

Condensed Epic: Hellenistic Epyllia [Unit 5]

Primary Reading: Callimachus' *Hecale* (on Moodle), Theocritus' *Little Heracles* and Moschus' *Europa*.

SECTION A: EPYLLIA

In the Hellenistic period we find a number of smaller hexameter poems containing strong Homeric language that concentrate on mythical, often epic, material. Scholars group these poems under the title *epyllion*. To begin this week's session we will look at this genre, its validity and its characteristics. You should read:

Merriam, C. U. *The Development of the Epyllion Genre through the Hellenistic and Roman Periods*. Lewiston. 2001. 1-24. [Library]

Fantuzzi, M. and Hunter, R. L. *Tradition and Innovation in Hellenistic Poetry*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, 191-245. [Moodle]. ***This title will be useful for individual analyses of the texts as well.***

Consider the following discussion points:

1. How valid is the genre *epyllion*? Is it useful to label these poems in such a way?
2. Are there any defining characteristics of the *epyllion*?
3. Why does this genre become popular in the Hellenistic period?

SECTION B: EXAMPLES OF EPYLLIA

In this section of the seminar, we will explore the poems: Moschus' *Europa*, Theocritus' *Little Heracles* and Callimachus' *Hecale* (respectively).

For each poem you should consider the following discussion points:

Mythical Analysis:

1. Compare this instantiation of the myth with that of its predecessors. What differences has the author made and why?
2. How much does knowledge of previous myths affect an audience's interpretation of this instantiation?
3. How does the poem play with epic conventions? Why?

Narrative Analysis:

1. What is the structure of the poem?
2. What are the defining features of the poem?
3. How are the protagonists characterised? Why?
4. How Hellenistic is this poem?

Consider the following individual discussion points for each poem (and secondary reading):

Myth in Greek and Roman Epic

Moschus' Europa

Discussion Points

1. What is the influence of art on this piece? What ecphraseis are used and why?
2. Why has Moschus used the example of Io?
3. How does Moschus relate to other 'abduction' stories? E.g. of Tyro (*Odyssey* 11.253ff.), Medea (*Argonautica*) and Persephone (*Homeric Hymn to Demeter*).

Secondary Reading (don't forget Fantuzzi above)

Campbell, M. *Moschus Europa*. Hildesheim. 1991. 1-14. [Library]

Hopkinson, N. *A Hellenistic Anthology*. Cambridge. 200-202. [Moodle]

Merriam, C. U. *The Development of the Epyllion Genre through the Hellenistic and Roman Periods*. Lewiston. 2001. 51-73. [Library]

Theocritus' Little Heracles

Discussion Points

1. What concept of heroism do we find in this idyll? Why?
2. How does Theocritus use realism?
3. How does Theocritus use its models of Pindar's *Nemean* 1 and *Paeon* 20?
4. Compare *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* 275-91: what can this tell us about the poem?

Secondary Reading (don't forget Fantuzzi above)

Griffiths, A. *Theocritus at Court*, Leiden, 1979. 91-8 [Library]

Griffiths, A. 'Customising Theocritus: poems 13 and 24', in M. A. Harder, R. F. Regtuit and G. C. Walker (eds.), *Hellenistica Groningana Volume II: Theocritus*, Groningen, 1996. 101-18 [Moodle]

Merriam, C. U. *The Development of the Epyllion Genre through the Hellenistic and Roman Periods*. Lewiston. 2001. 26-49. [Library]

Callimachus' Hecale

Discussion Points

1. Is this poem a 'epyllion'?
2. How has Callimachus innovated Theseus' myth?
3. What type of heroism do we get in this myth? Why?

Secondary Reading (don't forget Fantuzzi above)

Hutchinson, G. O. *Hellenistic Poetry*. Oxford. 1988. 56-63. [Moodle]

Hutchinson, G. O. 'Hellenistic Epic and Homeric Form', in M. J. Clarke, B. G. F. Currie and R. O. A. M. Lyne (eds.) *Epic Interactions: Perspectives on Homer, Virgil and the Epic Tradition*. Oxford. 2006. 105-130 [Moodle]