

COMMENTATIONES

GERSON SCHADE

Institut für Griechische und Lateinische Philologie
Freie Universität Berlin
Germany

HELLENISTIC MIMETIC POETRY

ABSTRACT. Schade Gerson, Hellenistic mimetic poetry (*Hellenistyczna poezja mimetyczna*).

Since Callimachus' mimetic hymns, super-realistic sceneries are common in Alexandrian poetry. This type of 'realism', however, only accompanies textual interplay. It may even be subordinated to it, as a new reading of Theocritus' *Adoniazuseae* (*Idyll* 15) suggests.

Keywords: estrangement device; mimetic hymns; urban bucolic.

INTRODUCTION

In 112 BC, an Egyptian official sends a letter to a colleague, informing him about the imminent arrival of a guest. A senator from Rome wants to explore the crocodile district in the Fayum oasis. Tame crocodiles are kept there.¹ In the letter, the Egyptian bureaucrat asks his colleague to take care of the guest-chambers for the incoming visitor, and to check whether the landing-places need repairing, perhaps being still damaged by the latest Nile-flooding. Moreover, some delicate pieces of food are to be prepared with which the senator may wish to feed the crocodiles (*P. Tebt.* 33). The papyrus that contains the letter was

¹Cf. the lively descriptions by Herodotus 6. 69: "they put ornaments of glass and gold on its ears and bracelets on its forefeet, provide for it special food and offerings, and give the creatures the best of treatment while they live; after death the crocodiles are embalmed and buried in sacred coffins"; and by Strabo 17. 1. 38: "our host, one of the officials, ... went with us to the lake, carrying from the dinner a kind of cooky and some roasted meat and a pitcher of wine mixed with honey. We found the animal lying on the edge of the lake, and when the priests went up to it, some of them opened its mouth and another put in the cake, and again the meat, and then poured down the honey mixture. The animal then leaped into the lake and rushed across to the far side; ... the priests ... went around the lake in a run, took hold of the animal, and in the same manner fed it what had been brought."

retrieved from the cartonnage of a mummified crocodile, at Crocodilopolis, the city of the crocodile.² The papyrus remained at the place where it was sent to. It gives evidence of real life.

Some Hellenistic poetic texts seem to do the same. One or two *Idylls* of Theocritus and some *Mimiambis* by Herondas portray everyday life, even verging on the indecent.³ Their half-dramatic and half-mimetic texts differ much from the more elevated mimetic hymns of their contemporary Callimachus. Yet, these texts resemble each other. Their equivocal relationship suggests that at least Theocritus and perhaps also Herondas respond to Callimachus. Giving their low-life version to his high-flown mimetic hymns, they modify the new Callimachean hymns as did Callimachus changed the genre hymn as it was, introducing mimetic elements or Doric dialect, for instance Callimachus made his hymns strange in a pleasing way, alien *and* at the same time familiar.⁴ Theocritus and Herondas copied this estrangement, which became part of the poetics of all three: they gave the charm of novelty to things of everyday.

The degree of artificiality obtained by all these texts does not exclude any realism, quite the contrary. The texts abound in realistic detail, those by Callimachus as well as those by Theocritus and Herondas.⁵ This kind of artificial realism, however, confirms the proposed new reading. Instead of attracting attention to real life and its amusing facets, it might be just a deliberate distraction, a smoke-screen designed to conceal the meta-literary interrelation between authors and genre. Paradoxically as it may sound, the realism of Hellenistic mimetic poetry is due to the fact that Theocritus and Herondas imitated a successful innovation made by a fellow poet. Nothing else is to be expected from such a bookish universe as Alexandrian poetry, which Callimachus portrays so vividly in his *Aetia*-prologue. Art imitates art, not life.

But how was life going in Alexandria? Whom can we turn to for an answer?

FIRST PART:

ALEXANDRIA AS SHE WAS UNDER THE LATE PTOLEMIES

At the end of Ptolemaic Egypt, when the country became a Roman province, if asked what Alexandria meant to him, a person familiar with contemporary

² Cf. the introduction in Grenfell/Hunt/Smyly 1902, vi, and the introductory notes in Grenfell/Hogarth/Hunt 1900, 16sq.

³ Cf. Fraser 1972, I 621: "... the mime ... attempted to satisfy the taste for realistic portrayal, as well as for the dramatic. ... One magnificent piece of the third century with an Alexandrian setting survives, the *Adoniazusae* of Theocritus ... Those of Herondas provide a substantial contemporary, though not specifically Alexandrian, body of such verse."

⁴ The concept known as estrangement theory is established by Viktor Shklovsky, who largely drew on Romantic poetics: cf. Robinson 2008: 79–95.

⁵ Cf. Zanker 1987: 9–24.

poetry may have cited gloomy Propertius. He speaks of *noxia Alexandria*, ‘harmful Alexandria’, a place situated in ‘a land ever ready for treason’, *dolis aptissima tellus* (3.11.33, likely to be published after 23 BC). In the following, Propertius lashes out at Cleopatra, ‘the harlot queen of licentious Canopus’ (3.11.39), named after a town on the western mouth of the Nile, some miles to the east of Alexandria. Apparently, an underlying theme is discernible, a subjective reality is drawn on by Propertius.⁶ Its sybaritic image held a special position in the Roman-Egyptian subconscious indeed. Hadrian let partly rebuild the place in Tivoli.

In his days, Propertius’ vision of Egypt’s capital was of topical interest. In 31 BC, the battle of Actium was the turning-point in Augustus’ career, and the capture of Alexandria in the next year led to the incorporation of Egypt into the empire. Already Pompey the Great might have seized on Alexandria (Caesar *Bell. Civ.* 3.104). But ‘the sand robbed Pompey of his three triumphs’, as Propertius put it: ‘no day shall ever wash you clean of this infamy, Rome,’ he continued (3.11.35sq., just after having singled out Alexandria and just before mentioning Cleopatra). The final victory of Augustus was the more precious because it had been so difficult to obtain. Already his great-uncle Julius Caesar knew how treacherous the people in Alexandria were (*Bell. Alex.* 7 & 24). Having pursued Pompey to Egypt, Caesar was involved in a war which ended in the establishment of his mistress Cleopatra as queen. Having been adopted by Julius Caesar and being made his chief heir, Augustus allowed her to commit suicide after her defeat.

Cleopatra, however, ‘having resolved to die, became ever more defiant ... no craven woman she’, as Horace put it (*C.* 1. 37. 29 & 32), was not the only person given that privilege by the man who was to become the first emperor of all times. There was also Propertius’ friend Gallus, who became the first prefect of conquered Egypt, though he fell in disgrace and was driven to death in 26 BC: a curious graph of his career.⁷ His pride encouraged him to some insolence, though his enemies “no doubt were numerous” too.⁸ Having crossed the Nile’s first cataract, he erected an inscription, celebrating his exploits in three

⁶Opening his elegy on the death of Marcellus, Propertius similarly attaches a subtext to a place. Marcellus died at Baiae, and by prominently stating this fact, Propertius evokes in a depreciating way a drowning golden boy of uncertain tastes; cf. Heyworth/Morwood 2013: 283sq. This differs much from Virgil’s *Epiciedion Marcelli*. It was at his recitation of its end (*Aeneid* 6. 882sq., when Anchises addresses Aeneas as ‘poor boy, if only you might in some way break the harsh fates, you will be Marcellus’) that Octavia is said to have fainted; cf. Fletcher 1941: 99. Propertius knew Virgil’s texts; he praised his works, the earlier and rather Hellenistic output (2. 34. 67–76), as well as he echoed the opening lines of the *Aeneid* (2. 34. 61–6).

⁷As in the case of Marcellus, again providing a glaringly discrepant version, Propertius makes Gallus die for love of his mistress (2. 34. 91sq.). Being fond of him, Virgil made Gallus the subject of *Ecl.* 10 and treated him prominently in *Ecl.* 6. 64–73; cf. Cairns 2006: 70–109.

⁸Syme 1939: 309.

languages (*CIL* 3.14147, dated April 15, 29 BC).⁹ He fell victim to Alexandria in particular, and to Egypt in general: a real heart of darkness.

To sum it up. Under the late Ptolemies, Alexandria's image is connected with riches, luxury, decadence, and treachery; her inhabitants are a race of deceivers.¹⁰ Is it the volatile city's mixture of Greeks and Egyptians¹¹ that is to blame for it? Or rather, does the city already in antiquity came close to a prostitute, an image that dominates Lawrence Durrell's portrait of the city and her literary circles in his *Alexandria Quartet*,¹² more than two millennia later? Ironically alluding to a biblical vision, that of the Lord coming on Justice Day and crushing mankind as grapes, pressed once they are ripe (*Isaias* 63.3, *Revelatio Ioannis* 14.19sq., 19.15), Durrell calls her "the great wine-press of love", a city "you would never mistake ... for a happy place" (*Justine*, London 1957, 14). Yet, what a place this must have been to "an ironist who so naturally, and with such fineness of instinct took his subject-matter from the streets and brothels of Alexandria!" (*Justine*, 30), a thinly disguised self-portrait.

Was there a time when things were better?

SECOND PART:

ALEXANDRIA AS SHE WAS UNDER THE EARLY PTOLEMIES

At the beginning of Ptolemaic Egypt, if asked what Alexandria meant to him, a person familiar with contemporary poetry may have cited Theocritus, who has something more positive to say. He makes a person state that 'villains don't creep up on you now in the street and mug you Egyptian fashion' since Ptolemy rules the city; 'that was the dirty game they used to play, ruffians, born criminals, to hell with the lot of them.'

The scenery comes from one of Theocritus' urban bucolic *Idylls* (15. 46–50), the so-called *Adoniazusae*. Ptolemy is the name of all the Macedonian kings of

⁹The inscription is preserved in the Museum of Egyptian Antiquities in Cairo, and a copy is on display in the Museum of Roman civilization in Rome; cf. recently Hoffmann/Minas-Nerpel/Pfeiffer 2009. The inscription was found on the island of Philae. Some 150 miles south, at Qasr Ibrim in Egyptian Nubia, the Gallus-papyrus was discovered. The town was Roman for not many years, and the papyrus was found among discarded Roman sandals. The town is the only place in lower Nubia to have survived the Nile floods; after the construction of the Aswan High Dam, Lake Nasser transformed it into an island. On the Gallus-papyrus, the oldest Roman manuscript, cf. Anderson/Parsons/Nisbet 1979.

¹⁰Cf. Hutchinson 2013: 123–9, with much more material than it was possible to include here.

¹¹Cf. Gruen 2010: 107sq.

¹²Cf. Ghoneim 1996: 285–301. The four novels by Durrell, published between 1957 and 1962, each named after the person whose vision of reality influenced the narrative, is one of the seminal works creating the myth of Alexandria. It provoked many a controversy, a brilliant discussion of which forms the first chapter in Dampierre-Noiray 2013: 35–87.

Egypt; the one mentioned here is Ptolemy II, called Philadelphus, who married as his second wife his sister Arsinoe II at the beginning of the 70s (she died in 270).¹³ Our text speaks of her as queen, and as being still alive (15. 23sq.). The season is shown by the offering of fruit (112–7, in the singer’s interlude) to be late summer or early autumn. The scene, then, is staged in August or September. It is fairly early in the morning, and Gorgo calls upon her friend Praxinoa, who lives in a distant part of the town; both are Syracusan women, married and resident in Alexandria. The text consists of three sections into the last of which an interlude is embedded.

First, the house: Gorgo and Praxinoa gossip disrespectfully (1–43); they have not met much these days, living far away from each other. Second, the street: they fear being robbed; they hold their hands in order not to get lost; they meet briefly an old woman and a stranger on their way to the palace (44–77). Third, inside the palace (78–149): they admire the tapestries’ weaving. Another stranger is around, remarking that they disturb the atmosphere when they speak loudly in their curious accent ‘with their great broad vowels’ (87sq.). This happens just before the interlude begins (100–44): a female singer, a recitatrice, performs a song in honour of Adonis. Finally, Gorgo remarks that her husband Diocleidas is waiting for his lunch and that it would be of no good to leave him hungry (145–9). She bids farewell to Adonis, the archetype of a handsome youth, i.e. a type of man she seems not to expect at home: “the two women’s husbands are no Adonises, and Diocleidas’ dinner (147–8) will not match the royal cuisine.”¹⁴

Theocritus’ text is a mime, made quite lively by the changes of scene, yet rendered farcical by the protagonists’ ludicrous representation. The contrast between their low aspirations and the palace’s luxury is ironic. Its most conspicuous formal feature is the combination of a dramatic mime with lyric, by which Theocritus brings to life the spectacle itself *and* the emotions of the spectators. Callimachus contrived something similar in three of his six hymns (II on Apollo, V on the Bath of Pallas, and VI on Demeter). Belonging to a distinct class of Alexandrian experimental poetry, his three mimetic hymns are intended to appear ostensibly to be hymns. However, they leave the reader to deduce the situation from a speaker’s words, perhaps the organiser of the celebration. The reader is invited to form a picture of the venue as well as of the festivity during the advance of which the hymn is sung.

¹³*Idylls* 14, 15, and 17 are set in his reign; he was king of Egypt circa 283 to 246. *Idylls* 15 and 17, a eulogy of the king, speak of Queen Arsinoe, consort of Philadelphus circa 278 to 270. The texts are well commented on: cf., e.g., Hunter 2003, and recently Hopkinson 2015. Two older monographs deal extensively with the various contexts to which the *Idylls* belong: cf. Griffiths 1979, and Burton 1995.

¹⁴Hopkinson 2015: 206.

Bion from Smyrna may be regarded as a later follower.¹⁵ In his *Epitaph on Adonis* it is also the speaker who creates the whole scenery as he describes it, his style being more jumbled, impressionistic even, each of his suggestions conjuring up a scenery. In Bion, however, no instructions are given to participants, for the goddess Aphrodite is appealed to directly.

Closer to Callimachus in time and habit is Theocritus' *Idyll* 15: the reader has to guess what happens from the speakers' words. Although *Idyll* 15 is a dialogue, not a hymn, both this text and the mimetic hymns by Callimachus are illusory enactments or recreations of festivals. Theocritus created something similar in his *Idyll* 18, a hexameter version of a ritual re-enactment of Helen's marriage song, performed by maidens, assembled to dance and to sing before her bridal chamber at Sparta: such as is familiar to us from the poetry of Alcman, or perhaps Stesichorus, too.¹⁶ Yet, this text is introduced as what it is supposed to be by a narrator (18. 1–8), who gives a frame to the whole setting.

Callimachus creates the illusion successfully without such a frame. In his hymn on Apollo, for instance, Callimachus subtly suggests the setting: an imaginary bystander is asked 'don't you see' (4), an echo of the same 'don't you see' said by the performers in Alcman's *Partheneion* (PMG 1.50).¹⁷ Then, the suddenness to be expected in epiphanies is alluded to (5); finally, the speaker declares that 'we shall see' Apollo (11, a perlocutionary future). Youths are visualized by the narrator as singing and dancing to the accompaniment of lyre-music (12sq.), worshippers are ordered to keep silent during the singing of the paean (17). Eventually, in the moment 'we hear' (97) the cry 'hie hie paieon' its origin is explained (traced back to Apollo's slaying of the serpent at Delphi, 97–104). Ostensibly, Callimachus makes the speaker appear to describe a religious celebration, at which Apollo eventually manifests himself. Yet, all is transformed into a mixture of mimetic and diegetic: a new artistic style, pioneering the way for further development.

In the case of the hymn to Athena, too, Callimachus recreates the ceremony's tension so convincingly that some considered the text (as the hymn on Apollo)

¹⁵Cf. Reed 1997: 15–26. Reminding us of the fact (op. cit. 24) that the ritual lament for Adonis was a festival of women, Reed observes not only that two of Callimachus' three mimetic hymns (V & VI) evoke women's festivals but also that the Adonia in Theocritus 15 are attended and explicated by the two female protagonists.

¹⁶An ancient source states in the poem some things have been taken from the first book of Stesichorus' *Helen*. A.S.F. Gow, who cited this, thought that the statement could not be amplified (1952, II 348), yet R. Hunter reconsidered the matter recently (2015).

¹⁷The *Partheneion* of Alcman is the oldest Greek choral song to survive. The text is fragmentary, but two things are certain, and both may have made an impact on Callimachus. The performance is divided "between the evocation of a mythic moment and the description of a present performance. And ... the song ... purged itself of banality by lending an air of fiction to its own visible and audible moment. ... the girls sing of their own gestures and those of their leaders ... They are turning themselves into poetry ...", as A.P. Burnett put it (1985, 9sq.).

to be an actual cult hymn. Excitement and religious fervour dominate indeed the hymn's mood. Maidens are asked to come forth, bringing (or not) various things (e.g., 2 & 13–7, etc.). Athena is appealed to often and eventually greeted enthusiastically at her arrival (e.g., 33, 55–7, 140–2, etc.). In the case of Callimachus' hymn to Demeter there is another disconcerting effect. A group of women wait for the sacred basket to return to its starting-point after a procession, and at the end the basket has at last arrived. Yet, the narrator's nebulous and uncharacterised voice seems to be somehow above and surely outside the ceremony (e.g., 17–22). The women who carry out the ritual are addressed several times (e.g., sq.), Demeter only lately and, eventually, again in the poem's closure (e.g., 116 & 134–8). The result is paradoxical: while the setting seems 'real' in so far as one can imagine it, any attempt to identify the performance's venue fails, thus confirming the illusion created so successfully by the poet.

Callimachus' hymns are surely not to be performed at a festival. Instead they are designed only to create a festival's illusion. Theocritus knew these texts, for his encomium on Ptolemy II (his *Idyll* 17) shows notable similarities to Callimachus' *Hymn to Zeus*, which is therefore considered to be roughly contemporary.¹⁸ If Theocritus wanted to caricature this recently established literary genre some literati would have welcomed his low-life *Adoniazuae*; at least those who were indulging in a lively literary genre such as the *Maxims* of Machon, the anecdotes of which "were probably popular in Bohemian circles in Alexandria."¹⁹ This collection of dramatized dialogues between prostitutes and their clients, recording the repartees of both, unsuitable for translation, is certainly done by an ironist,²⁰ who wanted to entertain his readers (as does the *Alexandria Quartet* by Durrell).

Was Herondas a fellow of that ilk? Or does he stoop too low in his *Mimes* to be compared to Theocritus' poetic *replique* to Callimachus?

THIRD PART: AN INTERPRETATIONAL STAND-OFF

A certain Herondas sprang to fame in 1891, when a papyrus was published containing eight of his *Mimiamb*s. They are spectacularly low-life:²¹ in one, for

¹⁸ Cf. the literature as indicated by Hopkinson 2015: 243. Theocritus also alluded to the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*: various islands were afraid to allow Leto to give birth, but Delos offered refuge in return for being honoured later by her son Apollo. Theocritus has Cos, the birthplace of Ptolemy, make a similar speech of welcome, and the parallel with Delos is drawn explicitly (66sq.).

¹⁹ Fraser 1972: I 622.

²⁰ Analysing the ancient testimonies, A.S.F. Gow found that they suggest "that Machon and Callimachus were teaching in Alexandria at about the same time and may warrant a cautious conclusion that they were not far from contemporaries" (1965: 7).

²¹ In German, cf. recently W. Puchner 2012: 15–40.

instance, a brothel-keeper delivers a speech in court, accusing the captain of a merchant ship of having abducted a prostitute (2); in another, a woman owns a slave who provides her with sex: accusing him of having relationships with other women, she decides that he should be tattooed (5). Herondas vividly portrays Alexandria in his first *Mimiamb*, recording the opportunities for advancement offered by the city and the king. The scene is the house of a certain Metriche, a former concubine or courtesan. An old woman named Gyllis knocks on the door of the house of her young friend. They have not met much for some time, and Gyllis blames this on the distance she lives from Metriche.

The same happened at the opening of *Idyll* 15, though in Herondas the setting does not take place in Alexandria. Gyllis tells Metriche, however, that the latter's lover Mandris, who has been away in Alexandria for months, has clearly fallen prey to the city's attractions. She recommends the services of a young man, though Metriche asserts her continuing devotion to Mandris. Gyllis bids farewell; accepting wine, she departs. Though not being set at Alexandria, the text clearly has the city as its centre: a clever bit of paralipsis.

The poem divides naturally into three parts (as does *Idyll* 15), the second of which shows Gyllis' arguments and their refutation by Metriche. The passage concerning Metriche's lover Mandris contains various elements in praise of Alexandria (28–32). All things such as exist and are produced anywhere can be found there, says Gyllis, 'all the good things he (Mandris, who left for Alexandria) could want.' Yet, this catalogue of attractions is put in the mouth of an unlikely and unexpectedly humble, if not downright low-life figure, and it is highly curious to find the earliest reference to the Museum in such a context.²² It is the same somehow ironic contrast as in Theocritus' *Idyll* 15, which may be regarded as a point of contact with Herondas' first *Mimiamb*. But there is yet another one. Alexandria's attractions are also stated by two interlocutors at the end of Theocritus' *Idyll* 14, a praise seemingly taken up by Herondas in his first *Mimiamb*.

The plot of *Idyll* 14 shows two friends. One has been left by his girl, though cannot forget her, and is thinking of enlisting as a soldier, a mercenary. To him (Aeschinus) a friend (Thyonichus) recommends service with Ptolemy, of whom he is a most rapturous admirer. 'Ptolemy is the best paymaster a free man could have' (14. 58), Thyonichus says to Aeschinus, 'a lover of arts and women', he continues (14. 61). If you want to get on in life, Aeschinus, 'then off with you to Egypt. None of us is getting younger, we're all growing grey from the temples; we should make our mark while there's still spring in our knees', Thyonichus ends the poem.

Though both authors' strategies may differ, there is a third point of contact between Herondas' first *Mimiamb* and again another text from Theocritus. *Idyll*

²²Cf. Cunningham 1971: 67, and, in general, Bagnall 2002. Similar catalogues are frequent in comedy and listed by Headlam/Knox 1922, 26; parts of the passage have been suspected to be not genuine, but Di Gregorio rejects these claims in detail (1997: 69–73).

2 centres on a *woman's* infatuation with a man, with whom the woman fell in love at a festival (76–86), and Theocritus enlivened the theme of ‘love at first sight’ with a striking variant. For, it is usually the man, not the woman who is a victim to such a love. This is what happens in Herondas. In the first *Mimiamb* it is a *man* who fell in love with Metriche at a festival (*Mimiamb* 1. 56–60). Yet because she remains faithful to her lover departed for Alexandria, it is this other man who is in the lovelorn state.²³

Finally, there is another, fourth point of contact: Herondas, too, depicted two women on a visit. In his *Mimiamb* 4, they make an offering at a temple of Asclepius, itself amply described in detail. In *Idyll* 15 two women visit Ptolemy's palace, listening to a performance at the Adonis festival. Both texts contain descriptions of works of art, linked by the fact that they are described through the excited reactions of the spectators to them. Twice in the fourth *Mimiamb* (20–38 & 56–71) and once in the fifteenth *Idyll* (80–6) the life-like quality of works of art is admired. Moreover, in these texts both Theocritus and Herondas are interested in the psychology of religious feeling, as is Callimachus in his hymns.

Given the closeness between Theocritus and Herondas, it is tempting to regard the whole low-life mimetic poetry as farcical. Yet the texts are not simply pieces of grotesque reality, or not only; for, they can also be read as comic imitations of more pompous, highfalutin even, texts as these brand-new mimetic hymns by Callimachus were. Certainly, bizarre and extravagant Herondas belongs to a different tribe than Theocritus does, who refashioned various traditional literary forms in original ways, carefully polishing little forms, i.e. idylls. Nevertheless, it could be clearly demonstrated that both share some points of contact.²⁴ They may be taken together, and perhaps, the Alexandrian texts by Theocritus and the related ones by Herondas are fully to be appreciated only as meta-literary comments on other texts that were already around read, and discussed. Whether Herondas cared for it we cannot know; Theocritus, however,

²³An ancient testimony claims that Theocritus is, in this *Idyll*, dependent upon a mime of Sophron, from which Theocritus transferred rashly, or perhaps, tastelessly, altering it somehow, the figure of the servant Thestylis. Similarly, an ancient testimony declares that *Idyll* 15 is modelled on a mime of Sophron, that Theocritus made the earlier text somehow strange (the Greek citations are given by Gow 1952, II 33 & 265, now v. Sophron T 15 PCG). The citations sound very modern, suggestive of the strategies of defamiliarization *avant la lettre*. Be that as it may, in the case of *Idyll* 15 the scholiast cites a play by title, *Specators at the Isthmian Festival* (F 10 PCG). Sophron comes from Syracuse, and one may add that another contemporary Syracusan, the comic writer Epicharmus, wrote a *Specators*, in which bystanders commented on objects at the Pythian festival (F 68 PCG). As a native from Syracuse who stayed attached to his hometown, as his encomium on Hiero II may show (*Idyll* 16), Theocritus is likely to have known the texts and even heard them performed. Curiously enough, Egyptian themes are known to the Sicilian mime as well as to Sicilian comedy, whose inventor Epicharmus is praised by Theocritus (*Epigram* 18); cf. Sofia 2013, 39–58. On Sophron as a literary figure cf. the introduction by J.H. Hordern (2004: 1–34).

²⁴Cf. Zanker 2009: 36–9.

clearly struggled to gain Ptolemaic patronage. His encomium of Ptolemy, which employs the traditional format of a hymn, is evidence of his strife of matching another poet's recognition (*Idyll* 17), a text much closer to his other encomium of Hiero of Syracuse than to anything else (*Idyll* 16).²⁵

A papyrus would be much welcomed that should contain the impressions of a literary critic, who frequented not the crocodiles, but the literary cliques: preferably by someone like Lawrence Durrell, who analysed her Bohemian circles. A papyrus from Crocodilopolis would do best, extracted from the cartonnage of a crocodile being fed to death by tourists in the Fayum oasis. Such a text has come down to us, indeed. Actually, it is a papyrus from Oxyrhynchus, the city of the sharp-nosed fish. It gives evidence of real life.

Attacking vehemently and viciously his fellow poets in his *Retort to Critics*, Callimachus revived pamphleteering, showing how intensely vitriolic the meta-literary interrelation between Hellenistic poets has become. Being much annoyed, in a picturesque way (*P. Oxy.* 2079), Callimachus described the response of his creative impulse to the literary conditions of the time.²⁶ At least the literary persona who speaks the opening lines, if not he himself, was convinced that art imitates art, not life.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Anderson/Parsons/Nisbet 1979: R.D. Anderson, P.J. Parsons and R.G.M. Nisbet. "Elegiacs by Gallus from Qasr Ibrim," *Journal of Roman Studies* 69 (1979): 125–55.
- Bagnall 2002: R.S. Bagnall, "Alexandria: Library of Dreams," *Proceedings of the American Philological Society* 146 (2002): 348–62.
- Burnett 1985: A.P. Burnett, *The Art of Bacchylides*, Cambridge 1985.
- Burton 1995: J.B. Burton, *Theocritus's Urban Mimes: Mobility, Gender, and Patronage*, Berkeley 1995.
- Cairns 2006: F. Cairns, *Sextus Propertius: The Augustan Elegist*, Cambridge 2006.
- Cunningham 1971: I.C. Cunningham, *Herodas, Mimiambi*, Oxford 1971.
- Dampierre-Noiray 2013: Ève de Dampierre-Noiray, *De l'Égypte à la fiction: récits arabes et européens du XXe siècle*, Paris 2013.
- Di Gregorio 1997: L. Di Gregorio, *Eronda, Mimiambi (I-IV)*, Milano 1997.
- Fletcher 1941: F. Fletcher, *Virgil Aeneid VI*, Oxford 1941.
- Fraser 1972: P.M. Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria*, Oxford 1972.
- Ghoneim 1996: M. Ghoneim, "Alexandrian Culture in Modern Times: Egyptian Identity and Cosmopolitan Aspects," in: *Alexandria and Alexandrianism*, Malibu 1996.
- Gow 1952: A.S.F. Gow, *Theocritus*, Cambridge 1952.

²⁵A.S.F. Gow (1952: II 305) considered it to be a most remarkable achievement, inspired almost throughout by the choral lyrics of Pindar and Simonides. A text like this provides a stark contrast to Herodas, as does also a dialogue-piece such as *Idyll* 7. In this *masquerade bucolique* (as Gow called it, II 129) a tone much different from Herodas prevails. Yet, poets are a very chameleonic race, and Theocritus may well have taken his inspiration from very different sources.

²⁶Callimachus attacks conventional poetry. Theocritus and Herodas, though, may have seemed to him much more conventional and far less audacious than he judged his own poetry to be.

- Gow 1965: A.S.F. Gow, *Machon, The Fragments*, Cambridge 1965.
- Grenfell/Hunt/Smyly 1902: B.P. Grenfell, A.S. Hunt, J.G. Smyly, *Tebtunis Papyri I*, London 1902.
- Grenfell/Hogarth/Hunt 1900: B.P. Grenfell, D.G. Hogarth, A.S. Hunt, *Fayum towns and their papyri*, London 1900.
- Griffiths 1979: F.T. Griffiths, *Theocritus at Court*, Leiden 1979.
- Gruen 2010: E.S. Gruen, *Rethinking the Other in Antiquity*, Princeton 2010.
- Headlam/Knox 1922: W. Headlam, A.D. Knox, *Herodas, The Mimes and Fragments*, Cambridge 1922.
- Heyworth/Morwood 2013: S.J. Heyworth, J.H.W. Morwood, *A commentary on Propertius Book 3*, Oxford 2013.
- Hoffmann/Minas-Nerpel/Pfeiffer 2009: F. Hoffmann, M. Minas-Nerpel, S. Pfeiffer, *Die dreisprachige Stele des Gaius Cornelius Gallus: Übersetzung und Kommentar*, Berlin 2009.
- Hopkinson 2015: N. Hopkinson, *Theocritus, Moschus, Bion*, Cambridge/Mas. 2015.
- Hordern 2004: J.H. Hordern, *Sophon's Mimes*, Oxford 2004.
- Hunter 2003: R. Hunter, *Theocritus: Encomium on Ptolemy Philadelphus*, Berkeley 2003.
- Hunter 2015: R. Hunter, "Sweet Stesichorus: Theocritus 18 and the Helen revisited," in: *Stesichorus in Context*, Oxford 2015, 145–63.
- Hutchinson 2013: G. Hutchinson, *Greek to Latin: Frameworks and Contexts for Intertextuality*, Oxford 2013.
- Puchner 2012: W. Puchner, "Die spätantiken 'Mimiamben' des Herodas: mimischer Solovortrag oder theatralische Aufführung?," in: W.P., *Von Herodas zu Elytis: Studien zur griechischen Literaturgeschichte seit der Spätantike*, Wien 2012, 15–40.
- Reed 1997: J.D. Reed, *Bion of Smyrna: The Fragments and the Adonis*, Cambridge 1997.
- Robinson 2008: D. Robinson, *Estrangement and the Somatics of Literature*, Baltimore 2008.
- Sofia 2013: A. Sofia, *Sfingi e Sirene: La presenza egizia nella Sicilia greca del V sec. a.C., testimonianze nella commedia dorica e nel mimi*, Roma 2013.
- Syme 1939: R. Syme, *The Roman Revolution*, Oxford 1939.
- Zanker 1987: G. Zanker, *Realism in Alexandrian Poetry: A Literature and Its Audience*, London 1987.
- Zanker 2009: G. Zanker, *Herodas, Mimiambes*, Oxford 2009.

HELLENISTIC MIMETIC POETRY

Summary

His avantgardistic mimetic hymns demonstrate how effortlessly Callimachus transformed a genre known from the beginnings of Greek poetry. He did so rather often, as his *Iambics* may prove as well. Inspired by his high-brow strategies of defamiliarization, his contemporary Theocritus contrived something similar. On a less ambitious scale, his *Adoniasusae* (*Idyll* 15) may be seen indeed as an equivocal poetic response to Callimachus' new way. The result, however, is somehow farcical. This may be due to the fact that, a keen observer of contemporary literary achievements, Theocritus took also inspiration from the lower end of Alexandria's 'Golden Age'-poetry, i.e. Herondas. Seemingly and paradoxically, this new reading groups together authors not necessarily linked by other similarities. At one moment in their career, however, they all might have been tempted by depicting 'realistic' scenery; perhaps, just because their public craved for it. Much later, but at the same place, Lawrence Durrell portrayed such a Bohemian bunch, which similarly considered art as an end in itself.