

BOOK REVIEW

Echoing Hylas: A Study in Hellenistic and Roman Metapoetics. By MARK HEERINK. Wisconsin Studies in Classics. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2015. Pp. xii + 243. Cloth, \$65.00. ISBN 978-0-299-30540-6.

The story of Heracles' young companion Hylas is generally as follows: during a break on the Argonaut expedition, he goes into the woods to fetch water and is abducted by nymphs; Heracles calls his name repeatedly, sometimes hearing an echo. In this slightly revised 2010 Leiden PhD, Mark Heerink explores variations of the episode, arguing that "Hellenistic and Roman poets used the story of Hylas as a vehicle to express their ideas about poetry and to react to those of others" (4). The metapoetic approach is justified by verbal repetitions, taken as tropes of poets responding to each other; by activating the etymology of Hylas' name—ὕλη, "wood," and "poetic subject matter;" and by "the relationship and opposition between the archetypal hero Hercules and the tender boy Hylas, which is appropriated to symbolize the poet's positioning toward his predecessor(s)" (9).

While the focus is on Apollonius' *Argonautica*, Theocritus' *Idyll* 13, Propertius 1.20, Valerius Flaccus' *Argonautica* and Statius' *Thebaid*, the structure of Heerink's argument requires including other works, both of these authors and Homer, Hesiod, Aristotle, Virgil, Ovid, and especially Callimachus: "the Hylas poems all adhere to a Callimachean poetics, however differently interpreted by each individual poet" (9). In the Introduction, once Callimacheanism is outlined and situated in relation to Homer and Hesiod, intergeneric relations emerge as one of the central concerns of the book. Chapters explore how the poets, competing with their contemporaries and predecessors, experiment with generic prerogatives of epic, bucolic poetry, and elegy, via the Hylas episode.

A few snapshots illustrate this rich investigation. Chapter one: Apollonius' Heracles, too traditionally heroic, literally too heavy for the Argo, is left behind and replaced by "Callimachean" diplomat Jason, prefigured by Hylas. Insightful intra- and intertextual examination demonstrates that "in the Hylas episode, the epic has taken an important step in the "right" direction, by causing an important threat to the epic to leave. Hylas's entry into the spring, which symbolizes Apollonius's

Callimachean epic, and the concomitant leaving behind of Heracles, reflect Apollonius's attitude toward heroic-epic poetry and Homer in particular," which he can follow only to a certain extent (48).

Chapter two: Theocritus aetiologizes bucolic poetry by "bucolizing" Homeric legacy: Hylas is transformed into an echo, a natural sound, symbolizing the bucolic poet, Theocritus (67), who "shows his colleague and poetic rival Apollonius another way of writing Callimachean poetry by rewriting his Hylas episode" (72), and finds "his own poetic, Callimachean niche in relation to Homer's heroic-epic poetry" (82).

Chapter 3 is a particularly stimulating analysis of Propertius' 1.20, where he alerts the poet Gallus to protect his lover Hylas from Italic nymphs. By introducing Virgil's "elegiac excursion in *Eclogue 2*" (93) and Gallus' attempt to write bucolic poetry in *Eclogue 10* (97), Heerink unpacks the tension between bucolic and elegiac mode (97–98). While drowning Hylas symbolizes Gallus' poetry absorbed by Virgil's pastoral landscape, Propertius "has capped Virgil": the echo is "not reproduced by Hylas but is demythologized into a natural phenomenon that only symbolizes elegiac absence of the beloved." Moreover, "[b]y inverting what happened to Gallus and his elegy in the *Eclogues*, and by putting Hylas in service of that typically elegiac activity of the *praeceptor amoris* to warn Gallus, Propertius has also outdone his elegiac rival" (111–112).

As intertexts accumulate, reading of imperial epicists in chapter four grows more complex. Valerius Flaccus anomalously assigns "anti-epic" Hylas an unfitting epic role: he is carrying Heracles' weapons but, unlike in the corresponding passage in Apollonius (1.131–132), he is not yet strong enough to carry his heavy club (*Arg.* 1.110–111). Similarity with Ascanius following Aeneas dressed like Heracles (*Aen.* 2.721–724) presents Hylas as "a potential epic hero" (114). This "Virgilization" of Apollonius, impeded by Hylas' un-heroic pedigree, "functions as a metapoetical manifesto, revealing Valerius's *Argonautica* as an epic that can only imitate its Augustan epic predecessor to a certain extent," recalling "Apollonius's Callimachean position vis-à-vis Homer" (116–117). Ovid's "elegiac epic" *Metamorphoses* is thrown into the mix: Valerius' Heracles' passion for Hylas, who resembles Narcissus and Hermaphrodite, "elegizes" the *Aeneid* (cf. "Ovidian" unequal-foot-pun, *Arg.* 3.485–486; page 141). Further, Valerius combines Theocritus' and Propertius' Hylas (124), and is "window alluding" to Propertius through Ovid (133). Heerink then discusses Hylas in the *Thebaid* (5.441-4) and

Stattius' reference to following the *Aeneid* admiringly (12.816–817), arguing that these passages combine two Valerian Hylas passages (1.107–111, 3.495–496) in an allusion to Ascanius following Aeneas. The book ends with some remarks on political and poetic succession in imperial epic.

It is beside the point to blame such a streamlined inquiry for omissions, except the curiously understudied Echo ending Callimachus' epigram 28—especially since the poem is Heerink's interpretive touchstone throughout. Still, given the importance of succession, wood symbolism, bilingual name etymologies, and Heracles-Hylas paralleling Aeneas-Ascanius, one wonders how Heerink would have incorporated Heracles' son and heir Hyllus, etymologized when gathering wood for Heracles' funeral pyre in Sophocles' *Trachiniae* (πολλήν μὲν ὕλην, 1195), or indeed Aeneas' other son, Silvius, a Latin "Woody" (*Aen.* 6.763–772, with suggestive *quercu*).

The study is dense, even mildly but attractively dizzying. Meticulously close readings alternate with zooming out—trees and forest, as it were—assembling one giant puzzle. Thankfully, it is very accessible due to generous cross-references, recaps and summaries, clear, level-headed exposition, and absence of critical jargon. No specific theoretical framework is applied, though Bloomian "anxiety of influence" is implicit. In brief, this book is learned, exhaustively documented, imaginative and ultimately exciting.

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