Do Callimachus' Epigrams know they're Epigrams?

Epigrams are a very interesting category of literary texts, as they can be placed in a number of contexts, and they can be constructed for numerous reasons. As every literary work, they provide an opportunity for the author to project some of their own thoughts and ideas regarding literature or comment on issues of their reality. Even though epigrams are often a few lines long, they are still literary compositions, which are an opportunity for the author to showcase their talent and ability to give life to an object, make a statement, entertain a group or honour a person that has passed. The discovery of the Posidippus Papyrus was a strong piece of evidence that epigrams were composed for literary purposes in order to be part of a collection, but Callimachus' works also suggest that many of his compositions were not meant to be performed. Therefore, there are many metaliterary elements which suggest that his epigrams were composed for readers of his time or of a later time.

In many epigrams, inanimate objects seem to be getting a voice and experiencing human emotions and reality, as if they know what that is like. In others, Callimachus converses with a person that is no longer alive as a way to honour them and share their knowledge of the living world, now that they are no longer a part of it. Epigrams as literary compositions suggest a dialogue of some sort among the reader and the epigram as the reader is becoming an active part of the poem. In addition, the use of the first person in epigrams is a way for the author to be present in the poem and have a more active role in the perception by the reader.

In *Callimachus 6*, the author takes the persona of a nautilus shell, creating the illusion that the epigram is written on something so small like the shell of a nautilus. This is an unrealistic possibility as the shell would be too small to be inscribed. Throughout the epigram, the nautilus is aware of its death but at the same time it experiences the reality of a living breathing being, which is a paradox in the poem. The epigram seems to have a self-awareness as the nautilus knows it has passed away and yet it continues to have a voice and recite the poem.

In *Epigram 2*, Callimachus directly mentions himself grieving for the loss of his friend and remembering him and their relationship. He is also comparing his epigrams to nightingales, which according to the poem are not to be taken by Hades. This is an indirect comment on his poetry and its value as well as its existence for the future generations. The birds are not affected by death and his poems are not affected by time, which is an interesting aspect of the epigram.

Epigram 5 includes a short dialogue, where the person that has passed away is aware of their condition and comment on how the darkness is more hateful than light. Timon is known from 5th century comedy as a not quite liked figure. This dialogue creates a more active participation of the reader as they imagine the dialogue taking place as they read. However, in this poem Callimachus makes his own comment on Timon's condition and the later shares their knowledge on the darkness that exists in death. The way the dialogue is constructed and the comment of Callimachus in the beginning show that Callimachus is using the poem to convey his own ideas on death.

Epigram 13 is a quite short one, whose shortness is being discussed and interconnected to the theme of the poem which is the life of a person which was cut short. This epigram includes a comment on its own length, which makes the written information visible as the poem itself is so short, which means that the reader would probably notice it while reading. The epigram has a level of self- awareness as for its size, which is also a reference to its theme.

In *Epigram 19*, Callimachus speaks of a man that has died in the sea and has an empty tomb in his name. The epigram seems to be the author's own addition to the genre, as he incorporates tragic

elements into the epigram, guiding the reader to recall scenes of tragedy and place it within a literary context, as well as imagining a dramatical speech.

Epigram 37 is also a very interesting one as Callimachus seems to be composing it for himself, which is an obvious indication that it is not inscribes on a tomb as he is still alive and creating it. Thus, he must have been aware, as would be the reader, that this epigram does not have a physical object connected to it, but rather a fictional one.

In *Callimachus 30*, the author starts with the metaliterary comment that they hate the cyclic poem. This could be linked to the Homeric poems which were widely used as inspiration by many and were often copied or referenced. Callimachus states his opinion regarding the originality of poetry and how his own poetry claims to be unique.

The epigrams of Callimachus have many elements that suggest they are aware of their nature as literary texts. Callimachus has an active voice and persona within the epigrams and is very much part of the dialogue by making comments and using the first person to speak. The objects of the epigram exist in the realm of the reader's imagination, and this is also where the dialogues take place. Many of the epigrams have elements from tragedy and other include philosophical queries that philosophers of the time tried to answer regarding life and death. Epigrams enable such metaliterary comments as they are relatively short poems, which makes them easier to remember and also, they can fit into many different contexts which is useful for the author. Short forms of poetry convey many ideas and have many layers of meaning on few words, which makes epigrams rather complex and makes the reader keen to try and comprehend their meanings and references better. Moreover, in such forms of poetry it is easier fir the author to experiment with more styles and incorporate elements of different genres, due to the size and the nature of the poetry itself.

As for the purpose of the poems' self-awareness, Callimachus must have known that those epigrams were never meant to be inscribed on nothing more than a papyri, thus they would end up as written literary works for the readers to enjoy. The epigrams know they are epigrams even though they pretend to be actual inscribed objects. Therefore, the emphasis falls not only on the written work but to the author behind it and their interaction with the reader. This is important for Callimachus' fame and for his praise as an innovative author, whose works evoke emotions and stimulate the reader's imagination.