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

Citation for published version (APA):
CHAPTER 6:  
POETIC IDENTITIES: SPHRAGIS-EPIGRAMS VERSUS ROLE-PLAYING

6.1 Introduction

After analyzing the Hellenistic poets’ attitude towards their mythical, historical and contemporary colleagues, the moment has now come to move on to their self-representation as poets. The first part of this chapter (6.1-6.7) focuses on first-person statements that are crafted as self-representations, instances where poets create a characteristic image of themselves.\(^1\) They belong to the category of *spfragis*,\(^2\) the term that indicates signature passages that either explicitly name an author or implicitly identify him or her by a list of characteristics.\(^3\) Although such passages are absent from the Homeric epics,\(^4\) they can be found as early as Hesiod (Th. 21-36), the *Hymn to Apollo* (165-172) and, most famously perhaps, Theognis.\(^5\)

---

1 By “persona,” I mean the (to some extent possibly fictional) personality of the author as projected in his first-person utterances. The recognition of the concept “persona” is relatively recent; in the 19th century, biographical readings of ancient Greek poetry that hardly distinguished between the historical poet and his or her constructed persona were common, cf. de Jong (2002: 387-399). This is similar to ancient biographical practice; cf. Leo (1901), Momigliano (1971), Lefkowitz (1981). Theoretical distinction between persona and *poeta* is not found in ancient literary criticism, cf. Halliwell (1987: 172) on Arist. Po. 1460a5-11, Clay (1998: 9-40). New Historicism provides some useful insights on the creation of personae as well; it advocates a return to the analysis of the connection between an artist’s cultural context and his works, yet recognizes an element of deliberate “self-fashioning” that complicates the relationship between historical author and persona, cf. e.g. Greenblatt (1980), Greenblatt and Gallagher (2000). Greenblatt’s theories have been applied to Pliny (Winsor Leach, 1990), Horace (Mc Neill, 2001) and Cicero (Dugan, 2005).

2 The term is taken from Theogn. 18-22. What kind of *spfragis* he envisaged (e.g. inclusion of his own name, an actual seal to mark the scroll, deposition of the scroll in a temple, insertion of the name of Cyrrus, the fact that his work was written down, not merely orally delivered) is disputed, cf. e.g. Courtney (1990: 8-9), Pratt (1995: 171-184), Gerber (1997: 117-129).

3 Kranz (1967: 27-79) names the following characteristics of *spfragis*: invocation of the gods of poetic inspiration, mention of the γένος (ethnicity and family) and τρόπος (character) of the poet, and (in hymns) the αὐτάρκης ἐγώ-formula indicating the next song the poet will embark upon.

4 This leaves out the Muse-invocations or the representation of the blind bard Demodocus, who was seen in antiquity as a reflection of Homer; they do not belong to the same category as Hesiod’s *spfragis*.

Κύρνε, σοφιζομένωι μὲν ἐμοί σφρηγίς ἐπικείσθω τοῖσδ’ ἐπειν, λήσει δ’ οὕσποτε κλεπτόμενα, ουδὲ τις ἀλλάξει κάκιον τοῦθελοι παρεόντος· ὥδε δὲ πᾶς τις ἔρει· "Θεύγνιδος ἐστιν ἐπὶ τοῦ Μεγαρέως· πάντας δὲ κατ’ ἀνθρώπους ἀνομαστάς." (Theogn. 18-22)

Cyrnus, let a seal be set by me, capable poet as I am, upon these words and they shall never be stolen unnoticed and no one shall put a worse verse where the better one is present. Thus will everyone speak: “these are the words of Theognis of Megara, and he is famous among all people.”

Their raison d’être can be defined as follows:

In a time of mainly oral transmission, a poet who wished to retain the title to his poetry, needed to stamp it with some mark of ownership; the ease with which poems could pass from one collection to another, a hazard to which gnomic poetry in particular was subject, is vividly shown by the well-known overlaps between the texts of Theognis on the one hand and on the other of Solon, Tyrtaeus and Mimnermus. (Courtney, 1990: 7-8)

This kind of sphragis gains importance when a poet is no longer naturally present at the occasion of performance (i.e., when a version of a poem starts to circulate independently of its author). Although the separation of author and work first occurred whenever a song was performed in the absence of its composer, the sense of disconnection inevitably became more evident as the oral-aural transmission of poetry was replaced by writing and reading, a development that found its culmination in the era of the book, as Rudolf Pfeiffer called the Hellenistic era.6

Apart from raising the problem of authorship, the physical separation of author and work entailed the problem of identifying the speaker’s voice. At live performances, external factors inherent to performance (e.g., number of speakers, gender, the presence of persons and objects referred to in the song) allowed the audience to perceive to what degree the speaker and the poetic “I” were identical. In the written and read versions of poetical works, however, this was not always self-evident; a speaking voice might remain unidentified when

---

6 On the importance of literacy to Hellenistic poetry, cf. Bing (1988). Unsurprisingly, this is also the time when acrostics, which allowed authors to incorporate their name indelibly in their works, first appeared. On (signature) acrostics in Greek and Latin poetry, cf. Courtney (1990: 3-13). Examples of acrostics serving as sphragis: Chaeremon, end of fifth century BCE: ΧΑΙΡΗΜ- (fr. 14b Snell); Nicander of Colophon, second cent. BCE: Lobel (1928: 114-115) ΝΙΚΑΝΔΡΟΣ: (Ther. 345-353; Alex. 266-274); the iambic proem to Eudoxus’ (?) astronomical treatise, second cent. BCE: ΕΥΔΟΞΟΥ ΤΕΧΝΗ; the first 23 lines of the proem to the geographical work of a certain Dionysius, son of Calliphon, first cent. BCE: ΔΙΟΝΤΣΙΟΥ ΤΟΤ ΚΑΛΛΙΦΩΝΤΟΣ.
it was removed from external identifiers provided by the original context of a performance.\textsuperscript{7} Perhaps sphragis-like poetic signatures are so common in Hellenistic poetry because they help prevent this uncertainty by allowing the author to broadcast his authorship.

An additional reason may have been the increased interest in the personality of the poet as historical person, which was remarked upon in Chapter 1. For by including sphragis-passages, the author identifies himself through the creation of a persona even when not present at the reception of his work. The contents of these passages show that the work is usually felt to be an expression of the poet’s character and creed. In the case of poetry collections (e.g., of epigrams, the main topic of this chapter), readers would be inclined to take all statements in the first person as expressions of the poet’s persona, such as it was introduced in the sphragis, unless explicitly indicated otherwise (by name or gender specifications).

The second part of this chapter will discuss instances of “role-playing,” i.e., when a poet creates a completely fictional personality, which differs from what we may assume is his own historical personality or poetic persona (6.8). It may seem at first that these subjects have little in common, or even that one is opposed to the other. This is partly true; yet, as I will argue, both find their origin in the fact that (written) poem and poet were no longer automatically coupled at the occasion of performance in the Hellenistic Age. On the one hand, this stimulated poets to identify themselves \textit{vis à vis} their readers in sphragis-passages, on the other, it also offered them the possibility to play hide and seek by manipulating their readers’ expectations. Both of these ways of dealing with identity ultimately derive from the awareness based on their own experience that hundreds of years after their deaths, readers would wonder who the “I” expressing its opinions in the text on the scroll really was (cf. Chapter 1). It could be important to make this clear unequivocally, to communicate with future readers beyond the grave, as most of the sphragis-epigrams would seem to do. But the awareness that their texts, completely detached from their current contexts, would be all that remained for the prospective reader, also offered Hellenistic poets the possibility of playing with this reader, inviting him to guess at the identity of the speaker. In a way, this practice is similar to what Peter Bing has observed in Callimachus’ epigrams, and which he calls

“Ergänzungsspiel:” the reader is invited to participate in the recreation of the presupposed situation the poem describes.

### 6.2 Spṛagis in Epigrams: Succinct Self-portraits

As demonstrated in Chapter 1, the Hellenistic preoccupation with literary tradition occasioned a vogue of literary epitaphs for dead poets. Most of these can be read as (playful) evaluations: in the compass of a few lines, they strive to convey the most essential characteristics of the works and personality of these poets, items that were regarded as reflections of each other. A remarkable echo of this practice is found in the spṛagis poetry that Hellenistic poets also started to write about themselves; these too often took the form of literary epitaphs. They probably felt that they had an excellent opportunity to influence the opinion of later audiences: they could now present themselves by the same tools they employed to evaluate predecessors. Their outlook on the past steered their glance forward to their own eventual fame and thus influenced the way they tried to enter the literary tradition.

Apart from the fiction of being epitaphs, many of the spṛagis epigrams create the impression of being sung at symposia. It was common practice to “joke over a cup of wine” at these occasions (οἴνῳ καίῳ συγγελάσαι, i.e., improvise or perform witty epigrams), as Callimachus phrases it in his own epitaph (AP 7.415). The preeminence of this theme suggests that belonging to the social stratum that frequented symposia was an important part of the projected identity of many third-century poets. There is of course a tension between the ephemeral quality of symposiastic jokes and witticisms and the wish to leave

---

9 Cf. e.g. AP 7.5 (Alc. of Messene on Homer); AP 7.11 (Asclep. on Erinna); AP 7.28 (Anon. on Anacreon); 7.410 (Diosc. on Tellen); AP 7.709 (Alex. Aet. on Alcman).
12 Of the poets discussed here, this applies to Asclepiades, Hedylus, Posidippus, and Callimachus. The symposium is absent from the poetry of Leonidas. Nossis, as a woman, does not refer to it either. For the importance of the symposium in Hellenistic elite culture, see e.g. Cameron (1995: 71-104).
behind a poetic monument for future generations implied by the act of writing them down. This indeed is the essential paradox of the Hellenistic epigram

6.3 Asclepiades, Hedylus, Posidippus: Eros, Bacchus and the Poet

The interaction of erotic and symposiastic themes with the representation of poetic personae is a major theme in the poetry of Asclepiades, Posidippus and Hedylus. In antiquity, the symposiastic epigrams of these poets were already perceived as so closely connected that authorship of some of the poems was uncertain. This led Reitzenstein to his famous thesis of the Σωρός (Heap), a joint collection of epigrams by the three poets, where authorship was not indicated. Although this theory has not found wide acceptance, a close thematic as well as historical connection between the three authors is undeniable.

Epigram AP 5.169 by Asclepiades is generally regarded as the opening of a collection of his erotic-symposiastic poetry. It lacks a signature in the sense of a name but nevertheless qualifies as sphragis, because it expresses the preferences which characterize the

---

13 Asclepiades and Posidippus share six attributions and one is shared by Asclepiades and Hedylus, cf. Gow and Page (1965: I, xxx: II, 117). They assume that these double attributions go back to Meleager (first cent. BCE) because the doubt is not indicated by οἱ δὲ, like in all other attributions, but by ἤ. Mel. AP 4.1.45-46 also closely connects the three.

14 Reitzenstein (1970 [1893]: 101-102). The collection was supposed to have functioned as a kind of “written down symposium” of the three poets, in which one poem capped the other in the way this happened at real symposia. Reitzenstein based this idea on the mention of the Σωρός in the scholia A ad II. 11.101. For a discussion of the problems in Reitzenstein’s thesis cf. e.g. Lloyd-Jones (1963: 96-7), Gow and Page (1965: II, 116), Gutzwiller (1998: 152).

15 Asclepiades and Hedylus are both from Samos; Asclepiades features in an epigram of Hedylus (Ath. 11.473a/VI GP); Asclepiades and Posidippus are both named in an honorary decree at Delphi (Homolle, 1909: III, 3 no. 192). Moreover, the latter two both describe Ptolemaic monuments in Alexandria, which would suggest that they lived there as contemporaries, i.e., around the 270s BCE. Gutzwiller (1998: 182) posits that Hedylus and Posidippus composed their collections to be read against the background of the poems of the older Asclepiades.

16 Or “Sicelidas,” as he is called in Theoc. Id. 7.39 (cf. scholia ad loc.) and by Hedylus (Ath. 11.473a/IV GP) and Meleager (AP 14.1.46). Testimonies suggest that he was born around 320 BCE (Gow and Page, 1965: II, 115), and thus “stands on threshold of the new age in which he was a powerful formative influence.” He is also named by the Scholia Florentina on Call. fr. 1 Pf. as one of the Telchines, together with Posidippus, cf. Ch. 4.6.

The epigram expresses a specific outlook on life: of all of life’s pleasures, mutual erotic love is the greatest. This reads like an announcement of the (poetic) interests of the author. Indeed, the great majority of Asclepiades’ poetry deals with love and its pleasures and pains. Yet, the praised sweetness arising from mutual love is exception rather than rule in the collection. Asclepiades’ poetry on this topic may be “sweet;” the torments he describes hardly are. It is no surprise that the other signature poem, AP 12.50 (considered the closing poem of the posited collection), offers a much more pessimistic outlook on love.

18 A definition of priamel is given by Bundy (1962: I, 5): “The priamel is a focusing or selecting device in which one or more terms serve as foil for the point of particular interest.” See further Race (1982). On the programmatic use of the priamel in Hellenistic epigram, see Guichard (2004: 139-141).

19 The poem stands in the tradition of general priamels, cf. e.g. Arist. Eth. Eud. 1214a6 (purportedly inscribed on the Propylaea of the Letoön at Delos, but also found in Theogn. 255-256); κάλλιστον τὸ δικαιότατον, λάθων δ’ ύγιαίνειν· / πάντων ἡσυχίον δ’ οὐ τις ἔχα τὸ τυχεῖν. (Most beautiful is what is most righteous; best is to be in good health; sweetest of all is to get that which one longs for).

20 Gutzwiller (1998: 123): “The identifying characteristic of this youthful Asclepiades is his entrapment within an endless cycle of love, a cycle of desire and betrayal, symbolized by the dice game of the Erotes, AP 12.46.” Cf. the depiction of Eros in Anacr. PMG 398 and A.R. Arg. 3.

21 The opening word Ἡδυ should also be regarded as a poetic quality sought by Asclepiades, cf. the frequent recurrence of this term in meta-poetic contexts in other Hellenistic poets, e.g. Nossis AP 5.170, Theod. Id. 1.1; 65; 145; 148, Call. Aet. 1.11.

22 Some notes on the text and interpretation: Gow and Page (1965, II: 127) remark that ἄσις (5) may mean the same as ἡμέρα; Guichard (2004: ad loc.) thinks this is not the case. In line 6, the phrase πάλι κοιμιστὰν λύχνον remains hard to understand, whatever reading is chosen. Line 7, despite many conjectures also remains problematic. For a discussion see the commentary of Guichard (2004: ad loc.).
Drink, Asclepiades; why these tears? What is the matter with you? You are not the only one that cruel Cypris has carried captive, and bitter Eros has not whetted his bow and arrows on you alone. Why do you lie in ashes, a living corpse? Let’s drink the unmixed drink of Bacchus; a finger of day is still showing. Should we wait again to see the lantern to put us to bed? (?) We drink since Eros is not present. After a short while, you fool, we will be made to rest the long night.  

Whereas AP 5.169 expresses an ideal and a poetic program, AP 12.50 reflects the harsh reality of Asclepiades’ experiences, which the reader has witnessed in the other poems in the collection (cf. πικρός Ἔρως, bitter Eros, 4). The poem nuances the image of his persona and of his poetic program offered in the first epigram: his view on love is played out between the expectation that it is ηδού (sweet) and the experience that it is often πικρός (bitter). Hence, his poetry comprises the two components of Sappho’s famous phrase “γλυκοπικρός Ἔρως” (Eros, the bittersweet).

As Gow and Page note: “It is not quite plain whether A. is addressing himself or is addressed by comrades at the symposium,” but to my mind the first possibility seems more probable. If so, the epigram nicely illustrates the dichotomy of Asclepiades’ persona (desperate lover and wryly commenting poet in one), which has been singled out as a

---

Perhaps a toast to love is lurking in the garbled syntax of the first half of the line. The idea expressed might be something like “we drink to love anyway; for in a short while, not even bitter love will be here.”

23 The poem owes a great deal to Alc. fr. 346 Voigt: πώνωμεν· τί τὰ λύχνοιν; etc. Guichard (2004: 267) claims that Asclepiades has deliberately reversed some of the phrases. In Alcaeus evening has not arrived, yet, drinking can begin (1). In AP 12.50, day is about to break, night is almost over; it is just as well to finish another drink and wait till daybreak (5, but see previous note). Alcaeus calls for a heady mixture (one measure of water on two of wine, cf. e.g. Ath. 10.430a), to enable the drinkers to “forget troubles” (3). Asclepiades calls for unmixed wine (5), a drink the Greeks thought only fitting for barbarians, in toasts (especially toasts to beloveds, cf. Theoc. Id. 2.150-154 and 14.18), libations to the gods or in medical use (cf. Hippocr. Anaph. vii 56), cf. Page (1955: ad loc.). Alc. frs. 335 and 38a Page also share some of the epigram’s thematic similarities, viz. the carpe diem-motif combined with drinking, cf. also Theogn. 877-8; 973-8.


25 So Knauer (1935: 13), Stella (1949: 56), cf. Guichard (2004: 60; 263); “La invitación a beber es un estílamo de la poesía simposiaca; la novedad de Asclepiades consiste en que se hace la invitación a sí mismo.” None of the other epigrams by Asclepiades present a mimetic fiction in which the author is addressed, whereas the author’s persona speaks on numerous occasions.
characteristic of his poetry. Reason and emotion are split when it comes to the troubles of love; the only solution is to drink deeply and find oblivion.

The epigram lacks any reference to poetic immortality. This topic does however interest Asclepiades elsewhere: it occurs in his epigrams on Erinna (AP 7.11) and Antimachus (AP 9.63). Yet, in the setting of AP 12.50, poetic immortality is the last thing to worry about for the speaker, caught up as he is in his unhappy affair and his cups of unmixed wine. The only thing that he expects will continue after his own death is that the Erotes will go on playing their endless game of dice; the everlasting cycle of love, hope, betrayal, and despair will continue.

Although Asclepiades does not explicitly connect them, it is well known that the themes of drinking and love are often linked to the motif of poetic inspiration or composition. In Hellenistic poetry, the theme of the drunken poet is found, for example, in the following epigram by Hedylus, which may have been a sphragis opening a collection of his poetry.

πίνωμεν· καὶ γὰρ τί νέον, καὶ γὰρ τι παρ’ οἶνον
eὖρομι’ ἀν λεπτὸν καὶ τι μελιχρὸν ἐπος.

ἀλλὰ κάδοις Χίου με κατάβρεξε καὶ λέγε
IENTATION."

Let’s drink, for I would find a new, yes, in my cups, I would find a refined and sweet verse. Come, drench me with gallons of Chian wine, and say, “Play, Hedylus.” I hate to live to no purpose, without being drunk.

26 E.g. Gutzwiller (1998: 139), Guichard (2004: 57-61). However, Gutzwiller does not read the present epigram as an instance of this, but assumes the presence of an interlocutor.
27 Cf. below on Pos. AP 12.98 and AB 100 and Call. AP 12.43 and 12.73. Fantuzzi and Hunter (2004: 448-462), cite many examples of the division between the intellect and the emotions in the man of letters in love.
28 Cf. e.g. AP 12.99, 3-4 (anon.): τηκέσθω Μουσέων ὡς τὸ πάρος πάνος· ἐν πυρὶ γὰρ νοῦς / βέβληται γλυκερές ἁχθὸς ἐχὼν ὀῤήνης. (Let the laborious work of the Muses waste away, for my mind is prey to the flames, with the pain of a sweet sickness). For the opposite idea, viz. that poetry can assuage love’s disease, cf. Call. AP 12.150; Theoc. Id. 11.
29 AP 12.46, 3-4: ... δήλον, Ἐρωτευ, ἀκόμη ἀκόμη ἀκόμη ἀκόμη ἀκόμη. (It’s clear, Erotes, you will continue playing dice, as before).
30 Wine as an inspiration, or rather a condition for the composition of poetry is attested as early as Archilochus: ὡς Διονύσου ἅντακτος καλὸν ἐξάρξαι μέλος / οἶδα διθύραμβον οἴνοι συγκεραυνωθεῖς φρένας... (I know how to begin a beautiful dithyramb song for Lord Dionysus when my mind is blitzed with wine... fr. 120 West). Cf. Call. fr. 544 Pf.: τοῦ [...] μεθυπλήγος φροίμιον Ἀρχιλόχου (the winestruck mind of Archilochus).
The opening word πίνωμεν (let us drink) recalls the sphragis of Asclepiades, but whereas Asclepiades resorts to unmixed wine in desperation, looking for a remedy against his cares, Hedylus drenches himself with wine because it inspires him. Life spent in sobriety, according to this poet, is worthless (4). He feels that his wine-drenched poetry is something new (νέον), sweet (μελιχρόν) and—unexpectedly—refined or polished (λεπτόν). These literary terms are strongly reminiscent of Callimachus’ meta-poetic passages, especially the adjectives λεπτός and μελιχρός. However, unlike Callimachus, who uses them for instance to compliment the poet Aratus on his polished poetry as the “work of sleepless nights” (AP 9.507), Hedylus presents his own epigrams as the irrational and spontaneous fruit of uninhibited drinking, inspired by what he sees around him at the symposium. Perhaps the phrasing, suggestive of a repetitive drunken stutter (καὶ γάρ τι ... καὶ γάρ τι ... καὶ τι), enacts this ideal on a stylistic level. Hedylus sees no contradiction in writing sweet and refined verse and being drunk at the same time, as is confirmed by the last line of another epigram of his, which pays a compliment to a colleague poet, a certain Socles: Ὄστε, φίλος, καὶ γράφε καὶ μέθυε. (So, my friend, you should both write and be drunk). Hedylus’ paradoxical poetic ideal, then, is the spontaneity of the wine-drenched symposium, laid down in polished verse.

Unlike Hedylus, Posidippus does explicitly address the opposition between irrational conditions such as love and drink and the intellectual effort involved in the writing of verse. This results in a number of sphragis-poems that illustrate his view that wine should be enjoyed in moderation, just enough to allow a bit of erotic desire to be kindled. This should in turn be enough to allow the learned poet to write poetry about it and so combat the...

32 For the interpretation of ἐκ κενῶν, cf. Gow and Page (1965: II, ad loc.).
33 On the unexpectedness of this claim, see Crowther (1979: 5).
34 Cf. e.g. Call. AP 9.507, on Arat. Phaen., with Gow and Page (1965: II, ad loc.), cf. Ch. 5.2. According to the El. M. 72.16, a certain Hedylus wrote (a commentary?) on the epigrams of Callimachus. Gow and Page find it hard to believe this is the same man (1965: II, 289), Gutzwiller does accept it (1998: 171). The striking use of literary terms in this epigram provides a reason to consider the possibility seriously.
35 Cf. e.g. AP 5.199; AP 11.486; Ath. 11.473/GP VI; Ath. 8.344/GP VIII; Ath. 4.176/GP IX, and the remarks of Gutzwiller (1998: 181): “While the epigrammatist sometimes takes a critical perspective on those excessively indulging in the symposiastic pleasures of wine, food, and sex, the licentiousness invited by unrestrained drinking is also used figuratively to set out the poetics governing the collection.”
36 Ath. 11.473a/GP VI. This is the way in which most editors print the last line; the MS reading is: Ὄστε φίλει καὶ γράφε καὶ μέθυε. (So, make love, write and drink). At any rate, the idea that writing and drinking can be combined remains unaffected.
disease he has allowed to assail him.\textsuperscript{37} The following epigram possibly opened a collection of Posidippus' symposiastic epigrams:

\begin{quote}
Κεκροπί, ὦ αἰνε, λάγυνε, πολύδροσον ἰκμάδα Βάκχου, ὀαῖνε, δροσίζεσθω συμβολικὴ πρότυπος. στιγάσθω Ζήνων ὁ σοφὸς κύκνος ἄ τε Κλεάνθους μούσα· μέλοι δ' ἐγὼ ὁ γλυκύπικρος Ἐρως. (AP 5.134)
\end{quote}

Sprinkle, Cecropian jug, the dewy moisture of Bacchus, sprinkle it. Let the toast that I contribute be bedewed. Let us be silent about Zeno, the wise swan, and the Muse of Cleanthes, and let bittersweet Eros be our topic.

A toast to Eros, whom the toaster calls “bittersweet,” is proposed. Posidippus is aware that the god of love may be unpleasant, yet, apparently seduced by wine and the sweetness that may also be found in Eros, he wishes to sing of him. By using Sappho's expression, he moreover implies that love is a venerable theme that has inspired great lyric poetry in the past. The topic of Eros is introduced in opposition to the more solemn themes that belonging to the wise swan Zeno and the Muse of Cleanthes, references to two eminent contemporary philosophers and successive heads of the Stoic school in Athens.\textsuperscript{38}

Aslepiades' desperate call for unmixed wine and Hedylus' wish to be drenched with gallons of Chian wine (κατάβρεχε, 3) find a restrained echo in the wish of a slight sprinkling of wine-dew in Posidippus' sphragis (ὡαῖνε, δροσιζέσθω, 1-2). This expression in fact alludes to the idea that cicadas (symbols of poets and song) were traditionally believed to feed on dew: so the symposiastic poet should feed on wine-dew in order to sing.\textsuperscript{39} The cicada as a metaphor for the poet returns in another epigram, where it is subjected to the tortures of love:

\textsuperscript{37} On the recurrent triangle love, drink and the learned poet in Hellenistic poetry, see Fantuzzi and Hunter (2004: 342-343).

\textsuperscript{38} Zeno did presumably not write poetry, but Cleanthes certainly did, e.g. the Hymn to Zeus, fr. 1 Powell. The adjective “Cecropian” presumably means that Athenian wine is drunk, or that the symposium is imagined as taking place in Athens. Despite this fact (in the Hellenistic era, Athens was of course more famous for philosophical schools than for anything else) the topic of this “Attic” symposium is not to be philosophy, but love, a more Platonic subject (cf. Pl. Symp.). Gutzwiller (1998: 159): “Posidippus' point here seems to be that wine is the proper accompaniment for song about Eros, which he prefers to the more serious topics found in the philosophical writings of the stoics.” Of course one of the main teachings of the Stoic philosophers was that to reach peace of mind, one had to disregard passions (love, fear, anger and sadness) as much as possible.

\textsuperscript{39} Cf. Pl. Phaedr. 259c5-259d8: cicadas had originally been human beings who got so caught up in their song they forgot to eat and drink. The Muse decided to change them into the immortal insects freed of bodily desire that live on dew. Call. Aet. fr. 1 Pf. also voices the poet's wish to become a dew-fed cicada.
Τὸν Μοῦσον τέττιγα Πόθος δήσας ἐπ᾽ ἀκάνθαις
cομίζειν ἐθέλει πῦρ ὑπὸ πλευρὰ βαλών·
ἡ δὲ πρὶν ἐν βύβλοις πεπονημένη ἄλλ’ ἀθερίζει
ψυχῆ ἀνιηρῷ δαίμονι μεμφομένη. (AP 12.98)

The meaning of the poem is ambiguous. The text could be read as expressing the claim that the learned man is immune to love (cf. Gow and Page 1965: II, ad loc). An acceptable translation would then be:

Desire, having bound the Muses’ cicada upon a bed of thorns, wants to silence him by kindling a fire under his flanks; but the soul that was previously trained in books, does not care about other things, and scolds the obnoxious god.

To paraphrase: reading has steeled the soul of the learned man (3). He scolds the obnoxious god Pothos (Desire, 4) and does not care about anything but his reading.

Another reading separates the words in line 3 differently: ἄλλα θερίζει (he reaps a different harvest), which results in the interpretation that the soul of the man who previously labored in intellectual endeavors now sees itself forced to “reap a different harvest altogether” (viz. that of love poetry, in which complaints are uttered against “bittersweet love”). Based on the Greek scriptio continua of the manuscripts (ἀλλὰ θερίζει), both divisions are equally possible, and my tentative suggestion is that the ambiguity is intentional. This would mean that the interpretation of the epigram is left to the inclination of the “soul that was trained in books.” If the reader is clever enough, he can see how one could both escape the pains of love and give in to them: through love poetry.

6.4 The Seal or Testament of Posidippus

The so-called “Seal of Posidippus” (SH 705/AB 118) is best treated separately, since it does not appear to share any connection with the epigrammatic collections of Posidippus, Asclepiades and Hedylus as discussed in the previous section. This sphragis-elegy may

---

40 This reading partly depends on taking δὲ as strongly adversative, cf. Denniston (1981 [1954]: 155).
41 One may wonder what kind of literature this refers to: philosophical (e.g. stoic) writings? Or perhaps the idea is that through reading enough love-poetry one becomes immune to love itself?
42 So e.g. Gutzwiller (1998: 160, n. 91). For the (implication of) a metaphor equating harvest with poetry, cf. e.g. Theoc. Id. 7.155-157.
43 For a history of the finding, publication and ascription of the poem, see Lloyd-Jones (1963: 75-77) and the annotation in SH. Posidippus’ authorship had already been suggested by Trypanis (1952: 67-8) on the basis of an inscription at Delphi (dated 263 BCE), and another at Thermos fitting the details of
have headed or closed a collection of poetry by Posidippus that stands apart from his sympoistic epigrams.44

Regarding this poem, Gow and Page have stated that it does “not enhance [Posidippus’] reputation... nor tell us much about him” (1965: II, 482). Although the reader might be inclined to agree on the first point, the second calls for closer scrutiny. In the following I will therefore follow in the footsteps of Lloyd-Jones and undertake a close reading that investigates the poem as a sphragis. The text is corrupt and often highly problematic in many places; I will only touch upon the points that are relevant to my argument.

\[
et
t\text{e }\text{t} \text{i }\text{k} \alpha \text{a} \text{l} \text{ō} \text{n} , \text{ } \text{M} \text{o} \text{u} \text{s} \text{t} \text{a} \text{x} \text{i} \text{a} \text{ } \text{p} \text{o} \text{l} \text{i} \text{ē} \text{t} \text{i} \text{d} \text{e} \text{s} , \text{ } \text{h} \text{i } \text{p} \text{a} \text{r} \text{a} \text{ } \text{F} \text{o} \text{i} \text{b} \text{ð} \text{ou} \\
\chi \text{r} \text{ου} \text{σ} \text{o} \text{l} \text{ύ} \text{ε} \text{w} \text{e} \text{ } \kappa \text{a} \text{t} \text{a} \text{b} \text{a} \text{r} \text{ο} \text{ī} \text{o} \text{ī} \text{s} \text{ } \text{u} \text{ν} \text{a} \text{ί} \text{s} \text{i} \text{ν} \text{e} \text{k} \text{λ} \text{ι} \text{ύ} \text{e} \text{t} \text{e} \\
\text{P} \text{a} \text{r} \text{n} \text{i} \text{ν} \text{s} \text{o} \text{u} \text{ } \text{v} \text{i} \text{φ} \text{ό} \text{e} \text{n} \text{t} \text{o} \text{s} \text{a} \text{n} \text{a} \text{ } \text{p} \text{t} \text{u} \text{χ} [\alpha] [\zeta] \text{ } \text{h} \text{e } \text{p} \text{a} \text{r} \text{e} \text{ } \text{O} \text{l} \text{ύ} \text{m} \text{p} \text{ω} \text{i} \\
\text{Β} \text{ά} \text{k} \text{ε} \text{k} \text{o} \text{i} \text{u} \text{ } \text{t} \text{a} \text{s} \text{ } \text{t} \text{r} \text{o} \text{t} \text{e} \text{t} \text{e} \text{i} \text{s} \text{ } \text{A} \text{r} \text{χ} \text{o} \text{μ} \text{e} \text{n} \text{o} \text{u} \text{i} \text{a} \text{ } \text{θ} \text{υ} \text{μ} \text{ė} \text{λ} [\zeta] , \\
\nu\nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \nu \n
If, Muses of my city, you have with pure ears heard anything beautiful, either from Phoebus of the golden lyre, in the glens of snowy Parnassus, or near Olympus, as you start for Bacchus his triennial ceremonies, now help Posidippus to sing of his hateful old age, writing down the song on the golden columns of your tablets. Leave your Heliconian peaks, and come to the walls of Piplean Thebes, Muses of Castalia. You also loved Posidippus once, Cynthia, god, of Leto the far-shooting son ... a dart ... ... an oracle to the snow-white house of the man from Paros. May you send forth and sound out from your holy shrine such an immortal voice, O Lord, even for me, so that the Macedonians may honor me, both the islanders and the neighbors of all the Asiatic shore. Pellaean is my family. May I find myself unrolling a book standing (all at once?) in the crowded market-place. For the Parian nightingale (grant?) ... a mournful thread, with (empty?) tears streaming down the eyelids, and groaning, while through my own mouth ........... and let no one shed a tear. But for my part, may I travel in old age the mystic path to Rhadamanthys, longed for by my people and all the community, on my feet without a stick, sure of speech among the crowd, and leaving to my children my house and my wealth. (transl. Austin, adapted)45

The poem is addressed to the Muses and Apollo. The poet asks the Muses to help him sing of his “hateful old age.”46 Some lines later, they are invited to help him inscribe his song on golden tablets; this presumably means it is supposed to become immortal47. At the moment

---

45 Some notes on the text and translation: in 5, AB read συναείσατε (help bear the burden). I prefer the perfectly understandable original (συναείσατε), cf. Theoc. Id. 10.24. In 18, I fail to understand the reason for the proposed ἄφνω; the original reads ἄμφω, which is however difficult as well. I prefer to print daggers. In 20, I doubt the reading κεινά “empty.” Regrettably, I was not able to see the original tablet.

46 Cf. the sentiment voiced in Call. fr. 137-8 Pfr.: Μούσαι γὰρ ὅσους ἰδον ὅθματι παῖδας / μὴ λοξῶ, πολλοὺς οὐκ ἀπέθεντο φίλους. (For upon who the Muses in childhood looked with no unfriendly gaze, they won’t neglect them when they are grey).

47 Although it might also contain a reference to the Orphic practice of dedicating golden lamellae to the gods of the underworld, cf. below for the Orphic connection.
of voicing this request the poet seems to be located at (“Pi(m)pleian Thebes,”48 for this is where he asks the Muses to come to. Perhaps this geographical reference means to evoke Orpheus (who was born in the vicinity) as a poetic model for Posidippus. The fact that Posidippus claims (cf. 25) to be initiated in the mystic rites that allow men to pass into the realm of the blessed after death might then furnish an additional link with Orpheus, who is often connected with such rites.49

Besides this indirect reference to Orpheus, there is another poet of the past who plays an important role in the elegy, Archilochus. The god Apollo is asked to grant Posidippus an oracle similar to the one he gave for the “man from Paros,” (τοῦ Παρίου 12, cf. 19 Παρίου ἄηδόνι).50 It seems likely that the oracle referred to is the one Apollo gave to Archilochus’ father, saying his son would be “immortal and renowned in song among men.”51 Posidippus apparently feels his poetry ought to earn him honors similar to those Archilochus received from the god.

It is clear that recognition of his poetic abilities is high on Posidippus’ agenda: he wishes to be honored by all Macedonians and all inhabitants of the Asian shore. The geographic precision of this wish may partly be explained by the fact that Posidippus himself is of Macedonian stock, but it is even more relevant that practically all of the ruling Hellenistic dynasties, in particular the Ptolemaic house, were. The Ptolemies moreover dominated the eastern Mediterranean, that is to say, “the Asian shore.” Posidippus is implying, therefore, that he confidently regards the social and cultural elite of the Greek-

48 “Pi (m)pleian” may also be an epithet of the Muses rather than of Thebes; for the difficulty of deciding on the spelling, see Lloyd-Jones (1963 ad loc.). He sees no way to interpret the adjective. Bing (1988: 38) proposes that Pi(m)pleian Thebes may be understood as referring to a kind of literary reality; it is anywhere Posidippus wishes it to be, if he only describes it on his tablets.

49 Pi(m)pleia is where Orpheus was borne by Calliope according to A.R. Arg. 1.25; it is near Pieria, the traditional haunt of the Muses, cf. Rossi (1996: 63).

50 On the various oracles pertaining to Archilochus, see Gerber (1999, test. 3; 12-18), Clay (2004: 9-25). Lloyd-Jones thinks the oracle referred to is the third cent. BCE oracle of Mnesipes, concerning the re-installing of the cult of Archilochus at Paros and the building of a sanctuary named the Archilochean, cf. SEG 15 (1958), 517. However, there appear to be no ancient references to this oracle. It may have been of very local significance. Moreover, the wish for cultic honors is unparalleled in surviving Hellenistic poetry. However, for the possibility that the older contemporary of Posidippus, Philitas, was given such honors, see Hollis (1996: 56-62).

51 “Ἀθιναίτα ς τοι παῖς καὶ αὐτίμαι, ὁ Τελεσίκλεις, ἐσται ἐν ἀνθρώποις...” (Your son, Telesicles, will be immortal and subject of song among men...). Cf. Gerber (1999: test. 3; 18). The other famous oracle was pronounced to the killer of Archilochus: “You killed the servant of the Muses, depart from the temple,” cf. test. 12-18. In the present context, the former oracle seems more meaningful.
speaking world ruled by the Ptolemites as his primary audience. This recognition on a human scale (instigated by the wished-for Delphic oracle?) should find its material expression in an honorary statue, (cf. lines 17-18, to the effect that Posidippus may “find himself standing in the agora handling a scroll,” to celebrate his poetic achievements).

The following lines, owing to their fragmentary survival, cause serious interpretational problems. A contrast seems to have been created between the tears that are shed for the “Parian nightingale” Archilochus (19-20) and the death of Posidippus, which he apparently hopes will go unlamented (24). Lloyd-Jones conjectures that this difference in lamentation could be explained with reference to the fact that Archilochus died an early death in battle and wrote “bitter” (iambic) poetry, whereas Posidippus lived until old age (25) and wrote poetry of a more pleasant character. This wish thus serves to illustrate the difference between Posidippus and Archilochus’ characters while underlining the fact that, even though very different, Posidippus is as great a poet as Archilochus, although, as we shall see, the fact that Posidippus wishes his death to remain unlamented is certainly also connected to the fact that he is an initiate in some kind of mystic (possibly Orphic) rites.

The poem contains two kinds of wishes pertaining to Posidippus’ death and beyond. As poet, he asks for divinely decreed honors similar to those of Archilochus and for a statue in the agora, divine as well as human recognition for his poetic endeavors. Besides, Posidippus also augured himself immortality of a different kind altogether through his mystic initiation (25), which should ensure a life beyond death among the blessed in the realm of Rhadamanthys for him. As initiate of the mysteries, he asks for a healthy old age

53 See Lloyd-Jones (1963: ad loc.) and Gutzwiller (1998: 152). Cf. the bronze statue of Philitas (Pos. AB 63), and the series of epigrams on the statues of the dead poets by Theocritus, discussed in Ch. 1. The statue of a seated man holding a scroll in the Vatican collection (inv. no. 735) with the inscription ΠΟΣΕΙΔΙΠΠΟΣ is believed by Dickie (1994: 373-383) to portray the epigrammatist; others think it depicts the homonymous contemporary comic poet.
55 Rossi (1996: 64) argues that ὀθωτοπής refers to the moral rightness of Posidippus’ poetry.
56 Cf. AB test. 1, a golden lamella (fourth cent. BCE from Pella) inscribed: ΦΙΛΕΙΦΩΝΗ | ΠΟΣΕΙΔΙΠΠΟΣ | ΜΥΣΤΙΚ | ΕΥΣΕΒΗΣ (To Persephone, from the pious initiate Posidippus). Considering its date, this may refer to the grandfather of the present Posidippus, cf. Dickie (1995: 81-86), (1996: 59-65). Even so, hereditary initiation in the family of Posidippus is possible. For the hereditary nature of proper names, cf. Call. AP 7.525. The initiation is clearly of a religious kind; to read into the expression a
and for an unlamented death that may bring him among the righteous to the realm of Rhadamanthys, longed for by his people. Interestingly, it would seem that these wishes are not so much expressed for the benefit of future readers, but rather aimed at impressing his contemporaries.

Returning to the verdict of Gow and Page, I think that this elegy does in fact tell much about Posidippus, his aspirations, and the way he saw himself. He confidently presented himself to his contemporary readers as a successful poet beloved by the Macedonians. Helpfully, he reminds them that he should be immortalized in statuary, since in his own esteem he deserves universal fame on an equal footing with Archilochus. He moreover claims to be immortal both because of his poetry and his initiation into the mystic rites of Rhadamanthys. It is hard to find another sphragis as self-satisfied in tone.

6.5 Leonidas: Dignified Poverty

Very different from Posidippus’ smug self-congratulations are Leonidas’ sphragis-epigrams. Next to his great output of poems on humble lower-class people and their toils, this epigrammatist also wrote (epitaph-) epigrams on Anacreon (2), Homer, Hipponax, Tellen, Alcman and his contemporary Aratus, as we saw in Chapter 1 and 5. He was clearly aware, then, of the lasting reputation poetry could procure its author. This awareness also finds expression in the epitaph he wrote for himself.

Πολλόν ἀπ’ Ιταλίης κείμαι χθονός ἐκ τε Τάραντος πάτρης· τούτο δὲ μοι πικρότερον θανάτου κηρύσσει Μουσέων πάντας ἐπ’ Ἀνακρέονος. Πολλὸν ἀπ’ Ἀράκνονν ἀβίος ἀλλὰ μὲ Μοῦσαι ἐπιτεθεῖκαν, λυγρῶν δ’ ἀντὶ μελιχρῶν ἐχω. οὐνομα δ’ οὐκ ἠμυσὶ Λεωνίδου· αὐτά με δῶρα κηρύσσει Μουσέων πάντας ἐπ’ ἥλιους. (AP 7.715)

I lie, far from the earth of Italy, and outside Tarentum, my fatherland; this fact is bitterer than death to me. Such a life of wandering is no life—still, the Muses loved


57 Perhaps this is an allusion to Archil. fr. 133 West: οὕτως αἰδοῖς μετ’ ἀστών οὐδὲ περίφημος θανῶν / γίνεται· χάριν δὲ μᾶλλον τοῦ ζωοῦ διόκομεν <ὁ> ζωο, κάκιστα δ’ αἰεὶ τοῖς θανόντι γίνεται. (For no-one is respected or famous among his citizens after his death; we rather pursue the favour of the living while we live; the dead are always treated in the worst way).

58 Gow and Page express doubts in attributing this epigram to Leonidas of Tarentum (1965: II, 391), but it seems a reasonably safe bet to do so.
me, and I have sweetness in return for suffering. The name of Leonidas has not perished: those selfsame gifts of the Muses proclaim me for all time.

Leonidas’ epigram takes the form of words spoken by him from the grave. The absence from his fatherland (emphatically in enjambment), a result of his unhappy wandering life, is worse to him than death. Yet, both death and its concomitant oblivion and the distance from his fatherland are remedied to some extent by the sweetness (once more, as in Callimachus’ and Hedylus’ poetry the adjective μελίχρον is used) of his poetry (5). It is attractive to connect the expression in 3-4 with Od. 8.63-4, the description of Demodocus:

τὸν περὶ Μοῦς ἐφίλησε, δίδου δ’ ἀγαθὸν τε κακὸν τε·
όφθαλμῶν μὲν ἄμεσε, δίδου δ’ ἱδείαν ἀοιδήν. (Od. 8.63-4)

For him the Muse loved exceedingly, and she gave him good and evil; she robbed him of his eyes, but gave him sweet song.

Likewise the bitterness that accrues to Leonidas’ life of wandering poet is sweetened by his talent. The implication may even be that his suffering somehow guarantees his talent, as in Demodocus’ case. Leonidas moreover appears to hope that his roaming existence on earth will be echoed by the roaming fame of his poems after his death; poetry making sweet in death at last what was bitter in life (4). This poem itself, which found dispersion in book form rather than being inscribed upon Leonidas’ tomb, is a pre-emptive fulfillment of his wishes.

As noted, the difference in tone with Posidippus’ sphragis is striking. The melancholy, querulous tenor of the epigram, lamenting the bitterness of life on this earth, is typical of the surviving poetry of Leonidas, who often wrote about wandering, hardship, and death, especially of the poor, a social stratum to which he apparently felt affiliated. In particular, the epigram discussed seems connected with two other epigrams that contain the name Leonidas and describe his poverty.

Λαθρίη, ἐκ πλάνιος ταύτην χάριν ἐκ τε πενέστεω
κῆς ὅλγησιτύιον δέξο Λεωνίδεω,

59 On the hardships of wandering, cf. Leon. AP 7.736, which is often related to the present epigram. It is unclear whether Leonidas was exiled or driven to a wandering life by his poverty, cf. AP 6.300 and 6.302.
61 Cf. e.g. AP 7.726, AP 7.731, AP 7.736, AP 7.740, AP 7.472, AP 7.655. Gutzwiller (1998: 91) regards the epigrams as “heavily influenced by Cynic tenets.”
Lathria, accept this gift from a wanderer, a peasant, from Leonidas who has few resources. Take some rich cakes, olive oil saved for the purpose, this fresh fig just cut from the branch, five grapes pulled from a tasty bunch, mistress, and this libation poured from the bottom of the jar. And as you saved me from disease, so if you save me from hateful poverty, you’ll have a goat as sacrifice. (transl. Gutzwiller)

Flee from my hut, furtive rodents; Leonidas’ poor canister cannot support mice. The old man can survive on salt and a couple of crumbs; from my fathers I learned to like this style of living. So why do you burrow into this hovel, nibblers, since you won’t find a taste of any leftovers? Go run to some other house—my resources are few—where you’ll get better rations. (transl. Gutzwiller)

That the first epigram (AP 6.300) is a votive offering asking for (public) success of this collection of poetry seems suggested by Leonidas’ humble wish that the (enigmatic) goddess Lathria will save him from poverty. The simplicity of rustic offerings to the goddess could be read as symbolic of Leonidas’ epigrams, representatives of a small and unassuming genre in which he focuses on the humble existence of common people. They are choice and flavorsome items, albeit not sumptuous and rich; the complex and polished compounds rhetorically heighten their value.

In AP 6.302, Leonidas even claims he is so poor he cannot support the mice invading his hovel. All the same, he seems proud of his simple way of life (3-4). The exhortation to the

---

62 Gutzwiller understands her to be Aphrodite, comparing epigrams by Gaetulicus (AP 6.190), and Cornelius Longus (AP 6.191). Cazzaniga (1967: 63-74) thinks the epithet refers to Artemis. If Gutzwiller is correct, the disease referred to in 7 may be love.

mice to find a place “where they’ll find better rations” may be a disguised message to critics: Leonidas’ poetry is so unassuming it should escape being attacked by them. 64 Mice, crumbs and a wandering life of hardship: Leonidas is clearly worlds apart from his pompous and successful contemporary Posidippus.

6.6 Nossis: Positioning a Woman’s Poetic Perspective

A rare instance of *sphragis* epigrams by a female poet is provided by Nossis. Her elusive identity and her almost exclusive interest in women have led to divergent theories about her life, poetry, and conditions. 65 Eight of her eleven surviving poems describe dedications, 66 seven of them by women, the majority probably to Aphrodite. 67 Basing themselves on this fact, some have posited that Nossis either was a hetaera (courtesan), 68 or, on the contrary, a lady of aristocratic Locrian descent. 69 Current scholarship rather reads Nossis’ choice of poetic themes, especially her interest in women, as an expression of female homosexuality that was most famously exemplified in antiquity by Sappho, and thence as a sign of poetical affiliation to this poetess. 70 Indeed, Nossis frequently refers both explicitly and implicitly to her.

A well-known problem is formed by the fact that Nossis is explicitly associated with erotic poetry both by others (Meleager and Herondas) and by herself (*AP 5.170*), 71 whereas

---

64 Hopkinson (1988: *ad loc.*) notes that mice also appear in the hut of Molorchus (Call. fr. 59 Pf.). Callimachus’ Hecale too lives in a rustic hut. Perhaps on a meta-poetic level the humble, poor life stands for λεπτότης.

65 *Her floruit* probably falls in the 280s or 270s BCE. She names Epizephyrian Locri in Southern Italy (Magn Graecia) as her home. Her dates can be determined by taking into account her epitaph of Rhinthon of Syracuse (*AP 7.414*), whom the *Suda* dates in the reign of Ptolemy Soter (who died in 283-2) and the reference to a Nossis in the poetry of Herondas (who belongs to the second quarter of the third century).

66 There is one other epigram, which the ancient copyist already doubts, viz. *AP 6.273*.


68 Reitzenstein (1893: 142).

69 Polybius states that the hereditary aristocracy of Locri went by matrilineal descent (12.5.6). The fact that Nossis concentrates mainly on women, combined with her emphasis on matrilineal descent (*AP 6.252; 6.253; 6.265*) fits with this statement. In addition, “Nossis” may have been an aristocratic name, cf. Cazzaniga (1972: 173-6).

70 Skinner (1989: 5-18), Gutzwiller (1998: 74-84). Gow and Page (1965: II, 434) moreover think Nossis may have composed lyric poetry as well, like Sappho. This is suggested by the epithet μελοποιός (*AP*).

71 Nossis states that nothing is sweeter than love (*AP 5.170*) and compliments a hetaera (*AP 9.332*). Meleager described Nossis’ poetry as follows: μυρόπνουν ευάνθεμοι ίς / Νόσσιδος, ἢς δέλτοις.
most of her extant epigrams are not explicitly concerned with love or sexuality. This suggests they are not entirely representative of the corpus as it was known in antiquity. In other words, Nossis’ poetry may originally have even been more like Sappho’s.

Like her male colleagues, Nossis is clearly aware of literary tradition and the roles that originality, emulation of literary models and fame play in it, as her references to earlier poets and anticipation of becoming a precursor herself demonstrate. The following epigram, which looks simple and self-contained, holds numerous intertextual allusions that carefully position Nossis’ poetry in the Greek poetic tradition. It is usually considered the sphragis of a collection:

\[ \text{άδιων οιδέν ἐρωτὸς; ἀ β’ ὀλβια δεύτερα πάντα ἐστίν; ἀπὸ στόματος δ’ ἑπτυσα καὶ τὸ μέλι.} \\
\text{τοῦτο λέγει Νοσσίς; τίνα δ’ ἀ Κύπρις οὐκ ἐφίλησεν, οὐκ οἴδεν ἡκίμα τ’ ἀ, ἀνθεα ποία ὀδα.} (AP 5.170)\]

Nothing is sweeter than love; all blessings are inferior to it. I even spat honey from my mouth. This is what Nossis says; and whom the Cyprian has not kissed, she does not know what sort of flowers roses are.

The first phrase, ‘άδιων οιδέν ἐρωτὸς, may be read as a reference to the sphragis of Nossis’ elder contemporary Asclepiades (AP 5.169, discussed above), presumably the first poet to

---

κηνον ἐτηξεν Ἑρως. (The myrrh-breathing blossoming iris of Nossis, on whose tablets Eros himself melted the wax, AP 4.1.9-10). Herond. Min. 6.20-36 and 7.57-8, name a Nossis (the poetess?) and an Erinna (the other poetess?) as women interested in a βαυβων (dildo). Perhaps this is to ridicule their (alleged or self-professed) homosexuality?

72 The exception is AP 9.332,4 where there is a reference to a hetaera, who is praised for making a golden dedication to Aphrodite, paid for by the money she has earned with her body. See also below on AP 5.170, 4.

73 Gutzwiller (1998: 80) states that this perceived contradiction (i.e., ancient references to Nossis’ erotic poetry, while her epigrams are not particularly erotic in tone) is based on the modern “misunderstanding of female eroticism… [which in Nossis’ case arises] merely from the casting of her gaze upon women as they go about the business of their private lives.” But see my remarks below on AP 5.170, 4.

74 In an epitaph on the poet of tragic burlesques Rhinton of Syracuse (AP 7.414), Nossis also addresses the question of fame for a poetic achievement. Gutzwiller (1998: 85) suggests: “The Rhinton epitaph may have served to suggest that Nossis’ own poetry, though slight, was nonetheless innovative and worthy of praise [emphasis added].”


76 A note on the text and translation: in the last line, the original reading κηνατ is hard to understand. Stadtmüller reads τινας (fem. sing. gen.) referring to either Aphrodite (“she does not know what kind of flowers Aphrodite’s roses are”) or to Nossis (“she does not know what kind of flowers Nossis’ roses are”). It is probably best to suppose that κηνα equals ἐκεῖνη and refers back to τίνα δ’ ἀ Κύπρις οὐκ ἐφίλησεν, in which case the solution κηνα γ’ (Reitzenstein) gives the best sense: “she does not know what sort of flowers roses are.”

184
compose collections of erotic epigrams. Asclepiades’ epigram names several pleasant things, only to emphasize a greater pleasure: love. Nossis reduces his priamel to a short and apodictic claim “nothing is sweeter than love,” contrasting the sweetness of love with all that may metaphorically be considered sweet (ἄλβω, with a clear undertone of material possessions, cf. LSJ s.v. I, Od.17.420), and with something literally sweet, honey (2). By agreeing with Asclepiades, she represents herself as adhering to his poetics. The fact however that her assertion is made so confidently in her own name (3) also conjures up echoes of the famous priamel in Sappho fr. 16. Sappho contrasts the opinions of οἱ μὲν ... οἱ δὲ ... (some ... others) about what is beautiful (armies, fleet) with her own creed (emphatically ἔγω δὲ, but I) that the most beautiful thing on this earth is “that which one desires” (fr. 16.1-4 Voigt).

Another reference to Sappho may be discerned in the last phrase οὐκ οἶδεν † κήνα τ’ †, ἀνθεα ποία ὄδα. In the first place, these words would seem to signify that whoever has not tasted love knows not its delights; nor its pains, for of course, roses have thorns. Yet, this complex metaphor would also appear to allude to the following Sapphic fragment:

καθάνοισα δὲ κείση τοια μεμοσύνα σέθεν ἐσσετ’ ουδὲ ῥοκ’ † ὑστερόν· οὐ γάρ πεδέχηις βρόδων τῶν ἐκ Πιερίας· ἀλλ’ ἀφάνης κἀν Ἀίδα δόμωι φοιτάσης πεδ’ ἀμαύρων νεκύων ἐκπεποταμένα. (fr. 55 Voigt)

And you will lie dead, and there will be never be any remembrance of you in times to come, for you do not partake of the roses from Pieria; no, in the house of Hades too will you flit around unseen, amidst the shadows of the dead.

The fate of being completely erased from human memory is here prophesied to a woman who does not “partake of the roses from Pieria” (i.e., who has no connection with the Pierian Muses and their arts). Remembrance lives on exclusively in song; song provides subject and singer with immortality. So when Nossis says, “whom the Cyprian has not kissed, she does

78 The copyist of the AP already understood epigram 5.170 to contain an allusion to Asclepiades (5.169), as witness the fact that he juxtaposed the two poems.
not know what sort of flowers roses are,” she is reacting to Sappho’s statement. She claims that one has to taste of love in order to recognize “roses,” that is, to be able to partake actively or passively of the Muses’ gift of erotic poetry. This interpretation is confirmed by the fact that Meleager in his long opening poem to the Garland metaphorically calls Sappho’s poetry “roses”: καὶ Σαπφοῦς βαῖνα μέν, ἀλλὰ όδα. (And what little there is of Sappho, but all of it roses, AP 4.1, 6). Lastly, it could be argued that the phrase contains a double entendre, since όδα could also metaphorically indicate the female pudenda (LSJ s.v. III, Pherecr. 108.29). If this should indeed be understood as the underlying pun, it sheds a somewhat different light on the idea that Nossis does not refer to female homosexuality in her poetry at all.81

Nossis’ statement that she has “spat honey from her mouth” has a meta-poetic ring to it, considering the importance of metaphors of honey and bees referring to poetry and poets in Greek literature. Surprisingly, the phrase implies a somewhat negative attitude towards “honey.” Nossis seems to claim that love itself is more important than the poetry concerning it. It has attractively been suggested that Nossis rejects at least the poetry of a certain kind (of poet). The phrase may in fact refer to the honey-voiced poets of Hesiod Th. 96: ὰ δ’ ὀλβιος, ὄντινα Μοῦσαι / φιλωνται· γλυκερή οἱ ἀπὸ στόματος ῥέει αὐδή. (Blest is he whom the Muses love; sweetly the voice streams from his mouth). Hence, it would allude to the widespread popularity that Hesiod enjoyed as a model among such influential avant-garde poets as Callimachus and Aratus. Nossis may be implying here that she does not position herself in the tradition of such learned or ironic “poets’ poets”. Her poetry, by contrast, is straight from the heart; Sappho is her model, not Hesiod.85

80 It would seem she addresses women exclusively, if κήνα is read in 4.
81 The double entendre seems also hinted at e.g. in AP 5.81: Ἡ τὰ όδα, όδοδεσσαν ἐχεις χάριν. ἀλλὰ τί πωλεῖς; / σαυτὴν ἢ τὰ όδα ἢ ἡ συναμφότερα; (You, rose-girl, you’ve got a rosy charm, but what are you selling? Yourself, or the roses, or both?).
85 Gutzwiller (1998: 76-77) moreover suggests that Nossis refers to the poetry of Erinna, distancing herself from it (Erinna, the maiden-poet, who died before marriage; Nossis the woman who has tasted love). This depends on references to Erinna in contemporary and later epigrams (7.13.1; AP 2.110; AP 7.121.1; AP 9.190) that call Erinna a bee-like poet (a bee calls to mind honey, which Nossis, as she phrases it, spits from her mouth). These references in the epigrams, Gutzwiller suggests, may have
Distinct allusions to Sappho are also found in another *sphragis*-epigram, one that is usually considered the closing poem of a collection. This repeated reference to Sappho may in fact be an additional argument that both epigrams belong to the same collection.

\[\Omega \ ξεῖν’, \ εἰ \ τὸ \ γε \ πλεῖς \ ποτὶ \ καλλίχοροιν \ \ Μιτυλέναν \\
τὰν \ Σαπφόσ \ χαρίστων \ ἄνθος \ ἑναυσόμενος, \\
eἰπεῖν, \ ώς \ Μούσαιοι \ φιλάν \ τήν \ τε \ \ Λοκρίς \ γά \\
tίκτε \ μ’ \ ἱσαίς \ δ’ \ ὅτι \ μοι \ τοῦνομα \ \ Νοσσίς, \ ἰθι. \ \ (AP \ 7.718)\]

Traveler, if you are sailing to Mitylene of the fair dancing grounds, to be inspired by the blossom of Sappho’s charms, say that the land of Locri has borne me, dear to the Muses and to her, and, knowing that my name is Nossis, depart.86

The poem possesses thematic characteristics of an epitaph. The resemblance to Asclepiades (AP 7.500), an epitaph for a man drowned at sea, who asks the passer-by to bring to his father the message of his death, is particularly suggestive.87 Nossis varies this theme by asking the passer-by to tell of her birth on Locrian soil when arriving on Lesbos, where Sappho, her poetic “mother,” was once born. Just as the dead man and his father communicate through poetry over seas (of time) separating them, so do Nossis and her predecessor Sappho. The epigram also seems to imply that, although other prospective poets might travel to Lesbos to be inspired by Sappho (2), Nossis had no need for that. She could write poetry in the vein of Sappho while staying at home. Such an interpretation invites a comparison with the ending of Callimachus *lambus* 13, which states that he has not felt the need to travel to Ephesus to become skilled in the Ionic tradition of iambic poetry of Hipponax, as others have.88

---

86 Some notes on the text and translation: I have chosen to adhere as closely as possible to the MS of the *AP*. This means reading ἄνθος in 2, rather than αἴθος (Edmunds and Maas) and ἑναυσόμενος rather than ἑταυσομέναν (Reitzenstein) in the same line. Line 3 originally reads: φιλατηναιτελοσα. Here I accept Brunck’s emendation as given above. Line 4 reads: τιτκημεσοισοτουνομα, here I prefer Theiler’s emendation as given above to that of Brunck (τίκτεν ἵσαι, ὅτι θ’ ὀἱ τοῦνομα). 87 Cf. Gutzwiller (1998: 86). AP 7.500: Ω παρ’ ἐμὸν στείχων κενὸν ἠρίον, εἶπον, ὀδίτα, / εἰς Χίον εὔτ’ ἄν ἵκη, πατρὸι Μελησαγόρη, / ὡς ἐμ’ μὲν καὶ νῆα καὶ ἐμπορίην κακὸς Εὐρος / ἀλευθερὸν δ’ αὐτὸ λέειπτ’ ὄνομα. (You, who pass by my empty grave, traveler, say to my father Melesagores, if you visit Chios, that the evil Eastern wind wrecked my ship and my freight, and that of Euhippus just this name is left.) 88 Fr. 203.14-15 Pf.: ἁείδω / οὐτ’ Ἐφεσον ἔλθων οὖτ’ ἰσοὶ συμμείζας / Ἐφεσον, θεον περ’ οἱ τὰ μέταρ μέλλοντες / τὰ χωλὰ τίκτει μὴ ἀμαθᾶς ἑναὐσονται. (I sing, although I have not traveled to
In her poem, Nossis is carving out a distinct position in Greek literary tradition for herself as a woman, by choosing a female model, Sappho. The passer-by, who is addressed and asked to spread the fame of Nossis’ poetic talents, should be understood as a prospective poet of erotic poetry. Such poets\(^9\) will name her as they travel to Lesbos to be inspired. Nossis thus positions herself as a link in the chain of (female) love-poets.

6.7 Callimachus: Ironic Self-criticism

Of course Callimachus, the great master of third-century epigram, cannot be absent from a discussion of sphragis-epigrams. Although the first epigram to be discussed here, like those of Nossis employs an erotic theme to characterize his epigrammatic persona, Callimachus’ approach is more ironic and complicated.\(^9\) As Fraser remarks, “[Callimachus] strikes … a note of intellectual and still more emotional self-criticism” throughout his epigrams (1972, I: 594); the following lines exquisitely illustrate this:

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{(fr. 1 Pf., Hymn II, 105-113)} \\
&\text{I hate the cyclic poem and I dislike the path that carries many hither and thither. I also hate the roaming beloved, and I do not drink from the (common) well. All vulgarity makes me sick. Lysanias, you are indeed fair, so fair—but before saying it properly, some echo repeats “and some other’s affair.”}
\end{align*}
\]

Since many of the themes in this poem echo meta-poetic remarks found elsewhere in Callimachus’ oeuvre,\(^9\) the temptation is great to read it as another expression in this vein: Callimachus loathes unrefined poetry and chooses to be an exclusive poet. However, the last, erotic, couplet would not completely fit such an interpretation, and there have indeed been

---

\(^{9}\) Perhaps even poetesses, as Gutzwiller suggests, although the participles (2, 4) does not point exclusively to a female addressee.

\(^{92}\) For two other sphragis epitaphs by Callimachus, see Ch. 7.3.

\(^{91}\) This may have been the opening of a section of erotic epigrams in a book, cf. Gutzwiller (1998: 218).

\(^{92}\) E.g. Aetia fr. 1 Pf.; Hymn II, 105-113.
proposals to excise it.\textsuperscript{93} The solution to this problem may be the recognition that the poem takes the form of a negative priamel.\textsuperscript{94} Callimachus does not privilege the opinion about poetic matters he expresses first (I hate the cyclical poem)\textsuperscript{95} over his other opinions (I hate the well-worn road, the roaming beloved and the common well). All these other statements should therefore not be read as metaphors glossing the first, apparently meta-poetic, declaration,\textsuperscript{96} but as exempla on the same level, leading up to the erotic conclusion. This conclusion, if logic obtained, should be: “and you, Lysanias, are worst of all.” Yet, the message is more complicated. First, the speaker declares his admiration for Lysanias (Λυσανιή, σὺ δὲ ναίχι καλὸς καλός, 5), which gives the impression that Lysanias is not vulgar. Eventually however, he realizes to his regret that Lysanias is another illustration of his negative exempla (5-6); he is not exclusive either, someone else “has him too.”

The persona Callimachus creates here is that of a poet who wishes to be a man of good taste. Despite this, he suffers from a weakness for beautiful, yet regrettably vulgar boys. The irresistible Lysanias embodies the vulgarity that the speaker at first claims to resent so much. At the same time, the theme of “love for an unworthy beloved” is much worn, even “common” in itself.\textsuperscript{97} This illustrates the flaw in Callimachus’ alleged fastidiousness and ironically criticizes and undermines his high-minded claims. That the last words (ἄλλος ἔχει, “another’s affair”) are spoken by an echo might be an implicit acknowledgment of this fact.\textsuperscript{98} The well-worn theme of involuntary desires for an unworthy beloved echoes through Greek elegy from the very beginning (e.g. in the poetry of Theognis).\textsuperscript{99} Callimachus demonstrates his consciousness of the fact that in love-poetry he

\textsuperscript{93} E.g. Gow and Page (1965: II, 156-7).
\textsuperscript{94} Henrichs (1979: 207-212).
\textsuperscript{96} Cf. the metaphors of water and the road Callimachus uses in fr. 1 Pf. and Hymn II, 105-113.
\textsuperscript{97} Reitzenstein (1893: 69-71) points out the marked resemblance to Theogn. 579-82, where a virtuous female speaker rejects promiscuity. Henrichs (1979: 210) shows that all the metaphors (the worn road, the common well) used in the epigram find their counterpart in erotic metaphors employed in Theogn. 699-602 and 959-962. The irony is that they are worn and common expressions in themselves.
\textsuperscript{98} The echo has received a great amount of scholarly attention, focusing mainly on the question how ναίχι καλὸς καλός can be supposed to be echoed by ἄλλος ἔχει. For a recent overview of scholarly discussions on the topic, see Gutzwiller (1998: 221, n. 78). She reads the last couplet as an illustration of “how refinement can inhibit fulfillment of desire.”(1998: 222).
\textsuperscript{99} Cf. Wilkinson (1967: 5-6).
too involuntarily adopts a persona who is not entirely master of his own preferences, no matter how refined a poet he may otherwise (wish to) be.

6.8 Role-playing versus Self-representation

As announced earlier, the exact opposite of a clearly identifiable persona, which helps the reader recognize who the speaker in a poem is, can also be found in Hellenistic poetry, in particular in some of Callimachus’ mimetic hymns. This section will argue that this can be explained from the particular circumstances in which Hellenistic poets themselves read older poetry as well as from the fact that their poetry was written and circulated in book-form.

When reading a first person utterance without a context, a diligent reader will try to identify the speaker from the text and, if necessary, mentally reconstruct the implied occasion of performance or imagined situation of utterance. The reader must rely upon hints in the text about the identity of the speaker (e.g., male or female qualifying adjectives, participles, or pronouns) and references to the situation at the moment of speech (e.g., time of day, location, and address to interlocutors). This process lends itself to experiment and manipulation, as the creation of “insubstantial”\(^\text{100}\) or at least elusive voices in the poetry of Callimachus demonstrates, particularly in his so-called mimetic hymns (II, V, VI).\(^\text{101}\) Thus, at the openings of Hymns V and VI, an illusion of an actual occasion is created:

\[
\text{'Οσσαι λωτροχόοι τάς Παλλάδος ἔξιτε πάσαι,}
\text{ἔξιτε: τάν ἵππων ἀρτι φρυασσομενάν}
\text{τάν ἱεράν ἐσάκουσα... (Hymn V, 1-3)}
\]

All who pour water for the bath of Pallas, come out, come out! Just now I heard the mares of the goddess whinny... (transl. Nisetich)

\[
\text{Τῶ καλάθῳ κατιόντος ἐπιφθέγξασθε, γυναῖκες:}
\text{“Δάματε, μέγα χαίρε, πολυτρόφε πουλυμέδιμνε.”}
\text{τὸν κάλαθον κατιόντα χαμαὶ θασείσθε, βέβαλοι. (Hymn VI, 1-3)}
\]

Sing, women, as the sacred basket returns, sing the refrain: Hail Demeter, Goddess of nurture, Goddess of plenty! You uninitiated there! Gaze on the basket at street level only. (transl. Nisetich)

\(^{100}\) The phrase is Hopkinson’s, with reference to the narrator in Call. Hymn VI.

In these two *Hymns*, the reader will eventually have to conclude that the speaker is female and therefore cannot be identified with the author, Callimachus. However, this conclusion is entirely dependent on the imagined occasion, a festival at the temple of a female deity, where only women were welcome. Callimachus thus creates a riddle: how could he, as a male author, possibly know what happened at such festivals?\textsuperscript{102}

It is generally agreed that these hymns were not meant for “real” cult practice.\textsuperscript{103} They are therefore not to be read as “scripts” prescribing the actions that should be performed on the (Hellenistic) occasion of actual rituals. Rather, Callimachus deliberately wanted them to convey the illusion that they represented some cultic occasion that had taken place in the (distant) past. This can be explained as follows. In the Hellenistic age, literary and poetic texts of the Greek past that had originally been intended for oral performance were preserved on scrolls and read privately and individually rather than performed publicly.\textsuperscript{104} Parts of the context and code that would have helped original audiences to understand such poems (in particular their deictic references) and identify their first-person speakers were thus lost to third-century readers. This loss of context arguably also influenced the Hellenistic poets’ way of looking at first-person utterances in such texts. On the one hand, reading texts out of their historical contexts fostered the biographical approach we have already encountered in Chapter 1: character and life of an author were argued from or reconstructed out of his/her oeuvre lacking independent information. When it came to the creation of sphragis passages for their own works, this meant that Hellenistic authors tried to identify themselves as unambiguously as possible, as the epigrams discussed in the first part of this chapter illustrate.

On the other hand, Hellenistic poets, in their scholarly occupation must have noticed that some first-person passages had become obscure through loss of their original context. This is most notably suggested by the scholia vetera to the *Victory Odes* and *Paeans* of Pindar,

\textsuperscript{102} In *Hymn* V there are no participles referring to the speaker to give the fact that she must be a woman away. It is only made clear in lines 51-54, which warn off all men. They form the prelude to the story of how young Tiresias unwillingly saw Athena naked. Apart from all attendants addressed, it seems even the goddesses horses are female. In *Hymn* VI, the situation is more or less the same: only women are addressed, and it is clear that this is a festival where men are not wanted.


\textsuperscript{104} On how this affected the metrical choices of Hellenistic poets, see Hunter (1996: 4-5): recitative meters gradually replace lyrical ones. On the general loss of performance occasions and its effect on Hellenistic poetics, see Hunter and Fantuzzi (2004: 1-17).
which often struggle with the question of whether the poet or the chorus (or both) is
supposed to be speaking in a particular passage, or whether they are perhaps even “voicing
the sentiments of the victor.” References to ancestry or topography in particular were liable
to make such statements ambiguous because the facts they refer to were no longer known.
Thus, for instance in P. 5.72-80 for a victor from Cyrene, the question for the scholiast is
whether it was the poet or the chorus who was more justified in singing:105

       τὸ δ’ ἐμὸν γαρ ἔκρυει
       ἀπὸ Σπάρτας ἐπήρατον κλέος,
       οὖθεν γεγενναμένοι
       ἵκοντο Θήρανδε φῶτες Αἰγεΐδαι,
       ἐμοὶ πατέρες, οὐ θεῶν ἄτερ
       ἀλλὰ Μοῖρας φίλῳ τις ἄγεν. (P. 5.72-80)

And mine it is to proclaim the delightful glory that comes from Sparta, whence men
born as Aigeidai, my forefathers, came to Thera, not without divine favor, but some
Fate led them. (transl. Race)

Indeed, the scholiast remarks at this point: ὁ λόγος ἀπὸ τοῦ χοροῦ τῶν Λίβυων ἢ ἀπὸ τοῦ
ποιητοῦ. (The utterance is [made] either by the chorus of Libyans or by the poet.)106 Such
remarks suggest that the passage of time could make the–presumably once-familiar–
references in texts ambiguous and obscure to later readers. It is not unlikely that already the
Alexandrians, who, as we know, seriously occupied themselves with the study and critical
assessment of such texts (in particular Pindar’s), were aware of this problem.

Callimachus was one of the scholars who spent a great deal of his time in the Library,
studying and analyzing ancient scrolls. This must have formed his way of composing poetry.
I argue that he must have been well aware through his own reading of archaic texts like the
above passage from Pindar, that his own poems too would be read in the future rather than
performed. For this reason, he deliberately created in his Hymns various (fictitious) “lost
distincts”: the ritual bath of (the statue of) Pallas at Argos, and the festivals of Apollo at
Delos, and of Demeter (at an unspecified location). He pretends that the texts of these hymns
were originally pronounced in these particular settings. This effect is achieved, as we saw, by
“throwing the reader in the middle of proceedings” without any narratorial frame, and
subsequently using a great number of deictic references to the purported circumstances.

105 Cf. Lefkowitz (1991: 72-88) who argues that the whole (mistaken) idea that the Victory Odes contain
changes of speaker can be retraced to these critics.
106 Even today the question remains disputed, as Race’s note (1997: ad loc.) demonstrates.
The unusualness of this practice may be demonstrated by contrasting it with the 18th
Idyll of Theocritus, the epithalamium of Helen sung by Spartan maidens, which is framed by
remarks of an external primary narrator, who sketches the background before giving the
floor, as it were, to a group of Spartan maidens.¹⁰⁷

Ἐν ποκ’ ἄρα Στάρτα ξανθότριχι πάρ Μενελάω
παρθενικά δ’ ἅλλοισσα κόμας ὕκινθον ἐχοίσαι
πρόσθε νεογράπτω θαλάμω χορόν ἐστάσαστο,
δωδεκα ταί πράται πόλιος, μέγα χρήμα Λακαινάν,
ἀνίκα Τυνδαρίδα κατεκλάξατο τάν ἀγαπατάν
μναστεύσας Ἑλέναν ὁ νεώτερος Ἀτρέοι ὑιῶν.
ἀείδον δ’ ἀμα πάσαι ἐς ἐν μέλος ἐγκροτέοισαι
ποσσί περιπλέκτοις, ὑπὸ δ’ ἰαχε δῶμ’ ὑμεναιῷ
“Οὕτω δὴ πρωιζὰ κατέδραθες, ὥ ϕίλε γαμβρέ;”(Id.18, 1-9)

Once then, in Sparta, at the palace of golden-haired Menelaus, maidens, with blooms of
hyacinth on their hair, danced the hearth-side hymn which they arrayed before the new-painted bridal chamber
– twelve in number, they were, the foremost in the town, fair flower of Laconian
maidens, Menelaus’ younger son had closed its doors on his loved Helen, Tyndareus’ daughter, whom he had wooed and won. And all in unison they sang,
beating time with weaving feet to their song, while the bridal chamber rang with the bridal
hymn. “Have you fallen asleep so early, dear bridegroom?” (transl. Gow; the song of
the girls continues for 50 lines; there is no return to the narratorial frame.)

We see here how Theocritus chose to provide the maidens with some background
information in a brief prologue, making it easier for his readers to understand the context,
and firmly creating a narratorial frame, which erases the impression of vivid directness that
Callimachus’ hymns so patently breathe.¹⁰⁸

Despite their “dramatic” or mimetic appearance, the primary ancestor of
Callimachus’ Hymns is not in first instance drama, but rather the choral lyric celebration of
cultic festive happenings such as can be found in ancient performative texts (Pindar’s
epinicia, or the Partheneia of Alcman). These texts frequently contain references to affairs
contingent to the original performance, including names, topography, and deictic

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Id. 6 and 11.
¹⁰⁸ In other dramatic monologues and dialogues, Theocritus does use the dramatic technique that
throws the reader in the middle of a scene without a narrative introduction (e.g., 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 10, 14,
and 15); the same happens in the Mimiambhs of Herondas. However, these poems are “mimes,” little
plays that may or may not have been intended for fully-fledged dramatic performance or less
dramatic “recital” but that at least descend from a dramatic ancestry. They owe much to the mimes of
Sophron (fifth cent. BCE), who is indebted to, or represents a variant of, the Athenian dramatic form.
expressions. To create a similar illusion of missing contexts, Callimachus makes the first-person speaker in his mimetic hymns similarly address persons imagined to be present, and use deictic references to imagined circumstances. A comparison between a fragment of Alcman’s *Partheneion* (6th century BCE) and the opening of the Callimachean *Hymn to Apollo* (II) will illustrate the point:

> ἥ οὐχ ὀφής; ὡ μὲν κέλης
> Ἑνετικός· ἀ δὲ χαίτα
> τὰς ἐμὰς ἄνεψιᾶς
> Ἀγησιχόρας ἑπανθεῖ
> χρυσὸς [ʔ]ς ἀκήρατος·
> τὸ τ’ ἀργύριον πρόσωπον,
> διαμάδαν τι τοί λέγω;
> Ἀγησιχόρα μὲν αὐτὰ· (Alcman fr.1 PMG 50-57)

Can’t you see? The courser is a Venetian Horse, and the hair of my cousin Hagesichora blooms like pure gold; her face is silver. Why must I tell you more clearly? There is Hagesichora herself!

In this passage from Alcman’s famous *Partheneion*, the chorus of maidens is apparently singing about one in their midst (perhaps, considering her name, their leader); this is made explicit in 56/7. This utterance would presumably have been accompanied by some gesture or choreographed move pointing out which of the girls was Hagesichora. The many other mysterious references in the fragmentary poem (to unknown gods, rivaling choruses, girls in the chorus, and festive activities on subsequent days) are also contingent to the original context of the performance in early Spartan society and lead to contrary opinions in

---

109 Harder (1992: 385, n. 7) recognizes that there may be a relation between the mimetic elements in Call. *Hymns*, the hints of mimesis in the *HH* and the conventions of choral lyric, but she leaves this unexplored. For the difficulty of understanding Alcman’s *Partheneia* owing to their highly contingent references, see Campbell (1982 [1967] *ad loc*.), Robbins (1997: 224-225). In *HH Apoll.* 156-175, the Delian or Hyperborean Maidens are apostrophized as if present. See on the reception of this hymn in Call. *Hymn* II, Bing (1993: 181-198).

110 Harder (1992: 386-387; 389) lists various means of creating the illusion of a (lost) occasion, such as the address of a more or less well-defined fictional audience; the indications that a speaker is fixed in time and space (e.g. familiarizing articles indicating a location, to imply that events are seen from the perspective of the speaker as “*erlebendes Ich*”); deictic words indicating time; use of present and future tense referring to the actual situation and the speaker’s expectations.
scholarship about the details of this occasion. It is easy to imagine how tantalizing such texts appeared to Hellenistic scholars in later antiquity in their more complete forms.

As announced, the elusive references in Alcman’s Partheneion are comparable in many ways to the opening of Callimachus’ Hymn to Apollo (II), where a scene of epiphany at Apollo’s Delian shrine is mimetically re-created in words. The echo of Alcman line 50 in οὐχ ὀράᾳς (Call. Hymn II, 4) provides a clear pointer to Callimachus’ deliberate attempt to create the illusion of a real occasion:

Οἷον ὁ τῶπόλλωνος ἐσείσατο δάφνινος ὀρήπης,
οἷα δ’ ὅλον τὸ μέλαθρον∙ ἑκὰς ἑκὰς ὅστις ἀλιτρός.
καὶ δὴ που τὰ θύρετρα καλῷ ποδὶ Φοῖβος ἀράσσει·
οὐχ ὀράᾳς; ἐπένευσεν ὁ Δήλιος ἡδύ τι φοῖνιξ ἐξαπίνης,
ὁ δὲ κύκνος ἐν ἠέρι καλὸν ἀείδει. (Hymn II, 1-5)

How Apollo’s laurel sapling shook, how the whole temple shook with it! Back, back, all who have sinned! The doors are rattling: it must be Apollo striking them with his gleaming foot. Can’t you see? All of a sudden the Delian Palm nodded with joy, and now the swan is singing high in the air, his lovely song. (transl. Nisetich)

By this technique, that is, by using an elusive voice to launch the reader into the middle of proceedings without any introduction to create the illusion of a real performance, Callimachus demonstrates his awareness of the complexities that accrue to reading and interpreting ancient texts out of their context. He imitates and creates a similar situation for his readers.

6.9 Conclusion

As the instances discussed in this chapter show, the Hellenistic poets’ awareness of their own position as readers of texts of the past influenced their perception of their own task as creators of texts that would become a decontextualized text of the past to future readers.

112 Robbins (1997: 224) remarks: “Probably because of the parochial nature of his poetry, [Alcman] was considered a difficult poet, and this explains why he attracted considerable attention from scholars in antiquity.” An example of creative reception of the Parthenia may be found in Theoc. Id. 18, cf. Hunter (1996: 139-166). As noted however, Theocritus places the song of the maidens in a historical context by the brief frame.
113 In Call. Hymn II, there appears to be more than one speaker, cf. Bing (1993: 181-198.)
The absence of independent historical information caused Hellenistic poets to read the poetry of their predecessors in a biographical way. This was commonly accepted as the best way of gaining knowledge about their character, life, and morals, as literary epitaphs demonstrate: Archilochus was violent, Anacreon drunk, and so on (cf. Ch. 1.5.3). This being the case, the Hellenistic poets must have been doubly conscious that they could partly determine how their own personalities would be reconstructed from their poetry.

The evident means to influence readers beyond the grave was found in the writing of self‐epitaphs and other sphrageis. In these, writers characterize themselves and offered their readers a key to their poetry. The voices created are those of dedicators at shrines, of the dead speaking from their tombs, or of symposiasts in various degrees of inebriation who are declaring their stance in life and their feelings about poetic creativity and fame.

Some Hellenistic poets revealed an awareness of the lasting quality of their own memorials by alluding to the living fame that was the contemporary tribute to predecessors like Archilochus and Sappho. At other times, this awareness seems absent, were it not for the fact that the mere act of writing down one’s own name in poetry implies the expectation that someday, somewhere, someone would read the descriptions of the unhappy love affairs or drunken revels and care who the poet behind the creation was. This is what unites the Hellenistic epigrammatists, however different their individual voices may be: they wished to be read and interpreted and perhaps enter into the tradition to be anthologized or imitated as predecessors in their own right.

Reading poetry of the past without a context could also swing the other way and lead to ambiguity, interpretational problems, and the awareness that a first‐person statement need not necessarily be identical to the voice of a poem’s author. This awareness also finds expression in Hellenistic poetry, notably in Callimachus’ sophisticated mimetic Hymns, which created the illusion of lost performances for readers. Callimachus crafted this illusion by inserting deictic references to absent people and distant (or unreal?) locations, leaving his readers to guess at the relation between the speaking voice and the author. Paradoxically, this complicated practice also implies the wishes to be read and interpreted and to enter the literary tradition.