g. Molorchus’ invention of the mousetrap, fr. 54-59 Pf.). Harder suggests that “untrodden paths” refer to Callimachus’ novel use of narratological devices in the Aetia (1990: 287-309).
that I might feed upon dew and shed old age” (31-36). Once more, the suggestion of small (cicada) versus big (ass) is connected to inherent positive or negative stylistic qualities, respectively, this time expressed through metaphors of sound.69

Finally, the poet professes that he is old and tired, but that it does not matter as long as he enjoys the sympathy of the Muses (37-8). With a nod to the Telchines, “no friends” of these goddesses (2), the text seems to have come full circle. After this, the fragment breaks off. On the basis of the London Scholium, Pfeiffer suggests that Callimachus went on to praise the Muses and Queen Arsinoe, wife of Ptolemy Philadelphus, here (1949 ad fr. 1.40 ff.).

The arsenal of rhetorical strategies deployed to convince the addressees that Callimachus’ is the only feasible kind of poetry is not mean: it consists of false oppositions, the aesthetics of exclusivity, the argument of authority, and the suggestion that the poet is envied for his excellence by malevolent creatures. Reviewing scholarship of the past, it appears this strategy has worked remarkably well in many cases. Callimachus has often been taken at his word as a lone warrior for the cause of good taste, threatened by insipid criticasters who prefer bombast and antiquated poetic forms.60 Many have admired Callimachus’ brave and lonely stance—and perhaps themselves for admiring him.

This circular admiration is exactly what Bourdieu describes with the term “distinction.” The rhetoric of the Aetia-prologue creates a position of exclusivity not only for the author, but also for all who profess to enjoy his poetry. Distinction is impossible where there is no disagreement of tastes; therefore the Telchines, historical or not, are a welcome and necessary foil. They embody the positive aspect that Glenn Most finds present in otherwise despicable envy, “... the acrid smoke which may well sting our eyes but is nonetheless the irrefutable and hence not entirely unwelcome proof of the existence of the blazing fire of an almost superhuman success.”61

4.6 The Telchines and the Lyde

As has been demonstrated, whether or not the Telchines existed in historical reality is a relatively unimportant issue for assessing the rhetorical strategies of the Aetia-prologue.

61 Most (2003: 139).
What comes across perfectly without this certainty is the (deliberately constructed) image of an exclusive, elitist, and excellent poet who writes for a select readership appreciative of a level of sophistication inaccessible to the masses. Nevertheless, the identification of the Telchines has been attempted since antiquity and like the quarrel of Callimachus and Apollonius, deserves some comments here.

The fragmentary *Scholia Florentina* identify the Telchines as follows:

Διονυσίως δυ[σ]ί, τῷ ελά
[ ] ἵνα κ(αί) τῷ ἱλειον κ(αί) Ασκλη-
[πιάδῃ τῷ Σικε]λίδη κ(αί) Ποσειδίττω τῷ ονο
[ ] ὑφίπτω τῷ ὑτορι κ(αί) Αναρ
[ ] βῶ κ(αί) Πραξιφάνη τῷ Μιτυ-
[ληναῖῳ, τοῖς με]φομ(ένο)ις αὐτοῦ τὸ κάτιο-
[χνον τῶν ποιη]μάτ(ων) κ(αί) ὅτι οὐχὶ μήκος ἡρα...

(PSI 11.1219, fr. 1 Pf.)

[It is aimed at vel sim.] the two Dionysii, the one known as ... and ... the (?)62 one, and Asclepiades also known as Sicelidas, and Posidippus the ..., and the orator ...yrrippus and Ana... [Two fragmentary names] ..., and Praxiphanes of Mytilene, as the ones attacking the futility of his poems, and because [they have vel sim.] no length...63

Because of the presence of Asclepiades and Posidippus, the reception of the elegiac poem *Lyde* of Antimachus (fifth-fourth century BCE) has generally been connected with this issue. These epigrammatists both praised the *Lyde* in their epigrams (AP 9.63; AP 12.168 respectively.), while Callimachus ridicules it with a dig at Asclepiades’ epigram (fr. 398 Pf.).64 This has generally led to the conclusion that all Telchines must have been poets and critics who, like Asclepiades and Posidippus, appreciated the *Lyde* and attacked Callimachus for writing elegiac poetry that did not conform to the example set by Antimachus.65

However, as has most forcibly been argued by Alan Cameron,66 the relationship between the *Scholia Florentina*, Asclepiades’ and Posidippus’ epigrams and Callimachus’

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62 See Pfeiffer on the possible adjective (1949: ad loc.).
63 Apart from Asclepiades, Posidippus and Praxiphanes, it is impossible to identify the individuals named. Apollonius cannot be fitted into any of the lacunae, cf. Pfeiffer (1949: ad loc.), Fraser (1972: I, 747, 749, 750-1; II, 1052, n. 251).
64 See Ch. 2.5.2. The *Lyde* was popular, as the epigrams of Asclepiades and Posidippus attest. The latter also wrote an epigram on a theme drawn from it (SH 703). Lyde also figures in Hermesianax fr. 7.41-6 Powell. Cameron (1995: 485-7) moreover wants to restore Λιδῆ in a corrupt epigram by Hedylus (Ath. 11.45.17-45) and Crates (AP 11.218) implies that Antimachus is better than Choerilus; however, see below on this epigram.
65 Although other conjectures have been made, e.g. by Musti (1999) who (unconvincingly) relates the Telchines to the Homeric Sirens, and thus to Homeric epic.
fragment is unclear. The epigrams and fragment make it seem likely that Callimachus disagreed with Asclepiades and Posidippus about the merits of Antimachus’ poetry. Yet, it is improbable that Callimachus named his opponents in the now lost parts of the Aetia, so the Scholia Florentina presumably arrived at their identification through educated guesswork. This was based on the epigrams, which indeed suggest that Callimachus had a literary disagreement with Asclepiades and Posidippus, and on Callimachus’ now lost polemic treatise entitled Against Praxiphanes, which apparently also discussed the appreciation of the Lyde.67

The fact that the Aetia was an elegiac poem makes it inherently likely that any polemic in its prologue would indeed have concerned elegiac poetry, as the Lyde was.68 So the idea of combining the information from the epigrams with the Aetia prologue is not so far-fetched, especially when Cameron’s ingenious interpretation of Asclepiades AP 9.63 is taken into account. Here Lyde claims: “I am more exalted than any woman descended from Codrus, thanks to Antimachus” (πῶν δ’ ἀπὸ Κόδρου / σεμνοτέρη παρὸν εἰμι δ’ Ἀντίμαχον, 1-2). This likely refers negatively to Callimachus’ character Cydippe (Aetia fr. 75.32 Pf.), who is “a woman descended from (the legendary Athenian King) Codrus,” one of the few known to literature. The implication would be, then, that Asclepiades wrote his epigram (AP 9.63) not only to praise the Lyde but also to disparage the Aetia.69

All considered, it seems probable that there was a contemporary debate on elegiac poetry, centering on the appreciation of Antimachus’ Lyde. It is possible that this debate involved a comparison between the Aetia and the Lyde. Whether it was waged in Callimachus’ Aetia-prologue remains unclear, but, if it were, I hope to have shown that Callimachus probably tried to trump it by presenting his attackers as insipid and envious demons and the poetics they defended as bombastic, vulgar and old-fashioned. In itself, the

67 See Brink (1946: 11-26) on the identity of Praxiphanes and the contents of this treatise, which apparently criticized Plato as a poor judge of poetry for liking Antimachus (fr. 589 Pf.); it also seems to have praised Aratus (fr. 460 Pf.). See further Pfeiffer (1968: 136), Fraser (1972: 1, 749), Lefkowitz (1981: 126), Krevans (1993: 149-161) and Cameron (1995: 301-309).

68 Cf. Krevans (1993: 149-161), Cameron (1995: 263-387). This is also implied by the fact that fr. 1 Pf. names the elegists Mimnermus and Philias as models. The Aetia and the Lyde were probably both long elegiac poems consisting of interwoven shorter tales, written in a learned, bookish style. Antimachus was a scholar and editor of Homeric epic and in this aspect he seems to have been a kind of precursor of the Hellenistic poets, which may explain his popularity in this era. On Antimachus (fragments and testimonia) see Wyss (1936) and Matthews (1996).

choice to address the question in his poetry shows his awareness of the benefits of what Bourdieu would later term “distinction.” Through criticism (even of his own fabrication), his prestige paradoxically flourished.

### 4.7 Criticism of Contemporaries in Callimachus' Iambi

The text of the *Aetia*-prologue, though corrupt at places, allows the modern reader to follow the rhetorical strategies employed by Callimachus to persuade his audience of the validity of his poetic choices; the second *Hymn* (to Apollo) permits the same. This is not the case with the majority of the *Iambi*. Although some appear to engage in polemics on contemporary poetics, it is often difficult to ascertain what Callimachus actually wrote and even more so what he meant to convey. Sometimes the *diegeseis* are of some help, but the danger of reading one’s own preoccupations into the *Iambi* rather than those of Callimachus looms large. Complicating it further, the *Iambi* almost certainly constituted a poetry book assembled by Callimachus himself. This means that the poems were presumably arranged in such a manner as to comment upon and enhance each other’s meanings. It is hard, if not impossible, to reconstruct these interrelations—let alone the meanings they might have conveyed—with confidence from the scraps that survive.

What can, however, be concluded with some degree of certainty from the *diegeseis* in combination with the comparatively intact texts of *Iambi* 2 and 4 is that a (jocular) verdict on some contemporary poets and their idiosyncrasies is being pronounced. *Iambi* 2 relates the fable of how humans received the voices of animals, naming some examples:

> Τάλλα ζώα ὠμοφώνει ἄνθρωποι, μέχρι κατὰ λύσιν γῆς ἐπιστέθησεν ὁ κύκνος πρὸς τοὺς θεοὺς καὶ ἀλῶπης τὸν Δία ἐτόλμησεν μὴ δικαιῶς ἀρχεῖν φάναι. ἐκτοτὲ δὲ εἰς ἄνθρωπος μετήνεγκεν αὐτῶν τὴν φωνήν, καὶ λάλως ἐγένοντο· Ἐδήμος δὲ, φησίν, τὴν κυνὸς ἔσχε, Φίλτων δὲ ὅπως, παρεπικόπτως τούτους. (Dieg. fr. 192.22-31 Pf.)

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70 Cf. Williams (1971: *ad* 105-113).
71 This is for instance the problem with Lelli’s interpretations (2004). He often makes claims that are impossible to verify on the basis of the surviving material, e.g. that *Iambi* 3 and 5 are meta-literary discussions, contrary to what the *diegeseis* state. Of *Iambi* 3 remain only four complete lines (of at least 40), of *Iambi* 5 twelve (of at least 70), cf. Pfeiffer (1949). Kerkhecker (1999) and Acosta-Hughes (2002) provide many useful insights on the *Iambi*, yet raise almost as much questions as they answer.
All the other animals spoke the same language as humans until the swan went on diplomatic mission to ask the gods for the banning of old age and a fox dared to say that Zeus’ rule was unjust. From that day, [Zeus] gave their voices to humans, and they became talkative. And Eudemus, [Callimachus] says, received the voice of a dog, and Philon of a donkey, to mock them.

The text of the *lambus* itself further states that X [unreadable name] received the voice of a parrot (fr. 192.11 Pf.) and the tragedians the voices of the animals in the sea (12). This presumably ridicules the persons involved as incapable poets, though it is not easy to establish the exact shades of the mockery.73 The attribution of the fable to Aesop (fr. 192 Pf. 15-17) and the claim that his outspokenness caused him to receive a hostile reception in Delphi might imply (and self-referentially illustrate) that it is better to avoid taking responsibility for attacking rivals by name.74

In *lambus* 4, an unnamed speaker (according to the *diegesis*, the persona of Callimachus) addresses a certain Simos and, apparently to teach him a lesson, relates how an arrogant and aggressive laurel and a modest olive tree were once discussing who was best. The olive tree is on the point of winning when a bramble tries to intervene, saying “cease before we become objects of fun for our enemies.” It is snubbed by the laurel.


The poet was arguing with one of his rivals; a certain Simos, who happened to pass, chided them, thus implying to be their equal. [Callimachus] calls him a Thracian <...> he is a stealer of boys. And indeed he adds the following fable, how in Tmolos a <laurel and> an olive tree were arguing about who was best (because they stood next to each other) and enumerated their useful qualities. When they continued arguing, an old bramble butted in: “Stop before we become the laughing stock of our enemies.” (For it grew next to them). Looking down on it [...] the laurel says: “You wretch, so you too are one of us now, are you?”

74 Cf. Ar. Rhet. 3.1418b28-33: the assuming of a mask if one wishes to say something unpleasant that may reflect badly on the speaker is typical of iambic poetry, cf. Ch. 2.2.2.
At first glance, the moral of the fable recounted by the speaker to Simos seems to be: “Don’t pretend to be able to judge an argument of your betters.” Considering the diegesis, the subject of the poem may be literary polemic, although Simos is apparently also called a “stealer of boys” (cf. diegesis), which would rather point towards an erotic quarrel. Perhaps the two were even combined, but Arnd Kerkhecker rightly expresses his doubts on the matter:

The diegesis does not specify the nature of the rivalry and it seems natural to accept the stock image of a Callimachus engaged in poetic feuds. And yet, precisely because this assumption is so natural, it could be mere guesswork. The text of the poem is almost complete and there is nothing to suggest a debate of poetic principles. The point of the quarrel is not spelt out. (Kerkhecker, 1999: 112)

It may be more rewarding to consider the structure of the poem and make sense of the rhetorical strategies employed in it. First, it should be asked which character in the fable represents the point of view of the speaker. There is the striking fact that the aggressive laurel tree, which seems to lose the quarrel with the olive tree in the end,75 almost literally echoes the words the speaker uses to snub his interlocutor Simos. The speaker’s ironic question, “So you are one of us then, are you?” (Εἰς—οὐ γὰρ ἡμέων; 1), attacks the presumption of Simos, who counsels against fighting amongst equals. In the laurel’s words to the bramble in 102-103, it returns: “You wretch, so you too are one of us now, are you?” (ὦ κακὴ λώβη, ὡς δὴ μί' ἡμέων καὶ σύ). Does this mean the speaker of the lambus is to be equated with the laurel, the apparent loser of the quarrel? If so, the whole poem would appear to be an intricate form of self-irony on the part of the speaker, “Callimachus,” who recognizes that all his quarrels can only end in self-defeat.76

The bramble seems wiser and more reasonable with its counsel against fighting amongst equals, and thus even resembles Hipponax as he was presented in lambus I (cf. Chapter 2.2.2).77 Is his perhaps rather the point of view that should be attributed to Callimachus the author? Finally, the ploy the olive tree uses to win the duel is to quote a conversation it allegedly overhears between two chattering birds in its leaves. In it, the achievements of the olive are praised and the laurel is disparaged.78 This not only

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75 This seems to be the conclusion of the lambus, but since the text is fragmentary this is not entirely certain.
77 The parallelism of the poem implies that butting in in a quarrel of superiors may also have been Simos’ “fault.”
78 Beginning in line 61 and presumably continuing all through the speech of the olive, i.e., up to 90.
remarkably resembles the iambic practice of expressing personal opinions through a mask in order to avoid reaping the blame for them, which is what Callimachus did in Iambus 1 (by making Hipponax his mouthpiece, cf. Ch. 2.2.2) and in Iambus 2 (by attributing his own insulting remarks about other poets to Aesop). It is also reminiscent of the way Callimachus uses the authority of Apollo in the Aetia-prologue and Hymn II (105-113) to justify his poetic choices.

All in all, what becomes clear about the tactics of (literary?) feuding in the Iambi is that they are part of a teasing game of hide and seek, in which it is hard to pin down the speaker who pronounces the invective. The collection looks more like a self-conscious essay in the intricacies of (iambic) charade and a comment upon rhetorical strategies that Callimachus employs elsewhere than a serious attack on literary opponents.

4.8 Criticism in some Epigrams

The characteristic uniting the remaining examples of blame and criticism found in this period is their focus on the way in which contemporary poets followed the example of a particular poetic model; this is the element singled out for criticism. Clearly it was considered important to be aligned with the right models, or, conversely, to follow these models in the right way. If a Hellenistic poet did not succeed in doing so, he was liable to grave criticism or even ridicule. Yet, as will appear, in many of these instances too, the social backgrounds of criticism and blame play a role under the surface.

An epigram by Theodoridas of Samos criticizes his contemporary Mnasalcas’ choice of models:

Μνασάλκεος τὸ σάμα τῶ Πλαταϊδά
tῶ ’λεγηροτοῖω
ά Μώσα δ’ αὐτῶ τάς Σιμωνίδα πλάθας
ής ἀποσπάραγμα
† καίνα τε καὶ γάν † κάπιλακυθίστρια
† θυραμβοχάνα†
tέθνακε, μη βάλωμεν·εἰ δὲ κε τόν
† τύμπανόν κ’ ἐφύση. (AP 13.21)

A note on the text: καινα τε και γαν was emended by Toup and Jacobs into “κενά τε κλαγγάν,” which is translated here. On line 8, cf. Page (1975): “omnino non intellegitur; desideratur sententia ἀπετυμπανίσθη ἀν.”
This is the tomb of Mnasalces son of Platais, the poet of elegy. His Muse was a chip off the block of Simonides and consisted of emptiness, clatter and dithyrambic hollering. He is dead, let us not throw stones; but if he would be alive... [obscure threat]

Despite the textual and interpretational problems, it is clear that this epigram condemns what was in the eyes of Theodoridas a specific literary fault of Mnasalces. He is ridiculed as an uncritical epigone of Simonides who produced poetry in a bombastic style, full of ridiculous compounds—presumably imitated by the ones in the epigram itself. The main criticism is lack of originality. Similar accusations regarding the composition of unoriginal poetry are not frequently found in Hellenistic literary criticism. In general, imitation was not considered a bad thing, provided it added something to the model or modified it in some unexpected way. However, this was apparently what Mnasalces failed to do, and this is why the author of the epigram thinks of him as (metaphorically?) dead and buried, and threatens him with obscure punishments in the last lines.

The following intriguing epigram of a certain Crates appears to address a similar issue with regard to the poetry and models of Euphorion:

Χοιρίλος Ἀντιμάχου πολὺ λείπεται· ἀλλ’ ἐπὶ πᾶσιν
Χωρίλον Εὐφορίων εἶχε διὰ στόματος
καὶ κατὰ γλῶσσαν ἐποεῖ τὰ ποήματα καὶ τὰ Φιλητᾶ ἀτρεκέως ἤδει· καὶ γὰρ Ὄμηροκός ἤν. (AP 11.218)

Choerilus is no comparison with Antimachus. Yet, Euphorion always had his mouth full of Choerilus and he made tongue-twisting poems and knew all about Philetas. No wonder, since he was a Homerist.

On a first reading, this epigram seem to focus on Euphorion’s (wrong) choice in literary matters, favoring Choerilus over Antimachus as a model, and writing (overly) difficult poetry in the vein of the learned Philitas, presumably full of Homeric hapax legomena. However, as Gow and Page state, “Crates is interested in the names, not the identities of the poets,” so that, as a literary statement, the epigram may not have made much sense in the

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80 Some instances are aimed more generally at the inadvisability of imitating Homer (cf. Ch. 2.5.1). Dioscorides praises Machon because he is not unoriginal, while reverting to the style of classical comedy (AP 7.708).
81 Gow and Page (1965: II, 222): he was either the philosopher Crates of Mallus who was active, like Euphorion, at the Pergamene court of Antiochus, or a contemporary homonymous poet of epigrams, cf. Diog. Laert. 4.23.
82 Gow and Page (1965: II, 222).
eyes of contemporaries. There is a hidden (and rather insipid) meaning to the epigram: all
the authors’ names conceal obscene connotations. Thus the name “Choerilus” is meant to
convey a reference to χοίρος (female genitals, cf. LSJ s.v. II), whereby the first phrase,
especially εἰχέ διὰ στόματος (“he had his mouth full of”), gains a completely different
meaning. The name “Philitas,” when connected in the poem with κατάγλωσσα ποίηματα
(“tongue-twisting poems”), suddenly reveals its etymological link with the verb φυλώ (“to
kiss”). Even venerable Homer is brought into this obscene pun: his name is implied to be a
composite of όμοο (together) and μηρός (thigh).

What is the aim of this irreverence? Did Crates perhaps mean to imply that the false
etymologies, or puns, reveal a deeper truth about these poets, especially Euphorion? Gow
and Page think that the epigram mainly constitutes “an attack on Euphorion’s morals” and is
“damaging to his character.” They are probably correct, since the epigram does not seem to
aim at serious criticism of Euphorion’s poetic style and there is no evidence that Euphorion
wrote “licentiously” (Gow and Page ad AP 11.218,3). As Jerker Blomqvist phrases it, “The
personal involvement of the author manifests itself in the fact that the real motive behind the
attack is obscured by the actual contents.” In other words, as a literary attack it makes no
sense, so there must have been personal reasons involved.

Considering Blomqvist’s remark on the epigram, it is attractive to speculate about
possible professional envy in order to interpret the attack. The poets involved in this
particular example of mud-slinging both appear to have had a connection with the
Pergamene court of King Antiochus, which could boast an important library and scholarly
community. The Suda claims Euphorion was made director of the library by Antiochus, so
perhaps this was a good enough reason for Crates to be envious.

Another epigram that looks like a reverent epitaph for this same Euphorion by his
contemporary Theodoridas of Samos is usually read in a similar vein:

Εὐφορίων, ὥ περισσόν ἐπιστάμενός τι ποῆσαι,

83 Except, apparently, those of Antimachus and Euphorion, cf. Gow and Page (1965: II, ad loc.).
84 Normally meaning “full of recondite words” but here assuming an unexpected relation to the word
for tongue-kissing (cf. LSJ s.v. καταγλώσσα).
85 The verb όμηριζω is used with the same intended equivocation in Ach. Tat. 8.9.
86 Whose name is not punned upon. Etymology and puns on poets’ names are discussed in Ch. 7.
87 Blomqvist (1998: 51). The allegation may be that Euphorion owed his wealth to Nicia, the wife of the
King of Euboea (cf. Suda s.v. Εὐφορίων), who may be the “rich old woman” with whom he is said to
have lived (Plut. Mor. 472D).
Euphorion, who understood how to write brilliant poetry, lies by these Peiraic dams. But you must dedicate to the initiate a pomegranate or an apple or a myrtle. For when he was still alive he also loved these things.

An actual literary feud between Euphorion and Theodoridas seems in fact supported by Clement of Alexandria’s reference to Euphorion’s “Writings aimed at Theodoridas” (πρὸς Θεωδορίδαν ἀντιγραφαί, Strom. 673P). This is what has induced scholars to see another scurrilous attack on Euphorion in the epigram.88 Once more; the play is on the double entendre in apple and myrtle, attested as references to female genitals.89 This is no real epitaph, then, but another attack on Euphorion’s “morals.” The fact that it “buries the author alive” may have been an additional joke.90

### 4.9 Conclusion

This chapter has aimed to show that envy, strife, and the wish for Bourdieuian “distinction” in the field of cultural production may be considered important motives for delivering or pretending to receive criticism and blame among colleagues in Hellenistic poetry. Because of his wish for distinction, Callimachus would not have been content if his intellectual and difficult poetry would have been instantly acceptable to everyone. This induced him to create a poetic persona in the Aetia-prologue that makes him appear like a threatened specimen, an elitist, misunderstood dissenter, fighting for a high aesthetic cause. Although it is not altogether implausible that some did indeed criticize his poetic choices, the fact that he chooses to elaborate upon it in the opening of a poem addressed to the court makes it clear that he at least intended to make the most of this—in all likelihood not very threatening—opposition.

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88 Cf. Gow and Page (1965: II, ad loc.).
89 In all likelihood, the pomegranate also shares a similar connotation, although it is not attested as such, see Gow and Page (1965: II, ad loc.).
90 At the time of writing Euphorion was presumably still alive, cf. the fact that the Suda names Syrian Apamea rather than Peiraeus as his burial site (Gow and Page 1965: II, 545). Gow and Page suggest Πειραϊκοῖς should be connected with πεῖρα, πειράζω, πειράματι, πειράύω in their erotic sense. The same line may also refer to the word σκέλος (leg), since Euphorion apparently had ugly or crippled legs (κακοσκελής, cf. Suda).
Another matter is whether Callimachus quarreled with his pupil Apollonius. This can certainly not be proven on the basis of the evidence usually adduced. What does seem likely is that, if they did quarrel, it would have been due to poetic similarity and possibly professional rivalry, as both were employed in the Museum and presumably supported in their poetical production by the monarch. The perception of this closeness in itself may even have led to the invention of the quarrel by later scholars.

That Callimachus disagreed with Asclepiades and Posidippus about the appreciation of Antimachus’ Lyde seems more likely. Whether this also means that Asclepiades and Posidippus are necessarily to be identified amongst the Telchines attacked in Callimachus’ Aetia-prologue is another question. As my analysis of this text has demonstrated, it is at least clear that the Telchines, whoever they may represent, are welcome foils, introduced to set the poet Callimachus apart and emphasize his (enviable) excellence.

When it comes to criticizing the choice of a contemporary’s poetic models, several reasons may underlie the criticism. One epigram (AP 13.21) authentically attacks the choice of poetic models of a contemporary. The obvious point here is the unacceptable practice of insipidly following the classic models (Mnasalces is accused of being “a chip off the block of Simonides”). Clearly this is not a good thing; indeed, when looking at Hellenistic poetry in general, imitation for the sake of imitation is hardly found. Of course, this does not prove that Theodoridas’ allegation was true to fact.

Crates’ epigram on Euphorion also appears to attack a particular aspect of the poetics of imitation (AP 11.218), the point of criticism being the choice of inferior (and perhaps too artificial and obscure) models. The real significance of the epigram (as supported by its counterpart by Theodoridas, AP 7.406) however reveals itself to be totally different: it is an allegation about Euphorion’s sexual mores for wholly inscrutable and presumably personal reasons. It can be assumed that a personal feud was behind the quarrel; it charades as literary criticism, but involves no such thing.

All in all, it would appear that so-called aesthetic value judgments and the quarrels about them are not always what they seem in Hellenistic poetry. More often than not, unstated reasons for disagreement lurk behind the dismissal of another poet’s poetic or aesthetic choices. Callimachus is the champion of exploiting—real or imagined—criticism; by incriminating his alleged detractors, he emerges triumphantly from the fray in the Muses’
birdcage. The massive scholarship on Callimachus’ quarrels is testimony to the effectiveness of his manipulative strategy.