1. The myth of Hylas

During a stopover of the Argonauts in Mysia, the young Hylas sets out to fetch water for his companion Hercules. Wandering in the woods, he arrives at a secluded spring, inhabited by nymphs who fall in love with him and pull him into the water. Mad with worry, Hercules stays in Mysia in search of the boy, whom he will never find again. He is then left behind by the Argonauts, who continue their quest for the Golden Fleece.

In the course of time, the story of Hylas and Hercules has been credited with various meanings. According to Strabo (1st cent. BC), the myth is aetiological in that it explains the origin of a cult in Mysia:

Above Prusias lies a mountain called Arganthonium. And here, they say, Hylas, one of the companions of Heracles who sailed with him on the Argo, was snatched by nymphs when he went ashore to get water. (...) And still to this day a kind of festival is celebrated among the Prusians, a mountain-ranging festival, in which they march in procession and call Hylas, as though making their exodus to the forests in quest of him.¹ (tr. Jones, adapted)

¹ Strabo, Geogr. 12.4.3: ύπέρκειται δὲ τῆς Προυσιάδος ὄρος, ὃ καλοῦσιν Ἀργανθώνιον. ἐνταῦθα δὲ μυθεύουσι τὸν Ὡλαν, ἕνα τῶν Ἡρακλέους ἑταίρων συμπλεύσαντα ἐπὶ τῆς Ἀργοῦς αὐτῷ, ἐξώντα δὲ ἐπὶ υδρείαν ὑπὸ νυμφῶν ἁρπαγῆναι (...) καὶ νῦν δ’ ἐτείον τις ἄγεται παρὰ τοῖς Προυσιεῦσι και ὀρειβασία θιασευόντων καὶ καλοῦντων Ὡλαν, ὡς ᾧν κατὰ ἑξέχασεν τὴν ἐκείνου πεποιημένων τὴν ἐπὶ τὰς ὤλας ἔξοδον.
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The Hellenistic poet Nicander (2nd cent. BC) claims that the myth is aetiological in another sense, by making it explain the origin of the echo. If we may believe Antoninus Liberalis’ summary, Nicander, in his now lost Heteroeumena (“Metamorphoses”), explained how the nymphs abducted Hylas and turned him into an echo, a motif that plays an important role in almost all the poems about Hylas that have come down to us:

The nymphs, fearing that Heracles might discover that they had hidden the lad among them, changed him into an echo which again and again echoed back the cries of Heracles. (tr. Celoria)

Modern scholars have read the story as a rite de passage, the transition of a boy from his involvement in a pederastic relationship with Hercules to marriage with a nymph. The figure of Hylas has also been seen as a vegetation god, whose “death” coincides with the seasonal decline in the natural world and “is the focus of an annual religious ceremony characterised by the lament of the participants.”

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2 Antoninus Liberalis’ story of Hylas (26) has as its heading: ἱστορεῖ Νίκανδρος Ἑτεροιουμένων Β’ (“Nicander tells this tale in the second book of his Metamorphoses.”).
3 Sourvinou-Inwood 2004, 243ff. has interpreted the myth as aetiological in yet another sense, as a foundation myth of the Mysian city of Kios (later Prusias). See, however, the review of Köhnken 2008, 489, who convincingly argues that this thesis does not have any basis in the Hylas-poems (“Der Hylas-Mythos ist kein Stadtgründungsmythos.”).
4 Nic. fr. 48 G-S (= Ant. Lib. 26.4): νύμφαι δὲ δείσασαι τὸν Ἡρακλέα, μὴ αὐτὸν εὕροι κρυπτόμενον παρ’ αὐτὰς, μετέβαλον τὸν Ὕλαν καὶ ἐποίησαν ἠχὼ καὶ πρὸς τὴν βοὴν πολλάκις ἀντεφώνησεν Ἡρακλέα. Incidentally, Strabo (quoted above) also seems to hint at the echo motif.
5 See e.g. Hunter 1999, 262: “The story of Hylas’ abduction by nymphs may be understood as a story of a young man’s transition from being the eromenos of an older man to a new status as object of female desire ...”. Cf. Hunter 1999, 268 (on Theoc. Id. 13.7: πλοκαμίδα, “lock(s)”: “Hylas, like the model ‘ephebe’ Apollo (...), had not yet cut his youthful locks, which is a familiar rite the passage for sexes in many cultures (...).” Cf. Gow 1950, II, 233 on the same passage.
poems narrating the myth of Hylas have even been given mathematical significance. In this thesis, I will argue that the Hylas poems have an additional level of meaning. My contention is that the story is used by classical poets as a vehicle to express their poetics, and thus acquires metapoetical significance.

2. The wandering echo

As an introduction to the Hylas poems and a preliminary survey of their metapoetical dimension, I will now first briefly track the chronological development of the echo motif. In the oldest poetic treatments of the Hylas myth that we have, from the beginning of the Hellenistic age, Apollonius of Rhodes’ *Argonautica* does not associate Hylas with the echo, but *Idyll* 13 of his contemporary Theocritus hints at the boy’s metamorphosis:

\[\text{τοῖς μὲν Ἄλαν ἄμετρον, ὅσον βαθὺς ἦνυγε λαμίως; τοῖς δ᾽ ἄρ᾽ ὁ παις ὑπάκουσεν, ἀραιὰ δ᾽ ἵκετο φωνά ἐξ υδάτως, παρεὼν δὲ μᾶλα σχέδον εἴδετο πόρρω.} \]

Id. 13.58-60

“Hylas!” he [Heracles] bellowed, as loud as his deep throat could cry, three times. Three times the boy replied, but his voice rose faint from the pool; though close, it sounded far away. (tr. Verity)

‘Sterben’ und weiterleben Osiris, während die Nymphen mit ihrer tätigen Bemühung um den ‘Ertrunkenen’ die Rolle der Isis spielen und der ungestüme, durch wüste Gegenden irrende Herakles an Seth erinnert.’ (p. 63-4).

7 Mauerhofer 2004. For a critical discussion of Mauerhofer’s approach, see Heerink 2006.

8 Before the Hellenistic age, the story of Heracles and Hylas had probably often been told in the many lost epic poems that dealt with Heracles. We know that at least Cinaithon (8th cent. BC) dealt with Hylas in his *Heracleia* (schol. A.R. 1.1355-57c), although there is a possibility that Conon, the mythographer (1st c. BC/AD) is meant by the scholiast (see Huxley 1969, 86). Peisandros of Kamiros (7th or 6th cent. BC) wrote a *Heracleia* in two books, apparently following a certain Pisinos of Lindos (thus Clem. Al. *Strom.* 6.2.25). There also existed a *Heracleia* by Panyassis (5th cent. BC) in 14 books. See Huxley 1969, 99-112 for these epics about Heracles. For other ancient Hylas poems that possibly existed but are now lost, see e.g. Mauerhofer 2004, 26-36 (Ch. 1: “Verschollene Darstellungen der Hylas-Sage”; his reconstruction of a hypothetical satyr play on Hylas (34), which is based completely on his own imagination, can be disregarded).
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Hylas’ reply to Heracles has much in common with an echo: three cries, three replies, and the answer is distant and faint. Furthermore, as the underlinings indicate, line 59, describing Hylas’ answer, “echoes” Heracles’ cry in the previous line on both a textual and a phonic level (τρίς – τρίς, αὕσεν – ὑπάκουσεν).10

The Romans take the lead from their Hellenistic predecessors. In his miniature, two-line version of the Hylas-myth, Virgil concentrates on the echo, which he literally repeats:

his adiungit, Hylan nautae quo fonte relictum
clamassent, ut litus “Hyla Hyla” omne sonaret. Ecl. 6.43-4

[Silenus] adds at what fountain mariners for Hylas lost | shouted till all the shore re-echoed Hylas, Hylas. (tr. Lee)

Much as in Theocritus’ echoing lines, Virgil’s echo is imitated in the prosody, as the sequence of the long and the short a in Hylā Hylā creates the effect of a fading echo.11 According to M.G. Bonanno, Virgil reacts to Theocritus, whose Heracles cried “Hylas” thrice, by mimetically reproducing Theocritus’ statement with Hylan and the repeated Hyla Hyla; morphologically, Hylan is different from the two vocatives, but not phonetically, because of the subsequent nautae.12 By making his echo so explicit, Virgil has interpreted Hylas’ reply in Idyll 13 as an echo, revealing an awareness of the traditional metamorphosis of Hylas, which is also reflected in Theocritus’ poem.

About a decade later, Propertius’ elegy 1.20 has Hercules responding to the cry (sonitum) that Hylas utters when he is pulled into the water:13

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9 Cf. Hunter 1999, 282 (on Id. 13.58-60): “(...) the experience of deceptive distance suggests the familiar echo effect.”
10 Bonanno 1990, 195-6. Furthermore, the postponed metrical position of ὑπάκουσεν in relation to αὕσεν creates the fading effect of an echo. Incidentally, the great acoustic distance between Heracles and Hylas can be seen to be mimetically expressed by the separation of παξεύων and πόρρῳ. See also Ch. 2, Section 3.1 and 3.2 for Theocritus’ treatment of the echo of Hylas.
12 Bonanno 1990, 197; Wills 1996, 53 with n. 11.
13 As McCarthy 1981, 199 makes clear, facili liquore in 47 excludes the possibility that sonitum refers to a splash (for this interpretation, see Shackleton Bailey 1956, 58 and Diller 1975, 430). Cf. Camps 1961, 97
The Echo of Hylas

tum sonitum rapto corpore fecit Hylas.
cui procul Alcides ter “Hyla” respondet; at* illi
nomen ab extremis montibus** aura refert.   Prop. 1.20.48-50

* ter “Hyla” respondet at Fontein: iterat responsa sed mss.
** montibus Heinsius: fontibus mss.

[T]hen Hylas made a sound as his body was seized. To him from a distance Hercules thrice replies “Hylas”; and the breeze brings back the name to him from the far-off mountains. (tr. Heyworth)

The triple cry of Hercules again alludes to Idyll 13, on which poem Propertius’ entire elegy is in fact modelled, and as in Theocritus and Virgil Hercules’ cry is reproduced in the form of an echo. Although Propertius evokes the tradition according to which Hylas was transformed into an echo, however, Hylas is not identified with the echo, which is reproduced by the mountains and carried to Hercules by the wind. Propertius has demythologized the echo, making it appear as a natural phenomenon.

In the Flavian era, Valerius Flaccus’ Argonautica reacts to the echoes of his Roman predecessors:

(on 1.20.48), who provides an interesting parallel for the rare use of sonitum to denote the human voice: Virg. G. 4.333f.: at mater sonitum thalamo sub fluminis alti | sensit (“But his mother in her bedchamber beneath the river’s depths | felt his clamour”; tr. Johnson), on which see also Heyworth 2007b, 93: “[I]n each case the human voice when heard through water becomes a sonitus.”


14 See Ch. 3, Section 7.1.
15 Broukhusius 1727, 86: “aura est Echo. etenim metuentes nymphae ne Hercules absconditum apud se Hylam inveniret, puerum in Echonem commutarent. auctor Nicander apud Antoninus Liberalis.”; Baker 2000, 181 (on Prop. 1.20.50): “This seems best taken as the echo of Hercules’ repeated calls in 49, the name being that of Hylas (cf. Virg. Ecl. 6.32-4).” Most modern editors (e.g. Barber 1960, Butrica 1984, Fedeli 1984, Goold 1990, Luck 1996, Viarre 2005 and Heyworth 2007a) read montibus in line 50, which makes for a more logical echo. The reading fontibus, however, which is the “codicum consensus”, has the advantage that it could add an allusion to Idyll 13, where Hylas was seemingly transformed into an echo answering Heracles’ cry from the water (ἐξ ὕδατος), if ab extremis fontibus is interpreted as “from the depths of the spring”. The Latin, however, which is awkward on any interpretation, does not seem to allow this interpretation: “extremis is very hard if fontibus be retained. It cannot merely be equivalent to longinquis and would naturally mean ‘from the fountain’s edge’ (...) rather than ‘from the furthest part of the spring’.” (Shackleton Bailey 1956, 58). Cf. Heyworth 2007b, 93: “(...) the transmitted fontibus can hardly be right in 50 unless extremis is corrupt.”

17 See also Ch. 3, Sections 6.2 and 7.2.
rursus Hylan et rursus Hylan per longa reclamat
avia: responsant silvae et vaga certat imago.  

“Hylas”, he shouts, “Hylas”, over and over again through pathless territory. The forests reply and the wandering echo emulates [his cry].

Hercules’ cry, with the double Hylan, is a clear allusion to Virgil’s repetition Hyla Hyla, for instance marked by the double rursus and reclamat in 596. As Barchiesi comments: “Once again’ expresses both the phonic and intertextual reiteration of the name; reclamat, coming after the Virgilian clamassent, is a gloss on this process of replicating what has also been said/written.” Furthermore, Virgil’s presence is supported in 597 by the allusion to another echo in Eclogue 10:

non canimus surdis, respondent omnia silvae.  

No to the deaf we sing; the forrests answer all.  (tr. Lee)

The natural phenomenon of echo is used by Roman poets as a trope to describe the intertextual process, as scholars have shown, and this is how it is used by Valerius: his text is an “echo” of Virgil’s. The intertextual play is even more sophisticated as the intertextual echo inverts the acoustic one: Virgil’s Hyla Hyla is paradoxically the echo of Hercules’ cry Hylan ... Hylan in the Argonautica.

Valerius also reacts to the earlier echoes. Whereas Theocritus’ echo was in fact Hylas, answering from the water, and Propertius’ was more naturally produced by the mountains and the wind, the woods (silvae) bring back Hercules’ cry in Valerius’

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20 Barchiesi 2001, 140, who also notes that Valerius’ use of the rare verb responsare points to Virgil (Aen. 12.757).
21 See Hinds 1998, 5-8; Barchiesi 2001, 139-40 for the echo as a “trope of intertextuality”. Both authors also discuss Valerius’ passage in this context. Cf. Hollander 1981, who deals with the echo as “a mode of allusion” in Renaissance and post-Renaissance literature, but also mentions Valerius’ echo as an example (p. 13).
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Argonautica. Yet since *silva* is the equivalent of ὕλη,23 which in turn is an ancient etymology of Hylas,24 Valerius’ Hylas in a sense answers Hercules as an echo, just as in Theocritus and Virgil. But at the same time, like Propertius, Valerius has made the echo more natural, as it does not come from the water, but is produced by *silvae*, the “woods” that Hylas represents through the etymology of his name. With this natural echo that retains the association with Hylas Valerius can be said to have surpassed his poetic predecessors. As Barchiesi has suggested, Valerius’ *vaga certat imago* expresses this metapoetically: Valerius’ echo emulates the ones before.25

3. A metapoetical interpretation of the Hylas myth

This brief survey of the echo motif in the classical versions of the Hylas myth shows that the passages strongly react to each other, and that although the echoes are similar their message is not the same. The way the poets “echo” their predecessors in dealing with Hylas’ association with the phenomenon of echo can be read in terms of a subtle game of *imitatio* and *aemulatio*, in which each poet on the one hand affiliates himself with a literary tradition while at the same time attempting to find his own poetic niche within this tradition.

In this thesis, I will argue that the echo motif is only the tip of the iceberg, and that the Hylas poems in their entirety reflect the poetics of the respective poets on an implicit, allegorical level. I will, in other words, present a “metapoetical” reading of the poetic versions of the Hylas myth. The etymology of Hylas’ name, as derived

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23 *Silva* and ὕλη can both mean “forest”, “wood” (*OLD* I, 2; *LSJ* I, II), but *silva* can also metaphorically denote “(literary) material” (*OLD* 5b; the common term is *materia*) and thus translate ὕλη (*LSJ* III.3).

24 See Barchiesi 2001, 189 (n. 41) for puns on this etymology by Strabo (quoted in n. 1 above: Ὅλαν ... ὕλας) and *Orph. Arg.* 643-5: Ὅλας ἐξέκειτο νηὸς | λάθρῃ ἐπισπόμενος: σκολῆς δ’ ἀλίτη σεν ἀταρποῦ | ὕλῃ ἐνιπλαγχθείς ("Hylas disembarked, secretly pursuing him [Heracles]; but wandering in the forest he strayed from the winding path."). See also Ch. 1, Section 3.3; Ch. 2, Section 3.3; Ch. 3, Section 4 for the etymological wordplay on Hylas and ὕλη.

25 Barchiesi 2001, 140. For an example of the reception of this echo motif in Neo-Latin poetry, in the Hylas elegy of Daniël Heinsius (1580-1655), see Heerink & Bloemendal 2008.
from ὕλη, which can denote “wood” on the one hand and “poetic subject matter” on the other, is essential in triggering metapoetical meaning. A further key feature of the metapoetical dimension of the Hylas myth is the relationship and opposition set up between the archetypal hero Hercules and the tender boy Hylas and appropriated by poets to symbolize the way the poet deals with a poetic predecessor. Another recurrent element is the use of the setting of the rape of Hylas as a metapoetical landscape.

Although the Hylas poems share many metapoetical features and reveal similar metapoetical agendas, they also exhibit striking differences. Since the poems are written in different periods and literary contexts (Hellenistic, Augustan, Flavian), in different genres (bucolic, elegy, epic), and by different authors (Apollonius, Theocritus, Virgil, Valerius Flaccus, Statius), who write quite different styles of poetry, this is a priori hardly surprising. The Hylas poems echo each other, but as in the case of the natural phenomenon, each echo is not an exact replica of what it reiterates; the respective poets appropriate the Hylas myth for their own literary purposes.

In the four chapters of this thesis I will show how the four full-scale classical versions of the Hylas myth by Apollonius, Theocritus, Propertius and Valerius Flaccus, as well as the incomplete versions of Virgil and Statius, allegorically express the poetics of their respective poets. As will become clear in the course of the thesis, the individual metapoetical statements that these Hylas poems offer do not only stand on their own, but also contribute to a diachronic debate that extends and reinforces the metapoetical meaning of each individual poem.

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26 See n. 23 above.
27 Brief references to Hylas in classical poetry, which do not seem to participate in the intertextual game of the large-scale versions, will not be considered. Late classical poems on Hylas, including Aüsonius’ epigrams 97 and 98 (4th cent. AD), Orphic Argonautica 629-57 (4th/5th cent. AD; see also n. 24 above) and Drácontius’ Romulea 2 (5th/6th cent. AD), on which see e.g. Mauerhofer 2004 and esp. Weber 1995, cannot be dealt with in this thesis.
28 For a comparison of these Hylas poems in other than metapoetical respects, see esp. Türk 1895, Koch 1955; Murgatroyd 1992; Weber 1995, 52-127; Mauerhofer 2004.
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Before turning to the Hylas poems and their poetical agendas, I will now first contextualize my research within the broader field of research on ancient metapoetical discourse.

4. Metapoetics in Hellenistic and Roman poetry

Poetry is often about poetry.29 The self-reflexive dimension of a poem can be more or less explicit, but it can also be very implicit and reside below the surface of the text, as it were. In evoking this implicit, secondary level of meaning, for which the term “metapoetical” is commonly used, a key role is played by poetological metaphors. For instance, Arachne weaving a tapestry in book 6 of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* can be seen as a metapoetical representation in miniature, a *mise en abyme*,30 of Ovid at work.

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29 Systematic theoretical studies of self-reflexive literature (mainly in the form of 20th century novels) include Ricardou 1973; Alter 1975; Dällenbach 1977 (tr. 1989; see also next note); Belleau 1980; Hutcheon 1980 (1984); Christensens 1981; Fitch 1982; Paterson 1982; Waugh 1984; Imhof 1986; McHale 1987; Currie 1995. For the specific phenomenon of “metatheatre”, dealing with the self-referentiality of (ancient and modern) drama, see Hornby 1986; Abel 2003. Systematic exclusively theoretical work on the self-reflexivity specifically of poetry is rare, but see Müller-Zettelmann 2000 on “Metalyrik”.

30 *Mise en abyme* is one of the most common metapoetical techniques. The term was first used by André Gide in 1893 (in his diary; see Dällenbach 1989, 7 for the quotation) to denote literary self-reflexivity. He derived the term from heraldry, where the technical term denotes the placement of a miniature version of the original shield “en abyme”, in the centre of it. The literary *mise en abyme* has received extensive theoretical treatment by Dällenbach 1977. In the English translation of this book (1989) it is defined as “any aspect enclosed within a work that shows a similarity with the work that contains it” (8). Bal 1997 uses the convenient term “mirror-text” to describe the same phenomenon: “When the primary fabula and the imbedded fabula can be paraphrased in such a manner that both paraphrases have one or more elements in common, the subtext is a sign of the primary text.” (p. 58). Dällenbach treats *mise en abyme* as a relatively modern phenomenon, but as the Ovidian example shows, it also definitely features in classical poetry. Here *mise en abyme* can take the form of a scene, for instance an ecphrasis, a description of a work of art, which reflects the work that contains it. Apart from *mise en abyme* in this strict sense, as a miniature of the work as a whole, a character in a text can also act as a representation of the author himself. In the example from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, both types of *mise en abyme* are combined. Alternatively, the viewer of a work of art in a literary work can represent the reader of the text as a *mise en abyme*. Aeneas watching the images on Dido’s temple to Juno in *Aeneid* 4 is a famous example (on which see e.g. Fowler 1994, 251). Cf. Fowler 2000b, 90, who sees *mise en abyme* as part of the broader phenomenon of “surrogacy”: “(...) the *mise en abyme* of an image of the literary work is in fact part of a wider phenomenon of surrogacy in which all three elements of the literary process, author, work, and audience, can find representation within the work.” I will, however, use the term *mise en abyme* in the wider sense, as synonymous with Fowler “surrogacy”. For *mise en abyme*
with his poem, his “text”, through activation of the common metaphor of weaving for the writing of poetry.\textsuperscript{31} Together, such metaphors can create so extensive a subtext that one could speak of an allegory or, perhaps better, a “partial allegory”, as not necessarily all the elements in the poem can or need to be read metapoetically.\textsuperscript{32} It is important to stress that a poem containing a metapoetical allegory can be read and understood on a primary level without knowledge of the metapoetical dimension. In this respect metapoetical allegory differs from the usual allegory, in which the primary narrative cannot be fully understood without the secondary level of meaning.\textsuperscript{33} Dante’s \textit{Divine Comedy}, for instance, starts with the famous words: “Midway along the journey of our life \textbar I woke to find myself in a dark wood,\textbar for I had wandered off from the straight path.” (tr. Musa). The text makes it immediately clear that a metaphorical path is meant here and that the journey of Dante’s poetic persona, which covers the entire poem, is to be read allegorically.

Scholars tend to regard the self-reflexivity of art in general and literature in particular as a relatively modern phenomenon.\textsuperscript{34} Nevertheless, the study of metapoetics has yielded a rich harvest in the field of interpretative classical

in Latin literature, see also e.g. Braund 2002, 216-8 (with p. 223 for bibliography). See Ch. 1, Section 2.4 for examples from \textit{Iliad} 3 (see also next note) and Apollonius’ \textit{Argonautica}.

\textsuperscript{31} See e.g. Harries 1990 for the metapoetical link between Ovid and his \textit{Metamorphoses} on the one hand and Arachne and her tapestry on the other (and for more bibliography). The weaving metaphor already occurs in archaic Greek poetry: see Svenbro 1976, 191-2 and Svenbro & Scheid 1996, 111-30. For the metaphor in Roman poetry, where it became a commonplace, see in particular Deremetz 1995, 289-93; Svenbro & Scheid 1996, 131-55 and (for examples) Ross 1975, Index rerum notabiliorum s.v. \textit{deducere}. See also Ch. 1, Section 2.4 for an example from \textit{Iliad} 3; Ch. 2, Section 2.2 for an example from Theocritus’ first \textit{Idyll}; Ch. 3, Section 5.2 for the metapoetical significance of Virgil’s woven basket in \textit{Ecl}. 10; Ch. 4, Section 5.4 for the programmatic importance of \textit{deducere} (“to spin out”) in \textit{Ov. Met}. 1.4.

\textsuperscript{32} I owe the term to Slings 2004, 282 (on his metapoetical interpretation of Callimachus’ \textit{Hymn to Delos}): “It is not my claim that the \textit{Hymn to Delos} is a complete allegory – not even that all the elements in this poem admit of a metaphorical, implicitly poetical reading as well as a literal one, but I do claim that crucial elements in the poem constitute an implicitly poetic level, that is to say, there is a network of metaphors that together justify reading the \textit{Hymn to Delos} as poetry about poetry. (...) The best term I can think of is ‘partial allegory’.”.

\textsuperscript{33} Cf. Slings 2004, 281, n. 5: “The difference between a proper allegory and an implicitly poetic reading I propose here is that in a proper allegory the items only admit of a metaphorical reading, and a literal reading is excluded (...)”.

\textsuperscript{34} Alter 1975 and Hutcheon 1980, for instance, see the roots of the self-reflexive novel in Cervantes’ \textit{Don Quixote}. Dällenbach 1989 mainly deals with Gide and the French 20\textsuperscript{th} century \textit{Nouveau Roman}, but he occasionally also treats the self-reflexivity of older literature, including even the \textit{Odyssey} (pp. 86-7).
The popularity of metapoetical interpretation and the extent to which this line of research is nowadays accepted in the field of classical scholarship is further emphasized by the presence of a chapter on “metapoetics” in S.M. Braund’s introduction to Latin literature.38

35 Because of the pervasiveness of this ancient discourse, I cannot agree with Asper 2008, 197 (in his discussion of metapoetical interpretations of Apollonius’ Argonautica [pp. 189-97], who defines metapoetics as “reader’s poetology” and claims that “modern readers will be more ready to look out for metapoetic statements in ancient texts than ancient readers or audiences would have been (...).” Furthermore, I do not understand why Asper’s objection that metapoetical interpretation is generated by the reader is directed at metapoetics in particular. All interpretation of classical literature is by necessity a “fusion of horizons”, a compromise between a modern interpreter and an ancient text, and I do not see how metapoetical interpretation would be any special in this respect.


37 Galand-Hallyn 1994 deal with the metapoetical potential of descriptions from Homer to the Renaissance. Deremetz 1995 focuses on Roman poetry. After presenting a semiotic, theoretical discussion of metapoetics in Roman poetry, he presents various, extensive case studies on the prologues of Terence’s comedies, Lucretius Hymn to Venus (which opens his De rerum natura), Virgil’s Eclogue 6, Propertius’ Vertumnus elegy (4.2), Ovid’s Ars amatoria 1 and Silius Italicus’ Punica 11. See also conveniently Kofer 2003, 13-42, for a concise theoretical treatment of metapoetics as well as a useful survey of metapoetical interpretations that have been proposed, mainly of epic poetry. For more bibliography on ancient metapoetics, see e.g. Galand-Hallyn 1994, 14-6.

38 Braund 2002, Ch. 12: “Metapoetics” (pp. 207-24).
Nevertheless, the implicit nature of metapoetical readings now and then causes
them to be rejected for methodological reasons. M. Asper, for instance, in his 1997
book on the “poetological metaphors” of Callimachus, fiercely opposes metapoetical
interpretation on the ground that a secondary level of meaning is not necessary to
understand the text.39 Asper distinguishes metapoetical interpretation from his own
approach, which addresses only Callimachus’ explicit remarks about poetry, and he
rejects the common, “analogical” practice in metapoetical interpretation of reading
poetological metaphors metapoetically when they appear in a context that is not
explicitly about poetry. In her review of the book, however, K. Volk has shown that
the line between implicit and explicit statements about poetry is a fine and often
blurred one. She concludes: “A[asper]’s wholesale rejection of ‘metapoetic’ readings
on methodological grounds (...) fails to convince. It seems reasonable to judge
individually and on its own merits every interpretation that detects a hidden
reference to poetry in a particular passage: if it is bad, it is because it is bad, not
because it is ‘metapoetic’.”40

Although metapoetical interpretation is widely accepted and needs no further
justification, my specific, diachronic approach may help to convince even the most
sceptical critics of its validity. Most metapoetical interpretations focus on one specific
text, and my thesis also offers individual metapoetical interpretations, which can
stand on their own to a large extent. In the specific case of the Hylas poems,
however, which constitute an interconnected nexus of texts written in different
periods of antiquity, the metapoetical dialogue between these poems becomes
increasingly important over time, as each of these poems takes knowledge of what

39 Asper 1997, 224-34. See also n. 35 above.
40 Volk 1998. As Volk also duly notes, Asper even contradicts himself when he interprets the
metaphors used in Callimachus’ Epigram 28 as working on an erotic and a poetic level at the same
time (Asper 1997, 56-8). Comparable to Asper, Zanker 1999 fiercely criticizes the metapoetical
interpretations (of Hellenistic poetry) by Seiler 1997: “(...) [M]etapoetics is by definition to be found
‘behind the poetry’. Do we want to run the risk of leaving the actual poetry behind?”. As metapoetical
interpretation does not claim a monopoly on meaning, but opens up an additional level of meaning, it
seems to me to enrich poetry rather than the opposite. See also Seiler’s reaction to this review on his
website (http://www.poiesispoieseos.ch/za.htm).
was written before for granted. Alternatively, later Hylas poems can now and then “retrospectively” shed interpretative light on the metapoetical allegories of earlier ones. In other words, the metapoetical significance of the individual Hylas poems is reinforced by their intertextual contact. Although this “interpoetical dialogue” is an essential aspect of the metapoetical dimension of the Hylas myth in particular, my diachronic approach may also prove useful to strengthen or uncover other metapoetical dimensions and thus contribute to a better understanding of metapoetics in general.

41 See Hardie 1990a, and more extensively Hardie 1993, for the approach of “retrospective interpretation”. Hardie has shown that the Flavians read and interpret their most important model, Virgil’s Aeneid, in a way that anticipates modern studies of intertextuality. Flavian readings and interpretations of Virgil can thus be used as a critical tool for our own reading of the Aeneid.

42 Obviously, intertextuality plays an important role in my research. The last three decades of the previous century much insight has been acquired into the dynamics of the way in particular Hellenistic and Roman poetry deals with the traditions in which it places itself. G.B. Conte (1974; 1984) was the first to apply intertextual and semiotic theory, combined with a traditional philological approach, to classical texts. This approach was enormously productive, and the translation and revision of these works into English (Conte 1986), have had a major impact on classical scholarship, as had the works of Wills 1996, Fowler 1997, Hinds 1998 and Barchiesi 2001. My approach, which combines metapoetical and intertextual interpretation, is much indebted to these pioneering studies.