IDYLL 16: THEOCRITUS AND SIMONIDES

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Theocritus' *Idyll* 16 has generally been accepted as the property of History rather than Literature. With none of the riddles of the bucolic masquerade, it has had little to intrigue the literary critic, but for the historian it has offered, where so much is uncertain, one concrete piece of evidence for one date in the life of Theocritus. Though the date still wavers between 274 and 269 B.C., to be able to date any event to within five years, amid the plethora of conjectures, is no mean triumph. It is not surprising, therefore, that the poem has excited historical interest, but the result has been that the poem has not been considered so much for its own virtues as for the corroborating evidence it may lend to discussions of other questions, such as the date of Theocritus' stay in Alexandria, or the relationship of Theocritus to Callimachus and the literary controversies of the day. As a poem it has usually been given short shrift, or dismissed peremptorily as a frigid and derivative work —"mere pinch-beck" as J. A. Symonds has called it.[1] It has been con-

[1] *Studies of the Greek Poets* (London 1920) 472: "the panegyrics of Hiero and Ptolemy are among his worst poems—mere pinch-beck when compared with the pure gold of the Idylls proper." The historical bias is strong in all the modern studies of Hellenistic literature, and the poem is scarcely considered from any other aspect, except for incidental remarks, in such works as U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, *Hellenistische Dichtung in d. Zeit d. Kallimachos* (Berlin 1924); A. Couat, *Alexandrian Poetry under the First Three Ptolemies*, tr. J. Loeb (London and New York 1929), where there is not a single reference to the poem; A. Körte, *Hellenistic Poetry*, tr. J. Hammer and M. Hadas (New York 1929), which gives nothing more than a quote and general paraphrase of the poem; T. B. L. Webster, *Hellenistic Poetry and Art* (London 1964), where we are told, p. 88, that the poem "is a competent performance . . . but has little appeal for us today." A. Croiset, *Histoire de la Littérature Grecque* (Paris 1928) 5.201, finds the poem charming and clever, but notices nothing problematic in it. Even P. E. Legrande's study, *Étude sur Théocrite* (Paris 1898), has little to say on the poem beyond discussions of the historical questions. A. S. F. Gow, in his edition of Theocritus (Cambridge 1952), has lamented the neglect of this poem and has given the poem its only exhaustive commentary. This paper is an attempt to make a further contribution to Gow's

sidered enough to note the poem as an imitation of Pindar and leave it at that. This neglect has been unfortunate because the poem has undeniable aesthetic merit in itself, but more than that, it is unique in extant Greek literature for the tensions it reveals in Hellenistic poetry which was attempting to accommodate its classical poetic heritage to the realities of contemporary life. The poem, as the expression of an early stage in the development of Hellenistic poetry, is significant not only for its own century but also for later Roman literature, which was to undergo something of the same crisis.

The problems of the poem are numerous, but they are mostly connected with a few central ones. The first and most serious is the schism between the poem's apparent intent and its actual statement. It would seem to be in the encomiastic genre. Theocritus wants, it seems, to be granted a position as poet at Hiero's court, and the poem we should expect to be an example of Theocritus' encomiastic talent. Indeed we do find the themes, the conventions, and the general structure of an encomiastic poem. Theocritus appeals to those themes which had become commonplace *apologiae* for poetry—its power to confer immortality and to fill life with the Graces—and challenges his contemporaries to give over their foolish economy and to spend their money instead on the pleasures of life, the most important of which are the pleasures which only poetry can give, a civilized life and immortality. Pindar plays upon these themes repeatedly in his epinician poetry, and this similarity in the choice of themes has led some scholars to read the poem as an imitation of Pindar.[2]

As an advertisement of the encomiastic genre, however, the poem is not promising. Scholars have remarked that the poem seems not to have achieved its aim. Small wonder. It might be more surprising

monumental work by resolving, or if resolution is impossible, by further clarifying the problems which Gow has perceived and not hestitated to present. My debt to his exhaustive scholarship will be obvious.

[2] E. B. Clapp, "Two Pindaric Poems of Theocritus," *CP* 8 (1913) 310–16, has given the fullest comparison of the two poets, but it is an accepted commonplace that *Id.* 16 is a Pindaric poem. See Legrande (above, note 1) 38, 95, and also his *Bucoliques Grecs* (Paris 1925) 1.136, note 2; also K. Kuiper, "De Theocriti carmine XVI," *Mnemosyne* 17 (1889) 385: "Verum non imitatus est Theocritus poetam Thebanum . . . at suo modo imagines sententiasque, quas ille splendide ornaverat et sublate exprimere conatus est." See also A. T. Murray, "The Bucolic Idylls of Theocritus," *TAPA* 37 (1906) 138.

if Hiero had decided, on the basis of this evidence, to economize in other directions in order to have the wherewithal to foster poetry. What are in Pindar only tangential remarks, *sotto voce* asides to his patron that what he is doing is valuable and necessary, are inflated here to form the substance of the whole poem. The greater part of the poem is concerned with the poet's lament on the general apathy towards poetry and with the poet's rather desperately assumed air of indifference to such apathy. We can scarcely find a more striking misuse of the conventions of encomium. If Theocritus' economic situation were as severe as scholars such as Körte claim, could he not have known that self-pity and wholesale accusations of philistinism were not the way to ingratiate himself with a rich patron?[3]

The first four verses sound, in conventional hymnal style, the necessary note of confidence touched with suitable human modesty: "Let gods hymn gods, but we mortals shall hymn mortals." The next verse shifts to an aporetic tone as the poet asks "Who of the present day will receive our poems and not send them away unrewarded?" Aporia is conventional enough in hymns as the priamelic introduction to the theme.[4] Such a rhetorical question serves the double function of postponing the identification of the subject or theme of the poem while also setting up a catalogue of other equally worthy subjects as foil to the true subject. A deity has so many names, attributes, or myths, a city or a victor is renowned for so many feats that the poet is at a loss where to begin. The emphasis in such questions is on the difficulty of choice amid the abundance of possibilities. Theocritus' question is something quite different. It postpones the naming of his subject, but there the similarity to the convention sharply ends. The question is, first of all, not "Whom among so many (or how) shall I sing?" but "Who will listen?" More bluntly, "Who cares?" This is an extraordinary

[3] Körte (above, note 1) 280.

[4] See Pindar *Ol.* 2.2; *Pyth.* 7.5; *Pyth.* 10.4; and the most fully developed example at *Isth.* 7.1–15. Even Pindar's famous "What is a man? What is he not?" at *Pyth.* 8.99 serves a similar priamelic function. Cf. also *Ol.* 2.108–10, where the questions are used as the conclusion of the poem: the joys which Theron has brought to his home are inexhaustible. Note also Theocritus, *Id.* 17.9–12, where Theocritus uses the device in its proper hymnal way. On this "hymnal priamel" see E. L. Bundy, *Studia Pindarica*, *UCPCP* 18 (1962) I, 6. I am greatly indebted to Professor Bundy, whose studies on the conventions of Pindaric epinicia have helped me to see how unconventional this poem by Theocritus is.

descent from the confident assertion of the introduction. What is worse, Theocritus never entirely extricates himself from this pit into which he has thrown himself. His answer, which should be the resolution of this temporary aporia, is simply "I do not know" (14). The answer which in the hymnal style finally identifies the subject becomes here an admission that there is no one who cares. The following lines, which conventionally should serve to explain the poet's choice of one subject over other possibilities, here list a catalogue of excuses with which men dismiss poets, thus demonstrating even more cogently the truth of Theocritus' implied assertion that no one cares.

The central part of the poem, where in Pindar we would expect to find the paradigmatic myths which would relate the victor to the mythic world of gods and heroes, is given over to Theocritus' attempt to convert his stubborn contemporaries to a more liberal attitude. The mythical and legendary figures whom he names—the Thessalian families, the Lycians, Odysseus, Eumaios, Laertes—are paradigmatic rather of the poet's immortalizing power. After this defence of poetry Theocritus' pessimism breaks through again when he concludes his argument with the realization that all such arguments are useless against the covetous spirit (60–65).

Theocritus tries to escape the doldrums in one more attempt to find himself a subject. We have then that idyllic section in which Hiero is finally named; yet even here there still remains an ambiguous and uncertain note since the subject remains only a hoped-for subject and his feats only potential feats. Even the oblique introduction to Hiero expresses the poet's hesitancy (66–75): "But I am searching for that man who will welcome me. . . . For there will be some new Achilleus, some new Aias who will need me." The praise of Hiero's strength which follows this hope is clear and unequivocal, as are the wishes which the poet makes for prosperity during Hiero's reign, but yet this confidence, climaxed by the call to all poets to join in the triumphal songs, evaporates instantly when Theocritus thinks of himself. He concludes the poem in a despondent mood again (104–9): "If no one invites me I shall stay at home with my Muses; may I never be separated from them." Again, it is common to find in the conclusion of hymns the poet's reference to himself, but Theocritus' use of the convention is startling.

The personal reference can find expression in a variety of ways, but its general purpose is to bid farewell to the god or the man who has been praised, to remind this subject that the poet has fulfilled his task, that he has honored the subject to the best of his ability and will continue to honor him in the future. It thus reminds the subject of the mutual bond between him and the poet; it is a tactful hope that the subject will in turn honor the poet. In the *Homeric Hymns* the reciprocal duties of the god and the poet are often discreetly but explicitly stated. "Grant me a prosperous life in return for my song," says the poet, "and I shall remember you in another song."[5] Pindar uses the motif to assert that he too has won a victory in his song, and has by doing so enhanced the victor's glory. He has set the seal upon the victor's achievements.[6] Such references are a statement of the poet's confident belief in the supremacy of the achievements of both athlete and poet. What is distinctive in Theocritus' conclusion is that, instead of emphasizing the reciprocal relationship between poet and his subject, he snaps the fragile bond which he had tentatively been able to establish, by reverting to the theme of the poet's isolation and usefulness with which most of the poem had been concerned. He again answers his original question by implying that no one will care about his poetry, but consoles himself with the perpetual companionship of his Charites.

Here, however, Theocritus has reduced himself to an absurd dilemma because his Charites cannot function as Charites if they stay with him. To use his own personification, it is only when his Charites go out to lend their beauties to someone's house and name that they become Charites: that is, Pindar's encomiastic Charites. Locked in the poet's chest at home they remain only papyrus rolls. This is far from being the consoling philosophy of art for art's sake, for Theocritus has categorically excluded such a view of poetry. His

[5] Some form of the motif occurs in almost every Homeric hymn, but see in particular 2.494–95; 6.19–21; 7.58–59, where Dionysos' help is essential for the song; 8.15–17; 10.4–6; 11.5; 13.3; 15.9; 20.8; 22.6–7; 24.5, where Hestia is asked to shed *charis* on the hymn; 26.11–13; 30.17–19.

[6] See *Ol.* 1.115–16; *Ol.* 6.105, where Pindar asks for the blossom of his song: that is, that the song should always be worthy of its subject; also see *Ol.* 10.101–10; *Nem.* 3.73–76; 5.50–54; 8.46–51; 9.53–55; *Isth.* 2.43–48; 4.90. Note, in contrast to *Id.* 16, the more conventional pride of the poet in *Id.* 17.136. See also Bacchylides' use of this convention in his poem to Hiero (3.96–98), another poem in which money is an important theme.

emphatic defense of poetry has been solely on the grounds that it is a necessity for the non-poet, as the complement to the life of action. His image of his Charites scolding him and shivering with cold when they come home rejected shows too painfully what kind of domestic life we may visualize for the poet left alone with his Muses. Rejected by others they become shrews at home. Can we so forget that vivid picture of his barefoot, sulking, humiliated Graces as to see in the poem's conclusion only a conventional *topos* expressing the sweet reasonableness of our Hellenistic poet's resignation to his limited horizons? One feels rather that something is omitted, that the last verse should perhaps read, "With them may I ever dwell, God help me."

Pindar has one poem which shows in its themes the most significant parallels to Theocritus 16. *Isthmian* 2 makes the same kind of comparison between ancient and modern poets and between ancient and modern heroes as Theocritus makes. "The Muses were not mercenary in those days," says Pindar, "nor were the songs of Terpsichore for sale. But now we are forced to agree that the saying 'money is man' is not far from the truth. But you are wise, Thrasyboulos. . . ." Later in the poem Pindar emphasizes the hospitality of Thrasyboulos—he is no stranger to festivals and sweet song. His relative Xenokrates is likewise praised for his generosity in providing festivals and entertaining at his table.

The scholiast notes that Pindar's mercenary Muse was a reference to Simonides, but the tenor of the whole poem indicates that Pindar is apologizing for the general contemporary conditions, in which poetry is commissioned for pay. The contrast between the first strophe and antistrophe is simply: "Men used to write for love alone; now they write for money." Pindar's abrupt transition (12), "But you are wise," is in Pindar's familiar oracular style but seems to be glossed by the rest of the poem, with its emphasis on Thrasyboulos' generosity and Pindar's sincere friendship. The last lines of the poem reflect back to the discussion of the mean considerations of monetary necessity and to the theme of love poetry in the first strophe: "Dispense these things, Nikasippos, when you come to my dear friend Thrasyboulos." In spite of the disagreeable financial necessities Pindar assures Thrasyboulos that this poem is the liberal gesture of a spontaneous friendship which looks for no reward. Pindar acknowledges the harsh truth that

money has intruded into the realm of poetry, but he does so only in order to affirm more emphatically that spontaneous gestures are still possible. Thrasyboulos, being a wise young man, will recognize a love poem when he sees one.

The situation is quite different in Theocritus. He does not achieve Pindar's resolution, and he never clearly exempts his hoped-for patron from the general condemnation which he makes of his contemporaries in the first half of the poem, nor does he manage to convey the suggestion of liberality on his own side as Pindar had done with such finesse. Pindar raises the question of money only to dismiss it as irrelevant on this particular occasion; Theocritus raises it only to conclude that it is everything. "Money is man" was for Pindar very close to the truth; for Theocritus the aphorism becomes virtually the whole truth.

Theocritus has the conventional themes of encomiastic poetry which have been made familiar to us by Pindar, but the conventions are so inverted that the tone of the poem is totally antithetical to that of epinician and encomiastic poetry. Where Pindar is confident, Theocritus is despondent; where Pindar resolves his aporia, Theocritus compounds and reinforces his; where Pindar exhibits the relationship of poet and victor as the paradigm of *charis* in a corrupt modern world, Theocritus suggests that *charis* is to be found only in the forlorn relationship of poet and his poetry. This is the primary problem of the poem. Why should Theocritus choose to present to Hiero such a despondent and at times almost an insulting attempt at encomium? Was it youthful immaturity? Flippancy? Cynicism? Genuine despair?

Further complications of the puzzle are suggested by Theocritus' choice of the Thessalian nobles and Simonides as his paradigms for the value of poetry. The Thessalian families—the Scopads and the Aleuads—rich as they were, says Theocritus, would have passed into oblivion had not Simonides immortalized them in his poetry. But what of this immortality for which they should be so thankful? What did the Hellenistic world know of them? The Aleuads played no great role in Greek history, but the part they did play was an ugly one. From Herodotus we learn that the Aleuads had intrigued with Xerxes and were instrumental in persuading him to invade Greece. When the invasion took place the Thessalians were the first to open their doors to the enemy. Herodotus excuses the Thessalian people by saying that

they were powerless to resist their leaders, the Aleuads. To the Aleuads therefore is ascribed the ignominy of being the first to betray Hellas to the Persians.[7] History knows little of the family after that, except where the family's name is linked to the Scopads.

The Scopads were another leading family in Thessaly which in later times seems to have been confused with the Aleuads. The Scopads, however, seem to have been denied even as noteworthy a role in history as the Aleuads. The references to them are slight, and mostly connect them with Simonides. It is probable that in the Hellenistic period the poems of Simonides which had been written for the family were still extant; it seems more likely, however, that their name was known more through the several anecdotes in which they and Simonides figure. These have survived to us from various sources—scholiasts' notes, authors such as Cicero, Quintilian, Ovid, and even from the scholiasts on *Idyll* 16.

These anecdotes are never complimentary.[8] They suggest a Philistine reluctance to support the arts. The most famous story is that told by Cicero (*De orat.* 2.352) and Quintilian (*Instit. orat.* 11.2.12) of Scopas' decision to pay Simonides only half the fee for a certain poem since only half had been concerned with the Scopads. The other half Simonides had devoted to the Dioskouroi, and he was told to look to them for the rest of his fee. Retribution came shortly thereafter on this family when the roof of their house collapsed and destroyed the whole family; Simonides was miraculously saved by the appearance of two young men (the Dioskouroi or their deputies) who summoned him outside at precisely the moment of catastrophe. Simonides, not one to harbor ill-will, wrote a threnody for the family. Plutarch preserves an even more damaging anecdote in which Simonides expressed his contempt for his Thessalian patrons. When Simonides was asked why the Thessalians were the only people who had not been deceived by him, he replied, "Oh, they're too uneducated (*amathesteroi*) to be deceived by me."[9]

[7] On the Aleuads see Toepffer, *RE* 1 (1894) 1372–74, s.v. "Aleuadai"; Herodotus 7.6, 130, 172; and How and Well's *Commentary* on 7.172, and their introduction, 30(e).

[8] On the Scopads see Swoboda, *RE* 3A (1927) 567–69, s.v. "Skopadai," and Gow's *Commentary* on Theocritus 16.18 ff.

[9] Plut. *De aud. poetis* 15C; see B. A. van Groningen, "Simonides et les Thessaliens," *Mnemosyne*, Ser. 4, 11 (1948) 1–7. Van Groningen takes deception to mean the deception

Simonides immortalized the Scopads indeed, but as patrons somewhat refractory to the civilized art of encomium. There is a hint of warning in Theocritus' mention of them, perhaps even a veiled threat—not that Hiero will be forgotten but that he may regret the immortality he achieves if he does not respond to Theocritus' call for patronage. Gow has suggested that the surprising absence of any reference to Hiero I, who had been hospitable to both Simonides and Pindar, may be a discretion dictated by the political circumstances—a public comparison between Hiero II and the tyrant Hiero I may have been unwelcome. Even if this were the case, surely Theocritus could have introduced more eminent *exempla* from the classical period. Few leaders could find a comparison to those rude and obscure Thessalian barons flattering.[10]

Theocritus' reference to Simonides in preference to Pindar is equally perplexing. Since Simonides certainly wrote epinician odes the choice of one classical encomiast over another may not seem peculiar at first glance. The choice becomes peculiar only when we begin to perceive the reputation which Simonides held in antiquity. A full discussion of the many-sided character which is revealed to us in anecdotes, apothegms, and fragments would be impossible here, but if we leave aside his reputation as a wise man and the question of his relationship to the sophists, we find that one of the most persistent themes of the anecdotes is Simonides' mercenary temperament.[11] There is the

of fiction, of myth. He thinks that Simonides refrained from mythic elements in his poems for the Thessalians since they were unable to appreciate the aesthetic which would include such elements in song. The story of the Thessalian boxer, however, who had to share his poem with the Dioskouroi casts some doubt on van Groningen's interpretation.

[10] C. Haberlin, *De figuratis carminibus graecis* (Diss. Hanover 1886), 56–57, believes that Theocritus, by mentioning the Thessalians, is making a discreet reference to the present ruler of Thessaly, viz. Antigonus Gonatas, a liberal patron of the arts whom Theocritus had courted before he addressed this poem to Hiero. Legrande (above, note 1) 38, has a more circuitous defense. He believes that it would be too "brutal" to mention the first Hiero to the second, but since the Thessalians were the other important patrons of Pindar and Simonides, any mention of the Thessalians would remind Hiero II of the liberality of Hiero I. Mention of the Thessalians, writes Legrande, p. 95, "est un des meilleurs arguments qui puissent délier la bourse d'Hiéron." One wonders if Hiero, amid the political turmoil of his time, would have entered into *la mascarade bucolique* with as much enthusiasm as modern scholars.

[11] On Simonides see U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, *Sappho und Simonides* (Berlin 1913), Georg Christ, *Simonidesstudien* (Diss. Zürich 1941), W. J. H. F. Kegel,

anecdote that Xenophanes had called Simonides a miser (*kimbix*, Fr. 21 Diehl), but we discover the first indubitable instance of the accusation in Aristophanes. He in one place (*Pax* 698–99) uses Simonides as the type of unprincipled opportunist who will do anything for money, and in another (*Av.* 904 ff.) introduces a shabby mendicant poet who sings Simonidean hymns in exchange for a new outfit.[12] Wilamowitz has suggested that Plato's characterization of Kephalos in the first book of the *Republic*, where a poem or a saying of Simonides is under discussion, is a subtle reflection of this side of Simonides' reputation.[13] Though these contemporary criticisms may be exaggerations or comic parodies of Simonides, yet they become firmly established as a commonplace in the Hellenistic and subsequent periods, so that Aelian can say (*Var. hist.* 8.2) that Hipparchos kept Simonides at his court only with magnificent bribes of money and gifts, "for no one will deny that Simonides was a lover of money (*philochrêmatos*)."[14]

Pindar could talk of money in his poems without ever tainting his reputation; in fact, when he talked in this vein it was invariably poor Simonides who bore the brunt of the scholiasts' censure. Bacchylides too could say to Hiero (3.87): εὐφροσύνα δ' ὁ χρυσός without fear of being misrepresented. Only Simonides, it seems, received disapprobation.[15] There seems to have developed a strong moral bias against Simonides as a cynical opportunist. It is reasonable to conjecture that such a bias may be reponsible for the present sorry state of the Simonidean corpus, for with such a prejudice against him it is only natural that schools would favor Pindar as the model of virtuous poetry while neglecting or even discouraging the reading of Simonides.

Simonides (Groningen 1962), and Denys Page, *Poetae Melici Graeci* (Oxford 1962 242–43.

[12] It is not true to say, as Wilamowitz (above, note 11) 148 says, that Pindar had made the same charge. It is the scholiast who explains Pindar's mercenary Muse in *Isth.* 2 as a reference to Simonides.

[13] Wilamowitz (above, note 11) 148.

[14] Note also Plutarch's story (*An. sen. rep. ger.* 786B) in which Simonides replies to the accusation of his money-fixation by saying that money is the only pleasure left to him in his old age. For fuller references to Simonides' *philokerdeia* see F. G. Schneidewin, *Simonides Cei Carminum Reliquiae* (Brunswig 1935) xxiv–xxxii; P. Pfeiffer on Call. Fr. 222, and Gow on *Idyll* 16.10.

[15] See schol. on Pindar, *Ol.* 2.157a; *Ol.* 9.74b; *Nem.* 4.60b; and *Isth.* 2.9, where the scholiast notes that Simonides was the first to write epinician poems for money.

Be that as it may, we should expect that if Theocritus wished to write a poem asking for patronage, in which the topic of money was to figure so prominently, he would have taken pains to dissociate himself from any possible connection with Simonides. It is remarkable that a poet who wished to carry on a diatribe against the covetousness of his age should call for support upon the one poet whose name was synonymous with covetousness. We should expect Theocritus to try to establish instead a kinship with the more spiritual Pindar.[16]

Such, then, is *Idyll* 16—a study in contradiction. It is not surprising that many scholars have considered it a failure. But before dismissing it out of hand we should attempt to interpret it in the light of the hints which Theocritus himself has given us. We must first accept Theocritus' mention of Simonides as deliberate. Theocritus does not mention Simonides, as Legrande says, because the Thessalians have reminded him of Simonides, but surely vice versa.[17] It is because Theocritus is looking to Simonides as his model that he thinks of the anecdotes which concern the Scopads and the Aleuads. Theocritus' image of his Charites remaining in their chest at home is a direct reminder of the pun Simonides had made on Charites, in which he said that he had two chests at home, the one for *charites* (thanks) which was always full, and the other for payment which was always empty.[18] The whole of *Idyll* 16 is an amplification and reiteration of that pun, with the new meaning of *charites* as poems being added. Theocritus receives no thanks, nor reward, but he does have his Charites.[19]

[16] The subject of avarice was a commonplace, as Gow documents at line 65. All the more surprising to find Theocritus associating himself with the one and only avaricious poet.

[17] Legrande (above, note 2) 136, note 2.

[18] Stob. 3.10.38. See Gow's *Commentary* on 10 ff.

[19] Wilamowitz (above, note 11) 149, note 2, says that Theocritus had been the first to play on the double sense of *charites*. But the point of the Simonidean anecdote is his pun on the word. He is promised *charis*, i.e. money, in return for a poem, and he replies that he has plenty of *charis* already, i.e. thanks, but no money. Theocritus' masterful stroke of making a triple pun on *charites* as poems, thanks, and rewards almost defies explication in any other language. Theocritus sends his *charites* out in search of reciprocal *charites* (rewards) from others; if they are sent back by return mail they return as Simonidean *charites* ("thanks all the same"), and so all the reward *and* thanks the poet gets is the return of his own poetry. The personification of the Graces who are prevented from being Graces expresses the complex interplay of all three meanings of the word far more effectively than any prosaic analysis can do.

One scholar who has taken the mention of Simonides seriously has understood that the poem is not in the encomiastic genre at all. Reinhold Merkelbach classes the poem as a "mendicant poem" ("Bettelgedicht"), fashioned in imitation of a similar kind of poem by Simonides.[20] Simonides had, in Merkelbach's view, adapted the begging songs which children sang as they made their rounds from house to house on certain festive days to the more formal genre of choral lyric. Merkelbach compares the themes and style of *Idyll* 16 with a poem such as the *Eiresione* (*Vita Hom.* 33), the *Chelidonismos* (Athen. 8.360B) and the Crow's Song by Phoinix of Colophon (Athen. 8.359E). In such songs adults or barefoot children went around, as do Theocritus' Charites, to beg for gifts, promising good health and prosperity upon the house in return, or threatening calamity if they are given nothing. Merkelbach conjectures that Simonides had adapted such folk songs to his own choral lyrics, perhaps in a poem to Hieron I, and had by doing so helped to establish the *topos* of the mendicant poet which we see parodied in Aristophanes' *Birds* (904 ff.). There a shivering poet sings some stirring patriotic songs, in the Simonidean style, in return for some clothes, and Pisthetaeros remarks that they must give him something or he will work harm on the newly founded city. Theocritus has then combined (or perhaps Simonides before him) the two ideas of the mendicant poet and the mendicant children into one, and has his poems go out as his children to ask for hospitality and to offer good wishes in return. Some of Merkelbach's parallels between the children's songs and *Idyll* 16 may have less substance than others—certain of the themes such as the wishes for prosperity may be found in almost any kind of hymn and need not be a direct borrowing from this folk tradition—yet his theory offers a cogent explanation which deals with the enigma of the poem.

[20] R. Merkelbach, "Bettelgedichte (Theokrit, Simonides und Walther von der Vogelweide," *RhM*, Ser. 3, 95 (1952) 312–27. Carl V. Holzinger, "Theokrit in Orchomenos," *Philologus* 51 (1892) 195, also calls *Id.* 16 a "Bettelgedicht," but does not amplify. E. Bignone, *Teocrito* (Bari 1934) 385, also recognizes the poem as something different from an encomium; he calls it not an encomium but an "augurio." So too, Max Treu, "Selbstzeugnisse Alexandrinischer Dichter (Kallimachos 13, Iambos; Theokrit XVI," *Misc. d. stud. Alessand. in mem. d. A. Rostagni* (Turin 1963) 284, remarks that *Id.* 16 in its essentials is not Pindaric, and that its mention of Simonides is intentional, but he does not explain Theocritus' preference of Simonides to Pindar.

Merkelbach has not, however, satisfactorily explained the poem. He has suggested a reasonable hypothesis as to its form and antecedents, but this alone does not account for Theocritus' decision to write a poem after the pattern of certain Simonidean poems which had been parodied by Aristophanes and as a result of which Simonides had achieved notoriety as a shameless mendicant. If we examine more closely the character of Simonides and his poetry we may be able to discern certain features which led Theocritus to see in him a poetic kinship.

Simonides was something of an innovator among poets of the fifth century. This we must deduce from several admittedly sparse tokens. There is first the evidence of his interest in philosophy which makes him the invisible antagonist behind two important discussions in Plato, the one in the *Republic* and the other in *Protagoras*. The references to him as a *sophos* suggest that Simonides had attempted to make some justification of poetry as being philosophically authoritative. His reputation may have come from his pithy apothegms and the discussions in his poetry of common moral questions, more than from any explicit claim on his part to be a wise man. He seems to have become, however, the representative of the poet-philosopher, and as such is a suitable target for Plato in the *Protagoras*. Simonides was a good example of the poets, mentioned by Socrates in the *Apology*, who mistakenly believed that they were endowed with *sophia*.[21]

In his style too Simonides contributed to the revolution which was taking place in fifth-century literature. There is, for example, the fragment of an epinician ode in which Simonides rates a modern athlete as superior to the ancient heroes Polydeukes and Herakles (Fr. 23 D). This was a dangerously secular precedent for the epinician genre, as ancient critics perceived. In a similar vein is the fragment of another epinician ode which begins with a scornful and mildly obscene allusion to the defeat of the victor's opponent (Fr. 22 D).[22] In contrast to this somewhat hyperbolic mockery of the genre, his style seems to

[21] The sarcasm in Socrates' damning compliment of Simonides as being "ambitious for wisdom" (*Protag.* 343C), and as being a "wise and godly man" (*Rep.* 331E) is to me unmistakable, but Bowra, "Simonides and Scopas," *CP* 29 (1934) 230, takes these expressions as sincerely intended. For a fuller discussion of Simonides' relationship to the sophists see Christ (above, note 11) 53–61.

[22] On this fragment see D. L. Page, "Simonidea," *JHS* 71 (1951) 140–42.

have been quite the reverse. He was recognized for his directness, simplicity, and pathos.[23] Dionysius of Halicarnassus compares the *pathetic* style of Simonides with the loftier (*megaloprepôs*) style of Pindar (*De imit.* 205.9-11 Usener), and Quintilian calls his style *tenuis* (*Inst.* 10.1.63). The Danae fragment (Fr. 13 D), with its emphasis on descriptive detail, realism, and emotional appeal, supports the verdic of the ancient critics. The evidence of Simonides' use of realistic detail is particularly interesting. A certain aspect of this realism which anticipates the Hellenistic writers is apparent in the Danae fragment, but there are scattered references to another kind of realism in Simonides: his ability to catch the style of slaves' conversation.[24] Simonides had the gift of catching and reproducing colloquial speech patterns; in this mimetic ability he again shows himself a forerunner of Theocritus and the Alexandrians.

But perhaps more important for our consideration is the tone of scepticism and pessimism which runs through so many of the Simonides fragments. This ironic scepticism is apparent not only in the attitudes he adopts towards the aristocratic concept of *aretê* in such philosophical fragments as the Scopas "scolion,"[25] but also in his attitude towards poetry. There is some suggestion of such a mocking attitude in his placing the athlete Glaukos above the heroes, but it is more visible in his famous rejoinder to the inscription which Kleoboulos had composed for the tomb of Midas (Fr. 48 D). Kleoboulos' epitaph asserts that it will remain forever proof against the destructive force of all the elements, as long as trees grow, the sun shines, rivers flow, the sea breaks. Simonides ridicules the idea that a stone can withstand the elements and concludes that nothing is proof against destruction:

> ἅπαντα γάρ ἐστι θεῶν ἥσσω· λίθον δὲ
> καὶ βρότεοι παλάμαι θραύοντι· μωροῦ
> φωτὸς ἅδε βούλα.

[23] For references to ancient judgments on his style see Christ (above, note 11).

[24] See Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1091A7, and W. D. Ross' *Commentary* (Oxford 1924) on this passage. Aristotle's comment here is further glossed at *Rhet.* 3.14 1415B24; see also the comment of Alexander of Aphrodisias (p. 797.6 Bonitz), who calls attention to Simonides' ability to mimic the speech patterns of slaves. For a fuller discussion of this point see F. W. Schneidewin, "Simonides λόγοι ἄτακτοι," *RhM*, Ser. 3, 7 (1850) 460–64.

[25] The interpretation of this poem is still a vexed question. For the latest discussion

Christ interprets this fragment as a defense of the superiority of poetry over stone monuments, though he admits that "diese Interpretation wird sich zwar kaum beweisen lassen, sie erklärt aber einzig den scharfen polemische Ton."[26] Here, for Christ, is the poet's classical defense of poetry. This is to read considerably more into the "polemical tone" of the fragment than is warranted.

We may suppose that Simonides would have considered poetry, which is orally perpetuated from generation to generation, as far more durable than stone. His poem on the heroes at Thermopylae (Fr. 26; 531 *PMG*) certainly exudes a confident belief in the immortality of fame won through heroism. Yet the polemical occasion of Fr. 48 D seems to give Simonides the liberty to abandon the traditional *persona* of the eulogist for a more private *persona* which expresses a view more in tune with philosophic ideas than with poetic.

The statement of the fragment is most emphatic: *everything* is subject to the gods. *Everything* is further glossed by the next words: "both stone and the human arts." The crucial word is παλάμαι. If it means artifacts, then poetry may be excluded; if, however, it has the wider sense of human creations, the whole sphere of human endeavors, then presumably poetry too is not exempt from the laws of change and destruction. The latter interpretation seems preferable, for it would surely be incongruous were this poem, after its emphatic insistence on the destructibility of everything and after its open scorn for fools who believe in permanence, to conclude: "But, on the other hand, poetry is proof against destruction." Scepticism certainly seems the dominant tone. Coming from a poet, therefore, the fragment seems to imply a gloomy prospect even for that one kind of immortality which the Greeks could recognize. Such scepticism could well reinforce the legend that Simonides was not, like Pindar, motivated by what Christ calls "eine innere Bindung an den Gegenstand seiner Kunst," but by cupidity and opportunism.[27] Christ finds corroboration of this ancient view in Simonides' handling of the epinician genre, but it is likely that this kind of reputation derived more from the contradictions of a man who made a frontal attack upon poetry (and equally,

of the poem and its earlier critics, see Hugh Parry, "An Interpretation of Simonides 4 (Diehl)," *TAPA* 96 (1965) 297–320.

[26] Christ (above, note 11) 40.

[27] Christ (above, note 11) 29.

we may say, upon his patrons) while parlaying it into a financial and social success at the courts of the great.

The picture which emerges is of a man whom financial necessity drove to write poems, suitable enough in type, theme, and sentiment for the rich, but a man who remained sceptical about the value of what he was doing; a man who fulfilled his official duties with efficiency and charm, but whose native temperament led him to utter more frivolous truths such as that one's duty in life "is to play and not to take anything seriously" (Fr. 192 B); a man who avoided the heroic or mocked it by hyperbole, and attuned his ear instead to the more dynamic cadences of the servants' quarters.

It is not surprising that of all the classical writers it was Simonides with whom Theocritus could feel the closest association. Clearly Theocritus had little in common with Pindar, either in style or in sentiment. Theocritus lacked Pindar's daring imagination and the proud conviction which could support such an imagination. Theocritus does not exhibit the Simonidean facility for dinner table wit or startling paradox, nor Simonides' amused iconoclasm; in other respects, however, in their fondness for the graphic and mimetic representation of life around them and their ear for the subleties of a simpler colloquial style, Theocritus could have seen in Simonides his *alter ego*.

To understand Theocritus' preoccupation with Simonides is the first step towards solving the problems of the poem. Theocritus had seen in Simonides a poet of similar temperament who had been able, in spite of his scepticism and his lack of Pindaric extravagance, to find a place for his poetry at the courts of rich tyrants. Theocritus was, it seems, in a similar situation. He had the poetic education and a graceful poetic gift, and needed some court to support him. If tyrants could be satisfied with Simonides' kind of poetry, then perhaps there was still someone who might appreciate Theocritus' poetry. *Idyll* 16 is an admission of the *un-Pindaric* nature of Theocritus' talent. I cannot promise, says Theocritus, that I can give you the kind of poetry which Pindar gave his patrons, but there are after all many poets who can sing your praises, and if I am included in their number I shall be able to match Simonides at least. For Simonides, though no Pindar, yet achieved immortality for some people and perhaps, in the case of others, improved the reputation which they left to posterity.

On the other hand, we must admit that most of the poem is not addressed to Hiero at all, but is a soliloquy which the poet addresses to himself. Pindar had shown that it was possible to introduce all sorts of personal references or reflections even within formal choral lyric, but such personal notes were never incongruous because they were always subordinate to the praise of the victor. In poems celebrating achievement it was legitimate to link the athletic achievement with the poetic, so that poet and athlete participated in each other's victory and stood together on the pinnacle of a common victory. Whether Pindar's poetic asides on his competitors or on the superiority of his own skill reflect any historical reality is of secondary importance. The purpose of their inclusion was certainly not to carry on literary quarrels in epinician poetry; that would have been a tasteless way to celebrate such high festive occasions, and a tasteless way to repay a host's hospitality. The poet's pride in his own creation is therefore a legitimate virtue in a poem celebrating the nobility of pride and competition.[28]

It is just in this respect that Theocritus shows so strong a contrast to the classical encomiastic tradition. First of all, though *Idyll* 16 makes the conventional defences of poetry as necessary for a gracious life and an immortal name, we miss the tone of confidence and genuine conviction. Theocritus' pessimism defeats the explicit arguments for the value of poetry, and even the paradigmatic references do little to strengthen the argument. But more significant is that the poet and the *laudandus* are not so much linked together as set in opposition. Despairing of the search for a generous patron and for recognition from others, the poet affects to find self-recognition a satisfactory substitute. The poetic self is not as in Pindar a foil to the *laudandus* but a substitute for the *laudandus*.

The poetic self becomes the real subject of the poem. It is true that in the section in which Theocritus praises Hiero and calls upon other poets to do likewise the poet and his patron become linked together in mutual glory, but this is a brief moment in the poem. The mood is abruptly shattered by the concluding lines where, in fact, Theocritus accepts the arguments which he had tried to counter earlier, by saying that he may not be necessary to the world, but on the other hand the

[28] For this question of the relevant intrusion of the encomiast's person in epinician poetry, see Bundy (above, note 5) II, 60, note 66.

world is not necessary to him. All attempts to meet a patron are virtually abandoned and the poet is left a solitary figure at the end. What sets out to be an encomium of Hiero becomes a *consolatio* of the poet. It is this discordant note which is responsible perhaps for the uneasy reaction with which some scholars have received the poem.

We may never understand fully the motives, conscious or unconscious, behind this incongruity in the poem, but we have some clue in the excuses which Theocritus puts in the mouth of the moderns who evade the claims of the poetry. Theocritus has, alas, given his opponents arguments which are more cogent than his conventional refutations. One excuse in particular, that "Homer is enough for everyone" (20), shows that the root of Theocritus' despair is not merely modern parsimony, but the modern concept of poetry, which is fundamentally alien to that of the classical period. Such a philosophy does not recognize the claims of poetry to be an integral part of life; poetry may be valuable as entertainment or even as a form of pedagogy, but if that is all, then the ancient poets are as good as the moderns. The suggestion of scepticism in Simonides' view of poetry is now expressed by the public at large.

The claim of poetry to confer immortality is no longer valid, and one can sense that the realization of this unhappy truth pervades the poem. It may be that this realization of the hollowness of poetry's claim leads Theocritus to omit any mention of Hiero I. The poets had after all played only a minor role in establishing the fame which such men had achieved, and besides who read the poets? School boys and would-be poets. Perhaps this is why Theocritus chooses the more obscure and insignificant Thessalians, because the claim of poetry was truer in their case than in the case of Hiero I. But even in their case the reference is somewhat self-defeating. What could Hiero II, or anyone else, have known about the Scopads except as a name associated, none too gloriously, in anecdotes with Simonides? Perhaps, indeed, it was Plato who was chiefly responsible for the perpetuation of their name. What fame the Scopads had achieved did not make a strong case for poetry. The reference is in any case undeniably recherché. But all Theocritus' arguments are going to be unconvincing because the poet's place has been appropriated by the prose writers—the historians and chroniclers. If men are still concerned

about eternal fame, and believe that literature can guarantee that fame, it is not to poets that they will first turn.

This then is the dilemma of the poem. Theocritus is hesitant and sceptical, but he sees that Simonides with his similar temperament had nevertheless managed to find a place for his poetry. But we sense that as he wrote Theocritus became increasingly aware that the dichotomy between his academic expectations of poetry and the realities of life in the third century was so serious as to make any synthesis impossible.

Homer's role in immortalizing his heroes was indisputable. The case was less certain for Simonides, but at least Simonides' contemporaries could still recognize the value of poetry. Though Simonides himself seems to suggest that he foresees the increasingly peripheral role of poetry in daily life, at least he lived in a period when poets were in demand. If we can trust the anecdotes, Simonides was so full of self-assurance that he could afford to be contemptuous of his patrons. The wealthy vied for the favors of the poets, and even the rudest aristocrat wanted his personal encomiast. There is a different situation in the third century. Poetry has become peripheral and virtually superfluous. No longer is poetry an active participant in the public rituals of the city, or the aristocratic family. It is no longer a necessary complement to achievement. The modern poet may still perhaps confer some immortality but it will probably be the immortality of a school anthology.

Idyll 16 is in a certain sense what we would call a bookish poem. It is not full of recondite allusions (though there are undoubtedly many more than we can recognize), but it reads like the work of a young man who has read his classics extensively and carefully, and is ambitious to make a name for himself in poetry. But as he writes he realizes that his poem is really an academic imitation, addressed more to himself and to fellow-poets than to Hiero. The references to Simonides, the Scopads, the Lycians, Odysseus' servants can have interest only for academicians; it is hardly to be expected that they would cause Hiero to take note of this new voice in the land.[29] With the realization that

[29] There has been considerable controversy about the place of this poem in Theocritus' poetic corpus. Opinion generally favors an early date for *Id.* 16, but some scholars see the poem as an accomplished product of Theocritus' maturity. See, for example, A. Gerke, "Alexandrinische Studien," *RhM* 42 (1887) 270 and 606; A. T. H. Fritzsche,

his arguments and echoes of classical *topoi* are irrelevant, and hence will never persuade Hiero, Theocritus in pessimistic resignation allows the poem to become a preoccupation with the sorry predicament of the impossibility of poetry.

We may feel that the poem because of its contradictions falls short of complete success. It is, however, a highly interesting document for our understanding of the nature of the poetic conflict in the Hellenistic period. Much attention has been given to the literary debates in that period, and to those poems of Callimachus and Apollonius which may or may not be expressions of these debates. Except for *Idylls* 7 and 22, Theocritus has remained largely outside these scholarly discussions. Yet *Idyll* 16, if it is one of Theocritus' early poems, predating much of Callimachus and Apollonius, may be even more significant because it poses the fundamental question for the period. Not what kind of poetry, but why poetry at all?

If poetry was recreated in the Hellenistic period, after a century of prose writing, as Bruno Snell says, then in *Idyll* 16 we can see one of the earliest attempts at this re-creation.[30] It is an attempt to revive poetry according to the classical precedents. But since this is a revival which the poem itself acknowledges as impossible, the poem remains as our only document of that attempt. Except for the frigidly conventional *Idyll* 17, what has survived of Alexandrian poetry suggests that any similar attempt at classicism, if we may call it that, was not sufficiently successful to be preserved.

The poem's interest for literary history lies in the fact that it stands midway between the classical utilitarian view of poetry and the frankly aesthetic view of Callimachus. It is the last lingering look back at the happy picture of poets honored by courts and cities for their wisdom, their wit, and their essential contribution to the social life around

De poetis Graecis bucolicis (Giessen 1844) 7; F. Bücheler, "De Bucolicorum Graecorum aliquot carminibus," *RhM* 30 (1875) 55. Max Treu (above, note 20) 288–89, remarks that we cannot distinguish the early Theocritus from the late because he is certainly *doctus poeta* in this poem. *Doctus poeta* Theocritus is, but surely *doctus iuvenis*; it is hard to believe that he could have written such a poem as this after his career had been well established.

[30] Snell, *Discovery of the Mind*, tr. T. G. Rosenmeyer (Oxford 1953) ch. 12. Snell calls Callimachus the father of Hellenistic poetry, but we can see here in Theocritus an earlier expression of the new problems, though Theocritus is never as vocal about his aesthetic principles.

them. But it is also a realization that such days are over and that the poet, if he is to continue to write at all, must invent a new justification for his poetry. This was a problem which was to engage the talents and minds of all the Alexandrian writers, whether they expressly discussed the question or not in their poetry, but it is here in *Idyll* 16 that we find the first and most explicit statement of that problem.