

Writing about encomion in Horace Carm. 4.9 and Theocritus Idyll 16

In this paper I will suggest that Horace, composing Carm. 4.9 about the dubious military commander Lollius, follows a literary precedent set by the Greek poet Theocritus, whose Idyll 16 contains wishful praise for Hiero, general and later king of Syracuse. I will compare passages where Horace's language paraphrases Idyll 16, and I will argue for similarities in each poet's use of encomion for self-fashioning. The potential incongruity between the present-time virtue and future heroic prowess of their *laudandi* is fundamental to the rhetorical strategies of both poems. Theocritus and Horace deliberately sound notes of doubt about Hiero and Lollius, in order to strengthen their self-representations as practitioners of the powerful craft of poetry.

The poems are broadly similar, in that both devote much space to a discussion of poetry's ability to immortalize remarkable, and not necessarily wholly virtuous, mortals. Further, each poet places his work within the traditions not only of lyric encomion but all great poetry across genre. In Horace's poem, a series of negative assertions (six total, introduced by *non* or *nec*, 5-23) about the interrelation between poets and the subjects of poetry is capped by the gnomic observation *sed omnes illacrimabiles/ urgentur ignotique longa/ nocte, carent quia vate sacro./ Paulum sepultae distat inertiae/ celata virtus* (26-30). The Ode's structure here appears to be a reversal and reflection of the structure of the central portion of Theocritus' Idyll. At 16.30-33 Theocritus makes the same point that, when hidden in Hades, the rich man will mourn, without *kleos*, the same as if he had been a poor wretch, if poets do not honor him in their songs. Then, through a series of exempla introduced by negatives, Theocritus recites the beneficial relationships that subjects of song used to have with poets in the past (οὐ ... εἰ μὴ ... οὐδ' ... lines 40, 44, 50, 57).

Idyll 16 begins and ends not with a *laudandus*, but with the poet singing about himself. The poem's emphasis is on Theocritus' commitment to celebrating men (16.1-4; 66-70; 106-109). This commitment is set against pessimistic observations that contemporary social conditions do not promise reciprocation (16.5-21; 59-65). Horace's Ode is not as explicitly concerned with the *charis* between poet and honorand as is Theocritus' Idyll. But Horace does suggest that Lollius, who displays numerous virtues (32-44), will not yet be described as *beatus* unless he too uses his wealth rightly (45-48). Theocritus' narrative about the warrior Hiero shows him about to confront the Carthaginians in battle, but it leaves open the possibility that Hiero will either be unsuccessful or will die (16.82ff.). Theocritus may not ever be able to find a contemporary worth praising. Likewise, Horace's conclusion that one who is rightly called *beatus* perhaps ought to suffer vicissitudes and death (49-52) seems to place an impracticable, unfulfillable obligation upon Lollius. Horace's words, however, will not perish (1-2). Each poem is effectually a celebration of the commitment of the poet to the honorable task of writing praise poetry. These unnoticed parallels between Horace's Carm. 4.9 and Theocritus' Idyll 16 strengthen the case for those interpreters who question Horace's intent in praising Lollius. I believe that Horace has found in Theocritus 16 a pattern for writing about encomion that suits one of his central concerns, namely, to fashion himself as a powerful Latin poet in the Greek tradition.

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