Poetry as window and mirror: Hellenistic poets on predecessors, contemporaries and themselves
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CHAPTER 5:
BIRDS OF A FEATHER: POETIC PRAISE FOR CONTEMPORARIES

5.1 Introduction

The Alexandrian Museum may have been satirized as a “birdcage” full of squabbling birds, but animosity amongst contemporaries is not the whole story. Persisting in Timon’s bird-metaphor, it might be said that the Hellenistic literary birds of a feather also often did what they are proverbially held to do, that is, “flock together.” In other words, there are several instances of compliments and praise among contemporaries to be found. Surprisingly perhaps, this is unique: in pre-Hellenistic Greek poetry, it is virtually impossible to find explicit praise from a poet for a contemporary.1 Either such poetry expresses or implies a negative evaluation of a contemporary or predecessor or it explicitly praises predecessors.2 This lack of explicit praise may be explained by the fact that the eventual positive evaluation of poets derived from the success they enjoyed, which preserved them for the appreciation of later generations. A need for explication of this success was perhaps not strongly felt; it may have seemed self-evident.3 In addition, it was easier to provide an opinion on the (well-known) poetry of the past. Praise of a contemporary has a different status than praise of a predecessor who has already entered the canon; for instance, it may be riskier (cf. the appreciation of Antimachus in Hellenistic poetry as discussed in Chapter 2). Assmann’s theory of cultural memory (cf. Chapter 1.3) is once more relevant: whereas the value of what is recent and belongs to “living memory” is often subject to discussion, what has receded into the past and become part of the established tradition is less likely to be so.

As stated however, the situation in Hellenistic poetry was different. Examples of praise as well as criticism directed at contemporaries are preserved to an extent that is unequaled in earlier Greek literature. In this chapter, instances of Hellenistic poetic expressions of praise will be analyzed for what they reveal about their writers. Although

1 See the collections of critical statements on poetry in e.g. Lanata (1963), Maehler (1963), Harriot (1969), Gundert (1978), Ford (2002).

2 One example of pre-Hellenistic praise of a contemporary can be found in the epigram by Plato (if he is really the author) on Aristophanes (14 DK/Vita Aristophanis: Αἱ Χάριτες τέμενός τι λαβεῖν ὅπερ οὐχὶ πεσεῖται / ἤγοιν, ψυχὴν ηὗρον Αριστοφάνους. (The Graces, seeking a shrine that would not fall, found the soul of Aristophanes).

they might seem to be no more than natural responses elicited by a satisfying work of art, the act of versifying praise in one’s own poetry proclaims a feeling of allegiance to the praised poetics. Thereby, it throws light on the poetics of the praising voice itself. Praise, like blame, implies the choice of a position in the discourse on poetics and in the field of cultural production (cf. Chapter 4.3).

5.2 Reading the Signs in Aratus’ Phaenomena

Immediately after appearing, Aratus’ Phaenomena, a didactic poem in archaic language dealing with the heavenly bodies, became a great success. Aratus presents his poetic venture as a way of translating the omnipresent signs of Zeus (especially the heavenly bodies) into language comprehensible to humans. Possibly as early as Aratus’ own lifetime, the Phaenomena had already become so popular they were even read in schools. This may come as a surprise, since, as Neil Hopkinson (1988: 138) politely puts it, “many modern readers find the Phaenomena unexciting.”

The raison d’être of the poem was a royal request. King Antigonus Gonatas of Pella in Macedonia had asked Aratus to versify a prose treatise by Eudoxus of Cnidus, an astronomer. This treatise was called either Katoptron (Mirror) or Phaenomena. When Aratus had finished, the monarch reputedly punned: “εὐδοξότερον ποιεῖς τὸν Εὐδοξόν ἐντείνας τὰ παρ’ αὐτῷ κείμενα μέτρῳ.” (You make Eudoxus even more famous, now that you’ve versified his material).

Contemporary expressions of admiration reveal a possible reason for the Phaenomena’s popularity. The three Hellenistic epigrams in praise of it all focus on its elegance or refinement, using forms and compounds of the adjective λεπτός. This is no

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5 The oldest papyrus of the Phaen. (v. 480-494), P. Humb. 121 (first half second cent. BCE), is an anthology for use in the schools, cf. Fantuzzi in DNP (s.v. Aratus).
6 Cf. Vit. Arat. 1.8.5-10. Phaen. 19-757 is based on Eudoxus; the meteorological part (Phaen. 758-1154) is related to a Pseudo-Theophrastean treatise (Περὶ Σημείων, On Wheather Signs).
7 The epigrams are AP 9.507, by Callimachus; AP 9.25 by Leonidas and SH 712 = Vit. Arat. 1.10.4-7 by “King Ptolemy.” On the former two epigrams see below; the latter epigram runs: Πάνθ Ἡγησιάναξ, τε καὶ ΄Ερμιππος ταῦτα καὶ πολλοὶ ταύτα καὶ τα φαινόμενα / ββολιος ἐγκατεθέντο
coincidence, since Aratus himself had apparently called one of his (no longer extant) poetic anthologies Κατὰ λεπτόν (SH 108-9). He moreover alludes to the quality of λεπτότης (refinement) with the acrostic λεπτή in Phaen. 783-787, a passage describing the appearance of the moon.8

\[\lambda \epsilon \pi \tau \iota \mu \varepsilon \nu \kappa \varsigma \alpha \theta \alpha \rho \mu \alpha \tau \rho \sigma \nu \tau \iota \sigma \eta \gamma \varepsilon \] 
Εὐδιώς κ’ εἰη, \[\lambda \epsilon \pi \tau \iota \tau \iota \iota \] 
δὲ καὶ εὐ μᾶλ’ ἐγενύθης

Ψνευματιὴ παχίων δὲ καὶ ἀμβλείῃσι κεραίαις

Τέταρτον ἐκ τριτάτοι φῶς ἀμενηνὸν ἔχουσα

Ηὲ νότου ἀμβλύνυντ’ ἢ ὕδατος ἐγγὺς ἐόντος. (Phaen. 783-787)

If she is slender and clear about the third day, she will bode fair weather; if slender and very red, wind; if the crescent is thickish, with blunted horns, having a feeble fourth-day light after the third day, either it is blurred by a southerly or because rain is in the offing. (transl. Kidd)

This passage constitutes a double proclamation of the ideal of λεπτότης. It spells the word λεπτή in the acrostic and at the same time illustrates exactly what this ideal implied: the subtle and able versification that allowed the double (or triple) incorporation of the word.9

The text with its acrostic shows that Aratus expects the reader to read carefully.

It is generally recognized that the word λεπτός and its cognates are of crucial importance in the critical discourse in Hellenistic poetry, as for instance its prominent position in Callimachus’ prologue to the Aetia (fr. 1 Pf. 11-12 and 24-5) demonstrates.10

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8 This interpretation is not accepted by Jacques (1960: 48-50), who explains the acrostic as a reference to the (accidental) acrostic in the opening lines of II. 24: λευκὴ. However, since Aratus named a collection of his own poetry Κατὰ λεπτόν, it seems hard to believe he was not aware of the meta-poetic significance of the word. Phaen. contains one other certain acrostic (802-806): ΠΑΣΑ, identified by Levitan (1979: 55-68). Hutchinson (1988: 215 n. 4) thinks that still another may have been attempted unsuccessfully at 808-812: ΣΕΜΕΙΉ (the diphthong Ε- opens the fourth line); he reads this as a neuter plural. Bing (1990: 281, n. 1) suggests taking it as fem. sing. and reading all the acrostics together as: ΛΕΙΠΙΤΗ ΠΑΣΑ ΣΕΜΕΙΉ. On acrostics in antiquity in general, see Courtney (1990: 3-13).


10 Cf. Ch. 4.5. Cameron (1995: 23) adds that Phaen. 783-787 contains two other words that frequently return in Callimachean critical or meta-poetic contexts: καθαρή (AP 9.566; Hymn II, 105-113) and παχίων (fr. 398 Pf.; fr. 1 Pf.). Other occurrences of λεπτός in Callimachus are hard to interpret: Hymn
Although it is unclear whether Callimachus or Aratus was first to use the adjective in a meta-poetic sense in Hellenistic poetry, the connection between the two poets is undeniably present. Apart from the question of priority, it is evident that λεπτότης was perceived as a central quality of Aratus’ poem, as the epigrams in its praise illustrate. They deserve a detailed analysis, starting with a complex epigram of Callimachus:

'Ἡσιόδου τὸν ἄεισμα καὶ ὁ τρόπος· οὐ τὸν ἄοιδὸν ἔσχατον, ἀλλὰ' ὁκνέω μή το μελιχρότατον τὸν ἑπέων ὁ Σολεύς ἀπεμάξατο. χαίρετε, λεπται όψιμες, Αρίητου σύντονος ἄγρυπνή. (AP 9.507)

This song and its style are Hesiod’s; not that the man from Soloi [has imitated] the poet entire, although it must be admitted that he has imitated the sweetest part of his verses. All hail, refined discourses, product of Aratus’ intense sleeplessness. Aratus is apparently praised as a ζηλωτής Ἡσιόδου (emulator of Hesiod); the Phaenomena are a Hesiodic song (ἄεισμα) in an improved Hesiodic style (τρόπος). Indeed, the poet is complimented for not imitating Hesiod entire, but only the sweetest part of his poetry. Callimachus’ salutation of the work of Aratus as the product of “intense sleeplessness” appears to point both to long night hours of deep concentration necessary for the production of such a polished and learned poem and to the expectation that an astronomical poem like the Phaenomena would have been written at night in order to observe the stars. Since Aratus...
was no true astronomer but depended on Eudoxus for his astronomical facts, this ambiguity is pointed and humorous.\footnote{Cf. West (1978: 139) on this passage.}

The expression λεπταὶ / ὑήσεις (3/4) reveals that Callimachus has not only noticed the acrostic ΛΕΠΤΗ in Phaen. 783-787, but also identified a surprising pun at the opening of this poem.\footnote{For the meaning of the adjective, \textit{Schol.} 3a: ὅν τε ἄνδρα ἤτοι δὲ ὄντινα τρόπον οἱ ἄνδρες, οἱ ὀμοίως πάντες ἄνδροι καὶ φθαρτοὶ ὄντες, οἱ μὲν ἐκ τούτου εἰσὶν ἄφατοι καὶ ἄνωθεν, οἱ δὲ φατοὶ καὶ ἄνωθεν πανταχοῦ, ὦ χειροτόν οἱ καὶ ἐνδοξοὶ τινες τῶν ἀνθρώπων, ἄλλοι δὲ ὁρθοὶ καὶ ἑυδοῦς ὄνομαζόμενοι καὶ φημιζόμενοι διὰ τὰ ταπεινά. (That is, for what reason men, who are all human and mortal, partly, stemming from him, are of no concern and unnamed, while others are famed and of great repute everywhere, and likewise, some people are named and}

The opening lines of the Phaenomena read: Ἐκ Διὸς ἄρχωμεσθα, τὸν ὀυδέποτε ἄνδρες ἐῶμεν / ἄφατον. (Let us begin from Zeus, whom we mortals never leave unmentioned). At first sight, ἄφατον (unmentioned, unfamed) constitutes an allusion to the opening of Hesiod’s \textit{Opera et Dies} (ὅτι τ’ ἄρρητοι τε, 4), the recognized poetic model of the \textit{Phaenomena}:

Μούσαι Πιερίθεν, ἀοιδῇ κλείον ταῖς

dεύτε Δι’ ἐννέπετε, σφέτερον πατέρ’ ὑμείουσαι.

ὅν τε διὰ βροτοὶ ἄνδρες ὄμως ἄφατοι τε φατοὶ τε,

ὅτι τ’ ἄρρητοι τε Διὸς μεγάλοι ἐκκτί. (Op. 1-4)

Muses of Pieria, singing your lays, come here and tell of Zeus, hymning your father, through whom all men on earth are spoken of or left in silence, famed or unfamed, through the will of mighty Zeus.

However, the word also puns on the name of the author, Aratus, by connecting his own name (Ἀράτος / ἀράτος) to the root ὑή, (to speak) through paronomasia. The adjective ἄρρητος can be read as a “variant” of this name. By punning in this way, Aratus once again, in a more subtle way, alludes to a feature of Hesiod’s \textit{Opera et Dies}. For in this subtext, a similar “etymology” is constructed, namely on the name of Zeus (root Δι-), the god “through whom” (ὅν τε διὰ / Διὸς μεγάλοιο ἐκκτί) everything happens.\footnote{West (1978: 139) on this passage.} The intertextual allusions thus convey both that the \textit{Phaenomena} stem from the \textit{Opera et Dies} and that the poet Aratus—like his subject, the heavenly bodies—is who he is because of Zeus (Op. 4). Calling himself one of the ἄρρητοι, the “unfamed/unmentioned,” Aratus modestly suggests that he declines fame while paradoxically hinting at his own name at the same time.

\footnote{Cameron (1972: 169-170), Hopkinson (1988: 137-8).}
Callimachus, in his praise of the *Phaenomena*, points to Aratus’ pun in two ways. First his epigram uses the uncommon “Ionic” form of the author’s name, Ἀρήτου, which is deliberately saved for the last line.19 Secondly, the epigram also alludes to it by calling the *Phaenomena* “λεπταὶ / ἄστρας”, once more playing on the root ἄστρα. This expression stands out as an odd way of referring to a work of poetry.20 By pointing at these refinements in the *Phaenomena*, Callimachus clarifies what “imitating the sweetest part of Hesiod’s verse” (2-3) amounts to: the opening lines of the *Phaenomena* show a truly refined reworking of Op. 1-4. They refer to Hesiod and his pun on Zeus by punning on the name of the author, Aratus, while paradoxically omitting it. Truly, Hesiod pales in comparison.

Callimachus was not the only one to spot both of these intricacies in the *Phaenomena*; the contemporary epigrammatist Leonidas of Tarentum alludes to them too: 21

Γράμμα τὸν Ἀρήτου Δαήμων, ὡς ποτε λεπτὴ φροντίδι ἡγαίονες ὀστέρας ἐφράσατο, ἀπλανέας τ’ ἀμφίω καὶ ἀλήμονας, οἷοι τ’ ἐναργῆς22 ἀλλόμενος κύκλοις οὐρανός ἐνδέδεται. αἰνείσθω δὲ καμὼν ἔργον μέγα, καὶ Δίως εἶναι δεύτερος, ὅστες ἑθής ἀστέρα φαεινότερα. (AP 9.25)

This is the writing of learned Aratus, who once with subtle intellect showed where to find the primeval stars, the fixed and the moving both, in whose circle the bright revolving heaven is bound. He must be praised as one who has perfected a great work, and let it be said that he comes next after Zeus, he who has made the stars brighter.

Here, the expression λεπτῇ / φροντίδι refers to Aratus’ acrostic ΛΕΙΠΤΗ. The final verses of the epigram (ἀἰνείσθω ... Δίως εἶναι / δεύτερος) once more points to the pun in *Phae. 2*: Aratus is “second to Zeus” figuratively as well as literally. In one sense, Zeus put the stars in

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20 The juxtaposition of the allusions to the acrostic and the pun on Aratus’ name suggests that both may have been read as instances of *sphragis*, i.e., of Aratus’ personal mark on the poem. LSJ s.v. ὁρίς only gives instances of the word as referring to speech or prose. Perhaps the pun (ὁρίς-ἀρηῖον-Ἀρήτου) is moreover echoed by one on Hesiod’s name (Ἡσίοδου-ἀείωμα-ἀοίδου), cf. Bing (1990: 283, n. 3), since this may in antiquity have been etymologized as deriving from ἑνίας ἀοίδης, cf. West (1966 ad Th. 22) and Nagy (1979: 96-7).
22 Beckby’s text reads οἴσιν ἐναργῆς (3), which Gow and Page consider incomprehensible. They suggest following Kaibel’s conjecture, which is printed here.
the heavens as signs for mankind and Aratus made them comprehensible;\textsuperscript{23} in another, Aratus’ name (once more referred to in the Ionic form, 1) comes after that of Zeus in \textit{Phaen.} 2. Leonidas contrives yet another pun in the conclusion of the epigram (6). It centers on the title \textit{Phaenomena}, implying that Aratus has made the stars “brighter” or “more apparent” (φαεινότερα) by writing about them. This could mean both that Aratus’ explanation makes the names and effects of constellations devised by Zeus “more comprehensible” and that the \textit{Phaenomena} of Eudoxus, on which Aratus based his own poetry, have now become “better known” (φαεινός is the Greek equivalent of Latin \textit{clarus}).\textsuperscript{24}

What is the aim of all these allusions? Both Leonidas and Callimachus wish to demonstrate that they are clever readers of a clever poem. They go to some lengths to show that they understand the message conveyed by the \textit{Phaenomena}, namely that “signs” should be noticed.\textsuperscript{25} For indeed, this is the primary theme of the \textit{Phaenomena}: the constellations are set in the heavens by Zeus as signs to be used by humans (especially farmers and seamen) who, if they “read” them correctly, will greatly benefit from their message. On a poetic level, Aratus enacts this message by incorporating subtle signs, such as acrostics and puns designed to be noticed by the reader, in his text. Callimachus and Leonidas, in turn, align their epigrammatic poetry with the poetry of the admired and praised Aratus, the paragon of λεπτότης, by including their own “signs” in the form of references to Aratean puns and acrostics.\textsuperscript{26}

Considering this, it is ironic that Leonidas appears to make a significant blunder in his praise of the \textit{Phaenomena}. Contrary to Leonidas’ claim (3), Aratus expressly says he does

\textsuperscript{23} Cf. especially the programmatic passages in \textit{phaen.} 5-6: Ο δ’ ἥπιος ἀνθρώποις / δεξιὰ σημαίνει. (And in friendly manner he points out to mankind the favourable signs); \textit{Phaen.} 15-16: Ἐμοί γε μὲν ἀστέρας εἰπεῖν / ἢ θέμες εὐχομένῳ. (In answer to my prayer to tell of the stars in so far as I may, guide all my singing).

\textsuperscript{24} Cf. Gow and Page (1965: II, 396), who refer to the pun allegedly contrived by Antigonus: “εὐδεξότερον ποιεῖς τὸν Εὐδοξον.”

\textsuperscript{25} Cf. Bing (1990: 285) quoting \textit{Phaen.} 1101-3: Οὕτω γὰρ μοιχεῖρα καὶ ἀλῆμονες ἀλλοθέν ἄλλοι / ἔσομεν ἀνθρώποι· τα δὲ παῖ ποιεῖν πάντες ἐτοίμοι / σήματ’ ἐπιγνώσαι καὶ ἐς αὐτίκα ποιήσασθαι. (So it is that we suffering restless mortals make a living in different ways; but all are only too ready to recognize signs that are right beside us, and adopt them for the moment, transl. Kidd).

\textsuperscript{26} This may be connected with the fact that both epigrams seem to be conceived as tags appended to the actual scrolls of the \textit{Phaen.} (note the recurrent deictic pronoun τόδε): they propose and enact a mode of interpretation to the reader.
not discuss the planets or “wandering stars” (ἀλήμονας), only the fixed constellations.\(^{27}\) It is tempting to conclude that Leonidas read the *Phaenomena* “at best inattentively.”\(^{28}\) Despite this fact, he evidently was aware of the intricacies of the *Phaenomena* and the reputation it enjoyed in well-informed circles. Perhaps he wished to create the impression that he too belonged to them.\(^{29}\)

We can see that Leonidas and Callimachus both aim to associate themselves with the poetics of a successful contemporary. They attempt this by imitating the praised poetic ideals in the expression of admiration itself. Admirer and admired end by becoming, so to speak, equal; the admired aesthetics informs the expression of admiration itself and becomes a self-advertisement of the poet who praises. Hence, these expressions underscore the praising poet’s own authority to praise.

### 5.3 The Mirror of Immortality

A similar principle may also be observed where immortality is claimed for the works of a contemporary, as the following epigram by Callimachus illustrates:

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\begin{align*}
\text{Εἶπέ τις, Ἡράκλειτε, τεὸν μόρον, εὲ δὲ μὲ δάκρυ} \\
\text{ἡγαγεν· ἐμνήσθην δ', ὡσσάκις ἀμφότεροι} \\
\text{ἡλιον ἐν λέσχῃ κατεδύσαμεν. ἀλλὰ σὺ μὲν ποι,} \\
\text{ζωοῦσιν ἄρηδες, ὧσιν ὁ πάντων} \\
\text{ἄρπακτης Αίδης οὐκ ἐπὶ χεῖρα βαλεῖ.} \quad (\text{AP 7.80})
\end{align*}
\]

Someone told me of your fate, Heraclitus, and made me shed a tear. And I remembered how often the two of us sank the sun with our talk. But you, I suppose, Halicarnassian friend, are four times turned to dust. Yet your nightingales live, on which Hades who takes all, will not lay his hands.

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\(^{27}\) *Aratus Phaen.* 454–461: οὐδ’ ἐτι θαρσαλέος κείνων ἐγὼ· ἄρκιος εἴην / ἀπλανέων τά τε κύκλα τά τ’ αἰθέρι σήματ’ ἐνισπεῖν. (I am not at all confident in dealing with them [i.e., the planets]. I hope I may be adequate in expounding the circles of the fixed stars and their guide-constellations in the sky; transl. Kidd).

\(^{28}\) Gow and Page (1965: II, *ad loc*). Kaibel (1894: 122) thinks Leonidas has not read it at all and took over the praise directly from Callimachus. Cameron (1995: 324) argues for some knowledge of the text on his part.

\(^{29}\) Alternatively, Leonidas may have been subtler than he seems on this interpretation, and actually referred (jokingly?) to the two lines that Aratus does spend on describing *his unwillingness* to write about the planets.
The apostrophe of Callimachus’ friend dramatizes the tension between the living memory and the reality of death. In Callimachus’ perception, it is as if Heraclitus were still there to be addressed.\textsuperscript{30} The epigram elaborates on this motif by telling how the two companions used to “put the sun down” with their conversations. But now the sun has set forever on one of them.

The topic of immortality is addressed in the reference to the undying “nightingales” of Heraclitus.\textsuperscript{31} It has been asked whether these “nightingales” were mere (unwritten) songs or written poems.\textsuperscript{32} Since Callimachus wrote his thoughts on (im) mortality down, it would seem that he thought that putting poetry in writing was a reliable way of protecting it against the hands of Hades (6).\textsuperscript{33} By implication, it is likely that his friend’s poetry was written down as well. The presupposed situation of the epigram may therefore be that, on hearing of his friend’s death, Callimachus took out his copy of Heraclitus’ poetry to prolong their conversation and concluded that Heraclitus had left behind immortal words that still spoke for him. Indeed, even from the vantage point of today, Heraclitus lives on, if not in his own “nightingales;” Callimachus’ epigram still testifies to his immortality and praises the enduring quality of his friend’s poetry. Yet, the epigram also implicitly pronounces on Callimachus’ own immortality.

Another epigram by Callimachus makes a similar point about poetic immortality more emphatically:

\begin{quote}
'Ἡλθε Θεαίτης καθαρήν ὀδόν· εἶ δ' ἐπὶ κωσὸν
tὸν τεὸν ὦχ αὐτή, Βάρκη, κέλευθος ἁγεί,
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{30} The epigram captures, as Walsh (1990: 1-3) notes, a sample of “audible thought.” Hunter (1992: 123) moreover notes that this poem marks a stage in the development of epigram from inscriptions to pure literary form: “Now there is no tombstone and no corpse, merely memory.”

\textsuperscript{31} It is unclear whether this was the title of a collection of poems, cf. Gow and Page (1965: II, 192), following Stadtmüller, or perhaps rather a metaphorical reference to Heraclitus’ poetry in general (cf. AP 9.184 on Alcman; Hesychius too glosses ἄρθρα: ἀσθήνη), but this does not influence the point. Diog. Laert. (9.17) identifies our Heraclitus as ἐλεγείας ποιητής Ἀλκαρνασσεύς εἰς ὅν Καλλίμαχος πεποίηκεν ὀάτως... (A Halicarnassian elegist on whom Callimachus composed the following lines...), cf. Strabo (14.656).

\textsuperscript{32} Russell (1981: 35) and Gutzwiller (1998: 206-207) both argue that the epigram illustrates that Callimachus believed the only survival beyond physical death lies in the written-down word. However Hunter (2007): “There is no way of ascertaining that Heraclitus’ “nightingales” should be understood as written-down poems. They may have been mere “songs,” remembered by his friend Callimachus.” However, one epigram of Heraclitus (AP 7.465) survives, and the qualification Diog. Laert. (ἐλεγείας ποιητής) also points to writing.

\textsuperscript{33} Cf. the topic of the epigrams discussed in Ch. 1.5.2.
Theaetetus went along the pure road. And if that path does not lead to your ivy, Bacchus, well, the heralds will but for a brief moment proclaim the names of others, but his skill Hellas will proclaim forever.

A certain Theaetetus, who apparently competed in a Dionysiac festival, did not win popular acclaim for his poetry. Callimachus turns this fact into a positive qualification. Other poets may enjoy their “fifteen minutes of fame” through the proclamations of heralds; Theaetetus will be esteemed forever by the whole of Hellas. This is a prophecy of immortality gained through poetry and proclaimed in poetry, namely the poetry of Callimachus. He poses as a discerning connoisseur of poets who proceed along the “pure road.” This expression strongly recalls the advice of Apollo to the young Callimachus in the prologue to the Aetia:

πρὸς δὲ σε] καὶ τῷδ’ ἄνωγα, τὰ μὴ πατέουσιν ἄμαξαι
ta steibein, eteiron ixaia mi kaθ’ ομα
difron eljan meθ’ oimoun ana plastin, alla kelleuthous
aprotipojus, ei kai steintotepi elassei. (fr. 1.25-8 Pf.)

“And I’m telling you another thing: take the roads that are not open to hackneys, and do not drive your [chariot] in the ruts of others, and not over the broad way, but on [untrodden] paths, even if that means driving along a narrower lane.”

As the previous chapter argued, such claims of exclusivity were aimed at gaining distinction in the Bourdieusian sense of the word. In praising Theaetetus, then, Callimachus produces, as Alan Cameron puts it, “a mini encomium of another poet that turns out to be a statement of

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34 Theaetetus was not necessarily a dramatic poet, since dithyrambs and other kinds of poetry were also performed at Dionysiac festivals, cf. Cameron (1995: 59, n. 126 citing Fraser 1972: I, 619, 231). Gow and Page (1965: II, ad loc.) assume, pointing to the tense of the opening verb, that Theaetetus has switched from performance poetry to another less public kind. In fact, the AP contains six epigrams ascribed to a certain Theaetetus (cf. Gow and Page 1965: II, 520 ff.). It is not entirely certain that this is the same man.

35 One may further think of AP 12.43: οὔδε κελευθὸν / χαίρω, τίς πολλοὺς ὧδε καὶ ὧδε φέρει. (The path that brings many hither and thither does not please me). The expressions have usually been interpreted as pointing back to Pindar (O. 6.23; I. 5.23: καθαρὴ κελευθος; (Paean 7b 11: τριτύνον καθ’ ἄμαξιτὸν). Asper (1997: 29, n. 34), however, notes that the interpretation of the phrase in Pindar is very problematic, cf. Ch 2.5.1. He interprets the metaphor in AP 9.565 as coming from the field of religious initiation (1997: 53-56): Theaetetus’ poetry stands to vulgar poetry as the mystic initiate of Bacchus (who will be immortal in the next world) to the uninitiated. Callimachus and Theaetetus are represented as initiates in the same mystic ritual.
[his] own views on poetry."36 At the same time, he arrogates the judgment of taste that decides who will be immortal and who will not by declaring that all Hellas will forever praise his work. This praise will therefore last eternally, like the positive judgment on Theaetetus' (i.e., by implication, Callimachean) poetics. Together, they determine the evaluation of Greek poetry: the fates of Theaetetus and Callimachus are firmly bound together by this epigram. Prophesying future fame for another poet on these conditions is equivalent to auguring future acclaim for oneself.

A completely different interpretation, however, would emerge from an—admittedly speculative—reading of this epigram in combination with two further epigrams by Callimachus that also address participation in Dionysiac competitions:

Μικράς τις, Διόνυσε, καλὰ πρήσσοντι ποιήτη
ὅψεσι· ὦ μὲν “Νυκῶ” φησὶ τὸ μακρότατον·
ὡς δὲ σὺ μὴ πνεύσῃς ἐνδέξιος, ἢν τις ἔφηται
“Πῶς ἐβαλες,” φησὶ· “Σκληρὰ τὰ γιγνόμενα.”
τῷ μεμηρίζεσθαί τὰ μὴ ἐνδικα τοῦτο γένοιτο
τοῦπος· ἐμοὶ δ’, ὦναξ, ἢ βραχυσυλλαβήι. (AP 9.566)

The words of a successful poet are but few, Dionysus, “Won,” he says at most. But when someone asks a poet whom you do not favor with inspiration, “What luck?” he answers, “Things are going badly.” May that be the answer of him who has pondered unfairness; but may I, O lord, be ever short-syllabled.

Εὐδαίμων ὅτι τάλλα μανεῖς ὑφαίσθος Ὀρέστας,
Λεύκαρε, τὰν ἀμάν οὐκ ἐμάνη μανίαν
οὐδ’ ἐλαβ’ ἐξέταιαν τῷ Φωκέος ὧς ἐλέγχει
τὸν φίλον ἄλλ’ ἀι χ’ ἐν δράμ’ ἐδίδαξε μόνον,
ἡ τάχα καὶ τὸν ἑταίρον ἀπώλεσε· τοῦτο ποήσας
κήγῳ τοὺς πολλοὺς οὐκέτ’ ἔχω Πιλάδας. (AP 11.362) 37

Orestes of old was lucky that, although he was mad in all other respects, Leucarus, at least that madness of mine did not seize him and he did not apply the ultimate test of friendship to the Phocian [i.e., Pylades]. No, had he but staged one drama, truly, he would have soon lost his friend. By doing this I too have lost all my Pyladeses.

36 Cameron (1995: 60). He moreover argues that σοφίη is another reference to Callimachean poetics (cf. fr. 1 Π. 17-18: αὐθίνοι δὲ τέχνηι / κρίνετε μὴ σχοίνω Περσοίδι τὴν σοφίην: judge by art, not with the Persian yardstick), and of Pindaric descent. This seems to be taking the allusion a bit to far, since σοφίη is a common term in archaic poetry since Solon in connection with poetry and remains so in Hellenistic poetry.

37 I follow the text of Gow and Page, which differs at some points from that of Beckby: ἀμὰν (2, Schneider) instead of μᾶν (P) or λίαν (Beckby); αἱ χ’ ἐν (4) instead of αἱ χήν (Davies); τοὺς πολλοὺς (6) instead of τῶς πολλῶς (Wilamowitz). For the interpretation of the epigram, cf. Davies (1925: 176).
The first epigram seems to presuppose that Callimachus participated in the Dionysiac competitions\(^3\) and that he prays for victory. The phrase “he who has pondered unfairness,” according to Gow and Page (1965: II, ad loc.), might refer to a specific individual rival but, as they admit, the reference of the phrase is unclear. The next epigram might describe the problems clinging to poetic competition between friends: it can easily turn to rivalry and hostility.\(^3\)

Returning to the connection with *AP* 9.565, it is remarkable that Callimachus appears to wish for the glory of winning a competition (*AP* 9.566) but consoles Theaetetus for losing by implying that the verdicts of juries in such competitions are ephemeral and cannot compete with the eternal judgment of Hellenic taste (*AP* 9.565).\(^4\) Supposing that all three could be read as a series, perhaps the third epigram (*AP* 11.362) addresses the problem caused by the contradictory assertions of the other two. It could be argued that Callimachus thus demonstrates what happens in a poetic competition between friends: when his friend Theaetetus loses, he commiserates and deprecates the importance of such victories (*AP* 9.565). When Callimachus himself wins in a similar contest, he is happy (*AP* 9.566); suddenly victory is important, whereas losing is a fate that is wished upon “someone who has pondered unfairness.” The hypocrisy resulting from this crass opposition might well cause one to lose one’s friends (*AP* 11.362). However, as stated, a combined reading of the three poems must remain mere conjecture.

## 5.4 Inviting Comparison

Theocritus’ *Id.* 7 arguably contains a parody on the implicit “claims of allegiance” to a poetic ideal such as we saw at work in the epigrams of Callimachus and Leonidas praising Aratus. In this poem, the young and inexperienced singer Simichidas tries to persuade the goatherd

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\(^3\) That is to say, if like most commentators assume, the speaking *persona* is “Callimachus the poet.” The *Suda* ascribes to Callimachus satyr drama, tragedy and comedy. None of this alleged dramatic output survives.


\(\) The address to Dionysus seems to fortify the link between the two epigrams. *AP* 9.565 and 9.566 are consecutive in the *Anthologia Palatina*; this may, but of course need not, imply that they were consecutive in a Callimachean poetry book. Gutzwiller (1998: 304) argues that the two poems may originally have formed part of a (Meleagrean, i.e., first cent. BCE) section on poetic victory in book 6, but later have been repositioned by the Byzantine scholar Cephalas.
poet Lycidas, whom he clearly expects to be the lesser singer, to join him in a singing competition with the following quasi-modest words:

(...) Λυκίδα φίλε, φαντί τι πάντες ήμεν συμπεραθαν μέγ’ υπείροχον ἐν τε νομεύσιν ἐν τ’ ἀματήρεσσι, τὸ δὴ μάλα θυμόν ἵανει ἀμέτερον· καίτοι καὶ’ ἐμὸν νόον ἱσοφαρίζειν ἐλπισματ. (...) (7.27-31)

Lycidas, all men say that among the herdsmen and the reapers you are by far the best of pipers, and much it warms my heart to hear. And yet, in my thought, I fancy myself your equal.

Some lines later, he continues:

καὶ γὰρ ἐγὼ Μοισάν κατυρσόν στόμα, κῆμε λέγοντι πάντες οἰοδόν ἀριστον· ἐγὼ δὲ τίς οὐ ταχυπειθής οὐ Δᾶν· οὐ γὰρ πῶ κατ’ ἐμὸν νόον ὤτε τὸν ἔσθλον Σικελίδαν νίκημι τὸν ἐκ Σάμω ὤτε Φιλίταν ἀείδων, βάτραχος δὲ ποτ’ ἀκρίδας ὡς τὶς ἐρίσδω. (7.37-41)

For I too am a clear voice of the Muses and all call me the best of singers. But I am slow to credit them, by Jove. For in my own esteem I am as yet no match in song either for the great Sicelidas from Samos or for Philitas but vie with them like a frog against grasshoppers. (transl. Gow adapted)

Apart from the claim that “all praise him as the best poet” (37-8), paradoxically, it is the expression οὐ ... πῶ ... ἐρίσδω (“I am as yet no match”) that best reveals Simichidas’ high opinion of himself. For he hereby invites comparison with two of the most famous singers of an earlier generation of Hellenistic poetry: the epigrammatist Asclepiades of Samos (here called Sicelidas) and Philitas, the former tutor of Ptolemy Philadelphus, a poet greatly admired in elitist poetic circles. Later on, Simichidas will even brag that the fame of his

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41 On the identification of Simichidas and Lycidas, see Ch. 7.4.
42 Especially the qualification of Lycidas as syrinx player (who punctuates his rural song with piping, pointedly contrasted with ἀοιδόν, 38) gives away Simichidas’ real opinion of Lycidas, cf. Hunter (1999: 160), who notes that Simichidas considers Lycidas “a rural nobody.”
45 Philitas was particularly famous for his elegies, in particular Bittis (cf. Call. fr. 1 Pf., Hermesianax, fr. 7 Powell, Posidippus 63 AB).
poetry may well have reached “the throne of Zeus” (93), which is probably a reference to Ptolemy Philadelphus himself.46

It is inherently unlikely that a poet belonging to the courtly and poetic elite would give any importance to a poetic competition with someone he appears to consider a “rural nobody” like Lycidas. Clearly, Simichidas’ boasts are intended to awe this “simple” goatherd; they should not be taken at face value. Moreover, the fact that Simichidas speaks of his own poetic ability (even in a depreciatory sense) in the same breath as that of Philitas and Asclepiades betrays his belief that he will be rightly called their equal sooner rather than later. His faux modesty is a deliberate way of associating himself with their successful poetics. It works on the principle that claims of allegiance implicitly suggest similarity to the praised poet, as demonstrated in section 5.2.

Lycidas’ reply that Simichidas is “a sapling all fashioned for truth by Zeus” (πᾶν ἐπὶ ἀλαθεία πεπλασμένον ἐκ Διὸς ἔρνος, 44) gains ironic weight in this light.47 It addresses the fact that Simichidas, despite (or perhaps because of) his feigned humility, unwittingly reveals his real motives and opinion of himself to Lycidas. In his naivety, he raises the stakes for comparison much too high, somewhat like a just-published novelist saying that the Nobel Prize will probably not come his way this year yet.

The true subtlety of Idyll 7, however, lies in the fact that with hindsight the poem as a whole could be read as a tribute to Lycidas, “the simple goatherd,” and his extraordinarily refined poetry. The poem thus creates an ironic distance between what is explicitly said by Simichidas in praise of Philitas and Asclepiades and the qualities of the mysterious goatherd poet Lycidas that are implicitly communicated by the Idyll as a whole.48 With this fine piece of irony, Theocritus demonstrates that he knows how the workings of praise, specifically claiming allegiance to an admired poetics and comparison to admired poets, operate. A

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46 Cf. Gow (1952: II, *ad loc.*), cf. Hunter (1999: 179). Ptolemy is also likened to Zeus in *ld.* 17.131-4. Another sign of Simichidas’ pretension is his bragging about the wealth and talent of his alleged friends. At 31-4 he emphasizes the riches of his hosts, who have been introduced elaborately earlier on (4-6). Lines 99-102 contain exuberant praise of his friend Aristis, a lyre-player.


48 Although this is hard to prove, Lycidas’ song is generally considered aesthetically much superior to that of Simichidas.
Hellenistic poet who proclaimed what he admired, thereby revealed who he hoped to be, or, as in Simichidas’ case, to become.

5.5 Eliciting Praise

In the context of praise and admiration, some brief remarks are also due on the compliments poets paid to the literary judgment of their patrons or other addressees. By implying that his literary taste is impeccable, a poet implicitly obliges the intended recipient to like his poem. A similar principle underlies the flattering opposition Callimachus creates in his *Aetia*-prologue between the ideal (or implied) readers of his text and his ignorant detractors, the *Telchines.*

Phrases like the following illustrate this intention:

(…) ἐνὶ τοῖς γὰρ ἀείδομεν οἳ λιγὺν έχον τέττιγος, θ' οὐκ ἔφιλησαν ὄνων. (fr. 1.29-30 Pf.)

For we sing for those who love the delicate sound of the cicada, and not the braying of asses.

In this poem, the image of a negative reception of poetry (as exemplified by the Telchines’ complaints) serves as a foil to its desired reception by the addressee (Cf. Chapter 4.5). This principle also informs the structure of Theocritus’ 16th *Idyll* for Hiero II of Syracuse (cf. Chapter 2.3). By ridiculing the point of view of miserly and stingy patrons, Theocritus implies that he expects Hiero to be generous and aristocratic in his approach to poets. Ptolemy Philadelphus, on the other hand, whose generous patronage of the arts apparently inspires more confidence, is not flattered by Theocritus with such indirect means but praised explicitly as a connoisseur and generous patron: 50

οὐδὲ Διωνύσου τις ἄνηρ ἱεροὺς κατ’ ἄγωνας ἵκετ’ ἐπιστάμενος λιγυρὰν ἀναμέλψαι ἀοιδάν, ὥ σὺ δωτίναν ἀντάξιον ύπασσε τέχνας. Μουσάων δ’ ύποφηται ἀείδοντι Πτολεμαίον ἀντ’ εὔεργεσίης. (17.112-115)

And there never comes a man skilled to raise his clear-voiced song to the sacred contest of Dionysus who does not receive the gift his art deserves, and those prophets of the Muses sing of Ptolemy for his benefactions. (transl. Gow, adapted)

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49 Cf. Schmitz (1999: 151-178), see also Ch. 4.5.1.
50 Ptolemy is called φιλόμουσος by Thyonichus in Theoc. *Id.* 14.61.
The passage enacts the ideal of patronage: the principle of *do ut des* through which poetry may thrive and procure *κλέος* for its patrons. It was of course extremely appropriate to flatter this particular king in such a way, since his support of the Alexandrian Museum showed that he wished to present himself as a lover of literature.\(^{51}\) In the encomium, Theocritus characterizes himself as one of the many “prophets of the Muses” who sing Ptolemy’s praises: all singers are envisaged as peacefully hymning the king in unison (17.115); an interesting contrast with the tactic employed in Callimachus’ *Aetia* prologue. It would of course not do to suggest that Theocritus was the only poet interested in hymning the King. As Chapter 8 will illustrate however, he does emphasize the fact that he is a poet who is in possession of exclusive qualities which Ptolemy will need.

A similar consensus of praising voices is also predicted in the prophetic ending of *Id.* 16, where the peaceful future of a bountiful Sicily under the benign reign of Hiero is envisaged:

εἰς μὲν ἐγώ, πολλοὺς δὲ Διῶς φιλέοντι καὶ ἄλλους
θυγατέρες, τοῖς πάσι μέλοι Σικελήν Ἀρέθοισαν
ὑμνεῖν σὺν λαοῖσι καὶ αἰχμητὴν Ἱέρωνα. (16.101-103)

I am but one, and the daughters of Zeus love many another beside; and may they all be fain to sing of Sicilian Arethusa with her warriors and the spearman Hiero. (transl. Gow)

The question whether this is a natural wish in a poet who seems to be desperately seeking a patron in the rest of *Idyll* 16 is beside the point. What is important is the mollifying of the mood of the prospective patron towards this single proposing poet. A little flattery, implying that everyone must want to sing his praises, might accomplish this, or so Theocritus appears to think.\(^{52}\)

The compliments Theocritus pays to his *ξένος* (guest-friend) the Milesian doctor Nicias (*Id.* 11, 13, 28) may also be addressed in this context. Theocritus is very flattering in his appreciation of Nicias’ poetic sensibilities; he praises him extravagantly as exceedingly loved by the nine Muses (ταῖς ἐννέα δὴ πεφιλημένον ἔξοχα Μοίσαις) and a holy shoot of the sweet-voiced Graces (Χαρίτων ἰμεροφῶνον ἱερὸν φύτον). Some epigrams that Nicias composed survive in the *Palatine Anthology*, which shows that Meleager deemed them

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51 Weber reads the expression *Μουσάων ὰ ὑποφήται* as an indirect reference to the *Museum* (1993: 322). However, on this expression, see Ch. 8.

worthy of his *Garland*. Nicias must therefore have been a poet of some repute, even if the epigrams are not of extraordinary quality. But this is beside the point, because in reality, Theocritus is not primarily concerned with asserting that Nicias was an extraordinary poet. In *Idyll* 11, the praise for Nicias’ poetic qualities is mainly part of the humorous explanation of why he will be an expert in judging the wisdom of the Cyclops, who found the perfect remedy for lovesickness in poetry: he is both a doctor and a poet. Perhaps *Idyll* 11’s presupposed situation is that Nicias is unhappily in love and writing love-poetry, like the Cyclops Polyphemus, who was not known foremost for his inspired poetry. If so, the “compliment” amounts to the following: “Nicias, you will be able to appreciate this poem like no other, for, just like *Polyphemus*, you have become a poet now that you’re in love.” The scholiast relates that Nicias replied to this humorous taunt:

\[ \text{ἡν ἀρ'] ἀληθὲς τούτο, Θεόκριτε· οἱ γὰρ Ἐρωτες ποιητὰς πολλοὺς ἐδίδαξαν τοὺς πρὶν ἄμονσους. (fr. 566 SH) \]

That was very true, Theocritus. For the Erotes teach many, who were not musical before, to be poets.

This ties in with the proposed explanation: Nicias seems to admit he has written poetry only because he was unhappily in love. Clearly, Theocritus’ compliments of Nicias have an tongue in cheek or humorous edge and form an ironic parody of the conventional praise usually lavished upon a recipient of poetry. As has been demonstrated, he is not above paying such compliments on his own patrons, Hiero II and Ptolemy Philadelphus and, in the context of his more familiar relationship with Nicias, the principles of the *captatio benevolentiae* were perhaps gently parodied.

### 5.6 Conclusion

The drive underlying the wish to praise contemporaries have turned out to be not so different from that fueling criticism and blame, so often regarded as typical for the

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53 *AP* 6.122; *AP* 6.127; *AP* 6.270; *AP* 7.200; *AP* 9.315; *AP* 9.564; *APL* 188; *APL* 189, most of these are dedications, some with a hint of bucolicism (*AP* 7.200; *AP* 9.564; *APL* 189). As Gow and Page (1965: II, 429) remark: “they are of reasonable competence rather than of distinction (...) unless Nicias’ surviving works are unfair to him, we must allow for the obligations of friendship and courtesy [in Theocritus’ praise of him].”

54 Alternatively, he might be turning the gibe on Theocritus, perhaps. Due to the lack of context, the full implications of the epigram remain ambiguous.
atmosphere among the bickering scribblers in the Birdcage of the Muses. In both cases, it can be defined as a wish for distinction, the creation of a position in the field of cultural production.

A recurrent feature of praise is the wish to be aligned with the distinctive and refined poetics of a successful contemporary (as in the case of Aratus, praised by Callimachus and Leonidas). This is done by subtly incorporating the admired parameters of the praised poetics in the poetry of praise itself. A double connection between the poetics of the two poets at the giving and the receiving ends of the praise is thus forged, explicitly (by the mere expression of praise) and implicitly (by incorporating the admired principles in the expression of praise). By making an object of admiration the subject of poetry, the poet adopts, so to say, the admired poetics of the other poet and moreover implicitly demonstrates his authoritative judgment.

At times, praising a less successful poet may be worthwhile as well, because it displays an exclusivity of judgment and a taste that will only be shared in times to come (as in Callimachus’ epigram on Theaetetus). By proclaiming the immortality of the praised in his poetry, the poet implies that his own poetry will also be immortal, as it will accompany and testify to the immortality of the other.

Striving to attain a certain similarity to the object of praise is clearly the principal factor underlying the praise of contemporary poets, then. In a slightly different form, this principle is also evidenced by an author’s pleas for benevolent judgment on the part of the reader (cf. Theocritus Id. 16, 17). Through praise of the addressee’s poetic sensibilities, the poet hopes to secure a generous reception of the poem. Theocritus was clearly aware that this principle was of fundamental importance to giving praise, claiming allegiance to the poetics of successful contemporaries, and flattering patrons. He parodies these practices in his humorous description of Simichidas, the naive poet comparing himself with the great names of the age (7). Moreover, his extravagant compliments of Nicias’ poetic qualities, deliberately placed in a comic context, also point to ironic awareness of the conventions of the captatio benevolentiae, which he himself practices seriously in Idylls 16 and 17.

All in all, the subject of praise of contemporaries and the awareness of its principles emerge as integral and vital parts of the Hellenistic discourse on poetics in the birdcage of
the Muses. Poets distinguished themselves not only with the divisive weapon of blame but also by forming (occasionally eternal) alliances.