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

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CHAPTER 7:
ALLUSIVE NAMES, ELUSIVE POETS: ALIAS AND ALTER EGO IN SPHRAGIS-POETRY

7.1 Introduction

Just as a clear, unambiguous sphragis aims to offer the reader a key to the interpretation of the work to which it is appended, so an enigmatic, ambiguous, or allusive one may relate to a certain interpretational goal or advocate an interpretational strategy. The fact that the reader is challenged to solve a riddle if he wishes to know more about the identity of the author indicates that this work is aimed at the ξυνετοί, the careful, clever readers.¹ A similar premise underlies the following fictitious Hellenistic epitaph, where form and significance of the inscription (a rebus) collaborate to express the name and therein the character of the deceased.

Δίζημαι κατὰ θυμόν, ὅτου χάριν ἂ παροδῖτις
diosákai fei mouvnoν γράμμα λέλογχε πέτρος
λαοτύπιος σμίλαις κεκολαμμένον. ἃρα γυνακί
τα χθονι κευθομένα Χίλιας ἦν ὅνομα;
touto γάρ ἀγγέλην κορυφούμενος εἰς ἐν ἁριθμός.
ἤ τὸ μὲν εἰς ὅρθαν ἀτραπὸν οὐκ ἔμολεν,
ἀ δ' οἰκτρὸν ναίουσα τόδ᾽ ἤριον ἔπλετο Φειδίς;
νῦν Σφιγγὸς γρίφους Οἰδίπος ἐφρασάμαν.
αἰνετὸς οὐκ δισσοῖο καμὼν αἴνιγμα τύποιο,
φέγγος μὲν ξυνετοῖς, ἀξυνέτοις δὲ ἔρεβος. (AP 7.429, Alcaeus of Messene)

I search my brain to understand for what reason the roadside tombstone has received as only inscription two phis engraved by the chisels of the stonecutters. Was the name of the woman who is buried in the ground here perhaps Chilias (Thousand)? That is what you get if you add the number up. Or did that go in the wrong direction, and was the poor woman who inhabits this tomb called Pheidis? Now, like an Oedipus, I have solved the riddle of the Sphinx! The one who elaborated the enigma of the double letters must be commended: he sheds light for those who understand, but leaves those who don’t in the dark.

There are only two characters inscribed on the tombstone: (Φ Φ). Since the character Φ had a numerical value of 500, they would add up to 1000 (Chilias, 4); however, this is not the

¹ Cf. DNP 10, 754-755 s.v. Rätsel: “Wer das Rätsel stellt, ist im Wissen überlegen; so kann der Person bzw. Instanz, die das R. stellt (z. B. dem Seher oder dem Orakel) von den Angesprochenen Autorität zugestanden werden; andererseits strebt der Ratende, durch Lösung des R. seine Ebenbürtigkeit im Wissen zu erweisen.” Cf. the epigrams of Callimachus and Leonidas on the Phaenomena in Ch. 5.2.
solution. Rather, the woman buried here was called Pheidis, which might be explained as “Two times phi” (Φεί δίς), but also as “Thrifty” (φείδομαι, to economize), a plausible name for a Greek woman. At the same time, the sparseness of the inscription (only two letters) excellently expresses the modest and frugal character of the deceased, who apparently did not wish for a verbose and costly inscription on her tomb.

In some Hellenistic sphragis-poetry, the name of the author likewise seems to be expressed ambiguously or indirectly. The modern reader’s uncertainty about its meaning may however arise from the loss of knowledge that was presumably still common among contemporaries of the poets. In some cases, such as the alternation Asclepiades/Sicelidas, the most likely assumption is that the alternative name was used as normally and frequently as the name that is more familiar to the modern reader. The case is more uncertain for Callimachus/Battiades. Is the alternative name a patronymic or was it chosen by the poet in connection with the colonist Battus, in reference to Callimachus’ ties to his mother city, Cyrene and to Cyrenaic aristocracy? The status of “Simichidas”, the alternative name that Theocritus appears to use to refer to himself in Idyll 7, remains enigmatic and subject to ongoing debate to this day. In other cases, the well known proper name of an author may be used in such a way as to contain hidden puns that need to be decoded or even discovered. In Chapter 5, the clever play on Aratus’ own name in the second line of the Phaenomena (ἀρωτίτων) was for instance discussed; some more instances of this kind will be analyzed in the present chapter. First the etymologizing background to such play with proper names will be briefly set out.

7.2 Puns and Etymology

The Greeks felt that names and nouns (ὄνοματα κυρία) could reveal important facts about the object or person they indicated to those who were perceptive to the “true meaning”

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2 For the interpretation, cf. Gow and Page (1965: II, 20-21): “No doubt the thriftiness implied in the name is exemplified in the brevity with which it is expressed.” Hopkinson (1988: 254-255) adds that the brevity of the epitaph might point in the direction of Callimachean leptotes. Similar riddle epitaphs are e.g. Leon. AP 7.422; Antip. Sid. AP 7.423; 7.424; 7.425; 7.426, 7.427, and Mel. AP 7.421.

3 The alternative name Sicelidas is found in Mel. AP 4.1.45; Hedyl. Ath. 1173A (VI GP) and Theoc. 7.39-41, cf. the scholia ad loc., who claim that it is a patronymic.
(ἐτυμος λόγος) they conveyed. Some instances of this belief could be subsumed under the category nomen est omen, literally, “the name is a sign or a token.” This resulted in kledonomancy, divination from names, “a system which operates on the conviction that language possesses an enigmatic oracular capacity to bear unexpected meaning not intended or even understood by the speaker.”

The belief that proper names could contain hidden meanings is attested as early as Homer. Words and names were explained in various ways that were later united under the heading “etymology” (ἐτυμολογία), the science of the true explanation of a name or word. From a modern linguist’s viewpoint, many examples of ancient etymology would be more accurately classified as verbal or stylistic playfulness, puns that play on phonetic and formal ambiguities or analogies (e.g. paronomasia, figura etymologica).

In many cases, it is difficult to believe that the Greeks seriously considered the derivations they proposed, and even harder to imagine that they thought such apparently arbitrary similarities revealed a deeper meaning about the object or person indicated. Yet, literary evidence certainly points in this direction. Examples of “etymologies” on (proper) names of individuals as well as peoples, cities and lands are extremely frequent in Greek

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4 Since most Greek proper names originally possessed an easily distinguishable meaning, deriving from a characteristic (physical, behavioral or otherwise, cf. DNP s.v. Onomastik), the origins of this belief are easy to understand. With the passage of time it was especially names of which the significance had become obsolete for which false etymologies could be established to provide a new significance.

5 So Zeitlin (1982: 46) on Aeschylus, especially on his explanation of the name Helen (which he connects to the root ἰλ-, “to destroy,” Ag. 681-90). On etymology in general, see also Woodhead (1928: 22-23), O’Hara (1996: 13).

6 The first to use this word was presumably Philoxenus of Alexandria, a grammarian of the first century BCE (see DNP s.v. Etymologie). However, the process of etymologizing had been current in non-systematical form long before. The first (ironical) reflection on quasi-scientific attempts at etymology can be found in Plato’s Cratylus. A treatise attributed to Augustine, but preserving material from centuries earlier, explains the four principles governing ancient etymological derivations: 1) κατ´ μιμήσιν: by imitating sounds, or by using sounds whose smoothness, harshness and so on mimicked that of the thing named; 2) κατ´ ὁμοιοτητα: from the similarity of one thing to another; 3) κατ´ ἀναλογίαν: by association, i.e., paronomasia and figura etymologica; 4) κατ´ ἀντιφασις: a name indicates the opposite of a thing or some property it has, cf. O’Hara (1996: 20).

7 When there is a likeness in sound, but it is not (necessarily) intended that the words are “etymologically” related, e.g. Il. 16.22: τοῖον γὰρ ὄνομα βεβίηκεν Ἀχαιοῖς, (such woe befell the Achaeans).

8 Where a derivation is clearly intended, e.g.: Odysseus from ὀδύσσημαι.

9 For some salutary caveats on the interpretation and “discovery” of etymologies and puns in ancient texts (how can one be sure that the etymology is intended?), see Haslam (1992: 199-204); O ‘Hara (1996: 5).
literature. To name one of the more famous will have to suffice here. In the *Odyssey*, the most notable example occurs in the passage in which Autolycus decides that his grandson is to be called “Odysseus” since many are angry with Autolycus at the moment the boy is born (ὁδύσσομαι, to hate, *Od.* 19.409). The connotations of this name, the epic implies, also apply to Odysseus himself.10 Names or sobriquets of poets are often explained in a similar way: Στησίχορος means “He who sets up the chorus”11 Μουσαιος means “Belonging to the Muse.” The alias Solon uses for Mimnermus (*Λιγυαστάδη* fr. 20 W), is explained by the *Suda s.v.* Μιμνεῖσθαι as deriving from the adjective λιγύς (ἐκαλεῖτο δὲ Λιγυαστάδης διὰ τὸ ἐμμελές καὶ λιγύ: he was called Ligyastades because of his harmoniousness and his clear [voice].)12

The scholarly Hellenistic poets continued and intensified the interest in the possibilities of etymologizing and wordplay as heuristic devices to explain origins of customs, cities, and geographical landmarks, festivals, cletic titles of deities, proper names of their characters, and so on. For instance, Callimachus’ *Aetia* and *Hymns* and Apollonius’ *Argonautica* reveal a distinct interest in the explication of names.13 In this chapter I will argue that it can indeed be found in the play upon proper names of the poets themselves.

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11 Whose original name was Teisias, according to the *Suda s.v.* Στησίχορος. Bowra (1936: 79) suggests that the sobriquet may be based upon some passage of Stesichorus’ poetry now lost, in which he spoke about his own name and origin.
12 A similar claim is made in the *Suda* about the alias of Simonides, Μελικέρτης (on a derivation from μέλι οἱ μελιχρός: ὅς ἐπεκλήθη Μελικέρτης διὰ τὸ ἡδύ. (who was also called Melicertes because of his sweetness). Cf. the explanations of Plato’s name as provided e.g. in Diog. Laert. 3.4, linking it with the adjective πλατύς (wide, broad). Whereas Plato’s original name would have been Aristocles, after his grandfather (cf. *AP* 7.60), he would have received the sobriquet either because of his bulky stature, the result of his wrestling lessons, or because of his broad forehead, or because of his broad style of writing. Notopoulos (1939: 135-145) argues that these explanations result from the (etymologically influenced) guesses of later biographers.
13 Contemporary scientific prose treatises also provide abundant evidence for their interest in etymology, as the titles of Callimachus’ lost scholarly works demonstrate: Ἐθνικαὶ Ὀνομασίαι (Local Nomenclature), Περὶ Μετονομασιῶν Ισθμῶν (On Changes of Names in Fish), Μηνῶν Προσηγορίαι κατὰ ἔθνος καὶ πόλεις (Local Month-Names), Κτίσεις Νῆσων καὶ πολέων καὶ μετονομασίαι (Colonizations of Islands and Cities and their Changes of Names), cf. *Suda s.v.* Καλλιμαχός. For a more playful approach to naming and names (anagrams) in the Hellenistic era, see Cameron (1995b: 477-484).
7.3 Wordplay in Hellenistic Sphragides

Some examples of play on the proper names of various Hellenistic poets have already been discussed: the epigrammatist Crates (AP 11.218) pretended to blame Euphron for his literary tastes while playing on the obscene double entendres on the names of the authors he mentions (Chapter 4.8). The epigram demonstrates the wide-spread uses of punning and quasi-etymologising, which in all likelihood—apart from being sparked by scholarly pursuits in etymology and aetiology—owe something to Old Comedy.14 A more serious instance of such play on an author’s name was found in the reference of Aratus to himself in line 2 of the Phaenomena, and the allusions to this pun in the epigrams in praise of this work (Chapter 5.2). In the light of these examples, it is opportune to cast a fresh glance at some other well-known passages in Hellenistic poetry.

It has been observed that the proems of the Argonautica of Apollonius and the Phaenomena share some salient features, including a hymnic opening to a god that is central to the poem, Zeus (Ἐκ Διὸς ἀρχώμεσθα, from Zeus let us begin...)15 and Apollo (Ἀρχόμενος σέο Φοῖβε, beginning from you, Phoebus...), respectively. Both also contain a belated and remarkably phrased invocation of the Muses.16 A punning allusion to the author’s name may be a characteristic that should be added to this list of similarities. Aratus modestly placed the pun on his own name in the second place, after Zeus (ἀροητὸν, 2); it might be argued that Apollonius was alluding to his own name in the beginning of the Argonautica through the invocation of his eponymous god Apollo.

The pun at the opening of the Phaenomena is paradoxical. While appearing to name Aratus, it implies at the same time that hemodestly wishes to remain unmentioned. How does

14 For examples of proper names in Comedy being abused to render obscene meanings, cf. e.g. Henderson (1991 [1975]).
15 Although Theocritus Id. 17 also begins with this phrase, later writers explicitly attribute the phrase to Aratus (Strato AP 12.1.1: Ἐκ Διὸς ἀρχώμεσθα, καθὼς εὑρηκέν Ἀρατός, “Let us begin from Zeus,” as Aratus said). Cf. also Cic. Rep. 1.36; Quint. Inst. 10.1.46; Macr. Somn. 1.17.14; see also the lengthy commentary in the Scholia (Martin) on the first line and Kidd (1997: 163).
16 Phaen. 16-17: Χαίροιτε δὲ Μοῦσαι / μελιχία χαλά πάσαι. Ἐμοί γε μὲν ἀστέρας εἰσεῖν / ἡ θέμις εὔχομένῳ τεκμήριοτε πάσαιν ἀοίδην. (And hail, Muses, all most gracious! In answer to my prayer to tell of the stars in so far as I may, guide all my singing. transl. Kidd); cf. Arg. 1.20-22: Μοῦσαι δ’ ὑποσχέσεις εἰεν ἀοίδης. (May the Muses be the “hypophetores” of the song.) On the structural similarity between the openings, and the remarkable choice of verb in the address to the Muses, cf. Kidd (1997: 162-3; 174 respectively). See on the muse-invocations of Aratus and Apollonius Ch. 8.3-8.6. The Aratus-Scholia also mention the parallel of Apollonius (Schol. Arat. Vat. 191). Conversely, the Scholia on Arg. (1-4a) mention the opening of the Phaen.
this relate to Apollonius’ choice to call on Apollo, while using the invocational title “Phoebus” (1.1)? Perhaps a similarly paradoxical modesty is at play here. Robert Albis suggests that Apollonius invokes Apollo as Phoebus perhaps to avoid making the play on names too obvious:

Elsewhere however, Apollonius frequently refers to the god as Apollo, and when the name appears in the genitive, it differs from the poet’s only by one iota (…) The similarity of the names of the god and the poet suggests that Apollonius has a special relationship with Phoebus. Apollonius means, after all “belonging to Apollo.” In the context of poetic inspiration this relationship has a special resonance. A divinely inspired poet is “entheos” [possessed by a god]. (Albis, 1996: 22)

Albis’ observations gain force when combined with the play on Aratus’ name, which, as we saw, was remarked upon by his contemporaries. Both puns occur in the opening lines of the poems, the perfect place for a sphragis. Both authors, Aratus and Apollonius, allude to their name in their praise of their patron god, and both leave their name unmentioned. Their signature is thus paradoxically hinted at and hidden simultaneously.

Two epigrams by Callimachus are of interest as well, since he appears to be exploiting the connotations of his own name (Καλλίμαχος) and his patronymic, as it shall provisionally be called, Battus (AP 7.525). It seems that the two poems are related to each other17 and that both make a definitive statement about Callimachus’ poetics. Let us begin with the epigram on Callimachus’ father.

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Ὅστις ἔμοι παρὰ σῆμα φέρεις πόδα, Καλλιμάχου με ἰσθὶ Κυρηναίου παιδά τε καὶ γενέτην.
εἰδείς δ’ ἀμφώ κεν· ὅ μὲν κοτε πατρίδος ὀπλών
ήρεξεν, ὅ δ’ ἤγιεσεν κρέσσονα βασικανίς. (AP 7.525)
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You, who are passing by my grave, know that I am of Callimachus the Cyrenaic both son and father. You would know both: one once was the chief of his fatherland’s armed forces; the other’s song was stronger than envy.

The speaker in the poem is the father of Callimachus, who is, however, not named.18 His modesty is emphasized by this omission even while he is immortalized by his famous son’s

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17 Scholars have regularly assumed that the two poems were companion pieces, e.g. Wilamowitz (1924: I, 175, n. 2), Gabathuler (1937: 5), Fraser (1972: I, 576), Bing (1995: 126-28), Gutzwiller (1998: 212).

18 It has been suggested e.g. by Gow and Page (1965: II, ad loc.) that, as often happens in non-literary epitaphs, the name may not have fitted the meter; the reader would have inferred that this was the reason for its omission. Alternatively, as noted, AP 7.415 could be read in conjunction with this poem, and so supply the name of the unnamed father of Callimachus, viz. Battus.
poetry. The token by which this man wants to be known, or so the epigram claims, is the paradoxical circumstance that he is both son and father of a Callimachus. This “riddle” is solved by the explanation that there are two persons bearing the name Callimachus, one a general (1-2) and one a poet whose song was stronger than envy (4), an expression with somewhat belligerent undertones.

This gives rise to a new riddle: how can these two namesakes be likened to each other? How do they both live up to their name? The pointe of the epigram may be that the two bearers of the same name, while having at first sight very different occupations, were in some sense as alike as their name suggests. The grandfather of Callimachus was a distinguished warrior. Callimachus the grandson was the vanquisher of envy through his song; he was a “warrior with words.” And so, both Callimachuses lived to gain fame for their name, which might etymologically be explained to contain the elements κάλλος (beauty) and μάχη (battle). At first sight, such a name might seem to befit a man at arms better than a poet, yet Callimachus the poet certainly lived up to the name.† The notoriously belligerent persona of Callimachus, as known from works such as the prologue of the Aetia (fr. 1 Pf.) and the lambi (cf. Chapter 4), fits the meaning of his name surprisingly well.

The second epigram leaves out the name “Callimachus” and only refers to him by what scholarship has predominantly accepted as a patronymic, Battiades:21

Βαττιάδεω παρὰ σήμα φέρεις πόδας εὖ μὲν ἀοιδήν
eidótoς, εὖ δ’ οίνῳ καύρια συγγελάσατι. (AP 7.415)

You are passing the grave of Battiades, who knew well how to sing and how to tell jokes properly over wine.

The epigram has been read as an evaluation of Callimachus’ complete poetic output. The phrase εὖ μὲν ἀοιδήν / eidótoς, εὖ δ’ οίνῳ καύρια συγγελάσατι could be said to cover the whole range, from Callimachus’ longer poems (ἀοιδήν: the Hecale, the Aetia, the Hymns etc.) to the poetry that is exemplified by the present poem, epigrams that were composed or

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19 Wilamowitz (1924: I, 175, n. 2) suggested—surely somewhat naively—that Callimachus could not write much about his father, because there just was not much to say about him.

20 Ferguson (1970: 66), without however referring to this epigram, remarks: “Certainly in general Callimachus lived up to his name Glory in Battle.”

21 The reader would have known that Callimachus was meant anyway, as the epigram was presumably found in a collection of Callimachus’ poetry, cf. Meyer (2005: 171).
performed at symposia (καίρια). The first and last words (εἰδότος ... συγγελάσαι) of the second line moreover aptly describe the whole field in which Callimachus’ poetry finds itself: it is not only learned and scholarly, but also ironic and tongue in cheek. The fact that the epitaph should be so concise yet express all the essentials about its author and subject reveals much about Callimachus’ poetic ideals as exemplified and expressed elsewhere. His preference is for short, subtle, and witty poetry, such as this epigram.

The fact that Callimachus here calls himself “Battiades” (i.e., the descendant of Battus, the hero who founded Cyrene and first of a long list of eponymous kings) has usually been linked to his connections with Cyrenaic aristocracy, or more broadly, to his patriotic feelings for the colony of Cyrene as a whole. Another interpretation simply explains “Battus” as the actual proper name of his father. Whichever of these possibilities is correct, the literal meaning of the name is of interest. In Greek, Βάττος means “Stammerer,” or “Lisper” (i.e., someone with a speech-impediment). In Herodotus’ account of the colonization of Cyrene, the naming of Battus, later king of this settlement is explained thus (Hist. 4.155):

Χρόνου δὲ περιμόντος ἐξεγένετο οἱ παῖς ἰσχύφωνος καὶ τοσιλός, τῷ οὐνομα ἐτέθη Βάττος.

And as time went by he [i.e., Battus’ father] begot a child that had difficulty speaking and stammered, to whom the name Battus [Stammerer] was given.

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22 Cf. e.g. Reitzenstein (1893: 87), Parsons (2002: 104; 129): “Callimachus represents half his life as οἶνῳ καίρια συγγελάσαι.” “[The epigram] ostensibly opens a divide between ἀοιδή and the opportunist wit of the symposium.”


25 Cf. Cameron (1995: 8). White (1999: 168-181) argues that antiquity would not have understood the name as a direct patronymic, but as referring more broadly to ethnic ties and ancestry, Callimachus’ relation to the founder of his father city Cyrene, the heroic Battus (celebrated e.g. in Pi. P. 4 and 9). Cf. e.g. Call. HYMN II, 96; Str. 17.3.21: λέγεται δὲ ἡ Κυρήνη κτίσμα Βάττου· πρόσογον δὲ τούτων έαυτοῦ φάσκει Καλλίμαχος. (Cyrene is said to be a settlement by Battus; Callimachus claims to be a descendant of his). Reitzenstein (1893: 233-234) thought that the character Battus in Theoc. Id. 4 constituted a reference to Callimachus. This forms part of his bucolic masquerade-thesis which has been discarded, cf. e.g. Treu (1963: 273-290). The occurrence of the name in Theocritus is however quite striking; certainly considering the claim of White that Battus was an extremely unusual name. BATTIADES is the name the Roman poets use to indicate Callimachus (Cat. 65.16; 116.2; Ov. Am. 1.15.13, lb. 55, Tr. 2.367, Stat. Silv. 5.3.157) As Gow and Page (1965: II, 152) suggest, this might indicate that he called himself thus elsewhere besides.


27 Cf. LSJ s.v., quoting Hesych. and Suda. It is believed to be an onomatopoeic word. The verb βαττολογεῖν/βατταρίζω means “to stammer,” or “to say the same word over and over again.”

28 According to Call. HYMN II, 76, Battus’ “original” name was Aristoteles.
Interestingly, Herodotus’ account of the colonization of Cyrene contains a significant equivocation on the name of Battus; the name turns out to be a lucky omen. As Battus arrives at the shrine of Delphic Apollo to ask the Pythia what to do about his voice, she replies:

“Βάττ', ἐπὶ φωνὴν ἠλθες· ἀναξ δὲ σε Φοίβος Ἀπόλλων / ἐς Λιβύην πέμπει μηλοτρόφον οἰκιστῆρα.”

“Battus, you have come to ask about your voice, but the Lord Apollo sends you out to Libya rich in sheep as a colonist.”

Herodotus explains that this is as much as saying “Ὦ βασιλεῦ, ἐπὶ φωνὴν ἠλθες” (“King, you have come to ask about your voice”), since in Libyan the word βάττος meant “king.” And indeed, “King” was the title by which Battus was subsequently addressed as founder of the colony Cyrene.

Callimachus was probably aware of this story, and he may have meant to hint at the fact that Battus was a name of good omen, as history had proved. He may moreover have wished to create a meaningful opposition between the connotations of the name “Son of the Stammerer” and the fact that he was a successful poet who suffered from no verbal impediments at all. Indeed, Hesychius s.v. βαττολογία defines it as ἀργολογία, ἀκαιρολογία (to prattle unseasonably).29 This suggests that the reference to his patronymic or alias should be understood as an instance of the explanation of a name κατ´ ἀντίφρασιν (by expressing the contrary).30 The name is a paradoxical token of Callimachus’ fluent yet concise poetic speech, his specific ability of καίρια συγγελάσαι.

7.4 Theocritus, Simichidas and Lycidas

The question of the exact relation between Simichidas, Lycidas, and the poet Theocritus in Idyll 7 is the last topic of this chapter. In this case, however, something different from and perhaps more fundamental than the play on a name is involved. The issue is nevertheless linked to the previous discussion, since it starts out from the difficult interpretation of what is usually considered an alias, Simichidas. Considering the programmatic significance of

29 Cf. also Suda s.v. βαττολογία; cf. LSJ s.v. ἀκαιρία (4) “bad taste in writing” (D.H. Dem. 7).
30 Cf. lucus a non lucendo ([It is called] a grove because there is no light in it; Honoratus Maurus, fourth cent. CE).
Theocritus’ seventh *Idyll*,\(^{31}\) the characterization of Simichidas in the poem is of paramount importance, since he is its internal narrator.\(^{32}\) In order to get a better understanding of what is at stake in the following discussion, a brief synopsis of the narrative contents of the poem is necessary.

At the poem’s opening an internal narrator starts relating how, once upon a time,\(^{33}\) he was on his way to the celebration of the Harvest Festival (*Thalysia*) organized by some aristocratic friends on the island of Cos. Together with his friends Eucritus and Amyntas, he departed from the city towards the farm of the organizers of the *Thalysia* (1-4). On the way, in the noonday heat, they met a mysterious goatherd, named Lycidas (10-14), whose looks and smell are described in great detail (15-20). This Lycidas addresses the previously nameless narrator of the *Idyll* as “Simichidas” (21); there is no explanation of their knowledge of each other’s names. The narrator proposes they exchange bucolic songs (36). After some preliminary remarks on fame and poetic creeds (37-41, 45-48) and the promise of a guest gift, a staff or stick (κορύναν/λαγωβόλον) on the part of Lycidas (43), they sing; the exchange takes up a major part of the poem (51-126). Afterwards, Lycidas hands Simichidas the guest gift and suddenly disappears in another direction (129); the narrator and his friends reach the farm, where a lush symposium in a *locus amoenus*, described in picturesque and sensuous detail, is held (130-157).

The significance of this “exchange of bucolic song” (which was first converted into a poetic form by Theocritus, cf. Chapter 3.7) and of the particularly evocative description of the rural symposium at the end depends on the appraisal of the status of the poem as a whole, and of that of the protagonists in particular. Is everything what it looks like on the surface?

\(^{31}\) Cf. Gow (1952: II, introduction to the *Idyll*), Lawall (1967), Weingarth (1967), Goldhill (1991), Hunter (1999). The numerous references to music, contemporary poets, the Muses, the Nymphs, poetic theory, poetic fame, as well as the exchange of song that takes up the major part of the poem make clear that this is a poem about poetry.

\(^{32}\) An internal narrator is a narrator who plays a role in his own story (also known as first-person narrator). On the narrators in Theocritus’ *Idylls*, see Hunter (2004: 83-97).

\(^{33}\) Cf. Wilamowitz (1924: II, 142): “Theokrit hat durch das Anfangswort es war einmal das Erlebnis, von dem er erzählt, in eine unbestimmte Ferne gerückt, also es ein Märchen wäre.” Gow (1952: II, 131): “the Greek implies only that the epoch referred to is closed, or the state of affairs no longer existing, not that it belongs to the distant past... The opening suggests that T.’s circumstances have changed in some way—for instance that he or his friends are no longer in Cos.” Clauss (2003: 289) remarks that the parallels Gow adduces would seem to support both the interpretation of Wilamowitz and his own.
This point is related to the question of the identifications of Simichidas and Lycidas, which have been variously evaluated.34

The Scholia, in accordance with the practice of biographical readings of poetry in (late) antiquity in general, mostly assume that Simichidas is an alias of the author and that the whole poem should be read as an autobiographical record. They consequently interpret the name Simichidas as either a patronymic, derived from a father who was named Simichos or Simichidas,35 or as a kind of sobriquet (ἐπώνυμον) referring to a certain physical feature of the poet, namely his flat nose.36 In any case, they mostly appear sure that he is to be equated with the poet.37

In the nineteenth century and well into the first half of the twentieth, a biographical reading of the seventh *Idyll* remained the predominant approach. Attempts were also repeatedly made to “unmask” Simichidas as well as Lycidas as participants in a masquerade

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34 The scholarship on the seventh *Idyll* comprises ca. 220 publications, including numerous books. In the compass of this chapter, I signal the most important trends in the scholarship concerning this “enigmatic masterpiece” (Gow). In Weingarth (1967) a full discussion of the scholarship up to that year can be found; Hunter (1999) provides a useful update.

35 *Vita*: πατρὸς Σιμιχίδα, ὡς αὐτός φήσε (Whose father is Simichos, as he himself claims.); cf. *Schol.* 21a,b: ὁ Θεόκριτος Σιμιχίδα νιός ὄν Σιμιχίδαν ἐαυτὸν ὑμνᾶει πατρονυμικῶς. (Theocritus, the son of Simichidas, calls himself Simichidas with a patronymic). The *Vita*, *Suda* and the (Hellenistic?) epigram that was presumably affixed to the *Idylls* also name an alternative father, namely Praxagoras (3). This rings truer, since there is not, as in the case of “Simichos,” an obvious text-internal reason for calling Th.’s father thus.

36 *Prol.* 3: ἤν γὰρ τὴν ὑπὸ σιμός. (for he was snub-nosed), cf. *Schol.* 21a. Although this too is problematic, at least, if we believe, with Petroll (1965: 33) that the first person speaker of *Id.* 12 should be identified with the poet, because there he mentions his ὑπὸὸς … ἀραιῆς (slender, straight nose). In *Id.* 3, a goatherd complains that he has a σιμός nose. It seems to have been considered a typical characteristic of goatherds.

37 Cf. *Argumentum c* (referring to *Id.* 7.1 ff): προλογίζει ὁ Θεόκριτος. (Theocritus speaks in the prologue). The *Suda* also seems to consider it possible, cf. the explanation s.v. Θεόκριτος. So also the epigram appended to the *scholia* after *Id.* 18, beginning Σιμιχίδα Θεόκριτε. There seems to have been yet another school of thought: οἴ δὲ ἔτευχον τινών τῶν συν αὐτῷ καὶ οὐ Θεόκριτον διὰ τὸ “Σιμιχίδα μὲν ἔρωτες ἐπέτπανον. (v. 96)” (Some think that [Simichidas refers] to one of the others in his company, not to Theocritus, because of the phrase “the Loves have sneezed for Simichidas.”) They differentiate between Theocritus and Simichidas without, however, explaining why the narrator is addressed by Lycidas as “Simichidas.” The name Simichidas further occurs in an ingenious pun in the pseudo-Theocritean *technopaegnia Syrinx* (on its spuriousness, cf. Gow 1952: II, 553-554), viz. in the enigma/pun Πάρισ Σιμιχίδας: Paris was the judge (κριτής) in the beauty-contest of the goddesses (θεάν), hence Θεό‐κριτος. Nickau (2002: 389-304) argues that the name Simichidas in *Id.* 7 indicates that Theocritus was a follower of the contemporary poet of *technopaegnia* (such as the *Syrinx*) Simias; his sobriquet would refer to this master.
bucolique with cultic or secular overtones. This did not influence the biographical approach, so that a meta-poetic interpretation of the poem in which the events should be understood symbolically rather than literally was not undertaken.

Such a symbolic interpretation only became possible when scholars recognized that the use of the name “Simichidas” rather than “Theocritus” might convey an essential difference on some level between the internal narrator and the “author” Theocritus. This is, for instance, hesitatingly expressed by Gow:

Simichidas describes in the first person an experience which evidently reflects, in part at least, an experience of Theocritus himself. “I” in literature may stand for the author himself (Id. 28) or for a character he has created (Id. 3); between these extremes an author may identify himself not wholly but only in part with a character who uses the first person. Hence, though the speaker in Id. 7 is plainly in part the poet, the two are not necessarily identical (...) Still, it is most natural in this poem to assume the identity, and with this caveat I shall assume it and suppose Simichidas to be neither more nor less than an alias for Theocritus. (Gow, 1940: 47)

The way was now open to readings that recognized a certain symbolic, meta-poetic quality in the poem. Thus, Sanchez-Wildberger (1955: 65ff) not only suggest that Simichidas is on a meta-poetic level part of the persona of Theocritus but also posits that Lycidas must be a part of it. She regards the confrontation between the two poets in the Idyll as “eine Doppelspiegelung des einen Theokrit” (68); in her view, the songs of both singers present “dieselbe seltsame Mischung von städtischem Leben und Bukolik.” (67). There is, however, one major problem with this interpretation: if it is correct, then why is Simichidas, not Lycidas, the narrator? And why is the poem not composed in the form of a simple mimetic dialogue

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38 This thesis proposed that all herdsmen in Theocritus’ poetry were really portraits of contemporary poets in disguise, who convened on certain occasions to indulge in the simplicity of rural life. The idea was propounded especially by Reitzenstein (1893), but several others participated in the “guessing game” which resulted in manifold identifications, especially for Lycidas: Aratus (Bergk); Dosiadatos (Wilamowitz), Leonidas (Legrand), Callimachus (Gercke), Astakides (Ribbeck), Rhianus (Legrand) or merely an “eccentric poet going about in herdsmen’s outfit.” Wilamowitz later retracted his belief in the masquerade bucolique (1906: II, 136), although he still maintained that Lycidas could well be the Cretan poet Dosiadatos.

39 Cf. e.g. the remarks of Wilamowitz (1924: II, 136): “Der Eindruck wird nicht tauschen dass er wirklich die Erinnerung an das Erntefest wiedergibt, zu dem ihn Phrasisamos und Antigenes, die vornehmen Koer, eingeladen hatten. Simichidas ist ja Deckname für Theokrit, ob für diese Gelegenheit erfunden, oder weiter geltend, können wir ja nicht entscheiden. Versteck spielen wollte der Dichter doch nicht vor der Kaische Gesellschaft, für die er zunächst dichtete.” Similar views can be found as late as the 1960’s, e.g. Petroll (1965: 32); Monteil (1968: 100).
Simichidas’s role as the narrator undeniably gives him a greater claim to identification with the author than Lycidas; he is in control of the narration of this poetic encounter. This means Lycidas cannot be an alter ego on the same level as Simichidas. This problem is solved in Händel’s interpretation of the Idyll as an encounter between Theocritus (Simichidas) and one of his own fictions, Lycidas, “einer jener idealisierten hochpoetischen Hirten wie man sie auch sonst in den bukolischen Idyllen findet.” Although this suggestion is plausible, it does not explain why the author needed to be called “Simichidas” rather than “Theocritus.”

Another strain in the history of interpretation continued to attempt to identify Lycidas, while the Simichidas/Theocritus equation was simply accepted. The first to make the important observation that the seventh Idyll contained elements of the Dichterweihe, as most famously found at the opening of Hesiod’s Theogony, was Van Groningen (1959). Building on this idea, Puelma (1960) remarked upon the similarities between the meeting of Simichidas and Lycidas and several meetings between gods and mortals in the Homeric epics. The idea that Lycidas represents a god in disguise was then propounded with force by a number of critics. Yet, they could never agree which divinity hid behind the goatherd who is so teasingly described as the quintessential goatherd. This suggests that this reading, like the masquerade bucolique, is not the best way to approach the figure of Lycidas.

41 Cf. also Petroll (1965: 44).
42 Körte/Händel (1960 [1925]: 216). The reason he suggests for this fiction (viz. that Lycidas is introduced to convince readers that such herdsmen could actually exist) seems strangely naïve.
43 Cf. e.g. Petroll (1965: 32): “Während die Identifikation Simichidas/Theokrit verhältnismässig einfach ist, hat die Gestalt des Lykidas den Forschern viel Kopfzerbrechen bereitet und zahlreiche Deutungsversuche hervorgerufen.”
44 These elements are: the mysterious meeting, the slightly abusive tone of the encounter, the reference to the springs (Burina, Hippocrene). Most important, however, is the handing of the stick by Lycidas to Simichidas as “a guest gift in the Muses,” cf. the handing of a laurel to Hesiod by the Muses.
45 Cf. also Cameron (1963: 291-307) and Williams (1971: 137-145). The latter proposed that Lycidas should be identified with the god of poetry and song Apollo, which would make the ironies involved in the condescending behavior of Simichidas towards Lycidas even greater.
46 Id. 7.13-14: ἤς δ’ αὐτόλος, οὐδὲ κέ τις νιν / ἡγνοίησεν ἰδών, ἐπει αἰτόλω ἐξοχ’ ἐώκει. (His name was Lycidas, and he was a goatherd. Nor could you fail to recognize him as such, since he looked exceedingly like a goatherd).
47 Gods that have been proposed: a satyr (Lawall, 1967); Apollo (Williams, 1971); Pan (Brown, 1981; recently defended anew by Clauss 2003). Segal’s remark (1981: 122) seems most convincing: “Lycidas’ divinity remains a hint only, a suggestion which the alert reader will keep in the back of his mind.” Bowie (1985: 67-97) interprets Lycidas as a character from the lost poetry of Philitas. Barring the find
Segal created a new range of possibilities by dispensing with exclusive identifications when he called Lycidas “a symbol:”

A symbol cannot mean whatever the critic wants it to mean; but it is important to recognize that a symbol may have several related and interconnected meanings. Precisely because of the range of such interrelated meanings we can return to a literary work again and again and never fully exhaust its significance. (...) Thus there is no necessary contradiction in regarding [Lycidas] as a god, as an aspect of Theocritus’ poetic personality, or (...) as a symbol of bucolic inspiration in general. (Segal, 1981: 114)

Segal takes his cues from structuralism and regards the confrontation of Simichidas and Lycidas as a series of binary oppositions between city (Simichidas) and wild countryside (Lycidas), civilization and nature, Demeter (goddess of the Thalysia) and Pan (god of herdsman, flocks, and wild animals), reality and myth, irony and romance. He suggests that it is exactly in the interplay between these dichotomies that bucolic poetry gets its form; the encounter between Simichidas (the townsman) and Lycidas (the quintessential goatherd) takes place on a country road, a no-man’s land between city and rough mountainsides, and leads to a celebration of the fruits of the tamed countryside, the Thalysia.48 He regards the Idyll as an attempt of Theocritus the poet to come to terms with the opposing constituent elements of his new bucolic poetry.

He also appears to be one of the first to fully realize the significance of the fact that “Simichidas” is an internal narrator who controls the narrative of the meeting, but that Theocritus the poet has deliberately created Simichidas as his alter ego:

By enclosing the encounter within a frame and making it the subject of recollection by a first-person narrator, he forces us to see Lycidas from the point of view of Simichidas’ I. This is not the device one would expect if the poem were merely trying to contrast two sides of Theocritus’ poetry or personality, for then the two figures ought to stand on the same level of reality and objectivity. (Segal, 1981: 125)

This resembles the observation that Gutzwiller builds upon in her perceptive study of “pastoral analogy” as a determining constituent of bucolic poetry. She argues that the essential significance of the bucolic Idylls is in the analogies constructed by the poet between the herdsman characters in the main body of the poem, and the figures of narrator and

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narratee in the frame. In the purely mimetic poems there is only an implied frame formed by the reader’s experience; the analogy remains implicit.

In the sixth Idyll, for instance, the narrator addresses a certain Aratus and presents the dialogue of the two herdsmen Damoetas and Daphnis. The herdsmen in turn play the roles of the Cyclops in love with Galatea and a praeceptor amoris. In this Idyll, the utterances made at every level of the poem shed light upon the situation at another level. The situation of the Cyclops and Galatea may in some way reflect the situation between the shepherds Damoetas and Daphnis; the implication may be that they are lovers or friends who offer each other advice upon matters of love. Their relation in turn illuminates the situation of the narrator and his addressee (his friend or lover?) Aratus.\footnote{Cf. also Bowie (1996: 91-100).}

The situation in the seventh Idyll is fundamentally different because there is an internal narrator, as Gutzwiller explains:

Simichidas and Lycidas do not correspond to characters in the frame, whose likeness and difference define or mirror their own likeness and difference; the frame presents only the narrator, who suggests his oneness with the poet himself by placing himself in a recognizable time and place with companions and acquaintances who seem historical personages. Because of this suggested identification, the poet himself is implied in all the relationships of his autobiographical projection in the form of Simichidas. And so, as Simichidas is an analogue of Lycidas, the poet may be viewed as Lycidas’ analogue as well. (Gutzwiller, 1991: 160)

I would even go further and state that, whereas Simichidas is indeed an analogue or alter ego of the poet, Lycidas is an alter ego once removed; an “alter alter ego.” To clarify that the narrator is a fictional alter ego, not to be equated tout court with the poet, Theocritus, the narrator receives a different name: “Simichidas.” The attested connotations of this name fit the character of the narrator, if “Simichidas” indeed derives from σιμός, snub-nosed, as the \textit{scholia} assumed. This adjective came to mean “arch” or “pert,” because of the character that was usually ascribed to people with flat noses.\footnote{Cf. \textit{LSJ}, who cite \textit{AP} 5.176; \textit{AP} 5.178.} Arch and pert would indeed appear to be adjectives that quite accurately describe the narrator’s demeanor (e.g., 26-30; 37-4).\footnote{Cf. the remarks of Segal (1981: 167-176).}

To develop the possibility that Simichidas is presented as a fiction in the poem, it may be emphasized that the initially nameless internal narrator receives the name Simichidas from Lycidas (21). This act indicates that he is, at some level, the creation of Lycidas. There is
no explanation why Lycidas calls the narrator “Simichidas.”52 When the narrator eventually starts singing his song, he accepts the name by which Lycidas has accosted him but appears to keep it at a slight remove from himself (95-98). The beginning of Simichidas’ song poses some problems with regard to the question of its true authorship: 53

Συμιχίδα μὲν Ἐρωτες ἐπέπταρον· ἢ γὰρ ὁ δειλὸς τόσον ἐρα ως Μυρτοῦς ὦσιν εἰαρος αἴγες ἐρανται.

Ὥρατος δ’ ὁ τὰ πάντα φιλαίτατος ἀνέρι τήνω παιδός ὑπὸ σπλάγχνοισιν ἔχει πόθον. οἴδεν Ἀριστεῖς,

εὐσθλὸς ἄνήρ, μέγ’ ἀριστος, ὥς ᾧ δὲν κεν αὐτὸς ἀείδειν. Φοίβος σὺν φόμμην γεία τριτόδεσσι μεγαίροι,

ὡς ἐκ παιδός Ἀρατος ὑπ’ ὀστίον αἴθετ ἐρωτι. (7.96-102)

For Simichidas the Loves sneezed, for he, poor soul, loves Myrto as dearly as goats love the spring. But Aratus, dearest friend in all to me, guards deep at heart a desire of a boy. Aristis knows, a man of worth, the best of men, whom Phoebus himself would not grudge to stand and sing, lyre in hand, by his own tripods—knows how to the very marrow Aratus is aflame with love for the boy. (transl. Gow)

The oddness of this opening and the difficulty of deciding who the alleged speaker is have been remarked upon:

The singer emphatically distances himself from the events he is describing. Whereas the singer of Lykidas’ song unambiguously identifies himself as Lykidas (55), Simichidas’ song could be performed by another singer: μοι in 103 and 118 are inconclusive, and even τὸν ἔξιν ... μεν (119) does not necessarily pick up 98. Simichidas’ song could be performed by others, whereas Lykidas’ performance is wholly personal. (Hunter, 1999 ad 98)

I would like to suggest that the fact that the singer refers to himself so emphatically in the third person might moreover indicate that he is not completely at one with the identity of “Simichidas” as bestowed upon him by Lycidas. In other words, the internal narrator points at the “fictional status” of Simichidas by his unwillingness to completely identify with him. He appears to make Simichidas simultaneously the singer and the subject of his song; or at least to create a (meaningful?) ambiguity as to the exact relation between Simichidas and the

52 Cf. Gow (1952: II, ad 11-14) and Hunter (1999: ad 11-14).
53 Cf. scholia at 21a: οἱ δὲ ἐπερὸν τινα τῶν σὺν αὐτῷ καὶ οὐ Θεόκριτον διὰ τὸ “Συμιχίδα μὲν Ἐρωτες ἐπέπταρον:” (96). (Some think [“Simichidas”] refers to another in his company, not to Theocritus, because of the phrase “The loves have sneezed for Simichidas”). However contrast scholia at 96-97c: περι ἐστιν ὁ ποιητής ἄδων φησὶ τῷ Συμιχίδα ὃι Ἐρωτες ἐπέπταρον. (Singing about himself, the poet says: etc.).
54 Id. 7.55-56: αἱ κα τὸν Λυκίδαν ὀπτεύμενον ἐξ Ἀφροδίτας ἀφού ἔρως αὐτῷ με καταίθη. (If he saves Lycidas, who is roasted by Aphrodite; for a hot love for him burns me up).
author of the song. Is it really the song of Simichidas? If so, what is the significance of the reference to Aristis (99)? Perhaps the song that follows is really a song in the voice of Aristis, just as Lycidas’ song gives voice to the song of Tityrus.55 The way in which Aristis is praised is remarkably similar to the way in which the narrator praises himself.56 At any rate, what comes across is that the voices are strangely mixed up, and it is difficult to ascertain the ultimate authority behind the song.

The impression that Simichidas is in some way a “creation” of Lycidas seems to be confirmed by Lycidas’ enigmatic remark to Simichidas that he is a πᾶν ἐπ’ ἀλαθείᾳ πεπλασμένον ἐκ Διὸς ἔρνος (44, translated below). This expression, with its paradoxical opposition of ἀλαθείᾳ (truth) and πεπλασμένον57 (made up, fashioned, fictioned) has repeatedly caught the attention of scholars, who have generally proposed to translate it as, “you are a sapling of Zeus all fictioned for truth,” meaning, “you are a convincing fiction, a poetic creation that is true to life.” As Gutzwiller explains:

Understood so, the phrase has reference not simply to the truthfulness of Simichidas’ preceding statement, but also to his truthfulness as a poet, his ability to compose with verisimilitude, or even of his truthfulness as a poetic fiction, his believability as the poetic creation of the narrator. (Gutzwiller, 1991: 166)58

So, Simichidas may be considered a convincing creation of Theocritus. To complicate matters further, it must be stressed again that he may in some sense also be a “creation” of Lycidas, who of course ultimately is the creation of the narrator/Simichidas, too, as the narrator controls the narrative of his meeting with Lycidas. There are other indications in the text that

55 Cf. the commentary of Gow (1952: II, ad loc.): “The most obvious inference from T.’s words would be that Aratus’ love affair formed the subject of a poem by Aristis.” Heubeck (1984: 233-43) proposed that the song eventually sang by the first person narrator is indeed the song of Aristis. Cf. also Hunter (1999: 180): “Like Lycidas, Simichidas’ song experiments with different voices: 103ff may be taken as a recreation of the song of Aristis, or more probably as the voice of the poet [Aristis] himself.”

56 Praise of Aristis: ἐσθλὸς ἀνήρ, μέγ’ ἀλαθείᾳ ἔρνος, ὅν οὐδέ κεν αὐτὸς ἀείδειν / Φοῖβος σὺν φόρμιγγι πάων τοπόδεσσι μεγαίσσω. (98-99) resembles self-praise of the narrator: καὶ γὰρ ἐγὼ Μοισάν καπαρφόν στόμα, καμὲ λέγοντι / πάντες ἄνδρον ἀλαθείᾳ. (Indeed, for I too am a clear voice of the Muses and all call me the best singer, 37-8); and of his art: ἐσθλὰ, τά ποιού καὶ Ζηνός ἐπὶ Θύρόνον ἀγαγό φῶμα. (Wonderful things, that, I think, have brought my fame even to Zeus’ throne, 92).

57 Cf. LSJ s.v. πλάσματα: “a distinctly literary term, expressing a figment, or fiction of the imagination of a poet,” cf. e.g. Xenophan. fr. 1.22-23 DK: οὐ χά μας διέπαν τιτάνων οὐδέ Γαγάνταν / οὐδέ κτε Κενταύρων, πλάσματα τῶν προτέρων. (Not recounting the battles of the Titans or the Giants or the Centaurs, those fictions of earlier men.) And Pl. Tim. 264e4-5.

58 Gow (1952: II, ad loc.): “the phrase has been suspected, and if taken at its face value is certainly odd.” For a meta-poetic interpretation, see e.g. Walsh (1985: 19), Segal (1981: 170-1), Goldhill (1991: 232), Hunter (1999 ad loc.).
Lycidas is Simichidas’ creation. This seems, for instance, to be suggested by the phrase ἐσθλὸν σὺν Μοίσαισι Κυδωνικόν εὕρομες ἄνδρα. (13: we found, with the Muses, a good man of Cydonia). The ambiguous and remarkable expression σὺν Μοίσαισι ... εὕρομες might easily be construed as meaning, “we invented,” or “created with the help of the Muses,” that is to say, “we composed a poem about this man, we invented him.”

In turn, this might explain the mysterious and much debated emphasis on Lycidas’ “extreme likeness” to a goatherd in one line although he is explicitly called an actual goatherd in the following lines. The underlying significance of the expression is perhaps rather that Lycidas is an extremely realistic creation of poetry, the perfect quintessence of the bucolic herdsman poet, a goatherd who “looks exceptionally like a goatherd.” Just as Simichidas is “fictioned for truth,” Lycidas is a character that resembles greatly what he is; he too is a convincing fiction.

The interpretation that either singer in the poem appears to be portrayed as the creator and fiction of the other, or at least remarking upon the fictional status of the other, is supported by the observation that both sing songs in which other (bucolic) singers feature. These singers, caught in a poetic fiction, are also themselves creators of singers in their songs.

All this ties very well into the tangled web of echoes, analogies, and allusions that Theocritus spins in all of his bucolic Idylls, as argued in Chapter 3.12. As bucolic poetry is poetry by singing herdsmen about singing herdsmen, it is only natural that the poet Theocritus creates a poetic alter ego who simultaneously functions as the creator of his antagonist (the singing herdsman Lycidas) and as the fiction of this singing herdsman (“Simichidas”) in this poem. In a programmatic poem about the nature of bucolic poetry,

59 For εὐφύσκῳ meaning to “compose a song” cf. e.g. Hedyl. (Ath. 11.473a/GP V). It would usually seem to carry a hint of “invention of a formerly non-existent type of poetry” (cf. the expression protos heuretes). None of the scholarship I have been able to see has this interpretation, the general trend being merely to explain the phrase as meaning “we fell in by the good grace of the Muses” (i.e., pointing forward to the fact that the meeting would result in a musical exchange), cf. e.g. Gow (1952: II, ad loc.), Goldhill (1991: 228), Hunter (1999 ad loc.).

60 Id. 7.14-15: οὐνομά μὲν Λυκίδαν, ἢ δ’ αὐτόλος, οὔδε κέ τις νῦν / ἡγνοίησεν ιδών, ἐπεὶ αὐτόλορ ἐξοχ’ ἐὼκει. (His name was Lycidas, and he was a goatherd. Nor could you fail to recognize him as such, since he looked exceedingly like a goatherd). This expression has been the starting point of the whole debate on the identity of Lycidas. For a discussion of some of the older theories, cf. e.g. Gow (1952: II, 128-9): ἐξοχ’ ἐὼκει: “If pressed here, it would probably lend a little colour to the view that Lycidas is not a goatherd at all.” The formula is very similar to the ones used to introduce gods in human form in the Homeric epics, cf. Puelma (1960: 144-164); Cameron (1963: 291-307); Hunter (1999: 146-150). On the remarkably opaque phrasing, see Goldhill (1991: 228-229): “A doubt is introduced? Yet precisely what is not provided is adequate, clear information to move beyond that doubt.”
such _mise en abyme_ serves to illustrate the Chinese-box-like structure characteristic of Theocritus’ bucolic poetry.

Lycidas’ song illustrates this. It tells of a symposium at which a herdsman-singer, Tityrus, will sing of the singing _protoi heuretai_ of bucolic poetry: Daphnis and Comatas, the cowherd and the goatherd who repeatedly feature in the poems of Theocritus and of his herdsman-characters.61 The song of Lycidas typifies the way in which songs are embedded in other songs, making different levels of song practically indistinguishable.

_and two shepherds shall pipe to me, one from Acharnae, and from Lycope one, and close at hand Tityrus shall sing how once Daphnis the neatherd loved Xenea, and how the hill was sorrowful about him and the oaktrees which grow upon the river Himeras’ banks sang his dirge, when he was wasting like any snow under high Haemus or Athos or Rhodope or remotest Caucasus. And he shall sing how once a wide coffer received the goatherd alive by the impious presumption of a king; and how the blunt-faced bees came from the meadows to the fragrant chest of cedar and fed him on tender flowers because the Muse had poured sweet nectar on his lips. Ah, blessed Comatas, yours is this sweet lot, you too were closed within the coffer; you too, on honeycomb fed, did endure with toil the springtime of the year. Would that you had been numbered among the living in my day, that I might have herded your fair goats upon the hills, and listened to your voice, while you, divine Comatas, did lie and made sweet music under the oaks or the pines. (transl. Gow, adapted)"

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61 Daphnis is the hero in the song of Thrysis in _ld. 1_ (as he is here), and is mentioned in the mimetic _ld. 5_ (a short reference by Comatas). In the partly mimetic _ld. 6_, he is a speaking character introduced by the narrator. A (different?) Comatas figures as a singer in _ld. 5_; cf. Ch. 3.11.
At the end of the song, the legendary goatherd poet Comatas, who was kept alive inside a chest by the providence of the Muses, is suddenly addressed directly despite being long dead and featuring here in a song embedded in a song. Ultimately, this means that the voices of Theocritus (who gives a voice to his alter ego, “Simichidas”) and “Simichidas” (who relates the song of Lycidas) and Lycidas (who sings of the song of Tityrus) and Tityrus (who refers to the singing mythical goatherd poet Comatas) converge.

The passage is extremely convoluted in that the song of Lycidas is set in the future, addresses a legendary and already ancient poet, and is recalled by Simichidas as something he heard “once upon a time.” Through this conflation of voices and time, Comatas is ultimately addressed by Theocritus himself, or by whoever is reciting the seventh Idyll. This is the miracle of bucolic poetry: the legendary goatherd singer Comatas, who is apparently at the heart of bucolic poetry, can be directly addressed and a song about his fate can resound across the ages because it has been handed down in the bucolic tradition, in songs by singing herdsmen about singing herdsmen; yet at the same time it seems invented at the moment of recital.

The unisonous address to Comatas, achieved through this harmony and the dizzying convergence of the voices of all the singers in all the layers of the poem makes clear that there is a fundamental unity to bucolic poetry. Although they operate on different levels of temporal and literary remoteness, and reality, myth, and fiction, they can be considered a single entity. The voices easily cross these boundaries and thus symbolize both the remoteness of the origins of bucolic poetry (Ἡχόνος ἀνίκ, once upon a time, 1) and its direct accessibility. Bucolic song simultaneously stresses the distance and elusiveness of its past and brings that past, through performance, directly to life.

Up to a certain point, this also applies to the song of Simichidas. Simichidas sings about his friend Aratus’ love for a certain Philinus. It seems likely that this Aratus is the same Aratus addressed in the frame of Idyll 6. It is not certain that he is the author of the Phaenomena; but if he were, the structural similarity of the songs of Simichidas and Lycidas

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62 This is similar to Arg. 2. 705-713, where the song of Orpheus, a hymn to Apollo narrated by the narrator in reported speech, is suddenly interrupted by a direct apostrophe of the god. The question who is speaking arises, Orpheus or the narrator. In last instance, it seems unanswerable, the implied point presumably being that there is a convergence between the voices of Orpheus and the narrator, cf. Ch. 3.5.
would be even greater. Lycidas sings of Tityrus, who sings of Daphnis and Comatas, the latter of whom is finally apostrophized. Just so “Simichidas” apparently sings of Aristis who sings of (the poet) Aratus. Aratus is eventually apostrophized as well. Lycidas, a fiction of “Simichidas” and Theocritus, sings of the fictional herdsmen in Theocritus’ poetry; “Simichidas,” Theocritus’ fictional alter ego, addresses Aratus who is also addressed by the poet Theocritus (Id. 6, 13). The internal narrator of the seventh idyll is linked more closely to the realistic frame of Theocritus’ poetry than Lycidas and is therefore able to refer to actual contemporaries of Theocritus (Asclepiades and Philitas, Aratus, possibly Antigenes and Phrasidamos). Nonetheless, he too is a fiction, as his name, given to him by the fictional goatherd Lycidas, indicates.

7.5 Conclusion

As we have seen, a name might harbor unexpected but relevant meanings intended to be decoded by the reader or interpreter of a work of poetry. To encourage such interpretations, the name could be contextualized to suggest meaning and evoke significances and similarities that would have otherwise gone unnoticed. Examples of this meaning-laden embedding include the scurrilous epigram by Crates (AP 11.218), the two epigrams of Callimachus on himself and his father (AP 7.525; 7.415), and the signatures of Aratus and Apollonius in the opening lines to their works.

The case of Theocritus/“Simichidas” is different in that it does not so much depend on the correct interpretation of the connotations of the name per se, but rather on the perception that “Simichidas” is a name given by Lycidas, a character in a poem, to the first-person narrator of that poem as an indication that this narrator is a poetic fiction. Once the fictionality of the narrator/Simichidas is recognized, his fictional status becomes the key to the interpretation of all that happens in the programmatic seventh idyll. This fictional status

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63 The scholia (Arg. ad Id. 6) suggest identifying him as the poet from Soloi: δύναται δὲ οὕτως εἶναι ὁ τὰ Φαινόμενα γράφας· συγκεχρόνικε γὰρ τῷ Θεοκρίτῳ καὶ εἰκός ἐστὶ τῶν φίλων ἀλλήλων γενέσθαι. (It is possible that this is the one who wrote the Phaenomena, for he was a contemporary of Theocritus and it is likely that they were friends). This identification was first questioned by Wilamowitz (1894: 182). For arguments pro and contra the identification with the author of the Phaenomena, see Hubbard (1998: 27) (pro); Gow (1952: II, 118-119) and Hunter (1999: 243) (contra). The structural similarity of the songs could indeed argue in favor of identification with Aratus the poet.
points to the creative role of Lycidas, who paradoxically is himself a creation of the internal narrator of the *Idyll*. Both are figments of the imagination of the other, and of the poet Theocritus; and the latter reinforces this by pointing to the fictionality of his creations in various ways (12; 44). The dual status of both Lycidas and Simichidas as poetic fictions and poets is a comment upon the character of bucolic poetry, a poetry of (fictional) herdsmen poets about herdsmen poets, singing of herdsmen poets, all created by Theocritus.