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Theocritus and the Style of Hellenistic Poetry*

Of the major poets of the third century it is perhaps Theocritus who most invites us to reflect upon what we think we know about Hellenistic poetry and upon the usefulness, or otherwise, of the label itself. Theocritus was not—as far as we know—a scholar-poet, that figure identified by Rudolf Pfeiffer (1955, 69) as ‘the feature of the Hellenistic age’;¹ there is, moreover, no reason to associate many of his poems with any particular situation of patronage, however clearly the Ptolemaic world looms in the background of several of them. On the other hand, it is his poetry which has given particular impetus to some of the ideas about Hellenistic poetry which have been most influential in modern scholarship—the appeal to the ordinary and the everyday, ‘Kreuzung der Gattungen’, the dominance of the miniature over the grand structures of epic, the interest in poetic and reconstructive dialect, and so forth. In this essay I want to use one poem in particular, *Idyll* 16, to explore some of the phenomena that we think of as most characteristic of the poetry of the third century.

I choose to revisit *Idyll* 16, the *Charites*, for a number of reasons. First, because there is every reason to suppose that it has nothing to do with Alexandria, and is therefore not an example of ‘Alexandrian poetry’, as that phrase is most commonly used. Secondly, of course, because it is one of the most intriguing and puzzling of the poems which survive to us from the earlier part of the century. It has recently been argued (Willi 2004) that we can see here poetry in transition: Theocritus has written in a new form but preserved poetry’s traditional social function of protreptic advice; it was to be left to Callimachus to change both form and function, the latter in the direction of a purely aesthetic function, ‘art for art’s sake’.² It matters less for present purposes that I cannot share this view of Callimachus’ poetry, than that *Idyll* 16 continues to attract attention as marking a new stage in the Greek poetic tradition. From another perspective, *Idyll* 16 has recently been the subject of interesting work which seeks to link it

* An earlier version of this essay formed part of the opening lecture to the 2012 Thessaloniki conference; I have not sought to remove all marks of its origin in an oral presentation for a specific occasion.

1 Much might be thought to hang on whether the writing of prose treatises, as well as poetry, was thought to be a necessary criterion for classification as a ‘scholar-poet’.

2 For this as a view of *Idyll* 16, however, cf., e.g., Fabiano 1971, 519 n. 7. Sistakou 2008a, 42–4 offers a clear account of the poetics of *Idyll* 16.

very closely to a historical context—something which, I think, scholars of Hellenistic poetry still try to do less often than they should, perhaps because they know in their hearts that, where the burden of proof is so heavy, such arguments have traditionally failed to carry conviction. Thus, José González (González 2010) has seen a traditional social function in *Idyll* 16—Theocritus revives the poetic voice of Theognis, a poet associated in some traditions with Sicily, to lecture and cajole his Syracusan fellow-citizens about the terrible state into which their city has fallen. For Malcolm Bell, on the other hand (Bell 2011), Theocritus joins his bucolic voice to the hopes of the young Hieron to rescue Syracuse from the agrarian crisis which besets it; we have nothing less than ‘a political and economic program for the new leader’.³ Much here would demand discussion on another occasion, but for the present I will focus on some very traditional critical criteria, to see if we can pick out features that we might wish to label ‘Hellenistic’, and whether that label helps or hinders understanding.

First, structure. It is clear, and generally recognized,⁴ that the poem falls into two halves, with something of a fresh start at v. 58:

ἐκ Μοισᾶν ἀγαθὸν κλέος ἔρχεται ἀνθρώποισι,
χρήματα δὲ ζῶντες ἀμαλδύνουσι θανόντων.

Theocritus 16.58–9

From the Muses comes excellent renown to men, but the living waste away the possessions of the dead.

ἐκ Μοισᾶν with which this second part of the poem begins—starting ‘from the Muses’ is a good move for any poet in any section of his song—takes us back to the opening quatrain:

αἰεὶ τοῦτο Διὸς κόρυαις μέλει, αἰὲν ἀοιδοῖς,
ὑμνεῖν ἀθανάτους, ὑμνεῖν ἀγαθῶν κλέα ἀνδρῶν.
Μοῖσαι μὲν θεαὶ ἐντί, θεοὺς θεαὶ αἰέδοντι·
ἄμμες δὲ βροτοὶ οἶδε, βροτοὺς βροτοὶ αἰείδωμεν.

Theocritus 16.1–4

It is always the task of the daughters of Zeus, always of singers, to hymn the immortals, to hymn the glorious deeds of excellent men. The Muses are goddesses, goddesses sing of gods; we here are mortals, let us mortals sing of mortals.

³ Bell also draws suggestive connections between Theocritus’ bucolic poems and the ‘pastoral’ art of third-century Sicily.

⁴ An exception here is Meincke 1965, 34–5 who appears to place the major break in the poem after v. 70; this cannot, I think, be correct. On the sequence of thought in vv. 68ff cf. below p. 73–4.

Both halves of the poem thus begin with the Muses, just as ἀγαθὸν κλέος in v. 58 picks up ἀγαθῶν κλέα ἀνδρῶν in v.2. This second part of the poem itself is bounded in ring composition:

τί γὰρ Χαρίτων ἀγαπητόν
ἀνθρώποις ἀπάνευθεν; ἀεὶ Χαρίτεσσιν ἄμ' εἴην.

Theocritus 16.108–9

What is desirable for men apart from the Graces? May I always be together with the Graces.

ἐκ Μοισᾶν ... ἀνθρώποισι (v. 58) is picked up by ἀνθρώποις ... Χαρίτεσσιν (v. 109), with variation between the two sets of goddesses with whom the poem has been concerned. There is of course no ‘clean break’ between the two sections of the poem: the transitional verse, ‘From the Muses comes excellent renown to men’ (v. 58), also summarises the immediately preceding section on the ‘benefits’ conferred by Simonides and Homer on the characters (real and fictional) about whom they wrote; moreover, the ‘formal’ break after v. 57 is by no means the only important structural moment within the poem. Nevertheless, it is not always appreciated just how neat is the formal division between the two ‘halves’ of the poem. If we include the opening quatrain in the first part, then the division is into 57 and 52 verses, or if we separate off the opening quatrain, as there seems every reason to do—among which will be both the very distinctive style of vv. 1–4 and the fact that we then have one part beginning with the Charites and the second with the Muses—we have 53 and 52 verses respectively, all but a complete equality. Are these figures simply the kind of accident which happens? Perhaps, but along with the ‘materiality’ of poetry—poems figured as unloved papyrus rolls etc—which is so central to *Idyll* 16, we ought perhaps also consider whether the stichometric habit has here encouraged an attention to neat divisions, as part of an *epideixis* of what poetry is or can be, and this is one manifestation of a set of such phenomena which become important in the Hellenistic period; we think, for example, of pattern poems (*technopaignia*), acrostics, the organization of poetry books and so forth.⁵ We will want to associate these phenomena with the writing habit, though their roots in archaic and classical verse require careful attention;⁶ it would, above all, be very nice to know just how such formally marked structures were ‘felt’. Be that as it may, if this structural analysis is on the right lines, then the neat division of *Idyll* 16 is a special case within a general tendency of Theocritean poetry. *Idyll* 17 falls into verse paragraphs of

⁵ Bing 1988 remains a valuable guide in these areas; on pattern-poems, acrostics etc cf. Luz 2010.

⁶ Relevant here is Faraone 2008.

roughly (though certainly not exactly) equal lengths;⁷ a case has recently been made for a very neat triptych structure of 72–28–72 for *Idyll* 24;⁸ the main body of *Idyll* 18 falls into ten-verse paragraphs, and similar structures may be found in the *Hymns* of Callimachus.⁹

What is true of the second part of the poem is also true of the poem as a whole. ἀνθρώποις in the final verse does not just take us back to v. 58, but also picks up the repeated βροτοί of v. 4. More is going on here than just the formal device of ring-composition. As is well known, the closing prayer to the Graces of Orchomenos in vv. 104–9 reworks the opening of Pindar's *Olympian* 14 for a victor from Orchomenos:

Καφισίων ὑδάτων
λαχοῖσαι αἵτε ναίετε καλλίπῳλον ἔδραν,
ὦ λιπαρᾶς ἀοίδιμοι βασίλειαι
Χάριτες Ἐρχομενοῦ, παλαιγόνων Μινυᾶν ἐπίσκοποι,
κλῦτ', ἐπεὶ εὐχομαι· σὺν γὰρ ὑμῖν τὰ <τε> τερπνὰ καὶ
τὰ γλυκὲ' ἀνεταί πάντα βροτοῖς,
εἰ σοφός, εἰ καλός, εἴ τις ἀγλαὸς ἀνὴρ.
οὐδὲ γὰρ θεοὶ σεμνᾶν Χαρίτων ἄτερ
κοιρανέοντι χοροῦς
οὔτε δαίτας·

Pindar, *Olympian* 14.1–9

Controllers of the waters of Kephisos, dwellers in a place of fine horses, O Graces, queens, celebrated in song, of shining Orchomenos, guardians of the ancient Minyans, hear when I pray. With you come all things pleasant and sweet for mortals, whether a man be wise, or handsome, or of glittering fame. Not even the gods organize dances or feasts without the holy Graces.

Theocritus' opening distinction between gods and men is in fact, as we now see, repeated at the end of the poem, but implicitly, through evocation of that same distinction within a model text. This is sophisticated, allusive poetry which makes demands upon us: ἀνθρώποις in v. 109 is anything but a mere line-filler.

⁷ One division would be 1–12 (proem), 12–33 (Soter, 21 verses), 34–57 (Berenice, 24), 58–76 (Cos), 77–94 (Ptolemy's power, 18), 95–120 (wealth, 26), 121–34 (piety, 14), 135–7 (envoi, 3); various subdivisions within this structure are readily identifiable.

⁸ Cf. Bernsdorff 2011. A perhaps more obvious division is into 1–63 (Heracles and the snakes), 64–102 (Teiresias), 103 to the end (Heracles subsequent education and career), i.e. 63–39–70 verses, or (more likely?) 1–63, 64–102, 103–(??)166 (Heracles' education and early career), 167–172 (hymnic envoi and prayer for victory).

⁹ Cf. Hunter 1996b, 155–6.

As for the initial quatrain itself, this falls—as do the three quatrains of the proem to *Idyll* 17¹⁰—into paired couplets; the couplets in this instance are held together by rhythmical identity and difference from each other (vv. 3–4 are *spon-deiazontes* and share an identical pattern of syllables per word throughout the verse), and by the mannered verbal repetitions and parallelisms which they display.¹¹ In running through the three classes of gods, (epic) heroes (ἄγαθοὶ ἄνδρες), and ordinary mortals (βροτοί), as also does the proem of *Idyll* 17 (though to somewhat different effect), the proem to *Idyll* 16 repeats with variation the same priamel-like function as the opening of Pindar's *Second Olympian*, and the following τίς question in v. 5 perhaps makes it not impossible that Theocritus was here actually reworking that grand opening for a Sicilian patron:¹²

ἀναξιφόρμιγγες ὕμνοι,
τίνα θεόν, τίν' ἥρωα, τίνα δ' ἄνδρα κελαδήσομεν;

Pindar, *Olympian* 2.1–2

Hymns, masters of the lyre, which god, which hero, which man shall we celebrate?

Theocritus' choice of βροτοί for emphasis in v. 4 will have been influenced by, and evoke, the Homeric tendency to use this form to refer purely generally to (ordinary) 'mortals' of any time; 'mortals' also introduces the central theme of the poem—the power of the poet to offer immortal κλέος, such as that already achieved by the ἀγαθοὶ ἄνδρες. Hanging over the opening fifteen verses of the poem are Homer's deprecatory οἷοι νῦν βροτοὶ εἰσὶ (*Iliad* 5.304, 12.383, 449, 20.287) and οἳ νῦν βροτοὶ εἰσὶν ἐπιχθόνιοι (*Iliad* 1.272), a memory with particular bite in v. 15, τίς τῶν νῦν τοιόσδε;, which picks up the question of vv. 5–7 after the parenthesis of vv. 8–12.¹³ Theocritus' complaints about 'men of the present day' turn out to have Homeric precedent: both look back to a lost time of heroic deeds (ὥς

¹⁰ Cf. Hunter 2003, 93–4.

¹¹ These parallelisms would be increased were we to emend αἰδοντι in v. 3 to the subjunctive αἰδωντι. I am not aware that this has ever been suggested; Austin 1967, 3 paraphrases the verse as 'Let gods hymn gods ...', but does not suggest the emendation. In favour of the transmitted text, it may be argued that the poet is describing what the Muses *do* (habitually), as in the opening of Hesiod's *Theogony*, whereas the subjunctive is appropriate for the human poet at the start of a new song.

¹² For other aspects of the opening quatrain cf., e.g., Gutzwiller 1983, 217–19, Fantuzzi 2000, 142–5.

¹³ The first half of v. 15 is more usually associated with Simonides fr. 10 Poltera (= *PMG* 506), cf. Gutzwiller 1983, 222–3, Vox 2002, 199–200 (adducing the contextual appropriateness of the Simonidean poem); I see no difficulty in the Theocritean question evoking both Homer and Simonides.

πάρος, v. 14), but—unlike his epic model—Theocritus will be able to express the hope that such days may yet return.

There is, of course, particular point in creating a neat stichometric division within *Idyll* 16, as one of the differences between the two parts is that whereas the first one illustrates the power of poetry from the great figures of the past (Simonides, Homer), the second focuses on the present and future and on what Theocritus himself could do for a worthy patron; present and future possibilities are indeed to be equal to those of the past. Both halves also move from the allegedly current distorted relations between poet and patron (vv. 5–21, 60–5) to an imagined ideal. Theocritus offers Hieron the same or even more in fact than the patrons of the past. A particular effect here is the replay of vv. 36–9 in the poet's wishes for peace in Sicily in the second half of the poem:

πολλοὶ δὲ Σκοπάδαισιν ἐλαυνόμενοι ποτὶ σακούς
 μόσχοι σὺν κεραῆσιν ἐμυκήσαντο βόεσσι·
 μυρία δ' ἄμ πεδῖον Κραννώνιον ἐνδιάσκειν
 ποιμένες ἔκκριτα μῆλα φιλοξείνοισι Κρεώνδαις·

Theocritus 16.36–9

Many were the calves which lowed as they were driven to the stalls of the Scopadae, together with the horned cattle; countless the splendid sheep which shepherds pastured for the hospitable Creondae over the plain of Crannon.

αἱ δ' ἀνάριθμοι
 μῆλων χιλιάδες βοτάναι διαπιανθεῖσαι
 ἄμ πεδῖον βληχῶντο, βόες δ' ἀγεληδὸν ἐς αὖλιν
 ἐρχόμεναι σκνιφαῖον ἐπισπεύδοιεν ὁδίταν·
 νειοὶ δ' ἐκπονέοιντο ποτὶ σπóρον, ἀνίκα τέττιξ
 ποιμένας ἐνδίους πεφυλαγμένος ὑψόθι δένδρων
 ἄχεϊ ἐν ἀκρεμόνεσσιν· ἀράχνια δ' εἰς ὅπλ' ἀράχλαι
 λεπτὰ διαστήσαιντο, βοᾶς δ' ἔτι μηδ' ὄνομ' εἴη.

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Theocritus 16.90–7

May numberless thousands of sheep, fattened by pasturing, bleat over the plain, and cattle moving in herds towards their home stalls speed the evening traveller on his way. May the fallow fields be worked for sowing, while high up in the trees the cicada watches the shepherds in the sun, and trills in the branches. May spiders weave delicate webs over weapons, and not even the name of the war-cry remain.

Some of the correspondences may be simply set out in schematic form: πολλοὶ ... μυρία ~ ἀνάριθμοι ... χιλιάδες, ἐλαυνόμενοι ποτὶ σακούς ~ ἀγεληδὸν ἐς αὖλιν | ἐρχόμεναι, ἄμ πεδῖον ~ ἄμ πεδῖον, ἐμυκήσαντο (cattle) ~ βληχῶντο (sheep), ἐνδιάσκειν | ποιμένες ~ ποιμένας ἐνδίους;¹⁴ σκνιφαῖον in v. 93 spells out what

14 This last case calls particular attention to itself as (cf. Gow ad loc.) v. 38 seems to offer the

is implied in the action of vv. 36–7. The replay, and indeed *auxêsis*, of the first passage in the second is reinforced by a reworking of part of Bacchylides’ famous encomium of peace from a paeon to Apollo Pythaieus at Asine:

ἐν δὲ σιδαροδέτοις πόρπαξιν αἰθᾶν
ἀραχνᾶν ἱστοὶ πέλονται,

ἔγχεα τε λογχωτὰ ξίφεα
τ’ ἀμφάκεα δάμναται εὐρώς.

<—U—U—U—U—U—U—U—>

—U—U—U—U—U—U—U—>

χαλκεᾶν δ’ οὐκ ἔστι σαλπίγγων κτύπος κτλ.

Bacchylides fr. 22 + fr. 4, vv. 69–75 Maehler

Over the iron shield-grips lie the webs of reddish spiders, and rust eats away at the sharp spears and double-edged swords ... no sound is heard from the bronze trumpets ...

Bacchylides was another encomiast of the first Hieron, but—more significantly in the present context—he was Simonides’ nephew, and in setting himself to write ‘Simonidean’ verse as a ‘Bacchylides’ for Hieron II, Theocritus here tropes literary affiliation and imitation in genealogical terms; the trope was to become much more familiar in Roman poetry.¹⁵

After structure, style. A case can be made, I think, that, for all our proper interest in Callimachean programmatics, the slender Muse and the tiny drop of pure water, and the very welcome recent concern with possible links between Hellenistic poetry and the kind of euphonist criticism about which we are constantly learning more from the papyri of Philodemus,¹⁶ there still remains much to be done in determining how the styles of Hellenistic poetry differed from what went before.¹⁷ The history of style is, of course, very difficult to trace, not least because ‘style’ is hardly separable from form and meaning, but there is no area of Greek, and specifically Hellenistic, poetics which remains as under-examined and as important. The remarks which follow will, of course, hardly make a dent in the surface.

only example of ἐνδιάω used transitively. In vv. 94–6 a reminiscence of Plato, *Phaedrus* 259a, with its repeated reference to the middle of the day, is possible; ἐνδιάω and related words are standardly associated in ancient lexis with midday, cf. the scholia on vv. 94–7b, Gow on v. 38, and the scholia on *Odyssey* 4.450. There may be a memory of one or both of these passages at [Theocritus] 25.85–99.

15 Cf., e.g., Hardie 1993, Chapter 4.

16 Helpful orientation in Gutzwiller 2010, 346–54.

17 Any full account would, of course, have to give due acknowledgement to the important work which has been done, such as that of Marco Fantuzzi on the style of Apollonius’ *Argonautica*.

That *Idyll* 16 contains almost a potpourri of stylistic levels is familiar critical territory,¹⁸ and it might be thought that a poem probably (though not certainly) entitled *Χάριτες* by its author would have style as a central concern, for *χάρις* and *χάριτες* are important terms in the ancient stylistic vocabulary. It is noteworthy that the discussion of *χάριτες* in Demetrius, *On style* gives a prominent place to both Sophron, the Syracusan mime-poet, and to the use of proverbs (156), and this will remind us that the marvellously inventive description of the poet's *Χάριτες* in vv. 5–21 is itself full of *χάρις*. Stylistic levels are, however, a crucial vehicle of poetic meaning throughout the poem. Consider Theocritus' demonstration of the power of Homeric poetry:

οὐδ' Ὀδυσσεὺς ἑκατόν τε καὶ εἴκοσι μῆνας ἀλαθείς
πάντας ἐπ' ἀνθρώπους, Αἶδαν τ' εἰς ἔσχατον ἐλθὼν
ζῶς, καὶ σπῆλυγγα φυγῶν ὀλοοῖο Κύκλωπος,
δηναιὸν κλέος ἔσχεν, ἐσιγάθη δ' ἄν ὑφορβός
Εὐμαιοὶ καὶ βουσι Φιλοίτιος ἄμφ' ἀγελαίαις
ἔργον ἔχων αὐτός τε περισπαραγχνος Λαέρτης,
εἰ μὴ σφεας ὤνασαν Ἰάονος ἀνδρὸς αἰοίδαί.

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Theocritus 16.51–7

Not even Odysseus, who wandered through all men for one hundred and twenty months and went alive to furthest Hades and escaped from the cave of the murderous Cyclops, would have secured long-lasting renown, and the swineherd Eumaeus and Philoities whose task was the herds of cattle and great-hearted Laertes himself would have been covered in silence, had not they benefited from the songs of a man of Ionia.

Odysseus 'wandered through all men for one hundred and twenty months'; here we have, I think, a rewriting, or perhaps explanatory gloss, on the opening of the *Odyssey* (ὃς μάλα πολλὰ | πλάγχθη ... πολλῶν δ' ἀνθρώπων κτλ.). It is perhaps not accidental that the opening of the *Odyssey* may also be evoked in Pindar's *Seventh Nemean*, a poem which is very important to *Idyll* 16:¹⁹

σοφοὶ δὲ μέλλοντα τριταῖον ἄνεμον
ἔμαθον, οὐδ' ὑπὸ κέρδει βλάβεν·
ἀφνεὸς πενιχρὸς τε θανάτου παρὰ
σῆμα νέονται. ἐγὼ δὲ πλέον' ἔλπομαι
λόγον Ὀδυσσεὸς ἦ πάθαν
διὰ τὸν ἀδυεπῆ γενέσθ' Ὀμηρον·

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¹⁸ Cf., e.g., Fabiano 1971, 519–20.

¹⁹ V. 63 φιλοκερδεῖνι βεβλαμμένον ἄνδρα seems to pick up οὐδ' ὑπὸ κέρδει βλάβεν in *Nemean* 7.18; on various aspects of the use of *Nemean* 7 in *Idyll* 16 cf. Sbardella 2004.

ἐπεὶ ψεύδεσ' οἱ ποτανᾶι <τε> μαχανᾶι
 σεμνὸν ἔπεστί τι· σοφία
 δὲ κλέπτει παράγοισα μύθοις. τυφλὸν δ' ἔχει
 ἦτορ ὁμίλος ἀνδρῶν ὁ πλεῖστος.

Pindar, *Nemean* 7.17–24

The wise understand the wind which will come on the third day, and they are not damaged by pursuit of profit, for rich and poor alike go to the tomb of death. I think that Odysseus' story has become greater than his suffering, as a result of sweet-voiced Homer; upon his lies and winged art there is something magnificent, and his skill deceives and leads men astray with stories. The vast majority of men have a blind heart.

Although the power of poetry is a ubiquitous theme in Pindar, the scholia (III 120–1 Drachmann) on this famous passage give a clear idea as to why it is particularly important for *Idyll* 16:

Intelligent men should not be deluded by their present wealth, but should take thought for what comes after and do something worthy, so that, afterwards also, they may be hymned and have immortal renown (εὐδοξία). Both the rich and the poor die, and therefore it is necessary to give thought to one's future renown. ... Men must not be mean (φιλοκερδεῖς), but offer pay (μισθός) to poets, so that they may have an eternal memorial of their virtue.

Scholium, Pindar, *Nemean* 7.17

Poets are able to magnify and increase ordinary deeds; therefore you too should give thought to being hymned.

Scholium, Pindar, *Nemean* 7.20

This gloss on Pindar's argument could well stand also as a gloss on much of *Idyll* 16. Should we therefore leap to the conclusion, as we tend to do in such situations, that Theocritus' reworking of Pindar (or indeed of any archaic poet) is influenced by contemporary or near-contemporary scholarship (of various intellectual levels)? What are the rules for determining when this approach is correct and when it is misleading? All reading and creative imitation is after all, to a greater or less extent, and with greater or lesser degrees of self-consciousness, a product of the educational and cultural context of the later reader and/or writer. In this case, some may think it significant for Theocritus' difference from, say, Callimachus that we are here not dealing with the intrusion of rare (scholarly) glosses in the Theocritean text, but rather with broad structures of meaning in an earlier text.

This Pindaric passage has been the subject of much debate and bibliography in modern times, and this is not the place to add to that.²⁰ There is, however, no

²⁰ Fränkel 1960b, 360–1 is an important contribution, cf. Most 1985, 149.

good reason to doubt that Theocritus would have understood Pindar to be saying that the power of Homer's poetry, its σεμνότης, had given the story of Odysseus a greater circulation and renown than would be commensurate with what he actually 'suffered'; πλέον' ... λόγον Ὀδυσσέος ἢ πάθαν in v. 21 alludes to and trumps πολλά ... πάθεν ἄλγεα in *Odyssey* 1.4.²¹ Theocritus then chooses the two most extended, but also most 'fabulous', episodes of that λόγος, the Underworld and the Cyclops' cave, to make the related point that no one would ever have heard even of Odysseus, had it not been for Homer; whether or not the memory of *Nemean* 7 also encourages us to entertain a doubt about the reality of those adventures—look what a poet can do for you!—may be debated. What is clear, however, is that the style of Theocritus' rewriting of the opening of the *Odyssey*, 'Odysseus wandered through all men for one hundred and twenty months', also contributes to the point that Theocritus is making. One ancient explanation of Pindar's description of Homer's (and Odysseus') ποτανὰ μαχανά (*Nemean* 7.22) is that the Homeric poems 'exalt and raise up (ὑψοῖ καὶ μετεωρίζει) the virtuous deeds of those who are hymned' (III 121.9–10 Drachmann). The language of ὕψος is suggestive here, because the *akribeia* of 'wandered for one hundred and twenty months' is very far from any ancient notions of stylistic grandeur or sublimity; Theocritus' phrase is, in fact, as prosaic a gloss on the opening of the *Odyssey* as one could imagine, and that perhaps is the point. The σεμνότης of Homeric verse can turn the bald facts and numbers of 'what happened' into something memorable. Theocritus here takes Odysseus' own echo of the opening of the poem,

ἀλλ' ὅδ' ἐγὼ τοιόσδε, παθὼν κακά, πολλά δ' ἀληθείς,
ἦλυθον εἰκοστῷ ἔτει ἐς πατρίδα γαῖαν

Homer, *Odyssey* 16.205–6

I am that man as you see him, having suffered misfortunes and wandered much, and I have returned to my fatherland in the twentieth year,

and surpasses it. Mortals count up and reckon, because our time is painfully finite and ever-diminishing; Muses operate across much larger and much more impressionistic vistas of time and space. The tedious detail of τὸ ἀκριβές matters to us in ways in which it cannot matter to higher powers. So too, Philoitios' 'job' (the very prosaic ἔργον ἔχων) was looking after the cattle (vvv. 55–6); Homer could make something wonderful even of so banal a phrase and of such unpromising material. Whether we can move from these examples

²¹ Although associating πάθα with *Odyssey* 1.4, Fränkel (previous note) thought the most important passage for Pindar here was *Odyssey* 11.363–76 (Alcinous' intervention).

to speculations about the critical discussions of Homeric, and more generally poetic, style which were available to Theocritus is (again) a matter for further discussion.

As for περίσπλαγχνος Λαέρτης, commentators rightly look to *Odyssey* 24.365 where the poet calls Laertes μεγαλήτωρ; the *hapa*x περίσπλαγχνος, a formation of a relatively common type found, e.g., in medical texts as well as in poetry, is here used, as with the previous examples, to illustrate what a poet can do for you. It is, however, not just the epithet μεγαλήτωρ which is at issue here.²² In Homer the epithet introduces the passage in which Laertes is bathed and given a splendid cloak, and Athena—acting, so Theocritus might observe, like Homer or another encomiastic poet—restores his physical beauty so that he looks like the immortal gods and becomes an object of θαῦμα to those around him (*Odyssey* 24.365–74); Laertes then proceeds to recall a glorious deed of his youth. The transformation of Odysseus' father from the pitiful sight he presented when Odysseus first saw him at 24.226–31 (and cf. 11.187–96) becomes a paradigm case of what a poet, and poetic style, can do for you. The power of style at which Theocritus hints finds a later resonance in Dionysius of Halicarnassus' famous comparison (*De compositione verborum* 4.12) of the power of verbal arrangement (σύνθεσις) to Homer's Athena who could give Odysseus different appearances, from the lowly to the magnificent, at different times; word arrangement too, claims Dionysius, can make ideas (νοήματα) expressed in the selfsame words either 'ugly and low and beggarly' or 'lofty (ὑψηλά) and rich and beautiful'. Though Dionysius is extolling verbal arrangement rather than style and lexical choice, it is (again) at least worth wondering whether there is any shared background for poet and critic here, or whether (as so often) we have a foreshadowing of a critical notion within poetry itself.²³

An earlier passage of *Idyll* 16 operates through a related stylistic effect. Like Pindar in *Nemean* 7 (cf. above), Theocritus uses the universality of death as a reason to employ poets:

²² Gow on v. 55 tentatively suggested that Theocritus in this passage was thinking of the scene in which 'Odysseus and Telemachus, attended by Eumaeus and Philoetius, go to visit Laertes'; this is surely correct.

²³ Behind Dionysius here lies, of course, a rich tradition, cf. Isocrates, *Panegyricus* 8 (criticized at 'Longinus', *On the sublime* 38.2–3). For a not dissimilar phenomenon cf. Strabo 1.2.9 where Homer's alleged practice of adding myth to 'historical fact' is illustrated by three Homeric descriptions of beautification or the creation of brilliant artefacts.

Μοισάων δὲ μάλιστα τίειν ἱερούς ὑποφίτας,
 ὄφρα καὶ εἰν Αἴδαο κεκρυμμένος ἐσθλὸς ἀκούσις,
 μὴδ' ἀκλεὴς μύρηαι ἐπὶ ψυχροῦ Ἀχέροντος,
 ὥσεί τις μακέλαι τετυλωμένος ἔνδοθι χεῖρας
 ἀχλὴν ἐκ πατέρων πενίην ἀκτῆμονα κλαίων.

30

Theocritus 16.29–33

[The best use of wealth is] most of all to honour the holy prophets of the Muses, so that even when you are hidden in Hades your reputation will be an excellent one, and you will not mourn, fameless, beside chilly Acheron, like a poor man from a poor family, the palms of his hands hardened by use of the mattock, who bewails his empty poverty.

Some recent criticism, picking up a hint from Gow, has wanted to see Sappho 55 Voigt behind Theocritus' reference to the unknown peasant languishing in Hades:²⁴

καθθάνοισα δὲ κείσῃ οὐδέ ποτα μναμοσύνα σέθεν
 ἔσσετ' οὐδὲ +ποκ'+ ὕστερον· οὐ γὰρ πεδέχῃς βρόδων
 τῶν ἐκ Πιερίας· ἀλλ' ἀφάνης κὰν Αἶδα δόμῳ
 φοιτάσις πεδ' ἀμαύρων νεκύων ἐκπεποταμένα.

Sappho fr. 55 Voigt

When you are dead, you will lie there, and in future time there will be no memory of you, for you have no share in the roses of Pieria. Unnoticed in the house of Hades when you have flitted away, you will go here and there amidst the insubstantial dead.

The theme is, however, a common one, and, however close in thrust the two passages may be, there seems no particular reason to think of Sappho here. Given what immediately follows in *Idyll* 16, we might rather think of Simonides' ἠρηνοί,²⁵ and that at least would be in keeping with the principal intertexts of the poem. Horstmann, however, tentatively suggested that behind this passage lay Achilles' famous exchange with Odysseus in the Underworld:²⁶

“σεῖο δ', Ἀχιλλεῦ,
 οὐ τις ἀνὴρ προπάρσιθε μακάρτερος οὔτ' ἄρ' ὀπίσσω·
 πρὶν μὲν γὰρ σε ζῶν ἐτίομεν ἴσα θεοῖσιν
 Ἀργεῖοι, νῦν αὖτε μέγα κρατέεις νεκύεσσιν
 ἐνθάδ' ἑών· τῷ μὴ τι θανὼν ἀκαχίζεν, Ἀχιλλεῦ.”
 ὧς ἐφάμην, ὁ δέ μ' αὐτίκ' ἀμειβόμενος προσέειπε·
 “μὴ δὴ μοι θάνατόν γε παραύδα, φαίδιμ· Ὀδυσσεῦ.

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²⁴ Cf., e.g., Griffiths 1979, 29 n. 55, Sbardella 1997, 137–9.

²⁵ Acosta-Hughes 2010a, 183 associates vv. 40–3 with the ἠρηνοί.

²⁶ Horstmann 1976, 126 n. 55.

βουλοίμην κ' ἐπάρουρος ἐὼν θητευέμεν ἄλλωι,
 ἀνδρὶ παρ' ἀκλήρῳι, ὦι μὴ βίोटος πολὺς εἴη,
 ἢ πᾶσιν νεκύεσσι καταφθιμένοισιν ἀνάσσειν.”

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Homer, *Odyssey* 11.482–91

‘No man, Achilles, is more fortunate than you, either from times past or in the future. Before, when you were alive, we Argives honoured you equally to the gods, and now again you hold mastery over the dead down here. Therefore, Achilles, do not grieve at death.’ So I spoke, and he replied: ‘Do not try to console me for death, glorious Achilles. I would rather be a bonded workman to another man, an impoverished peasant without much livelihood, than rule over all the lifeless dead.’

Theocritus’ point is of course, as Kathryn Gutzwiller points out,²⁷ different from Achilles’, but we may at least be encouraged to speculate further in this direction by the fact that v. 30 begins with a verbal repetition of another verse from *Odyssey* 11 (v. 211); the *Nekuia* does seem to have been in Theocritus’ mind here. The poor man, ‘the palms of his hands hardened by use of the mattock’, will then be an expansive gloss, with characteristic Theocritean earthiness, upon Achilles’ ἐπάρουρος, which is glossed in the scholia either as γεωργός or as ἐπίγειος καὶ ζῶν. So too, it will be Achilles’ ἀνὴρ ἄκληρος, glossed in the scholia as πένης, κλῆρον καὶ οὐσίαν μὴ ἔχων, which is the starting-point for Theocritus’ ἀχλὴν ἐκ πατέρων.

There are two other reasons for seeing Achilles’ words behind this passage, and both may be classed as stylistic. The closest verbal model for these verses in Homer is not in *Odyssey* 11, but rather in the famous simile of *Iliad* 23, in which Achilles’ attempts to escape the river-god are compared to a man clearing an irrigation channel:

ὥς δ’ ὅτ’ ἀνὴρ ὀχετηγὸς ἀπὸ κρήνης μελανύδρου
 ἄμ φυτὰ καὶ κήπους ὕδατι ῥόον ἡγεμονεύηι
 χερσὶ μάκελλαν ἔχων, ἀμάρης ἐξ ἔχματα βάλλων·
 τοῦ μὲν τε προρέοντος ὑπὸ ψιφίδες ἅπασαι
 ὀχλεῦνται· τὸ δέ τ’ ὥκα κατειβόμενον κελαρύζει
 χώρῳ ἐνὶ προαλῇ, φθάνει δέ τε καὶ τὸν ἄγοντα·
 ὥς αἰεὶ Ἀχιλῆα κινήσατο κύμα ῥόοιο
 καὶ λαίψηρόν ἐόντα· θεοὶ δέ τε φέρτεροι ἀνδρῶν.

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Homer, *Iliad* 21.257–64

²⁷ Gutzwiller 1983, 226 n. 55; cf. also Kyriakou 2004, 238 n. 32.

As when a man working on irrigation directs water from a dark spring through his plants and fruit, by working with a mattock and throwing muck out of the channel. As the stream flows forward, all the pebbles roll down and the swift-flowing water gurgles as it runs down the slope and catches up with the gardener. Just so did the river's wave ever catch up with Achilles, swift as he was: gods are more powerful than men.

The style of this famous simile, which contains the only occurrence of μάκελλα in Homer, is discussed in the scholia in terms of a move by Homer from his grand style to a much plainer manner (τὸ ἰσχνόν);²⁸ Theocritus, in running together two scenes involving Achilles, has made the language as plain as possible, including the only instance of τυλόω in poetry, to reinforce the warning about what happens to those who do not give thought to how poets can benefit them. The second reason for thinking of Achilles in this passage of *Idyll* 16 derives from another aspect of style. Odysseus' attempted consolation to the hero, μή τι θανὼν ἀκαχίζευ, Ἀχιλλεῦ, will certainly have evoked the familiar connection between Achilles' name and ἄχος (cf., e.g., AT-scholia on *Iliad* 1.1 h Erbse), and these sounds seem strangely persistent in this Theocritean passage: ἀκλεής, Ἀχέροντος, ἀχὴν, ἀκτῆμονα. ἀχὴν, which does not otherwise appear in literature (cf. Gow ad loc.), may in fact have been chosen to activate or reinforce a connection with Achilles and ἄχος.

The very variety of Theocritus' engagement with, and reproduction of, the poetry of the past, even within a single poem, and the lesson for the study of Hellenistic poetry more generally that this carries, does not need to be laboured at length, but another example, where it is again Achilles who carries the weight of the past, may suggest something of the range of phenomena which the Theocritean text has to offer.

As is well known, in his account in *Idyll* 14 of the disastrous party which revealed to him that his girlfriend's mind was on someone else, Aischinas uses two Achillean similes in very quick succession:

ἀ δὲ Κυνίσκα

ἔκλαεν ἑξαπίνας θαλερώτερον ἢ παρὰ ματρί
παρθένος ἑξαετῆς κόλπῳ ἐπιθυμήσασα.
τᾶμος ἐγὼ, τὸν ἴσαις τύ, Θυώνινχε, πύξ ἐπὶ κόρρας
ἦλασα, κάλλαν αὐθις. ἀνείρυσασα δὲ πέπλῳς
ἔξω ἀποιχέτο θᾶσσον. ἔμὸν κακόν, οὗ τοι ἀρέσσω;
ἄλλος τοι γλυκίων ὑποκόλπιος; ἄλλον ἰοῖσα
θάλπε φίλον. τήνῳι τεὰ δάκρυα; μᾶλα βρόντῳ.
μάστακα δοῖσα τέκνοισιν ὕπωροφίοισι χελιδῶν

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²⁸ Cf. Hunter 2009a, 158–60.

ἄφθορον ταχινὰ πέτεται βίον ἄλλον ἀγείρειν·
 ὠκυτέρα μαλακᾶς ἀπὸ δίφρακος ἔπτετο τήνα
 ἰθὺ δι' ἀμφιθύρω καὶ δικλίδος, αἱ πόδες ἄγον.

40

Theocritus 14.31–42

Kyniska suddenly burst into tears, more violently than a six year-old girl crying for her mother's lap. Then I—you know what I'm like, Thyonichus—punched her on the temple with my fist, and then gave her another one. Gathering up her dress, she took off as fast as she could. 'Wretch, don't you like me? You prefer some other lover? Be off and keep your new friend warm! Are your tears for him? Let them flow down big as apples!'. The swallow gives her young under the roof a morsel to eat and swiftly flies back off to gather more nourishment; more quickly than that did Kyniska fly off her soft seat, straight through the porch and the door, wherever her feet took her.

The first of these similes goes back of course to Achilles' address to Patroclus at the opening of *Iliad* 16:

τίπτε δεδάκρυσαι Πατρόκλεις, ἥϋτε κούρη
 νηπίη, ἣ θ' ἅμα μητρὶ θέουσ' ἀνελέσθαι ἀνάγει
 εἰανοῦ ἀπτομένη, καὶ τ' ἐσσυμένην κατερύκει,
 δακρυόεσσα δέ μιν ποτιδέρκεται, ὄφρ' ἀνέληται;
 τῇ ἱκελος Πάτροκλε τέρεν κατὰ δάκρυον εἴβεις.

Homer, *Iliad* 16.7–11

Why are you crying, Patroclus, like a young girl who runs to her mother and begs to be picked up, tugging at her dress and holding her back as she tries to hurry off, and as she cries she looks at her until she is picked up? Like her, Patroclus, you are shedding womanly tears.

In his note on v. 33 Gow observes 'There is some force in the criticism that ἔξαετής is old for such behaviour'. If we ask why Theocritus introduced this change in his model, a number of answers might come to mind, but—as often—we could do worse than begin with the Homeric scholia. The bT-scholia on the simile of *Iliad* 16 note how the poet uses similes to enable him to include all ages of females in his poem and how he here 'takes a banal (εὐτελής) event and represents it with grandeur and envisionment (μεγαλοπρεπῶς καὶ μετ' ἐναργείας)'. At one level this is merely a specific instance of the standard ancient view that similes aid *enargeia*,²⁹ but I am sure that many modern readers of Homer will gladly concur with the particularly memorable power of this 'realistic' image. Why did Theocritus replace the unspecific Homeric κούρη νηπίη by the more specific παρθένος ... ἔξαετής? For Dover, to some extent echoing (I do not know whether deliberately) the Homeric scholia, Theocritus' image is 'a

²⁹ Cf., e.g., Nünlist 2009, 291.

much less vivid picture of everyday life', though he says nothing as to whether he thinks this was simply Theocritus' lack of competence or whether it served some artistic purpose.³⁰ There would of course be much more to say about why Aischinas is made to appropriate an Achillean voice, but I want to ask a simpler question: can we be sure that Theocritus did not make his character use the specific (or, in Greek, ἀκριβές) epithet ἐξαετής precisely to increase the image's vividness, to out-Achilles Achilles, if you like? How secure are our judgements about ancient stylistic effects? Theocritus poses, as is well known, some of the thorniest problems in this area: to move from the micro- to the macro- level, how many modern readers are sure they understand the stylistic level of the Adonis-hymn in *Idyll* 15 and the purpose of that level.

We may well think that, leaving everything else aside, the image of the crying girl is much more powerful when used, as in Homer, of a man than, as in Theocritus, to describe an older female, but the narrative situation hardly allowed that in the case of Theocritus. There is, in any case, obvious humour in the Iliadic echoes: a lovers' spat at a party is improbably made as portentous as the story of the *Iliad* and, particularly, as tragic as the story of Achilles and Patroclus. The following verses in which Aischinas twice hits Kyniska have been compared to the violence sometimes exercised against women in New Comedy, but what seems more likely is that we have here a version of Achilles' anger when faced with the prospect of losing *his* girl in *Iliad* 1, an anger that puts him on the point of running Agamemnon through. 'You know what I'm like' (v. 34) functions (*inter alia*) as a kind of reference back to that scene: yes, we all do know the model text here—and Achilles' emotional character was probably the most notorious of any literary figure. Not for Aischinas, however, the indecision of the Homeric scene—he just let Kyniska have it ... Not for nothing, too, has Theocritus placed *antilabe* in each of the first three verses of *Idyll* 14³¹—it is these verses which mark how the hexameter of epic poetry has been brought down to the level of mime.

The source of Aischinas' second Achillean image is Achilles' account of his own labours in *Iliad* 9:

οὐδέ τί μοι περίκειται, ἐπεὶ πάθον ἄλγεα θυμῷ
αἰεὶ ἐμὴν ψυχὴν παραβαλλόμενος πολέμειζεν.
ὥς δ' ὄρνις ἀπτῆσι νεοσσοῖσι προφέρεισι

³⁰ Griffiths 1979, 114–15 argues that this 'literary posturing' by Aischinas cuts a very poor figure, as indeed do other Theocritean lovers: 'He has only the dimmest grasp of what his [Achillean] images mean ...'; for a very different approach cf. Burton 1995, 49–52.

³¹ There is a similar phenomenon at the head of *Idyll* 15.

μάστακ' ἐπεὶ κε λάβησι, κακῶς δ' ἄρα οἱ πέλει αὐτῇ,
 ὥς καὶ ἐγὼ πολλὰς μὲν ἀϋπνοὺς νύκτας ἴαυον,
 ἥματα δ' αἱματόεντα διέπρησσον πολεμίζων
 ἀνδράσι μαρνάμενος δάρων ἔνεκα σφετεράων.

325

Homer, *Iliad* 9.321–7

Nor do I gain any advantage from the fact that I have suffered grievously in my spirit, always putting my life at risk in war. Like a bird which brings its flightless chicks whatever morsel it finds, but itself goes without, so I have passed through many nights without sleep and endured blood-filled days of warfare, fighting with men over their women.

Again, there would be much to say about Theocritus' turning of this image into a paratactic simile: when we remember the surrounding context in Homer we note (with a smile) that Aischinas' subsequent counting of the days suggests an eroticization of Achilles' 'I have passed through many sleepless nights' (v. 325)—no doubt Aischinas really had, whereas Achilles' 'I have spent (many) blood-filled days in warfare' (v. 326) is probably somewhat remote from Aischinas' experience. Achilles may fight with men 'over' women, but we have just witnessed Aischinas fighting 'with' women. Here, however, I want merely to draw attention to one stylistic feature of Theocritus' reworking. V. 39 begins with the same Homeric gloss as stands in necessary enjambment at the head of *Iliad* 9.324, μάστακα.³² Nevertheless, the Theocritean reworking precisely inverts every element of the corresponding Homeric utterance; the matter may be set out in a table, with the elements numbered as they appear in their respective texts:

Theocritus		Homer	
μάστακα	1	μάστακα	5
δοῖσα	2	προφέρησιν	4
τέκνοισιν	3	νεοσσοῖσι	3
ὑπωροφίοισι	4	ἀπτῆσι	2
χελιδών	5	ὄρνις	1

Is this an accident (we can hardly doubt that such accidents do happen)? Would such *uariatio* (deliberate or not) surprise us at an earlier date? Is a dichotomy in such matters between 'accident' and 'design' a misleading one—are things rather more complicated than that? Are such things only possible in a poetry which re-

³² Three interpretations of Homeric μάστακ' at *Iliad* 9.324 seem to have had ancient currency, cf. the scholia ad loc., Gow on Theocr. 14.39: 'a mouthful, morsel', 'a locust' (both understanding μάστακα), and 'with the mouth' (understanding μάστακι, accepted by, e.g., Hainsworth ad loc.). Theocritus' μάστακα allows only the first two interpretations, and the first is, as far as I know, universally accepted by modern editors and translators; I am not convinced that Theocritus' usage here is a strong case of overt interpretation within a poem of a disputed Homeric word, but this is an area where differences of opinion are certainly possible.

lies upon writing and expects reception through reading? The Theocritean text, of course, abounds in patterns and echoing repetitions of all kinds, and not just in the bucolic poems (as usually understood).

Another poem of Pindar which has long been seen to have a special importance for *Idyll* 16 is the *Second Isthmian*, also for a Sicilian victor. It is, after all, in this poem that Pindar complains that the Muse of old was ‘neither φιλοκερδής nor ἐργάτις’, whereas today the watchword is χρήματα χρήματ’ ἀνὴρ. The scholia spin a story about how this poem was prompted by the μικρολογία of a patron, but also—more interestingly—interpret Pindar’s reference to the avaricious Muse as a reference to Simonides and cite iambics of Callimachus (fr. 222 Pf.) which echo this Pindaric passage in an explicit reference to the Cean poet; if nothing else, the Callimachus fragment suggests the familiarity of the Pindaric passage and its probable link to Simonides in the third century. Reference to *Isthmian* 2 may in fact be able to help with a difficult passage of *Idyll* 16, in a way which is perhaps exemplary for the poetry of the third century.

Not far into the second part of the poem Theocritus dismisses the potential patron who does not want to part with his money:

χαίρω ὅστις τοῖος, ἀνὴριθμος δὲ οἱ εἶη
 ἄργυρος, αἰεὶ δὲ πλεόνων ἔχοι ἥμερος αὐτόν·
 αὐτὰρ ἐγὼ τιμὴν τε καὶ ἀνθρώπων φιλότητα
 πολλῶν ἡμιόνων τε καὶ ἵππων πρόσθεν ἐλόιμαν.

65

Theocritus 16.64–7

Farewell to such a man—let him have measureless silver and ever be possessed by desire for more. For myself, I would choose honour and the friendship of men in front of many mules and horses.

Here Theocritus puts the old hymnic/rhapsodic structure χαῖρε ... αὐτὰρ ἐγὼ to brilliant (and ?? very Hellenistic) new use.³³ Whereas χαῖρε is used to ‘hail’ the deity who has just been the object of song, with a sense that he or she ‘appears’ in response to the power of the rhapsode’s hymn,³⁴ χαίρω dismisses the mean patron out of hand, as the poet moves on to a worthy subject of song; this is clearly an important structural moment in the poem, and one that cuts across the formal division I was considering earlier. Moreover, the wish (or curse) that such a patron should suffer from unquenchable desire for money (like Erysichthon for food) is a corresponding inversion of the closing hymnic request to

³³ Cf., e.g., González 2010, 100. Acosta-Hughes 2010a, 185 wants Simonides fr.eleg. 11.19–20 W to be the specific model here, but there seems nothing to activate such specific reference. On the transitional formula αὐτὰρ ἐγὼ cf. further Hunter 2003, 103 with earlier bibliography.

³⁴ Cf. García 2002.

the god who has been praised for ἀρετή and/or ὄλβος, a request that Theocritus also reworks at the end of *Idyll* 17, as Callimachus does at the end of the *Hymn to Zeus*.³⁵ This poet has now risen above such considerations. Theocritus is here, *inter alia*, exploring the relation between ‘modern’ encomiastic poetry and traditional hymnic poetry. What follows has been described as a ‘baffling’ transition:³⁶

δίζημαι δ' ὅτινι θνατῶν κεχαρισμένος ἔλθω
 σὺν Μοῖσαις· χαλεπαὶ γὰρ ὁδοὶ τελέθουσιν ἀοιδοῖς
 κουράων ἀπάνευθε Διὸς μέγα βουλευόντος.
 οὐπω μῆνας ἄγων ἔκαμ' οὐρανὸς οὐδ' ἐνιαυτοῦς·
 πολλοὶ κινήσουσιν ἔτι τροχὸν ἄματος ἵπποι·
 ἔσσεται οὗτος ἀνὴρ ὃς ἐμεῦ κεχρήσεται ἀοιδοῦ κτλ.

70

Theocritus 16.68–73

I am looking for the mortal to whose house I may come as a welcome guest (κεχαρισμένος) in company with the Muses, for the ways are difficult for singers without the daughters of great-counselling Zeus. Not yet have the heavens wearied of leading round the months and years; often still shall the horses set the wheel of the day in motion. There will come the man who will need me to be his singer ...

Gow glosses the reference to the Muses as ‘in plain prose it appears to mean no more than that it is useless for a poet to travel unless he carries his inspiration with him’ (n. on 69f.), a rather lame explanation which, however, is in its essence taken over by Dover. The image of the ὁδοί of poetry is of course ubiquitous, but it is important that Theocritus is looking for a worthy patron, someone who—as he will go on to say—has the deeds of an Achilles or an Ajax to his credit; it is to such a man that one makes journeys ‘with the Muses’. In the *Second Isthmian* Pindar uses the ‘journey’ metaphor in a similar manner:

οὐ γὰρ πάγος οὐδὲ προσάντης
 ἅ κέλευθος γίνεται,
 εἴ τις εὐδόξων ἐς ἀν-
 δρῶν ἄγοι τιμὰς Ἑλικωνιάδων.

Pindar, *Isthmian* 2.33–4

There is no hill, nor is the path steep, if one brings the honours of the maidens of Helicon to the homes of famous men.

³⁵ Cf. Hunter 2003, 197–8.

³⁶ Griffiths 1979, 35. For other aspects of this transition cf. Hunter 1996, 105.

The interpretation of these verses is (inevitably) disputed, but it is not hard to believe that Theocritus understood them as does the scholiast: 'For those who are praising glorious men the road (ὁδός) is not rough (τραχεῖα), but the opposite—easy and gentle, for they themselves (i.e. the subjects of song) provide the starting-points (ἀφορμαί) for praise' (scholium on v. 33, p. 219 Drachmann). If Theocritus has found *his* ἀφορμή in this passage,³⁷ then his 'Muses' will be songs in praise of great deeds (a meaning which also suits the reprise in v. 107): if there are no great deeds to praise, then poets really do find the going tough, but Theocritus is confident enough that there is still time for a worthy patron to arise. Behind both Pindar and Theocritus may of course lurk Hesiod's steep path towards virtue (*WD* 286–92): the patron will have to work very hard for the successes which manifest his ἀρετή, but it is those successes which make the way easy for poets.

The language of Hellenistic poetry thus leaves us with much to do, and much that leads to frustration. If only we could more often be sure of our stylistic sense: when in v. 75 of *Idyll* 16 Theocritus describes the plain of Troy as 'the plain of Simois, where is the tomb of Phrygian Ilos', is it important that Homer never says 'the plain of Simois' and never uses the singular Φρύξ, that in Homer the Phrygians are, in any case, quite distinct from the Trojans (a fact commented upon by the Homeric scholia),³⁸ and that to make the eponymous hero of Ilion a 'Phrygian' might in some circumstances be highly loaded (cf. Callimachus, *Hymn to Athena* 18 of Paris),³⁹ and that ἥριον occurs only once in Homer (of the mound which Achilles 'devised' for himself and Patroclus, *Iliad* 23.126) and only here in our corpus of Theocritus? Was Theocritus thinking of the opening of *Iliad* 6 in which the plain of Troy, the Simois (in the genitive in the same *sedes*), and a heroic exploit of Ajax all come together? So many questions ...

³⁷ Perrotta 1925, 21 illustrates this Theocritean passage from *Olympian* 1.109–11, where there seems indeed to be a similar thought: Olympian success by the victor will offer the poet an ἐπίκουρον ... ὁδὸν λόγων.

³⁸ Cf. bT- scholia on *Iliad* 10.415.

³⁹ Cf. Bulloch's note ad loc.