CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I have argued that the myth of Hylas and Hercules was used by ancient poets to express their poetics allegorically. Although these poets wrote different kinds of poetry (epic, bucolic and elegiac), the ideas metapoetically expressed through the myth have in common the fact that they are “Callimachean”. The poets offer an alternative to the hackneyed heroic-epic tradition before them, as symbolized by Hercules, and associate themselves and their poetry instead with the boy Hylas, variously the adoptive son, pupil and lover of the great hero, who eventually will go his own way. Despite the similarity of the literary positions taken, the ways in which the allegiance with the poetics of the Hellenistic maestro are expressed are quite diverse.

Apollonius Rhodius

The roots of this metapoetical use of the Hylas myth are to be found in the Hellenistic age of Callimachus’ contemporaries Apollonius Rhodius and Theocritus. As I have argued in Chapter 1, Apollonius employs Hylas and Hercules to characterize his epic. In an episode that at first sight seems a miniature Iliad, Apollonius reveals a Callimachean position vis-à-vis Homeric, heroic epic, by leaving Hercules, the archetypal hero, behind because he is “too heavy”. At the same time, Hylas’ switch from the pederastic, Homeric relationship with this hero to his marriage with the nymph symbolizes Apollonius’ maturation as a “new-age” poet. Apollonius, associating himself with Hylas, finds his own, Callimachean poetic niche with regard to his great epic predecessor. The symbolic significance of Hylas’ “marriage” to a nymph is further enhanced by being a prefiguration of the union of the epic’s protagonist Jason with Medea. Although he lacks the heroic qualities of his Homeric models, Jason’s attractiveness, with which he ensures himself of the help of the
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powerful Medea and so fulfils his epic mission, make him a successful hero in the end. Only after the first book of the epic, however, with the “Homeric” Hercules gone, is Jason able to display his alternative heroism. Jason’s position in relation to the traditionally epic Hercules can thus be labelled Callimachean, and the same goes for the way in which Apollonius’ protagonist relates intertextually to his Homeric models. Like Hylas, Jason can be seen as a \textit{mise en abyme} of the poet of the \textit{Argonautica}, who has placed his epic in the Homeric tradition, but has at the same time found a Callimachean way to distance himself from it.

\textit{Theocritus}

The bucolic poet Theocritus has taken another direction, clearly reacting to his epic contemporary Apollonius, as I argued in Chapter 2. Although Hercules again evokes Homeric epic, Hylas himself is now depicted in an alternatively Callimachean way. In his meta-bucolic \textit{Idylls} 1 and 7, Theocritus characterizes his bucolic poetry as Callimachean in relation to Homeric heroic-epic poetry. Although Homer is obviously a model, Theocritus turns his poetry inside-out, as it were, focusing on his less heroic passages, such as the shepherds appearing on Achilles’ shield in the \textit{Iliad}. The boy that appears in this same Homeric ecphrasis, singing a song “with his delicate voice” (\textit{λεπταλέῃ φωνῇ}, \textit{Il.} 18.571), became a model for Callimachus’ poetic persona in the \textit{Aetia} prologue, writing poetry like a playing child (\textit{παῖς}, \textit{Aet.} 1.6 Pf.) and keeping his Muse slender (\textit{λεπταλέην}, \textit{Aet.} fr. 1.24 Pf.). Similarly, Theocritus has turned Homer’s boy into the paradigmatic Callimachean-bucolic poet in his bucolic equivalent of the \textit{Shield}, the description of the rustic ivy cup in \textit{Idyll} 1. When Hylas apparently metamorphoses into an echo in \textit{Idyll} 13, the boy, producing a Callimachean sound and “echoing” Homeric poetry, becomes a paradigmatic Callimachean poet in much the same way. The echo also has bucolic associations, however, as it can be seen to symbolize the harmony between bucolic song and the sound of nature, which is essential for Theocritus’ poetry. Just like the boy on the ivy cup, Hylas is a symbol of the bucolic poet, an interpretation that is reinforced by
parallels between Hylas and Daphnis, the archetypal bucolic poet. In fact, Hylas evokes Theocritus himself, whose epic-bucolic poetry, written in hexameters and inspired by Homer, in the end proves to be only a “faint echo” (ἀραιή φωνά, Id. 13.59) of Homeric epic. In Idyll 13, Theocritus seems to describe the origin and development of his bucolic poetry, as symbolized by the gradual maturation and transformation of Hylas. In this respect, Theocritus’ metapoetical move resembles that of Apollonius, but the metapoetical dimension of the landscape in which Theocritus’ Hylas disappears highlights the difference from Apollonius. Having summarized the first half of the Argonautica, the outward journey, in only one sentence (16-24), Theocritus restarts the epic narrative and gives his own, bucolic version of it, which consists of the Hylas episode only. Theocritus elaborately describes the landscape where the Argonauts land, in terms that evoke the poetry of Hesiod, who provided Callimachus with a model for his Aetia, and with whom Theocritus aligned his bucolic poetry in Idylls 1 and 7. Whereas Hylas becomes part of the landscape, living up to his etymology as derived from ὕλη, “wood”, the heroic Hercules is not at all at home in this Callimachean, bucolic world, which is replete with echoes of Theocritus’ bucolic landscapes. When the hero arms himself for his usual kind of epic fight, immediately after Hylas’ abduction, he does not realize that his weapons will be of no avail in this world. The hero’s incongruity with Theocritus’ bucolic poetry becomes more painfully clear when, wandering through the countryside in search of Hylas, he is hurt by “untrodden thorns” (ἀτρίπτοισιν ἀκάνθαις, 64), which evoke Theocritus’ meta-bucolic locus amoenus at the end of Idyll 7 (ἀκάνθαις, 140) as well as Callimachus’ poetics (κελεύθους | ἀτρίπτους, Aet. fr. 1.27-8 Pf.). So although the poetic paths that Apollonius and Theocritus have taken are both in their own way “untrodden”, they are nevertheless quite different.

Propertius

Propertius’ Hylas poem, the subject of Chapter 3, is clearly modelled on Idyll 13. Not only does elegy 1.20 have the format of Idyll 13, Propertius also specifically alludes to
the Hellenistic poem. Like Theocritus, for instance, he summarizes the first half of Apollonius’ epic in one sentence (17-22). The landscape of Mysia also gets a bucolic flavour through allusions to the Roman Theocritus, Virgil. Propertius even extends the metapoetical allegory of his predecessor. Whereas Theocritus’ spring was only Callimachean by implication, Propertius clearly alludes to Callimachus’ famous, poetological water metaphors: his spring produces Callimachean water. Despite the bucolic colouring, however, the poem is thoroughly elegiac. As the traditional praeceptor amoris of Roman love elegy, Propertius tells the story of Hylas and Hercules to warn Gallus, who clearly evokes the elegist Cornelius Gallus, to look after his own beloved Hylas, whom he has apparently entrusted to Hamadryad nymphs. Metapoetically, through an etymological play with Hylas’ name as derived from ὕλη, “(poetic) subject matter”, and the mention of Hamadryades, which evokes Virgil’s bucolic poetry, Propertius warns Gallus to protect his elegiac poetry, his Amores, which he has “entrusted” to Virgil’s Eclogues. Propertius’ allusions to Eclogues 2 and 10 make clear what is meant, for in these poems Virgil, alluding to Gallus’ Amores, incorporated the elegiac into the bucolic, showing the superiority of his own, bucolic kind of poetry. Propertius’ Hylas story is a metapoetical allegory of what Virgil did to Gallus’ poetry, but by showing what happened to Gallus’ elegies Propertius has turned the bucolic Hylas of Theocritus into a symbol of elegiac poetry. As Virgil, following Theocritus, had associated Hylas and his echo with the origin of his bucolic poetry in Eclogue 6.43-4, Propertius emulates Gallus by doing what his elegiac predecessor was unable to do: to incorporate and surpass Virgil’s poetry. In particular, Propertius demythologizes Virgil’s echo by not associating Hylas with it. Instead of a symbol of the bucolic harmony between man and nature, Propertius lets his echo symbolize the elegiac absence of the beloved, turning the epic Hercules into an elegiac lover along the way. Propertius thus not only emulates Virgil and Gallus, but also Theocritus, whose Hercules was only an epic hero in a bucolic landscape: Propertius has elegized both Hylas and Hercules.
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Valerius Flaccus

Valerius Flaccus provides what can be seen as the climax of the series, as he has combined the metapoetical statements of the earlier Hylas poems, but has nevertheless been able to find his own poetic niche. In an episode that is set up as a miniature *Aeneid*, orchestrated by Juno, who is persecuting a single hero (Hercules) as she did in Virgil’s epic, Hylas is initially presented as a potentially epic hero, through allusions to *Aeneid* 7. There Ascanius’ shooting of Silvia’s stag sets in motion the chain of events that leads to war in Latium, thus starting Virgil’s “essential epic” and ending the bucolic and elegiac world that Latium was. When Hylas is chasing a stag in Valerius’ *Argonautica*, he initially clearly resembles Ascanius, but unlike his epic predecessor Hylas fails to shoot the animal. Furthermore, through Valerius’ suggestive use of imagery, Hylas’ initially epic hunting is transformed into an erotic, elegiac hunt that culminates in union of the boy with the nymph Dryope, who “elegizes” him. As a result, Hercules is turned into an elegiac lover, as in Propertius 1.20, the echo again symbolizing his loneliness. At the same time, however, it is suggested that Hylas does respond to Hercules as a bucolic echo, for it is produced by the woods (*silvae*) that Hylas represents according to the etymology of his name. Furthermore, the echo “echoes” Hylas’ bucolic response in *Eclogue* 6. So Valerius has incorporated the earlier bucolic and elegiac appropriations of the Hylas myth into his own version of the story. But that is not all. By transforming a potential *Aeneid* into a bucolic and elegiac world, Valerius inverts Virgil’s poetical move to essential epic in *Aeneid* 7. The Hylas episode also prefigures the way that Valerius’ *Argonautica*, for which the elegiac love of Medea is crucial, will go, and the elegizing of the *Aeneid* can thus be seen as a metapoetical statement about the entire epic: Valerius’ *Argonautica* is an elegized *Aeneid*. The metapoetical function of the Hylas episode recalls that of the parallel passage in Apollonius’ *Argonautica*, which initially seemed a miniature *Iliad*, but eventually characterized Apollonius’ position with regard to Homeric epic as Callimachean, similarly foreshadowing what was to come. The Roman poet of the *Argonautica*, however, characterizes his epic in relation to the Roman Homer, Virgil,
and can in this sense be said to be Callimachean: Valerius follows the Aeneid to a certain extent, but also departs from it by elegizing its most heroic moments.

Ovid’s elegiac epic Metamorphoses offers a similar “Callimachean” reaction to the Aeneid, and Valerius’ allusions to this work can be seen in this light. In particular, the merging of Hylas and Dryope recalls that of the potentially epic boy Hermaphroditus and the nymph Salmacis in an episode that metapoetically represents the entire Metamorphoses as a mise en abyme: as Hermaphroditus, who is initially depicted as a potential Aeneas, is feminized/elegized, so is Ovid’s Metamorphoses an elegized Aeneid. In this way does Hermaphroditus represent the Metamorphoses, which in turn invites comparison with the elegized epic boy Hylas, who represents Valerius’ elegiac epic. Hercules, on the other hand, clearly evokes Aeneas and thus the Aeneid, and his eventual departure from the Argonautica means that the epic will not turn into an Aeneid. Comparable to the situation in the Hellenistic Hylas poems, the Valerian relationship between Hylas and Hercules represents that between the two Roman epics. At the start of the Hylas episode this symbolic relationship is programmatically summarized, for although Hylas is said to follow Hercules, he “delays his unequal steps” (passusque moratur iniquos, Arg. 3.485-6), words which, triggering the use of passus in the sense “metrical foot”, evoke the difference between the hexameter and pentameter of the elegiac couplet, hence suggesting that Hylas elegizes Hercules.

Statius

In a brief passage in book 5 of his Thebaid (441-4) Statius reworks this passage from the Argonautica, when he describes Hylas as following and adapting the footsteps of Hercules (magnique sequens vestigia mutat | Herculis, 441-2). Through the intertextual contact with the epilogue of his epic, where the Thebaid is told to follow/imitate the footsteps of the Aeneid, albeit at a distance (longe sequere et vestigia semper adora, 12.817), Statius’ words also acquire metapoetical meaning. Just like Valerius, Statius uses Hylas and Hercules to describe allegorically the relationship of his Thebaid to the
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_Aeneid_, and to express the Callimachean poetics that pervade the epic, as C. McNelis (2007) has shown.

This is the only appearance of Hylas and Hercules in the entire _Thebaid_, and it only covers four lines. Although the metapoetical dimension of this passage can stand on its own, it is the long tradition of metapoetical appropriation of the Hylas myth that militates most strongly in favour of a metapoetical reading of the lines. The example of Statius most clearly shows how important recognition of the entire metapoetical tradition of the Hylas myth is to a full understanding of its individual manifestations.

The Hellenistic and Roman poets writing about Hylas and Hercules have exploited the associations of the two contrasting characters to make metapoetical statements about their own poetry. These are similar in their rejection of traditional, heroic epic, but different in the way that this “Callimacheanism” is manifested. The echo, which plays such an important role in triggering and describing the intertextual contact between the Hylas poems, thus also proves to be paradigmatic for the messages the poems convey: these are not copies of each other, but echoes.